

A REVIEW OF 13 EVALUATIONS OF REFLECT

Abby Riddell

**For ActionAid
JUNE 2001**

***“The central concern of all Reflect programmes is to enhance peoples capacity to have their voices heard – by whatever communication means necessary.”
(CIRAC meeting March 2000)***

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PREFACE

This is the first in a series of reports being produced by the International Reflect Circle, CIRAC.

The International Reflect Circle (CIRAC) was set up in March 2000 as a democratic space for Reflect practitioners from diverse organisations across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. This circle seeks to promote solidarity of Reflect practitioners at different levels around the world in order to strengthen international exchange and learning, and build a wider movement. CIRAC aims to be inclusive of all serious Reflect practitioners and has links with over 350 organisations using the approach in 60 countries. CIRAC communicates with these diverse practitioners through its publications and practical resources, through an e-mail network and a new website (www.reflect-action.org), as well as through feedback systems from meetings and linkages to training and exchange workshops around the world. CIRAC is co-ordinated each year by 2 people nominated from each region and holds annual meetings (most recently in South Africa in May 2001) with balanced representation from diverse organisations and networks around the world.

Forthcoming publications / resources from CIRAC include:

- *Global Survey of Reflect Practitioners;*
- *Approaches to Training in Reflect;*
- *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in Reflect;*
- *Power Analysis and Processes of Transformation in Reflect;*
- *Practical Resource Materials on Communication and Power.*

This first publication is an attempt to consolidate learning from 13 different external evaluations of Reflect that took place mostly in 2000. Each of these evaluations was commissioned independently to serve different purposes for different organisations working in different countries. In each case there were different evaluators brought in with different biases and different approaches. The task of consolidating these into a single document was formidable and we thank Abby Riddell for her remarkable achievement in having done so.

In the spirit of Reflect, we have circulated Abby's consolidated report to practitioners (through CIRAC). A team of practitioners from Ghana, Mozambique, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the UK, who are also working on wider learning around participatory monitoring and evaluation, met to review and discuss different responses - and have compiled these into a consolidated set of comments. Rather than use these to re-edit the report we are publishing these consolidated comments, which are appended here, after Abby's original report. We hope that this dialogue between evaluators and practitioners will continue, as there is much that can be learnt from such an exchange. Enjoy your reading, and let us know if you have any comments!

David Archer - June 2001 (on behalf of CIRAC)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reflect (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques) was developed as a radical new approach to adult literacy between 1993 and 1995 through field practice in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador. Since then it has spread rapidly so that in 2000 there are over 250 organisations working with Reflect in a diversity of programmes in over 50 countries, led by national and international NGOs, local and district governments, community based organisations and social movements.

Through 1999 and early 2000 a series of external evaluations were carried out which looked at the outcomes and impact from Reflect programmes in several different countries. This review is of the 13 evaluations completed to date of Reflect in 11 countries.

The purposes of this review are threefold: 1) to synthesise and summarise the 13 evaluations, identifying trends in literacy and empowerment outcomes; 2) to identify and classify trends in approaches to evaluation and the indicators used; and 3) to draw out some key hypotheses to frame further research / evaluations.

The report is organised as follows. Section 2 presents individual summaries of each of the 13 evaluations, in alphabetical order by country. At the end of the section there is a table of each evaluation, summarising the following:

- Programme context
- Reflect approach
- Evaluation purpose and timing
- Evaluation methodology
- Literacy and numeracy outcomes
- Empowerment outcomes
- Other outcomes
- Weaknesses
- Recommendations

Section 3 outlines several common issues / lessons that arise from the Reflect programmes. Section 4 gives an overview and lessons from the evaluations themselves. Section 5 details some of the indicators used in the various evaluations. Section 6 follows on with guidelines for establishing monitoring and evaluation frameworks for Reflect programmes. Finally, Section 7 puts forward several recommendations and proposals for further work.

Lessons / Issues

The most fundamental issue that was raised in a number of the evaluations was the relative priority given to literacy or empowerment in Reflect. Not all groups in-situ will have fully embraced the 'renewed' definition of Reflect:

"...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.” (Phnuyal, Archer and Cottingham, 1998)

Together with often ill-defined outcomes, this has made evaluation particularly difficult.

The ‘renewed’ definition is full of the ideals of potential achievements of Reflect programmes. It presents an evaluation challenge that goes considerably beyond testing the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy. It also crosses several disciplinary boundaries that package different types of outcomes such as literacy and numeracy, empowerment, development, democratisation, poverty alleviation, etc.

This much broader definition comes at a time when some of the international development agencies are reconsidering their earlier abandonment of adult literacy programmes on grounds of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Thus, the evaluations of programmes such as Reflect are receiving close scrutiny. However, some of these disciplinary boundaries are likely to continue to pose challenges, especially where these boundaries are reflected in ministerial divisions such as between education and community development.

Related to this fundamental intertwining of literacy and empowerment is the often missing relationship between Reflect circles and other community development organisations. For the ideals of the ‘renewed’ definition of Reflect to be realised, there needs to be a wider understanding of the development and empowerment aims and an integration of Reflect practice beyond those using the approach.

In addition, there is the often-missing relationship within international development agencies between Reflect programmes and their other sectoral work.

Several of the evaluations suggested that facilitators be offered additional training which could help them to extend the development aims of the circles, for instance, such things as micro-planning, strategic planning, advocacy, leadership training, etc. Clearly, where the aim is for the circles to be well-resourced, well-functioning community development organisations, utilising the literacy that has helped to empower them, it is important that the necessary skills to further such aims are available.

Related to all of the above points is the need to tackle the necessary resource requirements for action points. This may mean leveraging resources from governmental and non-governmental organisations alike, or it may entail attracting new resources. Especially in those circles within the most marginalized communities, it is important that they are not left high and dry just at the point at which they are mobilising themselves. This is an issue raised in several of the evaluations and underlies the challenge of promoting literacy in a context of empowerment, particularly where the support structures are not inter-sectoral, but within, say, a non-formal education department alone.

There is an inherent tension between a successful Reflect programme and its being scaled up with large state involvement. The role of the state was an issue in several of the evaluations, not only in terms of contrasting state-run literacy programmes with Reflect but also in terms of establishing partnerships between different stakeholders.

Facilitators are the crux of Reflect programmes. Thus, it is no surprise that there were many issues raised in the different evaluations concerning them, with regard to the criteria for their selection, their actual identification, and the training, supervision and follow-up that they are afforded. There are no magic bullets in dealing with the different issues concerning facilitators. Rather, it is important to consider holistically the approach to their recruitment, training, support and conditions of service.

Where Reflect is under consideration as an approach to be up-scaled beyond NGO projects, the cost of materials, training, refresher courses and supervision (depending on the degree of integration with existing Ministry programmes), is an issue in terms of the sustainability of the programme.

In several of the evaluations an overriding concern is expressed about the need to foster a 'culture' of evaluation within the programmes. However, the expected outcomes of many Reflect programmes have remained fuzzy, certainly not sufficiently well defined for indicator development. Similarly, output or outcomes of several programmes remain unassessed, making it difficult to develop feedback loops related to positive behaviours. The purpose of participatory evaluation where it has been used, has often been left vague, and in other cases, hasn't been invoked.

Other evaluation issues which emerged from the report concerned the fact that for any outcomes where there are diverse groups whose needs are to be met, it is important to distinguish adequately between these groups. Unless it is possible to hold constant certain factors (because one has collected data on them), it may be that the variation being explained is spurious or the attribution to particular factors is erroneous. Evaluations intended to inform potential up-scaling need to pay especial attention to such data gathering. On the other hand, the monitoring of a programme for an implementing organisation with a limited scope may not require such data collection. This underlines the importance of clarifying the purpose of an evaluation and whom it is meant to serve and matching the data collection with the purpose.

Most of the measurements of empowerment are relatively impressionistic, based on PRA and not distinguishing between different groups of participants, nor attributing, necessarily, action points to Reflect circles. Such measurements may be inadequate for bringing about the desired linkages between those traditionally supporting literacy and those supporting wider community development initiatives. For instance, were Reflect to be used to involve marginalized communities in contributing to poverty reduction strategies, the rigour of the change measurement possible from such an approach may be inadequate.

All of the evaluations reviewed emphasised the importance of participatory evaluation. Yet, the purposes and ways of involving participants varied considerably across the different cases. In some, the appropriateness of a participatory evaluation was merely stated as being obvious. No one would deny the importance of

participants being involved in the evaluation of their own programmes. However, as the frustration of the evaluators expressed in several cases, the time required for participants to develop their own indicators and to feel that they truly had an involvement in the evaluation was greater than the time allowed. The preparatory work underlying successful participatory evaluation needs to start long before the evaluation begins. What we saw in several of the evaluations was that often there was confusion over the expected outcomes of the programme and the relative priority given to literacy and empowerment. In the absence of any prior baseline measures, the task was ill defined at best. Given the lack of clear, well-defined indicators and measures, it may not always be effective to design Reflect evaluations as participatory.

Recommendations

Three main recommendations are proposed in the report:

1. Reflect should be applied in a cross-disciplinary way, across different types of development programmes, not necessarily even with an education bias, be they government or NGO-provided. One of the ways that this might be brought about is to emphasise 'voice'. Poverty reduction strategies require the voices of the poor to be heard so that strategies can be tailored not only at the macro level, but also to the needs of the poor at the micro level. This is understood, but the means by which such voices are heard are not institutionalised, and like any strategy that seeks to revolutionise practice, old habits die hard. Even if voices have been heard genuinely, without some community-based development organisation, it will be difficult to sustain the communication. Reflect, as a flexible approach that can be geared to a variety of purposes, could play a strong role in the development of such community potential.

2. Reflect programmes must develop a culture of evaluation amongst participants. The lessons of school improvement work bear scrutiny by Reflect practitioners. Whole school self-evaluation, for example, could easily be adapted to Reflect circles and their communities. It would entail assessment of the current status of the circle / community followed by the identification of priorities in a development plan. A shorter-term action plan could also be implemented and later evaluated, leading back to a new round of assessment.¹

If such regular self-evaluation were carried out, it would complement any external evaluations whose timelines tend to mediate against extensive involvement of this kind. Clearly there is a place for external evaluations, which may well be participatory in nature, but whose terms of reference serve implementing or supporting organisations or the government. However, the desire to make them participatory should not obviate the definition and measurement of outcomes. Such measures are as much a means of charting progress and modifying plans within communities as they are of providing benchmark tests for those supporting such communities.

¹ It is the cyclical *assessment* function, rather than simply monitoring, that distinguishes this from the participatory monitoring, which, clearly, has played a role in several of the Reflect programmes.

3. Programme pointers

A set of pointers emerges from the evaluations for improving Reflect programmes. These are:

- To nurture the creativity and commitment of the facilitators (which involves seeing to their incentives and materials)
- To ensure the system of supervision works, especially if the programme is up-scaled to national level
- To integrate Reflect with community development – don't isolate it in education
- To provide regular refresher courses that meet the facilitators' needs
- To provide other courses of importance
- To organise meetings and exchanges between facilitators
- To resolve the literacy vs. empowerment issue in-situ
- To define outcomes and develop measures and indicators of progress as well as documentation guidelines
- To provide for feedback loops from evaluations
- To facilitate the monitoring of evaluations
- To ensure inter- and intra-agency coordination and cooperation
- To pay special attention to language issues
- To provide guidelines for constructing a baseline survey as well as testing in literacy and numeracy
- To strive toward the integration of Reflect in PRSP designs and within larger programmes, i.e. not literacy alone

The report concludes that Reflect has much more promise than has been demonstrated in the set of evaluations reviewed. It remains for the international NGOs working with Reflect, to consider the proposed ways forward and to assist implementing organisations not only to improve practice, but also to ensure that the synergies implied in the new definition of Reflect are realised in support of poverty alleviation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reflect (Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques) was developed as a radical new approach to adult literacy between 1993 and 1995 through field practice in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador. Since then it has spread rapidly so that in 2000 there are over 250 organisations working with Reflect in a diversity of programmes in over 50 countries, led by national and international NGOs, local and district governments, community based organisations and social movements.

Through 1999 and early 2000 a series of external evaluations were carried out which looked at the outcomes and impact from Reflect programmes in several different countries. This review is of the 13 evaluations completed to date of Reflect in 11 countries. (Full references to these evaluations can be found at the end of the report.)

There are several purposes of this review. First, to synthesise and summarise the 13 evaluations, identifying trends in literacy and empowerment outcomes. Second, to identify and classify trends in approaches to evaluation and the indicators used. Finally, to draw out some key hypotheses to frame further research / evaluations.

The report is organised as follows. Section 2 presents individual summaries of each of the 13 evaluations, in alphabetical order by country. At the end of the section there is a table of each evaluation, summarising the following:

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2. SUMMARIES OF THE EVALUATIONS

The reviews or evaluations of the different programmes which are using Reflect vary significantly, as does the implementation of what, after all, is intended to be a very flexible, adaptable approach to adult literacy and community empowerment. The reviews have taken place at different stages in the development of the particular programmes, using different methodologies, for different audiences. They are as varied as the programmes they are reviewing. Different agencies have been involved, they have developed different materials, been underpinned by different resource patterns and training, and have attracted and served different types of learners in different contexts for different time periods and with different outcomes, only some of which have been reviewed or measured. This section provides summary details of thirteen evaluations covering Reflect programmes in eleven countries and attempts to provide some feel for the variation that is in the field.

2.1 Bangladesh

This evaluation was conducted at the end of a five-year programme, by a 6-person team comprising both external and internal evaluators and taking place over a month between July and August 1999. The evaluation was a requirement for a new funding proposal put to the UK Department for International Development. It was intended as a means of enabling ActionAid-Bangladesh to make informed decisions about mainstreaming the programme. The terms of reference for the evaluation were extensive. Ten objectives were listed:

- To assess the achievement of the Reflect project
- To assess the demand for Reflect
- To assess the differences in process and outcomes of Reflect in different contexts and for different groups of people
- To assess the sustainability of the learning process
- To assess gender, rights and power dimensions in Reflect
- To assess the effectiveness of monitoring, evaluation and learning systems and their use at each level of the Reflect project
- To assess the effectiveness of the operational mechanisms of the project
- To investigate the potential for major scale-up and mainstreaming of the Reflect approach, identifying issues and the possible implications for quality of the process, the training of trainers and facilitators, management and implementation arrangements, and monitoring, evaluation and learning
- To explore how Reflect can be made to be sustainable after scale-up
- To explore where and how Reflect can contribute to the achievement of Government education goals, policies and strategies

The evaluation consisted of a participatory collaborative review involving a literature review, meetings and discussions with ActionAid and partner representatives, learners and facilitators and field observations.

The five-year history of Reflect in Bangladesh began with a pilot in ten circles in 1994, the consolidation of the programme and its implementation through nine

partners in 1996. It extended to other programmes and by 1999 involved 36 partners, including some adoption of the approach in Government programmes. According to statistics supplied by Reflect implementing organisations and available from the Reflect Coordination Unit (RCU) in Dakar, in July 1999 some 27,000 participants had been exposed to Reflect, all but some 500 of them women.

The process designed by the RCU consists of a two-month preparatory period and a 9-month circle period, followed by a terminal evaluation and a 12-month post-circle period, so in all, two years. Follow-up is intended to be through lokokendras, a library, a cultural and training centre and a forum for linkage with development programmes.

Given the number of circles operating at the time of the evaluation and in order to meet the contextual differentiation specified in the terms of reference, the evaluation team asked the RCU to categorise (as 'A, B, C') the 36 implementing organisations by the quality of their programmes and then to choose one good and one weak circle from each strata. In addition, four new organisations were added to those selected in this manner. Eleven circles and their communities formed the focus of intensive investigation. In addition, the team carried out a secondary analysis on the statistics reported by all the implementing organisations.

It was not possible to validate any of the statistics, and the evaluation team was aware of their limitations, for instance, knowing that the drop-out rates reported were unreliable given that replacements are not shown as drop-outs. Similarly, the team pointed out the necessity of arriving at a better-articulated definition of literacy as well as the development of appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools to report on achievements. It is reported that some 60% of those who have been through the Reflect programme have at least minimum competencies. The percentage is lowest amongst adults, and highest amongst adolescents. Levels of numeracy reported in the RCU tracer study done in 1997-98 reported much lower levels than for literacy, with between 8-14% achieving minimum competencies. Similarly, it is reported that 74% of all participants have been using their skills; helping their children with school work, writing letters, maintaining household accounts, shopping, going through official documents, reading posters, etc., which they could not do before the programme.

The conclusion of the assessment of the gender dimensions of Reflect was that *"positive but impressionistic views were stated on changes effected in women/girls learners and on male members of the families/community... [but that] the evidence on which these views were based was sketchy and unreliable."* It was also noted that, importantly, the visible evidence of a real growth in assertiveness and confidence was valid only for the learners belonging to the good / strong circles, not the weak ones. More generally, the evaluation pointed to the focus in Reflect on the more easily addressed practical needs, rather than the longer term, strategic gender needs and interests.

Notwithstanding the unreliability of the statistics reviewed, the evaluators drew the conclusion that the programme is sustainable because the completion rate is 94%. Furthermore, based on their own observations in the context of this evaluation, they

cautiously estimate that 40% of those enrolled achieve sustainable levels of literacy, which they deem to be satisfactory.

The evaluation points to the *“challenge of sharing empowerment, learning and literacy in remote regions with relatively more marginalized groups”*, noting that the ‘weaker’ circles visited *“were generally the circles with even more poor participants. Economic constraints resulted in low attendance rates and less meaningful dynamics and learning processes within the circles.”* The evaluation recommends *“a greater interface with other development programmes...to see through action points to their logical ends, i.e. socio-economic benefits.”*

The evaluation underlines the importance of critical analysis of the processes of Reflect whilst appreciating the need for advocacy. Engendering more discussion and debate and a greater sharing of the experiences different groups have in implementing Reflect is suggested, together with other specific recommendations concerning upgrading the monitoring and evaluation system. There seems to be some reticence in tackling directly the need and appropriate use of quantitative data, including achievement tests in some places, though the report specifically recommends that standardised and quantitative testing of literacy achievement be developed, in particular integrating the competency levels already set with the terminal evaluation at nine months.

