

Assembling Reflections

by Zaki Hasan

Reflect convention in Bangladesh

Reflect, as a process of adult learning and collective analysis for social change and transformation, would be greatly intensified if the analysis carried out by the *Reflect* participants could go beyond the circle-boundary and be heard by a wider audience. One effort to achieve this is the annual *Reflect* convention that has been taking place in Bangladesh since 2003. The convention has established itself as a hub to link the reflections of participants, facilitators and trainers in a regular and systematic manner.

Since the first *Reflect* convention, the event has become more comprehensive, systematic and meaningful. More than 400 participants joined the convention in 2005 to share experiences of using the *Reflect* approach in establishing the rights of poor and marginalized people. ActionAid Bangladesh hosted the event while *Reflect* implementing organizations of Bangladesh and their national network (SPED – Society for participatory Education and Development) played significant roles in making the event a success. As well as ActionAid Bangladesh and its partners' staff, there were participants from other national and international development organizations, donor agencies, print and electronic media, educational institutions, and others. Participants from Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Pakistan made the convention an international space for reflection.

Mansoor Ahmed Chowdhury, Executive Director of Impact Foundation, in his opening speech said, "*Reflect is an effort to make an inclusive society where no one would be excluded*". Nasreen Huq, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh, in her welcome-speech said, "*A special characteristic of this convention is that it allows practitioners, particularly those on the front-line, to come and exchange their learning, the challenges that they have faced through the year*".

The convention focused on the, following themes:

1. *Reflect* and disability
2. Self-help groups through *Reflect*
3. Stop violence against women through *Reflect*
4. Quality health and *Reflect*
5. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction through *Reflect*
6. *Reflect* and ICT (Information, Communication and Technology)
7. Literacy through *Reflect*
8. Promotion of agriculture-based livelihood through *Reflect*
9. HIV/AIDS and *Reflect*

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As *Reflect* is about creating space for poor and marginalized people's voices, the convention's most memorable session was the one in which *Reflect* participants shared how they have been struggling to establish their rights through *Reflect*. For example, Monowara Begum commented, "*Nobody wanted me in their groups as I was disabled. But I wanted to show them my real ability. Then we formed our own group. I, Monowara Begum, without a leg, led the whole group*". Meanwhile, Alea Begum, a *Reflect* participant from a brothel, said, "*We are sex workers...no one gives importance, no one listens to us. Even when we visited banks, we weren't valued. Now we are. Most of the 400 girls here can now read and write*".

The crucial roles played by the

front-line *Reflect* circle facilitators and *Reflect* trainers were also celebrated. The 'Unique Contribution to *Reflect*' awards were started up, with 10 *Reflect* Circle Facilitators and 10 *Reflect* trainers given awards for their work.

I have had the privilege of attending all three conventions. The empowerment that I have felt during the convention could hardly be expressed in written form. The convention showed how social and poverty issues could become live and anyone whatever their language and academic background could understand the things that are being shared. The bonding that was created among the participants in the convention will surely last long.

Li Hong, a participant from China, wrote after the convention, "*I almost quit my membership and gave up my project before I came to the Dhaka Conference because of my tiredness, weakness and selfishness. I was changed and strengthened by your *Reflect* conference and your people, especially by my personal experiences with the local people and contact with children. I was touched deeply. I was pushed by *Reflect* and my life was affected by another life.*"

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For further information and to join *Reflect* Convention 2006 please contact Zaki Hasan:
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At last! A Reflect Asia Network!

Reflect has been practiced in Asia since its inception in 1993 but there has been a striking new momentum in the spread of the approach in the region in the past year. There are very diverse experiences across the continent and huge potential for exchange and learning that have not, to date, been fulfilled due to the absence of a *Reflect* network in Asia. There were some tentative attempts to form a network (e.g. a meeting in Bangkok in 2001, a workshop in China in 2004), which have kept some communication flowing, but the emergence of a real network has only now occurred following a regional meeting September in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The participating countries in the 'Reflect Asia Network Meeting 2005'

were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Pakistan. The participants at the meeting agreed that for the next year they would work to develop this network and to do so an ad-hoc core group has been formed. Zaki Hasan from Bangladesh will chair the group for the next year. A list of core group members is given in the table below.

During the meeting, a number of activities were identified that would be implemented in the following year. These include a regional *Reflect* training of trainers workshop, a newsletter, exposure/exchange visit, engagement with the International Reflect Circle (CIRAC) and human resource sharing. ActionAid Bangladesh will be the

secretariat for the next year and Nasreen Huq, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh, will be an advisor both to the Secretariat and the core group. For 2005, Ahmad Masoud of ActionAid Afghanistan has been elected as Asia representative on the CIRAC Coordination Team, joining the other member Shafiqul Islam from Bangladesh.

Reflect Asia Network Core-Group members are approaching various organizations and agencies for recognition as well as for financial and technical assistance.

For further information on the *Reflect* Asia Network please contact: reflect.asia.network@gmail.com

List of core group (ad-hoc) members

Country	Name of the member	Organization of the member	E-mail
Afghanistan	Javed Yousifi	ActionAid Afghanistan	javed@actionaidafg.org
	Brigitte Goby	ActionAid Afghanistan	brigitgoby@hotmail.com
Bangladesh	Masuda Faruk Ratna	GBSS	e-mail not working at the moment
	Zaki Hasan (Chairperson)	ActionAid Bangladesh	zaki.hasan@actionaid.org
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