

Editorial for the 10th anniversary issue of PLA Notes

• 10th anniversary issue

Welcome to the tenth anniversary issue of *PLA Notes*! The first issue of *RRA Notes* appeared in June 1988. It is testimony to the popularity and importance of participatory methods, and the commitment to sharing experiences amongst practitioners, that this series has evolved into the *PLA Notes* that is produced today.

It is perhaps apt that most of the articles in this anniversary issue explore the theme of participation, literacy and empowerment. Based on experiences with REFLECT, this issue demonstrates how participation must become a community-led dynamic that links analysis to action. This mirrors the move away from RRA and towards (and beyond) PRA to promote a sustained process of participation. The issue emphasises the diversity within and between communities and stresses that literacy, in its broadest sense, impacts upon the ability of different groups to communicate and participate. The articles also explore some concerns common to practitioners of PRA, such as the role of manuals and training in promoting standardisation and/or diversity, how to develop strengthened local level (horizontal) networks of practitioners, and how to scale up a participatory process from the local to regional, national and international levels.

The guest editors for the theme section are Bimal Phnuyal, David Archer and Sara Cottingham, and we acknowledge their hard work in bringing together an impressive collection of thought-provoking articles in this bumper edition of *PLA Notes*.

• In this issue

This issue opens with a suite of more general articles. Participatory planning is central to the

first three articles: Bhattacharyya and Murray describe the use of community-based assessment and planning for maternal and child healthcare in Ethiopia and Zambia, Hamilton et al. introduce a novel way of undertaking participatory needs assessment with displaced people, and Neela Mukherjee outlines her experiences in Bangladesh of introducing community participation at the stage of project formulation.

The final two articles in the general section have an agricultural theme. Thiele and Terrazas present their work in Bolivia on using participatory methods to understand indigenous approaches to soil conservation. This is followed by a short article by William Fielding which, based on his work in Nepal, sets out guidelines for on-farm trials on terraces.

Regular features

In the *Feedback* section, David Thomforde draws on his work in Uganda and sets out some of the challenges and opportunities for using PRA with people with disabilities. In a thoughtful response, Sulemana Abudulai, from Action on Disability and Development in Ghana, agrees that the PRA methods need little adaptation, but emphasises that special attention is needed to understand the barriers that prevent people with disability from communicating and participating. Disability is an important, and new, topic for *PLA Notes*, and thus will also be the subject of the *Feedback* section in October.

The serialisation of the *Trainers Guide to Participatory Learning and Action* follows on from *PLA Notes* 31 and describes the basic principles of participatory learning. *Tips for Trainers* has been prepared by Paul Mincher and describes an icebreaker that encourages group analysis and cohesion. This is followed by *In Touch* and the *RCPLA Pages*.

We look forward to your comments and contributions for any of the sections in *PLA Notes* and hope that you enjoy this anniversary issue.

1

Helping health workers to plan with communities in Ethiopia and Zambia

Karabi Bhattacharyya and John Murray

• Summary

This paper describes the use of a participatory approach to community assessment and planning in Ethiopia and Zambia. The purpose of the assessment was for government health staff and community members to jointly identify and prioritise maternal and child health problems and develop a plan to solve them. This assessment was conducted by a team of community volunteers and health staff. PRA and an integrated household survey were used to select a limited number of maternal and child health behaviours to guide planning and develop a joint action plan.

• Introduction

The recent issue of *PLA Notes* on Methodological Complementarity (Number 28, February 1997) highlighted some of the benefits of combining PRA with quantitative methods and sequencing methodologies. One of the benefits mentioned was the ability to provide planners with information that has scientific rigour for monitoring progress while collecting and using information that has local value. We have used a combination of methods to train government health staff to plan health activities with community members.

The design of the community assessment and planning process responds to two trends in public health planning. First there is a trend for primary health care programme planning to be decentralised to the district level, especially in Africa. Decentralisation requires that health planners collect local information to develop strategies and allocate resources. Second, as resources for health become scarce, poor

communities are increasingly asked to contribute resources (usually cash, land or labour) for health services. As a result, there is recognition, among some health planners, of the need to involve the local community in making programmatic decisions - deciding what is to be done and how.

While there is often the will to involve local communities in decision-making, health staff may lack the skills and tools needed, particularly for local level health staff who have with limited technical and financial resources. Health staff need assistance in a number of areas including: how to form groups which represent the community, how to engage in, and sustain, a dialogue with communities, and how to plan interventions with, and for, the people most in need.

The goal of the community assessment described here is for the health staff, and the communities they serve, to jointly identify and prioritise health problems and to develop plans to solve them. The assessment process collects and uses information on maternal and child health behaviours and is designed for district and sub-district program planners and health staff. The important features of this process are that it:

- uses a limited number of maternal and child health behaviours as a 'menu' to guide planning.
- uses an integrated household survey which measures indicators of the key behaviours.
- is conducted by a team of community volunteers who, with the health staff, are responsible for implementing health programs; it is not conducted by an outside research team.
- encourages community members and

health staff immediately to use and analyse information and to produce joint action plans.

- collects data that can be used at multiple levels: at the community level to develop an action plan and at the district and/or regional levels for project monitoring and evaluation.

• Design and methods

The process begins with a list of emphasis or key behaviours which have been shown scientifically to decrease the chance of children getting sick (morbidity) and dying from common illnesses (mortality). The list of emphasis behaviours are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The emphasis behaviours

Health practice category	Emphasis behaviours
<p>Reproductive health practices: Women of reproductive health age need to practice family planning and seek antenatal care when they are pregnant</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For all women of reproductive age, delay the first pregnancy, practice birth spacing and limit family size 2. For all pregnant women, seek antenatal care at least twice during the pregnancy 3. For all pregnant women, take iron tablets
<p>Infant and child feeding practices: Mothers need to give age-appropriate foods and fluids</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Breast feed exclusively for about 6 months 5. From about 6 months, provide appropriate complementary feeding and continue breastfeeding until 24 months
<p>Immunisation practices: Infants need to receive a full course of vaccinations; women of childbearing age need to receive an appropriate course of tetanus vaccinations</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Take infant for measles immunisation as soon as possible after the age of 9 months 7. Take infant for immunisation even when he or she is sick. Allow infant to be immunised during visit for curative care 8. For pregnant women and women of childbearing age, seek tetanus toxoid vaccination at every opportunity
<p>Home health practices: Caretakers need to implement appropriate behaviours to prevent childhood illnesses and to treat them when they do occur</p>	<p>Prevention</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Use and maintain insecticide-treated bednets 10. Wash hands with soap at appropriate times 11. For all infants and children over 6 months, consume enough vitamin A to prevent A deficiency 12. For all families, use iodised salt <p>Treatment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Continue feeding and increase fluids during illness: increase feeding after illness 14. Mix and administer Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) or appropriate home-available fluid correctly 15. Administer treatment and medications according to instruction (amount and duration)
<p>Care-seeking practices: Caretakers need to recognise a sick infant or child and need to know when to take the infant or child to a health worker or health facility</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Seek appropriate care when infant or child is recognised as being sick (i.e. looks unwell, not playing, not eating or drinking, lethargic or change in consciousness, vomiting frequently, high fever, fast or difficult breathing).

The emphasis behaviours are used as a 'menu' from which communities and health workers jointly prioritise those behaviours that are most important and feasible to change (see below). The prioritised behaviours form the basis for a joint action plan. The methodology is conducted over a 8-10 day period in each community. The four phases used are:

Phase 1: Identifying partners and building partnerships emphasises the establishment of working relationships between the health staff and community team members. The health staff are introduced to the community through a public meeting. The community learns that the team is there to listen to them and draws a map of the area and lists their own health priorities.

Phase 2: Selecting the emphasis behaviours involves the use of a simple household survey which collects information on the key child health behaviours in a sample of households. Cut-off points of 80% were established for the behaviours by the health staff. This meant that if less than 80% of people were undertaking the behaviours, they were considered to be at unacceptable levels. The team tabulates the data by hand. The behaviours shown to be undertaken by less than 80% of those people consulted in the survey are ranked, by groups of men and women, according to the importance of the behaviour and the feasibility of changing it. Based on the community ranking, 3-5 priority behaviours are selected.

Men and women are selected to be part of the groups if they have a young child or are involved in child care. Every attempt is made to promote participation from all segments of the community. For example, the social map from Phase 1 is used to ensure that different geographic and socio-economic areas are represented. It is particularly important to ensure that women with different backgrounds are represented; women who have to work, who have less education, and who are single mothers, for example, may all present unique perspectives. Women's and men's groups meet separately and are made up of 5-10 persons each.

Phase 3: Exploring reasons for the behaviours involves the use of a variety of participatory research techniques, including semi-structured interviews, seasonal calendars, and matrix

ranking, to explore the reasons behind the practices of the 35 selected behaviours. For each behaviour, a list of suggested topics and methods for understanding the behaviour more fully is used.

Phase 4: Developing intervention strategies based on the reasons why people are not undertaking the selected behaviours. The intervention strategies are suggested by community members and the health staff. During a public meeting, an action plan is developed for implementing the strategies. The action plan includes the identification of resource needs and allocation of responsibilities.

Field testing

In Ethiopia, the process was conducted in five districts in the Southern Nations and Nationalities People's Region (SNNPR). Ministry of Health staff from the regional level, four zones and the five districts were trained in the methodology for one week. The group then broke into five teams who went to selected communities in the five districts for an 8-10 day period to complete the four phases. The size of the communities ranged from 726 to 1187 households. At the end of the fieldwork, the group came back together to develop detailed implementation plans and identify next steps.

In Zambia, the process was conducted as a training of Ministry of Health staff for two weeks. It included 7-8 days fieldwork in two communities with a total of about 65 households in Chipata district, Eastern Province. A total of 14 people were trained including health staff from the national level, three districts in the Eastern Province, and staff from one health facility.

Community action plans

Communities and health staff were encouraged to develop action plans that were feasible given existing resources and structures. In general, the activities focused on the household (the knowledge and behaviour of caretakers), the broader community (support required to sustain or enable household behaviours, such as the availability of soap or community health workers) and the health

facility (health worker knowledge and practice, the availability of medications).

The strategies developed by communities in both Ethiopia and Zambia had a number of similarities. Community members were often not able to get vaccination or antenatal services and so it was proposed that better integration of services would reduce missed opportunities for immunisation and antenatal screening (e.g. checking the vaccination status of mothers and children during visits for curative care). Improving the counselling and health education skills of health workers on several key primary health care topics was considered very important.

Within communities, improved community organisation and participation was considered important to support household behaviour change. It was proposed that community-based health workers and community groups should be encouraged to conduct health education and motivate community members to seek services. Most communities wanted to involve existing community groups, such as churches, mosques, women's associations and schools, in health work. For example, some women said that their older children who were at school sometimes reminded them to take their infants for immunisations. Some community members expressed a need to develop new groups, such as health and nutrition groups.

The need to develop incentives for community health workers was raised in all communities and considered essential to sustain their performance. Community groups discussed the development of revolving drug funds, or central community funds for supporting community health workers, as well as non-monetary incentives such as regular training, and the provision of farming assistance for community health workers and their families.

Lessons learned

We have found that it is important to be clear on the features and limitations of this process (see Table 2). First, this approach is not intended to produce broad community participation or empowerment. Rather an attempt was made to be aware of existing power relationships in communities and to identify and involve the most vulnerable groups. However, it should be noted that this process is unlikely to change those relationships.

Second, the one-off implementation of this approach is unlikely to produce sustained changes in how health staff interact with community members. On-going training and supervision will be necessary for this to occur.

Third, since only limited data are collected, this approach does not allow the investigation of the complex socio-cultural aspects of each behaviour, such as a local understanding of diarrhoeal disease. Instead, data collection is focused on information that can allow sound program decisions.

Finally, this process is not a 'blueprint' or recipe for health planning. The 'menu' of behaviours, the specific methods used, their sequence and timing (whether over 10 days as done here, or over a longer period of time) must be modified and adapted to local situations. For example, there is no guarantee that drawing a social map and holding a public meeting will create rapport and generate a sense of partnership. However the goals of each of the four phases (building partnerships, selecting behaviours, exploring reasons for the behaviours, and developing an action plan) should help guide the key steps in the process.

Table 2. The community assessment and planning process

Does not ...	Does ...
Change existing power relationships within a community	Teach health staff to learn and listen from community members
Create sustained changes in the attitudes and behaviour of health staff towards communities	Give communities and health staff boundaries and a focus for the discussions (emphasis behaviours)
Produce in-depth information on cultural belief systems on any of the behaviours.	Use the emphasis behaviours as a way to open up discussions of constraints (cultural, social, environmental)
Produce quantitative data that is generalisable beyond the communities where it is collected	Use data and community priorities to decide health activities
Constitute a blueprint for better health planning	Begin a better relationship between health staff and communities

On a more positive note, this approach does represent a change in local level health planning. Currently, most program decisions are made without using local data and without any community involvement. This process helps health staff develop concrete skills for collecting and using data with community members. The use of emphasis behaviours worked well because maternal and child health issues were an important priority in these communities, although not always the top priority. Simple quantitative and participatory methods, which can be implemented quickly with a minimum of resources, make this process accessible for local health staff.

The emphasis behaviours provided a focal point for planning, but the suggestions for changing these behaviours were not only limited to individual behaviour change issues (such as health education to mothers). They also highlighted the need to address the organisation and resources of the community itself and to improve the quality and accessibility of care available at health facilities. As a consequence, health staff were made aware of the impact of their own policies and practices on members of the community. In this way, this assessment and planning process began to change the relationship between health staff and community members.

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NOTES

For a complete discussion of emphasis behaviours, see 'Emphasis Behaviours in Maternal and Child Health: Focusing on Caretaker Behaviours to develop Maternal and Child Health Programs in Communities', BASICS Technical Report, 1997.

2

Participatory basic needs assessment with the internally displaced using well being ranking

Clare Hamilton, Alice Kaudia and David Gibbon

• Introduction

This paper reports on a study by the International Childcare Trust (ICT) that took place in 1994, after the disturbances in the early 1990s in Trans-Nzoia, Western Kenya. A total of 2,944 households participated in an exercise that took just over one month. It had two objectives: firstly, to develop a methodology that allowed displaced people to develop their own strategies for rehabilitation; and secondly, to identify appropriate interventions for agencies to work in a co-ordinated, genuine partnership with communities.

The methodology adapts well being ranking to undertake participatory needs assessment with displaced people. This approach showed that there were distinct rehabilitation strategies amongst the displaced, depending on their current access to land and the gender of the head of household. This highlighted the importance of disaggregating data from apparently homogenous camps of displaced people and recognising the social categories within them.

History

With the political turmoil of 1991, certain regions of Kenya started to experience sporadic ethnic clashes. These were widespread in the Rift Valley and Western provinces. The disturbances have their roots in the conflict between alleged pre-colonial tribal boundaries and post-colonial private land tenure, with some tribes claiming traditional ownership of large tracts of what are now private farms. One of the results of these clashes was the displacement of individuals

from their land for prolonged periods or, in some cases, permanently.

Repeated clashes over a period of two years, caused large scale movements of people into camps, followed by a drift back home by those whose land had not been taken over. Initially emergency relief was provided at the camps, but gradually ICT realised there was a range of different circumstances among the clash affected communities. Some needed assistance in restarting their farms, whilst others needed to find alternative means of supporting themselves. It was clear that any 'blanket approach to aid' would be poorly targeted. Furthermore, other NGOs were becoming involved and the collective assistance needed to be appropriately directed and co-ordinated.

• Needs assessment during conflict

Conducting a needs assessment exercise where conflict is sporadic and recurrent causes specific difficulties. In particular, the speed of the assessment is of great importance. This enables a quick response to the findings, but also maximises the periods during which there is sufficient security for staff to work in the field.

During conflicts, communities are in a vulnerable state of shock; their traditional systems of support have been disrupted and in many cases their livelihood systems lost. They can easily become dependent on relief. It is important to 'kick start' their coping strategies through encouraging them to identify, by themselves, appropriate resources and skills to rebuild their lives. Yet with a more traditional approach to needs assessment, external agencies identify the appropriate interventions

for rehabilitation. This can reinforce the dependency created during the provision of emergency relief.

Due to the nature of this type of unrest, trust is lost between neighbouring communities. So as not to aggravate the conflict, it is essential that the exercise is conducted openly and equitably between the groups. Also, where possible, the exercise should contribute to the management of conflict. Thus, a participatory assessment was chosen so that groups knew what details were being given about each other. This enabled them to reach consensus amongst themselves about what action should be taken and who were the vulnerable groups that needed prioritisation.

Why participatory well being ranking?

Tools used in planning for relief work, such as the UNHCR's Framework for People Orientated Planning in Refugee Situations (Williams, Seed & Mwau, 1994) or the Capability and Vulnerabilities Analysis (Anderson & Woodrow, 1989) are improvements on traditional socio-economic surveys because they highlight differential access and control over resources and benefits between men and women. They also use a broad definition of resources, including protection and social organisation.

However, due to their complexity, these tools are likely to be used by external agencies, rather than allowing the communities to assess themselves. Thus, whilst they may highlight areas of strength that can be used in regaining self-sufficiency, the communities will not decide this for themselves and thus will not gain a sense of control from the analysis.

Well being ranking usually involves a few key individuals ranking the households in their community using locally selected criteria. Here it was adapted to form the basis of longer discussions on rehabilitation strategies and to involve members from all households. It was chosen because it enables households to define the criteria for basic needs assessment including the factors and resources which contribute to their livelihood systems. This information is then analysed as a group, which allows them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The strengths form the basis for

opportunities to change their situation, whilst the weaknesses are areas to be minimised. The group then ranks the households in terms of vulnerability. This discussion gives extra information about the household that might otherwise be overlooked. This was especially important for culturally sensitive information, such as disabled individuals, alcoholism and traditions relating to differential resource access.

The openness of the discussion often led to the management of conflict by, and between, the participating households. Furthermore, as the households themselves targeted the interventions of outside agencies, potential conflict due to the selective provision of aid was minimised.

• Methodology

The first day was spent training the teams in the PRA approach and in the adapted well being methodology. Three teams of two people were trained, one person to act as facilitator of the discussion and the other to note the key information. The individuals most successful with this approach were those that felt comfortable with the communities. Whilst the extrovert team members were often entertaining, the quieter approach generally provided more detailed information.

Women were targeted because they are often responsible for the provision of food and other basic needs to the household. Thus, they are able to report on the intra-household allocation of resources. This may have caused a bias in underestimating the income provided by the men. However, that which is earned but not spent on the household, was not considered to contribute to household food security.

Eight to twenty household representatives were brought together with two field staff (usually including a woman). People were asked to come from a particular neighbourhood; sometimes it represented just one ethnic group, but it was often mixed, although the conflict had made the neighbourhoods a little more homogenous. The households themselves decided upon the representative to attend, although women were specifically asked to come, as they are generally the providers for household

dependants. Due to the tradition that men have their own houses on the family farm, households were considered as a shared hearth. If there were dependants in that household (children, disabled or elderly relatives), they were eligible for relief and therefore, to take part in the needs assessment. Where a household did not have an adult woman, a man was chosen to represent the household's interests. Only households with dependants were considered in the exercise.

First household details were gathered, such as the names of those in their household, their ages (to assist with the provision of clothing etc.) and their relief card number (if they were already on the agency's books). One field officer then led a discussion on key topics covering the basic needs and resources of the households. Table 1 shows the main topics covered and the common issues arising from their discussion.

As each participant related their situation, one field officer noted the details for the NGO's records, whilst the other assisted in making a visual representation in front of them.¹ For example, if a household owned 1 acre, this would be represented by an appropriately sized clod of earth near the participant. If, however, the land owned was 2 acres, one of which was rented, one clod would be placed near and another at a distance to show the insecurity of tenure. Similarly, the numbers of people in the household able to provide an income would be represented by, for example, a corn cob. If, however, one did not actually contribute to the household, the cob would be moved away from the participant. The visualisation created discussions that outlined complexities in household dynamics that might have been obscured in more traditional data collection.

With a physical representation of their livelihood system in front of them, the participants were asked to rank the households in terms of their well being, starting with the least secure household. This led to discussions on what made a household secure and what

coping strategies were most appropriate to their new circumstances. Sensitive issues, such as alcoholism, domestic violence and disabilities were frequently mentioned at this point as this explained why one household was worse off than another when they had similar access to resources. Cultural causes of insecurity were also highlighted, such as the elderly living with relatives who would not have the right to bury them or women staying where they had no access to, or no control of, household resources. These hidden dynamics are often of great importance in deciding a household's resilience, but frequently fail to emerge from more traditional methods of needs assessment.

The issues were discussed as a group as it was in this forum that a better understanding of conflict issues took place. The exercise lasted about 3 or 4 hours. Using 4 teams of people, the exercise was repeated with other small groups until all households had been consulted. Groups were kept small to ensure that each person was able to contribute to group discussions and also to minimise demands on people's time. The complete survey, providing information on what support families needed and their existing coping strategies, was completed within one month.

¹ The informants did the visual representation themselves, but were assisted by the field officer in making the coding on the graphic uniform to the group, thereby enabling a comparison with others' experiences to be made.

Table 1: Key topics discussed during interviews

Topic	Issues
Land	Gender differentiated access, control and labour. Land titles, debt, political security. Loss of access to building materials.
Recent Harvest	Household food security. Lack of seeds, draught power and inputs. Labour requirements. Gender differentiated control of marketing.
Livestock	Cattle rustling. Small livestock diseases. Lack of draught power. Falling soil fertility.
Off Farm Incomes	Available skills. Lack of, or loss of access to, materials. Lack of markets. Seasonality of farm labour. Gender differentiated wages.
Education	Costs. Insecurity of household. Reduced incomes.
Local Groups and Social Networks	Skills. Insecurity of household (post trauma psychology). Group strategies. Traditional savings co-operatives.
Water & sanitation.	Vandalism. Time spent. Loss of containers. Loss of access.
Illness & Health Care	Lack of access. Lack of medicines. Increasing disease with poor housing and lower incomes (for soap and for nutrition).

BOX 1

TWO EXAMPLES OF WELL BEING RANKING

Mrs. Matumbe has 4 children and her elderly parents staying with her; 2 children go to school. Her husband is a teacher, who has a second family where he works in town. He sends some money occasionally. Her eldest child is now old enough to work, but can only find work as a labourer. She trades in vegetables when she produces any surplus. She owns 1 hectare but has not received the title yet. She managed to harvest 3 bags of maize (270 kg) and 70kg of beans, but had to sell half to pay off school fees and other debts. She could produce more if she had enough seed (her granary was burnt in the clashes). She is part of a woman's group who work together in trading and with a savings co-operative, but they lost their stock, and now only sell vegetables so their profits are small.

Mrs. Kitui lives with her parents-in-law, who allow her and her husband to use 0.5 ha. They both work as labourers when they can, but her husband often drinks the days' earnings. She is interested in business, but has too little surplus to join a woman's group. Only 1 of her 5 young children attends school. She harvested a sack and a half of maize (135kg), the rest was eaten green from the fields. She managed better with the beans, getting 60kg of good quality beans, much of which she will use as a seed for a second harvest - which may give her enough to sell for school fees.

• Results

The exercise developed a partnership between the communities and ICT, promoting appropriate, well targeted interventions. Furthermore, it allowed communities to begin to repair the damage caused by conflict and to identify areas where group activities would be more effective than individual action. This raised people's confidence in re-establishing livelihood systems (see Box 1).

At the end of the exercise, ICT had a wealth of detailed information on each household in the clash affected area, as well as proposed rehabilitation strategies for the communities and sectors where outside assistance would be of greatest value. These formed the basis for

'community summaries'².that were also available to other NGOs, allowing swift, community directed, focused and well targeted intervention.

It became clear that the apparently homogeneous groups into which the communities had formed themselves, were in fact heterogeneous. Some of the permanently displaced groups had acquired access to land through renting or relatives. On the farms, where the majority had returned to their land, lived displaced families. Post conflict, the

² Community summaries are 1-2 page briefings of critical issues, including areas in which the communities had decided to take action (such as reforming groups) and areas for which they had requested assistance, such as access to health posts or support in reprotecting springs.

main focus of the households had been to secure access to land, even though many had no hoe or seeds.

In terms of rehabilitation for the displaced, it became clear that women and men had distinct skills. Women were more interested in trading and cottage industries and thus needed materials. Men were in need of specific tools for more formal skills, such as mechanics. Those with common skills and interests formed groups and co-operatives and pooled their resources.

• Value of the participatory approach

Due to the speed of the exercise, it was possible to implement some projects within weeks of the discussions, for example, the 1 acre Growers Package (supplying a hoe, maize, sorghum/millet, vegetable and bean seeds and fertiliser for 1 acre) was provided to those communities with access to land. As the interventions had been directed by the communities, the limited funding was well targeted and appropriate, with gender differentiated assistance where necessary. Institutions for managing common resources were formed, reducing the need for externally negotiated group formation.

Participation meant that the discussions were inclusive and open. Individuals were unable to exaggerate their need, instead they became aware of others in greater need. The participatory nature of the discussions also contributed to the revitalisation of the community through raised awareness of under exploited or non traditional skills and resources. Traditional community activities that had been disrupted through the disturbances were evaluated and, where appropriate, restarted. These were particularly important for the female headed households

that had relied on traditional savings co-operatives to accumulate capital. Income generating activities were initiated through pooling of skills and resources. It also became clear from the discussions that participating in group activities was not a possibility for the least secure households, who could neither contribute labour nor resources. In some cases these most vulnerable members of society, were given additional support.

Neighbours that had been in conflict due to their different tribal origins became aware of the common effects of the disturbances and their shared needs. In many cases it was a matter of great surprise to the 'attacked' tribal groups that the 'aggressors' were the worst off in the group discussion. This process of reconciliation had started through having to queue together for relief food - but through discussion became more openly acknowledged, leading to the first stages of resolution.

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3

Lessons from community empowerment programme formulation: mission-2 of UNDP, Bangladesh

Neela Mukherjee

• Introduction

UNDP, Bangladesh is currently engaged in a community empowerment programme (CEP) for poverty alleviation and sustainable human development under the SAARC¹ country co-operation framework. Both UNDP and the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) are in the process of fielding two sets of Community Empowerment Programmes (CEP), which involve direct participation of local communities in decision-making and the implementation of projects concerning them. In mid-1997, the CEP-2² Formulation Mission of UNDP, Bangladesh was on a fast track to prepare 6 project documents at the national level in 2 months. The content of these documents is indicated below.

Objectives of the mission

The Mission aimed at producing 6 project documents and two project concept papers. The project papers focused on the following 6 areas or communities:

- urban poor in 'pourashavas' (town municipality areas);
- 'adivasi' (tribal groups);
- rural poor;
- garment workers;
- commercial sex workers;
- street children.

The project concept papers related to inland fisherfolk communities and traders in the informal sector.

The CEP-2 Mission had two primary objectives: capacity building of the poorest and facilitating developmental collaboration between the communities and development agencies. However, the Mission also had a rigorous terms of reference, some of which were: extensive research in the identified sectors, consultation with poor communities, with the GOB and other development agencies, and preparation and submission of project documents within a stipulated period.

Literature survey

A literature survey on project formulation showed that few agencies prioritised community participation at the stage of project formulation: many agencies focused on participation only at the planning and/or implementation stages. The challenges facing our Mission were two-fold: one to find appropriate ways to enable the communities to broadly identify and design projects based on their 'world-view' and the other, to match community 'reality' with other stakeholders' 'reality' including consultants, UNDP and government and non-governmental organisations.

• Methodology for people's participation

We used a quick variation of PRA, which we called Participatory Rapid Rural Appraisal (PRRA). PRRA is similar to PRA but is

¹ SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

² CEP-2: Community Empowerment Programme 2nd Formulation Mission.

designed for quicker analysis. While the appraisal was of a participatory nature, the term PRRA recognises that the appraisal was relatively short and extractive in nature. However, the approach was based on the principles of PRA: enabling local communities to analyse their knowledge and experience of development and help them to provide 'overviews' of local development status and priorities. The PRRA aimed to generate sufficient information from poor people's own experience and analysis which can form the basis for intensive participation of communities in the long term. This is consistent with PRA's principle of 'optimal ignorance'.

Phases

The different phases of the programme formulation Mission can be identified as follows.

- Phase 1- Review assignment to gain background information;
- Phase 2- An exploratory round of participatory interaction/consultation with the community using PRRA and leading to preliminary community design;
- Phase 3- Consultants preparing individual project concept papers, based on the community design and other primary data, which we presented to UNDP;
- Phase 4- Stakeholders' workshop for validation, assessment of the feasibility of options and link ups;
- Phase 5- Participatory interactions and consultations for a topical round of field investigation (used to focus on issues which are more specific and topic-oriented);
- Phase 6- Consultants revise proposals and validation/negotiations continue;
- Phase 7- Project documents submitted by consultants, appraisal and acceptance.

Of the 6 proposed projects, only 3 (those on rural poor, tribals, urban poor of pourashavas) covered stage 5. The others skipped it because of the lack of time. One proposed project, that on the commercial sex workers, was not completed. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, each stage took a long time to

complete. Of the 2 project proposals, one (informal traders) was completed at stage 3 while the other (inland fisherfolk community) reached stage 4 to be revised for the subsequent stage. Not all the project proposals formulated were finally accepted by the stakeholders, particularly the government. The latest information is that the GOB is formalising the project documents and, according to a realistic assessment, around 50 per cent of the projects formulated will be implemented.

• Community perspective

The local communities were met in small groups of women and men. The groups initially described their state of poverty, mode of existence, their concept of empowerment, ways to overcome poverty and their own interest in the proposed project. The communities also identified their problems, scored/ranked them, listed their coping strategies, suggested project activities and proposed roles for themselves and developmental agencies. For each proposed project, the results of community interactions in different locations were organised into two large matrices. Matrix-1 was organised around grassroots concepts of poverty and empowerment (see Figure 1). Matrix-2 was organised around the problem-domain as described by communities and their suggested strategies and actions (see Figure 2).

Matrix-1 was significant because it reflected community perspectives of poverty and empowerment. It also provided the conceptual basis for Matrix-2. We found that the local communities who experience poverty were able to describe their conditions practically with the use of their own indicators. They also had their own views on community empowerment. Matrix-1 provided an opportunity for these perspectives to be revealed and to see how local perspectives differed from those of other stakeholders, such as government agencies. Matrix-2, on the other hand, helped detail community-made project designs which could be input into the logical framework analysis of project documents, as required by UNDP.

Figure 1. Matrix-1 showing grassroots concepts of poverty and empowerment

Name of project, community, location	State of poverty and conditions of existence	Concept of empowerment and strengthening linkages	Ways to overcome/reduce poverty	Reasons for project justification

Figure 2. Matrix-2 showing community problem-domain, suggested strategies and actions

Name of project, community & location	No. of sessions and size of group interactions	Nature and process of poverty	Major problem domain as described by the poor	Coping strategies, including seasonal ones	Suggested actions & community contribution proposed	Expected project impact & other remarks

• Constraints and limitations of the mission

Some constraints, limitations and learnings of the Mission are described below.

1. Too many projects

There were too many projects in quite diverse fields and keeping pace with all of them, within the stipulated time frame, was difficult. Interactions and negotiations with stakeholders, other than the community, were often time-consuming. As for the interactive sessions with the rural community, most of them had to be completed before the onset of the farming season. For the urban poor community, time for interaction was again at a premium. We were constantly reminded that community time was limited.

2. Problematic road-side villages

We paid less attention to the roadside villages and decided to concentrate on interior villages, which we assumed would be poorer. However, for the project on rural poor, we found that even road-side villages had a staggering amount of poverty and deprivation, especially amongst women. Thus we decided to include appropriate samples of such villages in our study.

3. Not all answers exist

Communities or groups in different sectors poured out their minds and hearts while describing the problems, but when arriving at solutions, they had many empty boxes. Although they were ready to contribute, they expected other stakeholders to come up with a range of options for problems that they found difficult to solve. Sometimes, there were limited answers to many of their problems, such as ways of dealing with outsiders' attitudes to street children.

4. Outsiders' reality

The Mission started with exploratory PRRA for the community to derive preliminary project designs by identifying their 'problem outline'. However, not all of the national level consultants (associated with the projects) appreciated our task, since not all of them had been exposed to a participatory approach. Some would have been happier with 'questionnaires'. Slowly and steadily, as the PRRA output got organised into matrices and scaled up, most consultants felt encouraged. But the problem of using PRRA, which generated micro level data, in a project document was a real issue. Questions were raised about how to organise such data into the logical framework analysis. This was achieved by using matrices and adapting portions of the standard logical framework.

5. Matching diverse realities of stakeholders

Matching the community's 'reality' with that of other stakeholders/institutions was not easy. There were both social and political parameters within which any project has to work. For example, commercial sex workers of Tangail expressed that gaining social recognition was a priority for them. They symbolised this with fresh white flowers and they scored it against other priorities in a matrix. Little did they realise that they were considered 'outcasts' and a 'threat to society's moral fabric' by other groups. Thus, their stated priority was contrary to that of many other stakeholders. Faced with multiple perspectives, we felt sometimes that we lacked clarity on the positions of major actors in many issues emerging from the field.

6. Mission process vs. output

Often we found that the participatory process was becoming secondary to output. Many stakeholders at the workshop failed to realise that the Mission had gone through an intense participatory process to arrive at the output from PRRA sessions. The underlying participatory process, though not obvious to many, was key to the entire Mission.

7. Legitimacy of output

In stakeholders' workshops, some people raised questions about the technical validity and legitimacy of the community perspective. The question referred to the legitimacy of communities projecting their own 'reality' in their own way and with their own emphasis. It was not easy to handle such issues.

8. Community perennially hopeful

While they designed their projects, we tried our best to lower community expectations, because this was a formulation mission and there was no guarantee that projects would be implemented. However, in spite of reminding the community that the interactions might lead only to project proposals, they were still hopeful that something would surely happen.

· Innovative features of the mission

1. Participatory preliminary project design

The poor community did the preliminary design of the projects in the initial stage of project formulation. They identified their problem set, qualified their problems and described activities to overcome their challenges. This is quite different from other projects, where the community gets involved at later stages of planning and implementing, once project formulation is completed.

2. Scaling up of PRRA output

Different groups of poor people contributed their perspectives, but the issue became how to organise them and project them upwards for project designs to emerge. As indicated earlier, output from field-based sessions was organised into large matrices, which made comparisons possible. Based on the community's scoring/ranking of problems, simple indices were constructed to enable a common prioritisation of such problems.

3. Community-design based discussion by other stakeholders

The different problem-solution sets from the communities were presented to other stakeholders for discussion in workshops. In these workshops, the communities were mostly represented by local grassroots NGOs. The problems were worked upon and a number of solutions were offered by other stakeholders which helped in determining project activities and identifying preliminary institutional link-ups.

4. Emergence of community concepts

Community concepts of 'poverty', 'poor person', 'capacity building', 'justification for intervention' etc., emerged from the PRRA output. These often contrasted with the conceptual frame of UNDP, the GOB and NGOs. The communities' definitions were novel and innovative.

• **Preserving grassroots reality**

We strove hard to preserve as much of the grassroots reality as was possible given the parameters of the mission. The major risk was that the ‘reality’ of the poor community would get undermined in the process of matching the realities of different stakeholders. So we devised ways and means to highlight the issues which local communities so eagerly placed before us during the participatory sessions. We organised the community’s perspective (the PRRA output) into large matrices and placed them before the experts for validation. We arranged stakeholders’ workshops where the agenda of the community was placed as inputs for the other stakeholders to deliberate on, examine feasible options for, and identify activities which would resolve such issues.

Matching the diverse ‘realities’ was the most difficult task. There were occasions when we stumbled and faltered, got disillusioned with the process and felt discouraged and thought we would never be able to achieve our goal. But we usually emerged resilient, by becoming courageous, adjusting our steps and revising our approach.

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4

'The wayq'os (gullies) are eating everything!' Indigenous knowledge and soil conservation

Graham Thiele and Franz Terrazas

• The gullies

Farmers in the communities of Cebada Jichana and Dami Rancho in Cochabamba, Bolivia are threatened by the growth of numerous gullies. As farmers' leader Guillermo Orellana explained "the *wayq'os* (gullies) are eating everything". If nothing is done farmers will be left with islands of land in a sea of gullies. The problem is common in other areas of Bolivia too.

PROINPA the Bolivian Potato Research Programme, has been working for three years with farmers in the communities to control the biggest gullies with gabions and trees. However, farmer's involvement has been more as labourers than as active participants. Here we summarise the results of two participatory rural appraisals (PRAs), carried

out simultaneously in Cebada Jichana and Dami Rancho, which were designed to help farmers to resolve the problem themselves.

Methods

Some months before PRA fieldwork began, we explained the proposal to community members and they agreed to take part. On our arrival, to begin five days of intensive fieldwork, we explained more carefully what we hoped to do in a community meeting. The village leaders assigned participants to work with us on each day's activities. The first day we began with 'ice-breaker' activities. We asked farmers to scratch maps of their communities with sticks on the ground and construct time lines of major events and land use. These activities were useful as they stimulated lots of discussion.

Figure 1. Photo showing farmers commenting on gullies during transects



Other PRA techniques included:

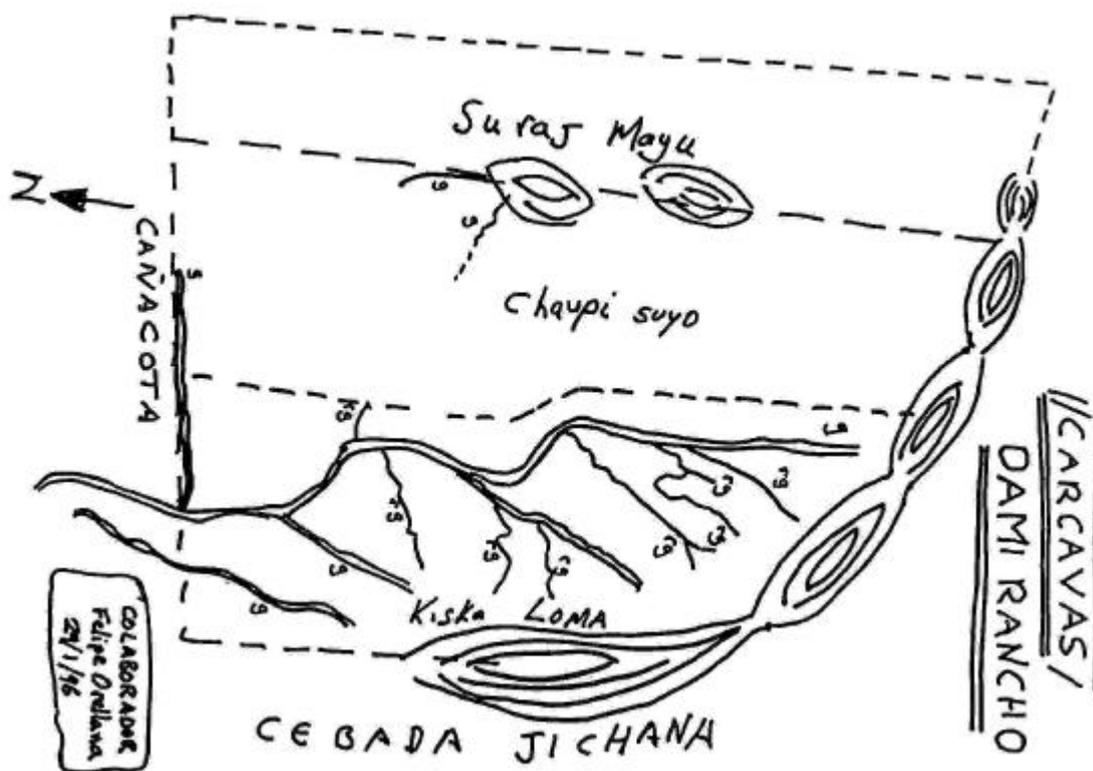
- walking transects, where farmers named and described soil types, the crops they grow and the problems they face in soil, crop and livestock management (see Figure 1.);
- farm plans, in terms of soil types and crops;
- mapping gullies, and indicating whether they had formed recently;
- preference matrices of the suitability of different trees and shrubs for erosion control.

We used flip charts to record key points from group interviews on important themes, such as water management, which didn't lend themselves to geographical representation. We set one day aside to work with women, as men tend to dominate community meetings. We worked almost exclusively in the Quechua language, because farmers feel more at home with this than Spanish. We planned to end the PRA fieldwork by explaining what we had

done and by leaving a report, which would include community prioritisation of agricultural problems and possible solutions.