The evaluation also underscores the need for *“greater flexibility and creativity on the part of the facilitator. This can only come from adequate training inputs and enabling supervision.”* The report had noted the rigidity of some of the facilitators, as seen for example in *“the mechanical translation of identified issues and ‘action points’ into stereotypical activities or into potential actions that cannot be carried out.”*

It is recommended that Reflect be brought to scale. At the same time, the evaluators endorse the suggestions made in early 1998 that a *“nation-wide, peer-based comparative study of different literacy approaches, including more traditional, ‘taught’ programmes”* be carried out. Many questions are left hanging in this evaluation that require further investigation, not least, of this very fundamental sort. Despite what was clearly an extensive evaluation, the particular interpretation made of the terms of reference together with the failure to pull together all the different threads of the study, make it difficult for one to feel confident of the conclusions presented. In a programme as large and diverse as that in Bangladesh, it would have been helpful if one could have achieved more ‘representativeness’ in the sampling and have been able to make more conclusive generalisations, especially for participants of different backgrounds or in different contexts.

2.2 El Salvador

This evaluation is of the introduction of Reflect into an already existing network of 22 organisations supporting post-civil-war democratic processes in El Salvador. Three pilot projects were started in 1993. Only one is evaluated here, carried out by four people between September and November 1999 and comprising a review of documentation, interviews, workshops and observation of activities. The purpose of

the evaluation was to investigate the process and impact of Reflect and to come up with lessons for improving its future implementation.

The use of Reflect in the CIAZO network was to aid empowerment, democracy and sustainable development at the local level. Literacy did not feature, the perception being that Reflect is more useful for organisation and empowerment than for literacy teaching. However, it appears that some false expectations were raised by the use of Reflect in the case of those communities, which expected to receive traditional literacy lessons.

Co-ordinators were given 10-12 days training and thereafter, limited technical support. The application of Reflect seems to have been more about PRA than anything else, building on the roots of CIAZO's work itself. The outcomes reported in the evaluation included: increased participation in circles and communities (though there was no baseline against which to measure this); improved self-esteem of women if not equality with men; improved personal relations; and much attention was paid to the environment, such as in community participation for the provision of drinking water, tree planting, etc.

The impact of Reflect was positive for CIAZO, allowing it to become a mediator between organisations in the region. The impact on individual organisations was not as great, whereas the greatest impact reported in the evaluation was on the communities themselves, though the need for follow-through was noted and the necessary support to develop actions from good ideas.

Weaknesses pointed out in the evaluation related both to Reflect and to CIAZO. The distance between the technical team's theoretical understanding of Reflect and the facilitators' application on the ground was considerable. There were problems in the use of Reflect techniques, a high turnover of facilitators, limited space for capacity building and insufficient follow-up. Problems related to CIAZO had to do with weaknesses in communication and co-ordination, participation in strategic planning, and a lack of explicit objectives as well as financial incentives for facilitators and trainers.

The evaluators drew up a list of recommendations for the future of the programme. Clarification of the aims and role of Reflect in community development and literacy was necessary as well as the strengthening and improvement of training. It was suggested that training was required in those management processes, which could lead to plans of action at the local level, based on a power analysis of the different actors. Also the development of more democratic and responsible leadership styles and the development of negotiation and conflict resolution skills required attention. In addition, there was need to consider how to make use of existing capacity in communities; to analyse and improve all activities from a gender perspective; and to study their successful actions and learn from them.

This evaluation is very different from the others reviewed in this report. There is little substantiation of the conclusions reached and no consideration of efficiency. Effectiveness, clearly, has not been well defined, as there were mixed expectations surrounding the introduction of Reflect. Reflect being introduced into an already existing network of community development and empowerment organisations also

sets this evaluation apart from the others. No costs were gathered. There is no analysis of those involved or of the facilitators, materials, etc.

2.3 Ghana (BILFACU)

This evaluation is of the introduction of Reflect into five communities in an isolated area of East Mamprusi District, Ghana, by BILFACU (Bimoba Literacy and Farmers Cooperative Union), a small organisation working in literacy, food security, women in development and savings and credit. The circles started meeting in February 1998, following the selection of the five communities, two facilitators for each circle, the development of the facilitators' manual, 9 days initial training, and the election of circle committees.

Learning materials were provided by BILFACU, monthly meetings of facilitators were held, and refresher courses took place every three months. Supervision was weekly, and BILFACU staff wrote three-monthly reports for ActionAid, which supported the new programme.

The evaluation took place from the 8th-10th March 1999, a year into the operation of the circles. The evaluation team consisted of BILFACU, ActionAid staff, a facilitator, a community leader, and representatives of other interested organisations. The objective of the evaluation was to help everyone to see how they would like to proceed in view of their starting point and where they were at the time of the evaluation. This included the participants, the facilitators, BILFACU and ActionAid. It was intended that the evaluation serve as a learning experience, increasing the skills of those involved and their awareness of the various factors affecting individual and community development.

There were three broad areas of the investigation: teaching and learning; logistics; and empowerment. Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and the circles' time lines were used.

Enrolment across the five villages was initially 127 participants. Those retained, however, were only 79, the percentage in each village varying between 33% and 94%. Attendance followed a seasonal pattern and during periods of heavy agricultural work, circles met only once a week. Facilitators' attendance was good, despite their receiving no incentive beside working tools, e.g. bicycles, rain coats, etc. Most were teachers receiving regular salaries. Ten to eleven units were covered in the year, adapted from the Ugandan manual.

Participants were asked to write a short letter to their visitors, but most were unable to write more than a few words. The evaluators reported that literacy did not seem to be a priority for the participants. This, together with the inadequate lighting for evening meetings, slowed down progress. The participants' numeracy was better: the majority could do addition, subtraction and multiplication, though not division.

There had been some misunderstanding about the use of local language readers. The BILFACU team thought that these were not permitted, so they were not used, despite being available.

Action points arising from discussions were carried out successfully both at the individual and the wider community level, as long as there was no need for external financing. The evaluators, however, pointed out the uniformity of action points, their having been derived from the original manual. Many activities and changes were reported within individual communities such as starting schools for their children, men taking more responsibility for work traditionally carried out by women, tree reservations being marked out, changed attitudes toward health and hygiene, etc. As the evaluators remarked, this was “*a record of outstanding energy and commitment*”.

The evaluators reported favourably on the facilitators’ understanding of the Reflect process. The facilitators effectively acted as a link between the participants, the Literacy Committees and the wider communities. They did seem to underestimate, however, what achievements could be made in literacy, being satisfied with too little from the participants.

The logistics for the circles seemed to be well provided, with only minor problems. Supervisors were able to make their visits using motorbikes and fuel provided by the project. Without such external support, the sustainability of the programme was in question, as neither the facilitators nor the supervisors received incentives.

The evaluators attempted to allow participants to make their own evaluation, but the generation of indicators proved to be a challenge. Despite this, the confidence of the participants as opposed to the other community members was noted.

Men seemed to be more integrated into the process than usual despite the circles mainly involving women. Young men were beginning to take an interest due to the success of the action points.

The evaluators concluded that Reflect should be scaled up on the basis of the progress made in initiating a process of community development, if not as much in literacy and numeracy, which they alleged Reflect undervalues relatively. The need for external funding for this purpose is very real, not least for funding many of the action points. It was also suggested that facilitators receive training in simple micro planning techniques in order to assist this process. Literacy Committees could use training in advocacy. Further investigation of the factors contributing to the poor reading, writing and numeracy skills was suggested as well as continuing adaptation of the facilitators’ guide.

This review is a good example of an evaluation that is striving to involve the participants and has a good approach toward defining those data that need to be collected. What the evaluators were looking for was clearly defined in the three broad areas, teaching and learning, logistics and empowerment, as well as the participants’ self-evaluation of these three areas. The challenge of participants developing their own indicators was recognised. One could work from this evaluation to envisage a process that could help develop a template of questions and procedures that might be more useful than the more individual, idiosyncratic approach seen in some of the other evaluations. The vignettes of the individual communities are helpful for understanding the context of what is reported. In effect,

they also produce a baseline against which future accomplishments can be measured. No more sophistication is needed to substantiate the claims made in the evaluation. One example of such a 'vignette' is given below:

Jiirik Community

- School started by parents who employ a teacher – 6 children attending. The facilitator (a teacher in the neighbouring village) has arranged with GES to post a teacher to the place. The next step is to write a letter to BILFACU requesting help in putting up a structure.
- Women attend clinic without a male escort to protect them from “rough” treatment by nurses. They are more confident dealing with clinic staff e.g. can find their own cards.
- It was planned to mark out a forest reserve – to prevent deforestation. This has not yet been done however.
- Wider community advised by community leaders to protect water sources, and participants organised the laying of steppingstones across the river to stop it getting so dirty.
- An extension worker from the Ministry of Health was invited by the Literacy Committee to lecture on personal hygiene. This service was free of charge (no fuel costs) and participants claimed to cut their fingernails on a regular basis as a result of the visit.
- Women had established right to sit outside at night with men – and not be “sacked” by their husbands.

Future Plans: To mould mud bricks and rehabilitate old literacy structure as the church they were using was often booked up at night. They expressed the view that they would continue with the circle meetings whatever was decided in BILFACU.

2.4 Ghana (NFED)

In 1997 ActionAid-Ghana supported the Non-Formal Education Division (NFED) of the Ministry of Education to pilot Reflect in two districts, one in the Northern Region and the other in the Western Region. The pilot was part of an exploration by the Ministry of how to make its literacy programme more community owned and cost effective. In a report commissioned by the NFED and produced in December 1999, this pilot is compared with the state-run programme, the Functional Skills and Literacy Project. Regional and district staff were interviewed alongside facilitators of the two models being assessed. Meetings were also held with field staff and participants, learning and teaching materials were reviewed, development projects undertaken were visited, and some community leaders and participants were interviewed. There were 251 participants in the pilot project, 44% women, and only one dropped out. Circles were supposed to meet four times a week, and refresher meetings were held fortnightly for facilitators.

The evaluators contrasted the pre-determined thematic lessons of the traditional approach with the open-endedness of the Reflect discussions, noting the difficulties

of the latter approach where facilitators lack vision. Also noted was the lack of momentum in following through action points in circles which had the false expectation that ActionAid would provide all the required inputs.

Several weaknesses of the Reflect pilot were pointed out: the inadequacy of materials, the facilitators' writing skills, and the lack of follow up reading materials. The hurried identification of the facilitators and the need to lower the selection criteria due to the inability of attracting sufficient numbers who had completed secondary school was noted. Also criticised was the inadequate training of trainers and the higher cost of training compared with the traditional approach.

An interesting point made in the evaluation was the use of the facilitators by other NGOs for different activities, in addition to the involvement of the communities in the income generating activities started as a result of the Reflect circles. Various examples were given of community activities that, it was thought, could be attributed to the influence of Reflect. For instance, there was freer discussion of problems within communities, participants were able to write simple letters, and there was much improved community interaction.

The report underlined the importance of monitoring and supervision and the necessary funding of the costs for this by ActionAid, leading to questions of sustainability.

The evaluation recommended extending further the Reflect approach, being more creative than the traditional approach and less prescriptive and that it should not be seen as a project, but *"an integral part of the development process of individuals, communities and society."* (p. 28).

Although the purpose of this evaluation was to compare Reflect with the government-run literacy programme, in fact, what is presented is not such a comparison, rather, a critique of Reflect from a traditional literacy provider's perspective. The evaluation does not make clear who was visited and the opinions, though substantiated by description, must be the authors. As the data are not given from which an independent assessment could be made, it is difficult for others to use this evaluation.

2.5 India

This study, we are told, is not an evaluation study, but rather, a policy oriented study. It was commissioned by DFID (India) in order to investigate the following themes:

- Issues relating to the nature and sustainability of the Reflect process
- Its potential for replication towards up scaling; and
- The possibility of the convergence of the Reflect approach with the strategy of the national literacy campaigns.

The fieldwork was carried out in three sessions over an 8-month period, between September 1998 and April 1999 by four national researchers. The draft report was presented in March 2000.

Three cases were selected for close study in consultation with DFID (India) and the central and regional offices of ActionAid. These consisted of Reflect circles in under-developed regions, comprising tribal populations in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa and other backward castes, scheduled caste and Muslim communities in Bihar. The programmes were supported by three different organisations, Yakshi-GD, MKP and Adithi. Each organisation was asked to identify two 'good' circles and two 'problematic' ones to be followed up. Group discussions were held with ActionAid regional office staff and the three selected organisations, trainers, facilitators, and participants in circles. Interviews were also held with participants, facilitators and community members / leaders in the selected circles / villages. Secondary data supplied by the implementing organisations were also studied.

All three programmes were catering for landless labourers and marginalized farmers. The first Yakshi GD circles began in May 1996 meeting four times a week, first in 10 villages, later extending to 15 circles. There were a total of 171 participants between 30-40 years of age, over half of whom were women. Over the 20 months until March 1999, an average of four Reflect units were covered in groups attended regularly by 11 people out of the average 15 per circle.

The MKP programme began 10 circles in late 1997, which met weekly, though with some discontinuity, due to difficulties with the facilitators. There were approximately 20 participants in each circle, aged between 25 and 30 years. About half the participants were women. They generally covered only one graphic, social mapping.

Adithi began its circles in August 1997 and over the 20 months covered on average ten graphics in each circle, covering five themes. Eight circles comprising 293 women aged between 25 and 30 years, met roughly five times a week, in groups of 30 participants, though with average attendance of only about 11 persons.

In comparing the three organisations, the evaluators found that because MKP had envisaged Reflect as an approach that could be adopted in all areas of its development work, the literacy component was generally neglected. In the case of the other two organisations, Reflect had been adopted both as a strategy for sustained community mobilisation as well as for achieving literacy. However, the evaluation noted the difficulty of differentiating between inputs and outcomes that are specifically related to Reflect and those that might be linked to other programme activities. In their investigation of various collective actions undertaken by the communities, the evaluators enumerated the activities initiated and the participants' self-evaluation of the gains derived from them. They raised the important question: What are the limits of action points emerging, given that they are carried out within inequitable structures?

The evaluation noted the important role played by the facilitator in each case and the need for high-quality, initial training as well as sustained training in the field. MKP's dependence on regular funding from ActionAid for this sustained training, the running of facilitators' fora and the retention of facilitators was pointed out. Facilitators were trained on average for 60 days (over an extended period) on the Yakshi programme, whereas they were only trained on average for 20 days on the others.

The balance between literacy and empowerment was discussed in a number of places in the report. The evaluators noted the need for Reflect to confront 'the issue of alphabets in their own right' and the related encouragement of the necessary discipline of learning them. They pointed to the fact that at least 50% of those enrolled in circles were unable to or chose not to acquire literacy (though they later gave their informed estimate that about 25% of those enrolled in Reflect were attaining sustainable literacy after about two years of the functioning of circles.) In the case of MKP, they noted that the ambivalence of the organisation towards literacy was a factor why literacy levels had not progressed adequately. The evaluators stated their opinion that at least 50% of participants in the age group 15-35 years should be acquiring literacy from two years' of circle attendance, but that Reflect should not be assessed only on the basis of literacy acquisition, since it achieves much more.

Costing data were obtainable on two of the three programmes. The cost per circle per year, as reported by Yakshi, was Rs.19.700. However, they estimated that in future, with an increased facilitators' honorarium and more learning and teaching materials, a more realistic cost would be Rs.29.500. This latter figure, average at 15 participants in 15 circles, comes o Rs.1.313 per participant per year. The average cost for an Adithi participant was worked out at Rs.451 per participant per year. The average salary per facilitator on the Adithi programme, however, is Rs.400 per month, as against the recommended Rs.1.000 per month of the Yakshi programme.

The results of these programmes in terms of literacy achievement, compared with those of the National Literacy programme are about the same, though the evaluators recognise the wider range of learning and development outcomes from Reflect. They raise several issues that need to be considered if Reflect were to be scaled up: firstly, context relevance vs. the degree of standardisation required, the quality of the facilitators and their support by academic resources centres and facilitators' fora. They also note certain weaknesses in Reflect: *'the tendency to over-emphasise aspects of 'spontaneity' and flexibility in the name of participation, at the cost of the crucial role of leadership and its responsibility for planning of implementation.'* (56) They also note the continuing ambivalence between the relative prioritisation of or the balance between literacy and empowerment. In a scaled up programme it would be extremely important to have a far greater element of structure in the programme in terms of time duration; finances; training inputs; training manuals; guidelines for the running of the circles, the units and graphics to be covered contextualised by region; supplementary teaching learning materials and support systems for community action and continuing education.

Given the purpose of this evaluation, to investigate the programmes' sustainability and potential for up scaling and integration with the national programme, one is left with many unanswered questions. One does not have a clear idea of the possible integration of the various agencies, with the government and with other development programmes, nor of the necessary co-ordination between NGOs and CBOs within the individual regions nor the country as a whole. Nor could one construct the feasibility of such integration from such micro experiences.

The evaluators describe their approach as a participatory, collaborative, qualitative review, *"appropriate to the Reflect process"*. The same justification for not

administering any formal testing of achievements, especially of literacy acquisition, is used as for the Bangladesh evaluation, which was conducted under the same team leader. However, with the time span allowed in the Indian study, it would seem much less justifiable, especially with the term of reference related to the potential convergence with the national literacy programme. Despite the fact that several visits were made to the same sites, one does not come away with a feeling of having understood the progress that has been made within communities, nor compared with each other. This is despite the wealth of description provided, in contrast, for instance with the terse Ghanaian BILFACU evaluation described above. One gets lost in the detail rather than the evaluators having picked out and organised for the reader the significant points emerging from the different case studies. For a country as diverse as India and for the stated purpose of the evaluation, it would also have seemed more appropriate to gain the national representativeness and the generalisations possible with something approaching at least a stratified random sampling, rather than a collection of case studies.

