



## Reflect, rights and governance:

Insights from Nigeria and South Africa

**Kate Newman**

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Africa Reflect Network

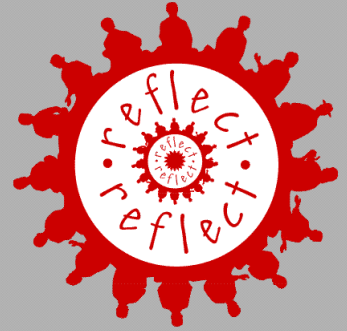
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COMMUNITIES  
INVOLVED IN REFLECT

CONSTRUCTION  
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FORMATION  
OF GROUPS





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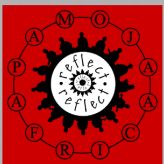
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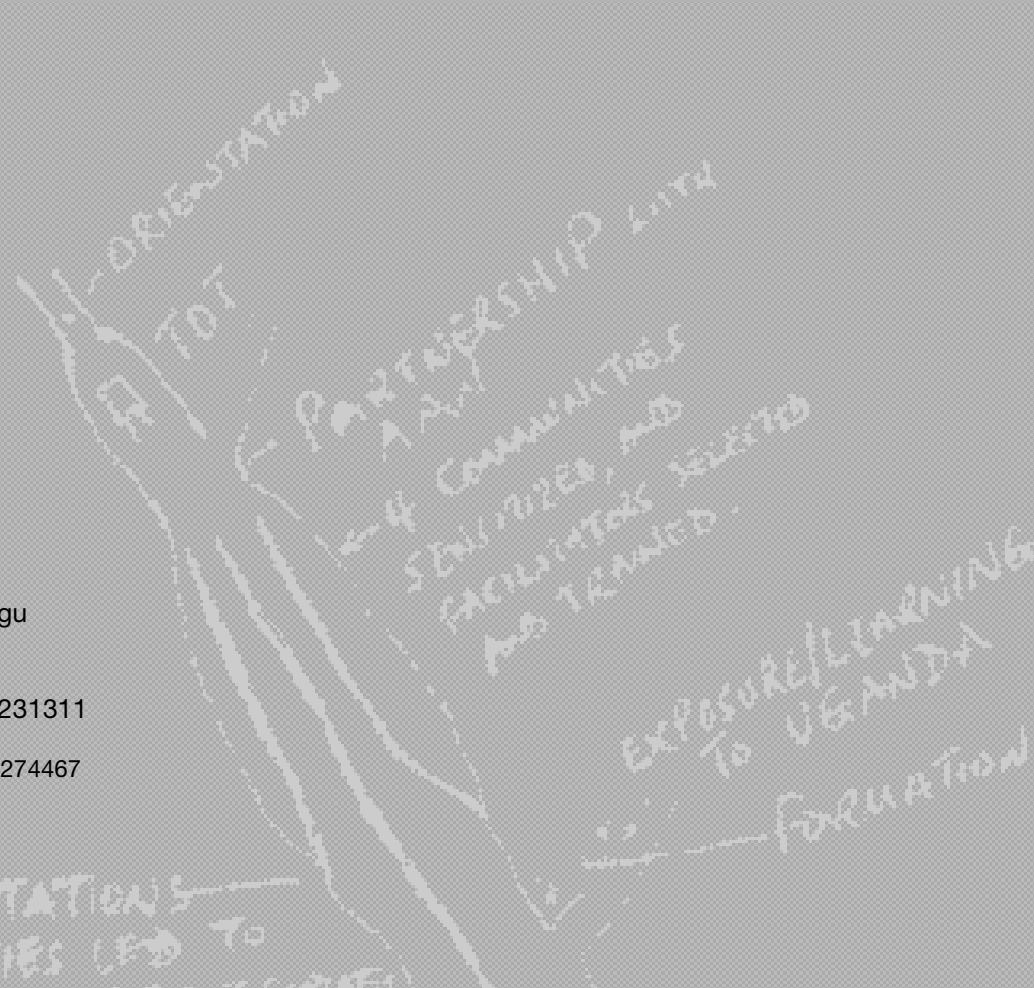
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# Preface

This publication documents *Reflect* experiences in two countries – Nigeria (where a range of projects are supported by ActionAid-Nigeria) and South Africa (where a specific project is implemented by *Idasa*, the Institute for Democracy and South Africa – a national NGO which receives no funding from ActionAid). These experiences were chosen because of their focus on issues of rights and governance. Both experiences contain rich learning which we hope will be drawn on by three different groups of people.

Firstly, *Reflect* practitioners who are interested in developing or strengthening their work in this area. *Reflect* is now being used by over 350 organisations in more than 60 countries. The wide range of contexts has meant that *Reflect* is continually being adapted and innovation is a major part of the approach. Learning from Nigeria and South Africa will provide further inspiration to *Reflect* practitioners to deepen their understanding and practice in the area of rights and governance.

Secondly, ActionAid staff and partners. ActionAid has been working with a rights-based approach to development since 1999. The move from a needs-based to a rights-based approach is not an easy one, and many parts of ActionAid are still struggling to understand how it should impact their work. We are currently (2004) reviewing our strategy, *Fighting Poverty Together*, and it is valuable to consider how learning from these *Reflect* experiences could inform this review. It is hoped that the ideas and experience contained here could be used to strengthen work by ActionAid programmes, particularly in the areas of people-centred advocacy and local governance.

Thirdly, there are many people who are working to influence governance and rights issues at national and local level who are concerned with how to involve people at the grassroots in these processes. Work in the area of rights and governance requires a two-pronged approach:

- policy influencing to create the legal space, processes and conditions for rights to be met,
- civil society building to ensure the spaces are filled and those in power are held to account.

These *Reflect* experiences show potential ways of enhancing the appropriateness, impact and sustainability of policy oriented work by involving local people (and their perspectives) in fighting for their rights and good governance.

The document is based on field visits to the two projects and extensive interviews with project coordinators, trainers, facilitators and participants (which took place in mid-2003). It also uses background information provided by the implementing organisations themselves.

The analysis provided in this document is my own, and draws on learning from this experience as well as six years of involvement with *Reflect*, participation in international *Reflect* circle meetings, country visits, contributions to a wide range of documentation and a variety of training workshops. However, it is necessary to highlight that I only spent a short time in each location and do not have in-depth knowledge of the country contexts, thus any mistakes are my own!

The information and analysis contained in this document would not have been possible without the support of ActionAid-Nigeria or *Idasa*. Both organisations hosted my visits, making me feel very welcome, and set up a wide range of meetings with different people involved in their *Reflect* work. Moreover, they engaged with me as I wrote the document, providing valuable insights and commenting on my analysis. Their ability to accept my criticisms of their work is a testament to their dedication to *Reflect*, rights and governance and to working with poor and marginalised people to achieve a more just and equitable society. In particular I wish to thank Chinwuba Egbe from ActionAid-Nigeria, Yoemna Saint from *Idasa*, and all the *Reflect* partner organisations, trainers, facilitators and participants who took the time to share with me their experiences of being involved in *Reflect*.

These *Reflect* experiences have boosted PAMOJA's (the Africa *Reflect* network) commitment to strengthening *Reflect* and governance work across the continent. PAMOJA believes that strengthening governance is a key strategy for achieving Education for All and the network will be focusing on this as one of their key thematic areas over the next three years. In March 2004, PAMOJA organised a workshop on *Reflect* and school governance to build the capacity of a core group of people across Africa to be able to train others in this area. This was just the beginning of a series of activities related to school governance that will be implemented in different countries of Africa. Experiences generated from the respective countries will be documented and compiled by PAMOJA for wide sharing, so look out for more reports, case studies and papers pertaining to the same subject.

We welcome your feedback on this publication. If you have further queries please access our website ([www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org)) or contact [pamoja@infocom.co.ug](mailto:pamoja@infocom.co.ug), or me directly on [knewman@actionaid.org.uk](mailto:knewman@actionaid.org.uk).

**Kate Newman,**  
**April 2004**

# What is *Reflect*?

***Reflect* is an approach to adult learning and social change. It was conceived by ActionAid and developed through innovative pilot programmes in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador between 1993 and 1995. It started as a fusion of the political philosophy of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, with the practical methodologies developed for participatory rural appraisal (PRA). It has spread and evolved rapidly, and is now used by over 350 organisations in 60 countries.**

*Reflect* is based on a series of nine core principles, which can be briefly outlined as follows:

**... power and voice:** *Reflect* is a process that aims to strengthen people's capacity to communicate by whatever means of communication are most relevant or appropriate to them. Although part of the process may be about learning new communication skills, the focus is on using these in a meaningful way.

**... a political process:** *Reflect* is premised on the recognition that achieving social change and greater social justice is a fundamentally political process. *Reflect* is not a neutral approach. It seeks to help people in the struggle to assert their rights, challenge injustice and change their position in society and, as such, requires us to explicitly align ourselves with the poorest and most marginalised.

**... a democratic space:** *Reflect* involves creating a democratic space – one in which everyone's voice is given equal weight. This needs to be actively constructed, as it does not naturally exist anywhere – and is never easy to achieve. Moreover, it is counter-cultural as it challenges local culture and the power relationships and stratification that have created inequality.

**.. an intensive and extensive process:** the intensity of contact is crucial for a process that seeks to achieve social or political change. Groups usually meet at least once a week for about two years, and sometimes continue indefinitely.

**... linking reflection and action:** *Reflect* involves a continual cycle of reflection and action. It is reflection for the purpose of change, and action linked to reflection, as pure activism rapidly loses direction.

**... grounded in existing knowledge:** *Reflect* begins with respect and value for people's existing knowledge and experience. However, this does not mean accepting people's existing opinions or prejudices without challenge. Further, participants are enabled to access new information and new ideas from new sources. But participants have control over this process – *Reflect* builds confidence in their own starting points, so that they can be critical and selective.

**... using participatory tools:** a wide range of participatory tools is used within a *Reflect* process to help create an environment in which everyone is able to contribute. These tools help provide structure for the process and include visuals (maps, calendars, diagrams, matrices etc) and other methods and processes, such as theatre, dance, video or photography.

**... power awareness:** all participatory tools can be distorted, manipulated or used in exploitative ways if they are not linked to an awareness of power relationships. Within *Reflect* the multiple dimensions of power and stratification are always considered, and inequitable power relationships challenged. This includes a structural analysis to ensure that issues are not dealt with at a superficial level.

**... coherence and self-organisation:** the same principles and processes that apply to others also apply to ourselves, within our own institutions and even our personal lives. The focus of the process is towards self-organisation: groups are self-managed and facilitators, where possible, come from within the community.

# Introduction

**When I went to Nigeria and South Africa last year (2003) I was not quite sure what I was looking for, or what I would see. Both *Reflect* programmes were implemented following seven years of learning from *Reflect* practice, and as such were framed quite differently from previous *Reflect* programmes in Africa. The trips were interesting and challenging, and enabled me to both learn from experience and consider more deeply *Reflect*, rights and governance.**

## What is governance?

Over the last few years governance has become a buzz word in development. Good governance is heralded as a prerequisite for positive change. It is seen as a way of strengthening government accountability, decreasing corruption and abuse of power and strengthening citizens' voices in decision-making. Organisations such as the World Bank or the UNDP frequently refer to governance in their literature, as do international and national NGOs.

In its broadest terms governance refers to the relationships between people and different institutions; it is the mechanisms which allow for information flows, decision-making and accountability. This might be between a government and its citizens, between an NGO and the people with whom they work, or it could be the internal management structure of any organisation. Governance can be discussed at many levels – in relation to international organisations, such as the WTO, national government or grassroots organisations. Each level has relevance in a fight for justice and equity for poor and marginalised people. Moreover, different people will experience governance differently due to their power and position in society.

## What can we (as *Reflect* practitioners) offer to the governance agenda?

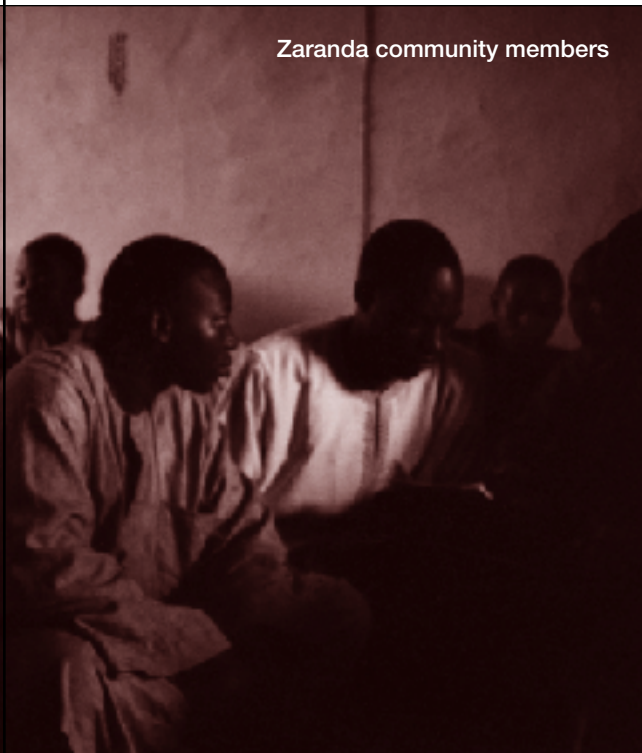
There are four main reasons why the *Reflect* approach has relevance for those working in governance. Firstly, the aim of *Reflect* is to strengthen people's capacity to communicate and be heard. At its most basic level governance is about systems for communication and access to information. This immediately signals a role for *Reflect* in relation to governance.

