

REFLECT

A report on Kolkata experience

September-December 2008

Stronger Together

act:onaid

UNDERSTANDING REFLECT IN WEST BENGAL - A REVIEW



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AA	ActionAid
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASHA	Association for Social and Health Advancement
BDO	Block Development Officer
BJJAS	Banchita Jana Jagaran Adhikar Samity
BMCDM	Baghmari Mother and Child Development Mission
BPL	Below Poverty Line
DA	Digambarpur Angikar
FGD	Focussed Group Discussion
GBS	Gitaldaha Bikash Samity
GP	Gram Panchayat
G-NESEP	Godhulibazar North East Society for Empowerment of the People
HIV	Human Immune-deficiency Virus
ID	Identity
JS	Jamgoria Sevabrata
KK	Kolkata Konsultants

KRO	Kolkata Regional Office
MAGJS	Murshidabad Adibashi Gramin Janakalyan Samity
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NBCD	North Bengal Council for Disabled
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
PDS	Public Distribution System
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRIA	Participatory Research In Asia
RCH	Reproductive and Child Health
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
SRHEDS	Samsia Rural Health and Economic Development Society
SMOKUS	Shripur Mahila – O – Khadi Unnayan Samity
SJGSY	Swarna Jayanti Gramin Swarojgar Yojana
SHG	Self Help Group
TCS	The Calcutta Samaritans
TOT	Training of Trainers

INTRODUCTION

Today's globalised world has seen an astronomical economic growth, but the benefits have not been experienced uniformly. Those left out are mostly the poor and the marginalised. Not only are the poor excluded, there is also evidence that almost every local process is negatively impacted by globalisation.

As with many other developing nations, the gap between the poor and the rich in India is wide. Almost 26 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and their per capita consumption expenditure is just Rs.591 per month (NSSO 1999-2000). Within the democratic political governance in the country the voice of the poor and the marginalised is hardly ever heard. The worst affected are women and children. Because the poor suffer from a lack of identity, they are deprived of basic human rights like shelter, food, health and education.

As per the 2001 Census, India's literacy rate is 64.84 percent. A global study on Education for All in 2007 pointed out that the status of literacy of those above 15 is 61 percent, of which 48 percent are female. Though adult literacy programmes exist, the figures indicate that women are unable or choose not to avail of these services and that this gap needs to be addressed.

India ranks 96 out of 177 countries in gender-related development index ranking and its patriarchal norms have led to consistent denial of women's rights. This is true of both urban and rural India, and is most apparent in the fact that they are almost always paid less than men. Some medieval perceptions still persist — women have been accused of being witches. Domestic violence is a deep rooted problem and has societal sanction, so much so that in the National Family Health Survey, 56 percent of women felt domestic violence is justified.

There are numerous laws that protect women's rights. These include the Equal Remuneration Act, the Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act, the Domestic Violence Act, and the Dowry Prohibition Act. Government is unable to enforce these laws, primarily because of the lack of social and political will to address these issues. Clearly, the answer lies in empowering women with knowledge and the confidence to raise their voices against abuse.

An appropriate space for this is an adult literacy programme that seeks to empower women by not just by making them literate but by also by making them aware of their rights and shaping their leadership skills. They will then be able to actively participate in development processes and ensure their own rights.

REFLECT : A BACKGROUND



ActionAid, an international anti-poverty agency, operating in over 54 countries, works primarily with the poor and marginalised in order to end both poverty and injustice. Since 1972, ActionAid India has partnered local NGOs, CBOs and people's movements to address both issues. It focuses on the rights of India's most marginalised: Dalits and tribals, the rural and urban poor, women, children and minorities. These groups face an acute lack of access to and control over resources, services and institutions.

Varied strategies and approaches have been used to ensure these communities can access their rights and participatory

approaches are now recommended because they help include the local context and the actual need. The approach reasons that until those excluded are able to build their own perceptions of the social, economic and political reality it is difficult to formulate any effort at change. Such an approach also displays the process of negotiations between the poor and excluded with the state and civil society.

Reflect (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) is an approach to adult literacy and social change based on the theories of Paulo Freire. To this is added Robert Chamber's gender, development and participatory approaches and both are moulded to a structure that responds both to practical needs of literacy programmes and helps bring about broader social change. This has been actively promoted by AA in its global mission 'Right to End Poverty'.

Reflect started in October 1993 when AA began a two-year action research project to explore the possible uses of PRA techniques within adult literacy programmes. It was first piloted in three projects in Uganda, El Salvador and Bangladesh. In the first six months of 1995, these were evaluated against other literacy programmes using traditional methods. Reflect proved to be both more effective at teaching people to read and write and much more effective in its linkage to wider development. Reflect has now been taken up in over 20 countries.

In 1997 work started in Bolangir, (one of the poorest districts in the eastern state of Orissa), through providing emergency help in response to a drought. The long term plans developed were approved by the local community assembly as the official local development plans.

When AA found that some voices especially those of the poorest were left out, they formed Reflect Circles that included them. These Circles met twice a week, discussing in greater depth the issues identified in the plans, translating them into action, and improving or correcting the plans to reflect their own point of view. This process of constant review ensured that the plans did not remain mere documents.

In West Bengal, the Reflect approach was shared with partner organisations at the end of 2005. In 2006, this approach was initiated with organisations involved in anti trafficking work. Reflect Circles began initially with women as primary members and went with the model closest to the people's rights focused practice.

Initially the emphasis was on rescue and rehabilitation. Gradually it probed into the causes of trafficking of women and children. It was then realised that vulnerabilities of families increased because of lack of basic rights and services. Members were mobilised to seek benefits from government schemes and policies. Gradually other dimensions were looked at and root causes identified. Members were then mobilised to look at food and livelihood entitlements. The Reflect circle members came together to seek these entitlements and many were finally able to benefit from government schemes and policies. The focus shifted from literacy to collective action towards ensuring people's access to entitlements.

As women got involved in addressing anti trafficking issues through the Reflect approach it gained a foothold in the communities and was seen as an effective process of including the marginalized. Along with the partners, the KRO team members decided to expand the intervention to other partners going beyond the specific area of anti-trafficking and integrating the rights based approach. The two major issues that emerged (particularly from women) during the integration process were literacy and the need to send children to school. The Reflect Circles were seen as appropriate platforms for mobilizing people around their rights. Hence, the Reflect work spread across the state with women and adolescent girls as primary members.

The current review and reflection exercise of Reflect work is intended to understand its status, its impact, the good practices and the learning. This would help in decisions on the future work structure, which would include AA facilitation and support.



OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Reflect aims to look at intervention, facilitation and change at three levels — the community/ members of the Reflect circle, Reflect facilitators and the organisation. The objectives that concretise the overall purpose were mutually formulated by AA and the reviewing agency. They are:

- TO UNDERSTAND THE PERCEPTION OF REFLECT AT THREE LEVELS: THE COMMUNITY/ CIRCLE MEMBERS, FACILITATORS AND THE ORGANISATION.
- TO ANALYZE THE PROCESS OF CHANGE AS PER THE CIRCLE MEMBERS.
- TO ASSESS THE EXTENT OF LITERACY INTERVENTION AND ITS IMPACT ON MEMBERS.
- TO ANALYZE THE PROGRESS OF THE CIRCLES WITH ADOLESCENTS.
- TO UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF FACILITATION AT ALL LEVELS.
- TO FOCUS ON GOOD PRACTICES AND THE CHANGE.
- TO LOOK AT POSSIBILITIES OF CARRYING FORWARD THE REFLECT APPROACH IN THE STATE.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve these objectives, various methodologies were used for the review and reflection exercise. Participation has been the core principle in designing the methodology and this is in alignment with the true spirit of the Reflect approach

PRELIMINARY PREPARATION

Discussion with ActionAid in order to have clear understanding of the perspective of the exercise and Reflect work especially in the region's context.

TOOLS DEVELOPMENT

The relevant information for the exercise was collected from:

- a) The decision makers in the partner organisation
- b) The facilitators
- c) The Reflect circle members

Focus group discussions (FGD) and group meetings based on core objectives, indicators and a few guidelines and pointers (Annexure 1) were conducted with all three target groups. In order to make the process more effective and highlight the “real voices” of the stakeholders and the partner community, participatory tools were used to capture their feedback on Reflect.