In Cebada Jichana, things went according to plan. In Dami Rancho, despite considerable contact with PROINPA in the past, farmers were reluctant to join in and most participants turned out to be either youngsters or newcomers to the community. Women failed to turn up as agreed. Our 'ice-breaker' activity of mapping community boundaries helped to spread a rumour that we were registering land for taxation. One pair of fieldworkers were chased away by an enraged farmer who threatened them with stones. Once we realised what had happened, we worked hard to regain farmers' confidence and by the end, had a group of active participants including the community leaders. Nevertheless, we didn't achieve as much as we had hoped and, because we didn't have everybody's support, we decided not to prioritise problems in Dami Rancho.

Figure 2. Farmers mapped gullies (marked with 'g' for gullies and 'rg' for recent gullies)



Indigenous technical knowledge

As we walked transects, we found that farmers in the two communities shared a wide knowledge of soil and water management. They described their soils (*jallp'a*) by colour, *puka* (red) or *yana* (black), by texture *chajwa* (sandy) o *llink'i* (clay) and as *ukhu* (deep) or *pata* (superficial). They explained that soils which are deep and black are more fertile and more suitable for potato (*papa jallp'as*) and that red and sandy soils are more susceptible to erosion. They called soils at risk from rill and inter-rill erosion *suchuj jallp'a* (soil which slides). They knew that many of their soils disaggregate very easily in contact with water; as one community member said "these soils are no good for irrigation".

Farmers explained soil conservation technology as we walked through their fields. The orientation of ridges used for growing potatoes depends on the soil type, slope and expected rainfall. In sandy soils, on steep slopes, ridges roughly follow contours, to avoid soil being washed away and to retain moisture for the crop. In black soils, which hold moisture better, ridges run down the slope to avoid water logging. When farmers believe it will be a rainy year, they make ridges steeper to help drainage. They have methods for predicting rainfall, but these are used less because migration and increasing market orientation have eroded traditional knowledge of this sort.

The farmers make shallow ditches (*bangos*) for water management using traditional ox-drawn ploughs. Above fields which are prone to erosion, they use these ditches to divert run-off from higher ground away from the cultivated area. In fallow land, after planting cereals, they construct ditches at varying distances (roughly every 5m on 5% slopes) to avoid soil loss and to serve as channels for irrigating and softening soil before ploughing.

Changes

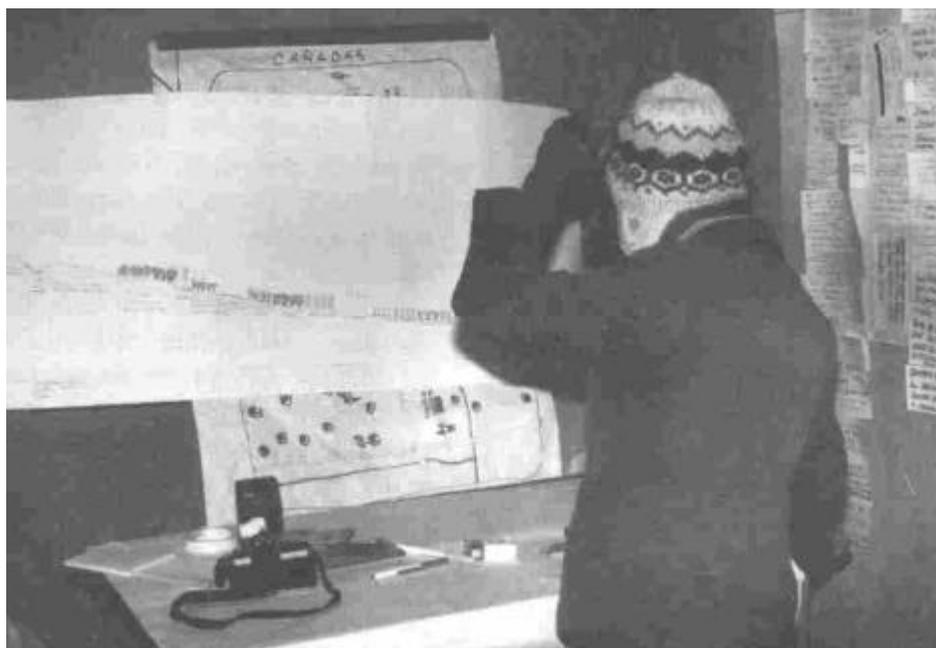
In the area of Dami Rancho (approximately 3 km²) farmers drew maps showing 14 large gullies (3-20m wide) formed since 1953 and others in formation (see Figure 2). In spite of their wide knowledge, farmers have not been able to solve the problem of erosion, which has become more severe over the last four decades. Indigenous technical knowledge, which was appropriate for lower population densities with long fallow periods and rain fed production systems, has not been able to adapt to the fast change which has occurred over this period.

Using cards to describe important events, farmers developed time lines for the community and land use (see Figure 3). Perhaps the most important event was the Agrarian Reform of 1953, when feudal estates in highland Bolivia were dissolved and the land was divided amongst ex-labourers.

Prior to the Agrarian Reform in this area, some 19 peasant families lived as tied labourers (*pongos*) on the land of four large estates. Potato was produced using farm manure, soils rested 5 to 6 years - until the native grass (*Stipa ichu*) grew back - the location of fields shifted and yields were good. After the Agrarian Reform, the land was shared amongst the peasant families. Fields became fixed and, to mark the boundaries, farmers made shallow ditches, which also served for drainage.

There are now more than 150 families in the communities. Farmers had to shorten the fallow periods. With the intensification of farming, erosion increased. The ditches, which had been made for field boundaries, began to change into gullies. Guillermo Orellana commented that when he was a boy, 25 years ago, he easily jumped a gully which is now four or five metres wide (see Figure 1).

Figure 3. Photo showing Felipe Orellana checking transects and time lines



With the increase in population, the land which the community used in the upper part of the hillside for livestock was divided into individual fields and cultivated. At the same time, the intensification of cropping in the lower area reduced land for livestock. Consequently livestock (mainly sheep) grazed around the gullies and even in them, removing vegetative cover (*Stipa ichu* could no longer grow back), thus worsening the problem.

In 1991 an irrigation canal was opened. Water flow is high (5 litres/second) for the steep, earthen, secondary canals, creating new gullies or worsening the existing ones. Inadequate management of irrigation is also leading to more rill and inter-rill erosion.

Effects of the gullies

Gullies are threatening the existence of the communities, reducing the arable area, cutting roads and making access difficult. The main irrigation canal crosses several gullies and is at risk of collapsing.

Community members are increasingly aware of the risk of the gullies. Although many are passive in the face of what they see as a natural disaster, others, mostly those who are directly affected, are doing something. Felipe Orellana is planting eucalyptus, kishwara

(*Buddleja* sp.), kewiña (*Polylepis* sp.), retama (*Spartium junseum*) and thola (*Baccharis polycephala*) in the gully near to his house to stop it increasing. Some farmers plant thola along secondary irrigation canals to protect them. Other farmers are benefiting from an FAO project to conserve soils by constructing deep infiltration ditches along contours and planting trees in gullies. Others are participating as labourers in the PROINPA project mentioned above. Truck owners fill gullies with stones so that they can enter their fields to remove their produce, such as potatoes. But this doesn't slow their growth.

During the meeting at the end of the PRA, members of Cebada Jichana used pairwise ranking to rank problems in order of importance. Gullies and soils susceptible to erosion (*suchuj jallp'a*) were ranked as most important, together with the poor condition of access roads (potato pests came sixth). Farmers identified some concrete measures which they could take without outside assistance, such as planting pasture and trees.

• What to do?

The role of PROINPA must be to help bring indigenous knowledge up to date. We can show farmers some options which might be useful, such as the use of a chisel plough to

improve water infiltration and reduce run off. PROINPA should strengthen research on 'double purpose technologies' which improve productivity and conserve soil simultaneously, because farmers do not adopt conservation measures without an economic return. Finally, we should make use of the community dynamic which the PRA generated to help the farmers of Cebada Jichana and Dami Rancho play a more proactive role in the control of erosion. Large erosion control structures are not sufficient, each farmer should be involved on his or her land. They can use maps and other PRA techniques to plan their own conservation measures.

One initial step we have taken is to encourage farmers in Cebada Jichana to form a locally selected committee (CIAL¹) of experimenting farmers. The CIAL researches problems which have been prioritised by the local community and reports back to the community on its findings. It uses the IPRA methodology (Investigación Participativa en Agricultura) described by Ashby *et al* (1995).

This work has been co-ordinated with the Hillside Project (managed by the Silsoe Research Institute) which is testing vegetative methods for controlling erosion and has proposed a number of promising species of exotic grasses and shrubs which could be used to counter erosion. The CIAL has identified additional local species and is carrying out its own trials to identify those which might be suitable as vegetative barriers to stabilise hillsides. After the first year's research, we used preference ranking with the CIAL to identify two potentially useful exotic species (*Phalaris tuberoarundinacea* and *Festuca arundinacea*) and one local species, (*Bromus* sp.) which farmers are planting on their own land. However, this is just a beginning. If we don't increase our efforts with farmers here, and elsewhere, the *wayq'os* will eat much more.

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¹ Comité de Investigación Agrícola Local.

5

How to get reliable yield estimates from terraces

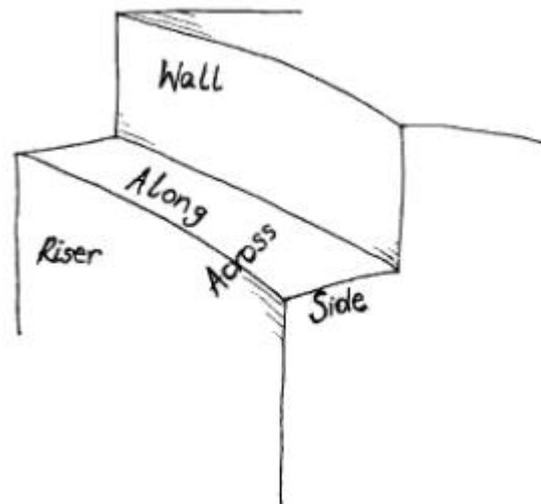
William J. Fielding

On-farm trials are important tools used in Nepal to identify problems and test new technologies under farmers' conditions. The problems of participatory on-farm trials have often been raised in *PLA Notes*. From studies in Nepal it is clear that although many factors influence the adoption or rejection of a new variety (level of education, caste, level of food security) the single most important aspect that most farmers look for is high yield. Thus it is essential that reliable data on yields are obtained from terraces, the distinctive feature of the Himalayas.

Terraces pose problems for the researcher which are not necessarily encountered on farmers' fields. These include their small size, and the high level of variability of productivity both within and between terraces. Variability of production within a terrace is primarily due to the slope between the terrace riser and wall (see Figure 1 which shows the terminology associated with a terrace). This slope causes a difference in the moisture available within rainfed terraces and it alters the soil properties of the terraces for both rainfed and flooded terraces. Adjacent terraces can produce quite different yields.

It has been recommended in *PLA Notes* that on-farm trials should consist of at least duplicate plots and that the plot size should be large (see Fielding and Riley, *PLA Notes* 29). Farmers can often be reluctant to give up much land to a trial because the size desired by the researcher may be a large proportion of their holding and so represent an unacceptable risk. Further, the small size of many terraces means that large plot sizes may not be feasible on a single terrace, however, in some instances quite large terraces can be found.

Figure 1. Terminology associated with a terrace. The *riser* is the front of the terrace where one walks, and the *wall* is the back of the terrace (where there may be a drain). The terms *riser* and *wall* are interchangeable as the riser of one terrace is the wall of its neighbour. The terrace *side* is the edge which connects the riser to the wall. The direction from riser to wall is termed *across* the terrace and the direction from side to side *along* the terrace.

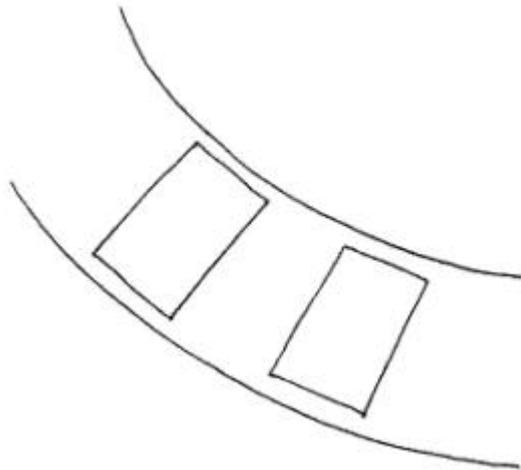


How should trials be arranged on terraces to get reliable yield measurements? Recent studies at Pakhribas Agricultural Centre suggest that the following guidelines should increase the reliability of yield data from terrace trials (see Figures 2 and 3):

1. One treatment **must not** be allocated to its own terrace; grow each treatment on every terrace in the trial. (If this is not possible seek the help of a biometrician).
2. Plots should be orientated so that they run from the riser to wall, not parallel to the riser.
3. Make plots as large as possible.

In order to get a large enough area from which to obtain reliable yield data, a "single" plot may need to be composed of smaller plots from several terraces in order to comply with Requirement 1 above.

Figure 2. A diagram of the recommended way of laying out plots on a terrace. The plots are orientated so that they run from terrace riser to wall or across the terrace.



Box 1 shows the effect of orientation of the reliability of yield data from a flooded terrace in Nepal. The effect of orientation is even more important on rainfed terraces so the example given here is a conservative one.

Terraces which do not differ in altitude by more than 25 m can be included in the same trial as

yields should not be effected by altitude over this range; changes in altitude of over 100 m should be avoided. Orientation effects temperatures on a terrace so could result in some plots being cooler than others if changes in aspect are severe. The importance of repeating treatments in a terrace trial is just as important as for field trials.

BOX 1

AN EXAMPLE SHOWING THAT YIELD ESTIMATES SHOULD BE MADE FROM PLOTS ORIENTATED ACROSS TERRACES

Yields of wheat were collected from 16 plots of 16 m², which were stretched out either to run parallel to the riser (2x8m) (along the terrace) or to run between the riser and wall (8x2m) (across the terrace). Using all the plots, the yield of the terrace was 4442 kg/ha.

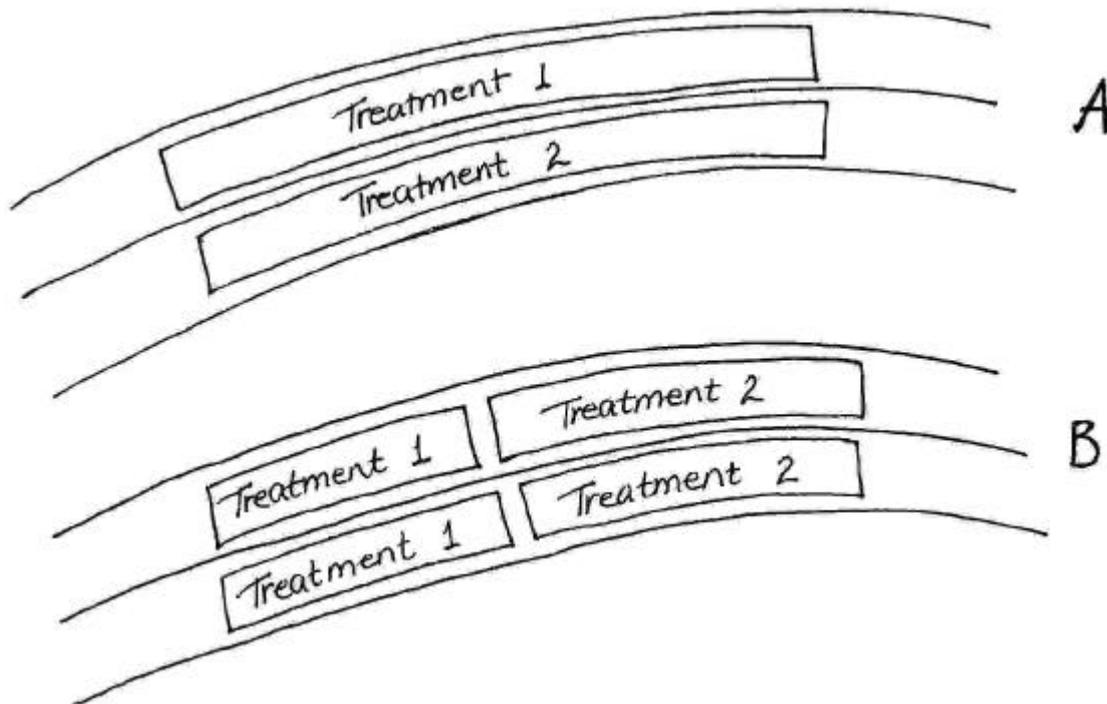
Plots orientated along the terrace gave yields which varied from 4837 to 3904, a range of 933 kg/ha.

Plots orientated across the terrace gave yields which varied from 4878 to 4095, a range of 783 kg/ha.

The range of the possible yield estimates which might have been obtained from a plot orientated along the terrace is about 20% greater than that from a plot orientated across the terrace.

In surveys or crop cutting for estimation of farmers' yields, the plot should also be orientated across the terrace to obtain accurate yields.

Figure 3. Treatments on terraces. Layout A is not a recommended way to test two treatments on two terraces. This layout assumes that the two terraces would be of equal productivity if the same treatment had been applied to each. Layout B is the recommended way to test the two treatments. If there are differences between the terraces, they will influence both treatments.



The recommendations above refer to terraces which have a single slope or are irrigated. Less is known about the variability of terraces with multiple slopes, but Recommendations 1 and 2 could be expected to hold for many types of terrace. The example in Box 1 shows that yields obtained when plots are orientated across the terrace can be expected to be closer to the 'true' terrace yield than plots orientated across the terrace. Because farmers attach great importance to yield, every effort must be made to correctly estimate this quantity so that farmers' reactions can be understood.

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Participation, Literacy and Empowerment

Reflections on REFLECT

Bimal Phnuyal, David Archer and Sara Cottingham

• Introduction

This edition of *PLA Notes* describes a series of initiatives by literacy practitioners around the world to make the ideals of participation, literacy and empowerment a reality at field level. All these practitioners have been basing their work on the REFLECT approach to literacy and social change; an approach that evolved out of three pilot programmes run from 1993 -1995, and that has today spread to over twenty five countries through ninety five different organisations. It also contains conceptual articles by writers who have been part of the learning process during this period.

This edition represents the shared learning from the problems and successes of the past two years, and is the first serious international compilation of articles on REFLECT. It could be described as a snapshot in the process of adapting and innovating the new approach; a constant process of renewal that recognises that participation at all levels, from local to international, is essential for social change, and central to the REFLECT process itself.

There is a rich tradition of adult literacy and empowerment that has developed inspired by the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (see Phnuyal, this issue). It is hoped that the experiences described in this issue show how REFLECT builds upon the most positive aspects of this tradition. REFLECT also draws on best practice in the world of Participatory Learning and Action. REFLECT has built on the principles, tools and techniques developed by practitioners of Participatory Rural Appraisal. REFLECT generates an intra-community dynamic, removing the external facilitator, and handing over the direction of

the process to local people. As with the shift from RRA to PRA, REFLECT rejects any on-off, occasional or extractive processes. Rather, REFLECT involves using participatory approaches within an extended educational process, self-managed by the community. It involves widening our understanding of literacy, and reveals the intimate connections between literacy, power and powerlessness at all levels. REFLECT is no longer an approach rooted exclusively in local level action; increasingly it involves addressing the relationships between micro and macro power structures, emphasising the need for institutional as well as individual change.

The articles in this issue show the diversity of present REFLECT programmes, and the constant evolution of the approach. But how did REFLECT begin? Below is how we originally defined and introduced REFLECT, followed by a brief summary of the original pilot projects.

• The original definition of REFLECT

REFLECT is a radical new approach to adult literacy and empowerment, developed through field experimentation in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador. The REFLECT approach seeks to build on the theoretical framework developed by the Brazilian Paulo Freire, but provides a practical methodology by drawing on Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques.

In a REFLECT programme there is no textbook - no literacy "primer" - no pre-printed materials other than a guide for the facilitators that is produced locally (preferably with the input of the facilitators themselves). Each

literacy circle develops its own learning materials through the construction of maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams that represent local reality, systematise the existing knowledge of learners and promote the detailed analysis of local issues.

These “graphics” (from the PRA basket of tools) might include maps of households; land use, or land tenancy; calendars of gender workloads, illnesses or income; matrices to analyse local crops, credit sources or ratings of local organisations. Each graphic is initially constructed on the ground using whatever materials are locally available (sticks, stones, beans etc.), and the discussion is facilitated by a local person selected as literacy facilitator.

Participants use simple pictures to label their map and help them transfer it from the ground to a large piece of paper - the first step to literacy. Words can then be introduced in places where their spatial location helps to reinforce recognition. As the REFLECT process progresses so the range of graphics helps produce a wider range of literacy and numeracy activities. A range of participatory approaches can be integrated into REFLECT, including the use of real materials, song, drama, poems, proverbs etc.. There is an emphasis on writing and the active construction of texts rather than passive reading.

By the end of the literacy course, each circle will have produced between twenty to thirty graphics representing a detailed analysis of their environment, and each participant will have these in their own exercise books together with the phrases they have written. The learners are thus able to produce a real document instead of copied scribbles. The graphics become a permanent record for communities, giving them a basis on which to plan their own development. As participants construct their own materials they take ownership of the issues that come up and often take local action, change their behaviour or their attitudes.

• **The pilot projects**

There were three action research pilots in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador - supported by ActionAid and funded by the UK

Overseas Development Administration (now Department for International Development, DFID). In Budibugyo, Uganda, the pilot was in a multi-lingual area where neither of the two main local languages was previously written. In Bhola, Bangladesh, the pilot was with women’s savings and credit groups in a conservative Islamic area, and in Usulután, El Salvador, the pilot was with COMUS, a grass roots community-based organisation run by ex-guerrillas. All the pilots were evaluated against traditional literacy classes using “primers” (a special type of text book designed for teaching adult literacy). The results were published in the ODA (now DFID) Education Paper, Number 17 (1996).

This paper concluded that the REFLECT approach proved to be more effective than primer-based methods both at teaching people to read and write (60-70% of those enrolled learnt to read and write) and at linking literacy with empowerment. In respect of empowerment, the major outcomes were: self realisation - most participants spoke of an increased ability to solve problems as well as to articulate ideas; increased participation in community organisations e.g. 61% of learners in Usulután took up positions of responsibility; community level actions in agriculture (e.g. food stores), health (growing medicinal herbs), and management of natural resources (e.g. tree planting); changes in gender division of labour - in Bundibugyo, men took on some household chores to free women for more farm work; enrolling children in school and starting non formal education centres, and health awareness.

The review concluded that literacy in itself did not empower people but that the two processes of literacy and empowerment were mutually reinforcing, and that dramatic benefits in the pilots were the result of this. It was also concluded that the approach was reasonably simple to use and cost effective.

• **The REFLECT mother manual**

The best practice from these three pilot programmes was consolidated into a “REFLECT Mother Manual”, published by ActionAid in 1996. This was intended to be a guide for people in other countries and contexts who were interested in adapting the

approach. The idea behind the manual was that it would never be used directly - but would be the basis for organisations to adapt the approach and produce local “facilitators manuals”. These local manuals are usually written in a local language and consist of 20 or 30 “Units”. Each Unit consists of a participatory tool or technique specifically adapted to the local context and some guidelines on how to use the tool to generate discussion and introduce practical literacy and numeracy work.

In the production of the REFLECT Mother Manual, language was used very carefully. Although easy to use, terms such as “teacher” and “learner” or “class” were avoided as they bring with them a range of images and associations which contradict with the principles and practice of REFLECT. Instead, the terms “facilitator”, “participant” and “circle” are used - to emphasise the democratic nature of the REFLECT process.

We have continued this practice in this edition of *PLA Notes* and we hope that the effect is positive. Nevertheless, we are aware that any approach or movement generates its own jargon and wish to avoid this wherever possible. Developing jargon is often an unconscious way of using literacy to construct power and exclude people. To be consistent we have found it essential to reflect continually on our own practice, recognising the need for changes in our own attitudes, behaviour and action - both as individuals and organisations.

• **REFLECT: the next generation**

REFLECT is now a rapidly evolving approach as practitioners in so many different countries and organisations adapt it in new ways. It is therefore appropriate that the first article in this theme issue summarises the latest developments in the REFLECT approach and provides a new definition of REFLECT, together with core principles and characteristics (see Box 1 and Archer, this issue). These are the outcomes from the most recent international REFLECT seminar which brought together fifteen key practitioners from Africa, Asia and Latin America to critique the Mother Manual.

This is followed by an article by Bimal Phnuyl on the organic process of REFLECT, and another by Keshav Gautam explaining the fundamental problems with the Mother Manual and the local facilitators’ manual (a concern often expressed with regard to PRA manuals). Finally in this cluster, Sara Cottingham describes the delicate balance between innovation and distortion in the rapid spread of the approach, and how support strategies have changed over the last two years. Many of these issues and strategies will find resonance with PRA practitioners.

BOX 1

REFLECT - THE RENEWED DEFINITION

REFLECT is a structured participatory learning process which facilitates people’s critical analysis of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. Through the creation of democratic spaces and the construction and interpretation of locally-generated texts, people build their own multi-dimensional analysis of local and global reality, challenging dominant development paradigms and redefining power relationships in both public and private spheres. Based on ongoing processes of reflection and action, people empower themselves to work for a more just and equitable society.

These articles are followed by specific case studies from India, Bangladesh, UK, and Nepal, which provide an insight into the diverse nature of the empowerment process in different countries (see Madhusudan, Kanyesigye, Nessa et al., Bhattarai et al., and Norris, this issue).

There is also a series of articles which explore key challenges in moving from a technical input to a more negotiated and inclusive approach to training literacy facilitators - by Maria Nandago from Uganda; Jillian Popkins from UK, and Rahman and Khan from Bangladesh. The importance of fora for trainers and facilitators to share experience is highlighted, and this theme is continued in the article on the resistance and structural changes necessary for REFLECT to be introduced in CIAZO in El Salvador (see Orellana et al., this issue).

The next cluster of articles explores some of the different contexts in which REFLECT has been used: in an urban area (see Jellema and Fiedrich, this issue), with children (see Cottingham, this issue), and the potential challenges and prospects for large scale programmes (Mogre and Adu Gyamfi, this issue).

Lastly, some key themes common to all participatory approaches to literacy and empowerment are explored: the challenge of integrating gender (Gomez and Metcalf, this issue); evolving conceptions of literacy (Archer, this issue); the challenge of adult numeracy (Foroni and Newman, this issue) and the way in which participants appropriate and use literacy (Jellema, this issue). Finally there is an end piece on the greatest contributor to participation, literacy and empowerment, Paulo Freire- who sadly passed away in May, 1997 (Phnuyal, this issue).

It has been a pleasure to prepare this edition of *PLA Notes* over the last few months, but we must ask ourselves whether we have managed to fulfil the aim of *PLA Notes* in creating a democratic space in which men and women from both North and South have an authentic voice. The *PLA Notes* series is a concrete example of the link between literacy and power which is at the root of REFLECT. A review of the authors shows that there are

fifteen male authors, twelve female authors, ten authors from the North, and seventeen authors from the South. We leave the analysis to you!

Finally, we welcome comments on any of the articles included in this edition, either directly to us or to the authors themselves. A list of contacts and resources is included. Anyone who wants more information should join the international REFLECT network or subscribe to Education Action (see the *In Touch* section).

Enjoy your reading!

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RESOURCES

The REFLECT MOTHER MANUAL is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Bengali from the International Education Unit of ActionAid, £12 each + postage/packing (address as above).

The ODA Action Research Report on the REFLECT Pilots Projects is available from DFID, 94 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 5JL, UK.

7

The REFLECT process at an international level

David Archer

• Introduction

Two years since the publication of the original Mother Manual, there are REFLECT programmes in 25 countries, working through 95 organisations, and many more countries and organisations are planning to start soon (see Figure 1). The original REFLECT Mother Manual, written in 1995 (based on the consolidated learning from 3 pilot programmes, in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador) and published in March 1996 is still a definitive starting point for most REFLECT programmes. However, it is already out of date. Innovations in practice in many countries have stretched REFLECT further and improved our understanding of everything from the training process to monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, the theoretical underpinning of REFLECT is becoming stronger, but this is not strongly articulated in the manual. Although it is widely well received, there have been some concerns about the bulk of the manual, the design and layout.

In early 1998, it was concluded that there was a desperate need to pull together all the concerns that have been raised and all the innovations that have been developed in practice since 1996. We felt the need to reflect further upon the theoretical side and think through the best way to make the manual user-friendly. To this end, a workshop was organised bringing together fifteen leading REFLECT practitioners from 11 countries (4 Latin Americans, 4 Asians, 3 Africans and 4 Europeans).

The workshop was designed to echo the principles and processes of REFLECT and as it proceeded, we became aware that the

workshop was the operational expression of our own REFLECT circle which has been evolving through international interactions over the past years. It became clear that we need to regard REFLECT not just as an approach to work at a local level, but as an approach which was equally valid for ourselves at an international level. Indeed, we emerged convinced that conceiving REFLECT as a process at all levels was integral to the approach itself.

We have already learnt that the most effective approach at the facilitator level is not to 'train' facilitators as if they are delivery instruments; rather facilitators have to be actively engaged in constructing their own texts, taking ownership of the approach and internalising it. Without this internalisation, they will have very limited ability to effectively facilitate a process for others. Equally, training of trainers has proved most effective where trainers have become co-facilitators and horizontal relationships have led to an equitable practice of power within the process. This logic is now being followed through to the national and regional level through trainers' fora (see Rahman, this issue) and REFLECT networks (see Cottingham, this issue). The Manual Revision workshop sowed the seeds of a similar process at the international level. The workshop was based on reflecting upon our experience, critically analysing it and constructing new texts.

This multi-layered process is crucial for ensuring effective REFLECT practice at the local level. If there is an inequitable practice of power at the macro level, then this will be replicated (even amplified) with power distortions all the way through the system. However, in addition to this, it is important to consider the REFLECT process at each level as having a value in itself (not always oriented towards the micro level practice). At each level, the REFLECT process can lead to individual change and often to processes of institutional change, which are both an integral part of the learning process and of immense importance in themselves.

• **The mother manual**

The focus of the workshop was on the REFLECT Mother Manual. It was felt that this document was effective in disseminating REFLECT, but was also potentially a seed for the distortion (see Gautam, this issue). It had become, by accident, a ‘sacred text’ which was all too easily interpreted mechanically and used by trainers to assert their expertise (and power) over facilitators. Whilst it was designed with the intention of in-built flexibility (requiring organisations to create their own local manuals, adapted to their own local context), practice has shown that the best REFLECT programmes are those which have virtually ignored it (or at least transcended it) and the worst are those which have used it mechanically (even to the extent of copying the sample units).

The workshop began with a critique of the Manual, identifying strengths, weaknesses and gaps and with a view to rewriting it. However, it became clear that a more radical shift was required, abolishing the whole concept of a manual. Certain resource materials are needed at an international level, pulling together learning and providing an overview of REFLECT for new practitioners, but this should not be conceived of, or structured as, a manual. An equal focus needs to be given to a series of discussion papers on key issues which can draw on case study experience and explore critical themes from the perspective of diverse practitioners. Furthermore, a focus needs to be placed on much wider dissemination of local and national case studies, evaluations and learnings, in order to reveal the diversity of

practices and minimise the risk of standardisation.

Learnings

The workshop also explored some fundamental questions concerning how we conceive literacy, power, knowledge, development, gender and stratification. There was vigorous discussion on each of these, always drawing from our diverse field practice, with an emerging consensus that:

- the REFLECT Mother Manual fails to acknowledge sufficiently the stratification that is inherent within all communities and which is present in all REFLECT circles; we need to focus more on how REFLECT creates a democratic space in which these stratifications become the focus of reflection and analysis;
- gender needs to be fully integrated into the approach, rather than being a casual add-on. Unless we internalise gender analysis as an integral part of REFLECT, the gender outcomes will depend on the gender sensitivity of implementing organisations. Recognising that discussion of all issues can be enriched by a gender perspective and that social transformation cannot be complete without change in gender relations, we agreed the need for a substantial re-think of the gender dimension of REFLECT (see Gomez and Metcalf, this issue);
- we should avoid romanticising local knowledge and acknowledge the complex inter-weaving of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ knowledge which REFLECT participants draw on in analysing local issues;
- development favours a functional literacy approach which enables marginal people to be incorporated into established economic and social values and practices. By contrast, a process like REFLECT enables people to critically analyse those values and practices;
- if we are to talk coherently about empowerment, we need to have a much clearer sense of what we mean by ‘power’. Power has often been conceived of as a quantity but this is not adequate, and we need to move towards an understanding of power as an attribute or a process; and,

- we need to re-conceive ‘literacy’ as encapsulating a wider range of communicative practices (including speaking, listening, gestures, language, discourse and even media), although it may be necessary to avoid the word literacy altogether, as it is inevitably interpreted in reductive ways (as the 3Rs - Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) in most contexts.

Definition

Following this analysis, the participants came up with a new agreed definition for REFLECT:

“REFLECT is a structured participatory learning process which facilitates people’s critical analysis of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. Through the creation of democratic spaces and the construction and interpretation of locally generated texts, people build their own multi-dimensional analysis of local and global reality, challenging dominant development paradigms and re-defining power relationships (in both public and private spheres).”

• Basic principles

Each participant individually wrote their own list of the basic principles of REFLECT. These were compiled, reviewed, fed back and critically analysed, resulting in the following list of principles:

- Gender equity is integral to all aspects of REFLECT, as it is essential for social transformation;
- The REFLECT process explores and analyses the causes of power inequalities and oppression;
- Stratifications and power relationships affect everyone involved in the process; REFLECT should seek to provide the space, time and process by which these stratifications can become an integral part of the process of critical analysis;
- Conflict is a reality in people’s lives and should be addressed constructively within the process, not suppressed or avoided;
- REFLECT is an evolving process, which must be continually recreated for each new context. Innovation is integral to the process;
- Individual transformation is as important as collective transformation;
- The equitable practice of power at all levels in the REFLECT process, is essential for determining empowerment outcomes; and,
- Institutional and individual change at all levels are an integral part of the process, making the networking of participants, facilitators, trainers, staff and organisations an essential part of REFLECT.

REFLECT characteristics

REFLECT draws upon and has evolved out of a diversity of theories and grassroots experiences including: the work of Freire, PRA, Gender, Popular Education, empowerment-based approaches to development, and the lived practice of over 100 organisations in 25 countries who have contributed to its continuing development.

REFLECT is a political process, creating a democratic space in which existing cultural norms and power relationships are challenged.

REFLECT challenges the view of communities as homogenous entities, recognising diversity, stratification and power imbalances (by gender, class, caste, race, age, language, physical ability etc.) which it is committed to transform.

REFLECT aims to provide the space, time and tools for an internal community process, which challenges the traditional externally-dominated model of development. It aims to enable people to see knowledge and social relations, not as ‘givens’ but as constructs, which can be re-constructed and changed, facilitating a process through which the oppressed can re-write their reality.

REFLECT is a learning process that starts from people’s reflection on their socio-economic, cultural and political environment and aims to promote change in individuals, communities, organisations and societies. It is

an intensive and extensive, horizontal, educational process.

REFLECT draws on a wide range of participatory tools and techniques, including a range of visualisation tools, theatre/role play, story-telling and diverse forms of cultural communication.

REFLECT is based on the generation of texts (in both visual and print forms) by participants themselves, through which they can identify their problems, needs, interests, capacities, expectations and priorities.

The REFLECT process recognises literacy (in the sense of reading and writing) as part of a wider set of communicative practices (including listening, speaking, language, discourse and media), all of which are crucial to either maintaining or challenging power relationships. REFLECT seeks to promote a multi-dimensional approach to literacy and these wider practices.

REFLECT adapts to the different conceptions of 'literacy' which exist in different contexts.

REFLECT is an approach to transformation, which seeks to impact not only communities but also the people and institutions involved in the process, making the networking of participants, facilitators, trainers, staff and organisations an essential part of the REFLECT process.

• Conclusion

Based on the analysis in the workshop, a detailed plan has been drawn up for the coming months to develop new resource material on REFLECT. As well as a new international resource book on REFLECT (to replace the Mother Manual), a strategy has been developed for dissemination of local and national case studies, to promote diversity. We are also planning a series of Discussion Papers which will be produced by different individuals drawing on REFLECT case studies and contributions from around the world. Each of these will be led by the following different individuals who welcome your contributions (see Box 2).

BOX 2

SUBJECT LIST AND LEAD CONTACT FOR REFLECT DISCUSSION PAPERS

Gender: Geni Gomez, (Nicaragua) Kate Metcalf (UK)

Numeracy: Nicola Foroni (Italy) Kate Newman (UK),

Knowledge: Anne Jellema (UK)

Language: Sara Cottingham (UK), James Kanyesigye (Uganda)

Stratification and Power: Keshav Gautam (Nepal) and N. Madhusudan (India)

Literacy / Communication Practices: David Archer (UK), Habibur Rahman (Bangladesh)

Development Paradigms: Anne Jellema

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: Bimal Phnuyal (Nepal), James Kanyesigye (Uganda)

Training and Institutional Change: Bimal Phnuyal (Nepal), Nicola Foroni, Dahar

Large Scale Programmes: Salifu Mogre (Ghana), Marden Nochez (El Salvador)

Generations / Youth and Older People: Teresa Casteneda (Peru), Geni Gomez

See REFLECT Contacts (p124) for contact details

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The organic process of participation and empowerment in REFLECT

Bimal Phnuyal

• Summary

Experience with REFLECT shows that literacy in itself is not sufficient to empower people unless conscious and planned efforts are made to interweave it with a participatory and empowering development process. This article raises some questions about understanding the process of empowerment, as well as sharing practical observations about the organic process of participation and empowerment in REFLECT.

PRA experiences from around the world show that the use of participatory tools and techniques in appraisal, planning or implementation is only one of the components for promoting a participatory process. Other key aspects include: the attitude and behaviour of practitioners, participatory policies and practices of organisation, and participatory monitoring and evaluation for an organisational learning system to function. An organic process of participation and empowerment promotes all these elements, which cannot be separated from one another.

• Introduction

Critical analysis is a crucial and initial activity in the REFLECT process. REFLECT practitioners, from community level local facilitators, learner-participants to national and international trainers, researchers and managers, all conduct this analysis of society. The process of critical analysis helps us to understand how a given reality is constructed, its institutional mechanism, its history and current dynamism. In the process, we also

come to realise why literacy or illiteracy is a political and structural issue rather than a personal and “educational” issue.

The use of participatory tools helps to structure the analysis in a systematic way. Each participant has the opportunity to contribute their perspective and experience. A continuous visual recording of perceived facts, tentative figures and different life experiences is a powerful way to explore the complexity of our environment. Awareness of social stratification is a primary step towards critical and in-depth social analysis. In REFLECT, this analysis develops from an individual to a collective experience, from household to community level, from local to global and also from simple to complex issues.

• Participants and facilitators learn

In the REFLECT learning process, participants and facilitators contribute as well as learn. They can re-discover their reality, identify their respective positions in it, and also explore the potential for a positive change in the status quo. Everyone has the potential to grow and empower themselves.

Whether drawing a village resource map in a community or conducting a national level social stratification exercise (see below), the role of a facilitator is to initiate the process of analysis, not to dictate its content. Participants decide the content. This should not mean that a facilitator cannot share his or her views, because a facilitator is also a participant in the overall process. Rather, the facilitator avoids imposing “answers”. Thus the REFLECT process becomes a two way learning experience with the facilitators sharing their new learning with the group.

The role of the facilitator is crucial for synthesising the learning, otherwise the learning process can become stalled. What is important is that there is a learning process, irrespective of whether it is facilitated by an insider or an outsider. Only then can both participants and the facilitator learn from the process. REFLECT provides an effective participatory frame or methodology, which is a new contribution to the Freirean tradition.

• **Practise theories and theorise practice**

Paulo Freire advocated that literacy or illiteracy is a socio-political and structural issue. Illiteracy is a social product and also the result of an oppressive and unjust social mechanism. The REFLECT process is in broad agreement with this view. Our experience, however, shows that simply teaching this 'fact' to the participants does not work, participants have to internalise this learning in their own context.

For example, the issue of social stratification was explored in a recent REFLECT Trainers' forum in Bangladesh (Chittagong, April 1998), which brought together REFLECT trainers from different organisations based in various parts of the country. A national map (social and physical) and regional and sub-regional maps were produced by people from each area. The group identified various groups in rural and urban Bangladesh using a range of criteria, including: socio-economic status, language, culture, ethnicity, indigenous people, occupational and professional status etc.. They also analysed the situation of women and men in these groups to see how gender interacts with other types of social stratification. Finally, they analysed levels of literacy and education amongst the different groups and the root causes for the lack of access to education.