A second point of connection arises from the *Reflect* circle itself, which provides a model for a possible governance structure. Members of a *Reflect* circle actively construct a democratic space where everyone's voice is given equal weight, and members can participate equally and have their voices heard. This way of working together provides a rehearsal space where people can learn new ways of interrelating, and it can be used to influence the functioning of other local organisations (for example school management committees, village development committees or local government), thus spreading models of good governance.

A third way that *Reflect* relates to governance issues is through its political focus, as being a rights-based approach (which is the specific focus of the Nigeria project examined in this publication). Much governance literature suggests that there are two dimensions that need to be considered in relation to good governance. On the one hand, a transparent and accountable government is needed. However, this government needs the support of a strong, organised and vocal civil society and *Reflect*, through its rights-based focus, can play a role in this endeavour.

Finally, *Reflect*'s understanding of power relations and stratification within any community, and its ability to work with group conflict and change, can give pertinent insights to the governance agenda and governance processes. Diversity within a community needs to be understood when considering governance relationships, and it is necessary to ask who is able to engage in the different structures, and how. *Reflect* has developed many techniques for probing this area of analysis, and these can be used to inform capacity building for different institutions on governance systems and processes.

Zaranda community members





Rights-based approaches have become very popular in development in recent years, and many NGOs have moved from a needs-based/service delivery approach to discussing a wide variety of rights. This approach draws on thought and practice from the international legal human rights framework, from social, cultural and political struggles, and includes demands for participation in decision-making, and the concept of citizenship. The approach is based on a holistic understanding of wellbeing that views different rights as interlinked. However, deciding which rights are the most important is a political debate which will differ for different country contexts. Many suggest that all citizens have a right to participate in this debate – thus suggesting that the right to participation is an entry point to realising other rights.

Working on rights implies a different way of working, with recipients seen as stakeholders rather than beneficiaries, as agents and subjects rather than objects in their development. With this also comes the realisation that it takes a long time to achieve such fundamental change – which can be messy, sporadic, conflictive and unpredictable. Finally, it is recognised that, along with a conception of rights, comes the issue of responsibility (for example paying taxes) and the relationship between these is important. Thus, both governments and people need to be included in a rights-based approach.

**Based on IDS Policy Briefing, Issue 17, May 2003 –  
by Rosalind Eyben**

### **Connections between governance and rights:**

There is no clear agreement as to how governance and rights interrelate, and the view taken here is just one interpretation. Both governance and rights-based approaches are normative and based on value judgements. Central to the understanding here is that poor and marginalised people should have a voice and choice in their life and development. Thus a rights-based approach focuses on accessing specific rights (which span social, economic, political and civil rights) to enable such voice and choice, and the concept of governance becomes the framework and process by which to secure these rights.

### **What does this document contain?**

This document gives detailed information about the two *Reflect* experiences. While the South Africa project is explicit in its governance agenda, the Nigerian experience focuses more specifically on a rights-based approach to community development. The publication is divided into three parts (with the Nigerian and South African experiences dealt with separately).

The first part is a detailed examination of the Nigerian experience – an EU funded *Reflect* programme, which focuses on a rights-based approach to development. It looks at: structure of the partnership; types of organisations involved; impact at the community level and impact on the organisations/*Reflect* practitioners. It concludes by arguing that, although the level of community involvement in local development (in this *Reflect* project) is impressive, the fact that the rights-based approach is not linked to any concept of governance could eventually undermine the work. It thus briefly considers what it would mean to place this experience in a governance framework.

The second part focuses on South Africa, and the experience is documented in a similar format to Nigeria. Although the scale of the *Idasa* (The Institute for Democracy and South Africa – a national NGO) project is much smaller than the Nigeria experience (being just one of many organisations working with *Reflect* in South Africa), many of the successes achieved and challenges faced are similar. However, due to certain contextual factors and the focus of the project, the way *Reflect* has played out at community level is very different from Nigeria. In South Africa, the focus was on linking with official bodies to access services, rather than taking part in infrastructure development directly. As in the Nigeria section this part closes with a short analysis of key learning from the experience, and recommendations for strengthening future work.

The final part summarises key issues from two projects and uses brief examples from other *Reflect* practice to complement the discussion. This reflection is included in place of an executive summary, and can be read as such. It highlights specific aspects in *Reflect*, rights and governance that must be considered by any programme working in this area. Moreover, it explores the links between the two projects looking at how they could learn from and strengthen each other.

# Reflect and a rights-based approach to community development – the Nigeria experience

## Introduction

The ActionAid-Nigeria (AAN) EU *Reflect* project in Nigeria has been running for about two and a half years, and is underpinned by AAN's understanding of a rights-based approach to community development. This section is divided into three sub-sections. Following a brief contextual background, the first sub-section looks at the organisation and process of *Reflect* in Nigeria, examining both the practical and conceptual issues which frame how *Reflect* was established in Nigeria. The second looks at the impact of this work, considering the various dimensions intrinsic to the *Reflect* approach, and highlights issues of power relationships within the project, looking at how these have changed over time. The final section analyses this experience and places it in a governance framework, looking at the links between a rights-based approach and concepts of governance, and examining how such an understanding might strengthen work in the future. The information and ideas explored here are based on a two and a half week visit to various partner organisations (see box below), and a documentation workshop which brought together all partners involved in the EU-funded *Reflect* project, and some other organisations working independently with *Reflect*. Interviews with the staff of ActionAid-Nigeria and partner organisations took place, as well as with facilitators and participants.

## Context

Nigeria's recent history of military dictatorship greatly impacts on people's views of government. The brutalities of the dictatorship meant that there were often severe consequences if people did speak out. This has led to a feeling of disengagement with the government, and a very limited conception of rights among much of the population. The distance between the government and its citizens is further undermined by a bureaucratic government system, with many levels and various agencies responsible for different aspects of service delivery. There is often a division between who sets the policy/allocates the resources, and who is responsible for service delivery, and there are no clear accountability lines.

## Organisations visited as part of the documentation:

**NMEC:** The 'National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education', was established in 1990 with the aim of making every Nigerian literate. It began with the idea of 'each one teach one', then moved on to establishing literacy centres. It started looking at *Reflect* in 1996, considering it to be a cheaper, more efficient and more participatory approach.

**Project-Agape:** Is a local CBO based in Nassarawa state 'committed to empowering communities towards sustainable holistic development.' It employs six staff and works in about 15 communities in the area. It first came into contact with ActionAid/*Reflect* in 2000, the partnership began in 2001.

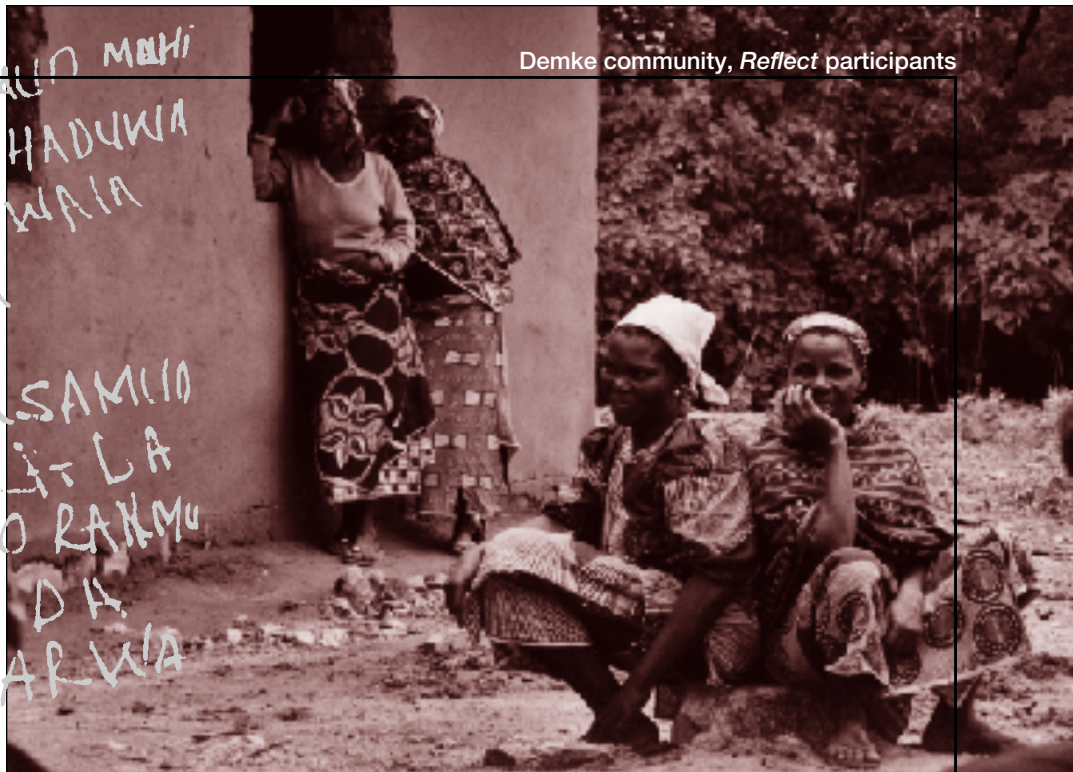
**COWAN (Nassarawa):** 'Country Women Association of Nigeria' is a national NGO with branches in 26 states. It aims to empower women, having identified them as the people most affected by poverty. Branches have considerable independence, but most are involved in micro-credit work.

**CBD-NGO Forum:** 'Community Based Development-NGO forum' is a coalition of NGOs/CBOs involved in development work in the middle belt and north of Nigeria. It is a democratic and pluralist association which supports its members through capacity building/training, information and solidarity action.

**Anfea-Bauchi:** Is the State branch of the Adult Non-Formal Education Agency, whose mandate is to increase adult literacy in Bauchi state. It is influenced by NMEC but has independence from them in their programmes and planning.

**WIN (Bauchi):** 'Women in Nigeria' is a national organisation with branches in 26 states. The sole aim of WIN is to empower women and their families. There are many programmes including micro-credit, reproductive and sexual health, adult literacy, water, sanitation and hygiene (service delivery) and community development.





Demke community, *Reflect* participants

A further complication, which restricts engagement with local government, is the current status of this level of government. During the military period, constitutional provisions at a local level were largely neglected and, although elections were held in 1999, the status and functioning of local government is still frequently questioned. Because of this, a review of local government took place shortly after this documentation visit (August 2003) examining the problems of inefficiency, high costs, and poor performance (the political reasons for this review are very complex and will not be considered here). Although the local elections were due to take place imminently, they have been delayed awaiting the results of the review. This has led to stagnation at local government level where many authorities are unwilling to embark on development projects before the next election.

In addition to the ideological distance from government, there are frequently great physical distances involved between the community and their local government offices. Many communities share ward councillors, which can mean that the councillor is based in a neighbouring community, often as far as 20 kilometres away, and sometimes with no connecting road. This exacerbates the lack of connection with local government and feelings of powerlessness. Moreover, the isolation of many communities limits the availability of basic services, and many do not have primary schools, health clinics or access to clean water. Finally, the role of religion and culture impacts greatly at community level and limits discussion both within *Reflect* circles and beyond. For example, in many of the communities where *Reflect* is being implemented, men and women are not able to meet together (due to cultural and religious prohibitions), thus making it very difficult to initiate dialogue. The status of traditional leaders with respect to local government also varies, and can affect the relationship between communities and their elected leaders.

# Organisation and process

**This contextual background influences the possibilities for *Reflect* in Nigeria, which are further impacted by the organisational context and the goals with which *Reflect* is being implemented. This section examines these aspects in detail.**

## Background to the project

**Geographical location:** ActionAid Nigeria (AAN) is working in the central/northern part of Nigeria. The main focus of the *Reflect* work is in Nassarawa, Plateau and Bauchi States (see map overleaf).

**Aims of the project:** *Reflect* is implemented by AAN through an EU-funded project, which aims to strengthen civil society through participatory approaches to capacity building. The project started in 2000 and focused on capacity building at two levels:

- 1 To empower communities and individuals by improving their communication and mobilisation skills to enable them to demand and assert their basic rights. Particular attention was to be paid to challenging gender norms at community level.
- 2 To build the institutional and programmatic capacity of civil society organisations and government agencies to enable them to engage on issues of quality, accessibility and appropriateness of education of the poor and marginalised.

AAN's strategy is located within the understandings laid out in ActionAid's *Fighting poverty together* (FPT). This is based around the following four aspects:

- recognising that poor people have a right to life's essentials, including food, water, healthcare, livelihoods and education;
- working increasingly in partnership with others to achieve greater impact;
- promoting change internationally in favour of poor people;
- counteracting discrimination against women and girls.

