

ADULT LITERACY ACCELERATES DEVELOPMENT



Reflect examples





Adult literacy accelerates development: *Reflect* examples

With contributions from:
Reflect Implementing Organisations and *Reflect* Practitioners in Bangladesh

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No one can deny the role of adult literacy in accelerating development. Governments in both rich and poor countries have an obligation to ensure the rights of adult learners and have signed up to a number of international agreements that promise to reduce illiteracy. However, in reality, governments and development agencies have de-prioritized adult literacy, thus violating the rights of over 776 million adults internationally. This situation is aggravated by low resource allocation to education, non-enrolment of children in schools, high dropout numbers from primary school, a lack of clear adult education policies and strategies and an absence of sustainable adult literacy programmes.

We *Reflect* practitioners believe that an effective, participatory and sustainable adult literacy programme is essential for fulfilling the rights of adult learners. This publication provides grassroots' examples of impact from *Reflect*, an innovative approach to adult learning, empowerment and social change, which fuses the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire with participatory

methodologies. It was developed by ActionAid and partner organisations in the 1990s through pilot projects in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador.

Reflect is now used by over 500 organisations in over 70 countries worldwide and has been used to address different development issues ranging from the right to education, climate change, disaster preparedness, violence against women, livelihood, disability, diversity, economic justice, quality health, child rights, women rights, adolescent rights, right to natural resources, empowerment and HIV & AIDS. Please see www.reflect-action.org for further details.

The Society for Participatory Education and Development (SPED) is a national *Reflect*-supporting organisation that is established, managed and run by *Reflect* Implementing Organisations (RIOs) and *Reflect* practitioners in Bangladesh. SPED in cooperation with *Reflect* Development Unit of ActionAid Bangladesh has produced this document on the eve of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009.



1 "I am Maya Begum. I have four sisters and a brother. My father was a drummer who used to play at Hindu marriages and pujas. However, marriages and pujas were not very frequent and poverty was an issue in our family. When I was 12 or 13, I was married off to another drummer. Within a year of our marriage, my husband became ill with leprosy and a lack of treatment aggravated the condition. At that point, a private organisation took away my husband for treatment for three long months. After his return, the same organisation offered me a job but I was unable to take it, as I could not read or write. After that, I was determined to learn. I joined the Reflect Circle at Kanchipara operated by SKS Foundation [a local NGO working in Gaibandha district]. Within a few days, I learned how to write my name and address. I carried on learning, greatly assisted by the Circle facilitator. After graduating from the Circle, the



Jaipurhat Leprosy Mission in Gaibandha recruited me as a community worker, visiting villages to collect the names and addresses of people suffering from leprosy. I am also involved with different development activities in my area, working to improve local facilities and services."



3 Anju Begum lives in Mohammadpur, Dhaka. When a local NGO, Assistance for Slum Dwellers (ASD), conducted a background study to identify potential Reflect participants, Anju was selected, as she had never been to school. She says, "I used to consider myself an unwise person since I was illiterate, and was often cheated. I used to feel awful whenever I went to any hospital or office, as people were annoyed by my queries. Once my husband gave me 200 taka to keep, and since I did not know how to count, I kept the money. Later, when my husband asked for the money, I gave it to him, but he claimed that he had given me 300 taka and falsely accused me of stealing. Such problems inspired me to learn to read and write and when ASD formed



2 Maleka Begum (45) lives with her husband, two sons and a daughter in Kani Para village in Udakhali, a neglected and disaster-prone area of Gaibandha district. Her husband is a day labourer and is in and out of work. Maleka and her family used to depend entirely upon her husband's income, struggling against poverty on a daily basis. This led to frequent quarrels between them. Maleka felt unable to work on her own, as she couldn't read and write. So, when the **Reflect** Circle was set up at East Udakhali by a local NGO in cooperation with ActionAid Bangladesh, she joined immediately. She participated regularly in Circle activities and was eager to learn. During her time with the Circle, she learned