The other participatory tools used interchangeably were:

TREE ANALYSIS: Highlighting the problems of the community, the process to deal with some of the issues in the Circle and the resultant changes.

Tally exercise using smiley cards: To get feedback on the three core components; literacy, rights consciousness and community action.

MOBILITY MAPPING: To highlight the mobility pattern of women before and after being members of the Circle.

PRIORITY RANKING: To identify the real problem in the community.

PROCEDURE

Following the finalisation of schedule, the team of consultants from KK visited all 13 partner organisation and interacted with members, facilitators and the Reflect Circle members at the community level. The sample covered is illustrated below in Table 1.

COLLECTION OF SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data was collected from ActionAid and their partner organisations. It includes the Reflect Mother Manual, project proposals, project reports, training reports, case studies and annual reports of the organisations. References were also drawn from relevant websites and online documents.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data/information generated from these procedures was analysed further in order to highlight the findings. Priority was given to the direct feedback of the participating stakeholders.

REPORT WRITING

The findings and analysis (done through visits and the secondary information) were collated into a comprehensive report in a mutually agreed report structure. A draft report was finalised after due consultation with AA and partners.



Table: 1 Sample covered during the review exercise

NAME OF THE PARTNER NGO	TOTAL NUMBER OF CIRCLES	FACILITATOR MET	PERCENT	NUMBER OF CIRCLES MET	PERCENT	CIRCLE MEMBERS MET
TCS	29	06	21	03	10	23
ASHA	10	03	30	02	20	24
SEVABRTA	20	18	46	03	15	40
NBCD	11	10	91	02	18	27
RIGHT TRACK	10	08	80	01	10	12
ANGIKAR	10	09	90	01	10	17
BMCDM	05	03	60	02	40	30
MAGS	16	05	31	03	19	42
SMOKUS	06	04	67	02	33	20
SHREDS	10	02	20	03	30	51
RURAL AID	10	10	100	03	30	42
G-NESEP	05	03	60	02	40	27
GBS	06	06	100	02	33	25
TOTAL	148	87	59 %	29	20 %	380

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS OF ORGANISATIONS IMPLEMENTING REFLECT IN WEST BENGAL

The review was conducted in Kolkata and eight districts of West Bengal: South 24 Parganas, Purulia, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, and Coochbehar. This was done with 13 partner organisations of AA actively engaged in implementing and utilising Reflect to empower marginalised communities in the state. A brief description of these organisations is below in Table 2.

Table 2: AA organisations actively implementing and utilising Reflect

NAME OF THE NGO	DISTRICT	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	ASSOCIATION WITH AA and REFLECT practice
TCS	Kolkata	<i>The Calcutta Samaritans is a voluntary organisation working in Kolkata since 1971. Its core area of work involves reaching out to drug and alcohol addicts. It is also involved in ensuring education of underprivileged children from the footpaths. AA began working with TCS from 2003.</i>	<i>"Kolkata 4 Change" was a project directly implemented by AA in 2003. With support from other NGOs it enabled the homeless to live a life of dignity. This successful effort of AA was further reviewed and strengthened by the rights based approach. TCS joined this effort as a DA local partner in 2005. In 2007, they started Reflect and currently the organisation is coordinating 29 Reflect Circles of adolescent members.</i>
ASHA	Murshidabad	<i>ASHA was established in 1998 to improve the socio-economic and health status of disadvantaged communities. It focuses on the rights of beedi workers, helping them to obtain ID cards, providing awareness on reproductive and child health, HIV/AIDS, and imparting life skill education to adolescent girls and boys.</i>	<i>ASHA approached AA for help in building groups that ensured women and girl child rights through the rights based approach. In 2007 AA shared the 'Reflect' approach, and ASHA adopted it. Currently the organisation is coordinating 10 Reflect Circles.</i>
Jamgoria Sevabrata	Purulia	<i>Registered in 1986, JS started with work as a local youth club. Currently, SEVABRATA is working on the right to food and livelihood and is spread across 11 blocks in Purulia.</i>	<i>Initially, in 2002, JS provided technical support to the panchayat. This led to joint development related work supported by national funds. From 2004 JS supported development initiatives using the rights based approach. At a training conducted in 2005, AA shared the Reflect approach and from the next year, JS worked on development initiatives using this approach. JS is now coordinating 20 Reflect Circles.</i>
NBCD	Darjeeling	<i>NBCD started in Siliguri in 1990 with the aim of empowering persons with disability. One of its most successful projects is the Prerana Educational Centre established in 1998. It has a residential and day boarding school for 139 children with varied disabilities.</i>	<i>Since 2005, NBCD felt the need to find a sustainable approach towards working for the rights of the disabled. AA facilitated this strategic shift and NBCD is actively engaged in developing groups with persons with disabilities and their families.</i> <i>Post a training conducted by AA in 2005, where the Reflect approach was shared; NBCD had already become AA DA partner and helped build alliances for people with disabilities. It is currently coordinating 11 Reflect Circles.</i>

RIGHT TRACK	Kolkata	<i>In the controversial dock area around south west Kolkata an enthusiastic youth group initiated process of change in 1989 by fighting social evils in the community such as alcoholism and black marketing. This was concretized in 1991 and registered as an NGO. RT uses a rights based approach and focuses on holistic development through education, health, vocational training, environment consciousness, livelihood issues and community participation.</i>	<i>The association with AA began in 2001 primarily on the right to education. In 2002, it got support from the National Fund (NF). In 2005 an AA training showcased the Reflect approach and in 2006 RT became a part of State Reflect Resource Centre (SRRC), as a development area partner. From July 2008, Reflect Circles were formed under RT and currently, the organisation coordinates 10 Reflect Circles.</i>
Digambarpur Angikar	South 24 Pgs.	<i>Digambarpur Angikar – DA (earlier known Gurudaspur Krishnachura Sangha) originally started as a local youth club interested in community work in Digambarpur GP in the Sunderban Delta region. It became a registered NGO almost nine years ago. They initially worked on formation of women's Self Help Groups and the ultimate aim is to help ensure an environment where people are assured of basic rights through a participatory and sustainable development process.</i>	<i>Contact with AA began in 2006, through a rights based initiative that aimed at ensuring women and child rights under the National Fund. At the end of 2006, DA was part of ActionAid's development area fund. The Reflect approach was initiated in January '08 and currently the organisation coordinates 10 Reflect Circles.</i>
BMCDM	South 24 Pgs.	<i>BMCDM was established in 2000 and registered in 2002. The organisation initially focused on education, nutrition and the immunization of children. Low cost latrines and rain water harvesting schemes were also promoted. Later it worked on a rights based approach to women's issues, particularly violence against the girl child.</i>	<i>The association with AA started in 2005, basically on a rights based approach to gender issues, particularly on trafficking issues of women and children. Later it also took up the work on addressing violence against the girl child and the need to promote her education. Post an AA training in 2005, where they were exposed to the Reflect approach, the organisation adopted it for core issues like education, health, gender violence and the shelter and dignity of women. The project was supported till April 2008, but currently funding has been reduced to an honorarium and the role restricted to that of a facilitator coordinating the Reflect initiative in five Circles.</i>