Thus the *Reflect* project was conceived in line with these wider goals, and is supported by a rights-based approach to development. This approach suggests that lasting solutions to poverty and injustice are rooted in helping people who are poor and marginalised to discover and secure their rights themselves. These rights include social, economic and cultural rights, such as the right to education, shelter, food, water, livelihoods, participation and health, as well as fundamental civil and political rights<sup>1</sup>.

**A diverse range of organisations:** AAN works with eleven partner organisations – a mixture of government institutions at national and state level, and local NGOs/CBOs. These partners work on different scales with varying focuses. Organisations include NMEC (The National

Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education) and ANFEA (Adult Non-formal Education Agency) who are using *Reflect* to achieve their literacy goals; local CBOs such as Project Agape (Nassarawa State) and WIN (Women in Nigeria, Bauchi State), who are using *Reflect* in a localised area to enhance community-led development; and organisations such as MSO (Muslim Sister Organisation, Bauchi State) who use *Reflect* as an internal process to strengthen their organisation.

Working in partnership is not always easy, and one partner providing the funding and technical expertise easily skews relationships. AAN has tried very hard to form an equal relationship and many of their partners are very positive about the partnership, commenting that it is distinct from others that they are involved in: *"It has been interesting and educating working with AAN. They have helped build the capacity of the individual, the organisation and the community. AAN are quite fair – most organisations are partial in their selection but AAN have not done this, they have worked with us from where we are, taken us for what we are."* (WIN-Bauchi)

*"We are colleagues, partners and friends. We invite each other to our occasions, and we hope this relationship will grow further."* (Anfea-Bauchi)

However, there are clear power relationships demonstrated in these partnerships: *"The relationship with AAN has been mainly positive, but AAN does not always practise what it preaches. Sometimes they don't consult us, and even though they use the language of participation, they expect us to just be there and drop everything when they come and visit. Further, if we come to visit AAN they are always late for meetings."* (Project-Agape)

Any partnership within the *Reflect* project impacts the way *Reflect* is implemented at the community level, as power relations are easily replicated. This is particularly important when considering basic rights and governance. If the governance structures within the partnership are disempowering, this will often also be the case in the relationship between the organisations and the communities with whom they are working, and this can undermine the rights-based approach.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on *Fighting Poverty Together* see: <http://www.actionaid.org/aboutus/ourstrategy/ourstrategy.shtml>



**Working in partnership:** the diverse range of organisations involved in the project meant that there was a need to form various sorts of partnerships. For example, the links with NMEC aimed at developing their skills in *Reflect* and working with their existing structures and contacts, while simultaneously influencing government policy on adult education. And the concept of partnership propagated with civil society organisations (CSOs) was quite new in Nigeria. AAN did not wish to be merely a donor, but felt that it was crucial that this partnership would ‘actualise the togetherness needed’ (Chinwuba, AAN) in order to implement FPT.

Rather than work with civil society organisations which were quite established, many of these partnerships are with relatively new organisations which were run quite informally. It was important for the project that the CSO was close to the community, and it was hoped that the partnership would empower the CSO to work better with the community while implementing the FPT goals. Partners needed to be able to understand AAN, and AAN needed to know what strengths and weaknesses organisations had in relation to FPT. The relationship between AAN and the partner was thus defined through looking at what the organisations had done in the past, the context of their work and how their goals and AAN’s goals fitted together.

**Organisational and programmatic capacity:** AAN frequently works on two levels with these partners, to strengthen both their organisational capacity (specifically the CSO partners) and their ability to work with communities and implement *Reflect*. This two-pronged approach enables organisations to adapt and grow in reaction to their *Reflect* experiences, providing potential to use learning from their community level work to strengthen their internal understandings and ways of working.

AAN offers initial *Reflect* training – for both trainers and facilitators – to their wide range of partners (although as the project has evolved, partners are taking on more responsibility for these aspects themselves). AAN also supports training workshops on other aspects such as gender, impact assessment and strategic planning, and provides ongoing support to their partners in the form of occasional visits and communication by letter and phone calls. AAN has convened a ‘practitioners’ forum’ which enables trainers to share experiences, and a writer’s workshop was held to give both trainers and facilitators the opportunity to write their own *Reflect* materials. AAN is planning to run an adaptation workshop (to create a Nigerian *Reflect* manual), and also to strengthen trainers’ understanding of HIV/AIDS through a Stepping Stones workshop.

## Reflect training of trainers

*Reflect* training workshops are planned and adapted by those running them, and differ in each context. The initial training plays a very influential role in how a *Reflect* programme develops in any area. It is therefore interesting to briefly summarise the two-week training of trainers run by AAN. The training is divided into two phases, with the first week focusing on: Freirean philosophy, poverty (as a denial of basic human rights), gender and development, adult literacy and PRA. The second week focuses on micro-facilitation, running *Reflect* programmes (eg recruitment and training of facilitators, training for transformation, monitoring and evaluation, unit development). Within the training *Reflect* is defined as a rights-based approach which provides a democratic space. Further, it is described as a process which promotes dialogue, where power relations and structures are the focus of analysis, promoting conscientisation and awareness of needs, rights and responsibilities. The understanding of transformation from within is also emphasised.

**Facilitator support:** beyond this initial training the support given to facilitators is decided at partner level. Therefore, some partners provide more structured opportunities for sharing and learning between facilitators, while others focus more on reacting to requests from the facilitators themselves. For example, Project-Agape holds quarterly meetings with the facilitators, who are also visited individually on a monthly basis. However, WIN-Bauchi has no formal system for facilitator support, and CBD-NGO Forum invites facilitators to meetings at their offices when they feel that the need arises.

This ongoing support, both between AAN and their partners and between partners and facilitators is often less than ideal, and, as will be seen later, enhancing these structures could result in a much stronger programme at the community level.

**Support for action points:** action points (ie the actions agreed on by *Reflect* participants, following discussions/analysis in the *Reflect* group) are a key part of the *Reflect* approach as conceived in Nigeria, and within the *Reflect* project there are specific funds allocated for supporting them. Although communities are encouraged to involve local government in their action plans, this support is rarely forthcoming, thus the communities turn to the implementing organisation. This can often lead to ideological conflicts, as it is unclear when a rights-based approach becomes service delivery, and funding of action points is implicated in this.

## Understanding a rights-based approach in practice

As outlined earlier, the rights-based approach is integral to ActionAid's way of working and understanding of solutions to poverty and injustice. In framing this *Reflect* project, experience from Latin America, especially El Salvador was drawn on (work in El Salvador has focused on strengthening local government accountability through building people's capacity to engage with their local officials and representatives). The AAN project was therefore the first African *Reflect* programme which did not focus explicitly on 'literacy + empowerment'. Rather, it systematically aimed at a rights-based approach to community development and, as such, was funded through the EU 'democracy and citizenship' budget line.

AAN's understanding of a rights-based approach clearly influenced both the training and delivery of *Reflect*, and is discussed during the *Reflect* training of trainers (see box left).

### What is a rights-based approach?

When asked what is understood by a rights-based approach, partner organisations linked community issues directly to government.

*"It is about communities presenting their issues to local government. Not necessarily challenging them, but, if they present their issues, more money from local government will go to these issues, and less will be able to go into their (the LG) pockets."* (Dung, CBD-NGO Forum)

*"It is the right of citizens to get benefits from the government, and to make sure that the government plays its part. Every stakeholder should claim ownership of the project from its conception, and rights implies giving them a democratic space so that they can voice their opinion and design their intervention"* (David, Project-Agape)

The box above gives a more detailed understanding of how two different partner organisations perceived a rights-based approach. It is interesting to note that partner organisations explicitly link the rights-based approach with government responsibility to deliver services. However, as will be seen below, this understanding often remained at a theoretical level, and did not necessarily influence how *Reflect* was conceived or implemented. In fact, often during the implementation of *Reflect* the concept of rights became more about ensuring access to basic services rather than pressurising the government to deliver.



## Conception of *Reflect*

In the same way as AAN has its specific objectives in implementing *Reflect* (ie to support a rights-based approach to development and achieve the goals of FPT), the partner organisations needed to incorporate the approach into their own plans. Thus, it is interesting to see how partner organisations perceive *Reflect*.

Although all organisations received the same training, understandings of *Reflect* among partners varied, and some organisations described *Reflect* in terms that are in tension with a rights-based approach. For example, WIN comments:

*“Reflect is an approach that has reduced our demand and dependency on donor agencies, it has made us aware that we can solve problems ourselves. It has also reduced our dependency on government – we don’t need to go to them unless it is outside our capability – if it is something technical that we can’t do.” (Deborah)*

This conception of *Reflect* as promoting community independence is felt strongly by many organisations involved in the project. For example, Project-Agape states:

*“Reflect is a methodology for communities to assess the resources they have in the community and make decisions as to how to use them. Before Reflect, people didn’t sit together and discuss issues. Now they come together and analyse. Reflect means development is sustainable. If we leave, the community will continue to make decisions and do things on their own.” (Becky Yohamma)*

This idea is supported by CBD-NGO Forum:

*“The community began by saying we need this, and this and this, but after the training the community people built a school – they didn’t just wait for the government, they built the school and then went to the local government. Communities who have been doing Reflect don’t just expect money to come from heaven.” (Rehab David)*

## NMEC’s conception of *Reflect*

*“My first reaction was ‘what is all this – how can you get adults to do this’ As time went by, I realised it was a useful method to liberate people from all sorts of constraints – from illiteracy, from political constraints and ethnic conflicts, religious difficulties and bigotry. If we continue with Reflect Nigeria will definitely change. Reflect is a relevant methodology to achieve our mandate to make Nigerians literate as soon as possible. Reflect has an edge, particularly in the areas of participation, learning and retention, and the way it involves rural communities... The Reflect circle revolves around the community – they see it as their own rather than belonging to the government. Reflect has enabled the community to develop literacy without government intervention, the materials are community generated, the facilitators community based. Traditional community crafts, such as carpentry, which had been dropped due to the oil boom, are now being reintroduced because of Reflect – they are seen as viable, self-generating activities. It has also led to an increased interest in issues such as HIV/AIDS – they now realise that it is true, it does really exist.” (Nagi)*

A member of the Auntie Mary literacy project went even further, saying: *“Reflect helps wipe away laziness, poverty ... and stops people depending on government. It enables them to discover their own potential.” (Domkur Fajing)*

The reason for commenting that these views are in tension with the rights-based approach is that they remove the role of the government from community development, placing all the emphasis on community energy and initiatives. However, this leads to the necessity of questioning what a rights-based approach means. It is clearly the case that communities which have *Reflect* circles are more able to secure access to their basic rights – even if they do end up playing a role in delivering these rights.

Moreover, it is important to place these comments in context. People at the grassroots level in Nigeria have historically felt very dependent on external forces for every aspect of their local development. There has been little space for them to act for themselves and they have been paralysed in their efforts to act as a community. Thus the action of initiating projects and not waiting for government approval is very empowering.

In addition, there were some comments which placed this idea of community independence and ownership within a wider conception of awareness of rights. For example, Mary from COWAN-Nassarawa stated: *“Reflect helps people to know their basic human rights. Their right to talk to their leaders, to take decisions with their leaders and to*

Community initiatives and ownership are fundamental to the success of any project, and the fact that there was such a strong feeling of community ownership suggests that organisations are now in a position to develop their *Reflect* work further. For example, if organisations began linking community debates to wider issues, through accessing local government budgets and official documents relevant to the discussions taking place, these could be used to extend an awareness of rights. *Reflect* participants could use the skills and confidence developed from being in the circle, to begin to articulate their views, and get their voices heard in local debates.

*participate. Reflect raises people's awareness of their rights so that they don't just sit around and wait for things to happen, they involve themselves. The programme is sustainable as there is ownership."* But even Mary continued to emphasise community led solutions in enhancing access to services. These diverse comments indicate the partner organisations' limitation in the implementation of a rights-based approach.

One reason for the prevalence of this conception could be the lack of ongoing support to both organisations and facilitators. Although an understanding of *Reflect* might be very clear at the time of training, the organisations and facilitators are given little ongoing support and are essentially left on their own to take the project forward. As is commonly seen in development programmes, physical structures are very attractive solutions to identified problems – they are concrete and visible, and relatively easy to construct. However, strategic solutions, required to secure basic rights indefinitely, are often much less tangible and require sustained effort over a long time period with few visible results. Without ongoing support it is easily conceivable that organisations and individuals will reach for short term solutions rather than exploring more strategic methods of tackling community issues and challenging government structures.

Another reason could be the limits of a rights-based approach when not placed in a governance framework – this idea will be explored further below.

## Introducing *Reflect* to the community

In line with AAN's aim of working with the most poor and marginalised communities, most partners highlighted the criteria for community selection as those that have the highest poverty levels (defined by lack of government infrastructure, community organisation, and food security issues) and which are the most inaccessible (due to poor transport, geographical location, lack of roads etc).