2.6 Malawi

This evaluation was a mid-term review of Reflect after it had been operating for about a year in Malawi. The programme itself was a pilot of activities run by four NGOs in seven districts over three years, set up to evaluate the impact of Reflect in promoting adult literacy in comparison with the National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP). The review team comprised five members, two staff from the national office, two from regional offices, and an external consultant. The objectives of the review, which was carried out over two weeks in December 1999, were to investigate the management of Reflect, the differences that it had made in circles and at community level, and to make practical recommendations based on the lessons learned. The review covered four of the seven districts, one from each of the NGOs involved, chosen to ensure geographical diversity. Each NGO was asked to select two circles and a control group based on the quality of the Reflect programme being implemented, for example, one strong circle, one struggling circle and one average control (NALP) class. The team conducted focus group discussions with NGO and government staff, Reflect facilitators and NALP instructors and Reflect circle and NALP participants from those circles selected. In addition to reviewing secondary data, discussions were held with community leaders, participants' notebooks were viewed, and informal testing of written and numeracy skills was performed.

Implementation of the Malawian pilot programmes depends heavily on the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare's Community Development Assistants (CDAs). Communities identified facilitators amongst themselves, having at least a Standard Eight education. The CDAs were responsible for training the facilitators and for monitoring their performance, the progress of the literacy circles and the implementation of their action plans. In September 1999 it was reported that there was a total of 804 participants, 79% of which were women, meeting in average circle sizes of 21 people. Of these participants, it was estimated that about two-thirds were literate and numerate. The review's report was that in three of the four 'successful' circles, there was a wide variation in literacy and numeracy levels – between 38% and 85%, whereas in the 'struggling' circles less than one-third could read and write simple words.

The results reported reflected majority attendance of circles by women, in contrast with the male-dominated circle and village development committees. Attendance tended to stabilise 3-4 months after circles had been established, the 'successful' circles losing just over a third of their participants and the 'struggling' circles losing about half of theirs. The team noted as one of the most striking findings of the discussions held with participants the level of their feelings of empowerment by the Reflect classes. Some of the examples of this empowerment included: women feeling confident to speak at village meetings; pride in being able to sign their names; understanding why it was important and encouraging their children to stay in school, etc.

Comparisons made with the NALP class participants were not definitive. Similar rates of dropout were experienced, there were smaller classes (averaging 18), but literacy levels were harder to assess due to a smaller percentage of participants attending the meetings with the reviewers.

Discussion with 22 facilitators outlined the following top prioritised issues for a well-functioning circle:

- Attitude of the facilitator
- Facilitators' training (need to activate monthly reviews and refresher training)
- Cooperation between committees, headmen and facilitators
- Availability of learning and teaching materials
- Understanding and motivating participants
- Supervisors' visits
- Honoraria

Discussions with government and NGO staff identified many shared issues, among which were:

- Lack of team work
- Lack of NGO-government staff cooperation
- Inadequate leadership to follow up action points
- Delayed responses
- Insufficient training and resources
- Little strategic planning

The team noted that some villages were not waiting for outsiders to resource their action points, but initiating them themselves, the most active committees being those with the greatest amount of co-operation from the village leaders.

A very detailed set of programme indicators had been developed by the Reflect steering committee to monitor the progress of the programme. However, it seemed apparent that little was done with these tools. A baseline survey was produced prior to the commencement of programme activities, covering 4,239 households in 82 villages (half Reflect, half control). Included in the baseline were the following:

- Age stratification

- Household size
- Gender desegregation
- Literacy levels
- Roles of men and women
- Control of resources and decision making powers
- Sources of income and expenditure
- Range and types of local institutions and leadership characteristics
- Extent of community development activities

The baseline will be revisited as part of the final evaluation of the pilot activities.

The reviewers drew up very helpful lists of achievements and challenges for each of the groups with whom they met, for circle participants, facilitators, implementers and the Reflect steering committee. Rather than being left unused, like much of the data collected for monitoring and evaluation purposes, they hoped that this would feed into adjustments to the programme.

2.7 Mali

This is an evaluation of a programme supported by Save the Children (USA) in 11 villages, six months into its operation and designed to improve the functioning of school management committees in each of the villages concerned. The review was carried out over one week in July 1999 by three teams. They met with the village circles and attempted to measure their degree of satisfaction with the programme, as well as its impact on the participants' capacities, through a written exercise focused on reading, writing and numeracy. In addition, the facilitators and village leaders were interviewed. The purpose of the evaluation was to contribute to the strengthening of the programme and to know the population's opinion of Reflect, as well as measuring the participants' capacities and supplying indicators to use in future evaluations.

There was considerable variation in the implementation of Reflect across the 11 villages. Circles met between one and six times a week in sessions of between one and a half and four hours. Circles were composed of members of various village groups and men predominated, comprising 71% of the total number of participants. In two villages, women were excluded entirely by the men from the circles. A facilitators' guide was distributed which covered seven themes, from the history of the village and its map, enumerating its human resources, to the theme of children's education. Circles had covered between two and all seven of the themes in the time leading up to the evaluation. Some 328 participants were involved in the circles altogether; only 8 had dropped out, but just over one quarter (88) did not attend circles regularly.

On the whole, the participants seemed to be quite satisfied with the programme. 192 participants were involved in the evaluation. Of those who expressed their dissatisfaction with the programme (ranging from 10-15%, depending on whether it was reading, writing, numeracy or the circle discussions), the majority were men. Only in the case of writing were the 11% dissatisfied more closely divided between the sexes.

These same participants sat written papers to test their achievement levels in reading, writing and arithmetic. The majority (86-95%) performed at average or good levels in all areas. However, as the evaluators pointed out, further analysis of those achieving these levels showed that most had already been exposed to some sort of literacy campaign, so that it would not be possible to relate their performance on these tests to Reflect alone.

Similarly, although most of the villages had already begun some sort of community development initiative before the Reflect circles, activities such as collective cotton farming were further reinforced in the circles. The circles were embraced both by the village elders and the village authorities in the majority of cases.

The weaknesses that were pointed out in this first pilot stage of running the programme included the inadequate training as well as further supervision offered the facilitators, the relatively low qualifications (sixth grade) for becoming a facilitator, insufficient teaching materials, and having too broad a range of participants in the circles (in terms of their literacy levels).

The recommendations that emerged from the review included:

- To strengthen women's participation in the programme
- To implement a flexible schedule of circle meetings
- To reinforce the facilitators' training and allow for two facilitators per village to be trained to cover absences
- To review the system of supervision and implement refresher training
- To put in place a participatory evaluation system
- To support the activities initiated by circles

Other suggestions included the establishment of better communication between the circles and the rest of the community, especially other community organisations, but also with other circles. In addition, it was suggested that there be more collaboration between different Save the Children programmes.

As can be seen from these summary remarks, this was an evaluation carried out for the implementing agency and should help it improve the delivery and effectiveness of the programme. It was not a formal impact evaluation. The state has not been involved directly in the programme. We have not been given any details of costs, nor was there any control group, nor any baseline measures against which to compare the participants' achievements – whether in terms of literacy or community development/ empowerment. We are not in a position to comment on the possible sustainability of the programme except in terms of Save the Children's own involvement, though the programme's integration within the communities it serves seems to be welcome and accepted.

2.8 Mozambique

This mid-term evaluation is of an ActionAid programme that, at the time of the evaluation (June 1999), had only been operating for about a year and a half in the

Maputo and Zambezia provinces of Mozambique. The purpose of the evaluation was to review the direction, process and evolution of the programme; to provide ActionAid-Mozambique with the means of developing strategies to improve the programme; and to determine the extent to which ActionAid has been successful in supporting the Ministry of Education's efforts to increase the literacy rate and to guarantee the right of basic education for all.

The evaluation was carried out by an external evaluator and ActionAid staff only in Maputo Province and not in Zambezia, as originally planned. In addition to a literature review, the evaluation consisted of semi-structured interviews with participants, facilitators, and local and central state and NGO bodies. Because the evaluation took place over the school holidays, it was difficult to arrange to meet with some of the circles. Only 6 of the 13 facilitators completed evaluation forms.

ActionAid had been asked by the Ministry of Education to expand its development work into adult literacy. The division of labour between ActionAid and the District Departments of Education of the Ministry was not clear from the evaluation. It seems that the District Department staff took responsibility for the implementation of the programme, once they and the facilitators had received initial training from ActionAid.

The evaluation states that:

"All the participants agree that through Reflect they have learned to read and write and....programmes of this nature should be promoted because they help to solve the problems that exist in their villages." (p. 3)

It is difficult to substantiate this from the evidence provided, however. For instance, the evaluators estimated that more than half of the enlisted participants dropped out, and some of the circles with whom they met had as few as 3 participants! Indeed, as the evaluators wrote, *"It seems that when enlisting, the participants had other expectations that were not met, so they gave up."*

The programme entailed training facilitators in two, two-week sessions, during which a facilitators' manual was prepared. However, the criteria for the selection of facilitators had not been applied appropriately. Many of them had insufficient prior education, and limited literacy in the local language. The objective was that circles would be conducted in the local language. Not only did the facilitators experience difficulties on this count, but the reaction to this objective on the part of the participants was also negative: they wanted to learn Portuguese!

Circles were held between two and four times a week, lasting at most, two hours / day. Mostly women attended. Facilitators were not paid salaries, but subsidies provided by contributions from the community. The facilitators' manual was the focus of the circles' for the first year. It has 14 units, including a variety of topics such as: health, education, water, community organisation, etc. It would seem that the paucity of the facilitators' own backgrounds, together with their insufficient training, contributed to a rather rigid use of this manual.

Clearly, there were several reasons to explain why the programme may not have been as successful as it might have been. In addition to the limited amount of

training of minimally educated facilitators, there was also a lack of follow-up or supervision from the district education department. The evaluators explain that many participants had already attended literacy classes in the past, the younger ones attending formal schools. These predisposed participants to learning approaches that, of course, were very different from what was provided. There seem to have been mismatched expectations all round.

It is not possible from the report to work out any efficiency indicators, as the total numbers remaining in the circles are not reported, nor is any type of achievement data reported. However, costing data were collected, and it is estimated that the cost of the Mozambican programme was \$28,000 per year.

Four weaknesses identified by the evaluators led to their recommendations. First, the facilitator's manual and the associated teaching materials should be produced in the community and according to local realities. This will require sufficient training of the facilitators to enable them to carry this out. Second, the process of identification of facilitators needs to be carried out with community participation. Third, there needs to be some assessment / evaluation of the level of the candidates, backed up by appropriate training for the facilitators, specifically in teaching adults. Finally, careful attention needs to be paid to language to enable facilitators to use both the local language predominantly in the circles but to have the skills to combine the local language with Portuguese when appropriate.

The contrasting snapshots provided by the evaluators of two other Reflect programmes, run by GOAL and Save the Children, respectively, are telling. Under the former, motivated facilitators are chosen and paid for by the community. There is regular, weekly supervision and responsiveness to the demands of participants. The circles, which are divided into weaker and more skilled participants, are conducted in Portuguese. There are monthly meetings to analyse the work that has been carried out and to plan and share information. Participants are tested regularly and given feedback on their progress.

One of the interesting aspects of this evaluation is the portrayal of the involvement of the state – here, the Ministry of Education – in the maintenance of the programme. Sustainability is questioned not only by the communities served – given the high level of drop-out and the insufficient responsiveness to the demands/ needs of the communities – but also by the relatively weak state infrastructure which is meant to sustain the programme. The recommendation to replicate the programme in other provinces would appear premature from the evidence at hand, unless the state recognises and is able to meet its requirements and that the programme is tailored to local realities and demands.

2.9 Nepal

The objective of this review was to assess the concept, process, practice and impact of Reflect vis-à-vis other existing approaches to literacy and empowerment activities in the development context of Nepal. Reflect in Nepal has a history dating back to 1995 when it was first piloted in 11 circles. By the end of 1999 it had encompassed 700 circles, about 200 of which were then operating. Reflect is carried out in 28

districts in 13 languages and among 15 different ethnic groups by 30 organisations. The review was carried out over two weeks in December 1999 by a team of six: two external consultants, two staff from the Education Network (an organisation which has superseded ActionAid-Nepal in its training and supervisory role), and two others with experience of Reflect. The two external consultants chose twenty circles operated by 7 institutions in 7 districts, bearing in mind geographic and ethnic representation. The draft report was presented to a group of participants, facilitators, trainers and programme managers for discussion.

The review team was not able to make a comparison of Reflect with other approaches, but they did emerge with some interesting comments on the different outcomes and observations of the processes that characterise Reflect in Nepal. The greatest achievement to which they point is that people have become vocal following their participation in Reflect circles. This has meant predominantly that they have discussed local issues and acted in some cases to address them. The reach of Reflect to the most deprived and difficult to reach communities was also notable as was the hope that had been generated among such people. A trend that Reflect circles are more effective when run with the most marginalized peoples was pointed out, though the circles were found to have operated amongst groups with average rather than the lowest levels of literacy. Disappointing was the fact that the follow-up activities were almost solely directed at savings and credit, without much reflection and so were divorced of any potential liberating effect. In most of the centres observed, participants mentioned sending their children to school, in particular, girls, and the team comments that the lack of literacy gains in the circles themselves may in some way be compensated for by the higher school-age attendance!

The review brought out the need to respond and support actions pertaining to particular issues generated in the circles and the need to integrate the agencies' work across different types of development projects so that 'literacy circles' did not stand alone.

The review pointed to a number of assumptions that have not been empirically proven and require more attention. Among these was the understanding that the drop out rate was low in Reflect circles compared with others. The reason for the high participation rate amongst women, as opposed to men, similarly, is not well understood.

There were several criticisms made of the way in which Reflect had been up scaled to the detriment of the quality of the programmes. It was pointed out that this dilution coincided with the Education Network assuming responsibility for the training from ActionAid-Nepal. These included:

- Self-assessment of the training of trainers seems to have been waylaid.
- The programme has become compartmentalised, covering particular issues, rather than being adapted to different localities.
- Letters had not been covered in most of the circles observed (literacy achievement has been unsatisfactory.)
- Insufficient care had been taken in the selection of facilitators, choosing relatively well-to-do persons who, rather than serving as a bridge to empowerment, were seen as part of the oppressors.

- The need to link local with national issues has been lost without the cross-fertilisation that would take place in exchanges amongst facilitators.
- There have been insufficient refresher courses.
- A secret aura has been placed around the training that has taken place – a lack of transparency.
- There are insufficient materials for neo-literates.
- Emotionally detached (from Reflect) people have begun running the programmes, without sufficient personal commitment.
- PRA has been used as an easy way out of hard statistical work.
- The practice of giving an orientation on Reflect before an institution takes it up has been abandoned.
- Objectives concerning literacy and community empowerment have not been clarified.
- Follow-on activities / future courses have not always been conceived as part of the programme,.
- Environmental issues have been addressed in very limited and fragmented ways.
- The roles and responsibilities of circle management committees have been unclear.
- There is no clear assessment of the output of Reflect.

The reviewers stated that they would not make recommendations, as these should be drawn up with the practitioners. However, several have slipped through, including:

- That an orientation in Reflect be compulsory for organisations wishing to use it, as had previously been the case
- That systematic and continuous follow-up is required in order to assess the impact of Reflect
- That there be regular reflection and soul searching involving critiques of all sorts of Reflect practice and processes at all levels and that an analytical workshop for the trainers and other key players is urgent
- That training be overhauled with an agreed minimum content and possible methods of delivery and tools and that professional trainers should have a particular length of practice and demonstrated ability
- That re-orientation be compulsory for all trainers once every two years in order for them to continue to be trainers
- That the main business of Reflect needs to be clarified, the place of literacy precisely defined and what is central to Reflect in terms of concepts and methods
- That annual documentation of the changes in concepts and practices of Reflect be done nationally and globally (Reflect is rather weak in obtaining and processing factual data and achievements are not properly recorded.)
- That Reflect be appropriately named in different contexts and languages
- That the Reflect support mechanisms be up-graded possibly catered for regionally and with some diversification of skills.

This evaluation provided a very useful summary of where circles have come from and where they have gone, so that one is in a position to judge the progress that has been made. Unlike several of the other evaluations, they state in summary form

what they learned rather than having the reader sift through all the information gathered from individual circles or discussion groups, viz. India.

2.10 South Africa

This evaluation, carried out in June-July 1999, was a mid-term evaluation of a pilot project in Northern Province, of 11 Reflect circles, begun in May 1998. The purpose was to assess how successful the pilot had been in making progress toward the alleviation of poverty through the creation of a practical link between literacy and community development, the establishment and support of critically aware community groups and the trial and enhancement of Reflect.

Once the facilitators had been identified, they underwent three weeks' training, consisting of two workshops, one on PRA and one linking literacy with participatory development. There were 217 participants, all but 9 women, with an average age of 58. One refresher workshop was run during the mealie season, when attendance was low. This ate into the total time once the programme had started. Although the average time spent in circles was meant to be 16 hours / month, or about 4 hours per week, in fact attendance averaged 111 hours over the full period, rather than the original 192 scheduled.

Meetings and focus group discussions were held with participants, facilitators, a representative of the local council ward and a village chief, in addition to the evaluators receiving written submissions from the project manager and field worker. Participants and facilitators were asked to assess their work in the circles against their expectations for what they had hoped to achieve. Participants could write their names and count to varying degrees. Their gaining self-confidence was perhaps more notable than their literacy and numeracy achievement, though their ability simply to write their own names was valued highly. The circles had also begun to develop ideas for small projects and had already arranged eye tests for themselves. In addition, they had requested help from agricultural extension workers, and had dug drainage ditches.