about women's rights, human rights, power relations, family laws and communication skills and this has made her an influential campaigner on issues such as dowry, illegal divorce and child marriage. She was soon elected as Chair of the Circle. The Circle set up a savings fund for income generating activities and Maleka proposed setting up a small grocery shop on the road beside her house. After evaluation of her proposal, the Circle granted her a 2,000 taka loan for her shop. The shop flourished and now earns her around 1,000-1,500 taka per month, enough to cover the family's needs. She also received training on vegetable farming and received seeds from the Circle. She earned around nearly 1,000 taka and was able to support her family during a period of food crisis, as well as saving seeds for the next



year. Maleka's face gleams with happiness. She now plays a vital role in family decision-making and her husband values her opinions. She is repaying her loan and also contributes to the Circle development fund. With only two more loan instalments left, she intends to take a bigger loan from the Circle to expand her shop. She is currently the Chairperson of the Access to Local Mediation Project under Madaripur Legal Aid Programme at Udakhali. She has also been elected to the Executive Committee of the *Chetona Lokokendra*, dealing with income-generating activities to support poor women in her community.

the Reflect Circle, I instantly took the opportunity to join. I used to go regularly and was very active with Circle activities even though my husband and neighbours accused me of just going there to gossip. At one point, my husband even beat me because of the neighbours' criticisms. I carried on regardless. I believe that the Circle has created a critical learning space for us and raised awareness about many things. The Circle participants have

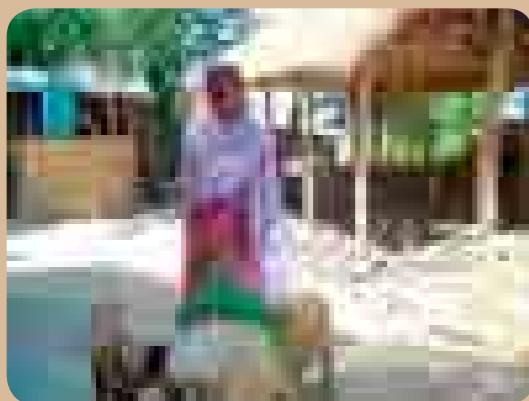
stopped ill practices such as child marriage, dowry, illegal divorces, and violence against women. We faced many obstacles but continued together because of the benefits. Now I know many things and have the courage to move around alone. A few days ago, I went to see the doctor. On my way, I not only helped my rickshaw puller to reach our destination, but also managed to get to the doctor's without asking for anyone's help.

Without literacy, I would have had to rely entirely upon others. Even my husband does not dare to deceive me anymore and he considers my decisions and opinions when deciding upon any family matter. Now I can even help my kids with their studies. I feel very independent and confident as a literate woman and no one can easily cheat me anymore."

4

"My name is Monowara Bewa. I am 30 years old and I live in Gunvori, Fulchhori, Gaibandha. I have two sons and one daughter. Previously, I did not know how

to read and write. However, after joining the Reflect Circle I can write names, addresses, and short sentences, as well as with some maths and calculations. I can read signboards, posters, leaflets and newspapers. I used to help my sons and daughter-in-law who are in level one in primary school to prepare their home tasks. I have also encouraged my neighbours to join the Circle. Many of them are now capable of reading and writing after participating in the Circle. Because of our awareness, now every child of our village goes to the school regularly. I was too scared to be involved in any income generating activities but now I am running a small business after getting training from the Circle. I also got a loan from the Circle fund to rear two sheep. I bred three lambs and sold them for 1,900 taka each, which allowed me to repay the loan as well as spending money on my family. The Circle has given me four more sheep. Now I am rearing those sheep as well as cultivating my own land."