In many *Reflect* projects around the world, *Reflect* is introduced primarily as an approach to literacy learning, and as such is relatively easily framed and described to the community. Similarly, characteristics of facilitators within such projects are reasonably self-evident, and community members are often willing to dedicate large amounts of their time to the *Reflect* process (as literacy development is often seen as something worth investing in). Conceiving *Reflect* as a rights-based approach to community development makes this initial process much more complex. Not only are there issues of how to describe *Reflect* to community members, but also how to actively engage and sustain them in a *Reflect* project.

### Anfea-Bauchi's experience

Anfea-Bauchi decided to work with *Reflect* because they realised the literacy techniques they were using were not working: *"people (at the grassroots) were tired with formal literacy, they didn't like the style of education. In that form of literacy you just learn how to read and write, and then you keep quiet, there was no conscientisation... literacy was not seen as functional. People were saying 'what can we do with it?' We didn't have an answer, we were only there to make them literate. Worse still, after two years people had forgotten what they had learnt, or weren't even learning in the first place."* (Gloria David, *Reflect* trainer)

Four staff members spent two days in the communities with which Anfea-Bauchi planned to work. On the first day they spoke to the chief and showed the relevance of *Reflect*. The second day was aimed at mobilising the community using a PRA map with community members and the chiefs. Then the facilitators were selected by the community based on the following criteria: physically fit, reading and writing knowledge, trustworthy, humble, from the community, patient, tolerant, a character accepted by the community.

*"Reflect relates education to development. It involves community participants. The facilitators are opinion leaders in the community. It is flexible, adaptable to any situation and clearly different from traditional methods. It involves the community and makes them conscious of their rights and responsibilities."* (Addul Kadir, Director, Anfea-Bauchi)



Village chief, Demke community



Most projects' start-up was characterised by an initial meeting with the village chief (a formality which is crucial in this area of Nigeria in order to implement any development project). A meeting with the wider community followed, resulting in facilitator selection by the community based on a mixture of criteria from the implementing organisation and the community itself.

For example, in their start-up process, CBD-NGO Forum introduced *Reflect* to the whole community as something “that you could use to address issues which affect you” (**Rehab**). Facilitators were chosen who were: good listeners; ready to teach; always reachable by the community; a little bit literate and humble.

WIN-Bauchi had originally hoped to work directly with women involved in their micro-credit work. However, this was not possible as the men in the community would not allow the women to attend the two week facilitator training (this point will be discussed in the Gender section below). Thus, in their start up phase WIN-Bauchi made the decision to work with the men instead. The facilitator, chosen by the (men in the) community, was someone who was respectable/respected by the community, ready to sacrifice and serve, could read and write in one or two languages (Hausa and English), and was ready to learn.

Once the facilitators were selected they attended a two week training (generally organised at state level), and returned to their communities to start the *Reflect* process.

## The *Reflect* process

Many communities call the *Reflect* group meetings ‘community meetings’ and these tend to take place fortnightly or monthly (although in some places groups meet weekly). These meetings are conceived as continuing indefinitely and, interestingly, participation in the meetings tends to grow rather than decrease overtime. This is in contrast to traditional literacy projects which frequently report problems in sustaining participation. Both Anfea-Bauchi and CBD-NGO Forum suggest that this is because more people become interested as the development projects begin. This implies that the actions planned by the *Reflect* circle were relevant and interesting to the wider community who, once they saw what was happening, felt they would benefit from involvement in the *Reflect* meetings.

In most communities groups began by doing a prioritisation matrix – examining issues in the community. Once a key issue was decided on, an action plan was designed in order to tackle the issue. This might have been supported by further analysis using additional *Reflect* tools such as community maps, trees or Venn diagrams.

## Use of tools

Participatory tools and techniques are an integral part of the *Reflect* approach and many *Reflect* circles used maps, matrices, trees and Venn diagrams to structure their *Reflect* discussions. Maps and trees tended to be popular, and people commented that they were easy to use and helped in analysis of community problems. For example, in Demke community they explained how a map was used in their action planning to agree a location for the primary school, and to identify the different families who would benefit from and contribute to the school. Zaranada community comments: “PRA graphics help us to understand, to analyse”. Venn diagrams, however, were seen as difficult to use and understand.

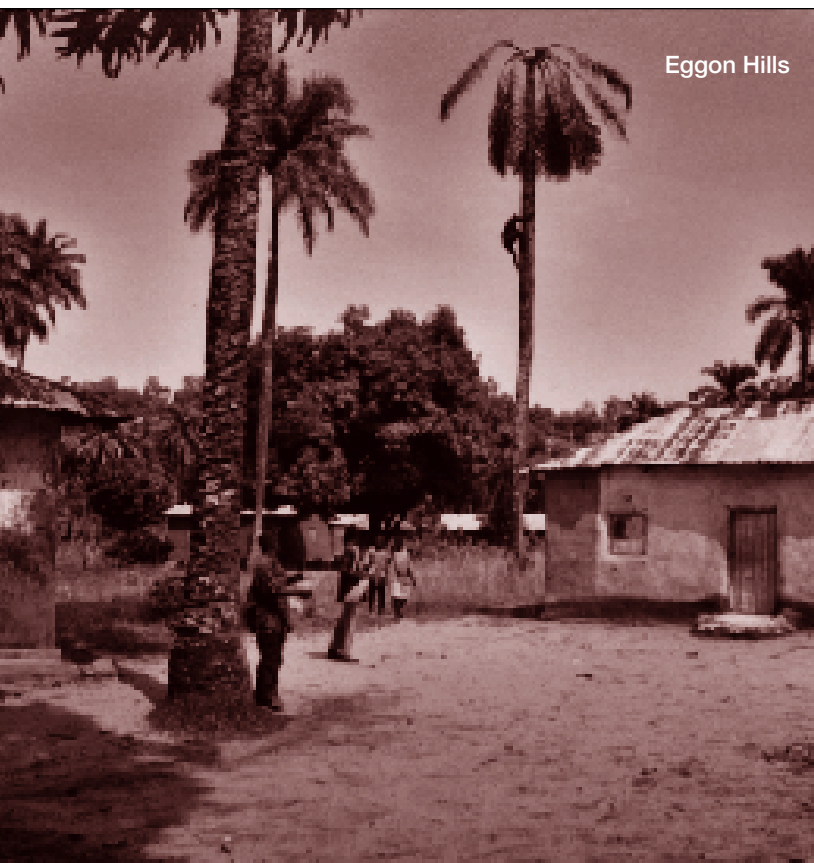
Although action points varied across different communities, they tended to fall into two categories – either infrastructure development, with the aim of increasing access to a particular service (for example: primary schooling, health care or water), or adult literacy classes (which link to the *Reflect* process to differing degrees in different places).

Action plans were developed considering the following questions: what is the specific activity, how will this be done, what is needed, what sources of support are there, where will it take place, who is responsible and when will it happen?

Frequently the initial stage of an action plan was to try to get external support – whether this was from the local government, or the implementing organisation. And the most frequent response from both agencies was to ask the community to begin the project, saying that they will provide some sort of support once they are convinced that the community is really engaged in the initiative.

Thus, *Reflect* groups attempted to garner support from the wider community – through community taxes and labour contributions – with varying levels of success. The final support given by the local government and/or the implementing organisation also differed greatly in different contexts. For example, WIN-Bauchi have agreed to fund half a borehole reparation project once the work starts, and the community are planning to sell a goat to raise money for their contribution to the project.

Ideally, the action point implementation should be accompanied by continual reflection and analysis as an integral part of the *Reflect* process. By reflecting on how the action plan is developing, groups are able to take their plans forward and learn from their experience as they continue with their community development work. It is difficult to say to what extent this happened at the community level, or whether the analysis is strategic or focused on the specific issue at hand, and this point will be returned to below.



### **Aspects of a *Reflect* process in the Eggon Hills, Nassarawa State**

*Work in the Eggon Hills evolved simultaneously on different levels. The involvement of different people in different ways strengthened the overall project, for example:*

**Personal involvement:** out of one prioritisation exercise the idea of micro-finance arose. So when Project-Agape received money to run a micro-finance project, they went to the community to see if they were still interested in doing this. They were, and the project started. Project-Agape comments that in *Reflect* communities participants do not default on their repayments, which is a common problem in other projects areas (and suggest that this is due to participants' feeling of ownership of the project).

**Community involvement:** one community was discussing the issue of water (this is always a problem outside of the rainy season). They began by looking at a problem tree of water – discussing the causes and effects of lack of water. Causes included overgrazing, bad use of water, use of chemicals, fishing etc. One obvious effect of lack of water is that you have to spend more time looking for it, meaning less time can be spent on other crucial activities. The group decided to sink wells, and so far have sunk four, which are working effectively.

**Cross-community work:** as well as community meetings there are also general meetings held for the three communities in the hills (as and when these are needed). In these meetings they discuss common projects – one of these was a health clinic (there were no health facilities in the hills). The three groups came to Project-Agape about this, and together they drew up a plan and went to the local government. The local government said that it did not have the staff for a clinic, but that they would pay two of the five salaries if local people could be identified to work in the clinic, and if the communities built the clinic themselves. The clinic is now built, and the local government has donated some furnishings. Unfortunately it is still not operational, but the community members are still hopeful, and are using this experience to inform their future action plans.

## Facilitators

Around the world facilitators are identified as the key to the success of any *Reflect* project.

After an initial two week training period, facilitators are left to guide their community through a *Reflect* process, to identify local issues and encourage community participation in their solutions. Facilitators (in this project) are not paid by any *Reflect* implementing organisation, although it is hoped that they will receive some recognition from the community members – either financial benefit or payment in kind (eg through working on their land). Many projects report difficulties in motivating and sustaining the facilitators (although many have stayed for the duration of the project and appear very dedicated).

Facilitators face similar challenges in the differing communities. Firstly, there is mistrust from community members who think that facilitators are political agents, or being paid by the local organisation and stealing the community's money. This became a big problem in Agwarde community (where COWAN was working). Community members, demanding to know how much he was being given for the project, attacked the facilitator and COWAN had to intervene to resolve the issue. Secondly, the facilitators' struggle to engage community members on two levels: to stay for the whole *Reflect* session, and within project implementation. Finally, as Manasseh from Ogbagi community commented, there is too great a dependence on facilitators: "*people don't do anything when I am not there*".

However, facilitators also recognise how they have benefited through their involvement. This is evident through increased respect and friendship from the wider community. Further, various facilitators have returned to education, one has been employed by the organisation implementing *Reflect*, and others mention how their own skills have increased.

As mentioned earlier, there is very little ongoing training for facilitators and this lack of support limits the effectiveness of the approach. In addition, many implementing organisations called the original training 'half-baked' (as it focused on content rather than process). Unfortunately, this is often reinforced by the ongoing training which has tended to focus on very specific skills, such as screen-printing, rather than deepening their ability to facilitate or analyse. Although content is important in any training process, this emphasis has meant that insufficient weight is placed on process, leaving the facilitator's skills less developed in this area.

In addition to this, another issue, which limits the effectiveness of the programme, is perhaps due to the conception of *Reflect* as a community development, rather than literacy, project. This has meant that many facilitators are not provided with learning materials (flip charts, markers, books etc), which is standard practice in many other places. This exacerbates the problems of lack of understanding of how to link tools, or make action points more strategic, as the facilitators do not have the material to keep records of the tools used or the discussions which took place.

Implementing organisations are aware of the limits of facilitator skills and identified two strategies to improve this: the development of a system of exchange visits (so that facilitators can visit each other's circles) and the pairing up of the facilitators, so that they can support each other.



Zaranda, well dug by *Reflect* circle members

# Impact

**The impact of the *Reflect* project takes diverse forms and can be seen across the range of people/organisations involved in *Reflect*. This section looks first at the impact at community level, and then considers how the work impacts on organisations and relationships within the project.**

## **On the community**

The impact of *Reflect* on the community can be seen at various levels. Firstly, the *Reflect* meetings provide a space and incentive for community members to come together and discuss issues relevant to them. This was something new in many of the areas that we visited as previously community decisions were made by a select few, those traditionally in power.

In relation to this it is important to understand the role played by traditional leaders. Village chiefs have given support to *Reflect* and their approval is necessary for the process to continue. As such, it could be argued that power relations have not changed significantly. However, the creation of the *Reflect* space is a step forward and it is only with such an initiative that the community can begin to examine issues important to them and attempt to change their village governance structures. As discussed below this has led to challenging village leaders in some cases, and it is likely that this will happen more as the project continues. However, it is also important to emphasise that *Reflect* does not aim to undermine or devalue these traditional structures, but support people in getting their voices heard with the ultimate aim of making the structures more democratic.

Secondly, there are a variety of action points which impact on individuals and the wider community. For example, a number of *Reflect* participants have chosen to return to school to further their education and, as mentioned earlier, many of the *Reflect* circles have led to the establishment of literacy classes, thus enabling the individual to access more skills and learning. Also, a wide range of income-generating activities have been introduced, improving economic life at the community level. The action points, such as bore hole-drilling/digging wells, road renovation, the construction of village halls, schools and clinics, and an electrification project, have all enhanced access to basic services, and have also strengthened community members' ability to work together. Finally, the visits to local government have created an understanding of linkage here.