The original plan was to compare the achievement of the Reflect pilot with a traditional adult literacy approach, namely the National Literacy Campaign. The collapse of this campaign, however, made such a comparison impossible.

The evaluation pointed to the following recommendations. For the pilot to continue, funding would be required. It would not be sustainable otherwise. It was noted that the focus of the circles was more on the communities, than the participants. It was felt that a shift of this focus toward the participants would be beneficial, not least for their own motivation. (Indeed, a Record of Achievement for participants after their first year was devised in response to their request for a 'certificate'.) Further support and back up for the facilitators and field worker was seen to be necessary. Other recommendations included more flexible meeting schedules, the encouragement of fund-raising initiatives, the maintenance of a project manager, a consolidation of the links with local government and an expansion of the programme

The South African pilot programme collected important baseline information on individual participants such as their prior education or exposure to literacy training, as well as the usual data on their sex, age and circumstances. When the final evaluation of the pilot is carried out, this will enable the differentiation of various outcomes in addition to the measurements of progress that can be made from the snapshots offered in the mid-term assessment of the involvement of the various circles in different activities, as well as their literacy and numeracy achievement. The certification devised to recognise individual participants' achievement probably needs to be complemented with some communally agreed measures of development activities and empowerment.

The evaluators make the important point that the project had problems in attracting sufficient funding because it fell between the stools of literacy and development, and thus did not fit easily into funders' categories (p.24). Supporting agencies need to consider appropriate responses to this point.

2.10 Sudan

This evaluation was carried out in January 1999 at the end of a three-year women's education programme in Gedaref, Sudan, the funding for which was brokered by World University Service (UK). The programme involved training between 30 and 40 facilitators and 400 women learners and the dissemination of lessons to all provinces of Northern Sudan. The aim of the programme was to test out an adapted version of Reflect in order to improve on previous methods based on the use of a primer.

The evaluation was carried out by a team of five, consisting of both external and internal evaluators over 4 days using interviewers who were part of the programme, interviewing participants, facilitators, the state adult education staff, the community and investigating the wider literacy environment, so researching the post office, the number of letters received and sent from the locales, and also researching the work of scribes in the community.

The particular Reflect approach (called Al Mira'a - mirror) was designed in 1996 following a survey of needs, and resulting in a manual with 10 units about the locale. Adult educators were trained in skills of group work and interactive games. Facilitators and project staff convened groups of learners first for 5 meetings a week over 6 months, later extended to 9 months, during which time learners could select from a revised manual containing 14 units. Facilitators underwent training of between 22 and 35 days.

When the communities were originally surveyed, the women were asked what their goals were. These included such things as: to write letters, to become community leaders, and to write down their own poems. The impact of the programme on the participants was gauged from several sources: a specially convened meeting, questionnaires, conversations with individuals and from participating in an outing organised by some of the women. The wider communities were also interviewed, including several male relatives of participants as well as local committees. What emerged from the evaluation were three meanings of literacy that had been derived from the programme: the acquisition and improvement of skills, for instance,

measuring in numbers or reading signs; nourishment and empowerment (as one woman said, "I have become one of those who speaks."); and useful knowledge (practical ideas to improve their lives.) At the same time, there was acute frustration with the obstacles in the way of starting practical projects.

The evaluators expressed their concern for the sustainability of the programme, given the paucity of materials to support continued uses of literacy by learners and the difficulties encountered in applying ideas for income generation that emerged from the circle discussions. Four points were made in the overall recommendations for the future of the programme. The first was to establish a sustained programme of training for facilitators. Grant applications have already been approved for the extension and replication of the programme. Second, it was pointed out that more creative use as well as the development of more literacy materials was necessary. Third, as the evaluation was unable to focus on numeracy and given the difficulty of starting projects, it was suggested that work be carried out to explore the connection between the learners' numeracy gains and their ability to plan, estimate and budget for their income-generating projects. The fourth point is related to this: that the learners and facilitators be under no illusions that the projects they devise will be supported by WUS (UK), that they need to identify potential support.

In this programme, the state utilised Reflect as a means of adapting its own adult literacy programme, though there is insufficient detail given as to the mechanisms involved, despite our learning of the plans for taking it to scale and replicating and extending the training of more facilitators. Indeed, the progress report for 1997 referred to the 'premature acceptance of the effectiveness of the approach piloted in this project'. This underlines a further point made by the evaluators that a culture of evaluation needs to be built into the programme. All the different facets of what looks to be a successful programme could not be investigated in a four-day evaluation. Even some of the hard evidence that is contained in the report, however, is not investigated. For instance, whilst there seems to be generally high retention of learners in the programme, some communities reported total drop out in the first year, and others with as low as 40% retention, as compared with three-quarters to full retention in most other communities. More investigation would be necessary to reveal what factors differentiate these particular cases.

2.11 Uganda (Foroni)

This evaluation was commissioned by ActionAid-Uganda to assess the impact of Reflect on the communities participating in it in relation to empowerment, acquisition, application and retention of literacy skills and how this influences their attitudes, values and practices. The evaluation was also to recommend strategies for the improvement of the programme and to assess the cost effectiveness of the methodology with regard to: cost per trainer, time spent by participants, training / facilitation materials, and the human resource requirement. The evaluation was carried out over three weeks in October 1999 by two consultants, one local and one external, assisted by two ActionAid Uganda staff. The review covered six field areas, of which four are the ActionAid development areas to which the pilot begun in 1993 has spread. Two are areas in which independent, community-based organisations operate. Five agencies besides ActionAid use the Reflect approach.

The evaluation consisted of interviews of participants, ActionAid staff and partner organisations, a review of literature, and observations made on home visits. Graphics were constructed with some of the participants as a means of assessing their achievements. A consultative review workshop was held in order to get feedback on the evaluation.

The review found that all the programmes are teaching people literacy skills, *“...and they have learnt improved skills and practices relevant and beneficial to their daily livelihood...in many instances, they are practising the skills acquired.”*

They also found that *“there is a gap between what ActionAid offers and what the participants wish to attain in terms of empowerment, skills acquisition and attitude change.”*

Some of the findings are reported below. Some of these are inconsistent with the evaluators' other comments, such as their report that there were no significant changes in attitude and behaviour. The lack of integration within ActionAid projects, however, was noted, and the emphasis on reading and writing to the detriment of empowerment and numeracy. It was felt, along similar lines, that too much emphasis was placed on the tools – that they were becoming ends in themselves. Particular aspects of Reflect, e.g. gender, HIV/Aids and food security suffocated other community initiatives. It was felt that indicators of progress should be worked out and analysed to assess performance, something that the evaluation itself failed to tackle. Guidelines should be laid down for required documentation. And if the programme is to be started in any new place, clear objectives should be designed considering the beneficiaries' interests and expectations.

The review made no attempt to tackle the terms of reference concerning cost-effectiveness and sustainability. It is very difficult to substantiate the findings based on the evidence provided in the report. The final recommendation of the report is telling in terms of the lack of focus and substantiation of the conclusions reached: *“For future reviews to take place, ActionAid should ensure that they have specific focus on particular issues and should be allocated ample time to study the needs in detail.”*

2.13 Uganda (Okech)

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development of the Government of Uganda commissioned this evaluation. Its purpose was: to compare and contrast resource requirements and the effectiveness of the government-run Functional Adult Literacy programme and Reflect; to assess the implementation of adult literacy education; and to recommend future policy on the development of adult literacy education. It was carried out in 1999 by a team composed of 4 Ugandan staff members from the Department of Adult Education and Communication Studies at Makerere University and one international consultant. In contrast with other reviews, which have focused more on process, the focus of this evaluation was on outcomes, together with a consideration of cost-effectiveness.

The evaluation comprises a representative range of situations, sampling at random for testing and interview of 793 individual graduates from 19 sub-counties of 8 districts in six of the eight regions. Because of the nature of the sampling, graduates could not be matched with their instructors or groups. 100 graduates were interviewed together with a control sample of 20 non-literates in each district, to assess their level of functional knowledge, attitudes, and practices. A written test of comprehension, numeracy and writing skills was administered to the graduates and a control group of primary school pupils from Grades 3 and 4. In addition instructors, facilitators and village leaders were interviewed.

Three factors appear to explain the variance in performance on the tests: location (sub-county), the grade reached in primary school, and to a lesser extent, socio-economic background. Length of exposure to literacy classes makes no difference to the knowledge score and not much to the attitude score, but a significant difference to the practice score.

On overall average, participants in Reflect perform considerably better than those in the functional adult literacy programme. However, when years of primary schooling are controlled, participants in the FAL programme with no or only very limited schooling perform better, whilst those with three or more years of primary schooling perform better with the Reflect programme.

In trying to explain the large differences between performance of the participants in the different locales, the study found that they are associated, at least in part, with different cultural attitudes towards education and learning. In turn, these influence both the motivation of individual learners as well as the local support and commitment given to the programme by the villages and districts.

It is important to note that in terms of the perceived benefits of literacy, the majority in all districts were content with reading, writing and arithmetic in general. Other advantages given ranged from those that met practical needs of learners to those attempting to meet their strategic needs.

Also uncovered in the research was that graduates spend more time discussing education and school matters with their boys and girls and more time looking at their homework.

Despite the number of income generating projects that had been started in the classes, the evaluation cast some doubt on their sustainability, either because there is no market or because crucial infrastructure is lacking.

The evaluators had great difficulty in estimating programme costs, in particular unit costs. However, the estimates derived were US\$4 per FAL graduate and US\$9 per Reflect graduate per year. Given the reduced central government input to these programmes, the evaluation casts doubt on the programmes' sustainability.

The majority of participants had attained a level of reading, writing and numeracy higher than that of Primary Four pupils. However, the average level of attainment is very limited.

The quality of implementation is the major explanation of the variations in the attainments of learners.

Graduates perform considerably better than non-literates. However, the mean scores for practice were relatively low compared with those for knowledge and attitudes. The problem may be that participants cannot put their newfound knowledge into practice, perhaps because of peer pressure, and more simply, because of their lack of resources.

On the whole the majority of learners seemed satisfied with the benefits they had reaped as a result of participating in the programme. However, the activities in which the learners and graduates are engaged are still at the bare subsistence level.

Some resource problems were uncovered in the study: the inequitable distribution of primers, the general lack of relevant reading materials, the lack of incentives for instructors, and dismal monitoring and supervision. It was estimated that the unit costs of participation are about US\$4.50 a year. If a reasonable amount is added on to ensure sustainability (in particular, the commitment of the instructors), the estimated amount would be US\$13 a year.

In this evaluation, one has the representativeness that no other study offers. The data on which the conclusions are based is also presented, so that one is in a position to judge for oneself, and not have only to take the evaluators' opinion. Information is available on resource levels, unlike most of the other evaluations. Whereas demand for the programme has been interpreted in some of the other evaluations as a symbol of sustainability, here, one gets some feel for the costing of the programmes so that the notion of sustainability goes beyond merely demand. Having various control groups, one can compare standards, something that is not the case with the other studies.

This is not just a dry quantitative study. In addition to the wealth of detail on a variety of outcomes, one also gets the views of the communities, though it is distinguished from other studies by its focus more on outcomes than process. Circles were not observed. As the study points out, because of the way in which the sample was drawn, it is not possible to describe the relationship between particular instructors and resource patterns and individuals' outcomes. However, to be fair, neither does one with the other evaluations, given their unquantified and more impressionistic measures of outcomes.

2.14 TABULAR SUMMARIES OF THE 13 EVALUATIONS

Table 1 below summarises in tabular form the thirteen evaluations described above.

**Table 1:
TABULAR SUMMARIES OF THE 13 EVALUATIONS**

BANGLADESH

Programme Context	Pilot in 10 circles in 1994, consolidation through 9 partners in 1995, extending to 36 programmes by 1999.
Reflect Approach	27,000 participants – all but 500 women, covered by 36 implementing organisations, supported by Reflect Coordinating Unit; 2-month preparatory period, 9-month circle; terminal evaluation; 12-month post-circle period; common Reflect manual with guided keywords and graphics.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	End of five-year programme evaluation; July-August 1999; required for new funding proposal to DFID; to enable AA to make informed decisions about mainstreaming the programme.
Evaluation Methodology	6-person team of external and internal evaluators; one month; literature review, meetings and discussions with AA and partners, learners and facilitators, and field observations; Coordinating Unit categorised implementing organisations by quality and 1 good and weak circle chosen from each of three categories plus 4 new organisations,
Literacy / Numeracy	Reported that 60% of 'graduates' have at least minimum competencies (lowest amongst adults, highest amongst adolescents) but in 1997-8 tracer study, levels of minimum competencies in numeracy were reported as between 8-14%; estimate that 40% participants achieve sustainable literacy.
Empowerment	Growth in assertiveness and confidence only for the learners belonging to the good / strong circles, not the weak ones.
Other Outcomes	74% participants using their skills in helping their children in their education, writing letters, maintaining household accounts, etc.; positive but impressionistic views of changes effected in women / girls.
Weaknesses	Focus in Reflect on the more easily addressed practical, rather than the longer-term, strategic gender needs and interests; insufficient interface with other development programmes to see through action points to socio-economic benefits; mechanical translation of issues and action points into stereotypical activities or potential actions that cannot be carried out.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of critical analysis and engendering more discussion and debate on Reflect • Upgrading monitoring and evaluation • Develop standardised and quantitative testing of literacy achievement that integrates set competency levels with the terminal evaluation at 9 months. • Need for greater flexibility and creativity of facilitators – through adequate training inputs and enabling supervisions • Bring to scale • Endorse need for comparative study of different literacy approaches.

EL SALVADOR

Programme Context	One of three original pilots in 1993; 22 organisations now in network with CIAZO as coordinator; roots in popular education, focus on empowerment, democracy and sustainable local development.
Reflect Approach	Perception that Reflect is more useful for organisation and empowerment than for literacy; 10-12 day training plus limited technical support.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	To investigate the process and impact of Reflect and to come up with lessons for improving its future implementation.
Evaluation Methodology	Four people two months, between September and November 1999; documentation, interviews, workshop and observation of activities.
Literacy / Numeracy	N/A
Empowerment	Women less shy, more self-esteem; increased participation in circles and communities (though no prior measure).
Other Outcomes	Environment receives much attention; Reflect has enabled CIAZO to become a mediator of organisations in the region; false expectations leading to drop-out when people don't get traditional literacy lessons.
Weaknesses	Problems in the use of Reflect techniques; distance between theoretical understanding and practice; high facilitator turnover; insufficient training and follow up; insufficient power analysis; problems finding facilitators.
Recommendations	Need to clarify aims and role in community development and literacy; need to strengthen and improve training; training required in management processes to lead to plans of action at local level based on power analysis of different actors, development of more democratic and responsible leadership styles and development of negotiation and conflict resolution skills; need to consider how to make use of existing capacity in communities; need to analyse and improve all the activities from a gender perspective; need to study successful actions and learn from them.

GHANA (BILFACU)

Programme Context	ActionAid supported in 5 communities in isolated area of Ghana, through local organisation, BILFACU; 79 participants; begun in February 1998.
Reflect Approach	Weekly circle meetings – mostly women, facilitators men; adaptation of Ugandan manual; 9 days' initial training; monthly facilitators' meetings; weekly supervision; materials provided by BILFACU; refresher courses every 3 months; 3-monthly reports; covered 10-11 units; no incentives but working tools provided
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	At one year; 3-day evaluation in March 1999 to gauge how they would like to proceed and how far they had got over the year.
Evaluation Methodology	Participatory, involving team of BILFACU and ActionAid staff, facilitator, community leader and representatives of interested organisations; focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and circles' time lines.
Literacy / Numeracy	Participants asked to write a short letter – most could write only a few words; majority could do addition, subtraction and multiplication, not division.
Empowerment	Action points carried out successfully as long as no need for external financing; lots of energy and commitment and many changes and activities reported in communities, though action points derived uniformly from original manual; beginnings of some changes in traditional men and women's roles reported in individual communities.
Other Outcomes	Men more integrated into process than usual.
Weaknesses	Dependence on external funding, not sustainable, underestimated possible achievements in literacy (undervalued).
Recommendations	Scale up; train facilitators in micro-planning techniques; train Literacy Committees in advocacy; investigate further factors contributing to the poor reading writing and numeracy skills; adapt facilitators' guide.

GHANA (NFED)

Programme Context	In 1997 ActionAid supported Non-Formal Education Division (NFED) of Ministry of Education to pilot Reflect in two districts.
Reflect Approach	251 participants (44% women); circles 4x week; fortnightly supervision.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	To compare Reflect pilot with NFED Functional Skills and Literacy Project and consider partnerships to extend coverage.
Evaluation Methodology	Meetings with field staff, participants; review of learning and teaching materials, interviews with community leaders and participants, development projects visited.
Literacy / Numeracy	Unclear though some could write simple letters.
Empowerment	Community engagement, though threatened by lack of external finance of action points.
Other Outcomes	Improved community interaction.
Weaknesses	Inadequate materials, including follow up reading materials, inadequate training of trainers, lowered selection criteria for facilitators.
Recommendations	Extend Reflect not as project, but as "integral part of development process."