5

"My name is Halima Begum and I am 40 years old. I am a participant in the West Udakhali Shukher Thhikana Lokokendra in Gaibandha district. As a child,

I missed out on school due to poverty. I was married at the age of 12 and went on to have six children. My husband was the only earner in the family and worked as a day labourer. However, the excessive pressure of work and tension resulted in mental illness. After 8 years as a mental patient, he died, as we were unable to obtain any proper treatment for him. After his death, my part of the struggle started. I worked as a day-labourer and put all my effort into running my family. My husband left very little for us. This was not enough even to send my children to school. After a while, I joined the Lokokendra. Before I came to the Circle, I couldn't write anything. Now I can read and write my name, address, account papers, signboards and can keep records of household expenditure. I also now understand the problems of child marriage, dowry, violence against women, divorce and polygamy. I wanted to marry off my daughter at an early age, but because of what I learnt in the Lokokendra, I changed my decision. I now send two sons and one daughter to school. I can now talk confidently in local arbitration as well as in the Union Council and local level administration. I borrowed 2,000 taka from the Lokokendra and bought a variety of snacks and pickles to sell in schools and villages. Now I am valued by people as a literate woman. I am very happy now and it is because of the Lokokendra."

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Aroti Rani (27) lives in West Chalu Village of Udakhali Union in Gaibandha

district. She married Sunil at the age of 13 and within a year gave birth to their daughter. Her husband used to work as a day-labourer but the whole family would go hungry if he missed just one-day's work. Sunil's ancestors were cobblers and although he wanted to continue this profession, he didn't know how. When the SKS Foundation, a local NGO in Gaibandha, started the Aware Project using the Reflect approach, Aroti was selected as

a participant. Before joining the circle, Aroti was unable to read and write but within a short time, she acquired functional literacy skills. Her new awareness made her think about improving her situation and she and her husband decided that he should go to Dhaka to learn shoe making. When he returned to the village, Sunil borrowed some money from his brother-in-law to start his work as cobbler and Aroti secured a 6,000 taka loan from the Reflect Circle. With this help, their business has prospered. Sunil got a trade licence from Union Council for his business and started work. They have already returned the



borrowed money and rented a store in the Kalibazar market. Now, Aroti works in her home and Sunil sells shoes and sandals in his stall. The shoes are in demand in the market and they get orders from far away. Aroti Rani feels happy and proud with this progress.



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Josna Begum has been involved with a Reflect Circle in the Nobinagar area of

Mohammadpur Beribadh in Dhaka for a long time. In her own words, "I used to be a very gullible person because of my illiteracy. I was often cheated and so always wanted to be literate. When I got the chance to participate in Circle activities, I grabbed the opportunity. I used to be regular at the Circle and was very attentive about the lessons. Although my mother-in-law had no complaints initially about me going to the Circle, she soon began

to disapprove of it. She claimed that there is no point in learning to read and write at my age and that it is far better to stay home and work. Besides, people in our area do not think well of a housewife spending so much time outside. My mother-in-law complained, 'in my day we used to be terrified of our mother-in-laws and used to be busy all day with the household chores; but the wives nowadays do not even bother to listen to us.' I still managed to go regularly to the Circle, the neighbours also used to criticize me. Despite all this, I continued with the Circle for my own good. Now, I know a lot and have the courage to face such people. I can write my own

name, do my calculations properly and even help my kids with their studies. Now I am doing a job at Japan Garden City in Dhaka. I can operate the lift myself and know exactly which level to get off at. I feel very independent and confident now that I can read most things. For instance, I can read the label on medicine to check the expiry dates. I would like to thank the facilitating organisations for operating such an adult literacy programme at Beribadh.



8

According to Shova Das, "only ten years ago I was a different person. I was always scared of talking to people, ashamed of going out of the house and I knew very few people. Even to my husband, I had little importance. He ordered me not to argue with men and not to go out of the house. Nevertheless, I struggled for my rights and involved myself in the Reflect Circle. And because of participating the Circle regularly, I can now talk confidently and read and write. I participate in and lead various development programmes in my area. My family is also happy with this change. People recognize me and ask me to participate in meetings and seminars. When I participate in this kind of meeting, I describe the necessity and importance of literacy to people. I also teach children and adults in my area. Everybody respects me and my opinions. They are now careful not to repeat the same mistake with their children by ignoring literacy."