It took about five hours to complete this analysis and for the group to have identified structural causes of illiteracy in Bangladesh. This helped to promote an understanding of why simply running literacy classes is not sufficient. The roots of the problem have to be addressed - illiteracy is both an effect and a cause of underdevelopment. This example demonstrates how REFLECT tries not to teach theories, rather it practises theories.

• **Political literacy**

Existing local and global oppressive mechanisms contribute to gender, socio-economic and racial discrimination at the household and community level. This means that poor and minority ethnic communities are suppressed and illiterate people, together with "underdeveloped" nations, are excluded from mainstream discourses at global level. These practices are legitimised through the psychological and cultural environment.

Through a critical analysis of power structures in society, REFLECT promotes 'political literacy', an understanding of how power relations work. REFLECT empowers individuals by helping them to develop a politically literate attitude and behaviour which can ultimately lead to wider institutional and societal changes from local to global level.

Social stratification

Power relationships are overlapping. For example, without addressing both gender and racial discrimination, poverty and illiteracy may not be improved. Thus, analysis of social stratification is a fundamental part in REFLECT - whether in TOT (training of trainers), TOF (training of local facilitators) or community level REFLECT circles.

Following social stratification analysis during a recent REFLECT TOT in Pakistan (Abbottabad, March 1998), many of the participants, who have been involved in various government and NGO literacy programmes, commented that they had previously focused on literacy activities without addressing the structural causes of illiteracy in society. Later, they discussed what the role of REFLECT practitioners should be in order to effectively address this issue.

This led us to realise that it is not only the non-literate population who have to learn and change their behaviour, but that literate outsiders have to change as well. We need to understand the structural causes of why more women are 'illiterate' than men (e.g. in Pakistan), why 'illiteracy' is higher in rural areas than urban areas, why more poor people are 'illiterate' than rich people, why more manual workers are non-literate compared

with their literate office clerks. We subsequently explored the historical causes of why more people in developing societies are non-literate compared to the industrially developed and militarily powerful countries.

It was also discussed that understanding and a change in attitude and behaviour should not be confined to a narrow sense of giving respect to a person or speaking politely. What is more important is to promote a politically literate attitude for both individual practitioners and organisations. Through the REFLECT process we have been continuously learning, particularly with regard to the potential for change: how to transform reality and reformulate policies and procedures?

• **Awareness to action**

The REFLECT process leads to awareness and action for transformation. Because REFLECT practitioners at all levels learn and acquire political literacy in the process, awareness and action for change can take place at all levels - both individual and organisational. Individual awareness leads to changes in personal attitudes and behaviour, whether on gender,

generational, economic or environmental issues. REFLECT can bring new and radical elements into the social sphere of adults.

Gender analysis in practice

Let us take the example of gender in REFLECT. There are numerous cases from different parts of the world on how participation in gender analysis has contributed to participants 'discovering' a new reality and how men and women subsequently started to behave in a more gender sensitive way. It has not always been an easy process, but it has helped to analyse the elements of given conflicts.

A recent example from Nepal (Basnet, Taplejung, April 1998) illustrates how the REFLECT process deals with practical issues and also how by starting from an individual's life experience, critical social issues can be raised and addressed (see Box 1). Interaction and analysis in REFLECT circles have led NGO management to prioritise their activities differently and re-strategise their work (see Madhusudan and Bhattarai et al., this issue).

BOX 1 **EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN**

Through analysing gender differences in workloads, participants in REFLECT learning circles in the Taplejung district of Nepal, became aware of discriminatory wage rates for women and men. It had been a longstanding practice that, whether they are paid in cash or grain, women receive only half the pay of men for completing the same number of hours of work. This issue was first discussed in the learning circle but was eventually taken beyond it. Discrimination in wage rates soon became a community issue and various conflicting views started to be expressed. REFLECT circle participants and many others in the village, both women and men, felt that the discriminatory wage-rate practice was an injustice that needed to be reformed. They managed to change the beliefs of some community members who had initially supported discriminatory wages. Despite resistance and pressure, circle participants and other community members, have succeeded in putting equal wages into practice.

In addition to the REFLECT circle participants at community level, REFLECT practitioners at different levels, including trainers and programme managers, learnt from the process. The most important learning is that the participatory process should go beyond narrow project planning to affect positively social practices. Another learning is that analysis and discussion on important issues, such as the discriminatory wage rates, should not be confined to the REFLECT circle. Without involving outside other community members in discussion, it is not possible to plan collective social action to address the issues.

Furthermore, and as a result of awareness leading to action, REFLECT trainers have moved away from lecturing on Freire and PRA to practising a participatory learning process during training. We have learnt that the contextualisation of REFLECT principles, or the re-creation of REFLECT, should take place from the outset, from the time of training and orientation as participants begin to explore on their own and develop their vision and innovate techniques during training. Training often becomes the model for how practitioners act later on, so it is important that the training experience is a learning one, rather than a teaching-based one.

• Power and participation

All development organisations and professionals now espouse the importance of participation and participatory methods. Participation has become a fashion and there are many interpretations of what a participatory development process means. As REFLECT practitioners, we have learnt that one core element of a participatory process is to contribute to the positive transformation of power relations, which is at the heart of empowerment. Only when oppressed and marginalised classes, castes, sexes or ethnic groups of people gain new power (physical or psychological, economic or cultural) at individual and societal level, can they participate effectively in the decision making process.

Some practitioners use physical involvement of people in a particular activity as an indicator of participation. Yet what may be more important, is to see who designed the activity and how it affects power relations. If some 'beneficiaries' simply participate in implementing a project activity which was not planned by them, and if they have never analysed its impact, then the 'benefit' may not empower them. In this case, participation is cosmetic, rather than genuine participation. In REFLECT, participants are involved in a thorough analysis of their reality, including an analysis of power relations, and plan their action for change. Box 1's example of women's action for equal wage rates can be taken as an example of how genuine participation can lead to action to transform unequal power relations.

This also applies in training situations. In REFLECT, we have observed that teaching PRA techniques to participants is qualitatively different from doing or practising PRA in the 'real world' context. The question of transforming power relations must be addressed within the training process as, without this, recreation of REFLECT does not become possible.

• Conclusions

The REFLECT process emphasises empowering people to be able to read the world, rather than reading the word. However, this is not an either/or situation. Political literacy enables one to read the world from one's position and perspective. A thorough analysis of given stratifications and power relations helps to promote an understanding of social dynamism, as well as see the possibility of change. Awareness and change at the individual level is important, but this must be supported by change in organisational policies and practices for societal change to occur.

REFLECT, like any participatory process, cannot have a blue-print for scaling up. Recreation of REFLECT means a process of involving people to do their own analysis and to develop their own vision. We can learn a lot from others' practice and also clarify basic principles of participatory processes through supporting each others' work, but ultimately it is necessary for each person and circle to re-create REFLECT according to the local situation.

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An encounter with a 17th century manual

Keshav Gautam

• Introduction

In September 1997, I had the opportunity to visit the British Museum with some of my colleagues. As we were looking at some of the old books on a table, we were quite taken with a book entitled 'A Sewing Manual for House Wives'. This book, if I can correctly recall, dated back to seventeenth century.

We were struck by the idea that manuals of this type existed so many years ago and, before long, our curiosity led us to seek out many other kinds of manual. There were manuals for kitchen gardens, for cooking and for knitting. In fact, we found a wide variety of detailed manuals, all of which dated back several centuries.

This discovery led us to reflect. All the manuals were targeted at European society and in all cases, they were targeted at women as the primary users. The manuals contained basic information, in the form of instructions, on how to do certain things in a certain manner. We were struck by the fact that in all cases, the authors of these books were men.

The REFLECT mother manual

The word 'manual' is now in vogue amongst development workers and there is a growing tendency to produce a manual for almost any kind of work that we can possibly think of such as bee-keeping manuals, training manuals, manuals for social analysis, PRA manuals and so forth.

One of the more recent developments has been the creation of the REFLECT Mother Manual.

As with all the other cases, this was written with good intentions, but increasingly we need

to ask whether good intentions are enough. The concept and nature of a manual may be in direct contradiction with the very approach which it is introducing.

Many PRA practitioners have grappled with this concern. For many years no PRA manual was available and the spread of the approach was through the exchange of case studies (e.g. in *RRA Notes* and later *PLA Notes*) or through horizontal links between practitioners. Producing a manual was seen to be fundamentally problematic as it might lead to stagnation or top down domination.

To some extent, the writers of the REFLECT Mother Manual acknowledge the problems inherent in a manual in the title. The manual is not a manual to be applied directly, but rather is a manual which will generate new manuals: sons and daughters. These should be locally produced manuals, adapted to the local environment. It aims, therefore, to avoid being a packaged manual, offering a standardised solution on how to do a certain thing in a certain way. It tries to emphasise diversity and flexibility. Yet can it achieve this? Does it in fact propagate many new manuals which are genetically very similar to the parent one?

A dictionary definition of a manual is that it is a book containing information or practical instruction on a given subject. The current use or understanding of any kind of manual is not very far from that definition. The manuals in the British Museum appeared to offer a very clear sense of this in practice. They were texts written by the 'knowing' for the 'unknowing'. Whilst they may have served as the source of some practical advice, this was probably secondary. Their primary impact was to delineate the appropriate domestic role of women in society.

We need, therefore, to look beyond the content of the REFLECT Mother Manual and consider its role and impact as a text. One consideration here is to look at the impact of the Manual as a one off definitive publication on REFLECT, which has induced some people to regard it as a 'sacred text' and something from which deviation should not be tolerated. Whilst the content of the text urges flexibility and re-interpretation of REFLECT in each context, the nature and structure of text promotes the opposite.

The REFLECT Mother Manual was written as a result of the positive experiences of the initial pilot REFLECT programmes in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador. These programmes were evaluated and showed positive achievements, so the issue of scaling up the approach was developed. But how is it possible to spread an approach such as REFLECT? Although other approaches were also used, the production and dissemination of a manual became a central part of the strategy. There is no doubt that many people have adapted the manual to their own situation and used it creatively. However, there is also an increasing concern that the manual may be having unintended negative impacts.

• **South Asia experience: challenging the use of manuals**

The REFLECT Mother Manual was not the first of its kind to promote and assist literacy workers in Nepal. For many years, primer-based literacy programmes have also included the publication of manuals or guidebooks for facilitators. In all cases, the intention behind the production of the manual cannot be questioned. One particular manual which stands out, was produced nationally for use in a mass literacy campaign in Nepal.

Whilst much effort is placed on preparing these manuals, field level practitioners are, on the other hand, constantly talking about the capacity of facilitators who can be recruited in rural areas. They rarely match the ideal profile which is conjured up in manuals, and yet, after a couple of weeks of training, they are expected to run literacy centres with little help, other than some "primers", or a facilitators' manual/guide-book. As a result, we often experience problems of dropout or very poor

performance of the participants; or rapid disillusion and drop out amongst the facilitators themselves. In spite of all these problems, the preoccupation of most literacy promoters and co-ordinators is to meet their programme targets, increasing the number of centres each year.

For all the good ideas in any manual, the use of a manual in such circumstances has not helped the facilitators to teach creatively. Few of the ideas or suggestions are internalised by the facilitators. If used, the manual, becomes a source of prescriptions to be mechanically followed and there are rarely examples of facilitators adapting the suggestions meaningfully to the context in which they are working.

The use of a facilitators' guide book or manual is thus rarely effective. For those of us excited at the potential of REFLECT to offer a new approach, we have to be very careful about falling into the use of old tools or mechanisms.

In the case of REFLECT, this challenge applies at two levels: first, to the REFLECT Mother Manual itself and second, to the local REFLECT manuals, which the Mother manual aims to generate. For example, we need to question whether a local REFLECT manual is any different from any other manual, when it comes to the grassroots level. Is the manual being used to further the dependence of the facilitators on it or are we promoting their capacities, so that they can redefine and use the manual according to their context? Is a manual likely to freeze REFLECT and prevent its evolution or adaptation? Does a manual create a gap between the 'experts' and the 'others'?

The REFLECT Mother manual suggests that a local team of people should produce the local facilitators' manual and recruit and train facilitators in the use of the manual. This approach was rejected in Nepal because it appeared to fall into the trap of producing a manual, not dissimilar to old manuals, in which people were told what to do but were rarely able to do it. Providing facilitators with a definitive manual produced by other people (even if done locally) would be to disempower them; make them 'cogs' in the delivery of the programme; robots, who should

follow a set of instructions. Instead, the focus has been placed on training of facilitators in the ideas and methods of REFLECT, so that they can internalise the approach and make it their own - doing those things they feel comfortable with and ignoring others. There is no sacred text for them to follow.

This requires a different mode of operation from the one in vogue. One-off training or casual follow-up training is not enough. The challenge is to establish a process that is continuous, developing and engaging local institutions to develop their potentialities at various levels. Mere reliance on the manual to propagate an approach will not be sufficient. We need to constantly have dialogue with the facilitators and the users of the approach.

This 'no manual' approach, currently being followed in Nepal, forms a stark contrast to what was developed in Bangladesh. There, the REFLECT Mother Manual, together with the manual from the pilot programme in Bhola, was used as a very direct resource for producing other local manuals, which had relatively little variation or adaptation. This is now changing and diversification is being emphasised, but there was a clear indication that the weight of a 'definitive manual' was distorting the very philosophy which the manual itself propounded.

In India a further innovation has emerged which offers a third way. This involves the facilitators themselves producing their own local manual in the course of initial and on-going training. Having been introduced to some basic participatory tools, they adapt the tools to address critical local issues and then write their own guidelines (for themselves) on how each tool could be used for developing reading, writing and numeracy practice. By being involved in the process of producing a text, they echo the process of the REFLECT circle itself. Having written their own manual, they are less likely to regard it as sacred and are more able to adapt the approach to their own individual contexts. The 'manual' they produce is compiled loose leaf, so that it can be updated and revised and never becomes a fixed or frozen text. Any manual should always be in the process of production or revision if it is to avoid becoming, in effect, a new primer.

There is no single path but it is clear that the concept of a manual is inherently problematic. In seeking to develop a radical approach to literacy, we must avoid becoming unwittingly constrained by one of the most inherently reactionary forms of text.

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How can REFLECT be used widely without diluting the participatory nature of the process?

Sara Cottingham

• Spread too thinly?

This is the question that REFLECT practitioners have been facing ever since the launch of REFLECT nearly two years ago. It is a key question for all advocates of participatory methods as they become increasingly popular within agencies of widely varying political interests and capacities. This article tells the story of the spread of REFLECT and some of the lessons being learnt as this takes place.

At the heart of the REFLECT process is a collective analysis of social and economic issues interwoven with literacy. The analysis is done at all levels; from participant to programme co-ordinator, and is unique in every case. The purpose is to control the development agenda from within, reducing the power of outsiders (especially funders), and thus fundamentally challenging the status quo. The successful experience of this process in the pilot projects was documented and shared in the REFLECT Mother Manual and an evaluation report.

There are now manuals in dozens of languages in 82 countries; key contacts in 50 countries; people who have taken part in trainings in 37 countries and REFLECT programmes in 25 countries (including the UK) implemented by 95 organisations. These organisations range from local NGOs to governments. The largest programmes (of about 300 circles each) are in Nepal, Bangladesh and El Salvador, where NGO networks have implemented the approach in their own organisations. But the majority of programmes comprise between 20 to 60 circles. Having distributed the manual widely, however, informal channels of information

suggest that there may be many REFLECT programmes, which are not in touch with others.

These 'facts and figures' show a very rapid spread of REFLECT. During the first year after the launch, the activities of resource people involved with the original three pilot programmes were largely reactive, including:

- two-week regional training workshops where people from different countries requested training either through the UK or through ACTIONAID in other countries. The majority of these were in Africa. Training was also done in national workshops;
- launches of the manual by REFLECT practitioners to audiences of government and donor personnel, and staff of national and international NGOs. These usually took place in the capital and were in response to hearing about REFLECT. The Press also attended in many circumstances;
- documenting interesting adaptations in *Education Action*; a magazine read by a wide range of development practitioners (as well as academics, donors etc., see In Touch, this issue);
- translation into Spanish, Portuguese, French, Nepali, Bengali; and,
- practitioners' fora for sharing experience and through this process, forming the human connections on which networking can be based. The purpose of this networking is to learn from others and to strive for a common goal of innovating and improving the approach.

REFLECT review

After this first year of 'reactivity', an informal review of the first generation of REFLECT programmes (i.e. those following the basic approach without major misunderstandings) seemed to fall into two broad categories. Programmes in the first category exhibited diversity through designing their own specific REFLECT programme, and even more interestingly, being innovative with the methodology (e.g. participants deciding on the language to learn rather than following a facilitators' manual).

Programmes in the second category exhibited standardisation. For example, programmes where the units are written in advance by the implementing agency and represent the standard development agenda in the area. The programmes showing diversity seemed to be following the principles of participation and empowerment, whereas the standardised programmes seemed to be diluting the participatory process and empowering the implementing agency more than any other player.

Perhaps the danger with standardisation is distortion. Clearly it is difficult to define what constitutes distortion (as opposed to creative adaptation/evolution), but there are some cases where organisations use the name "REFLECT" with little commitment to the basic principles of the approach and no intent to truly empower participants. This is particularly worrying because REFLECT, like PRA, could be an effective methodology for manipulating people to think a certain way; internalising the social or religious messages of development agencies.

Programmes exhibiting diversity

These reflections aside, it seemed important to understand the factors that promoted diversity or standardisation. A review of programmes in 15 countries by the International Education Unit of ActionAid concluded that organisations which had taken up REFLECT in innovative or creative ways tended to be working with local people in a non-hierarchical way (or be membership organisations). They were aware of social differentiation (gender, age, caste) and the

consequent power relations within the community where the REFLECT circles were running. They followed an ideology of social justice, shared by staff following the same ideology within the organisation, such as in:

- Decision-making;
- having at least one or two individual staff members with the confidence and capacity to implement the new approach for the first time;
- familiarisation with the use of participatory methods in other development work; and,
- being familiar with the language of the REFLECT materials.

In summary, they were able to analyse the new methodology, take a critical approach to their work, prioritise evaluation and learning, and work in a network of organisations sharing and documenting their experience of adapting REFLECT to their own context.

Programmes exhibiting standardisation

By contrast, in the standardised category, people tended:

- to work in hierarchical ways with communities;
- to impose their own agenda for the 'good' of the poor;
- to not be using participatory methods (although perhaps claiming to);
- to not be interested in networking and improving through shared evaluation;
- to not prioritise social injustice as a cause of poverty; often they were more oriented towards a 'technical fix' for poverty alleviation;
- to have hierarchical staff management relations;
- to have no gender perspective;
- to have less committed and less confident staff: absence of creative individuals to adapt the new approach;
- to be unable to read the language of REFLECT materials, and therefore, less free to make their own judgement of the usefulness of the approach for their own work; and,
- to be funding-led - perhaps implementing REFLECT because funding was available.

Initially, all the implementing organisations were NGOs, but their size and sources of funding varied. The factors which, somewhat surprisingly, did not seem to make any difference to the participatory nature of their REFLECT programmes were:

- whether they had received training from trainers with first-hand REFLECT experience;
- whether they had any expertise in literacy before starting REFLECT; and,
- whether they used participatory monitoring and evaluation in the normal course of their work.

• Reflections and Implications

Having identified some of the elements that influence the quality of REFLECT programmes, the International Education Unit discussed the implications of this for our work. Some factors were largely beyond our control. REFLECT was not and is not our “property”. It is not and should not be “owned” by anyone. It is an approach which any organisation can choose to take up and adapt.

Thus, some organisations who start REFLECT programmes will have real political commitment and capacity, but others will not. We cannot prevent or limit the spread. However, as a focal point for practitioners internationally, we can channel our energies and limited resources in order to reinforce innovation and diversity.

Below are a five key learnings that we have drawn out. Each of these elements can be important for promoting innovation in REFLECT in the future:

1. Networking

Networking seems to be particularly important in promoting innovation. Where effective networks exist there is less dependency on “external experts” and a greater potential for horizontal learning between practitioners in different organisations.

Networks may engage in this learning and sharing using many different approaches, such as:

- Exchange visits
- Secondments
- Workshops
- E-mail dialogue / network
- Documentation / dissemination
- Newsletters
- Mutual evaluations

Such horizontal exchange strengthens practitioners capacity to find creative solutions for themselves rather than expecting answers to come from on high. Networking can have a positive impact at a local level (e.g. within a district), a national level, a regional level (e.g. South Asia, Central America, francophone Africa) and an international level. Clearly there should be links between the networks at different levels - ideally with the agenda being set from the bottom upwards.

If a network (at any level) decides to employ a co-ordinator, this person’s role should be as a facilitator, not as a leader. They might help disseminate information, analyse trends, promote evaluation and research, plan technical support, explore funding sources and encourage innovation. However, they should not become (or be perceived as) the “new experts”. This warning needs to be spelt out as power relationships inevitably develop and need to be a constant focus for reflection (as they should be in REFLECT circles).

2. Training of trainers

A key to promoting innovation was felt to be in the way in which international training programmes were run. There was a need to change both the context and method of training. The training courses we conducted in 1996/7 were two week long, training of trainers workshops which we ran on a sub-regional basis (e.g. in East Africa, Southern Africa, Central America). Whilst emphasising participatory approaches they still included a substantial amount of outside input of knowledge, including ‘information’ on Freire and literacy. Now the more appropriate context for training inputs seem to be shorter orientation courses (e.g. five day courses) organised and co-facilitated by interested organisations, usually at a national or district level. The aim is to introduce REFLECT experience to date and let participants decide if it is likely to contribute to their work. After an

initial orientation, committed organisations can go ahead with trainings of a longer duration for staff and facilitators. If they request an outside trainer, then this is as a resource person working with others, not managing the training alone. The method of training more and more, mirrors the reflect process in a literacy circle; relevant issues (e.g. the link between literacy and power) being analysed in collective discussions structured by graphics, with participants producing their own texts and interpretations.

3. Targeting partnerships

In order to promote innovation, it can help to pro-actively seek grassroots organisations with some of the characteristics outlined above. Such organisations can be offered orientation and training and may become reference points for other practitioners.

4. Avoiding dependency

At national and international levels it can be counter-productive to manage any funds for the implementation of REFLECT. If such funding pots are established then it is likely that they will attract organisations who are motivated by funding more than by commitment to the approach. Organisations interested in REFLECT should fund a REFLECT programme by shifting existing resources or taking the initiative to seek new resources for themselves.

5. Radical revision of the REFLECT Mother Manual

The REFLECT Mother Manual, whilst seeking to promote diversity, by its very existence may promote standardisation. This is now being radically revised, making it more of a broad resource, removing all those elements where it slips into becoming a step by step guide. Case studies will illustrate diversity and a wider range of participatory innovations will be incorporated. The revision will be done by people from ten countries and the new resource materials (not a “manual”) will be published collaboratively by various organisations.

• Conclusion

The question posed in the title of this article is not answered. Looking at the current challenges in participatory learning, and the wider debates about how to scale up NGO work more generally, it is not logical for anyone to give a definitive answer to the question. However, the analysis of the last two years of REFLECT experience seems to show that a cascade approach (from the top downwards) is likely to be less successful than a REFLECT approach spread through a diversity of local initiatives and grassroots organisations who share their learning horizontally. This provides a strong basis for innovation and can help to ensure a continuing evolution of REFLECT.

At the moment, it seems that REFLECT will continue to spread, if anything on a larger scale. The challenge to practitioners is to constantly review their support strategies; not being afraid to openly admit mistakes, and not to always label them as learning points. In this way we hope to achieve ‘scale up’ and ‘replication’ through a critical mass at the grass roots which has its own sustainable momentum.

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REFLECT in practice: literacy and change in India

N. Madhusudan

· Introduction

YAKSHI is a small NGO based in Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh, India. It is committed to working with grassroots organisations to promote participatory approaches to development. Over the past five years, YAKSHI has offered technical support to Girijan Deepika (GD), an independent tribal peoples' mass organisation working in East Godavari District, and run by local people. This support has focused on finding practical means for strengthening participatory processes.

YAKSHI and GD decided to experiment with the REFLECT approach in 1995. They saw it as a way of promoting sustained dialogue at a community level and integrating the learning of literacy with the strengthening of indigenous and traditional knowledge systems.

Preparations

At an early stage it was decided that REFLECT should not be introduced to the communities as a literacy programme, as there had been many negative experiences of literacy programmes in the area. Rather, facilitators were recruited from the communities with a view to collectively analysing local problems. In the process of local research, they discovered that an indigenous system of community interaction known as the 'Gotti' was in decline. The Gotti was a traditional forum where people would meet to discuss local problems. It became clear that, if reactivated, the Gotti could offer an ideal forum for people to engage in dialogue.

In most villages, the Gotti had declined, parallel to wider processes of change, particularly concerning the local economy. Over the last

decade, traditional food crops had been undermined by the government policy of subsidising rice, which led to outside companies 'selling' cash crops. Tobacco and cotton were introduced with many promises and in the early years, people made large profits and planted all available land with the new crops. In later years, input costs rose as more fertiliser and pesticides were needed and when prices slumped on international markets, over 80% of households fell into debt. The impact on community life was devastating, as most rituals and cultural practices had been linked to the rhythm of the land, particularly the planting and harvesting of traditional food crops. There was no longer the space or time for meeting in the Gotti; communal interests gave way to individual pursuits in an increasingly monetised economy.

The reviving, or rather, re-inventing, of the Gotti was a priority task for YAKSHI/GD, undertaken through a campaign using street theatre, music, dance and painting. The facilitators developed a play that dramatised how the Gotti functioned, emphasising the importance of active and equal participation.

With the Gotti tradition reactivated, REFLECT could be introduced. The first step was for a team to develop and adapt PRA tools that would help to focus debate on critical local issues. Further local research was undertaken to facilitate this process and each Gotti completed its own process of problem ranking (see Figure 1). The ranking process identified the following major concerns: agriculture, health, forests, land, electricity, roads, education, drinking water, and irrigation.

Ten REFLECT circles were started in 1996. Facilitators were recruited, mostly young people from the communities who showed an interest

and commitment to GD's goals and who had creative communication skills. They were given minimal incentives, not salaries. Circles started meeting three times per week.

Challenging the cash crop economy

Agriculture was consistently highlighted as a major concern, resulting from the rapid and recent changes that had taken place in the area. A series of PRA tools were designed to bring out key agricultural issues, starting with historical maps, contrasting present agriculture in the village with that 30 years ago. This was followed with a crop matrix exploring the uses of each crop. Most Gottis analysed over 20 crops, classifying their use for food or cash. This led to separate matrices, analysing the advantages and disadvantages of different cash crops and food crops.

Cash crops were rarely identified as offering benefits other than income, but required considerable inputs, e.g. land, plough bullocks, seeds, capital, market, water, pesticide, labour, and had led to many losses. One Gotti identified the following disadvantages: indebtedness, no food or proper markets, suicides (drinking fertiliser), lack of fodder for livestock, new health problems (e.g. fertiliser contamination, tobacco related diseases: TB).

In contrast, food crops were seen to be useful for encouraging communal work, providing food security and fodder for livestock and poultry, maintaining soil fertility, producing some cash (if sold) and preventing debts (as inputs were low). The disadvantages related to predators and the vulnerability of some crops to heavy rains or winds.

When all circles had completed a full analysis of agricultural issues, they were encouraged to identify possible solutions and actions. The cumulative analysis lasted several weeks resulting in substantial planned actions. Many Gottis decided to plant 50% of their land with food crops - reversing the trend towards complete domination by tobacco and cotton. Seed banks were established to preserve and multiply traditional food crops; demonstration plots were set up to grow crops without fertilisers; and indigenous water sources (ponds and small tanks), which had fallen into disrepair, were rehabilitated.

Figure 1. An example of a graphic constructed by REFLECT participants showing the level of analysis undertaken by local people. (Photo: D. Archer)

Holistic views of health

Once the agriculture theme was completed, the planning team of YAKSHI and GD developed PRA tools to address health issues, including health calendars and disease severity ranking, analysing which diseases cause pain, death, indebtedness etc.. Local health knowledge was visualised by drawing healthy and unhealthy trees to explore the roots of good health (e.g. fertile land, environment, mixed food, hygiene and exercise) and ill health (e.g. contaminated water, no nutritious foods, bad habits such as drinking and no exercise).

Local foods were classified by each Gotti according to why people choose to eat them (e.g. easy to cook, tasty, filling, cheap, social status, locally grown, nutritious etc.). It became clear that nutritious foods had low social status and this affected health. Using a timeline to analyse changing patterns of health over time, it was clear that health and diet changes were linked to agricultural changes. A parallel and related process involved people losing

confidence in indigenous medicine, with traditional medicinal herbs and plants in decline and many healers giving up their practice. Additional analyses concerned changes in animal health due to new diseases, water contamination and changes in weather patterns.

The holistic nature of the analysis which most Gottis reached, was impressive, with people identifying the inter-relatedness of problems. This process led to:

- reinforcing the return to growing food crops;
- the organisation of traditional healer camps and training workshops in the preparation of herbal medicines;
- vaccination camps to protect livestock and poultry; and,
- GD training local para-vets (local people given basic veterinary training).

The Gotti and literacy

The Gotti is now a vibrant forum for community debate and, as an indigenous, albeit revived, institution, offers much hope for sustainability. The Gotti will not come to an end when the literacy learning has ended, as its wider function is clearly embedded in the community. It is a space “to sit and talk”, “to share our happiness and sorrows”, and provides “an opportunity to reflect”.

The REFLECT methodology sits comfortably within this space and helps to structure and reinforce the interaction. Literacy learning has been interwoven with the Gotti discussions. The graphics produced by the Gottis have become key resource materials for those who wish to learn reading and writing. The wider activity of the Gotti also reinforces literacy as it provides practical uses for literacy. Moreover, as we begin to see literacy as something more than just the use of pen and paper, the Gotti has a much wider impact on “literacy”, strengthening people’s capacity to communicate.

There is a range of follow up activities which have already started. For example, over 250 traditional songs have been recorded, with family and villages histories, traditional stories, sayings and dances also being documented. The recording of local knowledge of medicinal

plants and herbs will be linked to new, locally managed income-generating projects.

The Gottis facilitated the introduction of participatory methodologies associated with REFLECT, but a question remains: how did the people feel about the process of learning to read and write; didn't people feel alienated at the point that this came in? Didn't they feel tricked? It appears not. The Gottis often attracted most of the adult population of a community to engage in discussions. However, in each community, only a certain number of adults chose to learn literacy. In many other contexts, this could have been regarded as ‘drop out’ or an indicator of failure of the literacy programme. The participants perceived it quite differently. As one Gotti member observed:

“Palm oil is an important product here and one youth in every five households can climb the trees to tap the oil. One in five is enough. It is not necessary for everybody to have the skill. The same is true of literacy. As long as we have enough literate people in the village, we will manage”.

The normal pattern of a Gotti meeting would involve a large group meeting to construct graphics and discuss issues, with only perhaps half of the group staying on to choose key words from the discussion and use them for learning to read and write. The choice of words to learn was left to each Gotti, with the facilitator keeping a record. Emphasis was placed on maintaining the participatory mode of behaviour at this stage. Participants were asked to act out words by shaping their bodies into letters and form words by moving around.

Gender concerns

Promoting participation of women proved hard in the early stages. Gottis had traditionally been male dominated and people’s memories of the old style Gotti could not be transformed simply by using drama. Change was made harder because the facilitators were generally young men (there were few older people or women with sufficient education levels) and as such, they lacked status locally. Some elder men were able to impose their vision of the Gotti (as a place where women were largely silent) on the young male facilitators. This had to be addressed at different levels:

- case-study research on the role and position of women in various areas of tribal society (e.g. agriculture, education, village politics), focusing on power relations, decision-making, violence and change;
- four day gender training workshops for REFLECT facilitators;
- incorporating a gender dimension in all materials, drawing on the research;
- 'melas' (one day fairs) held in each village, involving posters, songs, dance, drama and discussion about gender issues;
- formation of all-female Gottis in 6 villages; and,
- designing needs-based development programmes for women (including training women in the organisation and management of resources).

Next steps

REFLECT Gottis are operating in 16 villages and YAKSHI/GD plan to start REFLECT in a further 15 villages. In the initial villages, a new phase is being developed. PRA tools are now being developed to address forestry issues and, in future, environmental issues, credit and gender relations. The issues raised in Gottis are also being disseminated more widely in the local area through the 'Gonthenum' campaign. This uses exhibitions of posters and pictures, short dramas and a series of small booklets to share the outcomes of Gotti discussions and raise concerns for the attention of others. This is a key part of the process of documenting indigenous knowledge systems and integrating them with contemporary knowledge systems. One major effect is a strengthening of the wider literate environment, making literacy increasingly useful and relevant to local people.

In line with the principles and processes of REFLECT, GD and YAKSHI have placed a high priority on staff development, holding training workshops and organising fora for the exchange of experiences. Training has varied from 'Collaborative Women's Leadership' to 'Puppetry', and there is a constant spirit of search for new experience and learning which can help to develop their practice further and in new directions.

YAKSHI and GD have also deepened their links to wider tribal groups, particularly with the Integrated Tribal Development Agency in East

Godavari which is now planning to use REFLECT in 5,000 community learning centres in the District. UNDP has been keen to adapt the REFLECT experience to women's credit programmes elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh. YAKSHI have shared their experience with other NGOs in India in a 5 day orientation workshop on REFLECT in Rajamundry in 1997 and more recently, with literacy workers from across Asia in the South Asia Literacy Forum on 'Innovation and Diversity'. YAKSHI and GD are now acting as a key reference point for organisations developing REFLECT in other states in India. Indeed, the YAKSHI/GD experience has been influential on evolving debates between REFLECT practitioners locally and internationally, acting as a good example of how the REFLECT process, in its broadest sense, operates at every level.

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REFLECT and empowerment: our field experiences

James Kanyesigye

• Introduction

After four years of implementing REFLECT in Uganda, it is important to highlight issues that have emerged in communities which have had contact with REFLECT. There is currently a study being conducted on the long term impact of REFLECT on the lives of the participants and the communities surrounding the circles. Without pre-empting that study, this paper aims to just touch upon some of the experiences we have had with REFLECT and the empowerment outcomes that have been observed.

First, I would like to include our understanding of REFLECT. We define it as a democratic educational process that seeks to empower communities to critically question the inequalities in society and the dominant development paradigms. In so doing, they are

in a better position to take appropriate actions to create a just and equitable society.

In this paper, I focus on the reality of our experiences rather than on the abstract. I emphasise issues of gender, political, cultural and economic inequalities, as identified by the players: facilitators, participants, communities, and implementing organisations.

In Bundibugyo, where REFLECT was piloted, as in many communities of developing countries, women have little say in decision making, neither in their homes nor in the communities where they live. They are often regarded as second class citizens who implement, without question, other people's decisions and ideas. This status quo has reduced women to tools of labour and status symbols for men: the more women a man marries, the more wealthy he is regarded by society; and the more children a woman produces the more she is liked by her husband and is envied by her co-wives (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Evaluation of REFLECT circles in Bundibugyo showed positive outcomes on gender roles and relations (photo: D. Archer)



Women constitute the majority of our REFLECT participants in the circles - over 85% of participants are women in Bundibugyo. Like non-literate men in society, these women have not been given the chance to speak or are not listened to whenever they speak. The non-literate are considered to be ignorant, stupid, superstitious and lacking an ability to plan. As a result, when community leaders are elected, the non-literate are not considered. In community meetings, their views are disregarded. Many government functionaries or NGO staff issue communiqués (written messages) which the non-literate are told to implement. This phenomenon of excluding women and non-literate people from the mainstream of decision-making is what we sought to address when we started REFLECT in Bundibugyo. Our aim was to empower the socially and economically disadvantaged community members so that they can fully participate in their development process and shape their destiny.

The REFLECT process of empowerment started by communities (including both the literate and non-literate) selecting facilitators who lived in their villages. This meant that they understood the socio-economic, political and cultural status of their people. These facilitators were trained in participatory approaches to community development and went back to their communities to do a baseline survey on community needs, problems and priorities. They then received further training during which they worked to adapt PRA tools to address the problems that they had identified. The facilitators were thus able to open REFLECT circles with a solid foundation. Most circles consisted mainly of the non-literate, with a majority of participants being women. When discussions were generated in the circles they were based firmly on the community's own agenda and were not an outside imposition. The resonance and immediacy of the themes addressed, created a sense of ownership of the whole programme. This in turn made them feel comfortable to critically analyse some sensitive issues which would have been difficult to address in any other forum.

Emerging issues

For quite some time, persistent hunger in Bundibugyo was a problem due to poor agriculture practices and the growing population in the district exerting increasing pressure on the land. When the REFLECT participants discussed this issue using Household Maps, Agriculture Calendars, Rainfall Calendars, Natural Resources Maps, and Hungry Seasons Calendars, they were able to critically analyse the causes and effects on society, families, and individuals. These PRA tools helped the facilitators to systematise learning. The process was empowering as, for the first time, the women had the chance to give their opinion and be listened to by other villagers.

The outcomes from the discussions were documented by the facilitators and the learner-participants in notebooks. The graphics that they constructed serve as a record that can be used as reference materials during community planning. The analysis by participants and facilitators had many immediate and longer term impacts. First on the priority list of many communities was the lack of education available to children. Most children were not going to school because it was a long way from their village and the terrain was difficult to traverse. It was discussed and agreed in the circles that they should establish nursery schools in their villages where their young children could go for the first 2 years until they were old enough to attend the schools that are far away. It was decided that the REFLECT facilitators would teach the children. In a period of one year after the start of REFLECT circles in Bundibugyo, 12 pre-schools were established, entirely on the initiative of the REFLECT circles and without any external support. This was an indication to us that the communities, for the first time, were seeing the value of education and taking responsibility for managing their schools - they were even paying their facilitators allowances to motivate them to teach the young children.

Kabanyaka, a REFLECT participant in Busoru parish, who had been selected on the school management committee, had this to say:

“ ...I am 43 years old and I missed the opportunity to go to school when I was young

and when I got married, nobody listened to me when I spoke. Look at me now, I am the chair person of this school! It is great to lead the movement for education! Our children will never suffer the way we suffered..."

Another issue that was discussed by the participants, and later taken to the entire community for consideration, was that of giving out food to relatives and friends after a good harvest to show gratitude for the rich harvest received. This often meant that households were left hungry, as food had to be provided to the many relatives that helped during harvesting. I participated in the discussion where they sought the origin of the practice and its implications today. The circle came to the conclusion that the practice was no longer sustainable, given the growing numbers of large households and small plots of arable land. They discovered that some families were not cultivating their farms and as a result should not expect to live on other people's harvest. Some participants, however, said that the practice was good because it was a sign of good will and hospitality. Bakecura, a 37 year old participant from Nyakakindu village had this to say on the same issue:

" It is the hand that gives, that receives... If you don't give, God will not bless you with any more rich harvest. Even our ancestors will not be happy with us..."

At the end of the discussion, they agreed that they should cut down on the amount of food they give out, rather than abandoning the practice altogether. Six months later when I went back to visit them they told me that they were happy that the issue had been discussed and agreed upon. As a result, they now had some food in their granaries and they had agreed to construct a shelter to store food for use during the season of scarcity.

The REFLECT facilitators also felt the impact of REFLECT on their lives. As well as facilitating the circles in their respective villages, they have taken the responsibility of acting as resource people in their communities where their advice is sought for different development issues. When there are conflicts in the villages, the facilitators are to attend the conflict resolution meetings with elders and other opinion leaders. This has had a positive

impact on the facilitators because, although most of them are young men and women, they are regarded with high esteem due to their role as change agents and animators for development in their society.

Recently, when Bundibugyo was hit by rebels from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the communities were internally displaced and started living in camps. The facilitators were selected to be on the committees for relief distribution and helped to educate the people on how to avoid cholera in the camps. Some REFLECT circles were reported to be continuing, spontaneously (and without any external support) in the refugee camps

• Conclusion

The REFLECT circles have acted as community fora where communities meet to discuss pertinent issues. In the process, linkages are made to other players so that collective effort is strengthened through a process of mutual benefit from individual capacities. This process is encouraged from the start. During the training of trainers and facilitators, group work and team building is emphasised, so that later this can be replicated in the circles and in the communities. Ownership is fundamental at every stage: if the circles are not "owned" by participants then they will be following someone else's agenda not their own - and this could not be an empowerment process. Empowerment has to be generated from within; it cannot ultimately be led from outside. This is why we have moved beyond the use of PRA and have adapted the REFLECT approach - which involves handing over power and control to the communities themselves.