INDIA

Programme Context	Catering for landless labourers and marginalized farmers; different programmes started at different times between 1996-7.
Reflect Approach	Varied approaches among organisations: between daily and weekly meetings, and between 20 and 60 days facilitators' training, for instance.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	Commissioned by DFID (India) to investigate the sustainability of Reflect, its potential for up scaling, and the possibility of the convergence of Reflect with the national literacy campaigns; 8-months between September 1998 and April 1999 involving 4 national researchers; first draft March 2000.
Evaluation Methodology	Three cases selected in under-developed regions supported by three different organisations; two 'good' and two 'problematic' circles identified by organisation in each region; group discussions with AA and partner organisations, trainers, facilitators and participants; interviews with participants, facilitators and community members / leaders in selected circles / villages; secondary data studies.
Literacy / Numeracy	Literacy component neglected where Reflect adopted in all areas of development work; difficulty of relating inputs and outcomes specifically related to Reflect; results of NGO programmes comparable to National Literacy Programme in terms of literacy, though wider outcomes for Reflect.
Empowerment	Different types of community actions detailed; number of collective actions per circle by organisation enumerated; evaluation raises the question of the limits of empowering processes given the inequitable socio-economic, political and gendered opportunity.
Other Outcomes	At least 50% of those enrolled chose not to acquire literacy; cost per learner per year estimated at Rs.1.313, for Adithi: Rs.451 – differentials reflected in facilitators' salary differences Rs.400 vs. 1.000 per month.
Weaknesses	Need for Reflect to confront <i>'the issue of alphabets in their own right.'</i> MKP's ambivalence towards literacy was a factor why literacy levels had not progressed adequately; tendency to over-emphasise aspects of 'spontaneity' and flexibility in the name of participation at the cost of the crucial role of leadership and its responsibility for planning of implementation; continuing ambivalence between prioritisation given to or the balance between literacy and empowerment.
Recommendations	Reflect should be assessed on more than literacy achievement; other recommendations relate specifically to up scaling.

MALAWI

Programme Context	Pilot of four NGOs in 7 districts over 3 years.
Reflect Approach	Implementation depends on government Community Development Assistants (CDAs); facilitators with at least eighth grade identified by communities; CDAs responsible for training facilitators, monitoring their performance, the progress of literacy circles and implementation of action plans; 804 participants (79% women) meeting in circles averaging 21 each.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	Mid-term review of pilot after 1 year; 2 weeks in December 1999; purpose: to investigate the management of Reflect, the differences it had made in circles and communities and to make practical recommendations based on the lessons learned.
Evaluation Methodology	Five people, 1 external consultant and 2 each from national and regional offices; 4/7 districts chosen, one from each of the NGOs and chosen to ensure geographical diversity; each NGO selected 2 circles (1 strong and 1 struggling) and a control group (an average NALP class); focus group discussion with NGO and government staff, Reflect and NALP facilitators and participants; discussions held with community leaders; participants' notebooks viewed; and informal testing administered of written and numeracy skills.
Literacy Numeracy /	Two-thirds of participants literate and numerate; in some circles wide variation; in 'struggling' circles fewer than 1/3 could read and write simple words; (inconclusive comparisons with NALP participants as few turned up to discussions).
Empowerment	Reported strong feelings of empowerment.
Other Outcomes	A third to a half drop-out from successful and struggling circles respectively; most successful committees, those with greatest amount of cooperation from village leaders.
Weaknesses	Lack of team work; lack of NGO-government staff cooperation; inadequate leadership to follow up action points; insufficient training and resources; little strategic planning; little done with indicators to monitor progress.
Recommendations	Challenges for each group (participants, facilitators, implementers and steering committee) written up, including such things as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely honoraria and provision of adequate materials • More support, supervision and refresher training • Encouragement for facilitators to adapt materials and extend • Improve documentation and monitoring of impact and making it participatory.

MALI

Programme Context	Save the Children (USA) supported in 11 villages; 328 participants (71% men).
Reflect Approach	Circles 1-6x / wk of 1½ -4 hrs; covered 2-7 (all) themes of facilitators' guide.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	At 6 months; to strengthen programme and to gauge population's opinion.
Evaluation Methodology	1 week (July 1999); 3 teams; meetings with 192 participants of 11 village circles, village leaders, facilitators, written numeracy and literacy test.
Literacy / Numeracy	86-95% performed at average or good levels in reading, writing and arithmetic (most already exposed to some literacy training).
Empowerment	Reinforcement of community development initiatives such as collective cotton farming (response to question).
Other Outcomes	85-90% satisfied with programme; 25% participants don't attend regularly.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inadequate training and supervision offered facilitators • low qualifications of facilitators • insufficient teaching materials' • too broad a range of participants.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthen women's participation • implement flexible meeting schedule • reinforce facilitators' training and train two per village • review supervision system and implement refresher training • implement participatory evaluation; support circle-initiated activities • establish better communication between circles and community • institute more collaboration between different SCF programmes.

MOZAMBIQUE

Programme Context	ActionAid programme begun 1995 in 2 provinces (Maputo and Zambezia) implemented by district directors of education; agricultural districts affected by floods and droughts, lacking agricultural inputs.
Reflect Approach	Training of facilitators (2 2-week session); circles held 2-4x / week for at most 2 hours / day; no salaries, but contributions from communities; manual with 14 units.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	At 1½ years – to review the direction, process and evolution of the programme; to provide means of improving it; to gauge support to the Ministry of Education in its efforts.
Evaluation Methodology	June 1999 during school holidays; in Maputo province only – 2 districts (350 participants recorded); literature review, interviews with participants, facilitators, local and central state and NGO bodies; external evaluator + AA country staff.
Literacy / Numeracy	<i>“all participants agree that...they have learned to read and write”</i> (unsubstantiated).
Empowerment	Link with community initiatives unclear.
Effectiveness, Efficiency	Cost of \$28,000 per year (numbers remaining in circles not reported, nor achievement indicators).
Other Outcomes	More than half dropped out.
Weaknesses	Facilitators with insufficient prior education, limited literacy in local language, rigid use of manual; lack of follow-up supervision by district education department.
Lessons	Mismatched expectations: local language vs. Portuguese; traditional vs. Reflect learning approaches.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitator’s manual and other teaching materials should be produced in the community according to local realities • identification of facilitators needs to be carried out with community participation • there needs to be some assessment / evaluation of the level of the candidates, backed up by appropriate training, especially in teaching adults • careful attention needs to be paid to language – to use both the local language predominantly and to combine with Portuguese when appropriate.

NEPAL

Programme Context	First piloted in 1995 in 11 circles; end of 1999 had encompassed 700 circles, 200 then operating through 30 organisations in 28 districts; ActionAid-Nepal superseded by Education Network in training.
Reflect Approach	Diluted quality with expansion.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	December 1999; 2 weeks; 6-person team of external and internal consultants; to assess the concept, process, practice and impact of Reflect vis-à-vis other existing approaches and practices of literacy and empowering activities in the development context of Nepal.
Evaluation Methodology	20 circles in 7 districts operated by 7 organisations selected by external consultants bearing in mind geographical and ethnic diversity; circles observed and discussions held of draft report with participants, facilitators, trainers and programme managers.
Literacy / Numeracy	Most circles did not cover letters and literacy achievement was unsatisfactory.
Empowerment	People have become vocal and in some cases have acted to address local issues; follow up activities almost solely involving saving and credit.
Other Outcomes	More effective when run with the most marginalized peoples; reaching deprived and remote communities; school-age attendance seen to, including of girls.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment of the training of trainers seems to have been waylaid. • The programme has become compartmentalised, covering particular issues, rather than being adapted to different localities. • Insufficient care had been taken in the selection of facilitators, choosing relatively well-to-do persons who, rather than serving as a bridge to empowerment, were seen as part of the oppressors. • The need to link local with national issues has been lost without the cross-fertilisation that would take place in exchanges amongst facilitators. • There have been insufficient refresher courses. • A secret aura has been placed around the training that has taken place – a lack of transparency. • There are insufficient materials for neo-literates. • Emotionally detached (from Reflect) people have begun running the programmes, without sufficient personal commitment. • PRA has been used as an easy way out of hard statistical work. • The practice of giving an orientation on Reflect before an institution takes it up has been abandoned. • Objectives concerning literacy and community empowerment have not been clarified. • Follow-on activities / future courses have not always been conceived as part of the programme. • Environmental issues have been addressed in very limited and fragmented ways. • The roles and responsibilities of circle management committees have been unclear. • There is no clear assessment of the output of Reflect.

<p>Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That an orientation to Reflect be compulsory for organisations wishing to use it, as had previously been the case • That systematic and continuous follow-up is required in order to assess the impact of Reflect • That there be regular reflection and soul searching involving critiques of all sorts of Reflect practice and processes at all levels and that an analytical workshop of the trainers and other key players is urgent • That training be overhauled with an agreed minimum content and possible methods of delivery and tools and that professional trainers should have a particular length of practice and demonstrated ability • That re-orientation be compulsory for all trainers once every two years in order for them to continue to be trainers • That the main business of Reflect needs to be clarified, the place of literacy precisely defined and what is central to Reflect in terms of concepts and methods • That annual documentation of the changes in concepts and practices of Reflect be done nationally and globally (Reflect is rather weak in obtaining and processing factual data and achievements are not properly recorded.) • That Reflect be appropriately named in different contexts and languages • That the Reflect support mechanisms be upgraded possibly catered for regionally and with some diversification of skills.
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SOUTH AFRICA

Programme Context	Pilot project in 11 circles in Northern Province begun in May 1998.
Reflect Approach	Two workshops for facilitators in February and March 1998 on PRA and linking literacy with participatory development (3 weeks in total); 1 refresher workshop 217 participants (9 men), average age 58, assessment forms and records of achievement, 176 hours / year maximum circle time, average 93.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	To assess how successful the pilot had been in making progress toward the alleviation of poverty through the creation of a practical link between literacy and community development, the establishment and support of critically aware community groups and the trial and enhancement of Reflect. Carried out June-July 1999.
Evaluation Methodology	Meetings and focus group discussions with participants, facilitators and a representative of the local council ward and a village chief. Written submissions from project manager and field worker.
Literacy / Numeracy	Participants could write their names and count to varying degrees.
Empowerment	Gaining self-confidence, beginnings of ideas of small development projects.
Other Outcomes	Arranged for eye tests, drainage ditches, requested agricultural extension.
Weaknesses	Require funding for continuation, insufficient focus on participants' rather than community needs; facilitators and field worker need support and back up.
Recommendations	Additional facilitator training; more focus on participants themselves, not just on community; more flexible meeting schedules; encourage fundraising initiatives; funding needs to be sought for Reflect survival; generic format needed for field worker's reports; maintain project manager; consolidate links with local structures, especially local government; expand Reflect.

SUDAN

Programme Context	WUS(UK)-funded women's education programme to test out adapted version of Reflect amongst very poor communities in area including relief camps for refugees.
Reflect Approach	Trained 30-40 facilitators between 22-35 days and 400 women learners, following survey of needs, using manual developed with 14 units about locale; 5 meetings / week for 9 months.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	Final evaluation at end of 3-year programme; January 1999.
Evaluation Methodology	1 external and 4 internal evaluators over 4 days, interviewed participants, 35 facilitators, state adult education staff, the community, and investigated the wider literacy environment.
Literacy / Numeracy	Three meanings of literacy derived from programme: the acquisition and improvement of skills; nourishment and empowerment; and useful knowledge.
Empowerment	See above.
Other Outcomes	Frustration with obstacles to starting practical, income-generating projects.
Weaknesses	N/A
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a sustained programme of training for facilitators • More creative use and development of literacy materials • Explore connection between numeracy gains and planning and budgeting for projects • Identify potential support for income-generating projects.

UGANDA (Froni)

Programme Context	Pilot project begun by ActionAid in 1993, evaluated and led to Reflect Co-ordination Unit being established; estimated total enrolment 10,000; 5 agencies besides AA use approach.
Reflect Approach	Not described in report, but presumably same as in Archer, Cottingham, 10 days' initial facilitators' training, fortnightly training thereafter, refresher courses every 6 months, field worker visits.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	Commissioned by ActionAid to assess the impact of Reflect on the communities in relation to empowerment, acquisition, application and retention of literacy skills and how this influences their attitudes, values and practices – to recommend strategies for improvement and assess cost-effectiveness.
Evaluation Methodology	October 1999; 3 weeks; 1 external and 1 local consultant assisted by AA staff; interviews of participants, AA and partner organisation staff, literature review, home visit observations; graphics to assess participants' achievements; consultative review workshop; covered 6 field areas (4 AA).
Literacy / Numeracy	All programmes teaching people literacy skills and participants have learnt and in many cases practising skills relevant and beneficial to daily livelihood.
Empowerment	Not as significant changes in attitude and behaviour as in literacy skills.
Other Outcomes	Gap between what AA offers and what participants wish to attain in terms of empowerment, skills acquisition and attitude change; emphasis on reading and writing to detriment of empowerment and numeracy.
Weaknesses	Lack of integration within AA projects; too much emphasis on the tools; particular aspects (e.g. gender, HIV / Aids and food security) suffocate other community initiatives; inadequate power analysis.
Recommendations	Indicators of progress need to be worked out and analysed to assess performance; guidelines necessary for required documentation; clear objectives for new programmes to include beneficiaries' interests and expectations.

UGANDA (Okech)

Programme Context	Integrated Non-formal Basic Education pilot project launched in 1992 in 1 district of each of the 8 regions; emphasised functional aspects of literacy and designed to help people improve their living conditions; expanded into national Functional Adult Literacy programme under decentralised management; total 1999 enrolment: 140,000 learners; NGO coverage of between 20-30,000; combined total covers less than 4% of the 5m non-literate adults.
Reflect Approach	Pilot project begun by ActionAid in 1993, evaluated and led to Reflect Co-ordination Unit being established; estimated total enrolment 10,000.
Evaluation Purpose / Timing	Commissioned by the government via the World Bank to compare and contrast resource requirements and the effectiveness of the government-run Functional Adult Literacy programme and Reflect.
Evaluation Methodology	External consultant plus 4 Makerere Uganda staff members; 1999; random sampling and testing of 793 'graduates' in 6 of the 8 regions; interview of 100 graduates; control sample of 20 non-literates in each of the 8 districts; written test of comprehension, numeracy and writing administered to 'graduates' and control group of Grade 3-4 primary school pupils; interviews of instructors, facilitators and village leaders.
Literacy / Numeracy	Nearly everyone in the sample could read and understand simple questions, but the average numeracy score was 70% and the average score for more complicated comprehension questions was just over 60%; mean score on writing test was just under 40%; once prior schooling controlled for, there was little difference between the graduates of the FAL and those of Reflect; those with 3 or more years of primary schooling perform better with Reflect, while those with little to no schooling perform better with FAL.
Empowerment	Majority content with reading, writing and arithmetic in general; other benefits - meeting practical and strategic needs: improved family health, participation in civic activities, increased self-confidence.
Other Outcomes	Graduates performed better than Primary 3 and 4 pupils; assessment of retention of literacy and numeracy skills not possible; functional knowledge, attitudes and practices of graduates better than for non-literate control group; length of exposure to literacy classes makes no difference to knowledge score and not much to attitude score, but significant difference to practice score; graduates spend more time discussing education and school matters with their kids and more time looking at their homework; average cost of FAL: \$4 per participant per year; Reflect: \$9; the quality of implementation is the major explanation of the variations in the attainments of learners.
Weaknesses	Doubtful if numerous income generating projects would be sustainable – lack of market and necessary infrastructure; activities in which learners engaged are still at the bare subsistence level – hardly the kind which will enable many of them to break out of poverty; lack of post-literacy materials; instructors' lack of incentives threaten programme; monitoring and supervision situation is dismal.
Recommendations	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development should initiate discussions on options for a framework of shared responsibility for a national pool of adult educators; FAL Coordinating Unit should investigate how best to enhance quality of learning materials; multiply literature in indigenous languages; emphasise information on upgrading common rural occupations to link literacy, education

	and ability to raise productivity.
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3. LESSONS / ISSUES ARISING FROM REFLECT PROGRAMMES

There are very different ‘lessons’ that can be drawn from the set of evaluations reviewed in this report. Some of the lessons have to do with Reflect itself. Some have to do with carrying out evaluations of a programme such as Reflect. Not only is there diversity in the programmes under review, but there is also tremendous diversity in the approaches to evaluation used. An attempt will be made in this section to summarise the various issues arising from the different Reflect programmes themselves, and in the next section, in terms of the approaches to the evaluations of them.

3.1 Literacy vs. empowerment

Probably the most fundamental issue raised in a number of the evaluations was the relative priority given to literacy or empowerment in Reflect. Much of the distinction related to the implementing organisations themselves. An organisation used only to running adult literacy courses is very different from one used to facilitating integrated community development. In the case of the El Salvador work, probably the most extreme case under review here, one person interviewed said, *“Reflect is not for literacy, it would need to be adapted.”* This is in striking contrast, for instance, to the Ghanaian or Ugandan cases in which Reflect was being evaluated specifically for its literacy outcomes against more traditional approaches.

The divergence of views on this issue seen across the different evaluations in different countries is also, in part, a matter of how Reflect has developed. In the original Reflect Mother Manual (1996) Reflect is described as:

“a new approach to adult literacy which fuses the theory of Paulo Freire and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal.”

The ‘renewed’ definition (Phnuyal, Archer and Cottingham,1998) doesn’t even mention the word ‘literacy’. Reflect is described as:

“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.”

Such a broad definition full of the ideals of potential achievements of Reflect programmes presents an evaluation challenge that goes considerably beyond testing the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy. It also crosses several disciplinary boundaries that package different types of outcomes such as literacy and numeracy, empowerment, development, democratisation, poverty alleviation, etc.