SMOKUS	Uttar Dinajpur	SMOKUS was registered in 1994. Its prime focus is on women and child development issues and work on anti-trafficking and livelihood issues. It promotes around 350 SHGs with NABARD and SJGRY.	In 2005, SMOKUS worked with AA (through the National Fund) on anti trafficking. Post an AA training in 2005 and exposure to the Reflect approach, SMOKUS started anti-trafficking work with this perspective. From May 2008, AA support converted to an honorarium (channelled through Rural Aid) for the facilitator who coordinated the Reflect initiative. Currently the organisation coordinates 8 Reflect Circles of which two are from their own initiatives.
SRHEDS	Dakshin and Uttar Dinajpur	SRHEDS was formed in 1991. It works in 6 blocks of Dakshin Dinajpur and 1 block of Uttar Dinajpur ensuring sustainable development for the distressed and downtrodden, through sustainable agriculture promotion, anti – trafficking, PRI etc.	In 2002, SRHEDS came in contact with AA and worked on anti-trafficking through the National Fund. Post an AA training in 2005 and exposure to the Reflect approach, SMOKUS started anti-trafficking work with this perspective. From May 2008, ActionAid's support converted to an honorarium (channelled through Rural Aid) for the facilitator who coordinated the Reflect initiative. It now coordinates 10 Reflect Circles.
RURAL AID	Jalpaiguri	Rural Aid, is a registered organisation working since 1987. In 2003 Rural Aid extended its operation in Jalpaiguri in North Bengal. The organisation works on issues related to women, adolescents and children, literacy, health, water, sanitation, food security, livelihood, disasters and governance.	In 2006, aided by ActionAid, Rural Aid carried out anti-trafficking work through Reflect approach. The support for the AT project continued till April 2008, after which, Rural Aid become the nodal organisation in North Bengal coordinating Reflect initiatives with AT partners. It now coordinates 10 Reflect Circles.
G-NESEP	Cooch – Behar	G-NESEP was established in 2000 by a committed group of young men and women. It works in 4 blocks of Coochbehar on the issues like anti trafficking (cross border and in country), women and child rights, awareness building in the unorganized labour sector, right to food and work and promotion and propagation of SHGs.	In 2005, G-NESEP was associated with AA on anti-trafficking work. Post an AA training and exposure to the Reflect approach in 2005, G-NESEP used this perspective in anti-trafficking work. Till April 2008, support for AT project continued. After that it came as the honorarium for the facilitator (channelled through Rural Aid) who was to coordinate Reflect initiatives that are currently 5 Reflect Circles.
GBS	Cooch – Behar	GBS was registered in 2001. Presently It works in 5 blocks of Coochbehar on the issues of community empowerment with special focus on women and adolescents, by forming SHGs, Pramila Wahini (GP level committee of women), or by collaborating with the government on the Kishori Shakti Yojana, civil society programme (PRIA), and running the village adoption programme with NABARD.	In 2006, GBS and ActionAid worked on anti-trafficking using the Reflect approach. Till April 2008, this support for AT project continued. Currently, the organisation coordinates 8 Reflect Circles of which 2 are from their own initiatives. They are introducing the Reflect approach in 40 new groups as well. Currently they are mobilising women on issues of livelihood and land rights using the ActionAid National Fund.

* DA: Development Area. DA partners usually get long term support

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

PARTNER ORGANISATION'S PERSPECTIVE

"Reflect is a continuously changing, self-evolving process for a group of disadvantaged people especially women in order to make them aware of their rights and entitlements. A changed perspective enables them to unite and fight against discrimination and ensure access to services."

Consolidated reflection of NGO staff

The Reflect concept was introduced to partner organisations through trainings, meetings and exposure visits. Initially, most interpreted it as an adult literacy programme. Only after implementation and capacity building sessions did they recognise its validity in mobilising communities, especially the poor and marginalised.

Most such partners worked on anti-trafficking. Though considerably experienced in alliance building, they were new to the approach but agreed to initiate it within a specific vulnerable community or most vulnerable pockets.

It was encouraging to find that though the anti-trafficking project formally ended in April 2008, the Reflect approach has been appreciated by decision makers in partner organisations who have moved forward with minimum financial support and have encouraged facilitators and Circle members to carry on though on a limited scale. Those at an advanced stage were taking concrete steps towards self-sufficiency and many organisations who facilitated the formation of SHG groups have included economic empowerment within the Reflect process. The new Circles however were impacted by lack of financial resources and monitoring.

Most acknowledge that implementing Reflect is an immense learning experience. GBS, ASHA are now using this approach in other programmes and projects that empower the poor, the marginalised and vulnerable and have convinced other donors to support this strategy in development initiatives they fund. Almost all organisations believed that this approach could bring about lasting social change in their regions but felt that they would need more time and capacity building to ensure a long term impact.

GBS of Coochbehar was supporting six Reflect Circles through AA support. The organisation felt that this process of empowerment could be taken beyond a project and a limited area and have initiated two more Reflect Circles with their own resources. They have also managed to get support from another agency for a civil society empowerment programme by forming 40 groups that functioned like the Circles and integrated previous learnings.

FACILITATORS' PERSPECTIVE

"Reflect is a process to by which community members identify, prioritise, analyse and solve problems themselves. This process ensures independence and empowerment. It leads to for social change and education and hence spreads its fragrance to reach other communities."

Consolidated reflection of Reflect facilitators

Facilitators play a crucial role in the formation, conscientisation and continuation of the circle. They are usually from the immediate community or, from a neighbouring one and in some cases from the NGO staff. However it appears that those from the immediate community are more accepted. Their educational qualifications ranged from primary education to graduation, but this has never been a limiting factor.

For most it has been a life transforming experience. Many have personally experienced domestic



violence, exclusion, gender bias, ignorance and illiteracy. In a sense they mirror the society they belong to and therefore are best equipped to communicate. Often, facilitators have started out as Circle members and have grown into the facilitator role.

The facilitators have both potential and energy; but as they themselves point out, they require support and training so that they can facilitate the Circles efficiently. In certain cases the role requires more clarity and definition, so that they can successfully guide

the group towards sustainability instead of dependence. Those who emerged from the community command respect and enjoy power — some have been elected as Panchayat members some even reach the level of a Pradhan.

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CIRCLE MEMBERS' PERSPECTIVE

"It's a platform that has enabled us to move out of the confines of our houses to a larger world and discuss our problems and joys with other members. Through this we have learnt to find solutions by getting information on a range of issues. It is also a place where we learnt to write our names and gained social recognition."

Consolidated response of circle members.

Members of Reflect Circles are mostly women from rural areas with limited mobility and low literacy levels. Gender discrimination and domestic violence is common, and a woman's role is perceived to be only that of a homemaker. Articulating their views on their rights is a far cry. This perception was a major challenge when women decided to come together to form Reflect circles.

The situation improved as women met every week, shared their feelings, articulated their life experiences and identified common issues of concern. Adolescents with problems were inquisitive to know more about themselves, their communities and their future. They found the Circle to be a platform to make friends and gain knowledge.

Most were illiterate and a major benefit of belonging to the Reflect Circle was the fact they learnt to write their names. This brought confidence and respect as many men till today are unable to read or write. Most importantly, they were able to sign on all official documents relating to Panchayat work.

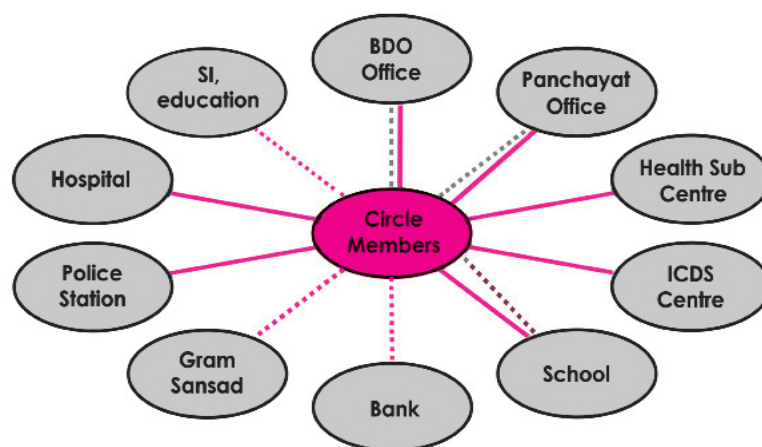
With an awareness of their rights members are now well informed on schemes and entitlements. The Reflect approach assisted them in identifying problems, prioritising, and identifying ways of finding solutions themselves. This was done through group meetings and discussions. Empowerment through information enabled them to raise their voices against injustice. With each success the group grew stronger and was motivated to address the next set of problems. The Circles gained recognition and respect in the community as well.

Circle members acknowledge that earlier they were reluctant to speak to outsiders, but today even the BDO fears them (*"Aamra aage bairer lokeder samne katha bolte partam na, ekhon amaderke BDO shahebo bhoy paan."*) They are now people of stature and other women come for help with their problems.

The Circle members feel, *"Hum kuan mein rehne wale medhak the, ab bahar aa gaye"* (We were frogs in the well i.e. having a very limited universe, and now we have come out of it). This Circle has also identified community leaders based on their skills, qualities and initiative.

The mobility map based on information shared by the Circle members on their mobility and accessibility to various stakeholders, the Panchayat, government departments and institutions is illustrated in Figure 1. It shows considerable increase in their accessibility and mobility to various locations and stakeholders so that community action can be taken to ensure their entitlements.