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13

REFLECT, savings and credit in Bangladesh**Fazilatun Nessa, Begum Rokeya and Achintan Mazumder****• Introduction¹**

The Government of Bangladesh and diverse Bangladeshi NGOs have taken a keen interest in women's education and empowerment for over a decade. However, this interest has not translated into significant improvements in women's literacy, their income levels or their social status (UNDP 1997). Programmes tend to be narrowly focused, the most common strategy involving the formation of women's *shomitis*, (savings and credit groups). It is unusual for programmes to address the multi-dimensional needs of women and few focus effectively on strengthening women's own capacity for analysis and decision-making.

There is no doubt that the formation of *shomitis* has created an opportunity to change the economic condition of women, through promoting new forms of income generation for some of the poorest and most excluded women. However, programmes rarely fulfil these opportunities, most notably because women rarely retain control of the credit that they take out from their *shomiti*. Loans are often handed directly to husbands or fathers (or even to brothers or uncles) and are rarely invested for income generating activities. Where men do invest these small loans in potentially profit-making activities, they are rarely activities

which are run by (or even involve) women and women almost never have a say over the use of the profit. Women are only given access to any of the money in order to meet the regular

repayment requirements or to make the forced savings required by the schemes.

• The role of REFLECT

It was precisely in this type of context that REFLECT was first developed in Bangladesh, through a pilot programme with ActionAid in Bhola Island. REFLECT was designed to make ActionAid's long running *shomiti*-based savings and credit programme more sustainable by reducing dependency on ActionAid and enabling the women to manage their own development processes. In our own work in Netrakona, REFLECT was developed in response to a mid-term evaluation of SUS (Sabalamby Unnayan Samity), a local NGO, in 1997. This showed that women had almost no control over the loans they took from SUS *shomitis*. Providing loans to women in such a context does little or nothing to improve women's status in society, rarely leads to increased income for women and is ultimately unsustainable.

In reviewing the existing system, SUS identified a major deficiency as women's inability to influence decision making processes on economic matters within their families. Women needed access to knowledge and skills about starting an effective business if they were to gain any economic power. For example, they needed to know how to select a profitable business, who to contact, how to keep accounts, how to manage a business and how to market products. They also needed communication skills to be able to secure support to start up a business. It was in this context that REFLECT was introduced - the aims being to enable women to:

¹ This article draws on a research project entitled 'Literacy, Gender and Social Agency', which is being supported by DFID.

- gain the literacy and numeracy skills necessary to run their own business;
- develop analytical and business skills; and,
- improve their status within their family and society as a whole.

In both Bhola Island and SUS, participants in REFLECT circles have undertaken a detailed analysis of their social and economic status. They have studied income and expenditure patterns through calendars and have made projections on possible uses of loan money. They have analysed savings and credit through matrices. Indeed, a wide range of detailed graphics have been produced in each circle, addressing everything from health issues to population and mobility.

Progress

Reviewing the progress of circles to date, it is clear that participants are now able to understand and use their savings and credit pass books; they have learnt some business skills and a few business tricks, and they are able to monitor the progress and profit of an income generating activity more closely. Through their exchanges and group analysis, they have also developed a greater understanding of health issues including strategies for both prevention and cure of many local illnesses. They are using local health facilities more regularly and are more mobile from their homes than previously (a significant issue in a very traditional Islamic area).

However, to date there has not been systematic evidence that women have gained a greater say in decision making on economic matters. Loans are still passed to their husbands (or other men in their family) and, although they may now, in some cases, be asked for an opinion, it is still the men who decide on the use of the loan and who retain control of any profits. The social values and cultural beliefs that exclude women from a significant say within the household have not been challenged. SUS has been running REFLECT circles for just one year, so perhaps it is too much to expect such substantive change over a short period. But it may also be that other strategies are required. If women's capacity to secure change depends (at least in part) on attitudinal change amongst men, then it may

be necessary to develop programmes such as REFLECT specifically for men. Although there are limitations to the change which REFLECT circles have brought about over the past year in SUS, there are some positive examples, which indicate that more substantive change may occur in the longer term.

Tahura Begum's story

Tahura Begum is one of the members of an SUS shomiti who joined the REFLECT circle in April 1997. Her initial motivation was to become literate, so that she could help her children with their school work, maintain her pass book and keep some accounts. She had some wider expectation that participation in the circle would help her improve her status within the family and even thought that literacy might enable her to get a job. After nine months in the REFLECT circle, Tahura was interviewed at length. She said that her economic position had improved and she now received more respect from her family and community, who regarded her as 'educated'. She had learnt a number of business skills and could run a small business independently. Specifically she had negotiated with her husband to give up the small poultry farm they were running and start up a business selling bananas in the market, which would be more profitable. Having run the banana business, well she made some profit, which she then invested in buying a Sallow machine (an irrigation pump) together with some other women from the REFLECT circle. She has recently planted some fruit trees, commercial trees and medicinal herbs and plants. Tahura now has a bank account in her own name where she is able to deposit profits to save for improving the family home (for example she has built a pit latrine) and investing in her business

Tahura has now enrolled her daughter in school for the first time and helps her with homework. She even helps to teach her husband in the evenings. Her opinion is now actively sought by both her husband and other people in the community and her advice is well respected. Indeed, several people in her immediate community suggested that she should stand as a candidate in the Local Council Elections. She chose not to, as she

recognised that she was not yet well enough known in the wider community. However, in the future she feels that anything may be possible.

Jahan Ara's story

Jahan Ara is a 36 year from the Islampur slum area of Netrakona who makes a living as a biri-maker (rolling small cigarettes from local tobacco). She said that her main reasons for joining the REFLECT circle were so that she could teach her own children, read letters from her parents, avoid being cheated by shopkeepers, read signs and addresses in the city and understand her pass book. She reported that the most valuable outcomes of the REFLECT process were that she could now:

- understand alternative ways of improving her economic status;
- run a small business, keeping accounts and monitoring profits; and,
- improve the health and hygiene of the family environment.

Some of the specific ways in which she sees the REFLECT circle as having helped her include the following:

- she took out a loan to invest with her husband in a rickshaw (ensuring he provides for the repayments and she is given 25 taka a day - about 50p) which is proving profitable;
- she now visits relatives and neighbours and regularly goes to the hospital and market alone (which was very rare previously) feeling confident about orienting herself around town; and,
- she has been able to actively support a local candidate's campaign in the recent election.

• Conclusion

REFLECT is still in its infancy, but the early indications are that it has proved effective in promoting some change to women's status when linked to a savings and credit programme. Women have improved their economic understanding and have acquired some practical skills for starting up businesses. The status of some women in their family and

community has improved, but for many others the process of change will take longer, as cultural beliefs and attitudes are deeply rooted. It is unclear whether the REFLECT approach alone has secured these changes or whether the savings and credit programme has been an essential part of the process, but it is clear that a savings and credit programme alone is unlikely to lead to such change.

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SEACOW and Chisa Kruskaisa

Teeka R Bhattarai, Debendra Adhikari and Ishwari Nepal

· **Introduction**

SEACOW (School of Ecology and Community Work) is an activist organisation working with rural communities in the mid-hills of Nepal, amongst indigenous tribal communities called the Chepang. SEACOW began working with the Chepang people, who live in the Kandrang Valley in the Chitwan district, in 1993. The main economy of the area is subsistence agriculture. There is acute food shortage, inadequate drinking water and generally high levels of poverty in the area.

In response to the needs of the community, a formal vocational school was adapted into a locally responsive land-based holistic training centre. The SEACOW programme assisted with a tree nursery to support the agro-forestry programme. But there was no reliable supply of water for the nursery and so consultation with the community began to try and strengthen the existing drinking water system. It was decided that the project would aim to improve the drinking water and also initiate literacy classes. The community members involved in the project went to visit good and bad examples of drinking water systems. These study tours became an integral part of the project, together with Adult Learning Centres (ALCs), groups which met five times a week to learn to read and write. The ALCs served as an effective informal forum for SEACOW to meet community members in order to learn more about their lives and experiences. ALCs were run for 3 years by SEACOW, which provided training and support to local facilitators.

· **REFLECT and Chisa Kruskaisa**

In 1995, based on their experience of adult literacy and their interest in learning more, SEACOW members participated in a REFLECT orientation workshop. Analysing the limits of their existing programme, particularly the lack of effective links between the ALCs and wider empowerment processes, SEACOW decided to adapt the REFLECT approach for their ALCs. Many SEACOW staff were already familiar with the ideas of Paulo Freire and PRA. During the REFLECT training, the issue of the name “REFLECT” was raised. The group could not find an appropriate Nepali word for this type of learning process and brainstormed to generate a suitable and comprehensible word. *Chisa Kruskaisa* emerged from the participants during this process; it means ‘a short meeting to learn’ in Chepang, the local language.

The seven *Chisa Kruskaisa* (adult learning and empowerment circles) in the Kandrang Valley, have been in operation since April 1997. The average number of regular participants is 14 but can be as many as 25. This number is satisfactory given that the settlements are sparse. Almost half of the participants are women, and there are two female facilitators. The age of participants ranges from 15 to 55, whereas that of facilitators is from 20 to 50. Facilitators, who are all from the same community as their learners, spent about two months holding informal discussions about local problems with possible participants and their families prior to setting regular meetings.

Even after starting up regular meetings of the *Chisa Kruskaisa*, several days were spent discussing different issues emerging in the village before developing the curriculum and introducing the literacy dimension. Informal

discussions and time spent in these meetings gave the participants confidence to start the 'literacy' aspect of REFLECT.

- **Facilitator capacity and learning environment**

As many facilitators had previously undergone training in non-formal education facilitation, they were able to interpret and lead discussions on their own. Based on the informal discussions in each community, common themes had been identified and these were used as the basis for structuring the learning process. Having been involved in developing the curriculum, facilitators in each Chisa Kuskaisa had the confidence to relate the discussion to the overall process of development in their specific community.

A key aspect of REFLECT is making links between the micro and the macro environment and examining how they are inter-related. SEACOW staff members explored Paulo Freire's ideas in greater depth and realised that they were compatible with their way of working, as they focusing on a vision of radical change and the need to empower people rather than simply run charitable programmes. The implications of this were explored in the facilitator's training which aimed to set an example of the participatory

practice which facilitators would later use in their own communities.

Since the facilitators understood the concepts well, they composed the basic ideas of Freire and key issues from their local discussions into songs (see Figure 1). Songs are popular and powerful tools in the local context and are important in the systemisation of information (processing and memorising). Local people use songs to record the major events and changes in people's lives, and they thus act as a local history. Efforts were made to combine visual aids and other oral traditions in an informal environment.

One of the challenges was to make the learning environment appropriate for drawing on such oral traditions. It was concluded that the formal setting of the ALC did not encourage people to openly discuss and express themselves. People felt that their ideas did not flow without smoking or drinking and sitting by the fire, so the formal environment of the old ALCS gave way to a much more informal and vibrant setting for the learning process. This was done in collaboration with participants who together came up with their own definition of the purpose of a Chisa Kuskaisa: it was a 'short meeting': a place to discuss, critically analyse their lives, entertain but also to learn to read and write. This 'literacy' aspect is only one part of the Kuskaisa process in our context.

Figure 1. Local facilitators compose songs based on their learning



• Progress

Changes have been felt at three levels: at the individual and family level and in the wider community where we have seen the beginning of a reflection and analysis process. People have become more vocal and have started to analyse their lives more critically than before. Sometimes whole families join in the discussion, which speeds up the change process and ensures that it is accepted in the family. Enthusiasm to try new ideas has increased.

More inter-community exchange tours have been undertaken, thus further consolidating and broadening the learning process. These have helped to create an informal environment for interaction as well as enhancing solidarity amongst the group members. In this sense, the *Chisa Kruskaisa* has encouraged people to go beyond their community and to see their lives from a different perspective. Meeting with other communities to share experiences has also helped to increase people's confidence, especially when speaking to outsiders. In general a greater feeling of co-operation and solidarity has emerged as a result of the *Chisa Kruskaisa* process.

For example, there is now a letter-press in the village where facilitators can print copies of the texts from the *Chisa Kruskaisa*. This has facilitated the learning process and has created a sense of pride amongst participants when they see their texts printed. The press is useful for producing reading material and also helps to strengthen the literacy-environment in the village.

In the Chyoding community, water emerged as a key issue in the *Chisa Kruskaisa*. Although the drinking water scheme had been supported by various sources, it was not being properly maintained by the community leader. The issue of water was discussed in the circle first and then the participants decided to approach the matter with the community leader. As the community members were united on this issue, the leader was forced to agree with them. People subsequently approached SEACOW to support the cost of repairing the water pipes. In the inter-community tours they had learnt about the drinking water systems in another

village. They invited one of the trained plumbers from there to fix their pipes. This is just one example of direct action which has been undertaken by the participants to improve their lives. The *Chisa Kruskaisa* provided a structured environment in which people could analyse the current water situation in the community and look for a constructive way to resolve the problem.

Likewise, in the Gundi community, latrines were constructed and a section of trail was improved as a result of discussion in the circle. In this case, the community leader was very supportive to the *Chisa Kruskaisa* and actively encouraged people to participate in the circle. The circle has also had an impact on adjoining villages, who are now looking into the possibility of starting their own circles.

The role of SEACOW

SEACOW's input to the *Chisa Kruskaisas* includes employing a promoter to support the process and providing wages for the facilitators. An agreed amount of kerosene, lanterns and exercise books are also supplied. Participants pay a fee of 5 rupees a month which is used as savings by the group. The circles will run for as long as there is interest and enthusiasm for them in the community. There is now a transition, with the local communities taking on the lead role in managing the *Chisa Kruskaisas*. In the future, SEACOW will be providing support for training, if and as requested.

• Internalising REFLECT

It took a considerable period of time for SEACOW to develop confidence to take up REFLECT. After initial REFLECT training in Kathmandu in 1995, two SEACOW staff members returned frustrated. They were reluctant to give up using literacy primers, as they were familiar with them. Another problem was that facilitators did not understand the jargonised and elitist so-called "standard" Nepali - and thus had difficulty in understanding, recording and then transferring what they had learnt in the REFLECT training to other SEACOW members. However, after continuing discussions within SEACOW and after acknowledging the limitations of the

existing primers used in ALCs, it was decided to at least explore REFLECT further.

The first step was to conduct our own training on REFLECT, adapting it to the local context. We realised that rather than introducing REFLECT using illustrations from elsewhere (e.g. the pilot projects), the contextualisation of REFLECT is important during the training. We placed a strong emphasis on the principles, which themselves place emphasis on local adaptation and creativity. Once this was internalised, people were much more open to learning. This internalisation of REFLECT was needed by both individual staff members and by SEACOW as an institution - so that we could see how to build on our past and existing strengths and mould reflect to our needs.

A key part of the process of internalisation was generating confidence.. It was necessary to spend time building facilitators confidence so that they would not feel the need to use a primer. It was also necessary to have the institutional confidence to create and adapt something for ourselves rather than follow the well-trodden path of other institutions.

• **Lessons learnt**

Although the *Chisa Kruskaisa* had a defined beginning, a participatory process had already been started in the area. SEACOW members and also many local facilitators had been practising and even innovating various participatory methods in their work. The use of diverse and culturally rooted methods helped to add an element of fun, informality and openness, whilst also enabling people to retain the ideas and analyse them in a non-visual way before or after they were transcribed. The in-built flexibility of REFLECT encouraged these culturally appropriate and innovative methods. Rather than mechanically focusing on the teaching of words and letters, participants spent time reflecting on the meaning of words and phrases before learning how to write them.

Facilitators were trained in the use of PRA, but they were encouraged to use it only when they knew why they were using it. The PRA tools are used to structure the discussion but are not an end in itself. In this sense, we are somewhat reluctant to boast about the sacredness of PRA as a technique, as it is often used before people have actually felt the need for processing such information. People have different means of analysing their situation. Even at the purely practical level, people are reticent to divulge critical information before you have earned their trust. Time and effort was put in to adapt REFLECT to the local context, ensuring that facilitators could implement the concepts that they felt were most important.

In addition, every effort was made to ensure that the training itself was participatory and that it served as an example for the facilitators to follow. This had a profound impact on eliminating the authoritarian image of teachers. It was not expected that everybody who participated in the training must be a facilitator, rather it was seen as an opportunity for interested people to learn about the REFLECT process and see what role they wished to play in it. Some people in the community were not comfortable with REFLECT as they felt that their dominant position within the community was being challenged. This was accepted as inevitable, as any process of change will generate conflict.

What is important is that *Chisa Kruskaisa* and other learning activities are holistic processes in the communities - fully linking literacy with people's lives. It will be interesting to see how the *Chisa Kruskaisas* develop in the future. We have yet to see how participants will emerge as a continually conscientised group of people over time.

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REFLECT in Oxford, England

Alison Norris

- **Introduction**

In many ways Oxford is a prosperous city. A wide variety of educational opportunities are available to its citizens, which raises the question, why use REFLECT? Yet, despite Oxford's advantages, many local people are marginalised, particularly by class and race oppression. The existing educational systems preserve the status quo, either consciously or as a consequence of long established hierarchical structures.

ODEC, the Oxford Development Education Centre, is a small NGO based at East Oxford Community Centre. Our aim is to make the world more just by achieving participatory democracy through participatory education. We adopted REFLECT as part of our efforts to close the gap between this rhetoric and the reality of our practice.

Initially, we were interested in Paulo Friere's work, but we struggled to make this process accessible to people. Our experience in England is that more people are writing about and studying Freire than actually trying to apply his ideas. We felt the need for more support from other practitioners. Both these problems spurred us to explore REFLECT. Our first focus was the tools, but as we learned more, we were also impressed by:

- the emphasis on the 'whole approach' (attitude of facilitators, tools and techniques, advocacy and action, rather than just tools alone);
- new ideas about how to build on people's experience; and,
- the emphasis on helping people to become creative facilitators, adapting and devising tools to suit particular circumstances.

Another important part of working with REFLECT, is the chance it gives us to build relationships with educators from other countries. This develops our own understanding of participatory education and development issues, and gives us a strong basis for challenging racism and other prejudices and misconceptions about people in Southern countries.

ODEC's work with REFLECT

We started work with members of Oxford's different African Caribbean communities, who face many challenges because they live in a white-dominated city. The Learning from Life project (LFL) was set up, in consultation with community activists, to help highlight and act on people's concerns.

ODEC already had a good relationship with senior citizens at the West Indian Day Centre and had helped them to produce a newsletter. Many people reacted to one article that described a growing communication gap between older and younger African Caribbean people. Thus, a key part of LFL became to provide an opportunity for younger and older people to learn from each other.

The original project team comprised a member of the Day Centre, a white ODEC worker and a young African Caribbean worker recruited specifically for the project. Together with volunteers, they used semi-structured interviews to start identifying participants' key issues, and, in February 1997, ran an introductory weekend. Invited participants were a mixed-group of about ten people who had shown interest in the project.

Timelines

After icebreakers, the group made a timeline of the history of racism in Oxford. To make the timeline, the facilitators encouraged participants to remember their arrival in England. Participants related incidents about their treatment at work, in church and in wider society. Next they drew pictures to illustrate these stories and put them in chronological order. Younger people added their pictures. Facilitators asked questions to deepen the analysis e.g. is this still happening?, why?

The process drew people in. One story sparked another; more people started drawing. We could have worked on the timeline all day. Younger people commented: *"It's different. You don't usually get the chance to hear the older ones talk like this. It makes you realise what you have in common"*. When the timeline was finished, people were less reserved and had a lot more energy. They felt they had permission to say what they needed to say, breaking the 'culture of silence'.

Pizza diagrams

To deepen the analysis, the group made a graphic that they called a 'pizza diagram' (an adapted Venn diagram). Participants thought about the groups and institutions that influenced their lives, mounting these on different sized circles of paper, using the largest circles for the most powerful groups. They arranged the circles to show relationships between the groups. This generated more energy - people were trying to clarify fundamental issues, such as 'Is it more effective to work from the grassroots up or to lobby big institutions?' People cared about getting their analysis right because they needed to make changes.

Outcomes

Using the pizza diagrams of power structures, the group developed action plans. Initially, they had been worried that it was going to be a weekend of talk and no action, but the shared analysis helped the group to decide on the many things they wanted to do. The graphics and the process were written up with the help of volunteer observers. As in the REFLECT literacy circles, this document is a summary

and an educational resource to support further analysis.

Participants held follow-up meetings and prioritised: re-starting 'Saturday school', surveying local people's skills and resources and making a video about community achievements. As time went on, meetings dropped from once a week to once a fortnight and participants felt they only had enough resources to tackle one action plan at a time. They prioritised plans for the Saturday School, called the 'Young Achievers' Academy'.

For a variety of reasons, some participants dropped out but new people arrived. This caused some problems, as new members had not been part of developing the original analysis. Sharing this analysis and giving newcomers a chance to contribute slowed down the work and frustrated some of the people who had been involved from the start. We find it is hard for facilitators and participants to understand that you can't just tell someone new what you have been doing and expect they will understand it.

We are still struggling with effective ways to deal with this practical problem. You can show new people the previous graphics that have been generated, but we find that pictures have more value as a reminder of participating in the process for those who created them. We need to develop new ways of analysing the same material, and concentrate on deepening our analysis each time.

• Young achievers' academy

After considering practical issues, (such as the age group of children to teach and how to organise teaching), and more philosophical issues, (such as the purpose and aims of the school), participants ran three information evenings for parents. Preparation included talking to two of the organisers from the previous Saturday school, to share ideas and to find out more about why the first school had closed after ten successful years. A key reason for this seemed to be over-reliance on one or two key organisers, which spurred people to try and share responsibility for the new Academy.

The deputy head of a local school was supportive and after three pilot sessions, invited participants to a Governors' meeting. Permission was granted to use the school buildings on Saturdays throughout the academic year and the Academy has been running ever since.

Participants were pleased by the enthusiastic response of the children, but worried by the lack of pre-planning and creeping over-reliance on two or three volunteers. We invited one of the organisers of the previous Saturday school to help facilitate a one day event to analyse progress so far. This was partly to help participants but also to introduce the REFLECT approach to a potential new facilitator. The event was structured around the adult learning cycle (what have we done? what have we observed? what have we learnt? what will we do next?) and came up with three key action points. First, the workers needed to get to know each other better and share a vision. Second, it was important to sort out their roles, responsibilities, commitment, and identify a regular space for dealing with problems. Third, the teaching content needed to be addressed.

Rivers

We started work on the action plans by asking everyone to draw a river of their lives so far, using rapids to show hard times, calm wide flows for strong, peaceful times etc.. People focused on the experiences that led them to get involved with the Academy. Facilitators joined in. This was a turning point. It released lots of energy and boosted trust in the group. Key issues, like attitudes to religion and the effects of internalised racism, started to surface. People still talk about their rivers. Revisiting the rivers and asking new people to draw their rivers has become an accepted way of introducing people to the group.

After the rivers exercise, the group wanted to revisit and clarify the objectives. From three sessions of card sorting and discussion, the following objectives emerged:

- to help children progress in main school and Saturday School;
- to teach community by example, incorporating spirituality;

- to teach children about their roots and help them have a positive identity;
- to teach critical thinking;
- to create parental involvement and to liaise with the community; and,
- for the children to have fun.

REFLECT for ODEC and for advocacy

Using REFLECT on ourselves has been a key way of learning about the process. ActionAid trainers ran a training of facilitators session for ODEC workers. Actions arising from this include: termly, participatory review meetings for all ODEC workers, increased sharing of written reflections on the work, and visits from local and national politicians. The latter is part of our perceived need to know more about political decision making processes and how best to influence these.

• Key lessons

The process of participatory education, with a global perspective, changes everyone involved, facilitators and participants alike. We have seen participants grow in confidence. As one Academy volunteer said: *"Before, I was afraid to say anything in meetings, now I just join in. I like the way you do it. You probably know the answers, but you get us to think of them ourselves."* But of course, we don't know the answers, we find them together.

Another participant commented: *"I've never been in a group in Oxford before where you can really put your baggage on the table and deal with it. We need this to start the healing process."* This highlights another lesson. The foundation of this work is building relationships between the people involved. This means making time to talk with people about parts of their lives that, at first, seem unconnected with concrete plans, such as running the Academy. As facilitators, it means being open about your own hopes, fears and problems. It means visiting people in their homes. It means idle chat, relaxing together. We are finding the stronger the relationships we build, the quicker the work moves on and the better our support is targeted.

As facilitators, we have also become more prepared to make plans as we go along, to think carefully beforehand but to be much more responsive. This was intimidating at first but gets easier (and becomes more fun) with practice.

As an organisation, ODEC's horizons have broadened. We are starting to see ourselves much more as a part of education in Britain rather than education in Oxford. Pressure is building on the education system to solve economic and social problems by providing a flexible workforce, and to do this cost effectively. Given this context, it is vital that we continue to embrace educational approaches based on social justice.

In many important ways we are part of one society and one world. The partnerships with other radical educators that we are developing and cementing by using REFLECT, are proving a key way for us to understand the connections between our local situation and other people's struggles. REFLECT, and other participatory approaches, help us to re-claim education as communal generation of the knowledge we need to shape our futures.

• The future

We have recognised the need to train ourselves, and other facilitators, by arranging on-going support as we do the work, both in terms of new information and time to reflect on our own experience. Our goals in the near future are:

1. To involve people from different African Caribbean communities in LFL, to deepen the initial analysis and plan and carry out more action. We plan to work with parents who bring their children to the Young Achiever's Academy, to get them to reflect on their own education and plan how they can collectively support their children in mainstream school. We plan to build better relationships with other African Caribbean community groups.
2. To build on our partnerships with radical educators from other countries, to use this as a way of promoting solidarity as well as a valuable way to learn.
3. To support more community facilitators by developing an accredited course in this

participatory, radical approach to Development Education work.

4. To extend our work to other marginalised groups in Oxford.

We are combining these goals in two new projects. The first project, Skills for Change, is already funded. The plan is for ODEC workers to spend six months consulting other community educators locally, and development educators nationally, about developing our own accredited facilitator's training programme. We will involve local community activists, who are interested in doing the training, in designing it.

The second project, for which we are seeking funding, is the Southern Trainers' Feasibility Study. This would be a partnership between ODEC, ActionAid's international education unit, the Development Education Association and the Federation of Community Work Training Groups. We want to investigate interest in setting up partnerships between radical adult educators from Southern countries and community activists in Britain.

We hope the outcome of this project will be a consortium of like-minded partners bidding for funding to run a joint project nationally. This could help us advance the following strategic aims:

- to strengthen on-going communication between participatory appraisal and Freirean trainers and practitioners in the UK, to increase our understanding of the participatory process and sharpen our political vision; and,
- to link UK work more systematically with participatory appraisal and Freirean work in other countries.

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Challenges in facilitator recruitment and training

Maria Nandago

• Introduction

REFLECT programmes depend on the use of local facilitators who come from the same communities as participants. In this way, the REFLECT process does not create or encourage dependency on external agents, but rather generates a dynamic within the community. However, identifying suitable facilitators is far from easy and training them effectively over a limited time period is a major challenge.

The norm is to provide facilitators with about two weeks initial training. At a glance, this may seem both too long and too short: too long because time is a precious commodity for local people (who have their own livelihoods/families to consider) and too short because REFLECT involves much 'un-learning' and the development of many new capacities and attitudes. There is a temptation to balance out these tensions - but the key may not be compromise so much as achieving clarity over the criteria to be used to determine the length of training. This has been a key issue in my work with facilitators in ActionAid Buwekula Project (ABP), ActionAid Uganda's second Development Area.

Background

REFLECT was introduced in Buwekula in 1996 after the successful development of REFLECT in a pilot project in Bundibugyo between 1993-5. ABP's adult literacy programme had been using a traditional Functional Adult Literacy approach. This involved using a primer with about 20 lessons. Each lesson started with a picture which was supposed to generate discussion. The picture was related to a key word or phrase which was

to be copied, broken into syllables or letters and re-built into new words.

In practice there was never much discussion. The programme was at a very low ebb, characterised by few learners and high instructor absenteeism. This paved the way for REFLECT, although REFLECT was not introduced following a systematic critical review of the Functional Adult Literacy approach. There was no specific appraisal of the potential of REFLECT for resolving the existing crisis, nor was there any detailed analysis of how to adapt the REFLECT approach to the local context. REFLECT was effectively used to replace the Functional Adult Literacy approach, without wider ownership from senior management or any adjustment of the wider development programme in the area. As will be seen, this contributed to several difficulties in the future.

Facilitator profile and selection

The identification and selection of facilitators for the REFLECT programme was done by the local community structures (elected local councils) with which ABP works, supported by our own staff, particularly the Field Development Co-ordinators (FDCs). The FDCs had received only limited orientation in REFLECT and were thus unable to apply relevant criteria for selecting facilitators (see below). A recent review of the facilitators that were recruited identified a number of major problems:

- Some of the facilitators were simply 'un-trainable';
- Some had worked previously as Functional Adult Literacy instructors and found it almost impossible to change their

attitudes or their relationship with learners; and,

- Some were elderly men and lacked the dynamism necessary for promoting a participatory process - they were not people who could accept even the basic premise that adult learners (particularly women) were able to contribute to their own learning.

Whilst there was a strong feeling that we should believe in the possibility of changing people's outlook and behaviour, a two week period would almost certainly be insufficient for such a task. As one community intermediary commented: "*Trying to straighten a bent stick may just result in breaking it instead*". Many of the literacy centres, which did have such facilitators, have subsequently closed and there is now much greater awareness of the need for clarity over the criteria and process for facilitator recruitment.

In selecting facilitators, people (whether from in or outside the communities), often prioritise criteria such as 'experience' or 'educational level'. It was on this basis that past Functional Adult Literacy instructors were selected in ABP.

But experience has taught us that this is a serious error. High educational levels can be an obstacle to being a good facilitator, as it may be associated with 'social distance' from participants. Furthermore, educated people are likely to have a basic belief in a formal education system, as they have been through it themselves. 'Experience of teaching' is also often counter-productive, as this usually signifies someone who is accustomed to assuming (and enjoying) a 'professional' role. Such people are often manifestly unwilling to give up their old status and its associated methodologies. They will regard the construction of graphics as essentially 'unprofessional'. Where they do incorporate elements of REFLECT, they will be doing so within a predominantly 'banking approach' (see Archer and Phnuyal, this issue), continuing to look down on learners as empty-headed individuals who need to be filled with deposits of 'real knowledge'. For example, they may use the construction of a disease matrix as an excuse to lecture people,

demonstrating their knowledge about health issues and undermining learners as being ignorant.

In the light of this, it is clear that the duration and nature of the training process cannot be separated from the selection of facilitators. It is worth spending time in identifying the right individuals at the start, rather than being left with a nearly impossible task of training unsuitable facilitators.

Initial training

The content of the initial training programme can easily become overloaded. There are times when trainers feel the need to communicate such a bulk of information about REFLECT, that they miss its essence. Early training workshops tended to suffer from this problem, with long presentations on PRA and Freire - which were ultimately contradictory.

A review of the impact of such training in Buwekula has led us to focus much more now on the REFLECT *process* rather than the content in the initial training. This enables people to experience something of the process for themselves so that they can understand and internalise the approach. A big emphasis is placed on practical experience with PRA tools and on facilitators discovering for themselves the potential of the approach for literacy and numeracy work. Facilitators are introduced to a range of PRA tools and then work in small groups to adapt the tools to address specific local issues - so that they end up writing their own Units.

However, whatever the scenario, it is important not to hold too high an expectation of the outcome from an initial training workshop. As one participant said at the end of a course: "*we have acquired a lot of skills which we shall try to put into practice...*" In this context we should see initial training as little more than the means for sparking off an initial interest, but we should accept that it is something that will need careful monitoring, if it is not to die prematurely or be stunted. There is a desperate need to provide follow up support to strengthen the skills acquired.

Ongoing training and support

One of the key challenges for any literacy or participatory programme is to maintain facilitators' confidence in what they are doing. One widely used way of achieving this is follow-up on-site visits. These visits usually play an important role in boosting motivation and confidence but they can also be useful for monitoring progress and identifying ongoing training needs. However, in some cases they can become counter-productive, particularly if they become purely supervisory visits, in which trainers or support workers pass judgements and wield their 'power' or status over facilitators. On the whole, this has been avoided, but much depends on personal relationships and attitudes within the field team.

In ABP, we have found another mechanism to be more effective at maintaining and boosting facilitator morale. This is facilitator-to-facilitator exchange meetings, which are initially held bi-weekly (and later, monthly). These are chaired by one of the facilitators (elected/nominated by the others) and usually meet without any external resource person (see Figure 1.)

The key to the success of these meetings is the 'magic' of first-hand information. Facilitators share their experiences on all issues concerning their circles. They bring in the graphics that have been produced and compare and contrast them. Where someone has experienced difficulties, other facilitators offer practical solutions. The lack of an external presence ensures that this becomes a supportive, rather than judgmental, process. This facilitates horizontal communication in working through problems and prevents any sense of dependency on 'experts'.

These exchange meetings are also the means for planning exchange visits between circles so that facilitators can see each other in practice and support each others work. In some cases, facilitators have assigned each other a circle to monitor (outside of their own). This 'twinning', ensures that facilitators can attend each others sessions on a regular basis to offer help, feedback and advice.

One good example of the impact of these exchange meetings and visits was in the two sub-counties of Kakindu and Busimbi, where the facilitators identified a key obstacle to progress as being the lack of support from local leaders. As a group of facilitators, they planned and implemented a series of sensitisation meetings for the local leaders. These introduced the basic elements of REFLECT and enabling the leaders to see how they too could become involved. This paved the way for community assemblies, attended by all local people, where the relationship between the REFLECT circle and the wider community was the focal point for practical discussions.

Figure 1. Facilitators everywhere require on-going support if they are to maintain momentum and direction. Here a facilitator in Bangladesh makes her way to an exchange meeting with other local facilitators (Photo: D. Archer)



Another practical example of an issue that has arisen in these exchange meetings is the concern on how to deal with participants who enter the REFLECT circle at different levels:

- some already knew how to read and write;
- some have some basic knowledge of letters; and,
- some are illiterate.

On this occasion there was a need for special input on how to handle a ‘mixed ability’ group. This issue could not wait until refresher training (see below), and so a resource person was invited to help the facilitators work through some teaching strategies which could accommodate this diversity.

One of the practical problems with these facilitators’ meetings is, as always, logistical. Facilitators often have to travel some distance from their homes (even if they are meeting facilitators from relatively nearby centres) and this can affect attendance. In Buwekula, facilitators have tried to overcome this by rotating their meeting venues so that they share the burden of travelling.

One evolution from these basic facilitator’s meetings in Kitenga, has been that the facilitators have formed themselves into a Savings and Credit group. They have set aside time at the end of their meetings for discussing issues pertaining to savings interest. This has given them motivation to attend the meetings and an additional bond as a group.

A final means for continuing support and training is refresher workshops, which are held a few months after the initial training and last between three and five days (depending on the context). These workshops have their agenda set in a consultative way with facilitators, who channel ideas through to ABP. In practice, facilitators often spend a significant amount of time improving Units they had previously developed and creating more Units to address issues that have come up in the previous period.

• Conclusion

The impact of careful selection of facilitators and systematic training and support can be seen in the way that facilitators start to assume

a wider role in their communities. Most become much more vocal in community meetings, stand for leadership posts and are highly regarded by others. As an indicator of this, in the recent Local Council elections, several facilitators secured posts on development committees. There is, of course, a danger of this reaching extremes, with facilitators being expected to do everything and assuming so many responsibilities that they cannot do anything effectively. For example, one REFLECT facilitator has been elected secretary for the Parish Development Committee, is an executive member of Kitenga Counselling Aides, is also a member of the Local Council Executive and has a key role in the Church. Whilst the ideal is to have active facilitators, there is a danger that facilitators assume all the action on behalf of REFLECT participants, and this has to be avoided.

It would be wrong to claim that we have resolved all the problems concerning facilitator capacity and motivation. We have made many mistakes and we have learnt from those, but there are continuing challenges. We are confident that PRA practitioners in other contexts must have shared many of our concerns and would be addressing the same challenges. We would welcome any suggestions from other practitioners on how such issues have been addressed in their practice.

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Facilitator training and innovation in REFLECT: experience from Nepal

Jillian Popkins

• Introduction

The issues raised in this article are drawn from an independent research project carried out for the Policy, Research and Advocacy Department of ActionAid Nepal between October and December 1997. The aim of the research was to investigate how facilitator training can contribute to the capacity of the REFLECT methodology to adapt to local conditions. The research process included observation of REFLECT circles in two districts of Nepal, semi-structured interviews with community groups and individuals and workshops with national level practitioners of non-formal education.

The research project made two initial observations. Firstly, strong resistance to the use of a primer has been central to commitment to the REFLECT approach in Nepal. On conceptual grounds, it is believed strongly that the use of any kind of manual is prescriptive and can never be as relevant to local realities as the words and issues that REFLECT circle participants generate for themselves using participatory tools. Criticism extends to the use of a guidebook for facilitators and, consequently, facilitator training has not featured the production of a local facilitator manual, as the ActionAid Mother Manual recommends. Secondly, there are certain innovations taking place in facilitation in Nepal. These involve the use of participatory tools (such as song, drama and myth) other than, and in addition to, PRA. This seems to suggest a high degree of facilitator ownership of the methodology.

This article summarises some of the issues emerging from research into these two areas and looks at the possible link between training and facilitation.

• The dynamic of facilitator training

The principles of the REFLECT approach include the following:

- a belief that the acquisition of written literacy skills can help people demand certain rights (e.g. the ability to read a ballot paper), thereby redressing inequality;
- promotion of a participatory process of literacy acquisition which is based on analysis of local conditions and which promotes action to mobilise resources within the community; and,
- a conviction that in a participatory approach to literacy, it is not possible to isolate the process of literacy acquisition from the empowerment process. Because written literacy is not an inherently superior tool for communication to oral literacy, for example, the ways in which people are disadvantaged by illiteracy is an issue of power and discrimination.

The techniques which are used to serve these principles are PRA for group analysis and the key word approach to literacy. The key word approach to literacy suggests that adults can learn to read and write better starting with words, rather than learning individual letters: a, b, c, and d. It also emphasises that key words need to reflect the learners' life reality. Facilitator training communicates these principles and techniques which together constitute REFLECT.

• **Training methodology: course content & training relationships**

Facilitator training in Nepal involves a certain amount of what we might call 'technical' input, which forms the course content. This includes an introduction to Freirean concepts, the key word approach to literacy and PRA training. However, REFLECT training seeks to share technical knowledge from the outside, without devaluing the local knowledge and experience of the facilitators.

Ideally, facilitators should not leave training courses knowing 'how to do' REFLECT. Rather they should have had the chance to explore the principles in which REFLECT methodology is grounded, and have developed the strategic skills and confidence to use practical ideas to run circles in their communities (including how to generate key words and conduct PRA). This demands a training approach grounded in negotiation and an organic relationship between trainer and trainees.

Observation of facilitator training in Nepal showed that course content, process and relationships cannot be understood in isolation from one another, and drew attention to two sets of mutually reinforcing tendencies. If the course content was predominantly technical, then the training process tended to be exclusive and the training relationship was hierarchical and authoritative. In contrast, if the content was 'experiential', the process was inclusive and resulted in a negotiated outcome. The following examples serve to illustrate this observation.

Facilitator training in Nepal commonly explores the concept of non-formal education (NFE). However, the question 'What is NFE?' immediately establishes a dichotomy between NFE and formal education. NFE becomes defined by differences in relation to formal education. The range of systems and the process by which local knowledge, value systems and cultural norms are communicated, are excluded from the agenda. Although termed 'non-formal', NFE is usually a timetabled event, its distinction from traditional schooling being the degree of formality.

The link between the technical and the hierarchical can be examining one group brainstorming exercise, used to address the question 'What is NFE?'. The following definitions were fed back in plenary:

- there is no fixed time or place;
- we can discuss the community;
- it is for men and women of oppressed groups, those who cannot go to school; and,
- everything that we learn from the community and our families is non-formal education.

This was then used by the trainer to produce the following definition: 'NFE has no certain time, place or content, it is a place where people can think about and discuss their situation, interest and needs. Whatever they discuss, they also read and write about'.