This much broader definition comes at a time when some of the international development agencies are reconsidering their earlier abandonment of adult literacy programmes on grounds of inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and thus, the evaluations of programmes such as Reflect are receiving close scrutiny. However, some of these disciplinary boundaries are likely to continue to pose challenges, especially where these boundaries are reflected in ministerial divisions such as between education and community development. Thus, when trying to identify in-country partners, for instance, a traditional functional adult literacy trainer may continue to be challenged by the Reflect paradigm and want to continue to 'deliver' her / his course. Turf battles between potential partners from different camps may also be waged. A challenge pointed out in the Ghanaian BILFACU evaluation was finding the *"means to neutralise the veiled friction between the two approaches, namely FAL (Functional Adult Literacy) and Reflect."*

Further, whilst central understandings of Reflect may have moved along the trajectory described above, this does not necessarily imply that they have been shared successfully in-situ. Thus, another related issue is the lack of definition of expected outcomes from the various Reflect programmes and the means of measuring them. For instance, in the Indian evaluation, it was stated:

"the place of literacy within the empowering and action components of Reflect have still to be conceptualised and operationalised. The tendency of seeing the relation between the two as a question of either / or, or before / after appears to persist." (p. 59)

A similar conclusion was reached in the Nepal study: the need to clarify what the main business of Reflect is and the place of literacy to be precisely defined. (p. 42)

3.2 Relationships between Reflect circles and other community organisations and with different sectors of international development agencies

Related to this fundamental intertwining of literacy and empowerment is the often missing relationship between Reflect circles and other community development organisations. In the Ugandan evaluation (Okech) it was pointed out that not only is there a need to link the work being done by NGOs and government, but within government, other departments beside Community Development such as Health, Agriculture, Forestry, etc. might find literacy education useful. Further, given that many learners joined the programmes in the hope of gaining access to a credit or small grant scheme, it would be worthwhile considering strengthening such linkages. In the Bangladesh evaluation, the lack of sufficient interface with other development programmes was identified as hindering Reflect's ability to see action points through to their socio-economic benefits. For the ideals of the 'renewed' definition of Reflect to be realised, there needs to be wider understanding of the development and empowerment aims and the integration of Reflect practice beyond those using the approach.

In addition, there is the often-missing relationship within international development agencies between Reflect programmes and their other sectoral work. For instance, a specific recommendation made in the evaluation of the Reflect work in Mali was that

there needed to be collaboration between the different sectors of the Save the Children Fund, e.g. those in charge of literacy, those responsible for gender concerns, and the concerned communities. Similarly, within the ActionAid work in Uganda (Foroni), it was pointed out that *“there exists a tendency to take Reflect Action as a distinct programme (among others) and it is implemented as such. This has created ...a reduction of Reflect Action to only a ‘literacy programme.’”* (p. 6)

3.3 Need for further development training

Several of the evaluations suggested that facilitators be offered additional training which could help them to extend the development aims of the circles, for instance, such things as micro planning, strategic planning, advocacy, leadership training, etc. In the Ghana BILFACU evaluation, it was recommended that facilitators receive training in simple micro-planning techniques to help them to develop the action points identified in their circles. In addition, the need for advocacy in order to obtain assistance was also pointed out. In the El Salvador evaluation the importance of conflict resolution skills was identified as a necessary adjunct to the facilitators' training, given the roles played by the Reflect circles. Clearly, where the aim is for the circles to be well-resourced, well-functioning community development organisations, utilising the literacy that has helped to empower them, it is important that the necessary skills to further such aims are available.

3.4 Action points and resources

Related to all of the above points is the need to tackle the necessary resource requirements for action points. This may mean leveraging resources from governmental and non-governmental organisations alike, or it may entail attracting new resources. It is important that circles, especially those in the most marginalized communities, are not left high and dry just at the point at which they are mobilising themselves. This is an issue raised in several of the evaluations and underlies the challenge of promoting literacy in a context of empowerment, particularly where the support structures are not intersectoral, but within, say, a non-formal education department alone. In the Sudan evaluation, it was emphasised that facilitators should reinforce the instruction to the participants that they should concentrate on actions that can be achieved locally and that do not require external resources but at the same time, identify government and non-governmental agencies that can be of help (p. 32-3). The Ugandan evaluation (Okech) recommends that instructional materials should *“continue to emphasise information on upgrading common rural occupations, so that learners more easily understand the link between literacy, continuing education and their abilities to increase the productivity of their livelihoods.”* (p. 100)

3.5 The role of the state and scaling up Reflect

There is an inherent tension between a successful Reflect programme and its being scaled up with large state involvement. The role of the state was an issue in several of the evaluations, not only in terms of contrasting state-run literacy programmes with

Reflect but also in terms of establishing partnerships between different stakeholders. Some of the models of NGO-state partnerships reduce the role of NGOs merely to service providers; others allow more diverse challenges to state patterns of provision. In the same way that international development agencies are scrutinising Reflect's role in achieving the desired literacy goals, so individual governments want to know that the more limited literacy roles which Reflect can play in communities will be productive and cost-effective relative to their own programmes. Adult literacy has been a poor relation of basic and higher education in ministerial budget wrangling, and Reflect facilitators – like those of other literacy approaches – don't have much political clout relative to formal school teachers.

In the Ghanaian (NFED) evaluation the cost of maintaining the enhanced training and supervision, which the Reflect programme offers, was seen as prohibitive for the expansion of the programme. The transport and meal allowances paid in the pilot were clearly an incentive, which would require a political commitment to replicate widely. In the Mozambique evaluation, the lack of follow-up supervision by the district education department was also pointed out as a significant weakness of the programme. In the Malawi evaluation, other difficulties were pointed out regarding the lack of co-operation between government and NGO staff. The government's lack of resources, especially vehicles, their bureaucratic processes, insufficiently trained and high turnover of staff meant that expanding to scale would be problematic.

3.6 Facilitators: criteria, identification, selection, training, supervision and follow-up

Facilitators are the crux of Reflect programmes. Thus, it is no surprise that there were many issues raised in the different evaluations concerning them, with regard to the criteria for their selection, their actual identification, and the training, supervision and follow-up that they are afforded. The variation across the Reflect programmes within and across countries, in terms of their focus, the different types of implementing organisations, their resourcing, their relationships with the communities they are serving and any state-run programmes, makes it impossible to draw hard and fast relations between particular variables and the success of the programme. Of course, the varied types of measurement of varied outcomes, some ill defined, also preclude firm guidelines regarding what works. Nonetheless, the evaluations do point to similar concerns surrounding the Reflect facilitators across the various programmes. The most common of these concerns are reported below.

The initial training, supervision and follow-up training are all clearly inter-related, so any deficiencies can both be compounded and corrected. Many of the evaluations reported insufficient training and supervision of one sort or another. It is important to consider holistically what can realistically be covered over what period of time in each. One of the criticisms expressed in the El Salvador evaluation was that the follow-up training was not conceived alongside the other training, but more as an afterthought. The evaluation of the Bangladesh programme pointed to the need for greater flexibility and creativity on the part of the facilitators.

There was also criticism concerning the process of selecting Reflect facilitators. The importance of involving the communities to be served was brought out in the

Mozambique evaluation. Also, the facilitators were criticised for having too little prior education. In Nepal, the facilitators were thought to be too well to do, and thus part of the problem, rather than a conduit out of oppression. Too little prior education or lowered selection criteria were other concerns. Insufficient facilitator incentives were a problem noted in several of the evaluations, e.g. Uganda (Okech). These weaknesses are inter-related, as very often having sufficient prior education is at odds with selecting a member of a marginalized community, or having sufficient knowledge of the local language. Similarly, insufficient incentives result in high turnover. There are no magic bullets here: the issues surrounding facilitator selection and training have to be dealt with as a package.

3.7 Materials, resourcing and sustainability

One of the attractions to governments considering Reflect against their own literacy programmes is that the circles develop their own learning materials rather than primers having to be provided. However, not only is there still the need for post-literacy materials, but more generally, and of extreme importance, material in local languages. Concern was expressed in several of the evaluations over the lack of such materials, for example in Mozambique, in Ghana and in Uganda (Okech). Where Reflect is under consideration as an approach to be up scaled beyond NGO projects, the major cost of materials, training, refresher courses and supervision, depending on the degree of integration with existing Ministry programmes, will impact upon the sustainability of the programme.

3.8 Culture of evaluation: improving monitoring and evaluation

Guidelines for improving monitoring and evaluation will be dealt with in the subsequent section. However, there is an overriding concern expressed in several Reflect evaluations with the need to foster a 'culture' of evaluation within the programmes. As has been seen in the summaries, there have been a variety of evaluation approaches, by no means all of which have served the purposes of the participants. In some cases indicators have been developed but used to little purpose (Malawi), in other cases indicators have yet to be devised, no less utilised (Uganda - Okech). Related to this and as observed above, the expected outcomes of many Reflect programmes have remained fuzzy, certainly not sufficiently well defined for indicator development. Similarly, the output or outcomes of several programmes remain unassessed, making it difficult to develop feedback loops related to positive behaviours. The purpose of participatory evaluation where it has been used, has often been left vague and in other cases hasn't been invoked.

The following section will pick up these points in the context of elaborating what has been learnt about evaluating from the set of evaluations reviewed here.

4. OVERVIEW AND LESSONS FROM THE EVALUATIONS

The varied nature of the evaluations under review here can be judged from the summaries. Only in the case of the Sudan and Bangladesh were these ‘final’ evaluations, completed after 3 and 5 years, respectively. The other evaluations were carried out at anything from 6 months to 6 years of the programmes running, and many of the evaluations were completed in two weeks or less. Four of the evaluations were extensive, covering both large numbers of participants and taking as long as 8 months, in the case of the Indian evaluation.

How did the purposes of these evaluations vary and to what extent were their expectations met and for whom? A review of these variations should help lead us toward some guidelines for future evaluations. Table 2 summarises some of this information. Whether an evaluation is noted as ‘conclusive’ or ‘inconclusive’ relates to whether it was able to substantiate the conclusions or recommendations reached and whether the original purpose of the evaluation was met. Whilst inconclusive, an evaluation may still be of value!

Two of the evaluations, the Uganda (Okech) and the Ghana (NFED) were carried out for government ministries in order to compare Reflect with the government’s own literacy programme. None of the other evaluations had such a specific comparison as its term of reference, though several sought to identify the possibilities of integrating the non-governmental and government programmes, or to review the differences between the programmes run by different implementing organisations. All sought to identify ways of strengthening or improving existing programmes.

Most of the evaluations served the Reflect implementing or co-ordinating organisations. Some also served the governments of the countries in which the programmes were located and / or the donor agencies. None of the evaluations was geared specifically to the needs of the participants, though they may well have been served indirectly. In the final column of Table 2 I have noted whether, in my view, the evaluation was conclusive. This refers to whether the evaluation was able to substantiate the conclusions or recommendations reached and whether the original purpose of the evaluation was met.

There are various facets of the thirteen evaluations worth emulating in future work. The Ghana (BILFACU) evaluation logically dissected the issues on which reporting was required and, additionally, constructed vignettes of the participating communities that could easily serve as baselines from which to measure change. The Malawi evaluation was similar, further dividing the analysis between different stakeholders and focusing their recommendations on the particular groups.

Like the Ghana (BILFACU) evaluation, these could serve as ‘markers’ against future changes. The Malawi evaluation reviewed here, however, is a mid-term evaluation. The final evaluation will measure change against an earlier collected baseline of indicators that were defined before the project got underway. The clarity of focus possible against such baseline measures was not replicated in any of the other studies. The Mali review enabled comparisons to be made between different circles in terms of the different resource patterns and the literacy and numeracy outcomes measured by the use of a written test. Those evaluations that balk at even such

simple measures make it more difficult to unpick patterns of resourcing and achievement.

The Nepal review was extremely thoughtful and frank in the comparisons it made between circles operated by seven different organisations implementing Reflect. The lack of a clear assessment of the output of Reflect is noted, a point that distinguished several of the other evaluations, namely Malawi, Mali and Uganda (Okech). The Sudan evaluation stands out for its description of the environment for literacy in those communities served by Reflect. The challenge of integrating literacy and empowerment in real development opportunities for participants and their communities is depicted clearly.

**TABLE 2:
EVALUATIONS OF REFLECT**

Evaluation	Purpose	Duration	Serving	Outcome of Evaluation²
Bangladesh	Wide-ranging: to assess achievements, demand, differences in outcomes in different contexts, inform decision re: mainstreaming	1 month	DFID, ActionAid	Not conclusive
El Salvador	To investigate process and impact and suggest ways of improving programme	2 months	CIAZO	Not conclusive
Ghana BILFACU	To gauge progress	3 days	ActionAid	Conclusive
Ghana NFED	To compare Reflect with government programme	?	ActionAid, government	Not conclusive
India	To investigate sustainability and potential for up scaling and convergence with national programme	8 months	DFID	Not conclusive
Malawi	To review performance, management, progress and make practical recommendations	2 weeks	ActionAid	Conclusive
Mali	To strengthen programme; gauge opinion	1 week	SCF	Conclusive
Mozambique	To review programme and provide means of improving; gauge support to MoE in increasing literacy	Summer	ActionAid	Not conclusive
Nepal	To assess process, practice and impact against other approaches	2 weeks	ActionAid and Education Network	Conclusive
South Africa	To assess progress toward the creation of a practical link between literacy and community development and the establishment and support of critically-aware community	6 weeks	Tlhavham a Training Initiative, Land Research Unit and	Conclusive

² Whether an evaluation is noted as 'conclusive' or 'inconclusive' relates to whether it was able to substantiate the conclusions or recommendations reached and whether the original purpose of the evaluation was met.

Evaluation	Purpose	Duration	Serving	Outcome of Evaluation²
	groups		ActionAid	
Sudan	To gauge practical applications and impact of programme	4 days	WUS	Conclusive
Uganda (Froni)	To assess impact on communities and to recommend strategies for improving programme, to assess cost-effectiveness	3 weeks	ActionAid	Not conclusive
Uganda (Okech)	To compare FAL with Reflect and recommend future policy	6 months?	Gov't, World Bank	Conclusive

The wealth and representativeness of the information made available in the Uganda (Okech) evaluation is notable as well as the direct comparisons between the two different approaches and for participants of different backgrounds. Despite the seeming reluctance of other programmes to engage in such an extensive, quantitative study, the rigour of the comparison between the government's and the Reflect programmes warrants it. Much harder than comparing literacy and numeracy achievements, however, is comparing empowerment, given the difficulty of using adequate proxies. To the extent that governments want to compare the cost-effectiveness of different approaches to literacy, the Uganda (Okech) evaluation provides an excellent template. None of the other evaluations does justice to such comparisons.

There are some other points that emerge from the whole set of evaluations under review here. First, it needs to be reiterated that the measurement of outcomes depends on their definition within the programmes themselves. The lack of such definition was an issue that came up repeatedly. The expectations of the different stakeholders varied considerably because of the lack of clarity of expected outcomes. It is not necessary for all such measurements to be quantified, as in the case of literacy and numeracy achievement. As was seen, snapshots that can be revisited re: existing and future plans, may provide a sufficient baseline, as in the case of Ghana (BILFACU), though this was not used appropriately in the case of the Indian evaluation, despite multiple visits to the same circle.

Second, for any outcomes where there are diverse groups whose needs are to be met, it is important to distinguish adequately between these groups. Most of the evaluations collected data on the gender of participants, but only in the case of the Uganda (Okech) evaluation was it possible to distinguish the outcomes of participants who had different numbers of years of prior education, a factor that accounted for the contrast between the two programmes being compared. In other cases, unless it is possible to hold constant certain factors (because one has collected data on them), it may be that the variation being explained is spurious or the attribution to particular factors is erroneous. Evaluations intended to inform potential up scaling need to pay especial attention to such data gathering. On the other hand, the monitoring of a programme for an implementing organisation with a limited scope may not require such data collection. This underlines the importance of

clarifying the purpose of an evaluation and whom it is meant to serve and matching the data collection with the purpose.

Third, most of the measurements of empowerment are relatively impressionistic, based on PRA and not distinguishing between different groups of participants, nor attributing, necessarily, action points to Reflect circles. Such measurements may be inadequate for bringing about the desired linkages between those traditionally supporting literacy and those supporting wider community development initiatives. For instance, were Reflect to be used to involve marginalized communities in contributing to poverty reduction strategies, the rigour of the change measurement possible from such an approach may be inadequate.

Table 3 details the concepts of empowerment used in each of the evaluations as well as what is reported as empowerment in the evaluations themselves. Where no concepts are given, they were not discussed in the evaluation. As can be seen, there is considerable overlap. What stands out in the evaluations, however, is the increased self-confidence demonstrated by participants – something not lending itself easily to precise measurement. Indeed, there are three approaches taken to the reporting of empowerment outcomes across the evaluations. All give examples of specific individual or community empowerment that was referred to in interviews and discussions with participants. The more ‘grounded’ evaluations attempt to distinguish particular outcomes by circle, so that it would be possible to identify trends if one were to revisit the same circles. This is the exception, however. The bulk of evaluations merely report at random some of the empowerment outcomes, whether at the individual or community level. The only evaluation taking the third approach is the Uganda (Okech) evaluation, in which questionnaires specifically address the list of reported empowerment outcomes seen in Table 3, thus making it possible to quantify across different types of circles, the prevalence of different types of empowerment realised, potentially relating it back to other factors on which the evaluation has collected information. Whilst these outcomes are conceived as ‘benefits of literacy’, in fact, they are little different from the ill-defined outcomes in the bulk of the other evaluations.

Finally, all of the evaluations reviewed emphasised the importance of participatory evaluation. Yet, the purposes and ways of involving participants varied considerably across the different cases. In some, the appropriateness of a participatory evaluation was merely stated as being obvious, given the nature of Reflect (viz. Bangladesh and India). No one would deny the importance of participants being involved in the evaluation of their own programmes. However, as the frustration of the evaluators expressed in several of the cases, the time required for participants to develop their own indicators and to feel that they truly had an involvement in the evaluation was greater than time allowed. The preparatory work underlying successful participatory evaluation needs to start long before the evaluation begins. What we saw in several of the evaluations was that often there was confusion over the expected outcomes of the programme and the relative priority given to literacy and empowerment. In the absence of any prior baseline measures, the task was ill defined at best. Given the lack of clear, well-defined indicators and measures, it may not always be effective to design Reflect evaluations as participatory.