Figure1: Mobility map of the circle members before and after Reflect Circle



.....Used to visit before joining in Reflect, but not frequently

.....Visits after joining in Reflect, but not frequently

———— Visiting frequently after joining in Reflect

Currently about 3000 marginalized women in west Bengal are part of the Reflect circle

COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVE

"We have come to know that in these Circles, women discuss their problems and also how and where to find work. They also get to know what they are entitled to. Can't we also be part of this? Can you help us start another group in our village?"

Consolidated remark of women who are not members of Reflect.

When Circle members led community action to access their entitlements, Reflect Circles gain prominence. Women are recognised as being knowledgeable and are respected. As a result, people from adjacent villages consult the Circle members asking for their advice on how to solve their problems. Women of these villages are interested in starting such groups and come to meetings to acquire skills and get information.

The community views this with pride. They say, "Kolkata theke lokera ashe, oder sathe katha bolte eytao khub baro sammaner bishoy" (People from Kolkata come to meet them; this is a great sign of respect and recognition.)

School authorities and even the Panchayat have provided space to conduct meetings. In one case, the Panchayat offered space for members to build a structure for meetings. Reflect is valued in the community and by the local authorities.

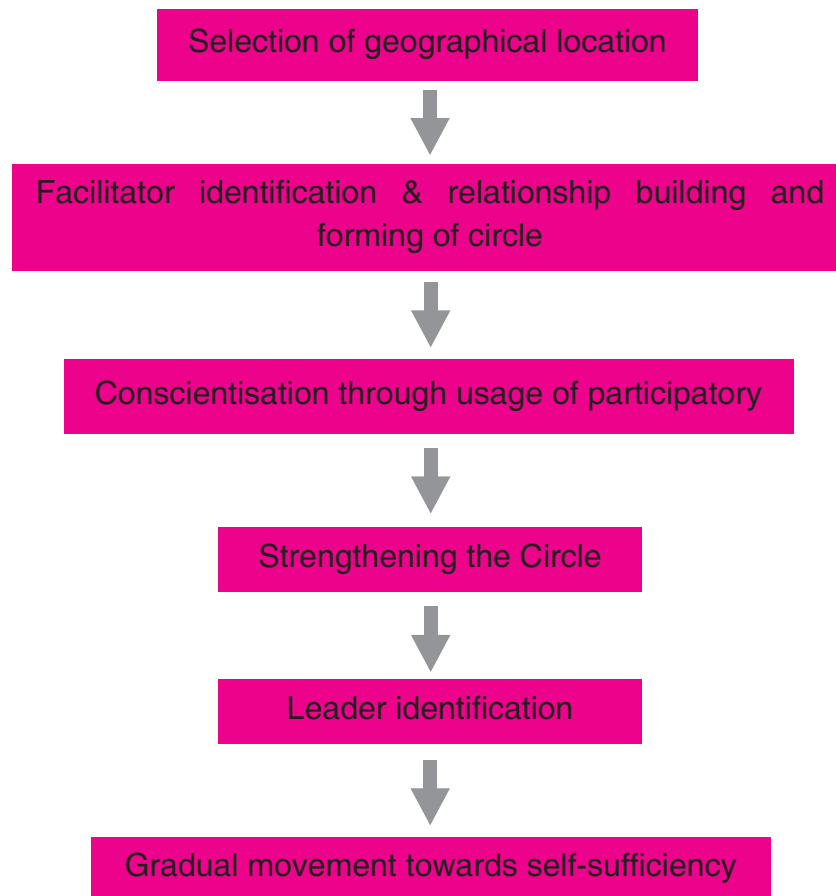
Where the Reflect Circles are active; they are able to pressurise the Panchayat to perform better. Women from local SHGs and others as well have shown solidarity when there is a need to show collective strength to combat a social problem.

Reflect Circle 6 in Rasakhoya village of Karundighi block (Uttar Dinajpur) is a year old. It has successfully initiated community action on issues of domestic violence, trafficking, physical abuse of women, primary education and entitlements under the NREGA scheme. Its reputation for efficacy has spread to other villages. In one case a woman travelled a long distance to seek help. Her boyfriend left her pregnant 12 years ago. Her returned years later, but refused to marry her. She is now a mother of a 12-year-old. Circle members are helping her in taking action against the man.

STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION

AA has not defined rules in implementing Reflect. A self evolved process has been undertaken to initiate, implement and sustain Reflect Circles. This may have context specific variations but the overall framework has been captured in Figure 2. Each of the steps has been further detailed below in the chapter.

Figure 2: Steps undertaken to start Reflect Circles



SELECTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The objective of the Reflect approach is to empower the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised. Therefore, the area selection is crucial. Most associated organisations have considerable experience in certain districts and blocks and can identify socially and economically backward pockets in their project areas or those adjacent to it. Selection of the block and GP is primarily done by the organisation. Staff members visit the villages of the GP or relevant wards in the city and finalise it. In few cases organisations consult the BDO of the block or Gram Panchayat Pradhan for identification of the GP or village to start the Reflect process.

But in some cases the group has been formed from the existing SHGs or other women's groups. Such groups have been converted to a Circle by value adding core components that are not linked to economic benefits and transactions common to SHGs.

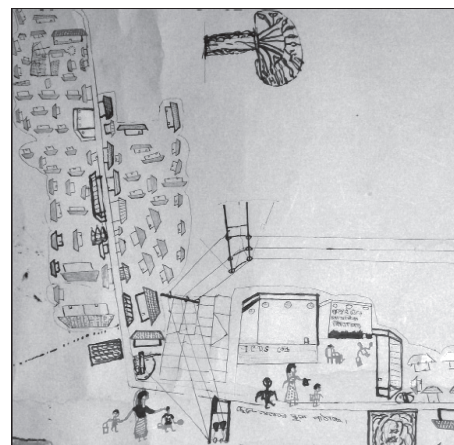
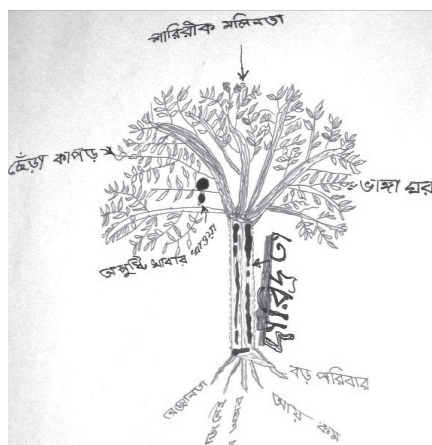
RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND FORMING OF CIRCLE

Once the area is identified, a facilitator is chosen mostly through local reference. Staff and the identified facilitator build rapport with a few local villagers and share the purpose of the visit. With the help of some interested men and/ women and influential individuals, a meeting with local women is organised.

The intent to form a Circle is announced and consensus the members on its formation. Following a social mapping exercise the Reflect Circle begins to meet. Initially the gathering is large but with time the group reduces to just those who are truly interested and can spare time for the group activities. Most groups comprise 25-30 members each.

USE OF BASIC PRA PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

Group discussions have emerged as the most popular tool or methodology to arrive at a consensus. The Circle starts with weekly meetings where people share personal experiences and problems. Facilitators introduce them to common issues affecting them as a group through social mapping exercises. Nature mapping, mobility mapping, problem tree analysis enables the members gain insight on the resources available, the bottlenecks in accessing services and various problems. This is the time when facilitators introduce basic PRA tools like social mapping, natural mapping, mobility mapping and problem tree analysis. These tools help the community members understand their surrounding and identify the root causes of their problems. Other techniques and participatory methods used by facilitators are street corner theatre (especially with the adolescent groups) and open meetings, posters, locally made flip charts and other communication tools along with participatory exercises have been commonly used to facilitate Circle discussions.



STRENGTHENING THE CIRCLE

The Circle is further strengthened by empowering women with information and helping them prioritise their needs. Also by planning community action to effect change through negotiation and protests. There has been an element of challenge at all stages. Resistance has been mostly from husbands, in-laws and the community. Comments like “Indira Gandhi hoya jabe” (Will you become Indira Gandhi?) are not uncommon.