This definition excludes the final point made by the trainees. As the question demanded a definition of NFE, it did not open debate about the nature of education in the broadest sense. The trainer already appears to have 'the answer' and the trainees seek to match it by drawing on their experiences of schooling. The activity reinforces a hierarchical relation between trainer and trainees, since there are certain answers which are more correct than others. This is not to advocate inclusion to the extent that 'anything goes', but to demonstrate that the *process* of deciding what is and is not a legitimate definition of NFE, in this instance, is not fully negotiated between trainer and trainees. That is to say, the opportunity for the trainees to challenge the idea that education is a timetabled classroom event, analyse why this is so and take ownership of a revised notion of NFE, is lost.

In contrast, some training revealed a highly inclusive process of negotiation. In one example, the following question was set: 'I have an MA qualification and am married with three children. I often come home drunk and beat my wife. My daughters do not go to school. Am I educated?'. The trainees were animated by this question, which the trainer used to facilitate a debate in plenary over the definition of education. During the course of the argument, the trainees shared similar examples from their own experience, which helped the trainer to elicit conceptual

distinctions. The debate ended with the simple but powerful consensus that a 'literate person may not be considered educated'.

- **Language as a barrier to communication**

Communicating new ideas is challenging, and can be hindered by cultural and linguistic difference. Trainers of facilitators often speak of the difficulty of communicating conceptual issues in training. For example, they say that they find it hard to explain Freirean concepts using language which is 'simple' enough for trainees to understand.

Observation of a training course in Nepal indicated that, by using games and visual aids, complex notions such as oppression and empowerment can be explored. The key is to ground the concepts in the trainees' realities, to make them meaningful to participants in terms of their own experience. This may be experience they have gained in the past or it may be simulated through training activities. The issue is not so much that of simplifying complex ideas as making them *meaningful* to participants, who are not familiar with the technical discourse that is associated with 'professional' ownership of knowledge. Rather than requiring trainees to adopt the language in which such ideas are expressed, inclusive participatory techniques allow trainees to measure the validity of new ideas against their own experience and to express them in their own terms.

Using technical terminology before drawing on experience can raise expectations which are difficult to meet in REFLECT training. The facilitators who arrived at one training course had participated in a community orientation on REFLECT¹. One of their expectations from the course was to receive an answer to the question 'What is REFLECT?'. By the third day of the course, one of the trainees expressed the concern that she still did not know what REFLECT was, so how was she going to be able to use it?

¹ Community orientation is the process of meetings and discussions between the NGO and the community which precede the commencement of REFLECT circles.

In another approach to facilitator training in Nepal, the word REFLECT is simply not used, in the belief that the process of the training course communicates the REFLECT approach incrementally. It cannot, therefore, be introduced definitively at any one point. This NGO terms REFLECT as 'a participatory approach to literacy'. Facilitator training conducted by the Nepali NGO SEACOW includes an exercise for the trainee facilitators to name the methodology themselves (see Bhattarai et al, this issue). Emphasis is firmly on the process, rather than on a name, which has been legislated outside the community.

- **Facilitator ownership of the REFLECT methodology**

Sensitivity to language is one way in which facilitator training courses in Nepal are working to reduce the alien apparatus of the REFLECT methodology, and PRA to communities. This is part of a commitment to adaptability, which goes beyond the relevance of key words and issues or the use of the local language in written literacy. Flexibility in the use of terminology indicates a wider need to adapt to local methods of analysis and communication: to integrate participatory techniques other than, and in addition to, PRA in REFLECT.

PRA is a tool designed to facilitate analysis and communication. However Mosse (1994) has shown that the success of PRA can depend on familiarity with the techniques. Similarly, because it is based on visual literacy, PRA may not be immediately accessible to people who cannot read and write and whose indigenous systems of communication rely on oral literacy, developing different cognitive strengths, such as memory-based skills. PRA may have to be 'learned' before it can be used (Robinson-Pant, 1995). Visual literacy is an unfamiliar concept in one geographically isolated community in Nepal. In this community, SEACOW has implemented a REFLECT circle, using other participatory tools, including song, story telling and drama, to generate both key words and social analysis. This approach focuses on the need to view analytical techniques, which are used in addition to PRA, as integral to the empowerment agenda promoted by the REFLECT approach.

Innovations in Nepal suggest that facilitators have taken ownership of REFLECT and are exploring ways of using local literacies (e.g. traditional songs) to serve the principles of community empowerment underpinning REFLECT. For example, they are combining visual literacy techniques, such as social maps, with forms of communication and analysis which are indigenous to communities. The function of these techniques may differ. For instance, one facilitator used songs to energise participants and to generate an issue for debate, as a way into PRA. In other circles, songs are used after analysis has taken place to communicate opinions (such as opposition to gender discrimination in schooling) to a wider audience in the community. The meaning of the songs may have changed as the words are changed, but their function as an indigenous form of collective expression is built upon. One facilitator (Save the Children Fund Japan) has been deconstructing traditional songs to conduct analysis and generate key words.

The extent and way in which training can contribute definitively to innovation merits further study. The research showed that some facilitators were using REFLECT critically, judging PRA to be inappropriate and using songs or drama to conduct analysis instead. Others did not feel confident enough to conduct PRA activities, so were 'falling back' on traditional activities with which they felt more comfortable. Innovative facilitation techniques in Nepal may be due to the promotion of creativity through training methods but they may equally be intuitive coping strategies, employed by facilitators who did not feel confident enough following facilitator training, to use PRA in communities with no experience of visual analysis.

Links between training and facilitation

In REFLECT circles, the relationship between the technical and indigenous, the alien and the familiar, is brokered by the facilitator. The ambivalence of the position of the facilitator, as both insider in the community and (by virtue of association with REFLECT) outsider, is key. The success of any literacy programme is dependent upon the relevance of written literacy to peoples' lives. It is the task of the facilitator to achieve this by adapting the tools

of the REFLECT approach according to her/his inside knowledge of the community.

If hierarchies are established within the training process, they may be reproduced in REFLECT circles. In the absence of a manual, the approach to facilitator training in Nepal is consistent with the impulse not to be prescriptive. However other elements in training can foster dependency on a uniform, methodological approach.

For example, many training courses include a biography of Freire's life in lecture form. One facilitator said that he had repeated this information in a lecture to his circle participants when he did not feel that they were learning quickly enough. In this situation, where REFLECT, as it was being practised, did not seem to be producing results, the facilitator reasserted his own authority by displaying his 'knowledge' to participants. This mirrored his experience in facilitator training.

We cannot say, however, that this means that it is wrong to use Freire's biography in REFLECT training. If biographical information is used in an inclusive, participatory way, it may equally promote a culture of creativity. Several trainers spoke of using biographical information as a means of motivating facilitators to take a leadership role in the community through education.

Similarly, there is evidence that communication problems feed down from training to facilitation. In the past, ActionAid facilitator training introduced PRA social mapping by name and this was followed by practical exercises. In circles, facilitators were having difficulty using the graphic because the word 'social' in translation was unfamiliar in this context to participants and therefore, acted as a barrier to using the technique. Having had the graphic introduced as a 'social map' in facilitator training, they introduced it as such to circle participants.

Recently, ActionAid Nepal facilitator training was adjusted so that participants made a social map first and then decided what to call it. The combination of changing the order and allowing trainee facilitators themselves to name the map, met the dual objectives of

emphasising the *process* of producing the graphic (rather than the finished product) and devolving ownership to the trainees. In the event, participants called the graphic a 'village map'. This trainer responsiveness is significant in itself and indicative of a symbiotic training process, in which technical input is balanced against recognition of the validity of REFLECT as it is being practised in communities.

• **Concluding comments**

As Pretty et al. (1995) have written: '*training does not happen in a vacuum. It happens within a particular policy context and organisational culture with its own management structures, professional norms and field practices (p. 63).*' It is beyond the scope of this article to suggest how facilitator training interacts with other processes, such as facilitator selection, or monitoring and evaluation of REFLECT circles. Training is just one of a range of influences which may affect facilitator capacity or behaviour in any particular context. It is also only one of several fora in which the principles underlying REFLECT are communicated.

Consequently, this article has raised more issues than it has addressed. However, acknowledgement of the need for inclusive participation in the processes surrounding REFLECT, of which facilitator training is just one, is of vital importance. There is recognition among ActionAid Nepal staff that REFLECT is an evolving development phenomenon, defined as much by practice in particular circumstances, as by paradigms of literacy acquisition. In a working environment where pressures to scale up have led to a growing number of requests for training from increasingly diverse clients, inclusive participatory approaches to facilitator training should be seen as a means of promoting the qualitative aspects of REFLECT.

Some of the above observations generated from the REFLECT experience in Nepal are relevant to discussions on PRA:

- Participatory training is not the remedy for all the problems. It needs to be supplemented by other components, such as participatory monitoring and evaluation.

- Empowerment of local facilitators (attitude and behaviour, skills and techniques, vision and organisation) is very important for a sustainable participatory process, particularly in the context of scaling up a programme.
- There can be no blue-print for participatory training. Trainers and participants should work together for the process to be designed for each context and the needs of participants. The most important point is the need to be clear about how training will fit with the overall plan of action.

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Empowering trainers: an experience from Bangladesh The REFLECT trainers' forum

Habibur Rahman and Serajud Dahar Khan

• Introduction

In Bangladesh, after a successful REFLECT pilot project on Bhola Island, a scaled-up project was started in November 1995. This involved setting up a REFLECT Co-ordination Unit (RCU) in Dhaka, which would provide training and support to a diverse range of NGOs, who were interested in REFLECT. Its prime concerns were:

- promoting and popularising REFLECT in Bangladesh;
- ensuring that REFLECT continued to link literacy effectively with an empowerment process oriented towards sustainable development;
- providing training for REFLECT practitioners, and,
- strengthening the institutional capacity of both governmental and non-governmental organisations involved in participatory approaches to literacy.

RCU now provides support to 19 different organisations across Bangladesh which are implementing REFLECT. These vary from grassroots/community based organisations to local or national NGOs. Collectively these are referred to as "REFLECT implementing organisations" (RIOs).

In May 1997, the REFLECT programme of Bangladesh was reviewed by DFID (Department for International Development - UK), ActionAid-UK and ActionAid-Bangladesh. Some of the major findings of this review were as follows:

- the quality of REFLECT programmes was inconsistent and some were mechanistically applying material from the REFLECT Mother Manual without changing or adapting it the context;
- training support was inadequate and too centralised. For example, one person, the REFLECT Training Co-ordinator in Dhaka, was responsible for the capacity development of REFLECT personnel across the whole country, through the various RIOs;
- there were no opportunities being created for the trainers to share their experiences and problems, or for them to be updated with new ideas and innovations generated elsewhere; and,
- trainers were often isolated and lacked the support of the wider management in their organisations, with managers treating REFLECT as a separate activity from their mainstream programme.

One of the key conclusions was that there was clearly an urgent need for a continuous process of capacity development, both for trainers and the management of the RIOs. Dependency on the RCU in Dhaka needed to be reduced and there needed to be a recognition that true expertise in REFLECT lay in the field, not in the capital.

The evolution of REFLECT Trainers' Forum

Following the review, a consultation was arranged with the reviewers and the representatives of the RIOs. The idea of organising a Trainers' Forum evolved through this consultation. The objectives of the Trainers' Forum were:

- to share experiences, anxieties and challenges being faced by the REFLECT Trainers and Co-ordinators among themselves and to learn from each other;
- to develop the capacity of the REFLECT Trainers and the Co-ordinators, strengthening their conceptual, technical and human skills for implementing REFLECT programmes effectively;
- to set up strategies and actions for encountering problems immediately;
- to share new ideas and innovations developed in REFLECT programmes within Bangladesh and abroad; and,
- to establish a decentralised pool of REFLECT trainers in different organisations in different parts of the country, all of whom could provide training to other organisations in future.

The Trainers' Forum is now the nodal point for the development and advancement of REFLECT in Bangladesh, generating continuous learning for the REFLECT trainers themselves and for others nationally and internationally who are interested in REFLECT. REFLECT trainers in Bangladesh are more than trainers, they also play the roles of capacity developer, academic supervisor, programme developer, researcher and advocacy worker. In some respects, the Trainers' Forum has become a union of trainers with a horizontal structure.

Increasingly new people are participating regularly in the forum. It acts as a magnet to attract other development practitioners who have diverse interests in REFLECT - whether as programme managers, evaluators, researchers, programme developers or advocacy workers.

How the trainers' forum functions

The REFLECT Trainer's Forum meets quarterly for a period of three to five days in a different location each time. Only the first forum was organised by the RCU. Since then all activities, from planning to report writing, have been managed and implemented by a rotating planning team of trainers. At the end of each meeting, a venue is chosen for the next meeting, a new planning team is constituted and the issues for the next forum meeting are

selected democratically. The planning team is then responsible for:

- unpacking and structuring the issues for discussion at the next forum;
- identifying suitable facilitators and resource people (either from one of the RIOs, the RCU or external sources);
- sending out invitation letters;
- arranging schedules and logistics (including food, accommodation and transport);
- preparing a budget;
- arranging field visits; and,
- arranging documentation and reporting.

Forum meetings over the past year have included the following focal themes:

- strengthening and diversifying the participatory process in REFLECT;
- post-literacy, continuing education and the literate environment;
- the great manual debate: national manuals, local manuals, facilitator-produced manuals or no manuals. What strategies are most effective for better conceptualisation and internalisation of REFLECT?; and,
- Paulo Freire - his theory and practice; how REFLECT has evolved from Freire.

Each Trainers' Forum meeting usually involves around 30-35 hours of work and will include some elements from the following range of activities.

1. *Field Visits:* the Trainers' Forum always starts with a field visit to see the REFLECT circles of the host RIO. Forum participants discuss the strengths and weakness of the circles they observe and offer practical suggestions for improvement at the field level. Forum participants are encouraged to analyse their own programme situation in the light of the findings from the field observation.
2. *Updates:* the trainers exchange major developments/experiences from their practice over the previous weeks and months.
3. *Anxiety and Challenge Sharing:* in the forum the trainers share their own anxiety and 'heart burning/feeling' (*Antarjala*) -

sharing concerns and forthcoming challenges with their fellow trainers.

4. *Analysis / Conceptual Strengthening*: in each Trainers' Forum, one focal issue for discussion is selected for wider conceptualisation, clarification and participation. The discussion helps the trainers in strengthening their conceptual, technical and human skills. As trainers develop their own understanding and feel empowered themselves, they develop the confidence and capacity to facilitate a similar process for empowering facilitators.
5. *Setting up Strategies and Actions*: the forum creates a space for the trainers where they can develop their own strategies and actions to resolve problems or limitations that have been identified. For instance, during the second forum, the trainers developed a post-literacy and continuing education strategy, which went far beyond what RCU had previously envisaged.
6. *Supporting Facilitators*: the trainers share the forum discussions with local facilitators from the host RIO, which helps them to pursue a similar process in their own organisations on their return. Whatever they have learnt from the Forum, trainers are encouraged to transfer/share this immediately, through their own fortnightly or monthly Facilitators' Forum. Facilitators are acknowledged to be at the heart of all REFLECT programmes and the Trainers Forum is thus seen as a means to strengthen those facilitators.
7. *Monitoring, evaluation and research*. up to date information on developments in each RIO is collated during the forum meetings and staff from the RCU use the opportunity to collect case studies, share approaches to evaluation and promote cross-project research.

• Outcomes

REFLECT trainers are now much more confident than they were before the review. Rather than feeling isolated, they feel part of a wider movement. Rather than seeing themselves as implementers of a programme brought from outside, they feel ownership of REFLECT and feel more respected as key

players in the development of the approach. Rather than follow something mechanically, they will question, challenge, criticise and innovate. The forum has generated inquisitiveness among most of the trainers. They are investigate and probe. They bring problems and ideas to the forum, rather than expecting to be passively filled. In effect, the trainers themselves feel empowered.

REFLECT is now expanding rapidly within Bangladesh, with 19 organisations having taken up the approach in different contexts. With this expansion, the number of trainers is, of course, increasing and it becomes difficult to accommodate everyone. For this reason, there are now plans to develop interlinked regional Trainers' Fora, to encourage local organisations to keep regular contact. Additionally, there would be strategic moments of exchange between the different regional fora.

If the present trend continues, the trainers' fora will take on a role beyond capacity building, to include wider programme development and strategic planning. This will be entirely consistent with the philosophy behind REFLECT, leading to increasingly bottom-up planning and participatory management. The danger of dependency on the RCU now seems much reduced, as ownership of REFLECT is genuinely broadened. The RCU's role in future is likely to focus more on networking, research and advocacy, rather than direct capacity building. Its authority will not derive from it being considered a concentration of experts or privileged 'holders of the truth', but rather from its capacity to be responsive to evolving strategies emerging from the grassroots.

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REFLECT and institutional change: the experience of CIAZO in El Salvador

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• Background to Ciazo

In April 1989, in the midst of the Salvadorean Civil War, CIAZO was established as the 'Inter-agency Committee for Literacy in the Eastern Zone of El Salvador'. As the name suggests, it was not an institution per se, but rather, coordinated work between the different organisations working in the East of the country. All these organisations were linked to the popular movement and were involved, in disparate ways, in literacy work. However, they lacked a clear or common methodology. CIAZO was initially based within FASTERAS (an umbrella foundation working for the self-management of Salvadorean workers) but after the National Peace Accords in 1993, it became an autonomous organisation and moved to working at a national level.

Acting as a form of network, CIAZO provides technical and financial support on literacy to over 25 grassroots organisations and cooperative federations (each of whom has representatives sitting on CIAZO's Management Board). It produces a wide range of educational materials, undertakes research, develops innovative approaches, and channels its experiences and learning into national level policy and decision making. Whilst adult literacy is a major focus of its work, CIAZO also has a Popular Education programme for children who are excluded from schools; it organises leadership training and cooperative capacity building courses, with particular experience in agro-ecological training. CIAZO now directly employs about 30 people and has close links to education personnel in each of its member organisations - all of whom work using volunteer teachers.

One of CIAZO's member organisations, COMUS (the United Communities of Usulután) received funding for a wider development programme from ActionAid, and in 1993, COMUS agreed to pilot the new approach to literacy which has subsequently become known as REFLECT. CIAZO agreed to provide some limited support to this pilot programme, as one of four innovative initiatives, which it was developing in the field of adult literacy at the time. CIAZO provided some technical support to developing the local manual and training local facilitators. It also became involved in the evaluation of the pilot experience in 1995, which involved comparing the outcomes of the REFLECT approach with the outcomes from the literacy work of CIAZO's member groups - all of whom were using CIAZO's national level programme 'Literacy for Peace'. The results of the evaluation showed that REFLECT was about as successful as CIAZO's national programme in respect of literacy work, but that it was massively more successful when it came to generating community action, empowerment and social change.

Despite very striking evaluation results in 1995, it was not until this year (1998) that CIAZO finally took up the REFLECT approach at a national level. The reasons for this delay were partly to do with a necessary process of ongoing learning and the need for evolutionary (rather than abrupt) change, but they were also partly due to fundamental institutional resistance.

• Resistance to REFLECT

Any process of change will encounter resistance, especially when that process challenges past behaviour and practice. The REFLECT approach required personnel in CIAZO to 'unlearn' ways and methods of working which had been developed over the years and which were perceived as the only effective way of working in the Salvadorean context. We needed to develop new ways of seeing and understanding social processes and new, more open, attitudes. The greatest resistance to the development of REFLECT in CIAZO came from the existing professional team, whose initial reaction was based on two openly declared arguments:

- REFLECT was seen (mistakenly) as a methodology imported from the North, which therefore would not respond to the needs and interests of our own context; and,
- REFLECT was seen as an approach which would be difficult to use and which would over-load facilitators, who, in turn, would be likely to reject it.

However, these arguments have gradually disappeared, as practice has shown them to be essentially false. However, underneath these concerns lay something deeper, a personal insecurity about taking on something completely new and a professional fear of losing the power and control which the production of primers represented.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that this fear and resistance was not a wholly negative force, as it produced an authentic (though painful) process of CIAZO discovering and assuming REFLECT for itself. It is clear that to impose REFLECT in a dictatorial or hierarchical fashion would have been contrary to the very essence of the approach. Working through a more horizontal process may have taken time, but certainly led us to enrich the approach. During this process, our good practice from the past was validated and maintained, rather than being dismissed in favour of the new approach. This was important, as the underlying theory of REFLECT is not wholly new. Rather, it is firmly rooted in the tradition of popular education in Latin America which has been in

existence for twenty five years. However, popular education has suffered over the years from excess theory and rhetoric, and a lack of methodological tools which allow its principles and ideas to be translated effectively into practice on the ground.

The process of transition

CIAZO's previous national programme 'Literacy For Peace' involved participants addressing a huge range of key issues; from human rights to forms of community organisation, from preventive health to appropriate technology, from women's rights to children's rights, from the causes of war to the details of the peace accords etc. However, this agenda was set by us as professionals and the methodology used rarely facilitated horizontal communication. After a nominal discussion on the surface of each topic, our literacy facilitators were likely either to move to the technical teaching of reading, or shift into lecture mode to tell participants more about what to think on each theme.

Following the initial success of the REFLECT pilot programme with COMUS, CIAZO was particularly excited at the potential of REFLECT to link the literacy process to serious reflection, analysis and action. A decision was taken to re-design the national programme and to abolish the primer. This was significantly inspired by the REFLECT experience, but also drew from other innovative experiences CIAZO had been undertaking in adult numeracy, gender analysis and collaboration with local municipal governments. The primer was replaced with a national manual (or 'methodological orientation book') for facilitators, called 'Education for Action'. The first level of this manual had ten 'units', addressing two or three themes each and most starting with the collective construction of a graphic. Facilitators received a few days of basic training (much along the lines of past training workshops), focusing on how to use this manual, and were then sent off to run their circles.

The results of this work in 1996/7 were both positive and negative. There were clear signs that circles were engaged in more community level actions, but the facilitators expressed

serious reservations about the use of some graphics, particularly maps. There was a reluctance to construct graphics on the ground, an issue with which the trainers themselves had reservations, which meant that facilitators were given few good examples and creative solutions. Facilitators were found to be following the manual rather religiously, even where a particular topic was of limited relevance in their area, and this would lead to a loss of group dynamic. Whilst the overall results in terms of literacy were consistent with past practice, there was a feeling that this was not enough.

In 1997, a series of workshops at a national level led CIAZO to decide that it was necessary to 'get radical' with REFLECT. They had replaced the old primer with a national manual, which was turning out to be much like a primer, so it became necessary to move away from this altogether. Facilitators were being treated as passive implementors, not creative agents at the heart of the process. Trainers themselves had not taken ownership of the approach and needed further support. Despite good intentions, it was clear that CIAZO had effectively distorted REFLECT, creating a hybrid which would not live up to our expectations. Nevertheless, during the experience, we had developed an understanding of some basic elements of REFLECT across CIAZO, which henceforth, could be used as a building block.

An ambitious plan was thus developed, involving training workshops with each and every member organisation. In these workshops, the idea was that local facilitators would produce their own local manuals, thereby creating new tools and techniques and internalising the approach. This was started with a workshop for 15 facilitators from one particular member organisation, together with one promoter from each of the other 15 member organisations. The workshop started with an introduction to PRA and then had a one week gap in the middle, during which participants went back to their communities to use PRA tools for background research. Then they re-convened and wrote their own local manual, adapting PRA tools to address the local issues they had identified - and working in small groups to write their own 'units'. Two similar workshops were conducted, until three

member organisations had produced their own manuals and at least two promoters from every other member organisation had observed the training process in practice. These promoters, with support from the national technical team of CIAZO, then facilitated their own workshops.

The impact of this training approach across the country has been the remarkable degree of internalisation of REFLECT by everyone involved, with people feeling a true sense of ownership of the approach and a high level of creative capacity being revealed. Production of training or resource materials is no longer seen as the reserve of experts in the capital and the horizontal exchange of materials between organisations has provided each facilitator with a huge resource base from which to draw. The level of confidence and commitment amongst facilitators is tangible and this is a powerful basis to enable them to engage in a process in which they will feel comfortable about sharing power with others.

From rhetoric to practice: moving beyond literacy

In contrast to the lack of discussion in literacy centres in the past, REFLECT is succeeding in creating a cultural dialogue between facilitators and participants, in which local knowledge is revindicated alongside universal knowledge. The communication is not just between facilitator and participant but also amongst participants. Individual and collective self-esteem (and thereby ultimately 'power') has been strengthened. Rather than being a process which is sealed inside four walls, REFLECT has linked the learning process to people's active participation as citizens in relation to local and national government. People have been demanding the delivery of services from relevant agencies; they have been insisting on transparent administration from all institutions (including their own local community organisations); and they have been fighting for active representation on public bodies. All of these actions should not be perceived as a consequence of REFLECT, but rather as an integral part of the REFLECT process.

REFLECT is therefore not just about literacy. It is a process which aims to strengthen civil

societies. This is crucial at a time when there is massive disillusionment with politics and conventional political processes. REFLECT does not bring a specific response or solution to the multiple problems and needs of communities, but rather it sets in motion a process of democratisation (in public and private spheres) and community participation. This may sound like old rhetoric, and it is certainly not a discourse which is unfamiliar to us. But for many years, we were using this discourse in trying to promote popular education, whilst using methodologies which were fundamentally traditional. At the time, we were hugely critical of government programmes and yet, those programmes were scarcely distinguishable in methodology from our own. REFLECT offers a fundamental shift in methodology and practice to match our different discourse.

• Restructuring CIAZO

Securing structural change in an organisation of the size and shape of CIAZO is not a simple task. Until 1997, the adult literacy side of CIAZO's work involved a team of 5 national technical advisers, 50 field promoters/trainers and 500 facilitators in 25 different organisations. The introduction of REFLECT on a national scale has led us to restructure, seeking more horizontal organisation. We have reduced the national technical team to 4 people and cut the number of field promoters/trainers to just 18. A new level of local promoters (or lead facilitators) has been created, who are REFLECT facilitators themselves, but have a role in providing additional support to other facilitators in neighbouring circles/communities. Financial resources have been re-directed away from the production of primers and towards training. Facilitators who were previously volunteers (which was more feasible in the highly politicised context of the civil war) are now given a nominal stipend. Overall, the salaried personnel at a national level have much less control and power than previously, whilst the member organisations are able to assume more control over the process. Rather than having nationally produced materials, facilitators in each member organisation are helped to produce local materials (through training workshops) adapted to their specific context and needs.

As CIAZO progressively discovers the implications of the REFLECT approach and adapts and internalises it more completely, we recognise increasingly, that it is much more than a packet of tools. We are seeing that the approach is diminished if it is conceived as, and restricted to, an approach to adult literacy. CIAZO's agro-ecological training programme and its leadership training courses are now increasingly influenced by REFLECT. Our gender training and children's education work are also strengthened by a genuine process of participation and empowerment. REFLECT is becoming a cross-cutting approach in all our educational work, ensuring an holistic approach which is both politically radical and explicit.

Between January and April 1998 CIAZO undertook a strategic planning process which will have fundamental implications for what we do and how we do it. We are seeing that the REFLECT approach is not just of value for promoting processes of change at the community level, but that it is also invaluable for changing institutions and how they work. Fundamentally REFLECT questions the lack of real democracy and the way in which power is constructed from above. It requires us to challenge existing power relations, whether in the public arena, in private institutions or even within personal and intra-household relationships. Although CIAZO has an impressive record of participation, having made continuous efforts to strengthen our internal democracy, we see the need for an even greater dose of participation at all levels of decision making, both operationally and strategically. We see ourselves pursuing an ongoing process of decentralisation - of both capacity and responsibility - so that people can speak with their own voice and be heard.

• Conclusion

As we approach our tenth anniversary, CIAZO has changed dramatically as an institution. The REFLECT approach has been integral to this process of change in recent years, as we have come to realise that the methodologies we use for promoting processes of change at the local level cannot be ignored, when it comes to our own processes of change. It is not only patronising if we use approaches with others which we do not feel are valid for ourselves,

but also ultimately contradictory. REFLECT provides an approach which can help to reduce the contradictions inherent in many institutions, which are supposedly working for development but which do not have equitable internal practices. However, it requires institutions to reflect for themselves and think through the implications on an ongoing basis and not to treat REFLECT as a project held at arms length.

Other institutions interested in REFLECT should draw from this lesson and ensure that they are ready to follow through its implications. REFLECT requires a radical change in your relationships with communities and partners, and that in turn, requires a radical change to your institution.

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Beyond the bounded community: REFLECT in urban settings

Anne Jellema and Marc Fiedrich

• Introduction

That homogeneous, egalitarian communities do not really exist, except in the imagination, is not a new insight. The challenge for practitioners of REFLECT, as for other participatory approaches, is how to build common ground out of diverse realities (see Figure 1). In an urban context, this can be especially difficult. A look at REFLECT Projects in Kampala, Uganda and in Dhaka, Bangladesh will highlight some of the problems and also suggest ways forward. The key issue, we argue, is enabling facilitators to respond to the informal, improvised survival strategies of the urban poor.

These two areas share some features that complicate the use of participatory approaches.¹ Neighbourhoods in Dhaka and Kampala are not separate units with clear physical or social boundaries: city-dwellers' most important social ties (work, family, friends) often stretch far outside the area where they live. There are strongly marked cultural and economic differences between people living in the same neighbourhood. People may be moving so frequently that their knowledge of their neighbours and immediate surroundings may be limited. Finally, in many rural areas, people's imagined notion of community incorporates geographical boundaries with strong moral imperatives of reciprocity, trust and solidarity; but in urban

areas this idea of 'belonging' to a place may be weak, contested or altogether absent.

In Kampala, REFLECT has been adopted by a community-based organisation, the Banda Community Development Project (BCDP), with funding from ActionAid. Banda is an informal settlement in a swampy area on the outskirts of the city, with a population of about 10,000. Like most informal settlements in African cities, Banda is made up of migrants from all over the country. Although most people are poor, inequalities among residents are marked. While some people are refugees from the war-torn North, with little or no security of tenure, other long-established residents are teachers, shop-owners and may be property-owners.

In Dhaka, REFLECT is directly implemented by ActionAid, together with a micro-enterprise scheme targeted at very poor women, in Mohammedpur *thana* (district). Mohammedpur has a population of roughly 100,000 people and about half of these are living in squatter areas where eviction is a constant threat. ActionAid concentrates its efforts on Tikkapara, one of 12 squatter *bastis* (slums) in Mohammedpur. Most of the women who join belong to at least one NGO savings and credit programme (though not always ActionAid's). Again, as in Banda, the inhabitants of the *bastis* come to Dhaka from all over and for very different reasons.

¹Although these characteristics may seem typically urban, they are also found outside of cities: see Archer and Jellema, 'Response to Dyer and Choksi', *Compare* 28(1): 88-92 (1998) on an experiment with literacy among pastoralists in northern India.

Figure 1. Finding common interests is a key challenge in this urban REFLECT circle in Tikkapora, Dhaka Bangladesh. (Photo: D. Fox)



• **From community to common constraints**

While knowing that urban neighbourhoods in Kampala and Dhaka are *not* villages, the first instinct of many development workers is to try to treat them *as if* they were, organising activities around wards or other geographical/administrative divisions and trying to generate shared interests from shared residence. Often this results in frustration with ‘ungrateful’ residents who apparently refuse to co-operate or in projects which residents tolerate but never actively make their own.

This was the approach first adopted both in the Banda and Tikkapara REFLECT projects, but signs that it wasn’t working came early on, in the form of problems with meeting places, timings and attendance. Beyond the difficulties of finding a private space to meet in a crowded, land-scarce informal settlement, there was also the fact that not everyone wanted to attend a circle near to their home. In Banda, for example, some women attended a circle near their work but lived elsewhere;

others thought it more prestigious to learn from the centre attached to the BCDP office; and again others preferred going to a circle where neighbours and friends could not see them. In addition, urban participants have many different occupations, and these jobs tend to be informal and thus unpredictable. This makes it hard to schedule meetings at times when all members can attend. In Tikkapara, women were prevented from attending by evictions and other crises stemming from their insecure foothold in the city; they also were less likely than rural women to have kin or friends nearby whom they could call on for childcare or other domestic help.

These logistical problems might have given warning that the geographically bounded community was a model ill-suited to Banda and Tikkapara but the more serious difficulties emerged in the application of REFLECT units. The temptation in urban contexts is simply to adapt the PRA tools and topics that have worked well in rural settings, without rethinking the rationale behind the techniques. For example, the ‘village map’ is enduringly

popular, probably because it allows participants to take a familiar reality and view it from a perspective that makes it possible to imagine change and plan action. In urban contexts, it is often 'translated' into a household or social resources map. However, if the presumption of an intimately shared reality is missing, the exercise loses much of its point. In Banda, when geographical maps were attempted, the fact that members of any one circle were drawn from all over the settlement made it impossible to produce something that was meaningful to all participants². In Tikkapara, participants from different neighbourhoods took great interest in the production of detailed maps (perhaps because Tikkapara is less spread out than Banda), but these maps could not easily lead to any kind of joint action.

Another example is the commonly used preference ranking of crops, which works well in settings where most people get their living from tilling plots of similar size and quality, and where a strict set of constraints (soil conditions, rainfall, available technology, etc.) requires each to choose what to grow out of the same limited set of options. In other words, it is a tool for analysing the available options for responding to the very tight constraints which all participants face. In Banda, the ranking of crops became a preference ranking of small business activities, and other units were introduced to help participants apply for jobs and understand their contractual rights as employees.

This was not entirely off the mark: for many women, as in Tikkapara, making money is a huge concern, and many pinned their hopes on REFLECT to help them. However, in one circle, it turned out that none of the women had much prospect of starting any sort of business or getting jobs in the formal sector, in part due to their husbands' determined opposition. Discussions of power relations and economic decision-making within the household would have been more relevant than analysis of small business options or job applications.

²In this case it might have been that the scale of the maps was too small - an artificial attempt to fence off a bounded 'community' - rather than too large. A meaningful map might have included Kampala.

With these lessons in mind, BCDP is now moving towards organising circles on the basis of occupation, so that there will be groups of market women, beer brewers, stone-crushers or housewives (the latter will probably be organised on the basis of neighbourhood). This is expected to solve some of the logistical problems mentioned above, but more importantly, circle members (like peasant livestock farmers or maize cultivators) will share a common body of skill and knowledge and will have experienced the same practical dilemmas as they try to make their living.

This makes it possible to base the REFLECT curriculum on, for example, income-generating activities, starting with existing practices (including timelines showing different activities that each participant is engaged in during one year/over a lifetime) and then deepening the analysis concerning the origin of raw materials used (maps), barriers to entering or expanding the market such as transport and credit (matrices analysing possible solutions), ways of processing or adding value (flow charts), and markets for the finished product (calendars showing seasonality of demand).

It remains to be seen whether, in the course of analysing common *practices*, these occupational groups will also discover common *interests* which they decide to pursue through joint action. Some occupations, such as beer-brewing, already have a strong collective orientation; others, such as stone-crushing, are organised in ways that produce fierce competition.

In Tikkapara it would be more difficult to segment groups by occupation (see Nessa et al., this issue), as most women pursue multiple small-scale income-generating strategies rather than a single occupation (and face strong cultural pressure to downplay these activities, defining themselves instead as 'just housewives'). In this case, however, the common experiences and constraints are supplied by the women's interactions with ActionAid and other NGOs active in the area, since most of them are regularly paying money into savings and credit groups managed by NGOs. Strict rules and procedures imposed by the NGO govern women's access to loans (passbooks, regular meetings with a credit

officer, rules about interest, repayment, etc.). Circle members have a common interest in trying to bend these rules where they can; they also face a common penalty if the NGO judges that one or more of them has defaulted. Thus, it makes sense to use REFLECT to explore all aspects of loan use, incorporating the analysis of income-generating strategies suggested above, but also engaging in an open dialogue about the NGOs' role in managing the women's money, and exploring the feasibility of changing rules that women find unfavourable to them (e.g. increasing the size of loans or relaxing the criteria of acceptable loan use), as well as what could be done to address other constraints on women's economic independence.

In this case, interventions by powerful outside actors (NGOs) have created interest groups where none 'naturally' existed before. In other contexts, REFLECT circles might form around other external interventions, such as a public works scheme, a slum resettlement initiative, or a feeding programme. Units could address key features of the intervention that directly affect participants and help them to determine whether benefits are actually flowing to intended 'targets'. This could develop as a shared learning process, with the implementing agency participating in the REFLECT process together with literacy participants.

- **From ideal norms to messy realities: adapting PRA tools**

Another aspect of the model of 'community' that informs so much development work is the assumption that a fairly stable set of shared, consensual values and norms governs people's activities within that community. Participatory approaches, such as PRA, are sometimes used in a way that illuminates the received wisdom on how people think they should act (norms and ideologies) more than how they actually do act (practices). But in urban slums, many people are in situations where cultural rules are muddled, patchwork affairs: either because practice is changing faster than ideology or because cultural differences bring competing ideologies up against one another.

To enable participants to analyse the real constraints that they face, PRA exercises in

urban REFLECT programmes need to start from the 'real-life' practices that participants feel comfortable discussing. Of course, norms and values (such as gender ideologies, for example) need to be brought into this analysis, as they themselves are among the most powerful constraints shaping what is possible and what is desirable. However, seeing them as contested and changing rather than consensual and timeless is essential to the critical dimension that REFLECT tries to introduce, and this can best be done by starting from practice.

For example, most Tikkapara women will agree that dowry is a bad thing. But it is only through exploring why dowry is given in particular real-life cases that reasons for the continuing escalation of this practice can be understood, or possible strategies generated for mitigating its negative effects on women. Box 1 highlights the need to respond more creatively to the reality of survival in the city, which demands temporary, flexible, unofficial (even illegal) arrangements.

How can urban REFLECT programmes generate units which help participants and facilitators mine the richness of real, informal practices? We have already argued that it is not enough just to substitute 'urban' themes for 'rural' ones: a problem situation needs to be defined that involves a tight set of constraints shared by all participants, and a limited set of resources for solving the problem. Focusing on changes in these constraints and in people's response to them is one recommendation. A focus on change over time may be an 'entry point' for facilitators. Both in Banda and in Tikkapara, participants point out significant changes in relations between men and women: changes in household decision-making, in mental and physical violence experienced by women, in gender workloads, in men's and women's access to information or participation in social networks, in dowry or bridewealth customs.

BOX 1
FROM NORMS TO PRACTICES

In Tikkapara, some REFLECT circles had discussed the rights of women within marriage. And rightly so, because Tikkapara women are at the forefront of gender change in Bangladesh. Many of them not only work outside the home, in violation of *pardah* (seclusion) norms, but they are also beginning to demand a greater role in family decisions. This means they are also frequently subject to physical and emotional violence by men resisting these changes. Yet the focus in REFLECT circles was on mapping the official channels (the police and the marriage registry office) available to women for seeking protection. However, interviewed participants pointed out that these institutions were actually of little practical use to powerless people like themselves. It is through *informal* strategies (including enrolment in literacy classes) that many of these women are gaining a surprising degree of independence. However, people do not have free range to invent new strategies; they must use the limited material and cultural resources available to them in their existing social location (gender, class, age, etc.). Exercises to explore these strategies, which might also look at how these have changed over time, strengths and weaknesses, how they could be augmented, which tactics are more effective and why, would probably have been more interesting and useful to participants. These exercises can start off from less controversial and more obvious shared interests at the beginning of the course and move on from there.

(see also Nessa and Jellema, this issue)

Health is another area where participants' shared anxieties could lead to rich discussions, because concerns about the body, disease and reproduction often symbolise deeper concerns about social change and gender conflict. The ownership and development of slum land is a third area where long-term social and economic changes as well as short-term political interventions have had direct effects on REFLECT participants. Units could explore layers of ownership and tenancy, the legal and de facto rights that people have in land and how disputes have been settled.

In designing units with clear objectives like those above, the diversity of participants' experience and the 'muddiness' of cultural norms around these issues becomes an

advantage rather than a handicap. The more different perspectives circle members bring to bear, the easier it is to understand practices (such as dowry customs, property rights or gender roles) as human inventions that change over time in line with changing power relations. In some situations, it might even be useful to make learners' own categories of ethnicity, status, etc. an explicit axis of comparison. However, in this case, great care would be needed to avoid simply reinforcing ethnic and other stereotypes.

• **Changes in facilitation methods**

Making urban REFLECT programmes responsive to urban realities will also demand changes in the training and management of facilitators (see Gautam and Cottingham, this issue). Training facilitators to use pre-designed REFLECT units and standardised PRA tools encourages a preoccupation with the exact application of the units already learned and inhibits people from manipulating exercises to suit the interests and circumstances of the members of their circle. Instead, trainers should introduce, one at a time, the basic ideas of maps, matrices and diagrams (in a 'real' rather than a simulated context) and then focus on learning to adapt these to the needs of specific groups.