A general point raised by all partner organisations was the increase in community independence – the ability to get on and do things for themselves without waiting for external assistance. The importance of the community 'owning' the *Reflect* process and projects was also highlighted. It was recognised that this increased the likelihood of success and also the sustainability of the projects.

For example, Anfea-Bauchui described *Reflect* as:

*"...an approach towards sustainability. It is a process of development which brings about sustainability. Sustainability was the main reason for failing in past literacy campaigns. This is the same in development projects. The UNDP made bore holes, they installed them, put their name above them and then went away, no one maintained them. With Reflect, the people decide if they want a bore hole and install it, they repair it. This sense of ownership is important. It isn't important to know which organisation funds it."*

This independence and ownership has had a knock-on effect, as many organisations highlight that they have received demands from neighbouring communities who have seen the impact of *Reflect* and wish to start work in their own communities.

However, despite the positive regard for *Reflect* and enthusiasm at the local level, it is also worth noting that some action points have been less successful than they could have been – perhaps because the levels of reflection and analysis have been quite limited. For example, *Reflect* circles have tended to get caught up in implementing a particular plan and their meetings have focused on specific moments in the plan, rather than maintaining a strategic overview. Thus, actions have tended to react to an immediate need rather than tackle the underlying problem. Unfortunately, this means that, for example, many of school buildings lie unused at the moment due to lack of teachers, or inability to finish the roofing or flooring of the structure (often due to lack of support from/accountability of the local government).

Although *Reflect* in Nigeria was conceived as an approach to community development, it is important to recognise that a community is not homogenous, and that different community members will have different priorities. Unfortunately, focus on community development in many areas has often been at the expense of thinking through the different perspectives that exist within a community. For example, the needs or wishes of one group of people may not be the same as others. This could partly be because implementation of the action points requires consensus and widespread involvement of community members. However, it is important that these different perspectives are not denied or ignored.



**Gurusu community:** through discussion we came up with so many problems facing us. We prioritised them and came out with our immediate need (access to health provision). We used a problem tree to analyse our problem, and a Venn diagram to decide where we could go for assistance. We then went to an action point – the construction of a dispensary. The circle members were involved from the start, but we then transmitted our idea to the whole of Gurusu community, who joined hands together to see that the project was executed. However, we as the community could not do this alone, so we went to see the local government to seek their assistance, with some materials such as health workers. We also got moral support from the Agency for Mass Education, Niger State. We faced enormous challenges in the project, as there was a lot of opposition from unprogressive people, who are always against any developmental programme that is initiated. What these people want to do is create confusion in the community. But we were bent down to see the end of the project, today the clinic is there for the community to use, with health workers posted by the local government. We learnt many lessons from this – it gave me encouragement to continue with Reflect. The coming together as a team is of great importance. Reflect is participatory and this was demonstrated in the project. The project today is owned by everybody and not for an individual. (Project supported by ANFEA-Niger)

**Gaskiya cooperative:** it all began when I was asked to attend facilitators' training. When I came back from the course, I met with the District Head to brief him all about the benefits of Reflect. In turn, the District Head called some of his village heads to brief them on Reflect also. They all welcomed Reflect and today the circle members, wider community, village head and other villages are involved in the programme.

I was a member of Gaskiya cooperative and I worked with the rest of the group. We used a prioritisation matrix and looked at what we needed in the community. We agreed to set up a committee to come up with an economic project that would reduce the poverty, and to start adult literacy classes.

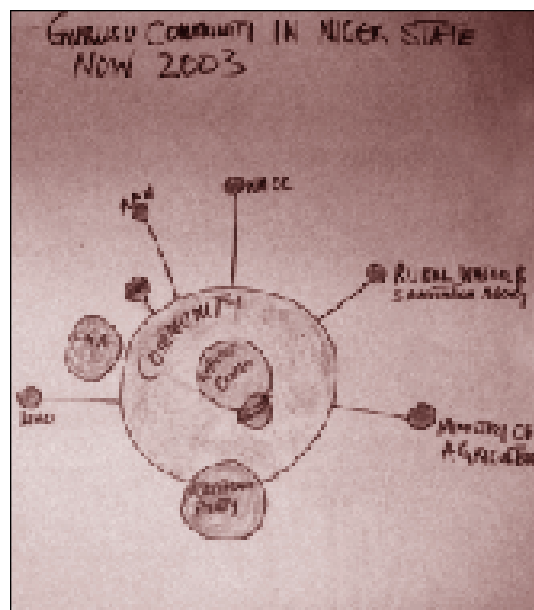
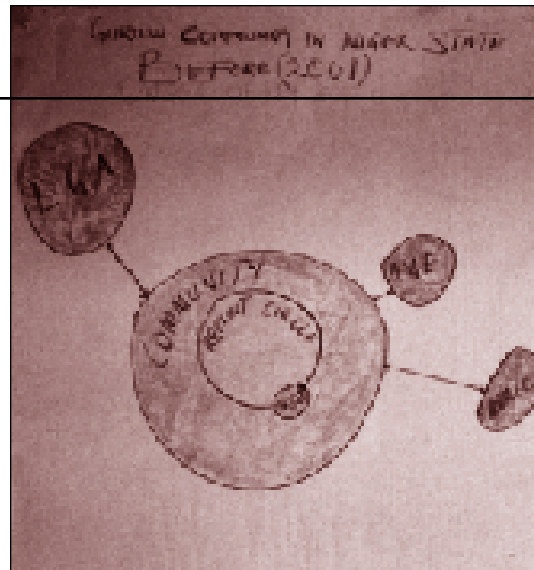
We decided to set up a poultry farm. To make our dream come to reality Urban Ministry, an NGO, quickly disbursed loans to us.

We are still facing funding problems to carry through the project. But we are continuing to try, we have learnt the lesson that 'together we stand, divided we fall'. We need to have more support from NGOs and other agencies and this would motivate us more. We also need to develop proper monitoring and evaluation systems for the project.

I myself have gained a lot from my involvement in Reflect – I have benefited from experience-sharing and social interactions, and communication within the community has improved. I feel I have good relations with the rest of the community, and that our self-reliance and sustainability has increased since we started working with Reflect.

(Project supported by Urban Ministry, Gombe State)

Power diagrams – before and after Reflect



Since working with Reflect members of Gurusu community highlight the increased presence of organisations in their community who are able to support community projects. Moreover, their community now has a ward councillor and thus they are more able to link to political parties and the government (see box on page 26 for more information).

## Gender

Work conceived within a rights-based framework is often concerned with 'public rights' such as access to water, housing and education, or the right to vote. Less thought is given to gender (or other power) relations in the community, or within households, and how this might affect an individual or group's ability to engage with different services and institutions. However, power relations underlie people's ability to secure their basic rights, and therefore need to be considered within any rights-based approach.

Gender relations are central to FPT and are clearly stated as part of AAN's goals within the *Reflect* project. However, there is a lack of clarity as to what is actually understood by gender within the project. Many of the partners and community members state an improvement in gender relations without being able to qualify what they mean by this. There is a lack of a wider understanding of gender, or a willingness to challenge cultural and religious practices which reinforce specific gender roles.

A complex web of societal and cultural norms and ways of behaving underpin gender relations. Further, other power relations, such as generation, educational level or class etc, interact with gender relations. Thus power always needs to be considered through multiple lenses, and gender relations cannot be considered in isolation. This means that confronting issues around gender is not something that has a quick or easy solution.

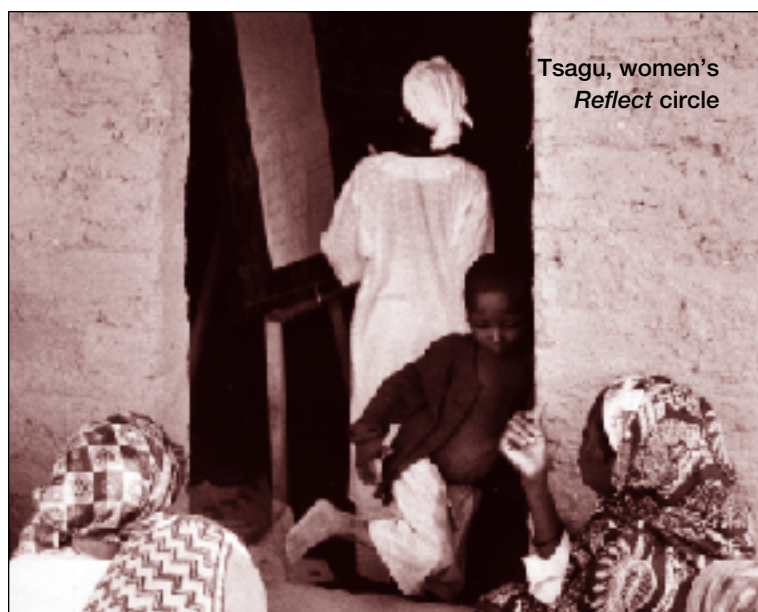
WIN-Bauchi, whose "sole aim is to empower women and their families", have found it impossible to work with women within the *Reflect* project. This is due, in part, to the men not allowing the women to attend a two week facilitator training, and the fact that, in the communities where they work, men and women are unable to meet together. Although they recognise that "it is important to work with the men's groups even if we can't work with women, as both sexes need to be included for gender relations to change" (Mary Dutsi, WIN – Chair of the board), their work with *Reflect* does not include any specific focus on gender. Rather, they concentrate on general community development, and as such will not succeed in fundamentally altering gender relations. For example, the group comments on various physical infrastructure projects which impact on practical gender needs – such as construction of boreholes or wells – but these do not challenge gender roles, unless they are part of a wider exercise looking at who collects the water and why.

There could be various reasons for why WIN avoids discussing gender relations directly. One major factor could be the fact that WIN is a Christian-based organisation and is working in a Muslim area (and has therefore chosen to work in this way in order to avoid religious clashes, and to earn the respect and trust of the community). However, it is also worth highlighting that WIN, and other organisations, chose to work with men rather than rethink the way training was organised so that

women could attend. In the same way as village chiefs, who are in a position of power, need to be included in order to commence *Reflect* at the village level, men, who are also in a position of power, will need to be included to ensure women's involvement in *Reflect*. However, this means that the inclusion of women and analysis of gender relations will need to be discussed within the *Reflect* circle rather than avoided.

The limited understanding of gender at an organisational level could be part of the reason for a lack of discussion of gender at a community level. This points to the necessity for further training and analysis in this area. While many people emphasise the need to celebrate small gains which make it easier to perform traditional gender roles it is important that this is only done with a view to how these gains will help in challenging the structural issues which currently define gender roles, ie when working with gender it is crucial to understand women's position and power and keep the long-term goal of changing this in sight. As an approach which values local knowledge and diversity within any group of people, and uses different tools to analyse the spaces occupied and skills possessed by different people in the group, *Reflect* could actively construct models for securing basic rights which acknowledge present power dynamics and attend to diverse needs and desires. If gender and power are not discussed it is likely that improved relations with local government and other bodies will serve to reinforce the current community power structures, rather than challenge them.

These comments focus specifically on gender relations at the community level, and refer to the lack of structural change, or systematic thought around working with gender. However, this does not mean that *Reflect* has had no impact on gender relations in the project. It is noteworthy that women have greater access to community information; that both sexes are working together on community projects; and that men are helping out in the house more. There were



Tsagu, women's *Reflect* circle



also some individuals who commented on their own personal experience of working with *Reflect*. For example, one participant, Muhammed Musa Mube, commented: *“It is as a result of Reflect that we now have participation in family matters. For example, if my wife or my children ask me to cook I will do this; this is not part of my culture or religion”*. In addition, as will be seen below, the impact on gender issues among staff working with *Reflect* was much greater.

Involvement in *Reflect* has also increased the value given to community meetings, and thus strengthened communication within communities. In various communities women commented on the fact that, prior to *Reflect*, men controlled all community decisions and information, but since the start of *Reflect* information is now also made available for them. This is illustrated by the experience in Ogbagi community, Eggon Hills where women have built a community hall. The main aim of this structure is to give the women a place to meet where they can discuss community issues. This initiative enables the women to discuss issues independently of the men, something that they were not able to do before, and also gives them a ‘rehearsal space’ so that they can practice communicating in a safe environment before approaching the men/those in power.

Communication in a more general form is also a crucial consideration when examining the impact of any *Reflect* project.

## Literacy and communication

The aim of any *Reflect* project is to strengthen people’s capacity to communicate by whichever means most appropriate to them. It is significant that, although *Reflect* was introduced in Nigeria as a rights-based approach to community development, through their involvement in *Reflect* many of the communities elected to begin adult literacy classes.