**TABLE 3:
Concepts of and Reported Empowerment in Reflect Evaluations**

EVALUATIONS	Concepts of and Reported Empowerment
Bangladesh	Concepts: resource management, health, gender roles, children's education. Reported: i) via Tracer Study: participation in household decision making and mobility of unaccompanied women; ii) in evaluation: a) joint decision making process in family on: family expenditures, cultivating lands; b) women allowed to attend circles; c) relationship of circle members with UP chairmen (sic) on action points; iii) statements on practical gender needs taking precedence over strategic and impressionistic views on changes in gender roles but visible evidence of growth in assertiveness, confidence and enthusiasm in female learners.
EI Salvador	Reported: improved image and self-esteem of women, community participation in drinking water, tree planting schemes, etc., respect for others, empowerment of disinherited, facilitators empowered at a practical level, sense of achievement and power.
Ghana BILFACU	Concepts: change attitudes; develop communities; create awareness around health, negative customary practices; project identification and initiation; effect action – individual and community; income generation; changes in power relations in family, circle community and vis-à-vis other organisations and district authorities; increased status of learners; relationship with wider communities, empowerment of facilitators. Reported: action points carried out successfully – individual and community; linkages with community power structures and outside community; roads regraded; schools started; government extension workers invited; women's unaccompanied mobility.
Ghana NFED	Concepts: creation of a democratic space where negative cultural norms and power relations are challenged, managed and redistributed; community involvement and participation, trust and confidence-building; action points. Reported: free discussion of problems; intervention on behalf of person accused as witch; writing letters and interaction in community activities and domestic issues; organised radio forum; changed gender roles.
India	Concepts: collective human agency (community participation, organisation building, collective action); self-realisation (self-confidence, dignity, self-respect); impact on context (resource management, health practices, gender roles, participation in household decisions, involvement in children's education). Reported: general illustrations of above and specific reports on individual participants.
Malawi	Concepts: programme indicators of literate habits and community empowerment: self-realisation, individual skills, knowledge and attitudes; community participation, membership in other community organisations; collective action; resource management; gender roles and resource control; health status; children's education (attendance); decision making; quality of discussion; number of post-literacy activities established and undertaken; number of circles able to do things on their own. Reported: confident to speak at meetings, increased self-esteem through literacy; giving right change at market; read letters; access to information for practical improvements to life; analyse problems and discuss solutions; productive collaboration with village organisations; better community organisation.
Mali	Reported: development activities begun (e.g. collective cotton farming, soap production).
Mozambique	Reported: discuss problems, exchange experiences about curative health, engage in development activities such as well-cleaning and bridge rehabilitation.
Nepal	Concepts: social actions, organisations, claim making, participation, income improvements, self-awareness. Reported: self-expression, sending children to school, personal cleanliness, bargaining in marketplace, no hesitation in speaking to outsiders.
South Africa	Concepts: establishment of critically aware community groups; income generating activities. Reported: discussing problems in groups; get help in

	overcoming marital problems; help children with school work; gain in confidence; improved relations at home and with other people; arranging eye tests; digging drainage ditches; requesting agricultural extension services; growth in confidence; life skills; write own name.
Sudan	Concepts: self-confidence, overcoming a sense of being ignorant, implementation of ideas for action, consideration of possible income generation activities, begin resource mobilisation, help with children's schooling, writing letters and reading signs and addresses. Reported: women taking a more assertive role in home and community, increased understanding of present problems, self-confidence and trust. Summary: three meanings of literacy: acquisition and improvement of skills, nourishment and empowerment, and useful knowledge.
Uganda (Foroni)	Concepts: should generate real changes in existing power relationships, improved skills and practices relevant to daily livelihood, Reported: improved pig rearing, rabbits, cows; reading signs, prescriptions, making calculations, communal work and village participation, increased confidence in contributing at meetings, mobilisation for resources, increasing knowledge about proper sanitation and hygiene, food security.
Uganda (Okech)	Concepts: benefits of literacy as reported below plus participants' and community leaders' views of these benefits: reading and writing names, improved family care, participation in civic activities, household decision making, improvement in household income, easy communication, children's schooling. Reported: changes in IGAs, knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning: health, nutrition, family planning, practice of democracy, agriculture, decision making, gender roles, participation in organisations, gender roles, confidence, involvement in children's education.

5. INDICATORS

Although some of the evaluations reviewed lack indicators entirely, others are full of them and merit some discussion if only to put forward ideas for possible emulation. The Uganda (Okech) evaluation collected the most comprehensive data of all the evaluations. Listed below are the data points used on: participants' characteristics, the circles and their facilitators, programme attainments, programme use and benefits, and programme costs.

Participants' Characteristics

- Socio-demographic compositions (age, sex, family composition)
- Educational and cultural background (primary school attendance, mother tongue and other languages spoken)
- Economic activities
- Learners' home environment (houses – construction materials, size, lighting, toilets, access to water)
- Access and mobility (transport)
- Literacy environment (reading materials in the home: any books, literary and school books, religious books; exposure to mass media)
- Class experience
 - Participation in literacy programmes (previous campaigns, current classes)
 - Reasons for joining literacy programmes
 - Improvement of self and family
 - To avoid being cheated and embarrassed
 - Attendance and absence
 - Whether or not taken final test
 - Reasons for not joining literacy classes
 - Negative attitudes
 - Gender and power relations
 - Other responsibilities at home
 - Unfulfilled expectations
 - Other reasons
 - Group dynamics in class
 - Differences in age, gender and ability
 - Self-confidence
 - Cooperation
- Reasons for drop-out (harassment by spouse and peers, lack of opportunities for continuing education, problems with instructors, unmet expectations and pledges)
- Learner investment in classes

Circles and their Facilitators

- Teaching materials and aids (availability of materials, relevance of teaching/learning materials)
- Facilitators and their involvement in the programme (sex, age, origin, education)
- Training of facilitators
- Facilitators' involvement in programme (rating the facilitators)

- Literacy classes (attendance and enrolment, monitoring and assessment tools, facilitators' views about participants, class committees)
- Monitoring, supervision and support (local govt. and NGOs)
- Attitudes toward teaching / facilitators' expectations (teaching preferences)
- Suggestions for improving facilitators' conditions

Programme Attainments

- Literacy and numeracy skills (test results)
- Retention of literacy skills
- Outcomes in knowledge, attitudes and practices

Programme Use and Benefits

- Involvement in projects and income generating activities
- Use of reading and writing skills
- Calculating
- Benefits of literacy
 - reading and writing names(avoiding manipulation and cheating)
 - improved family care
 - self-confidence and esteem and a sense of empowerment
 - participation in civic activities
 - decision-making at the household level
 - improvement in household income
 - easy communication and getting along easily
 - schooling of their children (assisting with school work)
- Graduates' educational aspirations
- Local leaders' views on benefits of literacy

Costs and Cost-Effectiveness

The other evaluations approached the task of data collection differently, though there is much overlap on many of the data points, as could be expected. Several monitoring formats are suggested in the Bangladesh evaluation that sets out the potential programme benefits. It starts by having facilitators list the proposed action points and then details the sequencing and modes of implementation. It suggests the production of a tally of implemented action points as well as some yet to be defined test scores in reading writing, numeracy and literacy skills. Statistics are given in the report on literacy achievement rates from a Retention Tracer Study carried out in 1997-8. However, no definitions are given for the scores, nor is the test shown. A list of issues on which information is to be collected is also given, namely, on 'critical social awareness', comprising: decision making at the household level, involvement in income generating activities, health awareness and cleanliness, participation in social activities, mobility, gender awareness, perception of education, and use of literacy. Another list for data gathering is on 'understanding status', comprising: awareness about personal life, authority over spending money, awareness about planned family, awareness about organisation, awareness about social problems, and concern about national issues.

The Ghana (BILFACU) report, as has already been mentioned, produces snapshots of different communities' action points and plans, so that there can be some measure of progress against their own plans. Other evaluations merely tally action points

completed, which is less informative, but gives summary information across large numbers of communities. The Ghana (BILFACU) evaluation, like most of the other evaluations, assessed the quality of the graphics, but it went further and also tested the participants' literacy and numeracy by having them write letters and make two-figure calculations. In its assessment of the graphics, the Indian evaluation looked at the content and quality of the graphics, their accuracy, their capacity to provoke dialogue and their perceived usefulness, in addition to the time utilisation, namely for the graphic construction, discussion and activities.

The Malawi review sets out a very practical draft methodology for its evaluation, detailing what information is needed and from whom it can be collected, working towards 'ingredients' of indicators gauging programme effectiveness, management / leadership capacity, and ability to learn from experiences (p.108). This builds upon a list of monitoring indicators developed by the Reflect steering committee (pp.24-5) and, of course, the prior baseline survey carried out before the programme began. The monitoring indicators are divided into the following categories:

- Rate of progress (units, graphics, action points)
- Overall participation (and quality of discussion)
- Methodology (facilitators and graphics)
- Enrolment, attendance and drop-outs
- Reading, writing and numeracy
- Literate habits and community empowerment
- Cost effectiveness
- General organisation and management
- External support

The baseline survey collected information on households and communities from 82 villages (41 Reflect pilot and 41 control national adult literacy programme):

- Age stratification
- Household size
- Gender desegregation
- Literacy levels
- Roles of men and women
- Control of resources and decision-making powers
- Sources of income and expenditure
- Range and types of local institutions and leadership characteristics
- Extent of community development activities

It is clear that different programmes have devised different ways of gathering information in more or less organised ways, including measuring literacy and numeracy achievement as well as progress toward other outcomes.

6. GUIDELINES

Given the arms-length nature of the relationship between ActionAid and many of the Reflect programmes to date, as well as the varied nature of the programmes themselves and the evaluations of them, there is no purpose in attempting to draw some hard and fast rules for evaluations that could be applied across the board. However, there are some guidelines, based on the review of these 13 evaluations that may serve, if nothing else, as a checklist, before engaging in further evaluations.

Whilst the terms of reference for evaluations are usually clear, the choice of approach in meeting them can vary. Some of the following questions might usefully be asked (and answered) before engaging in further evaluation work.

Who is the evaluation for?

What is its purpose?

What needs to be measured?

How will it be measured?

Can we do it ourselves?

What training / advice do we need?

If we need an outsider, who will determine and monitor the fulfilment of his / her terms of reference?

Who can provide training / advice?

What questions will be capable of being answered?

What questions will not be possible to answer?

How much time will be required to complete the evaluation?

How will the evaluation be used?

How will it be disseminated and to whom?

The answers to these questions should help to temper the approach to what it is possible to accomplish. It should be emphasised that the start-up of all new programmes should not only encompass some baseline measures, but the design stage should ensure that expected outcomes are clarified amongst stakeholders and that they are involved in the initial monitoring. Reading through the evaluations, it would seem that the impetus for them has come from the implementing organisations or donor agencies and that participants are brought in as part of that particular evaluation, rather than having been part of the establishment of a culture of evaluation from the start. If empowerment is the goal, then surely a part of the Reflect circle needs to be monitoring against desired outcomes in order to adjust the programme accordingly. This should not be externally directed. Rather, it should come from the participants themselves. Reflect circles provide a natural beginning to this process, creating graphic representations of local realities. What seems to be missing, judging only from the evaluations, is the creation of the film, rather than merely the snapshots of this, hopefully, changing reality.

One of the starting points of engaging stakeholders (and not only the implementing and supporting organisations) in a culture of evaluation is ensuring that there are compatible expectations, including agreement on the outcomes hoped to be achieved from Reflect circles, with respect to each country, or locale. Without such agreement, any snapshot or film of Reflect will be fuzzy. Such agreement should not only be the start of the Reflect programme, but also its monitoring and evaluation

framework, something, which has not always been detailed at the beginning of programmes. However, this is not to say that the onus of responsibility for all monitoring and evaluation should fall on the participants' shoulders. Nor does it engrave in stone those outcomes originally identified by participants: they may well change. Below, and summarised in Table 3, I have tried to disaggregate the potential interest of different stakeholders in different types of monitoring and evaluation and the data points that would feed them. It is hoped that this might be an aid to the initial design of a monitoring and evaluation framework for subsequent Reflect programmes, if not for a revisitation of those already in hand.

If we consider the different outcomes of a 'successful' Reflect programme and work back to what data would be required for assessing the achievement of these outcomes, we can then ask in whose interest and for what purpose such data would / should be collected and by whom. There are several categories of data including those on outcomes: on participants; on facilitators; on the community; and on costs. It is assumed that outcomes would include any of the following: literacy, numeracy, empowerment, community development / poverty alleviation and satisfaction. Specific definitions of any of these would tailor their meanings and their measurement. Thus, the range of communicative practices could be included as well as of empowerment, for instance. One of the common findings of the evaluations under review is that outcomes have been poorly defined and often not prioritised. In addition, it seems to have been the exception that any baseline has been constructed from which to measure progress on any of these outcomes. Any revisiting of the evaluations already carried out of programmes that have been set up should ensure that it is clear what is being evaluated. These outcomes would normally be of interest to all stakeholders, the participants, facilitators, communities and implementing and supporting organisations.

There are several data points on participants of interest to different stakeholders: the numbers, their sexes, their ages, how many years of prior education they've had or other literacy training. Ideally one can match the participants with their circles and facilitators as well as identify those who have and have not continued in the circles, information which could be recorded quarterly. Similarly, one could collect data on participation in post-literacy activities. It is not expected that such information be of great interest to the participants, facilitators and communities themselves, but it would be very important for the implementing and supporting organisations, whether non-governmental or state.

Information on the facilitators would likely be of similar interest to implementing and supporting organisations, for instance the facilitators' sex, age, prior education, training, language skills, membership in the community, honoraria/ salary, and their longevity in the programme.

Information on the communities themselves is also important to implementing and supporting organisations: on community development initiatives prior to the programme and / or its integration with these, the involvement of different categories of individuals in development activities, the nature of those activities as well as of the community-based organisations themselves.

Finally, the costs of running these programmes should be of interest to all, albeit from different perspectives, depending on the demands being made of the programmes. For instance, it would seem that the main cost of Reflect programmes consists of the training and refresher courses. Clearly this is a key interest of the supporting organisation, but the participants may not even be aware of it. For them, the credit needed to start up certain development activities may be the most crucial. There will be many data points that make up the total cost and that are of varying interest to different stakeholders.

**TABLE 4:
TYPES OF DATA OF INTEREST TO DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS**

Data of Interest to:	Participants	Facilitators	Communities	Implementing Organisations	Supporting Organisations
Data on:					
Outcomes	X	X	X	X	X
Participants				X	X
Facilitators				X	X
Community				X	X
Costs	X	X	X	X	X

If one jumps ahead to the different uses for such information, for measuring effectiveness and efficiency of operations, as well as cost-effectiveness when compared with alternative literacy and community empowerment initiatives, it should be clear simply from the above that the participants and / or the facilitators lack incentive to supply the information. The data are of much greater interest to implementing and supporting organisations than to the circle facilitators and participants and their communities themselves. This is problematic for making judgements concerning scaling up the programme and for its adjustment. Whilst evaluations themselves are carried out at particular points in time, the monitoring data, which feeds them are continuous, and its quality and reliability are crucial to successful evaluations. Incentives to produce reliable information need to be confronted from the start, as data that are unreliable can be as problematic as no data at all. These incentives need not be monetary; they could be tied, for instance, to material distribution or other sequenced activities; district education officials could be used where data collection is already taking place in the formal system. There are many approaches that could be considered depending on the prevailing circumstances.

Some starting points for monitoring and evaluation of different stakeholders in Reflect programmes are given in Table 4. Supporting organisations are not included in this table. Though they have a direct interest in the information, it is not information **on** them that is suggested to be collected. Indeed, it is assumed that costings will need to be collected by supporting organisations where they wish to investigate the cost-effectiveness of their programmes, their sustainability and / or their potential integration with government programmes.

The first line details some of the baseline information that should be collected prior to the start of the programme. This covers potential participants, the implementing organisation itself, as well as existing communities being considered for Reflect circles, and any community-based organisations they may have. In addition, it is suggested that any existing government-run programmes be investigated at this stage. Further information will need to be collected at least 6- and 12-month intervals. Data collection could continue beyond the first 12 months into the follow-up of the Reflect circles and the establishment of new ones. Six months into the running of the programme, one will want to have baseline information on the participants, facilitators, and the implementing organisation. More summative data requirements, such as attendance and drop out records for participants and facilitators alike, are suggested for the first 12-month interval. At this time, one will also want to gauge progress against the pre-programme data points. Similar surveys could then be carried out at further appropriate intervals.

**TABLE 5:
STARTING POINTS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS**

INFORMATION ON: INTERVAL	Participants	Facilitators	Implementing Organisation	Community and Community Based Organisations	Government
Pre-programme	Prior literacy training, prior formal education, sex, age, means, disabilities, interests, attitudes, literacy and numeracy levels		Relationship with government, supporting organisations and CBOs	Gender roles and resource control, health status; children's education; involvement in development activities, plans/ desires, leadership capacity, resources	Nature/ approach of existing programme, cost, spread, effectiveness, materials, facilitators, logistics, management, resources, timeliness
+ 6 months	Prior literacy training, prior formal education, sex, age, means, disabilities, interests, attitudes, literacy and numeracy levels	Sex, age, education, prior training, language, community member, incentives, attendance	Logistics, management, training and supervision, materials		
+ 12 months	Attendance, drop-out, attitudes, literacy and numeracy levels, satisfaction, further needs	Training, supervision, motivation of participants, cooperation with community, coverage of units, attitudes	Logistics, management, training, materials, relationship with government, supporting organisations and CBOs	Integration and follow-through of development activities, logistics, resources, gender roles and resource control, health status, children's education	Integration, logistics, management, resources, timeliness, attitudes

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a desk study. The benefits I have had of an overview of 13 different Reflect programmes are unequal to the loss of not seeing first-hand some of the communities that have gained from their participation in Reflect. At the same time, it has probably made me more dispassionate. I have had only the evaluation reports to guide me. Thus, the measures of progress recorded in the evaluations are all the more important. This particular set of studies is not full of quantitative data. Nearly all took a qualitative approach to the task, and so the reports are full of descriptions of focus group discussions and comments made in interviews by different stakeholders. I do not have a set of cost-effectiveness ratios that will enable me to weigh the contribution of different factors to the success of the various programmes. I have few quantitative outcomes reported at all. Rather, I must make judgements about the validity of what is reported as 'success'.