Changes in teaching and learning methods may also be needed to accommodate the wide range of skill levels and aspirations commonly found in urban programmes. In Banda, for example, many of the participants knew how to read and write, to some extent, before starting the literacy programmes. This has two implications.

First, the usual procedure of constructing graphics with local materials, then picture symbols (only later introducing words), frustrates many participants who already have some literacy. They need others to perceive their activities as serious, 'academic' education, and in the highly public context of Banda, picture-drawing is embarrassing. Instead, all graphics should be constructed with whole words from the beginning, only using pictures as backup for those who have trouble remembering the words (even maps should use lots of words, complemented only by simple pictures and lines). Once people get

good at recognising the words from the graphics (exchanging their own personal techniques for recalling words, e.g. by shape, length, first letters etc.), then they should quickly move on to writing and constructing phrases.

Second, BCDP has realised that it must accommodate the strong desire of many participants to learn to speak (and to a lesser extent write) English. The pull of the dominant language is likely to be strong in urban settings, where its influence is pervasive and the disadvantage faced by those who don't speak it is most blatant. As with other elements of an urban literacy programme, there is a temptation to take a purely functional approach to teaching the dominant language, concentrating on the practical needs of city-dwellers. The Banda programme will try to meet these needs by introducing some labelling of graphics in English (in some circles all labelling will be bilingual) and devising oral exercises on the basis of the finished graphics, loosely following a curriculum introducing important basic grammar concepts. At least some of the units will be chosen so as to specifically address situations in which participants want to make use of English.

However, BCDP also sees a need to go beyond a purely functional approach, using language to open up questions of power and identity (see Archer, this issue). A language matrix proved a very useful tool in developing a creative approach to English in Banda. Although people began by stating that they 'needed' English for practical purposes, such as going to the bank or the clinic, discussions based on the matrix showed that English was actually not used much in these situations, but that it was nonetheless significant. Further discussions led people to conclude that the main 'use' of English is actually to ensure and legitimate privileges. Hence REFLECT units on the uses of English in the particular situations named by participants will also have to analyse some of the issues around English as the language of (colonial and postcolonial) power.³

³ More ideas on incorporating English into REFLECT can be found in 'REFLECT in English: Guidelines for Banda Facilitators' (1998), a report available from the International Education Unit or

• Conclusion

As long as development workers are tied to the model of the bounded, homogeneous community operating according to consensual norms, the realities of urban survival for the poor will enter into programme design only in a negative way, as 'problems' for programme staff. However, REFLECT need not be based on such a model. As a flexible approach which builds on people's specific experience of their own reality, it easily accommodates changes in project design in order to make the most of diverse, 'messy' urban contexts. Many of these changes are still at the experimental stage, but we are hopeful that they will make the urban REFLECT programmes an exciting source of new innovation and insights for practitioners in the growing number of contexts (rural as well as urban) where the notion of community is becoming problematic.

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from ActionAid Uganda. See also see Fiedrich, 'Learning English: An uneasy flirtation with the powerful?', *Education Action* 7 (January 1997).

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REFLECT with children

Sara Cottingham

• Introduction

“Children are not a popular group with development workers. They do not provide ‘valid’ feedback in evaluations, and almost never bring credit to development organisations by speaking out in wider forums. We are often happy to wait until these children are grown up and see them enrol in empowering adult literacy classes, and engage in participatory development activities - with the aim of social change. Is there any reason to wait for social change?” (Frema Osei-Opare, personal communication, 1998).

On this basis, can REFLECT make a contribution in the area of children’s participation in development, (an interesting area explored in *PLA Notes*, Number 25, Special Issue on Children) and what is the difference between REFLECT with adults and children?

REFLECT with children starts with the assumption that most children from low-income households make significant economic and social contributions to their families; both girls and boys take responsibility for tasks in such areas as farming, herding, selling, looking after younger children, collecting fuel and cooking. From an early age many have life experience and skills to share with their peers and with interested adults, but often have no voice. In particular, in development planning their specific needs often go unrecognised. It is often assumed that they will benefit from interventions directed at more powerful members of the household, but this may not always be the case. For example, a credit scheme may be designed to help parents with school fees but in fact the money is may be

used to pay dowries for earlier marriages for their daughters. Thus, the objective of REFLECT with children is the greater empowerment of children: the starting point is their existing role in the socio-economic-cultural context in which they live (see Figure 1).

What is REFLECT with children?

As with adults, REFLECT with children is an education intervention based on discussion of relevant issues using participatory techniques. It provides a space where children can relate the new information and skills provided by their teacher (who has a different role to that of a facilitator for adults) with their own life experience. This is true whether REFLECT activities takes place in a formal primary school or a non formal education centre. Real learning can take place, but even more than with adults, must be integrated into, and recognised by, the formal system of children’s education in the countries concerned. If this is not done, there is a risk that children already marginalised by poverty, will be further excluded by their perceived lack of schooling. This poses certain challenges and it is important to analyse how the learning outcomes of REFLECT can fit into a standard curriculum. Some general examples are given in Box 1.

In addition to its complementarity with the formal system, there are other educational objectives for REFLECT. One of the main objectives is to provide a simple way for primary teachers to become more child-centred in their teaching methods and less authoritarian in style. In REFLECT, their role is as much to listen and give value to children’s contributions as to teach an agreed body of knowledge. There is consensus about

the desirability of child centred teaching in the world of teacher training colleges and this is often practised in more expensive schools, but is hard to find in the education available to the poor. PRA training for teachers is a major input but there is no need for the costly teaching aids or audio-visual equipment so

often thought to be necessary for quality teaching. It is also a methodology which children enjoy enormously, and this is itself a selling point for use by teachers - particularly when they have experienced this fun aspect for themselves.

BOX 1

NATIONAL CURRICULA AND REFLECT WITH CHILDREN

Skills-based approach

Many national curricula identify core skills rather than information that has to be rote-learnt and reproduced in exams, and REFLECT is particularly suited to developing skills in: self expression and articulating ideas (oral and listening skills); writing skills, especially independent writing based on a meaningful discussion rather than copying notes from the blackboard; problem-solving skills based on group analysis and actions decided upon with the teacher; mathematical skills which can be linked to the commercial activities of children; drawing skills, e.g. transferring three-dimensional graphics from ground to two-dimensional paper; and reading skills based on texts generated from the graphic and discussion and permanently displayed on the classroom wall.

Integrated approach

At primary level, many countries aim at an integrated approach to the subjects on the curriculum and REFLECT is one way to work on subjects such as geography, history, language and maths around the topic of a REFLECT unit. For example, a weather calendar could involve geography, history (as homework, children could ask older relatives about changes over the years and this local history could be presented as a timeline which in turn, could be compared with national history in the text book), reading, writing and mathematical skills (e.g. bar chart of rainfall).

Revision

In the same way as integrating subjects for more effective learning, there is room for REFLECT activities to be carried out after certain topics have been covered, in order to revise and reinforce what has been taught. For example, the teacher might have introduced kilometres as a way of measuring distance, but a mobility map would provide relevant examples from the children's lives to practise calculating kilometres walked or perhaps cycled over a period of time. Another example might be the twenty four hour clock, which is a notoriously difficult topic. The daily routine charts for girls and boys would enable children to match their usual way of telling the time with the twenty four hour system. A third example (used in Uganda) is to develop the food preference matrices for follow up work on a balanced diet with different categories of food, such as protein and carbohydrates being introduced.

Perhaps one of the contributions that REFLECT could make is turning some of the excellent standards set in curricula into reality in poorly-funded government primary schools. Currently, many of the standards described above may only be seen in private primary schools for the middle classes.

Alongside the educational objectives, are the empowerment objectives of REFLECT with children. Clearly the kind of activities associated with REFLECT develop children's confidence, awareness of their rights. For example, they can discuss such issues as drug abuse, sexual harassment, low or no wages, or teenage pregnancy. These skills can become part of the analytical equipment which pupils acquire, keep and use for life¹.

With REFLECT, children may have to lead a discussion in a large group of pupils but even the most shy child can participate by putting an object on the ground to represent something that is being discussed. This is good preparation for life as an adult but where does it lead in the lives of children at the time? Is it vital for children to be able to express their views to the managers of the school (or non-formal centre) or to their parents, or to the community? Or does their powerlessness in relation to adults make this a dangerous activity? Perhaps more acceptable activities are 'Action points', such as starting an income generating project for the school, which might be a more appropriate way forward. The programmes currently using the REFLECT approach with children have not yet addressed these empowerment issues systematically.

How has REFLECT with children been used so far?

Since 1996, REFLECT with children has been used in Uganda and Nepal. In Nepal, there are five ACCESS (non-formal education) centres who decided to switch to REFLECT by asking the teacher to use PRA alongside literacy. These teachers have knowledge of PRA because it is used extensively in the area. In the Uganda pilot, the main transfer of the methods from REFLECT was the use of syllable cards and flash cards (with picture and word for reading practice). In Nepal, however, these ACCESS teachers have been using the PRA graphics, such as Household Maps and Gender Workload Calendars with the children, whose ages range from six to fourteen years. Apart from being more participatory, and motivating the children to learn, the gender

workload calendar for girls' work and boys' work has provoked discussions at family level. This is particularly interesting because it fits with other programme initiatives on children's participation by ActionAid Nepal. Literacy and numeracy continue along conventional lines and are not linked to PRA, but despite this, the PRA method has caught the interest of two local headmasters, who have visited the centres.

In Uganda, REFLECT units have been integrated into the national non-formal curriculum, COPE (Complementary Opportunities in Primary Education), which is being piloted in Mubende District by ActionAid and the District Education authority. One hundred and twenty five non-Formal Education Centres have been set up in rural and urban areas and are attracting teenagers who do not feel comfortable taking advantage of the free universal education recently made available in the country.

The units have been designed as revision of subject teaching in Uganda, English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies (see Box 1) and are included in the 'Instructors' Guide' under the following titles: People and Animals Map; Daily Routine Chart; Work Preference Matrix; Food Preference Matrix; Games Preference Ranking; Mobility Maps; Weather Calendar; Health Curative Matrix, and Health and Hygiene Map. These have been linked to subjects, and there are also units on causes of drug abuse and a calendar of celebrations. One outcome observed in Uganda has been that the role of the teacher has shifted as a result of facilitating PRA, reinforcing the use of the other child-centred techniques recommended in the instructors' guide and training. (e.g. peer teaching, group discussion etc.) Another interesting outcome has been that graphics are labelled in both English and Lugandan, giving a clear structure to bilingual teaching, which may be lacking where teaching is supposed to be in English but for practical purposes the teacher translates everything into the mother tongue.

¹ R. Chambers' Trip Report India, International Thematic PRA Training Workshop, Ranchi 12-22 April, 1998.

Figure 1. 'Listening to smaller voices' - children in a non formal education centre in Daloche, Ethiopia (Photo: D. Archer)



• **What is the future of REFLECT with children?**

At the time of publishing this article there is more theory than practice about this approach. And yet with governments all over the South concerned to provide basic education for all their children, there is a real need to find low-cost, low-tech alternatives to providing quality education. Field practitioners committed to Children's Participation are invited to contact us if they are interested in experimenting with the approach, and pooling and analysing the results on an international basis for general publication. This seems the best way of learning from the process of developing REFLECT for adults, and therefore, of overcoming some of the obstacles at an earlier stage. We need to address issues such as

concepts of childhood as perceived in different cultures, gender issues for girls and boys and child-focused indicators for monitoring and evaluation amongst others. Finally, we need to be clear about the nature and extent of our empowerment objectives in using REFLECT with children, steering a midway course between the welfare-oriented approaches often associated with children's education and culturally inappropriate children's rights lobbying. We also need a new name, emphasising the difference between adult and children's participation, and avoiding future confusion.

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REFLECT on a large scale: challenges and prospects**Salifu Mogre and Julie Adu Gyamfi****• Introduction**

There appear to have been many successful examples of literacy programmes on a large scale so why make the change to REFLECT? There are a number of issues involved in this change which go to the heart of adult literacy debates over the past thirty years. The success of many programmes has centred on the acquisition of reading and writing skills on an individual basis; the 3Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) are not related to real life use - either for the individual or to the society in which they live. Furthermore development objectives are often not met satisfactorily, particularly in the area of community development.

Adult literacy strategies in Ghana

In Ghana in the 1960s, we had a Mass Literacy Campaign which attempted to impart literacy in English. This was difficult because neither the methodology used, nor the language of instruction, were relevant to every day life. This caused practitioners to switch from promoting English to promoting Ghanaian languages, of which there are fifty four, not including dialects. But this had its own problems. It was technically challenging to transcribe such a diverse range of languages and very costly for the government to sponsor. Ultimately, only a few of the main languages were developed for the literacy programme, and thus the attempt to provide literacy in the mother tongue on a nationwide basis was short-lived. Even today, when the national literacy programme in Ghana has made a major commitment to working in different languages, primers and other materials can only be produced in a limited number of them.

Another factor which has undermined large scale attempts at literacy programming is the top-down nature of national systems. On a large scale, it has seemed necessary to standardise everything; from teaching-learning materials to the training of facilitators, in order to offer a programme on an efficient and equitable basis. The effect of this standardisation is that there is little room for cultural diversity or local people's participation in, or ownership of, the process.

• Literacy from a development perspective

Continuous efforts have been made to find new methods of providing cost effective, empowering and relevant literacy programmes that will be accessible to every citizen of a country. These have been mainly rooted in community development agendas or Freirean theory (e.g. many primer-based approaches with civic awareness or, even political, messages). How does REFLECT fit into this picture, and , what does it have to offer?

The REFLECT approach has dimensions which attempt to overcome some of the basic obstacles to a standardised, nationwide literacy campaign. REFLECT offers a localised, rather than standardised, literacy process. The prioritisation of themes is developed according to locally-felt needs by the learners (or rather participants) themselves. This gives the community members a controlling role in the design of their own literacy programme, and literacy is thus more attractive to large numbers of people: no-one is excluded. Also important is the wider impact of the literacy programme on other community members. This often happens within the REFLECT circle, particularly when it is using PRA for discussion and other community members (not

enrolled in the literacy class) come and contribute, sharing their skills and experience, and making the conclusions reached more practicable. The locally-generated themes are relevant to the whole community and therefore, a community dynamic for change is initiated. Changes of attitude and behaviour in areas such as agriculture, health and hygiene, and children's education can take place.

On a more interesting note is the awareness of an imbalance in gender workload, leading to an awareness on the part of males to lighten the burdens of their female counterparts by giving them a helping hand. This kind of community development may resemble the developmental activities associated with the approaches to Functional Adult Literacy but are more sustainable because the actions are those suggested, prioritised and carried out at their own pace by the people themselves. They are not imposed by outsiders, however well-meaning or well-informed they may be.

Decentralisation

The management of the REFLECT literacy programme can be shifted from a centralised to a decentralised system which is driven by local initiative and interest. For example, the community can select people to be responsible for various roles within the programme, such as managing the class book box (which is a form of mini-library), construction of silk screen printers, monitoring and reinforcing the attendance of participants and the facilitator. The decentralisation of management to the level of the learner can reduce costs both of supervision (monitoring the attendance of the facilitators can be done by participants and community) and of teaching-learning inputs, such as exercise books, pencils, kerosene for lighting etc., which can be paid for by the participants themselves.

Localisation

The same principle of local control applies to the production of materials. Instead of being reliant on printed materials which are expensive and can take an unnecessarily long time to produce (sometimes a whole year, resulting in late delivery of class inputs); the REFLECT process enables people to write on their own topics, and in their own languages.

This process starts in participants' exercise books at the basic literacy stage, and progresses to the use of low-cost, low-tech community-based printing (e.g. silk screen printers) as an appropriate and integral part of the literacy programme. On a large scale this contributes to greater cost effectiveness, and could be factored into the budgeting for a national literacy programme. It also provides greater continuity in planning for basic and post literacy because the emphasis on local writing and materials production is repeated in both stages.

In REFLECT, the training and follow-up support for the literacy facilitators is shifted from the dissemination of a standardised body of knowledge imparted in a 'cascade', to a mixture of well-focused training, integrating central staff and local experience. This is the initial activity in the recreation of REFLECT necessary for every new programme. In addition, this kind of mixture leads to regular meetings of facilitators to share experience and plan their work together. These meetings promote a self-critical culture of analysis and action amongst facilitators, which they can share with the participants in their circle; for example, facilitators plan together on Action Points which affect their own families. This process of developing facilitators needs highly skilled support staff, and is thus one of the key roles of central staff in a large programme. In the long term the costs of such support can be offset by the use of experienced facilitators to train facilitators new to the programme.

Lastly, the 'local language' obstacle can be transformed into a strength, a way of drawing on the riches of local culture which can teach outsiders as well as insiders. This is particularly important in Africa, where the diversity of language development can be overwhelming for planners. The emphasis on writing based on analytical discussion and action means that the language of the specific learning group can be written down and developed almost simultaneously with the literacy programme. Some initial groundwork must be done (e.g. through a local writers' committee of people literate in another language with a transferable phonetic system e.g. English, a neighbouring language, Arabic) but once the process is started, the facilitators and participants can reach agreement about the

most logical way to write down sounds so that everyone can understand what is meant. This principle of communication is the only important test.

• Remaining challenges

In general, there seem to be encouraging prospects for REFLECT on a large scale as far as cost effectiveness, meeting development objectives, language diversity, decentralised training, management and materials production are concerned. The next question must be about the challenges which lie ahead.

One of the key challenges must be finding a way to plan and budget for a large programme at the same time as moving at the pace of local communities. An example may be when to deliver book boxes to literacy circles, considering that different circles may be ready at different times. But many similar questions may arise. Workable solutions can perhaps only be found if the staff responsible for implementing a large-scale programme are encouraged to move from a top-down to a bottom-up view of the world, and feel confident in taking their own decisions at their own level. In general, many staff working for national governments have not had the opportunity to develop practical skills in more bottom-up approaches to literacy and development.

Another challenge is how to utilise the existing capacity and prior investment in other approaches to literacy. When resources are scarce, it would be wrong not to consider this as an important question. There would be different solutions for different countries but one way of using the printed primers would be as supplementary reading materials in the later stages of the cycle or in 'post literacy'. Another strong point of having facilitators trained in teaching traditional approaches to literacy and numeracy is that they can adapt the same techniques, such as gap filling in sentences written on the chalkboard; dictation etc., for their new roles as REFLECT facilitators. The main difference is that they have to link the 3Rs to the collective analysis of their participants. Again the main challenge in this area has proved to be the change of attitude necessary for facilitators, who have to be prepared to accept a new and apparently

more 'humble' role where they learn as well as teach.

In a national programme, equitable coverage is a vital objective, and there may be potential literacy participants who are not so interested in the REFLECT approach. For example, participants in urban areas who come together only as a literacy circle but do not live in the same area, and do not have the same aspirations and needs, may not be motivated to discuss and plan issues collectively as a group. If this is the case, then literacy should be provided using another approach which meets their felt needs.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the prospects, and the challenges, for REFLECT on a large scale are exciting. There are no large scale programmes at the moment, but the government literacy programmes in India, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Uganda and Ghana have started pilots to see how the new approach can fit into their existing system¹. Since one of the key criteria for using REFLECT is to work at community level, it is an appropriate tool for both governmental and non governmental organisations. Therefore we expect that on an international level, there will be sharing of experiences, and a new improved version of the approach that is appropriate for mass coverage will be developed.

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¹ At the time of going to press, the government of Ghana is organising a workshop of 'Scale Up REFLECT: Challenges and Prospects' - to which thirty national literacy programmes across Africa have been invited. This should be an excellent opportunity to explore issues that arise when taking up a participatory approach on a large scale.

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Gender and REFLECT**Kate Metcalf and Geni Gomez****• Why is gender so important?**

In the past different popular education projects have often failed because they have not addressed the issue of gender relations and gender oppression. Crucial questions about power, access to and control of resources, gender violence and the sexual division of labour have been overlooked. A gender analysis provides the theoretical and practical framework to address these issues. A gender analysis is a holistic approach which subsequently does not exclude from its analysis other types of oppression

Gender has become fashionable in development circles. As a buzz word, gender has frequently become meaningless, overused and distorted. At times, the term 'gender' is used as a synonym for 'women'; we work with the theme of gender because we work with women. Or it is seen as a concession given to women; they are taken into account in our work, resources are invested in them. Or it is a term used in the jargon of institutions, organisations and development projects, like any other technical, neutral and apolitical concept. In all of these cases, the full potential of a gender focus is lost, and with it the subversive, transformative meaning underlying a gender perspective.

A gender focus implies the redistribution of social powers in order to create a more democratic distribution of power. To work with a gender focus implies deconstructing: to develop a critical vision, to distance ourselves from our culture, our values, our ideas and concepts, our ways of thinking and feeling in order to construct a new culture based on relations of equality and equity between men and women. One cannot simply add on a gender perspective to what we already know.

It is necessary to dismantle our way of thinking and construct a new vision of the world.

Key issues in a gender perspective

A gender analysis provides a framework to explore the totality of interacting influences, such as gender, class, ethnicity, caste, age and the macro and micro environment and culture, which affect women's and men's lives in different ways according to the context. A gender analysis is a feminist analysis. Central to a gender approach is a gender disaggregated examination of roles and control of and access to resources. Thus the household is deconstructed so as to reveal the differentiation within it; the gender inequalities and intra-household divisions.

The category of 'women' needs to be disaggregated, as women are not homogeneous but rather have multiple and contradictory identities. There is no universal experience of gender oppression because it varies according to the cultural context and other interacting influences, such as class, race, age and ethnicity.

Fundamental to a gender approach in REFLECT is the need to be context specific, given the multiple manifestations of gender oppression. Thus the oppression of one particular group or person needs to be understood without negating or overlooking another's experience of oppression, which may have similarities and differences. Evidently, this approach recognises the fact that different levels and types of oppression are present in the REFLECT circle, hence one cannot assume a false similarity of experience and unity if it does not exist. Oppression must not be

simplified, but rather made more specific so as to understand its complexity.

Ultimately, then, a gender approach in REFLECT starts with an analysis of women's and men's reality and subsequently examines it so as to understand the wider processes and structures that contribute to and cause their subordination. Instead of imposing one 'universal' method to bring about a gender consciousness, it is an approach which incorporates feminisms. Distinct gender approaches, then, will be suitable for different contexts. In the end, it must be the participants who decide what type of gender focus and method is best suited to their situation. This flexibility is at the heart of REFLECT. It is hoped that from this truly 'critical' analysis, women and men will look for solutions to their oppression. To transform oppressive structures, women and men must organise themselves to take collective action, elements at the heart of REFLECT. REFLECT is a learning process which develops skills needed to first analyse and, if appropriate, organise.

How to deal with conflict

Gender relations universally favour men and disadvantage women. However, analysing it from a different perspective, gender relations also harm men. The prescribed masculine gender roles constrain men: they often restrict men's role in child rearing, nurturing and caring roles. This is men's loss, as these roles, if shared, can be rewarding. Thus, the construction of masculinity and femininity is constraining for both men and women. This is not to ignore women's oppression in society. Men have a great deal to gain, not just power to lose, in re-negotiating/transforming gender relations.

The call for gender equality needs to be framed in this positive way without negating the focus on women's disadvantaged position. We need to think in terms of constructive conflict. Conflict is inevitable when one deals with negotiating power and we should not shy away from it but rather face it head on. But there seems to be a gender-bias in the types of conflict people are willing to tackle. Gender relations are often deemed too difficult and problematic to address due to arguments about cultural sensitivity. It would appear that the

argument of respecting 'traditional culture' is conveniently used by male representatives of that culture whenever their power is threatened. The 'traditional' culture is defined by them and represented by them. Although women are also complicit in this, as oppression is often internalised, there are always voices of dissent within traditional cultures. The issue of poverty is clearly not viewed in the same way as gender relations. Tackling poverty is often seen as an a-political and a-cultural issue, unlike gender relations, and therefore unproblematic.

The challenge is how to make conflict positive and constructive. Perhaps by asserting that men have also been disadvantaged by subscribed gender roles, albeit in a different way from women, the debate can become more constructive. For example, taking an equal share in child care is a rewarding and important role (see Figure 1). Domestic and 'reproductive' tasks are crucial for the functioning of society and should be valued. Equal partnerships between men and women are beneficial for both parties. The construction of both masculinity and femininity needs to be analysed and challenged.

Strengthening the gender approach in REFLECT

At a recent international workshop to revise the REFLECT mother manual (London, March 1998), there was an overriding consensus that the gender perspective in REFLECT needs to be strengthened. What are the implications of this? Change involves using a gender focus at all levels in the REFLECT process. This would mean applying a gender analysis to all PRA exercises in the REFLECT circle. This cross-cutting gender approach would also mean that the gender dimension of all exercises/discussions should be discussed and analysed. This gender analysis should be an implicit part of the REFLECT process. Facilitators need to gain an understanding of gender and how they would apply it in their work with REFLECT.

A gender analysis does not stop here however. Facilitators and promoters need to examine their own lives from a gender perspective. We cannot expect participants to change and be

open if the facilitators and other staff are not willing to analyse their own behaviour in the private and public sphere. The funding or implementing agency is also part of this equation. The staff need to understand and internalise the implications of a gender analysis. This would involve an analysis of the way the agency works and also the personal and professional relations of the staff.

Figure 1. Finding time to learn is a struggle for women with multiple burdens (Photo: Ghana Shyam Chhetri)



As a result of the workshop mentioned above, it has been agreed that a gender focus is now a central aim of REFLECT, and any organisation implementing REFLECT that overlooks gender is not doing REFLECT. There is a need to define criteria for the selection of facilitators, trainers, and organisations that we work with to ensure that they are gender sensitive or are open to learning more about gender. Gender as a cross-cutting issue should be present in:

- the basic principles and theory of REFLECT;
- training at all levels;
- background research;

- selection of facilitators (quotas for equal numbers of male and female facilitators);
- selection of language;
- who the programme is aimed at;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- organisation of the circles; and,
- composition of the circles.

In order to strengthen the gender focus in REFLECT, on-going training on gender issues for all levels of participation in REFLECT is required. Whilst women-only circles may be important in many cultural contexts, they should be matched by parallel men's circles which address the same range of gender issues. In mixed circles it is necessary to guarantee that women can participate equally with men; to talk, express themselves, defend their opinions, and identify their priorities.

There are different strategies for empowering women. One of these is the opportunity for women to meet in circles, to talk and to gain a collective strength. The circle can also be a space for women and men to analyse these inequalities and how they affect them in different ways and what changes can be negotiated. Above all it is essential to focus on the private sphere, not just the public one. Debate in the public sphere can be moved into the private arena. For example, if we speak about democracy, we should also focus on democracy in the relations between women and men or gender democracy in general.

REFLECT, with its highly participatory focus, proposes that participants start by recognising the knowledge and capabilities that people already have. However, in our patriarchal societies, women's and men's knowledge and capabilities are valued differently and unequally. Working with REFLECT, therefore, involves a revival and revalorization of women's knowledge, experience and words. Working with REFLECT could allow new priorities to be established in the development agenda of a community. There exists a tendency to consider the masculine as the norm. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that the needs, interests and order of priorities could and should be different. The topics addressed in the circles and the resulting actions should revolve around interests and needs in both the public and private sphere.

• How to strengthen gender in PRA exercises

This section highlights some ways in which a gender perspective can be promoted in the PRA exercises in REFLECT.

Local proverbs and songs about men and women can be collected for discussion of gender roles.

Land Tenancy Map

What is the gender dimension of land rights? What are the existing laws and customs?

Market Prices Calendar

Who controls the income gained from selling crops? Women or men etc.? Why? What are the implications of this?

Flow Diagram on Deforestation

Explore gendered relations and how this impacts on the environment and deforestation. Who decides which trees to plant? Do poorer women and families depend more on the forest for fuel? Do women plant trees for food and fodder? Do men plant trees for cash? Is this a reflection of gender roles? What is the impact on girls' schooling?

Community Organisations and Evaluation Matrix

Are there equal numbers of women and men in community organisations? What are their positions within the organisation? What discourse is used and what are the implications of this? Is it a male discourse? How are the meetings conducted? What are the times of the meetings? Does this exclude people? Who sets the priorities in the organisation?

Chapati Diagram of Informal Social Structure

Look at the gender dimension of power. Are women more powerful in the home? Are men more powerful in the public sphere? What are the differences amongst men and women?

Well-being Ranking

The focus should be on individuals not households. Intra-household inequalities should be explored. What are the differences amongst women, for example land owning women may be better off than landless women but still may suffer as women? The issue of domestic violence could also be discussed.

Social/Cultural Calendar

What are the positive and negative aspects of these cultures? What are the gender, class, race and religious perspectives? Who represents the 'culture' to the wider society?

Table of Human Rights Violations

Are there different violations for women and men? To what extent is police / army brutality gendered? Is rape used systematically as a form of torture for women? What are the connections between the military's violence towards women and the generalised gender violence in the wider society? Rape should be a category on a human rights violations matrix.

Box 1 shows an example of how Grupo Venancia (a grassroots women's organisation, based in Matagalpa, Nicaragua) has promoted a gender perspective in one of its REFLECT units. Grupo Venancia is currently in the process of developing more participatory methods to use in REFLECT in order to work with subjectivity and the private sphere in general, particularly the intangible notion of self-esteem and confidence. Sexuality is a key issue with regards to empowerment and a subject which has often been avoided in the more community focused use of PRA. Grupo Venancia has considerable experience dealing with this issue, which we hope will also be useful in our REFLECT programme. Obviously the subject of sexuality needs to be dealt with carefully as it is a sensitive topic. In June this year, Grupo Venancia is co-organising an international workshop with CIAZO in El Salvador and ActionAid UK on Gender and REFLECT. The workshop will focus on strengthening the gender dimension in REFLECT. A series of discussion papers will be published after the workshop outlining strategies and key issues emerging from the workshop. It is hoped that specific participatory methods will be developed in the workshop with a particular focus on the private sphere and subjectivity.

BOX 1
AN EXAMPLE FROM GRUPO VENANCIA

We have been developing PRA exercises with a strong gender focus to use in our REFLECT programme. One example of this is the 'Wheel of Relationships' unit, which analyses the relationships with various people. It focuses on issues such as - From whom do we receive support, love, companionship, understanding etc.? From whom do we receive criticism, abuse, no love etc.? Initially the current situation is looked at and then how people would like it to be. We could imagine how our lives would be if those people with whom we have the most conflict were more distant in our lives. Also, we explore what it would be like if the positive influences were closer to us. Each person then examines how this could be achieved. As it is sometimes difficult to identify negative relationships, we have found that it is more constructive to focus initially on what you like or dislike about each person and then what you would like to change about that person. The next stage can be to list the pressures that people place on you, e.g. people who criticise you, people who ignore you, who make you feel guilty etc. After this individual analysis there can be a wider group analysis to identify commonalities and differences and the implications of these.

action, this could mean a change in attitude or awareness, something intangible and difficult to evaluate, but which is often just as important as concrete 'community' actions. A gender analysis helps us to understand the nature of gendered processes at different levels, women and men as inter-related gendered agents. Only by analysing and understanding the complex reality of gender oppression and its relationship to other types of oppression can action be taken to transform it.

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• **Conclusion**

A gender approach in REFLECT is not just about making women equal to men but transforming the whole structure of society and social relations. It is missing the point to look for equality on men's terms. It is important not to have the idea of a fixed binary structure of oppressors and oppressed but rather to gain an understanding of the complex web of relations of domination. Clearly, women and men have multiple identities and interests, occupying different lives and gendered worlds. As a result, a gender analysis resists both rigidity and formulas; it is constantly evolving and is itself shaped by contexts, just like REFLECT.

A gender approach in REFLECT offers the possibility of bringing about change on the individual and collective level. Individual transformation is equally important to collective transformation, particularly with regards to gender. *Concientizacion* implies action to transform the oppressive reality, but this is no easy task. With relation to gender

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The evolving conception of literacy in REFLECT

David Archer

• Summary

There are fundamental links between literacy and power which frame the REFLECT approach as it has evolved since 1993, linking the literacy process to a wider, poverty-focused and rights-based approach to development and change. This article attempts to explore our evolving conception of literacy and the ways in which literacy is related to power.

• Introduction

The process of globalisation is creating societies in which people's level of access to information and knowledge is becoming a key factor in determining their access to economic, social and political power. Those without access to 'official' knowledge and information are increasingly excluded from significant participation in society. In this context, 'illiteracy' is increasingly becoming both a cause and effect of poverty - and a defining factor in all power relations.

Moreover, diverse field practice over the past five years has shown that, at the end of the twentieth century, traditional definitions of literacy based around the 3Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) have become inadequate. There is no simple line to be crossed from illiteracy into literacy (indeed, there never was) and literacy can no longer be seen as just about mastery of the alphabet. Rather literacy is an extended process involving a complex set of (what may best be called) communicative practices - all of which have an impact on people's ability to assert their rights or actively engage with the external world (whether with the State, with markets, or with civil society).

There is no great gulf between the written and spoken language. The experience of many REFLECT programmes has been that the development of oral capacities is a crucial, indeed inseparable, part of the literacy process. But this does not mean that people are learning how to speak; rather it concerns people asserting their right to speak and be heard (e.g. the ability of women to talk in contexts where, traditionally, they would be silent, see Jellema, this issue). A literacy programme can help to challenge this imbalance and it is this sort of impact which is often articulated by participants in terms of 'self-confidence'.

Another form of 'communicative practice', which often becomes interwoven with 'literacy', is language. In many multi-lingual contexts, even where starting with mother tongues, accessing the 'dominant' or 'market' language is seen by participants as a key part of the learning process (see Jellema and Friedrich, this issue).

In other contexts, the dominant communication practices may not revolve around reading and writing of the alphabet and the need to expand our conception of literacy becomes even clearer. One case study in Mam communities of Guatemala revealed the potential that an interactive local radio station can offer for generating an alternative to conventional literacy. In marginal urban areas of Santiago and Chile, the active 'reading' of television (at a time of censorship) and the 'writing' of alternative realities by placing video cameras in the hands of women's groups, created a very real 'popular' alternative (see Archer and Costello 1990).

As REFLECT programmes have evolved, it has become clear that many different forms of communication practice are implicated in the literacy process and all of these are closely linked to power:

- reading;
- writing;
- listening;
- speaking;
- numeracy (see Foroni and Newman, this issue);
- knowledge of different, specialised or professional jargon etc.;
- language capacity (especially in multi-lingual societies such as India);
- access to/understanding of different technologies (e.g. computers, printing press); and,
- access to/understanding different media for communication (e.g. radio, video, television).

In the light of this, there is probably no one who can claim to be 100% literate. Similarly there is no-one who can be regarded as 100% illiterate, as even the poorest and most marginalised will have their own complex body of knowledge accumulated through experience, and will have their own capacity and means to engage and communicate with their immediate society. However, in many such cases, such people will not be able to engage in wider society as active citizens, will not be able to assert their rights or have the means to articulate their needs, and will not be able to influence even basic decisions which directly affect their lives and livelihoods. Each individual's 'biography of literacy' will be distinct, depending on their needs and aspirations for participation in different spheres of life (economic, social, political, cultural, religious etc.) and at different levels (household, community, District, State, National etc.).

If we conceive literacy in this more complex and integrated way, literacy programmes are no longer simply about transferring certain basic skills, but rather they are intimately linked to the empowerment process (a term which itself is now central to the 'specialised discourse' of development). It seems self-evident that any approach to development which seeks to be sustainable cannot be effective if people do not have the capacity to

manage their own affairs. Literacy is precisely about that capacity and adult literacy programmes should be conceived accordingly. The learning process cannot narrowly focus on the 3Rs (programmes which do have almost universally failed, largely because of rejection from the learners). Rather, the literacy process should seek to focus on people's ability to participate actively in civil society (which requires a complex mix of communication practices), enabling them to effectively assert their rights (in every sphere of their life) and assume their responsibilities.

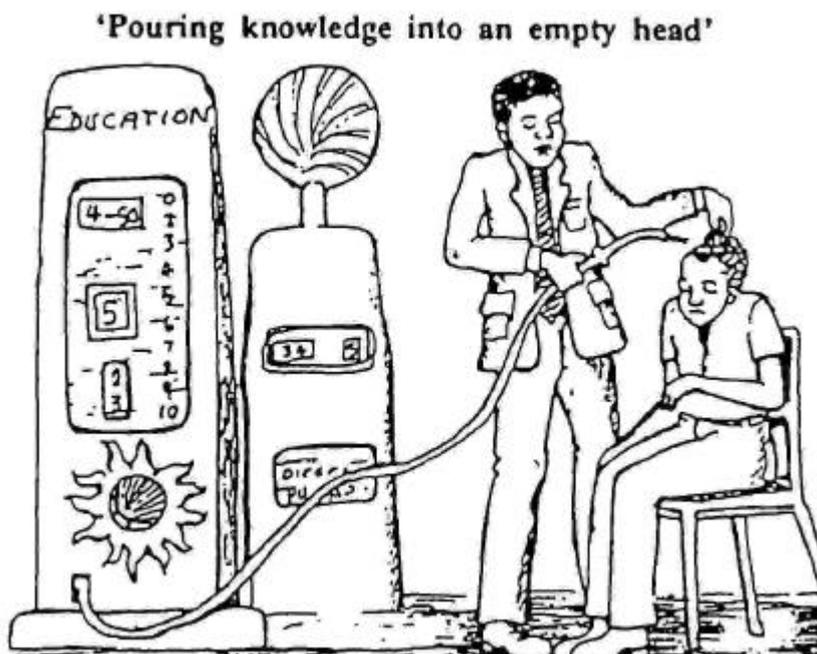
The inadequacy of functional literacy and the problem with the term 'literacy'

In the context of this introduction to a wider conception of literacy, it is interesting to re-visit one of the dominant models of literacy programmes in recent decades; that based on the conception of functional literacy. This concept underlies the primer-based methodologies used around the world.

Functional literacy is a concept initially developed by the US army and is based on enabling people to fit more fully into existing circumstances, practices and roles. The aim is 'to incorporate marginal adults into established economic and social values and practices' - equipping 'illiterate adults with just those skills and knowledge, no more, which ensure competence to function at the lowest level of mechanical performance as workers and citizens in a print-dominated society'. Being functionally literate becomes "a negative state" of "avoiding failure to cope" (Lankshear 1993).

This becomes demeaning, conceiving human beings in minimalist terms. The emphasis is placed on reading, responding to demands, understanding and following, (largely passive activities), rather than writing, leading, creating, commanding or controlling. It is particularly offensive in relation to women, who are so often seen as tools for development rather than human beings.

Figure 1. Banking education treats children (or adults) as empty vessels to be filled.



The concept of functional literacy is directly contradictory to Freire's view of literacy and humanity. It is explicitly a form of 'banking education': "the more that students put their efforts into receiving and storing information deposited in them, the less they can attain the critical consciousness that comes from intervening in reality as makers and transformers of the world." (see Figure 1).

REFLECT is not about helping marginal people to adapt to the existing order. REFLECT offers an alternative conception of literacy and points the ways towards a different paradigm of development. REFLECT aims to enable people to develop a new 'method of relating to the world', generating "thinking which perceives reality as process and transformation rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action" (Freire 1972). In this context, it is important to internalise what is meant when we say that literacy involves a wide range of communicative practices and that the "ultimate text to be read and written is the world itself" (Freire 1972).

• Literacy as communication practices: a cube

Figure 2 is an attempt to visualise what it means to say that literacy should be conceived as more than the 3Rs, involving a wider range of communication practices than just reading and writing. Literacy is presented as the combination of a range of different communicative practices which are needed in different spheres of life at different levels of engagement with the world (see Figure 2).

Beyond the cube

Whilst it communicates some basic ideas about literacy, the cube is not sufficient to capture all of the ideas which have revolved around REFLECT. It needs to be deconstructed and challenged because:

- REFLECT adds another dimension, that of critical analysis and understanding of the 'whole'. Indeed, REFLECT is about critically challenging these boxes and re-defining them (which is not captured in the diagram);
- the categories are not mutually exclusive; for example different languages clearly

- involve all the other communication practices;
- it fails to capture the stratification of society which so influences all communication; and,
- it is too static; by using squares/mini-cubes, it over-emphasises the boundaries between things and does not suggest movement or any potential for change.

An alternative visualisation for REFLECT

To try to visualise literacy as conceived in the REFLECT process, we have tried many other forms of visualisation. The visualisation which we feel best captures the essence of REFLECT is of a solar system (see Figure 3). In this visualisation REFLECT is placed at the conjunction of four factors or forces, none of which is static:

- communication practices;
- spheres or engagement;

- levels of engagement; and,
- stratifications, that affect the process.