It was slightly unclear why *Reflect* participants had chosen to begin literacy classes, or what they hoped to gain through literacy learning. However, there were some individual reasons for involvement in literacy learning such as: *“Literacy is a good thing, if you have a child who is somewhere else and sends you a letter with some money, and you can’t read, then you have to ask someone else to read it for you. This means you can’t keep any secrets – everyone will know what is in the letter, and that you have some money. Also, illiterates are looked down on, we don’t want this.”* (Mere community) and: *“As a younger person I didn’t go to school, now it is an opportunity to learn, I can write my name, my father’s and my husband’s, and I can open the Bible. When we started we were few, but others started to see the impact and now they’ve joined in too. Before I used to give way, let my husband decide everything. Now I don’t just keep out of his way, I even talk in public, I am the woman’s leader in the church.”*

(Monica Andrew, Demke community)

These comments suggest that people associate literacy with issues of control and power, and the linkage made between literacy and speaking out is particularly apparent in the second comment. Moreover, while the individuals are basing their comments on their particular experience, there are clearly wider community issues which lead to the desire for literacy learning (such as lack of access to basic services). Unfortunately, partly because of the conception of *Reflect* as a community initiative, rather than a literacy programme, many of these literacy classes have become completely separate from the original *Reflect* meetings (although in most cases the facilitator is responsible for both types of sessions). The way literacy learning has developed is ironic. The aim of the Nigeria *Reflect* project was to overcome some of the baggage and difficulties inherent in many traditional literacy projects, so it focused on strengthening civil society with no explicit mention of literacy. However, this has meant that trainers and facilitators did not have the same opportunities (as facilitators in other places have had) to develop their understanding of how *Reflect* can be used to support literacy learning. And, unfortunately, this has meant that most of the literacy classes are very traditional, using similar methods of literacy learning to that the facilitators used to learn to read and write in school. In the majority of communities literacy classes were meeting much more frequently than the *Reflect* community meetings – with some communities meeting up to three times a week. The interest in literacy and the frequency of meetings is a great opportunity which is currently being missed. Through integrating literacy learning, the effectiveness of *Reflect* as a rights-based approach can be enhanced – but only if literacy learning is linked to the discussions occurring in community meetings, and the process is participatory and empowering.

## Literacy and rights

Literacy can form part of the process of people accessing their basic rights. For example, if communities are able to write to their local government, this may strengthen their position when asking for support in basic services (as government often values written text over spoken word), or if they can access local government information this can also be used to contextualise their situation and add further evidence to their claim for service delivery. The use of newspaper articles can also help here. Further methods such as notice boards or newsletters can be used to share information and *Reflect* experiences with the wider community while simultaneously generating literacy in the community.

See the resource pack ‘Communication and Power’ ’03 for a wide range of ideas on how to link literacy to securing basic rights.

Although literacy learning has tended to be separated from the *Reflect* community meetings, it is clear that these meetings are strengthening other forms of communication, specifically oral communication – and this is leading to a change in community relations.

*“Reflect has helped the community in terms of unity. It has also helped bring the children together to talk, the meetings have helped both the young and the old see the importance of education... the more our community comes together the more it will grow.”* **(Reflect participant, Mere Community)**

It is also evident that *Reflect* has strengthened information sharing throughout the community. *“One of the problems of the hill communities is that they had no community structures – no way of coming together to discuss community issues and solve problems, they had no social groupings.”* **(David Allu, Project-Agape)**. Members of the *Reflect* circle have encouraged the wider community to take part in their projects, thus enhancing community collaboration and strengthening organisation at the community level.

However, the role of communication in the process has been limited due to the conception that the *Reflect* circle themselves must generate all information to be discussed by the group. By understanding communication as a two-directional process, the importance of introducing external information into the discussion is highlighted. This can be used to deepen discussions and analysis within the circle. For example, the *Reflect* group could examine articles from newspapers or radio broadcasts. Further, NGO or government plans and budgets could be shared with circle members. This would enable *Reflect* participants to place their situation within the wider context and target specific institutions in their struggle to secure their rights.

## Impact on relationships and power

This subsection considers how power and relationships have changed during the *Reflect* project. This involves looking at relationships between the communities and the government, within communities and within the project itself.

By examining changes in the way people relate to each other, important insights into power relations can be garnered. *Reflect* analysis suggests that communication is not just a technical skill, but that the ability to communicate is dependent on how powerful we feel in any given situation. Thus, power relations underlie people’s ability to communicate and access their rights, and are a crucial dimension in a rights-based approach. A change in power relations is significant as it suggests the extent to which the gains achieved within the project are sustainable – and whether they can be maintained, and improved on, over time.

Power relations do not change overnight, and there is no easy way to measure how relationships change. However, people’s perception of different relationships is an indicator of how empowered they feel, and, as such, this section is based on how people viewed the various relationships.

**Community and local government:** a key aspect of a rights-based approach focuses on building relationships between communities and local government. As mentioned earlier, the Nigerian government system is extremely bureaucratic, and the mixture between state level government, state agencies with specific focus (eg on education) and local government means that it is not immediately clear who holds ultimate responsibility for many basic services. However, local government is responsible for various services, including: administration of health centres, construction and maintenance of roads



Zaranda community

and drains, water supply, construction and maintenance of primary schools, basic environmental sanitation and other aspects of preventative health services.

The level of community relationship with local government differed according to who you spoke to – and there was a tendency for the implementing organisation to feel that this relationship was much stronger than the community perceived it. For example, Project-Agape highlights how it had organised a meeting between elected representatives and the electorate. This allowed the electorate to question the local government on various issues, and “*created an enabling environment. The community realised that the local government were ordinary people, who could be approached.*” (David, Project-Agape). However, community members commented: “*We have no contact with the local government, if they know what is happening it is through Project-Agape, not us.*”

This difference in perception could be for any number of reasons. For example, because the organisation’s relationship with the local government was quite strong, and they felt that they were speaking on behalf of the community when talking to councillors or officials, they might exaggerate the level of contact. Or, conversely, the community might play down the relationship, hoping to get more support from AAN if they were seen as abandoned by local government. Or thirdly, because this relationship is evolving and, while it might not be changing as fast as the community hoped, it has shown a dramatic improvement over time and this was recognised by the organisations. Finally, it might be that the community contact with local government is made with Project-Agape (ie community members and Project-Agape staff meet local government officials/representatives together), so that community members do not perceive this contact as their own.

The lack of expectation of local government at community level was also evident, as the participants in Zaranda community explained: “*It is so difficult getting to the people in these places. The local government has come and seen the work, but because they can’t follow it up we haven’t had anything from them. We have heard that all groups have difficulties getting support from the government, it’s not just us, so we don’t really expect anything.*”

Whatever the real level of relationship with local government in each individual case, it is worth noting that all communities had approached local government for help in implementing their action points. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, local governments are currently in a period of stagnation, unwilling to start any projects due to the upcoming local elections. This meant that communities were often told that they could not be helped at this time. However, the very act of asking local government for support is a breakthrough in Nigeria, where previously visits to the local government could have

## Politicisation of *Reflect* participants and facilitators

One clear impact of the *Reflect* group meetings in many communities is that participants are now urging their facilitators to stand for election. This clearly shows that participants are valuing the formal political system as a way of improving the situation at a local level, and see entering it as the most effective way of influencing it. To stand for election a facilitator would have to join a political party, which is interesting given that one of the main reasons that communities were wary of *Reflect* at the beginning was that they were worried that it was a political party.

When discussing the possibility of entering local government, one facilitator commented: “*If I am given the opportunity I would help my community in the area of western education and health. I would make sure that they are given their rights, that which they have not been getting they would get.*” The importance of representation was reiterated by the village chief, who explained that lack of education has meant lack of representation, as there is no one to speak on their behalf: “*Although some people have finished primary they were not able to take exams, and therefore they are not qualified for secondary school. If you don’t have someone in local government presenting your needs it is easy for people to ignore them.*”

There are various debates among many *Reflect* practitioners at all levels about whether it is a good thing for facilitators to enter politics, and much confusion between the ideas of rights awareness, politicisation, and adherence to a political party. While a rights-based approach, which involves siding with the most poor and marginalised is necessarily political, this does not imply that it is party political and this is an important distinction. If *Reflect* facilitators join a political party to represent their community without challenging the whole system of governance, there is a danger that they will become part of the system and be unable to change it. These issues – of whether change can be better achieved from inside or outside the system – need to be fully considered within any *Reflect* project.

resulted in imprisonment or even death. Comparisons between communities where *Reflect* is being implemented and other communities illustrate that *Reflect* has brought together communities and local government.

In addition, all of the communities visited as part of this research had achieved the understanding that they were entitled to visit local government and ask for support in accessing basic services. Moreover, although they were mainly negative around the impact they had had on local government, there was evidently awareness that local

government should be representing them. Comments included: *"We vote for the councillor, for the chairman. But they don't do anything. Now we have the clinic, we are empowered, we can go to the local government and say 'look what we have done for ourselves'."* (**Ogbagi community**). *"We only ever see a councillor during the election. He is supposed to represent us but he doesn't, there is no impact of government here in Tsagu."* (**Tsagu Community**). This sentiment was repeated in Demke community: *"Once they get elected they forget where they come from, they forget about us."* These comments suggest a level of understanding around local government accountability, but a lack of awareness about how to hold these leaders to account.

Although this new understanding and relationship with local government is positive, there are some fundamental issues which need to be further considered if *Reflect* is to strengthen people's ability to secure their basic rights. All the community visits to local government were linked to individual action points, and there were only very limited attempts to make this relationship more structural. This means that communities tend to approach local government with a very specific request, and often have no recourse if this request is denied. For example, many communities identified the lack of primary school in their community as a priority issue. They then approached the local government to ask for support in building and staffing a school structure. The frequent response by local government was to say: if you build the structure yourself we will provide teachers. This left the community with little option but to build the structure. Not only did this mean that communities were using their limited resources to provide a service which should have been provided by the government, but that they also had little means of ensuring that teachers were provided once the structure was built. This situation was described in Tako community, where the *Reflect* group commented how the local government said that they would send a teacher if the community built the school, which they did, but they still have no teacher.

It could be that the lack of follow through on commitments is reflective of the current situation of local government, and it will be important to look at what happens once local government elections have been held. It is hoped that the initial contact made by the *Reflect* participants during this unstable period will serve as a basis for deepening the relationship with local government in the future.

The role of the implementing organisation is highly significant in building relationships with local government. Many organisations had accompanied community members on their visits to local government, or had visited the local government on behalf of the community. For example, Mary of COWAN referred to an incident where the local government had sent out a letter to everyone in Agwade community inviting them to collect their fertiliser: *"But then the poor women were not given any; it all went to another group. So COWAN and the women went*

*together to the government and demanded the fertiliser – they got it!"*.

The demystification of local government, which is referred to by Project-Agape, is an important part of relationship building. If the community realises that the local government are ordinary people, they become approachable, and this forms the basis of any relationship. The fact that the government has historically been so far from the people means that they are regarded as something mysterious, out of community reach. The bringing together of councillors with their electorate is an extremely empowering step – it both builds the confidence of people in the community to demand their rights, and makes government visible at the local level.

Another strategy to increase government support for *Reflect*, as one group suggested, is to run a *Reflect* training workshop for local government. However, it is important to understand what the objective for this training is, and the type of support required of local government. The group who suggested the training went on to say: *"If local government were trained they would see that Reflect will lessen the demand/dependency on them – they will embrace Reflect, they will understand that the community comes to them only when it is pressed, and this would lead to the sustainability of Reflect ... with Reflect government will know that the community can dig a well and do it well. The local government can still get the credit – by saying the community have a well through my initiative – and it will be cheaper."* (**Win-Bauchi**). This illustrates a perception of government as a service provider who can support community initiatives, thus reinforcing a paternalistic understanding of the relationship between government and its citizens, rather than highlighting the importance of accountability and rights.



Tako community

## Using *Reflect* to get support for *Reflect*

A common method of explaining *Reflect* to someone is to involve them in creating a particular tool or technique. This can allow them to learn more about *Reflect* while simultaneously analysing a pertinent issue. Both NMEC and ANFEA-Bauchi employed this technique to convince their superiors to engage with *Reflect*.

As Sadiq, from ANFEA-Bauchi, explains: *“An official letter was sent to the ministry looking for approval to pilot test the methodology – this was rejected. We decided to carry out a sensitisation visit to the honourable commissioner and his management staff. We met them with a different perception on Reflect. We discussed and arrived at an issue – the falling standard of education in Bauchi state. We used a problem tree to find out the causes and effects of this, and then discussed it and came out with action points. Indeed, they were all happy, there and then they recommended/approved the use of the methodology!”*

Similar techniques could be used to strengthen local governments’ understanding of the approach and thus enhance their relationship with the local community.

This relationship between government and the local community will need to be reconceived if community members are to move beyond asking for ‘donations’ from local government to demanding and securing their basic rights. This is something that needs to be approached from both directions (ie through strengthening civil society/ community awareness and enhancing governmental perception of their role and their openness and understanding) and thus has a crucial impact on the way that the training of local government is designed and implemented.

As Mary from COWAN said: *“Transparency is key – if you are not open and transparent then people will not tell you what the problems are, or challenge you. Reflect needs to build self-confidence, so that you can mix with other people.”* (Mary, COWAN)

At this time AAN focuses its relationship on national government, and expects partners to work with government at a local level. However, in order for this to take place effectively, there needs to be further capacity building at this level, so that partner organisations can establish the grounds on which their relationship to local government should take place, the role of this relationship, and how they can support the communities with whom they work in transforming this relationship to secure their basic rights.