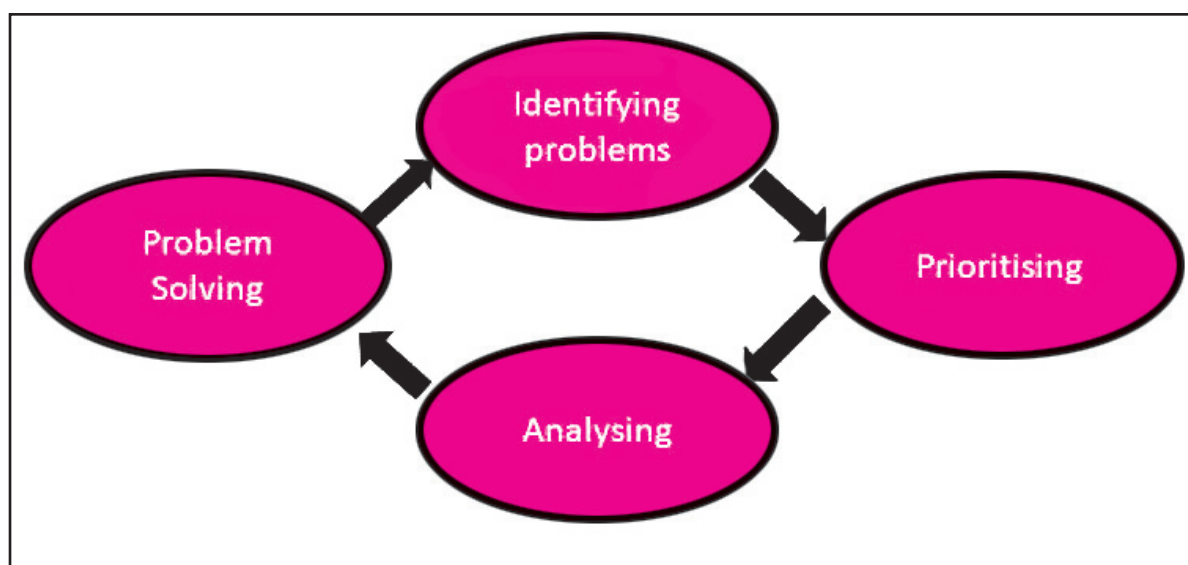
Two approaches were used by facilitators to initiate community action. Either the most important issue identified by the circle was chosen to start community action or relatively lighter issues that could be solved easily with intervention were chosen. The faster the group showed success through mobilisation and action, the quicker they gained recognition and respect in the community. The families’ resistance also lessened with time. The Circles have been strengthened with the support of the facilitators.

LEADER IDENTIFICATION

Within the collective of women in the Circle there are those who are more articulate, vocal and display greater interest in Circle level activities. They are usually identified as leaders and they ensure that members are present in meetings, gather other women for community action and represent the group when they meet external stakeholders. Usually those with some educational background and political affiliations are more easily chosen as leaders. There is also an emerging trend of Circle leaders being identified as facilitators and a few have even been elected as Panchayat members.

GRADUAL MOVEMENT TOWARDS SELF SUFFICIENCY

As the Circles start identifying problems, prioritising, analysing and solving them independently, the confidence to tackle other issues increases and as information levels increase, so does enthusiasm and motivation. The local recognition strengthens the Circle and so they are able to take concrete steps towards self sufficiency. Some groups have started saving money collectively to support their actions and other activities. Only about five percent have shown concrete signs of self sufficiency while the rest are still in need of strong facilitation and support from NGOs.



1 Indira Gandhi was first woman prime minister of India and is considered of the most empowered woman.

COMPONENTS OF REFLECT

COMMUNITY ACTION

Moving ahead to solve the challenges of their lives and their own problems have emerged to be the key component of Reflect functioning in West Bengal. The exposure to knowledge of their rights and entitlements has empowered them enough to enable them to raise their voices and question the system or other malpractices in society. The facilitator plays a significant role in motivating members and providing them with the confidence that they will be able to carry out the process. Issue identification is done collectively. The choice could veer towards an urgent problem that is comparatively easier to solve. The strategy is worked out by the women and supported by the facilitator who tries to ensure that the group takes the initiative. There have been instances however when other NGOs have persuaded the group to take a burning issue forward e.g. the right to food and right to livelihood under the NREGA scheme.

The status of the group and its members' capacity and motivation are key factors in ensuring success. This component has provided success and recognition to the group and thus the activities in the Circle revolves around working towards identifying issues and mobilising action to bring about change. The family and the community/para also gains respect through the Circle's activities.

Various strategies have been used to deal with problems. It could be writing letters to relevant authorities, submitting a petition, following up, information sharing, sensitising, involving the police and in some cases even organising a gherao of officials and GP staff. The usually quiet and reticent women have actually shouted and fought to ensure they gain success in accessing their rights. In many cases a more educated member's intervention has hastened the process. Whenever there is need to gather large numbers for an issue, Circle members are able to mobilise other local women as well – they could be neighbours, part of the family or women SHG members. Those Circles that are over three years old emerge as strong pressure groups, and their reputation and popularity has spread far and wide.

During the review-reflection exercise, the consultants conducted the 'problem tree exercise' where the Circle members highlighted community problems and the means and mechanisms they used to address it and the changes that they were able to achieve through their own efforts. A generic list has been compiled in Table 3 from all the different group works.

Figure 3.

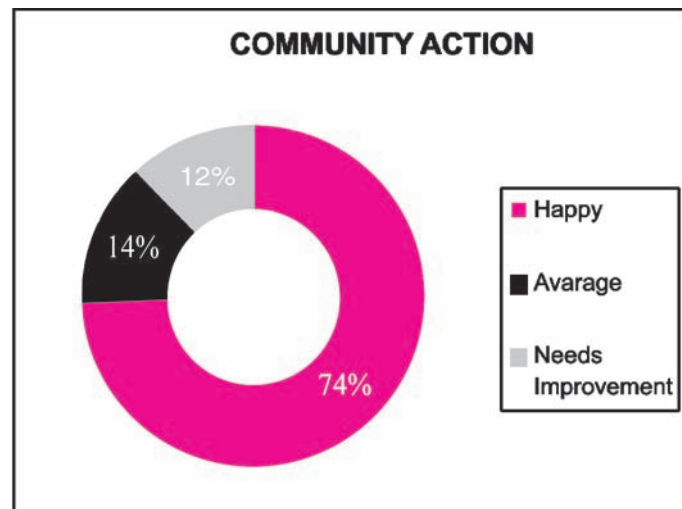


Table 3: Problem, action and achievement/change matrix compiled from tree analysis

Major Problem	Activity undertaken / Process	Output achieved
Gender discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting Group discussion Games for learning Raising voices Rights awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to outside world Participation in gram sansad meeting Can express feelings Formation of SHG Respect in community Women Pradhan
Poor functioning of schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting, Pressure building at Panchayat & BDO level Uniting voices Deputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School teachers regularly come to school Admitting children in schools. Became members of VEC
Trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting Training Group discussion Street corners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trafficking incidents either considerably reduced or stopped If a person outside the community wants to marry a girl, his identity is thoroughly checked. Girls stopped from being trafficked
Substance abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building pressure to remove liquor shops and ganja (Indian hemp). Motivating alcoholics to quit the habit Gherao/ Deputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stopping substance abuse Closing the liquor shop
Domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal action against domestic violence. Raising voices Rights awareness Organising rallies Family counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in level of domestic violence Women have learnt to protest They know where to go for help
Lack of proper sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building pressure on Panchayat, BDO, Raising voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allotment of sanitary plates
Identity and related entitlements (ration card, BPL card, Beedi workers identity Card, disability certificate etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building pressure on Panchayat, BDO, Raising voices Rights awareness Petition to officials Mass follow up 	<p>Obtaining the following identity and related entitlements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth certificate, Disability certificate, Death certificate, Beedi (tobacco) Worker I.D, Ration card available

<i>Midday Meal – Not provided or not of good quality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building pressure on Panchayat, BDO, ▪ Raising voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of midday meal ▪ Ensuring quality food available ▪ Provided with the responsibility to monitor the quality
<i>Existence of child marriage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting ▪ Group discussion ▪ Games for learning ▪ Raising voices ▪ Individual family counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some cases were stopped ▪ Increased awareness on this issue.
<i>Poverty & livelihood</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building pressure on Panchayat, BDO, ▪ Uniting the voices ▪ Deputation ▪ Meeting ▪ Group discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring entitlement under NREGA ▪ Membership of SHG access to credit and savings
<i>Lack of health facilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building pressure on the Panchayat ▪ Building pressure on the BDO and local health officials ▪ Uniting voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sub Centre available and functioning ▪ Facilities of Janine Suresh & Shish Suresh ensured.
<i>Lower literacy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting ▪ Group discussion ▪ Games for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to sign

Apart from the above mentioned issues focus groups working on issues of adolescents, the disabled, and the rights of beedi workers or those in the tea gardens have been addressed through community action. However the observation is that such actions are initiated after six months to a year of the group functioning.