There are lessons that can be learned from reading such a set of reports, seeing the same problems that occur across very different contexts, seeing different solutions to them from different perspectives, problems that need to be addressed in further programmes.

Reflect has come of age at a time when it is most needed. Education is at the forefront of development strategies because of its close relationship with poverty alleviation. What distinguishes Reflect from other adult literacy programmes is the direct connection it has with community development not as something that is done 'with' literacy, and therefore only once it is acquired, but rather is permeated 'through' the literacy training. For Reflect to serve the multiple purposes expected of it, however, evaluations have to rigorously provide feedback loops to improve implementation and enhance outcomes. If Reflect practitioners do not want to be judged on their ability to produce literate and numerate participants, then they must be judged on their ability to produce empowered, self-confident communities that can take development in their own hands. To date, most of the evaluations under review do neither one nor the other, detracting not only from their utility, but also downplaying unfairly Reflect's promise. The rigour of the original evaluation of the three pilot Reflect projects in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador (Archer and Cottingham) was not emulated in the further reviews of progress carried out in those countries' programmes, having the longest track records, with the exception of the Uganda (Okech) evaluation. Thus, especially if one is having to rely on evaluations, rather than the experience of the programmes in order to make a decision on up scaling or different modifications, one feels on shaky ground, even if generally positive.

7.1 Apply Reflect across disciplinary boundaries

The lack of a convincing evaluation literature makes the first recommendation I suggest much harder to achieve. This is that Reflect should be applied in a cross-disciplinary way, across different types of development programmes, not necessarily even with an education bias, be they government or NGO-

provided. The fact that Reflect falls between two stools has been observed as an impediment to funding. Seen differently, it could be a means of opening up new sources of funding. Although the ideology is there, I'm not sure that the training and orientation given to Reflect practitioners is sufficient to this challenging task. I would suggest that a pilot case study, which specifically sets out to cross these boundaries and to situate Reflect differently, be set up. The challenge of this task is that the linkages one would be seeking to create, and which, hopefully, would energise the programme, typically, are not well developed. These include linkages between ministries, between agencies, as well as within ministries and agencies. Thus, Reflect should be bridging different sectors within programmes run by the same agency in the same way that Reflect should be bridging those sectors between ministries. This would mean breaking down the barriers and bringing together land use and rural livelihoods, women's development and education, health, and micro-credit, to give but one example. Similarly, this will imply crossing boundaries between NGOs and CBOs and government, between circles and CBOs, and between circles, just as it would imply energising cross-level, within-Ministry linkages, feeding lifeblood into decentralisation where this is more intentional than in evidence.

One of the ways that this might be brought about is to emphasise 'voice'. Poverty reduction strategies require the voices of the poor to be heard in order that strategies can be tailored not only at the macro level, but also to the needs of the poor at the micro level. This is understood, but the means by which such voices are heard are not institutionalised, and like any strategy that seeks to revolutionise practice, old habits die hard. Thus, even if voices have been heard genuinely, without some community based development organisation, it will be difficult to sustain the communication. Reflect, as a flexible approach that can be geared to a variety of ultimate purposes, could play a strong role in the development of such community potential.

7.2 Develop a culture of evaluation amongst participants

This leads to my second recommendation. If anything like what is proposed in the first recommendation is to be achieved, then it is imperative, not only that expected outcomes are clear to all but that the stakeholders shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that their needs are being met. Participation is not for its own sake, but for the purpose for which the Reflect circles were established. That the evaluations reviewed revealed in several cases that the expected outcomes were unclear shows that different purposes may well have been served, depending on the perspective of different stakeholders. Whilst this is neither positive nor negative in itself, it leaves the situation wide open to abuse by those with most stick. This lack of clarity makes evaluation extremely problematic, for it is unclear what one needs to measure, even if resort to proxies is necessary, because the evaluation will be coloured by the perspective of those organising the evaluation. As we have seen in the evaluations reviewed, this has not been the participants.

Not only is it important that the expected outcomes of the programme are clear to all, but the means of measuring them needs also to be transparent. A few of the evaluations – not least the evaluation of the original pilot programmes (Archer and Cottingham) illustrate good practice by constructing baselines. The construction of such baselines will facilitate the development of indicators. But this activity is not a one-off activity at the time of the evaluation; it needs to be a nurtured process, so that participants – the primary stakeholders, as well as other stakeholders – can develop a culture of evaluation that is appropriate to adjusting the programme to fit their needs and expectations. If evaluations do not construct such space, they cannot hope to serve the needs of the participants themselves, who cannot be expected merely to embrace the results of an externally driven evaluation, however much participation is engendered. The lessons of school improvement work bear scrutiny by Reflect practitioners. Whole school self-evaluation, for example, could easily be adapted to Reflect circles and their communities. It would entail assessment of the current status of the circle / community followed by the identification of priorities in a development plan, the implementation of a shorter-term action plan, which after being implemented, would be evaluated, leading back to a new round of assessment.³

If such regular self-evaluation were carried out, it would complement any external evaluations whose timelines typically mediate against extensive involvement of this kind. Clearly there is a place for external evaluations, which may well be participatory in nature, but whose terms of reference serve implementing or supporting organisations or the government. However, any desire to make them participatory should not obviate the definition and measurement of outcomes. Such measures, as seen in whole school self-evaluation, are as much a means of charting progress and modifying plans amongst communities as they are for those supporting such communities who require some benchmark tests.

7.3 Programme pointers

The third recommendation I have is really a set of pointers that emerge from the evaluations for improving Reflect programmes. These are:

- To nurture the creativity and commitment of the facilitators (which involves seeing to their incentives and materials)
- To ensure the system of supervision works, especially if the programme is up scaled to national coverage
- To integrate with community development – (don't isolate it in education)
- To provide regular refresher courses that meet the facilitators' needs
- To provide other courses of importance
- To organise meetings and exchanges between facilitators

³ It is the cyclical *assessment* function, rather than simply monitoring, that distinguishes this from the participatory monitoring, which, clearly, has played a role in several of the REFLECT programmes.

- To resolve the literacy vs. empowerment issue in-situ
- To define outcomes and develop measures and indicators of progress as well as documentation guidelines
- To provide for feedback loops from evaluations
- To facilitate the monitoring of evaluations
- To ensure inter- and intra-agency coordination and cooperation
- To pay special attention to language issues
- To provide guidelines for constructing a baseline survey as well as testing in literacy and numeracy
- To strive toward the integration of Reflect in PRSP designs and within larger programmes, i.e. not literacy alone

Reflect has much more promise than has been demonstrated in the set of evaluations reviewed in this report. It remains for the international NGOs that are using Reflect in their programmes, to consider the proposed ways forward and to assist implementing organisations not only to improve practice, but to ensure that the synergies implied in the new definition of Reflect are realised in support of poverty alleviation.

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RESPONSE TO ABBY RIDDEL'S "A REVIEW OF 13 EVALUATIONS OF REFLECT"

As practitioners of Reflect, many of the members of CIRAC (the International Reflect Circle) had direct experience of at least one of the Evaluations reviewed in Abby Riddel's report. We have our own misgivings about these Evaluations, which in the majority of cases were unparticipatory and carried out over a short period of time by consultants with little knowledge of the context or experience of working with Reflect. For a further discussion of these points and for proposals on methodology for future evaluations of Reflect, please see the forthcoming CIRAC document on Monitoring and Evaluation, also produced by this team.

The Evaluation documents themselves are long and often unwieldy. We therefore welcome the work that Abby has carried out synthesising and analysing these documents and drawing out key lessons and recommendations in a succinct and clear report. Hers was not an enviable task. Whilst there are a number of key points where we differ with Abby's analysis we feel that she has raised some valuable questions and many of the recommendations she makes will be extremely useful to practitioners in their work with Reflect and when looking at how to carry out future evaluations of Reflect. In fact, often our disagreement was not so much with Abby's analysis of a particular point but with the Evaluation on which this analysis was based - not always an easy distinction. Our detailed response to Abby's report is below:

Literacy vs. empowerment

*Abby comments that a fundamental issue, raised in a number of the evaluations, is the relative priority given to literacy or empowerment in Reflect. She talks of the "renewed" definition of Reflect⁴, which "presents an evaluation challenge that goes considerably beyond testing the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy" (Abby Riddel p 48). Whilst agreeing that the current definition of Reflect goes further than that given in the 1996 Reflect Mother Manual, we would argue that, from the beginning, Reflect has gone beyond basic literacy and numeracy and that empowerment has always been central to the approach. This was made clear in the evaluation of the three pilot projects carried out in 1995 (see ODA paper 1996) and can even be seen in the origins of the name "Reflect" (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through **Empowering** Community Techniques).*

We also feel that Abby makes a rather artificial distinction between empowerment and literacy / numeracy, which are in fact closely linked to the

⁴ "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. (Phnuyal, Archer and Cottingham, 1998)

empowerment process in Reflect. Each Reflect project is uniquely adapted to its particular context and the focus of the work may change from place to place but it is rarely a question of a choice between working with empowerment **OR** literacy, rather these elements are interwoven. The conception of literacy is shifting from a reductive traditional focus on technical ability / competency to a focus on its practical value or use.

Where we would agree with Abby is in the challenge this presents for evaluators. It is not possible to measure empowerment in a one-off visit to a community or in a quick test and this was one of the key problems of all 13 Evaluations, only two of which took place over a period longer than 6 weeks. In some cases (for example, the Uganda, Okech and Ghana, NFED evaluations) the explicit aim of the evaluation was to make comparisons with the traditional government literacy programmes, working with a very narrow definition of literacy and paying little attention to empowerment outcomes. We recognise that future evaluations of Reflect will need to face up to this challenge, finding effective ways to assess the less tangible outcomes of a project. This may well involve a very different style of evaluation, one that is more systematic, thorough and ongoing than any of the 13 reviewed in this report, and that involves all the key stakeholders in a truly participatory process.

Links with other community organisations:

Abby talks of the “often missing relationship between Reflect circles and other community development organisations” and states that, “For the ideals of the “renewed” definition of Reflect to be realised, there needs to be wider understanding of the development and empowerment aims and the integration of Reflect practice beyond those using the approach” (AR p. 49). Whilst accepting that this may have been the impression given in some of the Evaluation documents, we would question this generalisation. The recent International Reflect Survey, completed by over 120 organisations working with Reflect worldwide, indicated that the majority of Reflect circles are closely integrated with community development work and that many circles were actually formed from existing community groups. Unfortunately, this is far more often the case in the smaller organisations working with the approach than in large organisations such as ActionAid and Save the Children, which, until recently, have tended to keep Reflect compartmentalised under “education” and quite separate from their work in other sectors. Although slowly, we feel that this is now changing as these organisations come to recognise the relevance of Reflect as an approach in a much wider arena.

Action Points:

Another issue highlighted in Abby’s report is the need to tackle the resource requirements for Action Points – “it is important that [Circles] are not left high and dry just at the point when they are mobilising themselves” (AR p. 50). This is an interesting issue but one that we would approach from a slightly different angle. If an implementing organisation engages itself in ensuring the resources for every Action Point highlighted by the community it may find itself trapped in very traditional service delivery mode. The focus of Reflect work (and of development work in general) is shifting to enabling people to demand

a more effective use of existing resources or to leverage new resources as their basic right, engaging with institutions such as the local government or relevant ministry, for example. Rather than depending on NGO handouts, local people are learning to recognise and challenge existing power relations, realising that the power to make changes is in their own hands.

The team was quickly able to come up with a number of examples of where such empowerment has taken place. In Ghana, for example, faced with the problem of a shortage of teachers for the local primary school, the community education committee presented a demand for a new teacher to the District Education Authority. The demand was accepted and a new teacher provided for the school. Similarly, in both Pakistan and Ghana, community members successfully gathered together to demonstrate for the provision of a water supply system and in Bangladesh, Circle members successfully negotiated with local officials to repair a broken road. Often, the community is able to make significant steps without any external help. When a community in Mozambique wanted to improve the birth attendance facilities offered, they approached the District Health Officer to support midwife training, but the community itself was able to construct a new delivery shelter.

The Evaluation documents that Abby looked at present little evidence of this type. We feel that this is symptomatic of the failure of many of the Evaluations to capture the true spirit of Reflect, instead focusing on quantitative indicators aimed at evaluating literacy and numeracy skills acquired in the group. Although other materials documenting such experiences do exist, we feel that there are many stories that have yet to be told and it is up to all of us in CIRAC to make sure that these are collected and shared.

Facilitator training:

Abby raises some important issues about the training and ongoing support of Reflect facilitators. As she says, facilitators are the crux of Reflect programmes and it is important to consider holistically the approach to their recruitment, training, support and conditions of service (AR p.51). A number of important issues were raised in the Evaluations regarding this point and the CIRAC members recognise it as a key issue for the future sustainability of the Reflect approach. As Abby points out, Reflect may be cheaper than some approaches as it dispenses with any text books, but the skills required of the facilitator can have extra resource implications in terms of the training and ongoing support that are necessary. In an increasing number of programmes, facilitators meet regularly to discuss problems and successes amongst themselves and provide mutual support, seeking outside help when necessary. This is a non-hierarchical and cost-effective way of building on the capacity of facilitators. For further thoughts on the training and support of facilitators please see the forthcoming CIRAC document on Training.

Abby also refers to the need for external training in areas other than Reflect by government and other specialists (AR p. 50). Whilst not disagreeing with this suggestion we feel that it is important to make sure that such training is in line with the approach rather than in conflict with it. Some of the training

courses offered by government and other organisations is run along very rigid, traditional lines, not at all in harmony with the participatory approach of Reflect. We would also add that many of the topics mentioned, for example, micro-planning, leadership training and advocacy training, are already included as part of the ongoing training of Reflect facilitators in many programmes. In Pakistan, for example, the facilitators meet regularly to discuss their work and give each other support and “experts” in particular fields are often invited to talk to the group in an informal setting.

Indicators for Evaluation

We agree with Abby that in many Reflect programmes the expected outcomes are not sufficiently well defined for indicator development and there is a lack of baseline material, which is crucial for any type of evaluation. This is an important area to work on. We feel that it is essential to develop a culture of continual internal evaluation within Circles, so that the participants themselves are in a position to identify their expectations of a programme and to judge the extent to which these are fulfilled over a period of time. Evaluation should be integral to the Reflect process.

Abby criticizes the PRA-based measurements of empowerment as being “impressionistic”. Whilst we recognise the need for continued improvement in evaluations and the tools used in the evaluations of Reflect programmes, we would argue that some extremely valuable information can be gathered using PRA tools. However, it is not always possible to provide a rigorous measurement to illustrate the changes that have come about in the life of a community or individual as a result of their participation in a Reflect circle. Whilst we are committed to the constant sharpening of indicators for the evaluation of Reflect, we also feel that it is useful to listen to people’s often-subjective impressions of how life has changed for them. Abby’s report tends to ignore much of the evidence of empowerment which is present in the Evaluations (India, for example), on the basis that it was not collected in a rigorous / scientific manner. Although the conclusiveness of the evidence in any one project may be open to question, the accumulation of evidence from multiple and very diverse sites can be a useful pointer and we feel it should not have been ignored.

Participatory Evaluation

We are strongly in favour of participatory evaluations. As Abby states, all of the evaluations reviewed emphasised the importance of participatory evaluation. However, in our opinion, none of them actually involved the participants in any meaningful way. As she makes clear in her report, “the time required for participants to develop their own indicators and to feel that they truly had an involvement in the evaluation was greater than that allowed. The preparatory work underlying successful participatory evaluation needs to start long before the evaluation begins in clarifying outcomes, measures, etc.”. She adds, “Given the lack of clear well-defined indicators and measures, it may not always be effective to design Reflect evaluations as participatory” (AR p. 56). We would approach these points from another angle, arguing rather than seeing the problems of time and a lack of well-defined indicators as a barrier to future participatory evaluations, we must accept the challenge

of devising thorough, ongoing evaluations with clear indicators to be developed and applied in a process involving all key stakeholders. As Abby states, "None of the evaluations was geared specifically to the needs of the participants". We would particularly support the use of bottom-up evaluations in which the Circle participants themselves take part in an ongoing process to monitor their progress against expectations / indicators that they have set and in which evaluation is an integral part of the learning and empowerment process.

Reflect is continually evolving and so, as practitioners, our approaches to evaluation must also continually evolve. We must accept the challenges laid down in Abby's Review as well as new challenges as they emerge. Indeed steps have already been taken to explore new ways of evaluating Reflect work, for example, in the Creative Evaluations of Reflect, which were carried out recently in programmes in five different countries, resulting not in paper documents but in videos and audio recordings for example, often produced by the participants themselves. In addition, and as mentioned at the beginning of this document, the CIRAC Monitoring and Evaluation Team is currently working on a publication exploring different types of evaluation and looking at possible directions for the future evaluation of Reflect (forthcoming).

By CIRAC's Monitoring & Evaluation Team, May 2001:

*Julie Adu-Gyamfi, Ghana
Qais Anwar, Pakistan
Marta Bazima, Mozambique
Dahar Khan, Bangladesh
Emma Pearce, UK*

julianaa@actionaid-ghana.org
qaisanwar@hotmail.com
aamozmp@virconn.com
dahar@aab.agni.com
emmap@actionaid.org.uk