**State and national government:** the relationship with state and national government was not explicitly discussed by any community. However, as many of the *Reflect* circles have decided to begin adult literacy classes, there has also been a limited relationship with the state literacy agencies – ANFEA Nassawera, Plateau and Bauchi. Unfortunately, this has had a low level of success, partly because of a lack of awareness within the agency of the *Reflect* meetings, which perhaps led to worries about the legitimacy of a community led literacy process. Thus, although ANFEA has provided some basic materials, they have not offered any literacy training to *Reflect* facilitators or supported the literacy initiatives in other ways.

Through their relationship with government institutions AAN, has been able to not only influence education policy, but also the way the institutions themselves operate. Adamu Khalid, Deputy Director of Planning, NMEC, comments on how he persuaded the management of NMEC to dedicate the money the institution had received through the Education Tax fund (40 million Naira – £160,000 approx) to work with *Reflect*, thus signaling the influence the project has had on NMEC’s approach to literacy.

The staff at NMEC highlight how contact with *Reflect* has impacted on their understanding of literacy, and has led to alternative literacy practices in Nigeria. Although the links between their *Reflect* work and other literacy programmes are still limited, staff state that *“we foresee a situation where primers will be discarded completely – this will be the ultimate.”* (Jagi, NMEC)

Jagi continues to comment: *“Reflect has rendered staff very outspoken, some might even say insubordinate. People see each other as colleagues, not as masters, there is now no gap. People freely express their minds – it’s not insubordination, it’s positive. There is more efficiency, and productivity has increased. The chief executive is also part of Reflect, so he understands. Before Reflect, we would not be invited to this meeting, it would be just the management.”*

Similar experiences are expressed by ANFEA-Bauchi, who highlight both how *“transparency and accountability from Reflect are coming into all our activities, influencing our day to day work ... we need to transform our own mode of literacy. If you teach me something that affects me I won’t forget it. In the past we received information produced centrally. We now see what happens with Reflect. We can sit down on our own and produce our own materials to achieve a better result”*.

*“We started the literacy class, but now we understand it is the duty of the government to give us a literacy class. But they didn’t do this. A year after we started the class we went to them and said ‘we’ve started the class, what will you give us now’. They gave us two text books and a register. They also said two people will come and visit the class and add to it, but this hasn’t happened.” (Manasseh Enjo – Facilitator, Ogbagi community)*

As highlighted earlier, this has meant that the *Reflect* facilitators tend to struggle with literacy on their own, and it is a lost opportunity with respect to the role literacy can play in holding government to account and accessing rights.

This, as in the case of the community’s relationship with local government, points to the importance of organisational relationships, and of building awareness of *Reflect* initiatives more widely within government institutions.

### **Within the community**

Relationships within the community have also changed significantly. Many groups mentioned that men and women were now sitting together and even working on projects together, something that would not have happened previously (although there were also many communities where men and women would not meet together, and only men were meeting in the *Reflect* circles).

The mere existence of the *Reflect* circle means that there is now a structure (which is internally democratic) in the community and this challenges the traditional community structure and the power of traditional leaders. Project-Agape describes how one community realised that their leader was: *“retarding community development, and decided to depose him and select another. They went to the higher leaders to inform them of this, and then selected a new leader.”* In another village a community member describes how: *“before Reflect I had no right to give my opinion on community matters, this was done by elders. Now I can also give my opinion.” (Muhammed Musa Mube)* These relatively small actions are actually considerable as they challenge a long history of position within the community. Moreover, changing relationships at the community level is a basis for strengthening civil society and raising awareness of rights. This, in turn, can increase engagement with local government.

In the same way as the *Reflect* circle is a rehearsal space for talking and behaving in different ways in other spheres, the community becomes a rehearsal space for those relationships which reach beyond it – thus increased equality at community level can impact on relationships elsewhere.

Project partners used **Venn diagrams** to look at how power relationships changed during the *Reflect* project at the community level. They began by discussing what makes someone/an organisation powerful, and came up with the following characteristics:

- control of resources
- ability to influence others, personality, religious beliefs
- sincerity of purpose/trustworthiness, shared understanding/values
- initiative
- total commitment/dedication

Organisations then identified all the relevant structures and individuals at the community level and, using the different power dimensions, looked at how these relations have changed. General observations included the following:

- Since working with *Reflect* organisations are moving closer to the community. There is also an increase in the number of community structures and organisations working with the community.
- There is an increase in commitment, both from the community members and the local government (which previously just had resources but no commitment).
- Most resources stay with the government (whether this is local, state or federal).
- There has been a decrease in the power of religious bodies (both churches and mosques).
- There is an increase in shared understanding and trustworthiness at the community level since working with *Reflect*.
- The *Reflect* circle itself has quite a lot of influence in the community – and has a strong commitment to community development.
- One group had increased the presence of political parties in the community, as they had managed to get a ward council since working with *Reflect*.

This points generally to an increasingly organised community, and thus enhanced opportunities for engagement with local government and a stronger voice for civil society. This implies that the conditions for good governance (which emphasise on the one hand a strong, organised and vocal civil society, and on the other systems for information flows, transparency and accountability) are emerging through involvement with *Reflect*. Further, the decrease in power of religious bodies, and the increase in commitment to community activity suggest changing motivations for involvement in community organisations and a change in the type of power around which the relationships are formed (previously power was rooted in influence/religion and now it is based on trustworthiness/shared understandings). (see diagrams on page 19).



## Implementing organisation

The impact of the project on organisations implementing *Reflect* is dramatic in terms of power and relationships. Involvement in *Reflect* has affected how organisations relate to communities, operate internally, and the attitude of individual staff and their approach to situations in their personal life. This subsection therefore considers these aspects separately.

**Relationship with the community:** one organisation commented: *“Recently ActionAid gave us grants to work with people at the grassroots. We bought the materials with knowledge from the community. Usually we would just give the materials to one person, but this time we counted the materials with the people from the community, we discussed it with the whole community, not just one person. Further, we took the material to the community rather than one person coming here, so that everyone knows what is there, there is transparency.”*

**(Sadiq, Anfea-Bauchi).** Various other organisations also mentioned a change in the way they work with communities: *“Reflect has brought us very close to the community... it has made us connect with the grassroots. You can't do Reflect and stay in your office, you have to get out there. Communities bring their action points to our offices, we meet together.”* **(Rehab, CBD-NGO Forum)** and: *“Even for us in NMEC we have changed through our work with Reflect. We now mix with people, we associate with them. We have got humility through Reflect, on a recent visit we slept on mats on the floor – we came to feel what the people are feeling.”* **(Azuka, NMEC)**

This change in relationship was also evident in visiting some communities. For example, when we met the *Reflect* group in Tsagu community, they led the discussion completely. They had certain issues they wanted to bring up with Anfea-Bauchi and were able to divert the agenda to meet their needs. This illustrates that the perception the community had of the organisation, as being there to serve community needs, is a very different relationship from more traditional development projects.

**Impact on internal functioning:** much of the evidence from *Reflect* practice shows that the concept of ‘coherence’ is crucial if the approach is to succeed in challenging power relations at community level. This is because power relations are replicated and, although the *Reflect* tools and techniques can be very empowering, they can also be manipulated and limiting if implemented in a top-down fashion with specific goals in mind (see box top right). Given the fact that *Reflect* can be manipulated, it is important that those involved in *Reflect* are open and honest about the possibility for abuse, and continually strive to avoid bad practice throughout any project – from the onset of partnership agreements, and the way training is delivered.

## The possibility for abuse of participatory methodologies is clearly illustrated by Shell's community development project

Shell is a petroleum organisation which has a history of conflict with local communities in the Niger Delta where they have been drilling for oil. This has given rise to a discussion of land rights, and who should benefit from the oil rich area. Although AAN have no formal relationship with Shell, they are in discussions at the moment and AAN is considering how best to influence Shell's thinking. Shell staff have received some *Reflect* training (not from AAN) and gave the following reason for working with *Reflect*: *“We have had drop out from the programme because their (community members) expectation of financial benefit is not being met. We have started sensitising them on this issue and we hope to make a positive change. Our desire to gradually change the mind set of our community in the Niger Delta can be achieved through the Reflect activities. Reflect is capable of creating a huge awareness that can liberate their minds and then motivate them to be self-reliant”.*

This shows how participation can become what AAN referred to as a ‘facipulation’ (facilitated manipulation).

## Impact on staff of Reflect project

An example of how *Reflect* has impacted on the way a university lecturer works with her students: *“I have been a university lecturer since 1991, but until my contact with Reflect my approach has always been the banking system. Anytime I went to class, I always had prepared lecture notes with me... [and] there was little interaction with the students. [...However] when the students wrote their exams they only returned to me what I had given them. My contact with Reflect has changed all this now... all I do is bring out key points for the students via discussion...together we find out the extent of our understanding of the topic...the students develop the unit by themselves. It becomes their own knowledge, not mine given to them on loan.”*

## Communication in the family

David Allu (trainer): *“Initially, when I got married I didn’t sit down with my wife to discuss and critically analyse issues, or allocate resources from the family expenditure. This really brought problems, especially on two specific occasions. After failing twice, I decided to practice what I train others on, by opening the democratic space to my wife to contribute in the planning and management of our family income. By doing this we have been able to jointly decide and allocate resources to items or expenditures that are priorities to the family.”*

Halnta Mijinwaya (trainer): *“I have taken the spirit of sharing and learning and allowing people to express their own personal view and opinion into my personal life. Reflect helps me in my business cycle – it encouraged me to throw the idea to a member of the family to decide and offer possible solutions, and to go with their ideas. As a result of these ideas and advice from my whole family the business is now going more smoothly.”*

Anonymous (trainer): *“We have two grown up children and felt that they should be involved and aware of certain key values and principles that would eventually affect their future. Whereas they have had some of these values taught at home and in Sunday school in church, we felt it was necessary that they participated in a discussion and analysed the issues. We started by their mother telling her story on what she valued most when she chose their father for a lover. These reasons formed one side of the matrix. The children then said what they desire of whoever they wanted for a life partner, and this was put on the other side. We then did pair-wise ranking (comparing which characteristics were most valuable) with each family member given an equal chance to participate. After the process the one challenge was that our daughter still desired to go and study, even though we made a copy of the tool for her to keep as a record. The second challenge was for her to link some of the identified values to biblical principles. The fundamental lesson for me has to do with the power of participatory decision-making. The leader cannot struggle to ensure compliance of everyone, but all stakeholders have this as a collective responsibility (ie that everyone is bound to comply with a decision which is made through participation).”*

If *Reflect* is conceived as a rights-based approach it is relevant to see how this impacts on the way organisations function (eg decision-making processes), and how rights are conceived within the workplace.

It was very positive to see every organisation, from NMEC to the smallest CSO, highlight the impact *Reflect* had on their organisational behaviour, pointing specifically to increased participation in decision-making and transparency: *“We are much more reflective and try to discuss issues much more. Reflect has created space within the organisation in which everyone is involved (from volunteers to the director). We had a retreat last year so that we could look inwards, improve ourselves. Reflect has helped to strengthen our relationships with one another in the office.”* (David Allu Project-Agape)

*Reflect* has also impacted on the way some organisations approach other parts of their work. For example, COWAN-Nassarawa was set up as a micro-credit organisation, and was having various problems when it first decided to partner with AAN. *“Now we realise that we do not need to impose it [micro-credit]. At the beginning people didn’t pay the money back as they didn’t know why they got the loan, now people who get the micro-credit loan come together. They discuss issues, not just micro-credit.”* (Mary, COWAN)

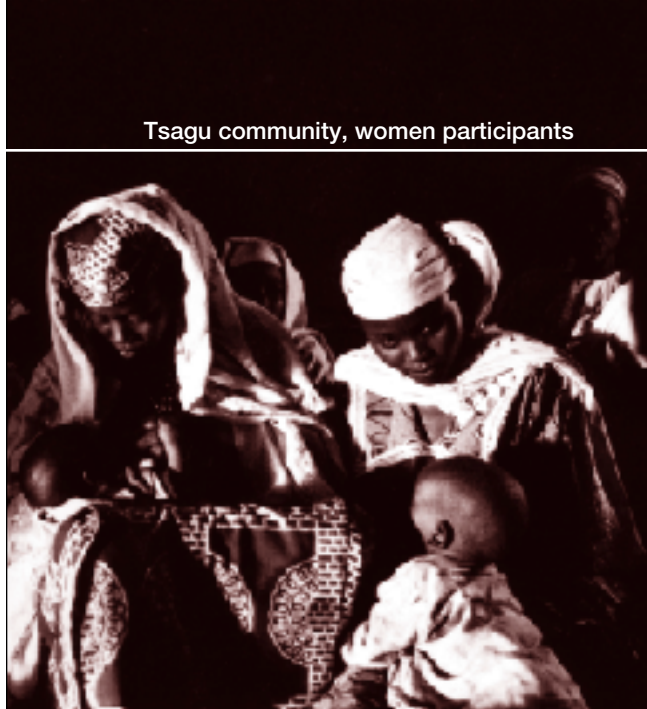
**Impact on the individual staff:** this impact extended to staff members’ lives outside their work. Not only did individuals mention how *Reflect* had influenced how they relate to others, but specific examples were given as to how *Reflect* tools had been used to address specific issues within the family.