April 2006, a Reflect Circle was formed in Godagari village of Sagarpara GP in Jalangi block of Murshidabad with 25 women from the local community whose husbands in most cases had migrated to towns and cities to work. The Circle members were alone and felt excluded and insecure. They realised that as women they were denied right to agricultural land. Together with the facilitator, they familiarised themselves with the process of 'patta' (the legal paper showing ownership of land) distribution and all the legal formalities required to secure a 'patta'. They then approached the block land revenue officer, the local administration and the Panchayat and demanded patta for women. Mostly they were refused and told, "Women can't get patta". As the men were away the land ownership for others in community could never be realised, not even through a lease agreement. After disappointing confrontations, they gathered themselves again with renewed energy and contacted local lawyers and also the sub-divisional administration so as to get to know details on the clauses in the land 'patta' allotment system. The West Bengal State Land Reforms Act, 1955, clearly states that women can get a 'patta' of land. This information helped them and they organised deputations to the BDO and Panchayat office. After much persistence, the administration finally relented and 32 women from Sagarpara were allotted 'patta' for 0.8 acres of agricultural land for agricultural work at Rs130 per annum (reduced) tax under the West Bengal State Land Reforms Act, 1955.

During the review approximately 125 women participated in the Smiley ranking exercise and the members rated the satisfaction levels with each of the core components of Reflect. The result was 74 happy responses on the most popular component of the Circle activities.

RIGHTS

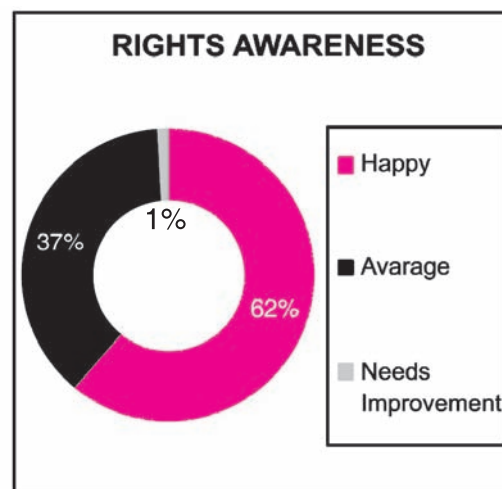
As Circle members discuss their family situations, problems and challenges, the facilitator helps identify significant areas and makes women aware of their rights. The most commonly discussed rights are gender related. Some of the other frequently discussed rights are: Land rights, right to livelihood, right to food especially in context of women's rights; children's right to education, health etc. The schemes and programmes that translate their rights to entitlements are also discussed e.g the mid day meal scheme, ICDS and NREGA, the antyodya scheme, the total sanitation campaign etc. Information on various acts and legislations related to domestic violence and child marriage are imparted and saves women from these social evils. Other rights and entitlements discussed were related to disability, the rights of beedi and tea garden workers, tribals etc. This information is discussed within the group and in some cases the organisations' do a reflection of the level of rights consciousness achieved.

Information comes by through discussion with the groups and sometimes through theatre group excises, BCC and IEC materials. This has helped women look beyond the age-old traditions, subjugations and threats from within their family and made them realise that there are ways and means to protect themselves and their children.



that focus on women and children. As most women are illiterate, the need of strengthening related IEC and BCC has also been felt so as to retain and reinforce the message.

Figure 4



Community action also happens once women are conscious of their rights and are clear on various violations. Through Circle activities women are able and motivated to speak out against all types of discrimination and violation of their rights.

Through the review exercise it was also felt that in the rush to effect change clarity on rights per se is not complete. The focus has been on carrying forward community action, thus knowledge about rights has remained limited and would need a more planned and intense communication to take it at the level of rights consciousness.

In some cases the facilitator also realises his or her limitation in possessing knowledge on various kinds of rights and entitlements

Approximately 125 women participated in the smiley card exercise and ranked their satisfaction level on each Reflect component. Sixty two percent women are happy knowing about so many of their rights but 38 percent felt their knowledge is average and needs improvement as stated in Figure 5. This indicates that innovations may be required to reinforce these messages and build in strong rights consciousness amongst the people, especially the marginalised.

Reflect Circle members in Satali GP depended on the tea gardens for their livelihood and following the recession, women and their families suffered due to delayed wages. Through discussion in the Circle, members learnt about their right to work and the NREGA scheme and found it to be a good opportunity to supplement their income. With support from the facilitator and members they procured 'job cards'. But when they enquired on the availability of work, they were dismissed by the Panchayat whose members said they were unable to provide any information. Circle members along with the community decided to visit the Gram Panchayat office and submit their demand for hundred days work in writing. They also went to the BDO who in turn pressurised the Pradhan. Ultimately the Pradhan had to conduct a survey of all those with job cards who were without work. Seventy such were identified and a list was prepared with details of the job card number as well.

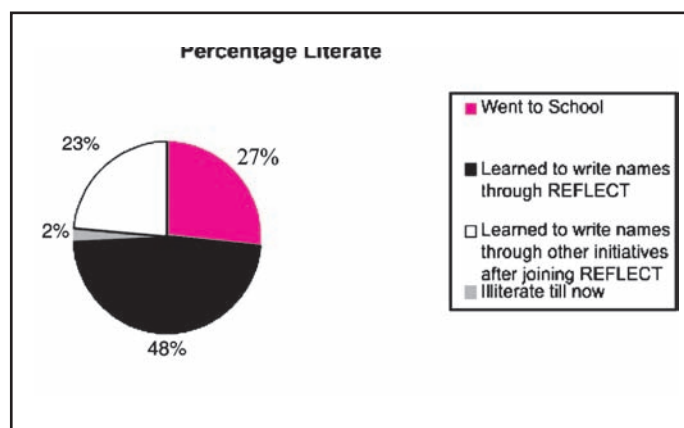
Finally, the Reflect Circle members and the community were successful. Job card holders of the Madhu tea garden got work under NREGA. As the village is affected by floods the work relates to building a proper drainage system and preparing roads. The rights and entitlement consciousness translated into these tea estate workers being able to enjoy their right to work.

LITERACY

The Freireian philosophy of the politics of literacy was the guiding factor in formulating the Reflect approach after integrating it with participatory methodologies developed by PRA practitioners. Reflect was thus initiated with a focus on adult literacy that would lead to empowerment of the poor. The Reflect Mother Manual guides facilitators and organisations on various participatory methodologies by using maps, matrices, calendars and other graphics to help adult learners analyse social, economic, political and cultural situations and thereby learn to read and write.

Following a discussion with Circle members during the review exercise, it was felt that women identified literacy with not just the skill of reading and writing but also as a tool for effective communication and self respect that would enable them to have easier access to information. Some looked on education as means to gain intelligence “Jodi pora shuna jantam, tahale ektu budhi hoto” (If I was literate I would have become more intelligent.)

Figure 5.



In most of the groups the literacy intervention has been done by empowering the group members by helping them to write their names and this one learning has been immensely empowering for women.

In organisations like Sevabrata, literacy was used as an entry point to form the circle. Most organisations also started by drawing social maps where groups of women drew various aspects of their village

From initially focussing on adult education and teaching members to read and write words from daily life, they later moved onto activities on social action that would bring about changes in their lives. This shift also helped the groups to get stronger foothold in the community and gain popularity.

