

The organic process of participation and empowerment in REFLECT Participación, alfabetización y empoderamiento. Reflexiones sobre REFLECT- ACCION

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 However, it is already out of date.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

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

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

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

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

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