In astronomical terms, REFLECT is the sun. The four factors orbit around the sun as planets. Around each planet there are a series of moons. Everything is in constant movement so any particular moment in a REFLECT process will involve an interaction of these four elements (and their different features/moons) in different balances.

The focus of REFLECT is to enable people to:

- recognise the different forces that are at work and how they are changing;
- address those forces that determine their access to power;
- see their own centrality to any process of change; and,
- make the orbits spin in their favour.

Figure 2. An attempt to visualise a more complex view of literacy - involving a wide range of communication practices.

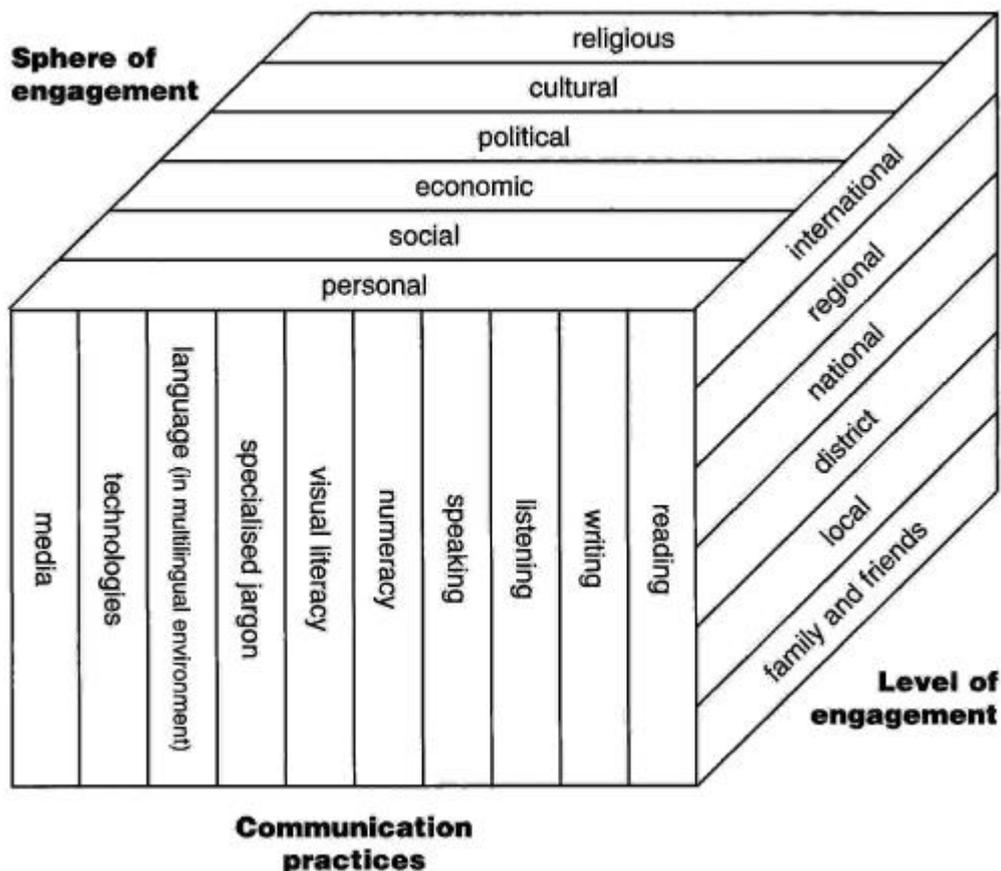
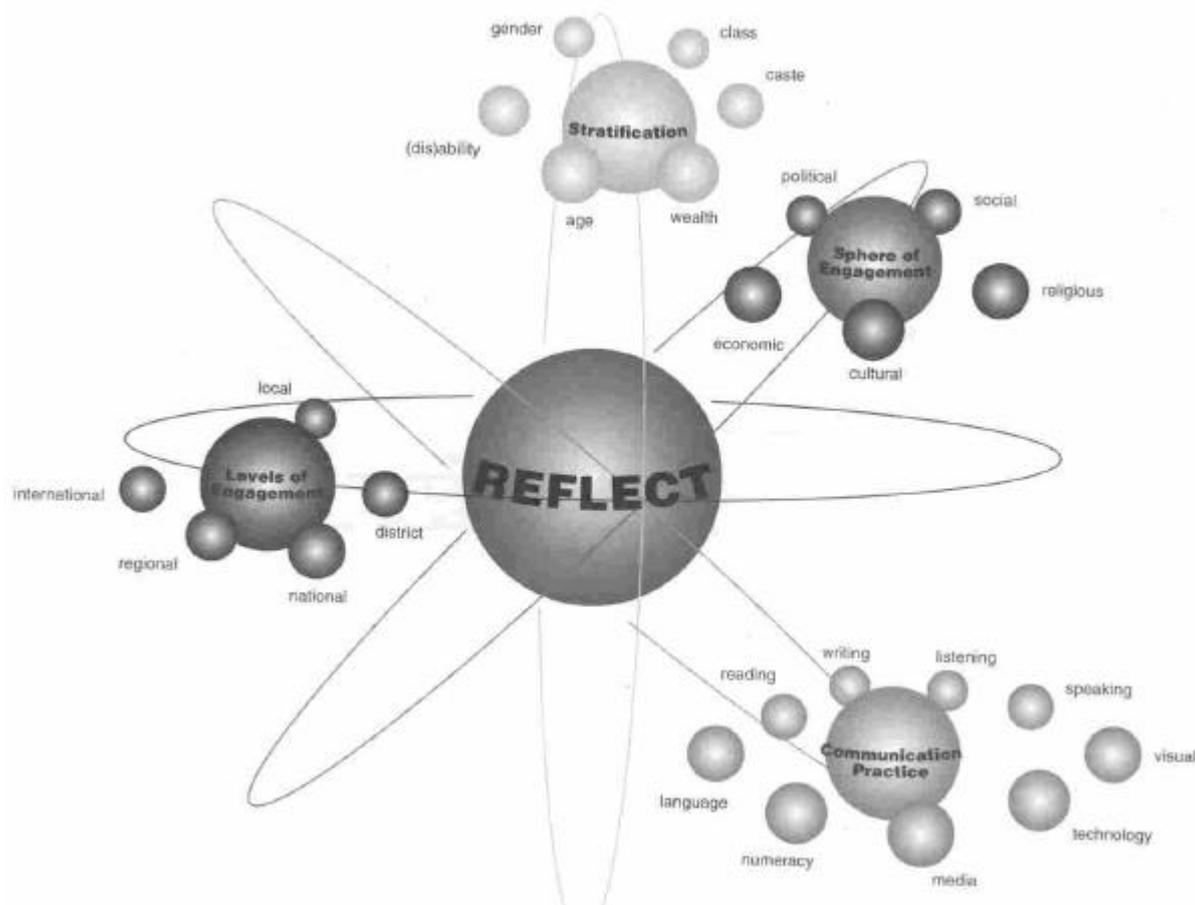


Figure 3. An alternative visualisation for REFLECT

One of the advantages of this image is that it stresses change and inter-relationships between different factors and levels. The terms 'literacy' (understood as an expanded concept) could be elucidated by being placed at the centre of this diagram (in place of REFLECT). It is very rare for any 'literacy moment' to be purely political, without any social dimension; written and oral communication are often intertwined. It is also rare to have something which involves just the local level without some external referencing. As each 'moon' has its own orbit, there will be points of convergence between levels and spheres (as well as points of divergence).

Implications for REFLECT at a local level

This understanding of literacy suggests that REFLECT programmes need to be designed as multi-dimensional processes. For example, drawing on the experiences of YAKSHI in India (see Madhusudan, this issue).

Stage 1. Initially it would be important to avoid promoting REFLECT just as a literacy programme, as this would inevitably lead to narrow expectations from participants. The dominant understanding of the term 'literacy' will not just disappear and so the term 'literacy' becomes increasingly problematic. If it is used to describe REFLECT at a local level, it will inevitably generate narrow, and therefore misleading, expectations. For this reason, REFLECT practitioners often look for alternative terms. New words, ideally from the local context in each case, can offer a rich alternative (see Madhusudan and Bhattarai et al., this issue).

Stage 2. Seek to have the whole community (or at least diverse parts of it, including non-literate, neo-literate and literate) engaged in a process of constructing a series of 'core texts', which represent local reality and draw on a mixture of media (print, visual and aural/oral). The focus is very much on creating a 'democratic space' for focused work on key

local issues. Power stratifications, which exist in the circle, should be recognised, but their manifestation in the process should be minimised. This should be achieved by using participatory tools, challenging formal interactions and following a set of core principles, so that, in many cases, the stratifications become part of the object of reflection. Various core elements are contained in the process of developing these core texts (see Figure 4).

A core text may be a map or calendar, a local story or a socio-drama. It may be in print form or visual or oral. It may be that each core text is, in fact, a mixture of different texts on a specific theme (e.g. a series of maps/matrices/calendars on agriculture). The key is that it is produced by participants in an active process of reflection on reality.

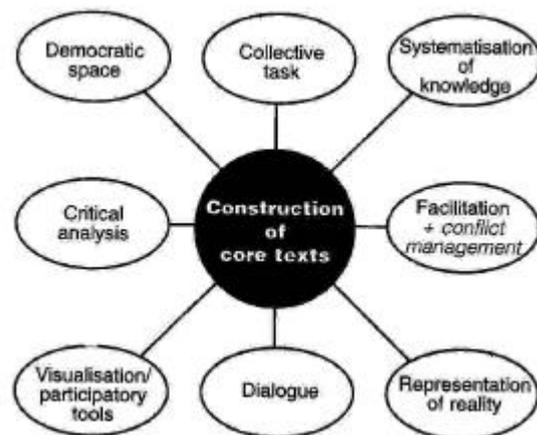
Stage 3. Each of these core texts would be used for follow up activities. These could be conceived as sub-circles, or as different moments in the work of the overall circle. For example:

- a basic literacy sub-circle where the focus is on working with the language in the core text, in order to learn to read and (particularly) to write new texts;
- a research sub-circle collecting materials from external agencies on the issue etc. and presenting these as texts for further reflection (for example, accessing the internet/using silk screen printing);
- a local knowledge sub-circle to systematise existing local knowledge on the issue;
- a culture sub-circle dedicated to production of creative/cultural materials, such as songs, drama or dances, usually in mother tongue;
- a language sub-circle using each core text for learning a second or third language;
- social action sub-circles which take the lead on organising actions (or linking to other existing organisations) to resolve issues that have arisen, though all may participate in implementing these; and,
- Other sub-circles as may be needed/identified.

These sub-circles should not be mutually exclusive but should be fluid, with people being able to move between them and sub-

circles regularly meeting to present their work to each other. The sub-circles could be designed as having a rotating membership, thereby avoiding any one group becoming too powerful and to give everyone access to different experiences. Other forms of sub-circle or group could also be considered according to the context (even working in parallel with the above) such as groups by gender or age.

Figure 4. Elements involved in constructing 'core texts'



The emphasis here is on an elastic process, with everyone producing a core text, then going away to use that text for different purposes, reuniting for feedback and then, producing a new core text on a separate or related issue.

However, continuity of action must stay at the heart of the process. The whole REFLECT circle would probably need to meet at least once or twice a week to ensure continuing clarity of focus. The importance of a core fixed space and time should not be under-estimated. However, once that has been established, flexibility, movement and diversity can become a strength.

In many cases the terms "sub-circle" or "group" may not be appropriate - as these may simply be different moments or activities of the REFLECT circle itself.

If we try to visualise this, the image of the solar system is effective once more, with a core circle (or sun) which needs to be very strong, around which there are a series of

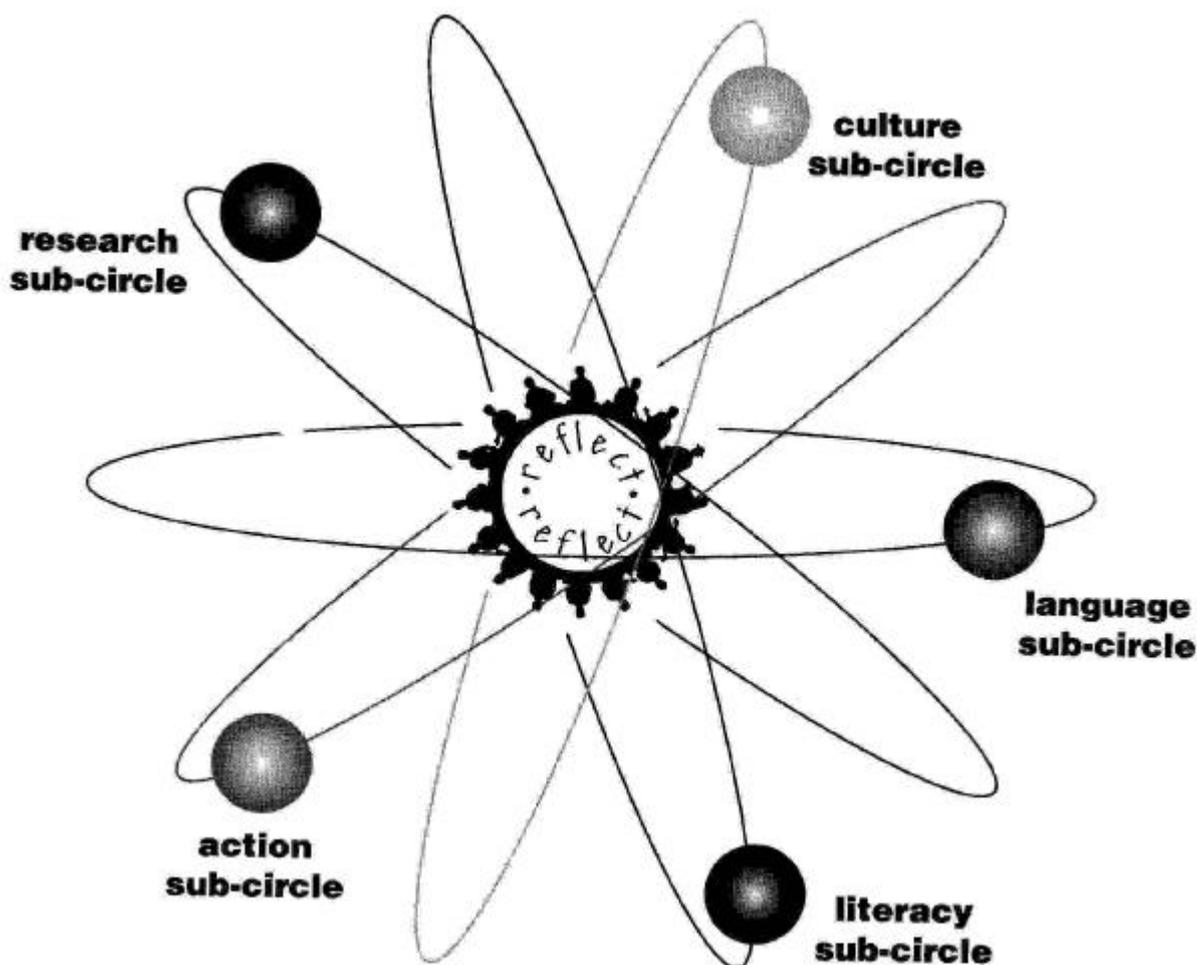
planets (sub-circles / activities) orbiting. No orbit will be maintained if there is not a strong gravitational pull at the centre and in this case, it is very important that the REFLECT circle become a source of light, heat and direction. This is illustrated in Figure 5. The effect of such a multi-layered approach will be:

- a dramatic impact on 'literacy' according to conventional definitions (with a more literate environment generated in more than one language, neo-literates using their skills and non-literates learning and having role models; the development of wide ranging literacy practices etc.);

- a strengthening of wider communication practices (e.g. language, use of media etc.); and,
- a clear linkage between the learning process and processes of empowerment and social change.

Clearly this is just one way of implementing a programme based on the conception of literacy which has evolved within REFLECT. The precise way in which these ideas will be developed in a particular context will vary. However, it is clear that there are problems with the above proposal.

Figure 5. Elements that may be involved in the REFLECT process at a local level



These problems include the following:

- sometimes it is precisely the uncontroversial nature of 'literacy' which is useful in that it generates space for people, perhaps particularly women, to meet. If REFLECT is introduced from the start as a 'discussion forum', then probably only the men will turn up and women will be excluded;
- it will be a logistical nightmare to run lots of different sub-circles. For example, who will facilitate them and who will train the facilitators? The approach depends on certain participants taking on lead roles as co-facilitators - but is this realistic?;
- if you include the whole community in the process, then numbers may be impossible to manage and you will miss out on the relative self-selection involved in targeting those who are not 'literate'. A wider group will mean more internal stratification within the process and more conflict;
- is it realistic to expect local facilitators, who themselves are part of the power dynamics of the community, to be able to manage power imbalances and conflict?; and,
- whilst we may have moved away from the idyll of a united community as a starting point, (by recognising stratification) are we not still working on the underlying assumption that everyone is willing to work towards transforming themselves into some sort of 'perfect community'?

• Conclusion

There is no simple new package or approach which evolves from these reflections on literacy. But there are, hopefully, some important elements to retain, such as the essentially dynamic nature of the process. It is this which will have most impact on the institutions supporting a REFLECT programme. The process should inevitably lead to demands for greater flexibility and responsiveness, which institutions may support rhetorically but are often ill-prepared for in practice. Any one individual or institution involved in the process should themselves reflect on it and then, revise actions in the light

of those reflections. However, in practice few institutions have shown themselves to be good at reflection, and those which are will often have a difficult time with their donors. Therefore, the implications of engagement in this sort of process are often far-reaching.

If we return to conventional ideas of literacy then, in some respects these reflections have indicated that we need to move away from the traditional idea of having a literacy programme followed by post-literacy and then continuing education (or seeing literacy as a foundation for later action for development). All these processes can be interwoven from the start, so that people in the same process, are working on the different levels of literacy and local action at the same time, mutually reinforcing each other. Rather than seeing these processes as happening in a 'box', (inside the four walls of a classroom) these processes are directly linked with the lives and ongoing communication practices and power relationships of the participants.

The conception of literacy and REFLECT presented here is by no means an end point. It has evolved over recent years and will continue to evolve. The point at which it becomes static will probably be the point at which it loses value. The lack of conclusion may be frustrating but this article will have succeeded if, in any respect, it has helped you to see literacy in a wider or newer light, and has, perhaps, stimulated a reaction (whether positive or negative!).

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Numeracy in REFLECT

Nicola Foroni and Kate Newman

• Introduction

'There does not exist a single illiterate adult who has not acquired some mathematical knowledge and/or a mental logic that they can apply'

Luis Orrellana, El Salvador

'Though people can live without being able to read and write, the ability to operate mathematically is an essential element of everyday life'

Teresa Casteneda, Peru

Despite the above statements, mathematics is often given second place in literacy programmes. Even in progressive literacy programmes, numeracy is often an appendage, addressed using more traditional/formal approaches than those used in the rest of the education process. Numeracy is not conceived as a fundamental part of the empowerment process with practical application at personal and collective levels.

It is clear to all teachers of adult education that, prior to joining any learning circle, all adults have developed mathematical capacities through dealing with situations that they face in their everyday lives. This is a resource to be drawn on, but it is usually ignored. A gulf exists between the strategies people use for mental calculations (or practical interactions) and those used in formal, written mathematics. In adult numeracy teaching, the formal system usually dominates and people's own skills, knowledge and experience of dealing with numbers in everyday life is rapidly forgotten. This stems in part from the fear and self-doubt of facilitators/teachers who have been

through the formal system. They have been taught that there is only one right way, and only one right answer, in mathematics. Thus, it is necessary to go back to some basic questions, including: why teach numeracy? Can numeracy work contribute to, and be interwoven with, the empowerment process? What particular approaches to numeracy can be integrated with the REFLECT process?

Why numeracy?

There are many reasons for strengthening the role of numeracy within literacy programmes and, specifically, within REFLECT programmes. These reasons will vary from context to context, but the sorts of arguments that have been used by REFLECT practitioners in different contexts include:

- whilst people may have mental capacities, there are limits to these capacities;
- improving numeracy skills can be important for preventing people from being cheated in the market place (though often it is precisely mental skills that need strengthening to address on the spot needs);
- co-operative systems (e.g. group saving, collective buying, joint working) which may be important for improving productivity and/or equity, are often vulnerable unless record keeping is well maintained and understood by everyone;
- increasing understanding and access to permanent/written records (e.g. accounts) in a wide range of contexts can be important for increasing transparency and accountability;
- complex numeracy work is often involved in effective forward planning,

- budgeting, projections, profit and loss estimates (and monitoring);
- understanding the forces at work on commodity prices (e.g. cotton, tobacco, coffee), how they vary between local, district, national and international levels, and changing trends, can be vital for enabling people to analyse their situation and make informed decisions; and,
 - mathematics can play an important role in challenging gender divisions; improving mathematical understanding amongst women can increase their power (at critical moments) in the private sphere and their capacity to engage at strategically important points of the productive process (which men may otherwise dominate); analysing gender differentials in pay can be important in the process of women demanding equal respect and conditions.

The mental/written divide

People develop and consolidate their capacities for mental calculation through all sorts of life experiences, including the buying or selling of produce and playing games (e.g. cards or dice). Indeed, it is not uncommon to find non-literate people who have greater mental arithmetic skills than people with a high level of formal education (who may have found that the mental/written systems clash).

The mathematics used by illiterate adults often takes a very different form from that learnt in more formal situations. Nevertheless, the methods developed on an individual basis appear to be very similar throughout the world. In fact, work by German Marino in Colombia¹, confirmed by an investigation carried out by CIAZO (Interagency Literacy Committee) in El Salvador and CNTC (National Peasant Committee) in Honduras (and later by various other institutions) revealed some of the common approaches to mental calculations (and tensions with the written formal system). For example:

- when thinking about numbers, non-literate adults generally understand a

quantity as made up of whole numbers. For example, the number 1,234 would be represented as 1000, 200, 30 and 4;

- subtraction is actually performed as an addition, adding up to the higher quantity. So, for example, when paying 32 pesos with a 100 peso note, the mental calculation would be similar to the following: 32 and 8 is 40, 40 and 10 is 50 (8 and 10 is 18), 50 and 50 equals 100 (18 + 50 = 68) so this would be the change expected; and,
- in multiplication, a strategy based on doubling and using the 10 times table is preferred. Multiplication of larger numbers will often involve breaking the number up into constituent elements (focusing on 10s and often using the monetary values in the specific country). So, when multiplying 27x16, the process would be as follows: 10x16=160, 2x10=20 therefore 20x16=2x160=320. Now 7=5+2, so 2x16=32 (doubling) and 5x16=80 (half of 160). So now we have, 320+32+80=432;

These examples look complex when written down and this is precisely part of the clash between the written and unwritten systems. The 'tactics' used mentally as outlined above are often done in agile ways. Literate people also use many of these approaches in certain contexts (instead of the formal schooled approaches), but may resort to scribbling sub-totals on the way. Indeed, the remembering of sub-totals is one of the biggest obstacles to the complexity of calculation that a non-literate person is likely to encounter.

It should be noted that there is a great variety in the mathematics developed to solve problems such as volume, weight, length, area, geometric shapes, fractions, equivalencies, angles etc. This is probably due to the fact that the local systems for dealing with such matters vary substantially. Nevertheless, the diversity of systems used is reducing. This is perhaps one of the indicators of globalisation, with the decimal system now almost universal, replacing local systems. However, Box 1 provides an example of how changing systems can cause unforeseen problems for local communities.

¹ Such as in 'Como opera matematicamente el adulto del sector popular?' Published by Dimension Educativa, Bogota 1992.

BOX 1

A socio-mathematical survey undertaken by a REFLECT programme in Bangladesh revealed that a 1987 law (which made kilograms official and the use of pounds a criminal offence) had led to women being unable to deal effectively with travelling salesmen. The REFLECT programme addressed this transition and one of the focus points was on equivalencies between the systems.

Some principles

It is clear that there is enough convergence in the mental processes that people use for calculations (and sufficient divergence between these practices and the existing written system) to serve as a basis for breaking with the traditional, formal system of teaching and operating. This provides the opportunity for a radical re-definition of approaches to adult numeracy, respecting people's existing capacities and processes. A number of principles can be identified which would underlie such a re-definition:

- the knowledge and logical operations that illiterate adults possess are essential elements to take into account, and the foundation on which all programmes should be based;
- mental calculation should be seen as a valid form of operation and this should be the point of departure for the acquisition of new knowledge;
- it should also be recognised that various options/paths exist when approaching a particular situation and that all these are equally valid (as long as they work reliably);
- the daily experience of the participants must be used as a starting point, along with the systems of measurement and calculation that belong to the specific context;
- the learning process should be structured using maths to work in real situations to solve real problems;
- The process should be designed so that the participants find and control the logic, understand a problem and are able to identify the steps necessary to resolve it;

- The process should be designed to enable participants to perform these steps to arrive at a solution mentally and/or in writing;
- mathematics should concentrate on strengthening, rather than replacing, the mental arithmetic ability that people possess. It should improve this skill in such a way that they can use the operations required in their daily life and reinforce their faith in their own ability, constantly recognising their own knowledge and practices;
- We should respect and use the local measurement system, as this is a cultural expression tied to context and daily life; and,
- Prejudices embedded in the formal system should be challenged, such as the opposition inherent in the written system to any form of estimation. Estimates are effectively regarded as 'incorrect' and therefore inappropriate in formal mathematics. However, in 'real life' an estimate is often more useful than strict, precise calculation. Box 2 provides an example of when estimation is useful in daily life, as opposed to exact calculation.

BOX 2

Imagine you are going to the market or going shopping with a fixed amount of money to spend. While buying you estimate, as you go along, how much you have spent and this guides you in what else you can buy. Would it really be more useful to use precise calculation - counting every penny? Or rather would this not just confuse the shopper and force a greater interest in the sum rather than what is being bought?

Redefining numeracy in practice

There has been much academic discussion as to how numeracy can be defined and it is frequently commented that mathematics is a classroom subject, whereas numeracy is the ability to operate mathematically in everyday life. A REFLECT approach calls for the two to be understood together and any mathematics used in learning circles should be drawn from real life numeracy problems.

If numeracy is to be linked with the empowerment process and if the learning process is to build on previous knowledge, it is important that the curriculum is not fixed. In a REFLECT circle, problems should be devised directly from the participants' lives and therefore, the mathematics learnt will vary from circle to circle. Facilitators will need some guidance on maintaining a sequence in all calculation work, passing from simple to more complex problems. For example, numeracy work arising out of a first map might concentrate on the reading and writing of the numbers 0-9, with a lot of practice, directly relating to the graphic. However, larger numbers should be introduced rapidly. The size of the numbers reached might depend on the monetary denominations regularly used by a specific community. Indeed, money can be used as one of the most effective ways of linking oral/mental skills to a written form (see Box 3 on CIAZO).

Facilitator training

One of the starting points for implementing any new approach must be the training of facilitators. It has already been noted that many facilitators/teachers in adult literacy programmes have a fear of numbers, often rooted in their own limited mathematical capacities. This ironically makes them hold the formal system in awe as the only true path. They see mathematics as an academic subject with few ties to reality. Therefore training programmes need to emphasise a re-learning of mathematics for the facilitators themselves. Facilitators need to understand that they are not 'teaching' mathematics and accept that, as a starting point, they must work with how the participants operate mathematically, implying that they will need to forfeit their position of power within the learning circle.

BOX 3

A CASE STUDY FROM EL SALVADOR

There is a direct relation between monetary systems and how adults calculate. An innovative method developed in El Salvador by CIAZO (now also in use in Peru) uses money in the mathematical process.

Rough imitation copies were made of the currency notes presently in use in El Salvador together with cardboard cut out coins. This money was not just reduced to a material resource, used just to simplify the mathematical learning process, but was considered as fundamental to the way in which adults both conceive and use calculations in their daily lives. The money was used in practical exercises arising out of the themes touched upon by different graphics, facilitating the jump from existing knowledge to written operations. If one studies the methods used by adults in calculation (as noted above) and the methods required by handling money, it becomes clear that the two are directly linked.

It is therefore evident that a large part of the learning and usage of mathematical logic is tied in with money usage. This might be a cause-effect relationship in that:

- mental skills have been developed as a result of physical handling of money; notes and coins are used in salaries, in buying and selling, in transport etc. Thus mental calculation is carried out due to the denominations particular to a currency (prices, daily expenses, production costs, utilities, credit, interest etc.);, or in reverse, that
- monetary systems may have somehow been designed (or have evolved) to respond to the ways in which adults calculate mentally most easily.

Whatever the case, the monetary system can be a key means for drawing on experience and addressing important mathematical principles/concepts.

Reading and writing

Because of the advanced level of oral mathematics the participants have before attending a learning circle, a large part of a numeracy programme will focus on the reading and writing of numbers and mathematical operations. Reading will also include familiarity with and interpretation of formulae and prepared sums, while writing will involve graphic representation. Both will start by using basic numbers, and then move on to symbols for diverse operations and spatial understanding. The learning process will always incorporate error identification and participants should work together, helping each other.

REFLECT graphics and numeracy

Experience has shown that mathematical skills can be developed easily by using the REFLECT graphics. The creation of such graphics is, in itself, a very mathematical process, but going beyond this, the structure of the graphics also allows for the introduction of many basic mathematical ideas.

1. The maps, matrices, calendars etc. produced by the learning circle include mathematical elements that can be counted or represented in a numerical form (e.g. the people included in the maps, the points on the matrices and the incidences on the calendars etc.). At times, they also require measurement (e.g. distance simulation on a map) or call for specific operations (such as summing the totals in a map, or percentages in the circular graphics). In fact, nearly all the graphics include mathematical elements, to a greater or lesser extent.
2. Some units include direct calculations in the construction of the graphic (i.e. one cannot proceed in the construction of the graphic without mathematical processes). This is illustrated in an 'Income and Expenditure Calendar', 'Projection of Loan use Matrix' or 'Market Prices Calendar' (see Figure 1).
3. While working with each graphic, a means is provided to explore a particular theme, and a more profound understanding can be

reached when using calculation. There are innumerable examples of this kind, as illustrated in the Box 4.

BOX 4 DEVELOPING NUMERACY FROM A GRAPHIC

Credit Matrices: loan repayment, relationship between capital and interest, interest rates, the relationship between investment and loan handling, credit registration options, individual loan books, group accounts, credit requests, bank systems, cheque and deposit books.

Map of Land Tenancy: land area, land distribution statistics (owned and worked on), percentage ownership by sex, calculation of investment in actual crops versus new crops, productivity from different fields, how much of a particular crop has to be given up each year.

Mobility Map: distances, time, cost of travel, differences between private and public transport, how market prices differ in different markets.

Schooling of Children/Education Matrix: Cost of schooling, level of schooling for different age groups, statistics relating to absence and drop out from school.

Hygiene Map: cost of latrine construction, installation of manual water pumps, cost of illness prevention versus cost of cure.

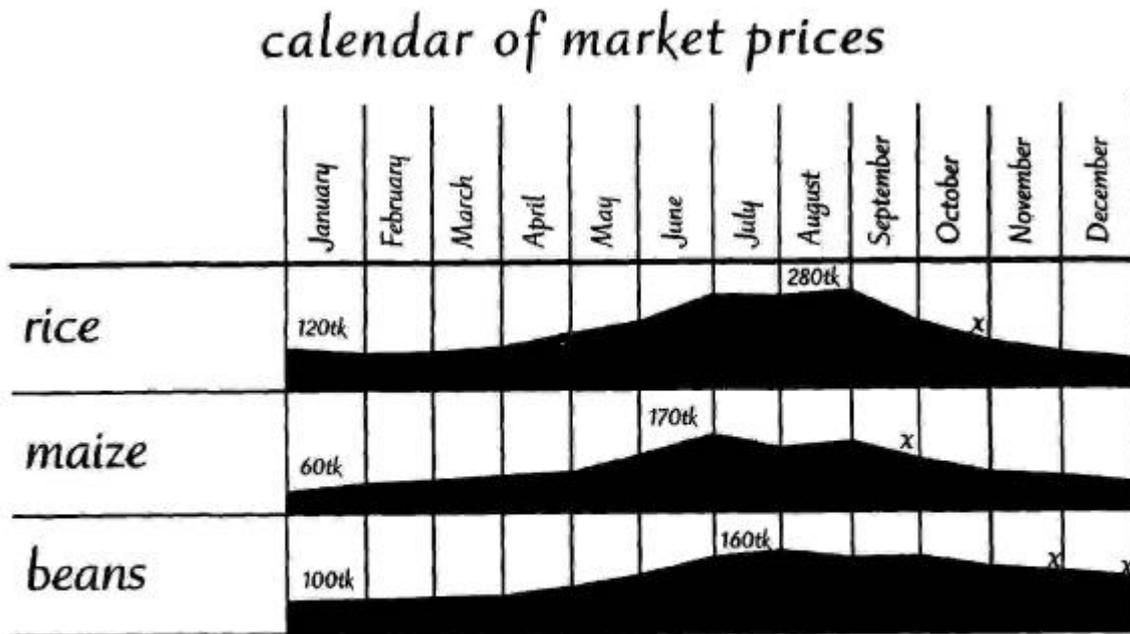
Chapati diagram of Community Organisations: Basic accounts of village organisations, suggested projects, financial explanations.

Map of services and opportunities: different types of employment (relationship with level of education), costs of different types of service (real figures; transportation, health and legal etc.).

Human rights violations: looking at national statistics (critically), types of violation and victims.

All the material used in these graphics, to introduce mathematical ideas should be local. The participants will achieve greater mathematical understanding if the methods use authentic relevant data, and familiar information. Box 5 shows an example where a community is working with graphics to develop numeracy.

Figure 1. Example of a numeracy graphic - a calendar of market prices (Source: REFLECT Mother Manual)



x = common time to sell

we have to buy food when the prices are high and sell our harvests when prices are low.

**BOX 5
A CASE STUDY FROM PERU**

In a learning circle in Piura, Peru, many of the participants were arriving late. This gave rise to a discussion about time and it became clear that the majority of the participants had little understanding of time, or how hours work. Following this, a decision was made to make cardboard clocks. The construction of these clocks provided an opportunity for the introduction of the concept of time and hours. Subsequently these clocks were also used to practise reading and telling the time. This resulted in a significant reduction in latecomers to the learning circle and people were able to use clocks in their every day life. In addition the clocks helped in the learning, understanding, reading and writing of numbers.

• **Conclusion**

The REFLECT graphics provide an excellent basis for the contextualisation of mathematics, which is a fundamental principle of adult numeracy work. The examples from Peru and El Salvador support our belief that mathematics should always be learnt in context, as the link with reality enables a higher level of learning to be reached very rapidly.

The precise numeracy content of a REFLECT programme cannot be pre-determined and should always be developed following a socio-mathematical survey (see REFLECT Mother Manual). A socio-mathematical survey looks at uses and practices of numeracy in people's lives, but also explores how people perform different mathematical operations (and the language they use). A part of the learning process must focus on the full diversity of tactics that adults use for mental calculations

which should be drawn out and reinforced (with participants exchanging their own 'secrets'). At all stages, numeracy must build on participants' prior skills and coping strategies). Once the survey is completed, it should not lead to pre-packaged materials. Flexibility is crucial and mathematics should be used for an end, to solve particular real problems and challenges, and to deepen the analysis of a particular topic. Facilitator training is crucial to build their confidence and enable them to break with the constrictions enforced on them due to their formal learning.

REFLECT gives equal prominence to oral skills (speaking, dialogue, language, discourse) as well as reading and writing. In the same way, numeracy work in REFLECT should give equal weight to mental skills and written forms and not seek to elevate one over the other, as if writing is the only legitimate path.

It will take some time before REFLECT programmes in practice succeed in giving numeracy equal status with reading and writing, but there are positive signs that this is the direction which is being pursued. In many cases, traditional boundaries are breaking down and numeracy is being interwoven with a wider learning process built around people's lives, in which calculations are not seen as abstractions but rather, form a key part in analysis and reflection.

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Talking out of turn: notes on participation, learning and action in REFLECT

Anne Jellema

• Introduction

The ideas and methods of the original REFLECT pilots owed a great deal to the methodologies of Participatory Learning and Action. Now, a few years into its development, it seems fair to ask what REFLECT has to give back to the wider community of practitioners of participatory methods, particularly to those not working in the fields of literacy or adult education.

Other articles in this issue have documented practical innovations of REFLECT projects around the world: ideas about training (see Cottingham or Gautam, this issue) or about how to work with folk models of mathematics (see Foroni and Newman, this issue), which could be used in work that has nothing to do with literacy. In this article, however, I want to look at some of the contributions of REFLECT from a more theoretical point of view. In particular, a three-year study of women learners, which is now underway in Uganda and Bangladesh,¹ has produced some insights about 'participation', about 'learning' and about 'action'.

• Talk, silence, and the limits of participation

One of the surprising findings from the early stage of our study is that women who belong to literacy circles say that they joined in order to learn how to *talk* and be listened to. As Jahan Ara, a 36-year-old rickshaw-puller's wife, expressed it: "*I can talk to anyone now, but previously I could not, because I did not*

know how to read, write and count." Participants do mention a few of the more conventional uses of literacy, such as being able to keep better records of expenditure or decode written addresses. But their most vivid and detailed stories are not about reading and writing; they are about being listened to by people to whom they would not have 'known how' - or dared - to speak before. Instead of considering what this tells us about literacy, I want to explore what it tells us about 'talk', which is, after all, the essence of any participatory methodology.

Educated professionals, development workers and academics intuitively feel that 'sitting around talking' is an easier, more spontaneous and naturally participatory kind of communication than written language. But this is not a perception that makes much sense to the Ugandan and Bangladeshi women we have been interviewing (nor is it one that Freire, sensitive to culturally imposed silences, would endorse). In their experiences, power and domination operate as much, in fact more, through the informal channels of face-to-face oral communication as through the formal apparatus of writing and texts. For them, there is no such thing as 'just talking'. Talk, in their societies, is still the daily currency of social relationships, and social relationships are always power relationships as well: you talk in one way to the landlord, in another way to the neighbour who is your sharecropper, and in yet another way to your son's wife. But these relationships are not fixed in stone; the balance of power can subtly shift from day to day. Thus to talk is always to negotiate.

As poor, younger women, the REFLECT circle participants must constantly be aware of complex rules of deference and propriety,

¹ 'Literacy, Gender and Social Agency', an ActionAid study funded by DFID.

which govern what they can say, how, and to whom. Many of these are to do with gender, others stem from hierarchies of generation, class, or ethnicity. For example, when Bangladeshi or Ugandan women address a male relative, they may have to avert their eyes, avoid using his proper name or words which sound like it, adopt a submissive bodily posture and lower their voices. Certain subjects, too, will be off limits for debate or discussion. When Ugandan women speak in family councils or local government meetings, they may be restricted to certain topics which are seen as women's affairs (unless they are senior in age, or unless they are visiting government officials or middle-class NGO employees). And the most powerful forms of speech that a culture has created may be off limits to women altogether. In many African societies, for example, only older men can address the ancestors in order to ward off sickness and calamity.

It is not going too far to say that in the areas we have been studying, access to power (even bureaucratic power) depends far more on the socially constructed capacity for speech than on skills of literacy. Women's restricted voice is closely bound up with their supposed lack of self-possession, of moral understanding and of rational judgement and their lack of experience of the wider world. Conversely, it is through (the right kind of) talk that men demonstrate their self-control, their command of reason and their moral capacity, and so prove they deserve full rights to participate in community affairs.

In these communities in Bangladesh and Uganda, if women, or for that matter men, break the rules of speech outright, if they talk 'out of turn', they will be ridiculed, ignored or even physically beaten. At the extreme, they may be labelled crazy, or persecuted as witches. But at the same time, the highly political nature of speech creates strategic opportunities for subversion or tactical manoeuvring. Women may 'gossip' in private about political matters that they are not supposed to be competent to discuss in public, they may tell each other the 'secrets' that their menfolk learn during initiation rituals, and they often develop 'secret' discourses of their own (for example, about abortion and sexuality), or even use 'black' speech such as witchcraft spells to appropriate male cultural

knowledge. However, these covert or heretical forms of speech are unlikely to be used in an important public occasion, such as a meeting with powerful outsiders, which is of course what a PRA activity is for villagers. The discussion that results can be fascinating both for locals and for outsiders, but participating in it is unlikely to be 'empowering' for women; unlikely to expand their options for overcoming culturally imposed silences.