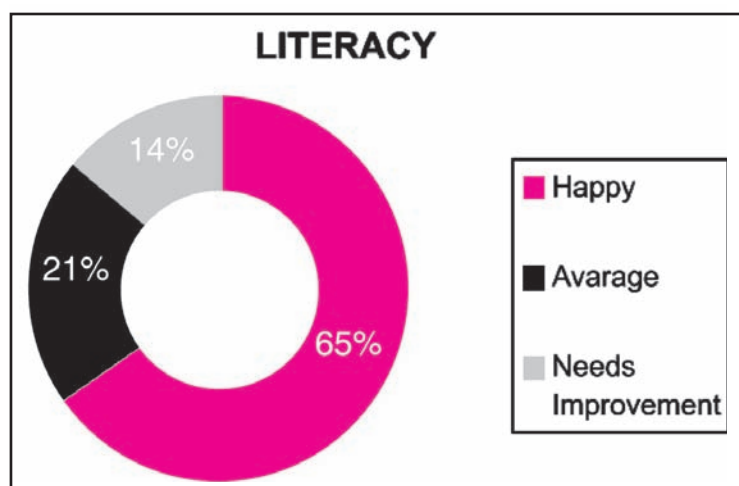
Members now understand that even being able to write their names is of immense value. It not only enhances their social status but is an essential requirement in financial transactions at the GO level and in SHG activities. The fact they can also sign their own petitions, is a matter of pride for them.

In few organisations like GBS, the Circle members have chosen to join other NGO-run and government-run adult literacy programmes members. They are also aware of the importance of education and make sure that their children go to school.

To look at the broader impact of the association of women in the Reflect Circle it has been observed that most Circle members now have a clear understanding of their surroundings and have even done a social mapping and resource mapping of the area. During the focus group discussions (FGDs) with approximately 300 women, it was also found that 27% had some background of education before, 48 percent have learnt to write their names after joining Reflect while 23 percent of the members are still illiterate.

The satisfaction analysis through the Smiley card exercise revealed that 65 percent of the women were happy with the literacy intervention which was largely in training women to write their name but 36 percent of the women felt that the intervention needs more improvement or is average as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6.



Jahanara Bibi (name changed) is one of the active members of a Reflect Circle in Baspara, a village of Godhanpara GP under the Jalangi block (Murshidabad) that has been functioning for last one year.

As a homemaker, she had little access to the outside world and no opportunity to contribute in the family's decision making process. She had not gone to school either. After joining the Reflect circle she learnt to read and write.

This transformation in Jahanara surprised her husband and her family. She gained confidence and became vocal and articulate. Now she is valued in her family and her opinion is considered important in all the family decisions. The husband too has taken the initiative to learn to write his own name.

OTHER SHADES OF REFLECT

INVOLVING THE MARGINALISED AND EXCLUDED

Reflect has proved immensely empowering for the women who belong to marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The women who belong to Reflect Circles are not only from the poorest of the poor families but from SC/ST and backward class groups, tribal and minority communities. In urban areas, homeless adolescents and the youths belonging to the poorest slums as well as squatters have also been reached. These women and girls with limited literacy are often victims of abuse and violence. They suffer from ill health and lack of information and the ability to speak out against years of domination and control from their families and the patriarchal society.

Reflect, in a sense, has given them a fresh lease of life. They have learnt to write their names and become vocal and articulate. They are mobile, moving out beyond their households and agricultural land holdings to visit the GP, block officials and other departments and institutions. Many have gained basic literacy skills, know their rights and are able to not only challenge local governance but they have also gained control in their own male dominated households. Leaders have emerged to lead community action and carry forward the group activities in a sustainable manner. They have also started participating in Gram Sansad meetings, have been nominated as political candidates and won Panchayat elections.

Meena Roy (name changed) belongs to a Circle in Targram village under the Panchgram GP of Murshidabad. Like most women in her village, she lived a secluded life, till she joined Reflect almost two and half years ago. She became an active member; quite knowledgeable about women's rights and entitlements. She actively participated in the Circle level activities which also made her popular in the village. Last year she was nominated a candidate and won the Panchayat elections. She is now into the political process but doesn't forget her base and continues to fight for the development of the village, especially the women. She considers it her responsibility to carry the voices of the other women forward to the Panchayat level.

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS

Increasingly adolescent girls have become vulnerable to abuse, early marriage, deprivation from education and trafficking. This has been the reason why they are included as a target group in a Reflect Circle. Adolescent Circles for the homeless in Kolkata are initiated by TCS. Adolescents from slums and squatter colonies are under the purview of Right Track. These adolescents are either school going or drop outs and in some cases from the never enrolled category. However children in the third category are few so literacy has not been a focus in the formation of these groups. Most Circles are new — they still need greater facilitation and time so that they are empowered enough to raise their voices against the social evils and patriarchal institutions.



This space has emerged as one where people can share their problems and gain knowledge about themselves and their rights. The high energy levels reflected in some of the groups also indicates the potential of an effective Circle.

One big challenge in keeping the Circle together is the mobility of young girls due to migration or marriage. Child marriage and trafficking are common ills here and so a process has been initiated whereby members raise their voices against these issues and for the need for education.

In Kolkata, TCS has formed boys Circles so that they can be oriented on relevant issues, though it is difficult to get them together at a particular time.

Activities like games motivates them to come to the circle and gradually they get interested in the other discussions of the Reflect circle.

18 years old Shakila (name changed) a member of the adolescent Circle, near the railway tracks of Park Circus railway station in Kolkata. She works in other people's homes. A burkha clad woman once offered her a maid's job for Rs.10,000 along with clothes and food. However because she was a member of a Circle, Shakila knew about trafficking and did not believe her. She took the clothes but decided to inform the police and the woman was caught and found to be an agent in trafficking women and girls. Shakila continues to go to court as a witness whenever required. She is happy that she was aware of such situations and skilfully used her judgment to save herself from being trafficked.

BUILDING ALLIANCES

The Reflect approach has enabled local women in the para (community) to share their problems, prioritise issues and find out solutions for themselves. These interventions have not only changed lives of women in the Circle but also beyond it. The macro impact at the village level and at the GP level has had a ripple effect in the larger community. Women now want to join a Reflect Circle or start one. The process begins when women outside the Circle either join a movement and wish to continue or because they see that Circle members are able to take their concerns to Panchayat or other places and access benefits.

Alliance building is a process initiated by the DA partners of AA, in order to form issue based groups to help bring about social change through partnership, mobilisation and social action. These partners have also formed Reflect Circles with the most difficult to reach target groups.

Strong possibilities of the formation of other Reflect Circles have emerged from the areas surrounding successfully functioning Circles. An interest to work for change can be encouraged by forming alliances with the Reflect approach. It has been felt that Reflect helps in building leadership potential, while alliance building provides the necessary strength for a mass movement that can address local problems.

In the Reflect Circle in Konacahara village of the Adabari GP of Shetai Block in Cooch Behar, women have led movements and stopped the production of liquor or improved the quality of midday meals and the functioning of ICDS centres. Women have brought about unimaginable change in just two years and so are very popular. They are saving up to ensure the Circle's sustainability. They have built an enclosure and a shelter through collections and space contributed by members. These women have motivated many others to form such Circles, mobilised support for over 40 other community groups where the Reflect approach organisation is being used to empower community based organisations on their rights.

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

One of the positive outcomes of is that members are not only vocal about demanding their own rights but feel responsible for other villagers in times of need. In some Circles members contribute on a weekly, monthly or even 'as and when required' basis. This takes care of the Circle's operational needs like expenditure on travel and food when the Circle is deputed to the GP or block office. In addition, the Reflect Circle also contributes and extends support to those who require immediate help.

A Reflect Circle was formed in the Saidabad tea estate, Kuthiline in Bidhan Nagar 2 GP under Phansidewa block (Jalpaiguri). The members collected money to cover the cost of travel and food when members go to the block office or Gram Panchayat. This helped in quickly initiating community action and other unplanned expenditure.

There was a disabled child from a very poor family in the village who had no support and was unable to move around asking for any help. The Circle members oriented his family on the child's rights and entitlements and bore the cost of travel for the child and his family to the block level office to get a disability certificate. Thus, with the help of Circle members, the child was able to get the much-needed identity card that allows him to access his other rights and entitlements.