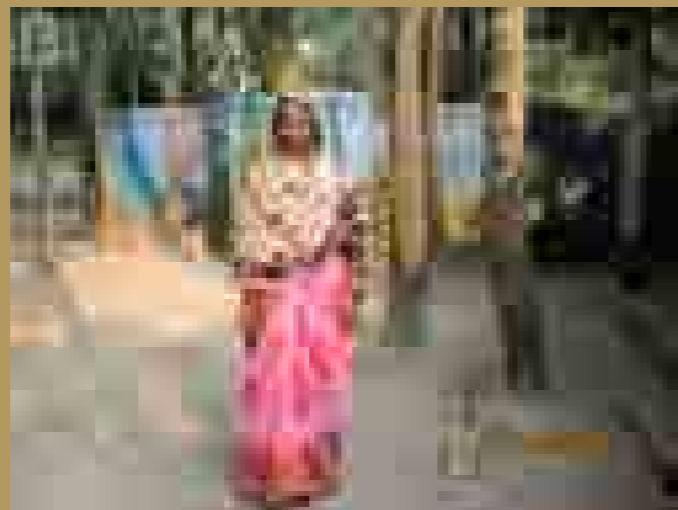
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Monowara Begum, of Ulipur in Kurigram district, was married in 1975 when she

was only 14. As she was illiterate, her opinions were ignored in her husband's home and the household was run according to her husband and mother-in-law's wishes. After 7 years of marriage, her husband became ill. He recovered after expensive treatment for which they had to sell their land; but was too weak to work and the family faced poverty. In 2002, Mohidev Juba Shamaz Kollan Shamiti (MJSKS), financed by ActionAid Bangladesh, formed a Reflect Circle in Sadua Damar Haat. Monowara joined the Circle and feels it has changed her life: "I was a regular participant in the Circle and in the first 9 months we learned basic literacy and numeracy as well as looking at various problems in

our area and working to resolve them. Afterwards, in 2003, I started the 12 months post-Circle group where we gained communication skills, read a variety of easy books and learnt about disaster preparedness, rights, gender and HIV & AIDS. I received training on poultry farming and earned money for my family. Nowadays I am taking care

of my sick husband's treatment, educating my children and feeding my family by farming my own land. All this has increased my importance in my family. I am also working as the secretary of the Lokokendra and participating in the observing committee of the Stop Violence against Women project facilitated by MJSKS."

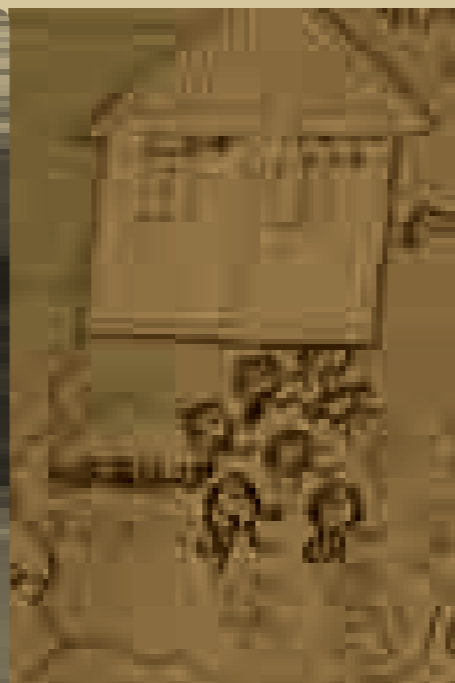


What is Reflect?

Reflect, or Reflect-Action as it is also known, is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change, which fuses the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire with participatory methodologies. It was developed in the 1990s through pilot projects in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador and is now used by over 500 organisations in over 70 countries worldwide.

At present Reflect is just referred to as Reflect but initially REFLECT was the abbreviation of "Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques".

- Reflect is an approach to critical learning, empowerment and social change.
- It uses techniques from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and build on literacy and other experiences
- Key to the Reflect approach is creating a space where people feel comfortable to meet and discuss issues relevant to them and their lives.
- Reflect aims to improve the meaningful participation of people in decisions that affect their lives, through strengthening their ability to communicate.



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