Learning

Participatory methodologies value local knowledge and the experience of insiders over the expertise of outsiders. As a corrective to the top-down professionalism of most development work, this is immensely useful. However, for the 'insiders' themselves, exploring and validating their own experience of the world around them is not enough; what they seek from literacy programmes are the levers to *change* that world. While affirming existing social and cultural identities is part of REFLECT's success, even more important is the opportunity to construct new identities, drawing on resources beyond the boundaries of their immediate social world. In order to do that, they need to be able to put external sources of knowledge, influence and authority into play; and they need an institutional foundation. In the case of REFLECT, the 'literacy program' plays that role.

Many women in REFLECT circles are anxious to structure their activities in what might seem to us as the most conventional, 'top-down' ways possible; spending hours copying out letters and phrases from the blackboard, scrupulously taking the register of attendance, demanding exams and certificates and even uniforms. Indeed, they often attempt to treat participatory features of REFLECT as a part of this 'schooling' (learning how to draw, in some Ugandan cases, or learning health and hygiene rules in some Bangladeshi ones). Their expectations may seem highly non-participatory, and even authoritarian, and the content of what they want to learn, may even seem irrelevant; but to deny their aspirations would seriously limit REFLECT's value to women in their ongoing gender struggles². If

² See also C. Kell, 'Literacy practices in an informal settlement in the Cape Peninsula', in *The*

we think harder about why women should want to recast a participatory discussion as a 'lesson', a circle as a 'school', and a facilitator as a 'teacher', the following points come to mind.

First of all, 'school' has a socially validated status as an important and permanent institution; it can't be dismissed as a mere gaggle of noisy women gathering to gossip. Thus, the fact that REFLECT circles meet regularly, over the course of nine months or more, at the same time and in a 'public' place, is extremely important to participants and facilitators alike.

Likewise, 'school' has an explicit code of rules, a hierarchy of authority and a set of disciplinary practices which are *different* to the norms which govern the rest of women's lives, and which are not under the control of the people who dominate the rest of their world. Whether it is arriving each day at the same time, sitting in a certain arranged order, taking the register, chanting the alphabet, or copying words into a copybook, *what* is done is less important than the discipline of following formal rules. When a woman is amongst a gathering of her fellow villagers, even one expertly facilitated by a person experienced in participatory techniques, a woman is inescapably the daughter of X, the mother of Y, the tenant of P and that is the (socially recognised) identity from which she speaks. But in the classroom it is possible for her to be a student; by participating in the regular rituals and disciplines of school learning, she is creating a different identity, a different place from which she can legitimately speak. This may be why learning to sign one's own name is such a central symbol of the whole social process of becoming literate. The fact that all circle members follow the same rules as learners inside the circle may also help them suspend the rules that stratify women outside the circle, making differences of age, class, etc. less of a barrier.

Second, both Uganda and Bangladesh idealise 'schooling' as a process by which 'ignorant' people, through hard work over time, become 'educated', successful, and rich. In reality this may be far from true, but the value attached to

social uses of literacy, ed. M. Prinsloo and M. Breier (Cape Town: SACHED, 1996).

education as a means of 'bettering' oneself rubs off on any kind of organised learning, and thus also helps women fashion alternative identities. It is not surprising, then, that many REFLECT participants demand exams, certificates and marks or that they emphasise the 'hard work' involved in their learning. When women say that becoming literate has enabled them to talk, in part they just mean that acquiring education has increased their status and thereby entitles them to speak more freely to a wider range of people. As Sahera Begum said, "*After joining literacy I have become more powerful. What ever I say my husband listens to me.*"

However, literacy for these women is not just about status. It is also about gaining access to knowledge from outside their own experience, and particularly 'book' knowledge, which is associated with the ideologies of progress, science and modernity. In Uganda this includes mastery of the English language. The women in our study are not naive about the 'objectivity' of such knowledge: they know that it underwrites the power of the state and of international organisations such as ActionAid, just as so-called 'local', unwritten knowledge underwrites the power of traditional village elites. But they can play the 'formal', impersonal authority attributed to written texts off against the informal, personalised authority that they transact through talk every day.

For example, some Bangladeshi women use their new ability to keep written accounts as an argument for being given more control over household expenditure. As Sahera Begum said, "I can take active decisions (in financial matters) because now my husband thinks that as a literate person I know something." In the original Ugandan pilot, mastery of the 'scientific' arguments for limiting family size, promoted by health departments and NGOs, helped women open up the previously off-limits issue of contraception, making it a legitimate topic for discussion between husband and wife. In both countries, possession of skills (thought to be) needed to get a waged job may entitle women to negotiate for greater economic freedom, even if there is no prospect of actually landing a position.

In short, the (mainly oral) forms of knowledge most widely used in their immediate

community often deny women the capacity to reason and to speak as full adult members of that community. For these women, 'just talking' is where the daily realities of hierarchy and domination bear down most heavily. Access to external knowledge, in this case, the knowledge represented by literacy or English, is an alternative way of constructing an authoritative and legitimate voice. Unlike conventional literacy programmes, however, REFLECT initiates a dialogue between local and external knowledge, using one to interrogate the other. This seems to be important in explaining the empowering potential of the circles: learners are not simply substituting one ideology for another but constructing their own interpretation of both.

Another important difference between REFLECT and traditional methods is that it encourages learners to define and manage for themselves an alternative structure, an institutionalised 'place' to speak from. Like other forms of 'school', it is socially recognised and has a robust public presence; but crucially, it allows women to experiment with 'counter-cultural' principles of social organisation.³ This process is what enables and entitles women to re-negotiate the 'rules' of gender, age, class, and ethnicity, first inside and later outside the literacy circle.

• Action

A few concluding words about how we understand 'action' and, more broadly, the socially constructed capacity *to act* (agency). Many development workers are predisposed to look for concrete changes in the 'real' world as a measure of impact. But for many of the women in our study, the most exciting possibility and the most compelling work that REFLECT circles hold out is the task of imagining (inside the circle) and experimenting with (inside and outside the circle) a new identity: a person who speaks, and is listened to, as a competent adult in a variety of public and private settings. Bangladeshi women interviewed were most impressed that candidates in local elections came to them to seek their votes, as literate and therefore influential members of the community.

³ Thanks to Anne-Marie Goetz for this insight.

Because agency cannot be created out of thin air, women need to find ways to validate to others their right and their competence to act (and to speak) in new ways. This is a prerequisite for any kind of action that would genuinely change the relations of power that restrict women's voices and their ability to 'participate'. In REFLECT, both the institutional structure and appropriation of the formal, written knowledge involved in literacy learning, have been crucial to women's ability to create a different voice for themselves without being punished for 'talking out of turn'. Of course, I am not recommending that all kinds of participatory development programmes should turn themselves into literacy projects. My conclusion is rather that the voices of participants cannot be taken for granted: practitioners of participatory methodologies need to think seriously about how they can provide participants with the institutional support and the knowledge resources they need to expand their own voice.

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Commemoration of Paulo Freire

Bimal Phnuyal

• Introduction

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, was one of the most influential philosophers of his generation. His classic work, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", was published in 1972 and he died in Sao Paulo, Brazil in May 1997. Freire's thoughts and vision help us to clarify many complicated questions related to life, learning and liberation. In the same way the struggles involved in his own life give impetus for us to continue the journey of life and, in Freire's words, "not to die in life". Freire has been a key influence on the development of REFLECT. This article aims to provide an overview of his life and work, introducing some of the key concepts that he developed which are significant for both PRA and REFLECT.



Breaking silence through empowered learning behaviour

In May 1998 there were many commemorations of the first anniversary of Freire's death. Reports from different continents suggest that Freire's

thoughts and actions are becoming more relevant than ever before. It is encouraging to witness that, in a recent colloquium in Bangladesh, many commemorators warned against the danger of the ritualisation of Freire. The empowered learning behaviour of the commemorators suggested that it is more important to apply Freirean learning spirit rather than following Freire as a dogma.

• Learning from life

Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, in the north-east of Brazil. Recife was characterised by sharp dichotomies between poor and rich, powerful and powerless. Paulo's father was a low level officer in the military who prioritised his children's education. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, Paulo experienced hunger and learnt first hand, from the deteriorating living situations of the working and middle classes, the politics and realities of life.

As a child, Paulo was thought to have learning problems; his teachers told his parents that he had a "mild mental retardation". This judgement proved far from accurate and Freire trained as a lawyer, a profession which he never wanted to practice. He had been influenced by the growing Catholic Action Movement (later known as the liberation theology movement). The process of understanding life and reality encouraged him to explore the possibility of changes in reality, drawing on the strengths and potential of oppressed groups of people, particularly their ability to learn and develop.

Freire married Elza Maria Costa de Oliveria in 1943. On many occasions he has said that she contributed significantly to his educational thoughts and action. He says that he learnt to

love from both his parents and Elza and this made him emphasise the importance of love in life and work. Without a feeling of love, hope and attachment, an educational process cannot be liberatory. Love is instrumental in humanising the self and humanising the world. Developing a critical consciousness helps people to love and respect human beings - leading them to fight oppressive relationships and practices.

While stressing that a person is fundamentally a social being, Freire also emphasised that each individual is unique. 'Be yourself' and respect other peoples' 'self', he would say. He further developed this insight later and linked it to social and educational processes. Transforming the world means humanising the world and it is important to humanise the self in order to humanise others' reality. Currently, we talk about the ABC (Attitude and Behaviour Change) of PRA which mirrors Freire's thinking from many years previously.

After abandoning law, Freire became responsible for planning education programmes for the rural poor and industrial workers in marginal areas of the state of Pernambuco. This experience helped him to develop issues of 'the pedagogy of the oppressed'. As he explored why rural poor and industrial workers are illiterate, he came to understand how literacy and education are social and structural questions - which are fundamentally linked to unjust social relationships. In 1954 he resigned his post and went to teach history and the philosophy of education at the University of Recife.

In 1959 came a new turn in Freire's life. With the election of a new and progressive mayor in Recife, Freire headed the Popular Cultural Movement, an active adult education programme, aimed at bringing education to the rural poor and developing their critical consciousness. Peasant associations, known as Peasant Leagues, were growing and they were mobilising their members for organising co-operatives and implementing land reforms. Literacy and adult education were linked to these processes as people needed to be empowered to understand and demand their rights. Peasants were organised in "cultural circles" and adult education became a form of "cultural action for freedom". From this, Freire learnt that education which aims to achieve

liberation and enhance democracy, needs to be participatory and liberatory in itself.

Given the success of the popular education programmes in Recife and the advancement of progressive politics nationally, Freire went on to take responsibility as the head of a new cultural extension service for popular education in the region. In 1963 he became Head of the National Literacy Programme of the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture. Freire worked both as a philosopher of this new practice of adult education and as an operational co-ordinator, developing various techniques to manage its implementation. From this experience he highlighted what were to become key concepts for his later writing:

- it is not possible to split theory from action;
- learners must be given the space and capacity to develop their own theories;
- top down transfer of knowledge does not work; and,
- people's involvement in the creation of knowledge through struggle is the key to ensuring a proper learning process.

The year of 1964 was a turning point for both Paulo Freire and Brazil. A military coup hindered the progressive reforms and innovations in popular education. Along with more than 100 key national figures involved in national reconstruction initiatives, Freire was imprisoned and underwent 83 hours of interrogation by military officials. They declared him a traitor to Christ and to the people of Brazil and after 75 days of imprisonment, he was forced into exile. This was perhaps the biggest lesson in Paulo's life - revealing how vested interest groups react against popular initiatives in society.

Freire did not stop exploring what he had initiated. He went to work in different parts of the world and advocated for the pedagogy of the oppressed. As well as sharing the Brazilian experience, he also became involved in many new initiatives in other parts of Latin America. His message was that oppressed and ordinary people have the capacity to learn, to develop and to change both themselves and the world. This was not just some abstract ideal, but the practical conclusion from his own life experience.

Educationists of the world could not ignore him. Either they appreciated him or they objected to him. For Freire there is no middle way: either an education process helps people in their empowerment or the education process helps maintain the status quo. No education process can be neutral and, likewise, no participatory process can be neutral.

Paulo was able to return to Brazil in the 1980s. He re-engaged in various popular education practices and became a founding member of the new Workers' Party of Brazil, a new type of left wing democratic party in South America, which aimed to promote democratic practices at the grassroots and within all its own processes.

• Key learnings from Freire

- Each person has the capacity to learn and participate and has right to do so;
- Education processes cannot be neutral; either they help to 'domesticate' people or help to liberate them;
- If education is to have a liberating outcome, the process itself needs to be participatory and liberating;
- 'Knowledge' cannot be imposed upon learners, rather an environment needs to be created for everybody to explore, analyse and synthesise;
- Real liberation is possible only through popular participation and a key to popular participation is popular education;
- Liberation needs to be conceived as both a process of transforming the self and a process of creating a new society; and,
- Changes are needed in both individual behaviour and social power relations.

The role of hope

In the course of revising his classic "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" Freire produced another important book: "Pedagogy of Hope". Reflecting upon 25 years of experience since the publication of the previous book, he concluded that hope is a key element for liberation and life. A liberating education process should help people to overcome their situation of apparent hopelessness. Hope is needed, both at the individual and collective levels, for basic survival. Experience of PRA and participatory development confirms this, showing that a

participatory process cannot work unless it brings hope to both participants and development practitioners. But hopes and dreams cannot be imposed, rather they need to be generated in a democratic process.

Henry A. Giroux, one of Freire's friends and an educationist himself, summarised what is liberating education. In a participatory liberating education process, participants learn a "language of critique" of existing power relations and also a "language of possibility" for creating a new society. REFLECT practitioners have tended to term this *political literacy*, linking awareness with action. Freirian jargon of "conscientisation" can be understood in these terms, as meaning the process of acquiring the language of critique to gain a genuine hope and to engage in new social struggles. Some PRA practitioners call this process "rediscovering reality" or "starting new initiatives for development". Thus, there is a common thread here between PRA and REFLECT as both highlight the use of visual methods to help participants systematise their knowledge and analyse their lives with a view to initiating a process of change.

Freire suggests that the process of action-reflection-action (better/improved action coming from reflection and reflection having to be rooted in action) is the means by which conscientisation becomes possible. This action-reflection-action is also called "Praxis". The role of a progressive teacher in such a praxis is not to teach "answers" but to create an environment for proper reflection in which each learner-participant can share and analyse his/her experience and draw new learnings. In praxis the role of a teacher is to engage in "dialogue" or "a dialogical process". This is quite similar to the process of facilitation in PRA whereby a facilitator is also a learner and explorer. In REFLECT this concept of dialogue is very much centre stage.

Culture of silence

Another interesting concept developed by Freire is "cultural action for freedom". Under an oppressive social system and practice, few people are powerful and many others are powerless. Not only do some people possess a great amount of wealth whilst others are poor, but some are regarded as "superior" and others

as “inferior” human beings. Oppressors are the “authority” and are supposed to be cultured and know everything, whereas the oppressed people are “illiterate” and do not know anything - therefore they should remain silent. These oppressive relations lead even the oppressed people to believe that they know nothing and that they should not speak out. Freire calls this the “Culture of Silence” of the oppressed - and it reflects the oppressor’s world-view.

A liberating education practice helps people to break the culture of silence and identify their true potential in new learnings and by engaging in new social struggles for a better life. Any transformation of culture involves moving away from holding the oppressors’ world-view to the oppressed developing their own perspectives and world-view. PRA and REFLECT practitioners might use different terms for this, such as developing a “local perspective”, a “poor people’s perspective”, or a “child’s perspective”. This involves recognising that there is not one reality, but a huge diversity of possible realities. By gaining awareness of the dominant reality one can initiate a progressive transformation of the reality.

Empowerment is about breaking the culture of silence - through empowered learning behaviour. We need participatory and empowering learning processes to change both ourselves and the world. Freire most clearly articulated this analysis and he continues to be an inspiration across the world. However, we must not be dogmatic in following Freire. His work should not be “ritualised” but should rather be re-invented. Freire himself emphasised this point:

“The only way that anyone has of applying in their situation any of the propositions I have made is precisely by re-doing what I have done, that is, by not following me. In order to follow me it is essential not to follow me.”

(Freire and Foundez, “Learning to Question”, Continuum, New York, 1989)

Let this be a homage of commitment to Paulo Freire !

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Using participative techniques with people with disabilities

by David Thomforde

with a response from Sulemana Abudulai

Feedback is a forum for discussion in *PLA Notes*. It features articles which raise common concerns or challenges in fieldwork or training, together with a response from another PRA practitioner. Letters and articles are welcomed for this section, as are your comments on any of the issues raised by **Feedback**.

Introduction

Although participative techniques are widely used, they have not often been applied to disability. People with disabilities have two challenges: they are the poorest in most communities, and are regarded as 'medical cases' by most development agencies. These factors limit their participation in planning and encourage a top-down approach to development planning 'on their behalf'.

This paper describes four one-day seminars, each organised for a different association of people with disabilities in western Uganda. The associations were established to represent subcounties, with areas of up to 400 square kilometres. The seminars had two goals: firstly, to generate information which would help the associations to plan their activities, and secondly, to see whether PRA techniques required modification when used with people with disabilities.

Methodology

Most of the participants were men and very few had 'gross disabilities' (i.e. completely blind or deaf, or severely crippled); most of the disabilities were minor, often the results of ageing. The activities at each seminar included the following:

- a map of the entire area covered by the association, including markers such as rivers and towns, but also features important to people with disabilities (rehabilitation services, income-generating programs organised by the associations, homes of members and officers). The maps were either drawn on paper or traced in the dirt;
- historical time lines of disability. Criteria for change included: number of beggars, amount of polio, percentage of disabled children in school etc.. Small groups rated how these had changed over the last 50 years;
- Venn (chapati) diagrams of institutions important for people with disabilities;
- choosing criteria and analysing how the lives of the participants had changed since the association was founded (this will be discussed more fully in the next issue of *PLA Notes*, Number 33, October 1998);
- listing of problems of people with disabilities, followed by pairwise ranking. This exercise was undertaken separately with groups of men and women;
- listing and ranking of plans that the participants wanted the association to pursue in the future; and,
- discussion of how the participants could monitor the progress of the association in addressing the above issues.

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• **Findings from specific activities**

The maps demonstrated the unequal distribution of leadership, membership and resources. In most cases, the association leaders lived in the town where the association was started, and most members lived near that town. Income-generating projects tended to be located near roads; there were few members from remote areas, and no income-generating projects in these areas. When questioned, most groups said that people with disabilities move towards roads in order to participate in income-generating projects and the association. Poor transport and communication in western Uganda make it difficult to integrate people in remote areas into activities. Yet there was no feeling that leadership and resources should be more evenly distributed.

The results of the historical timeline were general; individual participants could not remember how much change had taken place, but only the general direction of change. This was probably due to the preponderance of disability due to ageing. Most of the participants had not considered themselves disabled in the past, so had not paid attention to disability issues.

The Venn diagram brought out most of the important institutions for people with disabilities, including NGOs, hospitals, church groups, orthopaedic workshops and local government offices. Many participants had had no interaction with institutions outside their immediate area, so they had difficulty judging their relative importance. Most of the participants felt that they had been ignored by institutions which were supposed to care for them; they also felt they were not welcome at community activities due to the negative attitudes of other community members.

An analysis of changes in peoples' lives brought out the most discussion. Participants were able to pinpoint in which areas their lives had changed and whether the association had been instrumental or not. Generally, the associations were credited for improving the level of knowledge and unity among disabled people, but not seen as improving health, wealth or level of disability. In fact, in some cases, the

associations were seen as causing a decrease in these areas. This may be because the associations had raised expectations which they could not fulfil. Most of the associations were formed in recent years and operate without outside help. It may therefore be unreasonable to expect them to achieve much progress over such a short period of time.

There was no discussion of how the rest of the community had fared over the same time period. Yet most of the problems identified and rated as important (e.g. poverty, poor roads, no schools, disease, lack of training, etc.) were also problems shared by the community at large. The few problems identified which were specific to people with disabilities (e.g. schools unwilling to accept children with disabilities, lack of wheelchairs or crutches, etc.), were not rated as very important. The results for men and women were similar.

Many participants were illiterate. This created a problem in the different ranking activities, because the problems being addressed (e.g. lack of disabled leaders, poor roads, etc.) and solutions (e.g. make friends, register disabled persons) did not lend themselves well to written symbols.

Making future plans was a difficult exercise, because many participants had not taken part in this sort of process before. Plans tended to be either general ('get more united'), or to depend on outside sources for carrying out ('ask the government for assistance'). The monitoring activity was designed to generate some specific monitoring tools that the participants could use to track the progress of their associations. But, because of the general nature of the plans and dependency on outside sources, no tools were developed.

• **Reflections on using PRA with people with disabilities**

None of the participative techniques needed much modification for use with people with disabilities. The blind participants had the maps and charts described to them, and then verbally relayed their contributions. Hard of hearing participants had friends seated next to them to repeat information as needed. Participants with

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severe physical disabilities took part in small group activities, or activities on the ground, but had to verbally relay their contributions for activities taking place on a wall chart.

A more serious question involves the nature of the disabled population. Because people with disabilities are a small proportion of the population, bringing a group together inevitably includes people from a wide geographic area. Thus, in these seminars, the participants were not a community as such, but rather members of many communities united by an association. Their needs, problems, and priorities were diverse and context-specific, making it difficult to bring a focus to discussions.

The fact that many participants had minor disabilities due to ageing probably increased the lack of common purpose. A group of persons with gross disabilities may have generated a stronger sense of community, but blind, deaf and physically disabled persons would still have very different needs. Other than through the associations, there is often little interaction between different groups of people with disabilities, and little awareness of the needs of others.

The rationale of participative planning is difficult for many people with disabilities. In Uganda, as in much of the world, people with disability have traditionally been objects of charity rather than equal partners in development. Many of them have grown accustomed to this role, and have a difficult time when asked to give opinions or make plans. Their plans often consist of specifying where they will ask for help, rather than highlighting actions they can take to improve their situation. The associations are trying to overcome this, but themselves often fall in the trap.

• **Recommendations for working with people with disabilities**

A large publicity and mobilisation campaign is necessary for people with disabilities to attend a seminar. If possible, transport should be offered to people with severe disabilities. The campaign should be aimed at people with disabilities, but also at the broader community, so that more able bodied people can assist people with disabilities.

If participants are blind, the maps should have stones, gravel or other 3-dimensional objects to mark sites, either put in a map on the ground or glued to a paper. In this way, blind participants can review the map with their fingers. Where participants crawl on hands and knees, the maps should be made on the ground, and planks of wood can be laid across, so these participants can make their contribution without erasing features.

If many or all of the participants are deaf, communication can be difficult. A sign language translator can be used, but this only works where a common sign language is used. In most rural areas, each deaf person has his or her own set of signs which are used with neighbours, but which may or may not resemble those of other deaf people. Translation by individual neighbours will be necessary.

To increase the mutual awareness of problems, and increase the sense of unity of the participants, some special 'ice-breakers' should open the program and be used between discussions. These activities may help participants become more aware of the needs and problems of other participants with different disabilities, thus easing discussion and formation of unified goals. Some examples of exercises are listed below:

- sighted participants have their eyes covered and are guided by other participants, or try to walk on their own, to simulate blindness;
- participants have one arm tied behind their backs, to simulate an amputated arm, and are asked to cut food, do up buttons or fasten their trousers;
- participants are given earplugs and put in a room with people deep in conversation. This exercise works well to simulate the social isolation of deafness;
- to simulate arthritis, participants are asked to walk with stones in their shoes; and,
- walking participants use wheelchairs and try to enter and leave rooms with steps, demonstrating the physical isolation and difficulties in movement for those who cannot walk.

In the seminars described here, some participants were significantly disabled, some had more minor problems and some participants were not disabled, but were members of the

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associations because of having children with disabilities. These people often tried to dominate discussions. Participants with gross disabilities contributed little unless asked directly. Thus, where possible, activities should be limited to people with significant disabilities. However, disability is a concept without sharp delineations, and the current rebellion against the medical model of disability mitigates against the use of medical personnel to dictate who is disabled and who is not. Therefore the facilitator should try to separate out the people with significant disabilities for some activities so their voices can be heard with greater strength.

The above 'ice-breaker' techniques may also help, as will discussions where individual people with disabilities are asked to talk about their experiences and their treatment by the non-disabled world. Separating people into different groups by disability (seeing problems, hearing problems and physical problems) is also recommended, although it is often hard to mobilise enough people with disabilities to divide into groups of any size.

Practitioners who organise PRA sessions for people with disabilities must be ready for a long process; many people with disabilities must not only learn the PRA process, but they must overcome a lifetime of dependency habits before they can participate fully.

• **Conclusions**

There is clear potential for using participative techniques, after minor modification, with people with disabilities. These techniques could make a major difference in the lives of people with disabilities, so that they can become more involved in planning their futures. It is the attitudes of planners, and the attitudes of people with disabilities, rather than the techniques which must be changed.

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PRA and disability: a response from Sulemena Abudulai

I have found this article interesting and hope that its publication will encourage other practitioners who work with disability to share their experiences. David Thomforde's work in Uganda suggests that the methods associated with PRA do not need much adaptation to be used with people with disability. However, he also highlights that the ability of disabled people to communicate and participate is more challenging, and is not necessarily overcome through the use of PRA methods alone. It is on this point that I would like to develop a response, exploring how communication and participation affect the ability of disabled people to share in a development process.

Communication

There is often an assumption that target groups and communities will engage in effective dialogue with development agencies in the identification of problems, analysis of key issues and the formulation of strategies. Work in the disability movement has shown that people with disabilities, confined to the margins of society for so long, are often not encouraged to participate in community level discussions. In most cases they are not invited to PRA meetings nor are they considered a serious issue target group. This means that the outcomes from PRA within communities do not reflect the views, interests and concerns of disabled people. In other cases, not sufficient effort is made to involve people, such as those with hearing impediments, who can participate through the use of interpreters. This means group discussions will often marginalise those people with disabilities who do attend PRA meetings. Within different disability groups, it is often difficult to obtain disabled people's views on community-wide issues because decades of exclusion have often made them incapable of making contributions to discussions. This situation raises the need for organisations of/for disabled people to develop ways by which communication can be improved to ensure that people with disability participate fully in discussions. For example, focus group discussions could identify particular disabled people as distinct units for participation. Local interpreters of sign language can also be

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engaged to enhance participation by deaf people. Experience has shown however that the pace of work should allow for effective, rather than rushed, soliciting of the views of people with disability.

Participation

Experience has also shown that societal prejudices and poor communication can affect the level of participation of disabled people in PRA activities. Within the disability movement itself, participation may be affected by such factors as gender and literacy. For example, during focus group discussions, we have observed that literate blind people will tend to display inferior attitudes towards their illiterate counterparts; the views of women may also often be ignored. Good facilitation can overcome some of these problems, although the underlying attitudinal constraints may persist. Similarly, as people regarded as being on the margins of society, much work needs to be done to allow/encourage people with disability to express views on all issues affecting their communities and not to regard themselves as 'outsiders' in the system.

To overcome some of these problems disabled people and their organisations need to devise ways: of allowing disabled people to learn by being actively involved with one another, in their organisations and in the wider community; of ensuring that disabled people are involved in identifying problems and solutions at all levels; and to better understand and incorporate disabled peoples' perceptions of problems and solutions into the development process. It will be interesting to find out how other practitioners have overcome some of these challenges.

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<p>The next issue of <i>Feedback</i> in October 1998 will also explore issues of participation, disability and development. If you have any comments on this article which you would like to share in the next issue, please send them to <i>PLA Notes</i> before the end of August 1998.</p>

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A brief guide to the principles of PLA (II)

This section of the *Notes* provides training materials for participatory learning, exploring a different theme in each issue¹. Continuing from *PLA Notes* 31, this issue examines some of the training and institutional pressures for participatory learning that you, as a trainer, need to bring to the attention of trainees.

• Training for transformation

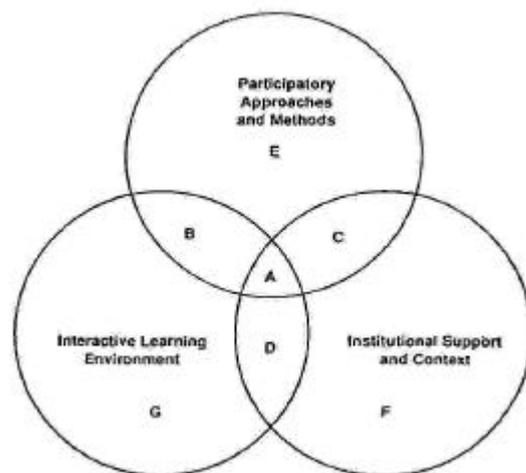
There is rapidly growing interest in participatory approaches and methods. The demand for training far exceeds the supply, but despite the growing enthusiasm, many institutions are facing some common and pressing problems. One of these is how to train sufficient numbers of staff to use the methods properly and effectively, as part of their standard working practices. It is one thing for an organisation to discover the power and potential of participatory approaches, but quite another for it to be able to train its own staff to tap that potential and use it with some sensitivity and consistency.

Intensive field-based training courses alone will not ensure that the trainees have a satisfactory grounding in the basic concepts, principles and methods to use them competently in their work, let alone the capacity to train others. This is because training does not take place in a vacuum. It happens within a particular policy context and organisational culture with its own management structures, professional norms and field practices. Training alone will not convert a conventional, technically-oriented institution into a more people-centred and sensitive one.

There are 3 essential areas to tackle. These are new methodologies for field-level work, new learning environments for professionals and rural people to develop capacities, and new institutional environments, including improved linkages within and between institutions.

These three areas for action are shown in Figure 1 as intersecting circles. The most effective actions lie in the overlapping central sector.

Figure 1. Training for transformation



The following assumptions underpin this conceptual framework:

- participatory approaches and methods support local innovation, respect diversity and complexity, and enhance local capabilities, represented by the ECAB circle;
- an interactive learning environment encourages an open-minded and sharing attitude, creates interest and commitment, and so contributes to agreed courses of action, represented by the GBAD circle; and,
- institutional support encourages the spread between and within institutions of participatory methodologies. This is represented by the FDAC circle, which occurs when a whole organisation shifts towards participatory methods and management, and where there are informal and formal linkages between organisations.

In this perspective, sectors G, F and E represent starting points and preconditions, but none is likely to spread well unless it receives support by moving into D, C or B, and then into A. Thus participatory field methods, as in E, are likely to be abandoned unless there is institutional support or a learning environment. This has been a recurrent experience with field training workshops in participatory methods. Those who have taken part may be convinced and wish to introduce participatory methods into their organisations, but find they cannot do this alone. Partly they may lack confidence or clout, but also their colleagues may be sceptical or hostile.

It is important for your trainees to understand the training they are involved in is only one part of a wider organisational shift. This may help them to readjust any unrealistic expectations and to identify follow-up support they might require.

Training suggestion:

1. Ask trainees to identify examples from their own experiences of sectors A to G.
 - What kind of changes have recently taken place in their organisations?
 - What is good and bad about the different types of organisation.

• **Issues for institutionalisation**

Institutionalising participatory approaches can take many years. Training is an integral element in the learning process of developing organisational learning and so, it is important that you deal at some point with some of the issues that participants are likely to face. Some prior knowledge of the most common issues can help to overcome or at least avoid problems likely to prevent success:

1. *Quality assurance*. It remains very difficult to assure quality in training or practice, as there are no 'standards' by which to judge performance. Anybody can claim to be an 'expert' in participatory approaches and there is no easy way to determine his/her authenticity until after the work is done.
2. *Contradictory donor policies*. Participatory approaches have become extremely popular among donors, who remain interested in

saving money and achieving tangible results quickly. As a result, these approaches are increasingly making their way into terms of reference and project guidelines, whether or not they are appropriate. Unfortunately, although they are promoting participatory approaches, many continue to set physical 'targets' as measures of success. This mode of investment and expenditure makes it difficult for programmes to apply participatory approaches appropriately, as they are expected to initiate visible 'projects' almost as soon as funds are allocated.

3. *Mechanistic applications*. Simply because an organisation has made a policy decision to follow a participatory path does not mean that it is using it in a flexible way. All too frequently, 'participatory approaches' are applied within rigid and standardised hierarchies that constrict decision-making, limit the range of possible development or research options, and ultimately, diminish the effectiveness of the efforts.
4. *The search for short cuts*. Participatory approaches are not substitutes for the thorough preparation, long term planning, constructive dialogue and sustained interaction that any development process requires. No participatory approach offers a quick solution to complex processes. There are no shortcuts to success.



Training suggestions

1. *Ask participants to produce their own list of how to recognise good practice in participatory development and what should be avoided.*
2. *Ask participants to buzz on what external conditions make it difficult or impossible to adopt participatory learning.*
3. *Ask participants to reflect on the internal conditions that encourage or discourage innovation and adaptation of participatory planning.*
 - *Is the method likely to be applied in a mechanistic way, or will the methods be continually adapted?*
4. *Ask participants to reflect on how their institutional processes should be changed to ensure that capacity is built up over time.*
5. *Brainstorm on why shortcuts do not work and why they are so popular.*

- **Training for analysis**

The use of participatory methods can lead to the collection of excess information which does not feed into an action plan. On many occasions, there has been a tendency for participants or trainers to get carried away with the use of the methods, while neglecting the importance of analysis. To lead to change, analysis is a crucial component, one which many people find difficult to deal with.

There are 3 critical questions about analysis that require attention in training and in practice: who analyses? what is analysed? when is it analysed?

Training suggestion

1. *Ask the group to identify who they feel should be involved in the analysis of each stage, and why. If the output is not very participation-oriented, you can challenge this as a trainer in further discussions.*

Who analyses?

During participatory work, there are many moments when it is possible to see two different sets of 'analysts': the external facilitators and local women, men and children. Usually, the external group start the interaction and so initially have more control

over the process. While it is relatively easy to encourage trainees to hand over the discussions and the diagramming to the local people they are meeting with, this is much more difficult when it comes to analysis.

Thus, the training workshop should focus on encouraging trainees to understand how to stimulate local analysis, rather than imposing their own forms of analysis. Trainees need to be aware that participatory fieldwork is not a fact-finding mission, but is about facilitating learning and analysis by local people. If this is not sufficiently emphasised in training sessions, then the fieldwork can become a mad rush for useless information and the whole purpose of participation is distorted. This does not mean that the external agent is neutral or does not engage in discussions. The issue is a more subtle one of relative power and devolving analysis and decision-making consciously. This is what becomes important to emphasise in training.

What is analysed?

The second aspect of analysis is about what is analysed. There is a real risk of simply focusing on analysing 'data', rather than reflecting on the process that develops during discussions. This is just as important in the development of a community action plan as the 'data' themselves. However, becoming aware of this aspect is often difficult for many newcomers to participatory methods, and trainees can find it difficult to know what 'process' aspects to document. Critical reflection on the process, therefore, allows for an understanding of whether local knowledge and capacities were enhanced.

When is it analysed?

In participatory fieldwork, there is no single appropriate phase for analysis. There are many steps that contribute to the overall analysis of issues and opportunities, each of which needs special attention in a training setting. Several steps in analysis can be followed in documentation, through probing, team analysis, plenary analysis, and community feedback meetings. Participatory analysis must be context specific, in terms of both content and process.

• Misconceptions and dangers

Some dangers

The use of participatory approaches in research and development has not been without its constraints. Practitioners have encountered a range of difficulties and dilemmas when working with local people to analyse their situation (Box 1).

The intense involvement of local people in research and development tends to generate much enthusiasm and anticipation about the action that they have identified. Although this is, in principle, a positive aspect, it can cause problems if any support promised by the facilitating agency is not forthcoming.

BOX 1 IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

- When facilitated by outsiders, participatory approaches can raise expectations of local people for continued involvement;
- The outcome depends on the attitude and vision of the persons facilitating the process;
- If carried out too quickly, they can lead to incorrect insights;
- The choice and sequence of methods needs to be adapted to fit each situation;
- In most cases, they will not lead to quantifiable results;
- They will never provide final answers! (but then, no approach ever will)

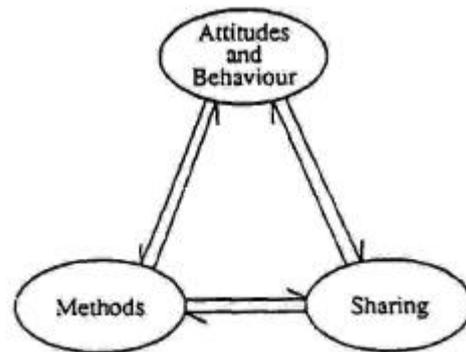
Although participatory learning and action is not simply the mechanical use of methods, this does occur. Participatory methods can be applied without an appreciation of the reasons for their use. The outcome will therefore depend on the attitude of the people employing the methods. For example, if the user of participatory methods is not conscious of gender differences within a community, then it is highly probable that the analysis will not deal with such issues. Likewise, if they are not aware of local power differences, then these are likely to be overlooked in the findings.

The downside of flexibility is that participatory approaches need to be adapted to fit each situation. Those who are looking for a

fixed, blue-print approach will not find it in participatory methodologies. Also, the type of information that generally results from the use of participatory approaches is usually qualitative, reflecting the diversity and complexity of the situation it is describing.

Training suggestion

1. Ask the group to develop a list of possible limitations and benefits of participatory planning.



TRAINERS' CHECKLIST

- What are the five key lessons you want participants to remember from any session on principles and institutional challenges?
- How do you plan to get participants to reflect on their own organisation's constraints to add adopting participatory approaches?
- How will you bring up the issue of quality assurance?
- How will you encourage participants not to use the methods mechanically?

1. Taken from a *Trainers Guide for Participatory Learning and Action*. Published by IIED. Price £18.95, plus p&p (25% UK and Europe, 35% airmail). See inside cover for details on how to order publications.

Next issue: Training in participatory methods in the workshop

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Tips for trainers: marching soldiers

I do not take any credit for this game; I picked it up from a Filipino friend who had for many years worked in popular theatre. It has not failed to disappoint on the many occasions I have used it in various countries and contexts.

The scenario of this game is a small poor village. The village is under threat from a group of approaching soldiers and the villagers have to prevent the soldiers from achieving their objective of crossing the perimeter and entering the confines of the village.

Time required (20-30 minutes)

• Objectives

- Primarily an ice-breaker; and,
- To stress the need for team-work, good communication and research skills, especially 'lateral' thinking.

• Materials

- Four markers to indicate the edges of the village; and,
- A drum or equivalent e.g. a plate and spoon or anything that can make a good rhythmic beat.

• Steps

1. A large space is required preferably out of doors.
2. A minimum of twenty people are needed to run this game effectively.
3. Before the session starts and without anyone else noticing, take one person aside to be a 'drummer'. Tell the person that he or she directs the speed of the marching soldiers through the beat of the drum. If the drum beat speeds up, the marching speeds up; if it slows, the

marching slows; if it stops, the soldiers stop. The drummer can vary the speed of the beat at his/her discretion. The drummer stands or sits inconspicuously to one side and does not communicate with the rest of the players.

4. Split the remaining people into two equal sized groups: one group is the villagers, the other the soldiers. Explain the scenario of the game to the two groups.
5. Mark the perimeters of the village by placing the markers in a square so that the villagers *cannot* hand to hand protect the total perimeter.
6. In defending the perimeter, the villagers are not able to use anything except their bodies. Please explain that this is *not* a game of violence and that participants are not allowed to move the perimeters of the village.
7. Take the soldiers to one side and explain to them their objective is to cross the perimeter of the village and that they must approach the village (initially in a line rather than a column) marching at the speed of the drum beat, on which they must concentrate.
8. Signal to the drummer to start the game.
9. Reminder: The soldiers may need to be reminded to follow the beat of the drum throughout the game.
10. If the villagers or soldiers break the rules, stop the game and re-group the two groups. As soon as one soldier has penetrated the village, it is considered a 'win' and the game can be re-started by regrouping the participants. The villagers on the other hand need to be questioned, challenged and stimulated into thinking. Let them work out the situation; your role as facilitator is to be provocative!¹

¹ The game finishes when the villagers realise that to stop the soldiers entering the village all they have to do is stop the drummer!

11. Run the game up to 3-4 times (the game is rarely completed in the first round). If the villagers have not solved the game, introduce the drummer and let the person explain their role.
12. At the end of the game (whether the villagers win or not) try to stimulate a discussion on what happened in the village, why and what insights they have learnt.

• Comments

In my experience, the villagers can develop very sophisticated 'solutions' to the game from kidnapping soldiers, giving bribes to offering peace talks. Sadly there is only one solution, and thus as a facilitator you can have fun in taunting the group when they fail in each round. Have fun!

Source: Paul Mincher, Resource Centre for Participatory Learning and Action, IIED.