- ☐ AA's anti trafficking partners are limited by lack of support and resources and often unable to continue with the Circle's functioning. There is a chance that due to lack of proper monitoring and technical support some Circles may phase out, despite having potential.
- ☐ In some cases, the implementing organisations lack the vision to utilise the Reflect approach in other development interventions, and implement the Reflect Circles in a stand alone project mode.
- ☐ Educated members of the Circles have in many cases played a crucial role in mobilising and leading community action. In some cases there is dependence on the educated members and a chance that they may dominate the group and monopolise the leadership role.
- ☐ Political affiliations of members and facilitators have in some cases caused bottlenecks in carrying forward the Circle level activities as it colours the perception of the people/ other members.
- ☐ Especially in the case of DA partners, facilitators may have other responsibilities in the organisation and this reduces the time they have to facilitate the Reflect Circles causing the Circles to become weak and ineffective. It has been also observed that such organisation-based facilitators have multiple roles and are unable to focus on the Reflect activities.
- ☐ As most of the Circles are in the remote villages where conveyance facilities are not very good also the geographical spread of the circle makes it further difficult to supervise without proper means of conveyance.
- ☐ The groups over the period have had members come and go especially for the Anti-trafficking project partners who have gone through a phase of transition and thus in many cases the old groups have new members almost making a fresh start.
- ☐ The groups in most cases still are largely guided and supported by the facilitator. This dependence has made some group to become weak in the event of the replacement or change of a facilitator.
- ☐ The possibility of Reflect approach to be integrated with the SHG structure is yet to be explored as SHG has been used as a sustainability strategy for many of the organisation and the challenge is to retain the Reflect approach in the growing economic interest of the group.
- ☐ Most of the circle meetings are being conducted in an open space and the women continue their work outside their home (like tea garden workers) or working at home (beedi binders) or have children to look after. This factor affects the attention span of women and it becomes difficult for the facilitator to continue discussion and conduct PRA exercises.
- ☐ The facilitators have to acquire a lot of information on rights and entitlements — they are challenged by this and are often not so well equipped.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNITY BASED FACILITATOR

The Reflect initiative must be facilitated by the community based facilitator after empowering them through trainings. This is because community based facilitator know the area better, undergo the same problems, is available to the circle all the time and will remain quite integrated with the whole process, even if there is lack of resources

IDENTIFICATION OF CIRCLES

The Circles must be initiated in an area after considering the socio economic profile of the area through either primary or secondary sources. Criteria of selection may include income range, caste groups, religious groups or groups with specific vulnerabilities like migration, trafficking, disaster prone area etc.

Capacity building at all levels is a requirement to strengthen Reflect work in West Bengal

- For management level or for decision makers of the organisation so that they can have a better understanding of the strength of Reflect as an approach to help them take it beyond the project level.
- For facilitators so that they become more efficient and innovative in utilising PRA tools and techniques to generate maximum understanding, reflection and action through active participation.
- For facilitator about various rights and associated entitlements. This training on a particular rights and entitlements can be provided to a core group of facilitators on each issue. They can be empowered as trained for the other facilitators in the organisation. For example – One group of facilitator becomes the expert in Right to Work and the entitlements under NREGA, while another becomes expert in Right to Health and entitlements under NRHM.
- For Reflect circle members – At least two members of each circle will have the elementary information of the basic rights and corresponding entitlements. Training organised for the group leaders on leadership skills and sustainability may be effective.

EXPANDING THE NUMBER OF CIRCLES

Currently there are only a few Reflect Circles in a block or GP that too restricted to small community pockets (para/ hamlets). In order to have a greater impact through Reflect, owing to the increasing demand for such Circles and to have effective participation in the governance there is a need to expand the existing Circles to cover at least a GP in a block.

GUIDELINES

There is a need of developing a guideline for Reflect functioning in the regional context. This will assist in the supportive monitoring and supervision to follow through the process of change; even stating the basics of Reflect like criteria for selecting an area for starting Reflect approach, for selecting facilitator or members, or even the helpful PRA tool vis-à-vis the Rights and entitlements. One needs to be careful in the effort to standardise that micro level innovations should not be limited.

URBAN MODEL

Sustaining Reflect Circle in an urban community especially amongst the poorest homeless and residents of the squatter colonies have been a challenge. Thus in participatory manner an urban strategy to concretise the Circles may be effective to deal with the increasingly mobile and confused urban poor into a Reflect circle.

FROM BASIC TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

Considering the level of circle members and the skills of the facilitator, the time period required from identification of the area to its self-sufficient operation will be around five years. Presently the oldest Circles are around quarter to three years old. So the circle still requires guidance and resources in the form of facilitator, training or capacity building etc for another three years for some of the Circles to move towards sustainability.



CONCLUSION

Reflect has taken a unique shape in the state, a model has emerged where women have paved their own way to find a space within the social ambit of the villages through the Reflect Circles. Though it was initiated to supplement the anti trafficking efforts of organisations but its success has motivated its larger replication in the state through more organisations joining in this effort of expansion. The empowerment of poor and marginalised women in the most distant and remote communities have been exemplary. The women have found friends and have given voices to their needs and thoughts. The adolescent group has been a necessary value addition to protect and involve the adolescents as citizens of the state.

The community and the government structure have become aware about its existence and thus have become conscious of people's opinion reflected through the circle members making them more responsive.

Thus there is a tremendous scope for the approach to be integrated with the other ongoing development initiatives by expanding the Circles and intensively building capacities at all levels. The partners should work towards creating an environment where together, the poor should be able to make a difference in their own lives by participating in the governance with active support of local stakeholders.

ANNEXURE

GUIDELINES FOR SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

ORGANISATION LEVEL

1. Give a brief introduction of the organisation.
2. How long has your organisation has been associated with ActionAid and in what way?
3. What are the core activities of the organisation? Where does Reflect stand in the activities of the organisation?
4. What is Reflect according to you?
5. What was the purpose of implementing Reflect in your project area?
6. Give the operational structure of the Reflect in your organisation?
7. What kind of Capacity Building Training is being organised on Reflect? What are the areas where more support is required?
8. What were the inputs given for literacy, what was the process of giving literacy input?
9. What were/ are the major rights issues you worked with, what was the process of empowerment on rights?
10. What were the major actions taken by the Reflect circle to address the right issues?
11. What were the total number of group and number of members initially and what are the present numbers?
12. Whether any indicator was set by the organization to measure the changes of the members and community before and after the implementation of Reflect?
13. If the organisation withdraws support, whether the Reflect circles are in a position to continue the initiative?
14. Any suggestion to strengthen the Reflect Initiative

FACILITATOR LEVEL

1. What is Reflect according to you?
2. When did you join the organisation and the Reflect initiative?
3. What kind of Capacity Building Training is being organised on Reflect? What are the areas where more support is required?
4. How did you form the circle, what was the criteria of membership, how much time did it take to have a functioning circle, what were the problems faced and action taken?
5. What were the total number of group and number of members initially and what are the present numbers?
6. Who decides the issues to be discussed, what is the basis of selection of issues, what is the methodology of discussion and analysis, how the decision made is disseminated or executed, who executes it?



**End poverty.
Together.**

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act:onaid

ActionAid works with poor and excluded people in 24 States in India and over 50 countries worldwide to end poverty and injustice. Together we claim legal, constitutional and moral rights to food and livelihood, shelter, education, healthcare, dignity and a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

7. What were the inputs given for literacy, what was the process of giving literacy input? The numbers of person who are functionally literate (before and after).
8. What were/ are the major rights issues you are working with, what was the process of empowerment on rights?
9. What were the major actions taken to address the rights issues?
10. How frequently does the Reflect circle sit together and who calls and conduct the meeting and writes the minutes and what is the average attendance?
11. Whether any indicator was set to measure the changes of the members and community before and after the implementation of Reflect?
12. What according to you are three best achievements and three major problems?
13. If you and the organization withdraws support, whether the Reflect circles are in a position to continue the Reflect initiative?
14. Any suggestion to strengthen the Reflect Initiative.

REFLECT CIRCLE LEVEL

1. Name of your group
2. How many years have you been a member of this group?
3. How many members are there in your group?
4. Is there any group leader? Who selected the leader?
5. What was your purpose of joining Reflect circle? Who motivated you?
6. How frequently does the Reflect circle sit together and who calls and conducts the meeting and write the minutes and what is the average attendance?
7. Who decides the issues to be discussed, what is the basis of selection of issues, what is the methodology of discussion and analysis, how the decision made is disseminated or executed, who executes it?
8. What were the inputs given for literacy, what was the process of giving literacy input?
9. What were/ are the major rights issues you worked with?
10. What was the action taken by the Reflect circle to address the rights issues?
11. What kind of Capacity Building Training is being organised on Reflect? What are the areas where more support is required?
12. What all areas / services have you accessed after becoming Reflect members?
13. Do you face any problem being the Reflect members and as Reflect members how are you different from other women of your community?
14. What according to the group are three best achievements and three major problems faced?
15. If the organization withdraws support, whether the Reflect circle are in position to continue the Reflect initiative and how?