

Appendix one:

What is *Reflect*?

Reflect is an approach to adult learning and social change, conceived by ActionAid and piloted in El Salvador, Bangladesh and Uganda in 1993–95. It fuses theories of Paulo Freire¹⁰ with the methodologies of participatory rural appraisal¹¹. The approach enables groups to develop their own learning materials by constructing maps, calendars, matrices, diagrams or using forms of drama, story-telling and songs, which can capture social, economic, cultural and political issues from their own environment. In this process the development of literacy and other communication skills becomes closely linked to the engagement of people in wider processes of development and social change.

¹⁰ Freire, a Brazilian educator, believed that education could liberate, or could be used to oppress, but is never neutral. He said that: 'The act of knowing involves a dialectical moment that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to new action'.

¹¹ Participatory Rural Appraisal: is a family of approaches and techniques that enable development professionals to have a better understanding of people's realities and priorities for action. The best known method is participatory visualisation: the construction of graphics such as maps and matrices, and the subsequent discussion of the findings and their implications for development activities; as well as the structural causes of poverty. *Reflect* emphasises the need for this information to remain in the control of the group, and the need to address and challenge power dynamics and conflicting priorities in a group or community.

How does Reflect work?

Reflect provides an on-going democratic space for a group of people to meet and discuss issues relevant to them and their lives. The participants/facilitator choose the specific topics themselves, according to their own priorities. The discussion is facilitated by a facilitator: someone from the group who has attended a *Reflect* 'Training of facilitators' workshop. The group uses various participatory techniques to represent their immediate reality, systematise their existing knowledge and analyse their situation. This is the basis for micro planning of development and lobbying activities. *Reflect* circles decide where and when to meet, how long for and how often – some groups might meet daily for one hour, others find it more useful to spend one afternoon or evening a week, the fact that the group themselves decide what would suit them best is key to the sustainability of *Reflect*.

Reflect training

The way people are trained is key for the successful implementation of *Reflect*. Both facilitators and trainers attend an initial workshop, however there is also a need for ongoing training and support. A typical *Reflect* training workshop is two weeks. This is sometimes broken into two parts – with the first part focusing on *Reflect* methodologies and the second on developing materials. Ideally there will be a break in the training to allow participants to return to their group, reflect on what they have learnt, practise using *Reflect* tools and collect materials for use in the second part. In this way the facilitators become involved in designing units for use with their group. This not only means that the issues discussed will be directly relevant to the specific group, but also that facilitators become 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.

Where are we with Reflect today?

In the past five years *Reflect* has spread rapidly with over 350 organisations now working with the approach in 60 countries. The International *Reflect* Circle (CIRAC) is a network of practitioners from diverse organisations across 20 countries. CIRAC promotes the continued evolution of *Reflect*, consolidating learning and developing international publications based on practice.

An extensive evaluation process during 2000 showed the diversity of *Reflect* projects – however they are all concerned with at least one type of communication practice. The focus is on enabling people to articulate their views through any communication means necessary, whether through oral, written, visual or audio-visual modes. This is crucial if *Reflect* is to help strengthen the meaningful participation of poor people in decisions that affect their lives.

Reflect has proved effective at 'giving people a voice', however, it is clear that in order to change their lives for the better, *Reflect* participants also need to engage more systematically with (and influence) actors and processes beyond local level. The challenge often remains of enabling people to analyse the linkages between local problems and macro forces, so that they can open doors beyond the local level.

Diversity and ongoing innovation are a major strength. *Reflect* has now been adapted in many contexts for example: peace and reconciliation work in Burundi; land-rights work in South Africa; capacity building for school management in Mali; preventive health work in Ghana; displaced people in Sierra Leone; community forestry in Nepal; holding NGOs and local government accountable in El Salvador; and bilingual and inter-cultural education in Peru.

Why Reflect

This project has *Reflect* as its starting point. This is because we believe that ICTs are only useful tools for poor people if they are linked to people's capacity to formulate and communicate their own analysis. *Reflect* provides the structures necessary for people to analyse their information resources and gaps and communication needs in a thorough way, ready to make meaningful choices on the technology they want to use. Literacy is also a key element in people's capacity to make use of information sources and resources, making *Reflect* a natural partner to ICTs for development.

More information:

The international *Reflect* circle has a website – www.reflect-action.org which includes information about *Reflect* activities and contacts in different countries, key materials and resources (including the 2003 resource pack *Communication and Power*) and contact details for more information or dialogue.

Alternatively write to:

Reflect Unit, ActionAid International, Hamlyn House, London N19 5PG, UK