This organisational impact is a clear achievement of the project, and could have a sustainable effect on how decisions are made and accountability is maintained at every level.

**Relationships within the partnership:** the concept of coherence is also relevant when looking at relationships between those involved in the partnership. It is important to look at how relationships in the project change during the project lifespan, and how concepts of rights are played out within the partnership. As discussed earlier, within the EU *Reflect* project there is a diverse group of organisations – national government institutions, an international NGO and small informal local CSOs – and this results in complex power relations.

At the beginning of the project all partners were linked to AAN, but there was little linking between partners. However, more recently AAN established a ‘Practitioners’ forum’. The aim of this was to enable trainers to come together and share *Reflect* experiences to further their learning. It is hoped that the responsibility for convening this forum will rotate among partners, and in this way all partners become equal members of the forum.

Considering the institutional differences in partners, this cannot be an automatic assumption, and will need to be continually worked at, in the same way as a democratic *Reflect* space at community level needs to be worked at. However, it was evident during the documentation workshop that participants from the different organisations interacted as equals, and respected each other as *Reflect* practitioners. Members of the different organisations participated equally, both within the formal workshop setting and on a social basis (eg during the lunch breaks or in the evenings). By linking CSOs and government institutions on an equal basis within this project, the structure of their network can impact future relations and provide a good model for governance.



Tsagu community, women participants

### Matrices of partnership

In the documentation workshop partners were asked to analyse their relationship with others in the project along the following lines: capacity building, accountability and transparency, gender roles, and working in partnership. Community members, facilitators and partners looked at their relationship with each other, between themselves, and with AAN, and ranked their relationship as low, medium or high. For example, looking from the partner's perspective in the area of accountability and transparency, they felt that their relationship with the community was low, as they feared being misunderstood by the community. The relationship with facilitators was seen as medium – as they are still learning about downward accountability. But among themselves this relationship was considered as high, as they were good at sharing. Finally, the relationship with AAN was seen as medium, as the accountability was one way (ie from them to AAN, rather than vice-versa).

However, it was also clear that AAN holds itself distinct from the other organisations in the partnership. This is inevitable to some extent– as the coordinator of the project, AAN does play a different role. Further, the partner projects perceive AAN as a funder and thus view AAN as a different entity.

Moreover, while many partners commented on the impact *Reflect* has had on them and their institution (ie has caused them to reconsider how they relate to the communities, and change their decision-making procedures), AAN does not report these results. This could be partly because AAN is not directly implementing *Reflect* and, as such, does not have the community links that other partners have (although NMEC is in the same position as AAN in this), and therefore is less influenced by what they see at the community level. However, this also suggests that AAN is detached from the actual operation of *Reflect* circles and has not developed the systems or culture to learn from what is happening at the grassroots. This could undermine the functioning of the project, as inadvertently AAN could be sending out signals that *Reflect* is something that only takes place at the grassroots, and organisational change is not important in the project. It is, however, important to note that in much of its other work AAN has played a facilitative, behind the scenes role. For example, in their relationship with CSACEFA (Civil Society Coalition on Education for All), AAN has created space for other organisations to network and campaign on EFA. This suggests that perhaps it is more difficult to sustain such a role in project delivery (ie it is easier to play a facilitative role when project funding is not involved). Despite this, AAN should be attempting to work towards a more equal relationship within the partnership, to find ways of overcoming the tensions of being both the main funder in a partnership and an equal participant.



Zaranda community, matrix of relationships

# Challenges and recommendations

## learnings from the project

There are various different challenges which have been touched on throughout this document, these can be classified and briefly summarised as follows:

### Project organisation

**Links between programme and policy:** to date there are no functioning structures for two-way information flows. Because of this, relevant information (eg from AAN or the partner organisations) is not made available to the circle, and this limits possibilities for analysis. Further, policy debates, which take place within the implementing organisations, do not draw on discussions and debates that are happening at circle level. *There is a wealth of information and evidence that can be gathered from the Reflect based discussions and used to support advocacy positions at both state and national level. Conversely, national level information/campaigning material can feed into discussions at circle level – and would extend and deepen its analysis. In order for this to happen the mechanisms need to be put in place at the beginning of any Reflect project to support information flows.*

**Ongoing support:** although the initial training is well conceived and delivered, there is a lack of ongoing support at every level. This not only means that organisations and facilitators feel isolated and unsupported, but that innovation by the facilitator becomes more important (if an individual receives less support, more depends on them). This limits learning at every level, and problems can become much more severe as they may not be picked up early enough. Moreover, without ongoing support there will be a lack of a conception of being part of a large project, thus issues remain focused at the micro-level. *The practitioners' forum is a positive initiative but it is equally important to support the facilitators, for example through their own forum, exchange visits and by linking them in pairs, so that they can assist each other at the local level (such exchange visits would also be useful for trainers, coordinators and community members).*

**Power relationships:** although AAN has made a conscious effort to limit its power vis-à-vis the implementing organisations, it is clear that AAN is in a position of power (partly due to its resources). This is also the case at community level where the implementing organisation has power. It is always much easier to identify power relations than to do anything about them, and power relations do not change overnight. *This suggests that power needs to be considered throughout the project span. There needs to be a greater awareness of power relations between those involved project. There are various Reflect tools which have been adapted to look at*

*power, and these could be used to strengthen analysis at every level. This means attention should be given to organisational structure in these projects, to give space for power analysis and to create a working partnership that takes power issues into account.*

### Impact and sustainability

**Circle sustainability:** all the communities have extremely committed community members who will work for the general good of the community, if they have the space to do so. This feeling of ownership is crucial if community development is to take place. Further, many skills and much knowledge exists in the community and this can be harnessed and used by communities to access their rights.

However, the sustainability of the programme is challenged due to the lack of involvement of local government (and is exacerbated by a dependency on facilitators – which not only puts strain on the facilitator but can cause problems if they leave the project). Moreover, the fact that community members are sacrificing part of their limited resources to implement projects that should be financed by the local government could lead to problems. This not only gives rise to financial pressure at an individual level, but also can be disheartening, especially when the local government has promised something and then does not complete their part of the bargain. *There is a need for greater attention to be paid to local government, both to enhance their awareness and understanding of Reflect, and to ensure that community members develop systems (which do not depend on one individual) of holding their local government to account on any promises made.*

**Capitalising on emerging relationships:** there is a challenge in how to extend and deepen the relationships which are forming between communities and their local representatives. *This implies broadening that relationship so that it becomes about accountability, rights and responsibilities rather than limited to a particular project aimed at securing a particular service. This could be supported by the use of external information (such as policy documents, newspaper cuttings etc) to contextualise any given situation (ie so that community members can understand what their entitlements are and demand their rights).*



**Community stratification:** creating community structures at local level can be very empowering. People need to have space to meet and discuss in order to reach collective agreements on how to work together, or on how to approach other organisations/institutions. Further, the fact that *Reflect* is participatory and democratic enables community members to experience a model of organising which they can use to advocate for changing relationships beyond the community. However, it is important that these structures recognise current power relations, position and community stratification. Not all community members will identify the same needs, or interact in the same way. *Community diversity needs to be recognised within any project aimed at furthering community development and access to rights. When analysing any issue, diversity in the community needs to be considered, as this may influence the process followed and the solution decided on. This will help ensure that the project avoids reinforcing current power structures.*

## Ideological questions

**Nature and funding of action points:** the majority of action points require some level of financial investment and are often designed to treat the immediate problem (ie lack of service) rather than analysing the underlying issue (ie the lack of government accountability and structural discrimination against certain areas/groups of the population). This not only means that it can be hard to achieve the action point if funding is not forthcoming (and raises questions about who should be funding action points), but also suggests that the problem is likely to resurface as power relations have not been challenged. *There needs to be a reconception of action points so that they move beyond a specific solution to a particular issue. A first stage in achieving this level of analysis is to link tools so that various perspectives on the wider picture can be examined. This will involve discussing the trade-off between immediate access to a particular service with sustained/fundamental access to rights. Currently, the focus is on tackling the situation that people find themselves in – for example through building schools or digging wells. A more strategic approach implies looking at what is causing this lack of access, looking at people's position rather than condition. This idea can be further developed by placing the rights-based approach within a governance framework (see below).*

**Conceptions of a rights-based approach:** there is continual struggle regarding what a rights-based approach is and when it becomes service delivery. This is due, in part, to a lack of a conception as to who should be delivering those rights, and a lack of linking rights to governance issues (see below). Further, the project focuses almost exclusively on social and economic rights to the detriment of political and civil rights. However, it is also clear that there are problems in how to talk about rights when a community has no access to basic services. This is a classic 'chicken and egg' problem. A conception of rights is needed in order for communities to organise and access basic services, but a stable living environment, with access to those basic services, is needed before an individual can even think about rights.

Although this is an important issue it should not be used as an excuse to focus on service delivery rather than rights-based work. A rights-based approach is slow, and results are not immediately visible. A first stage is the demystification of government – raising awareness that councillors and officials are just normal people, that everyone has a right to visit them, and that the local government is there to serve the community – and as such should be held to account. *However, for such an approach to succeed it is necessary to work in tandem with the councillors and officials themselves. This is beneficial for many reasons: it gives the work at the community level greater legitimacy; opens up government to the people; and gives local government a level of support in working with their constituency. This implies that discussion at circle level should always move from focusing on the single issue (eg lack of primary school) to looking at wider issues of transparency and accountability of local government.*

## Rights and governance

The AAN *Reflect* project aimed to strengthen people's ability to access their rights and it is clear that to some extent they achieved this. However, as can be seen from this document, the project ended up focusing specifically on access to basic services, and these were often provided due to community intervention.

It is unclear why the initial introduction of a rights-based approach gets transformed into a community development initiative, but one reason might be the lack

of linking to concepts of governance (something which was perhaps exacerbated by the lack of contact Nigerian marginalised communities have had with all levels of government in recent history). A rights-based approach can be understood in various ways depending on the way it is framed. The idea of rights can become a very neutral concept if the issue of who is responsible for delivering those rights is not considered. The emphasis on access to services rather than engaging with local government structures, or examining systems for information flows and accountability lines, has meant that questions of who is responsible for these services becomes less important than actual delivery. And the *Reflect* project becomes focused on enhancing community independence and local solutions, rather than challenging the systems and power relations that have prevented those services from being delivered in the past.

While the level of community involvement is impressive, it is necessary to question how this relates to issues of access to rights, and whether this is what was intended in the initial project conception. I would argue that it is not. The issue thus becomes how to transform this initiative into one which can be described as a rights-based approach. One way could be to use a 'governance framework', and discuss access to rights within this framework. In this way *Reflect* can be used to strengthen peoples' ability to access the broader range of rights and sustain that access.

**What does this mean in practice?** A governance framework implies considering the mechanisms and systems by which rights can be secured. This means that the discussion on the lack of access to specific services needs to be placed within a wider worldview, which examines why certain communities lack such services, whereas others do not. Moreover, current links between government and its people will need to be considered, including the systems which allow for information flows, decision-making, accountability and transparency. Such a framework would need to be discussed at every level within the *Reflect* process, enabling trainers, facilitators and participants to not only consider what is understood by the concept of rights and how these rights can be accessed, but also who should be held accountable for delivering specific rights.

**At community level:** in addition to looking at access to services, communities could discuss what their current relationship with the government is, why this is, and what they would like their relationship with government to be. This could lead to them developing strategies to change this relationship. It is only through a fundamental change in this relationship that governments will move from being seen as benevolent (or malign) to being seen as transparent and accountable, and community members will be able to become active citizens.

Holding governments to account is not a one-off activity but a continuous process. However, this does not mean that communities would be expected to invest large amounts of time and energy in the process. There will be initial investment in developing appropriate accountability systems, but once these are in place the involvement and cost to communities should be much less than it is currently, while impact should be much greater.

**At partnership level:** the concept of governance can be further strengthened if considered within the functioning of the *Reflect* partnership. AAN, and the other organisations involved in the project, will need to consider their own governance mechanisms and ways of relating – internally, with each other, and with the communities with whom they work. For example, considering the way they communicate together and how decisions are made.

**Governance and power:** power relations underpin any governance relationship (as an individual's power affects their ability to engage with systems of governance and access relevant information. Moreover, governance mechanisms and structures reinforce the power relations which exist currently). Through understanding power relations these relationships can be transformed to become empowering (as mechanisms can be designed which enable full and equal participation of those involved). Thus, issues of power will need to be considered at every level within the *Reflect* project (and there are many *Reflect* tools which have been developed to help with such analysis).

**Governance and diversity:** it is important that this governance framework also recognises and values diversity in communities. As highlighted earlier, initiatives based on a rights-based approach do not always consider differing perspectives within a community, and it is important that this is avoided. This is particularly important if the *Reflect* circle is to play a role in promoting alternative models of governance.

**Governance and communication:** communication plays a key role in working on issues of governance, and it will be crucial for the Nigerian *Reflect* practitioners to think through how they can strengthen this aspect of their work. As highlighted in the study, communication is currently seen as a uni-directional process, with all information generated by the circle, based on their existing knowledge.

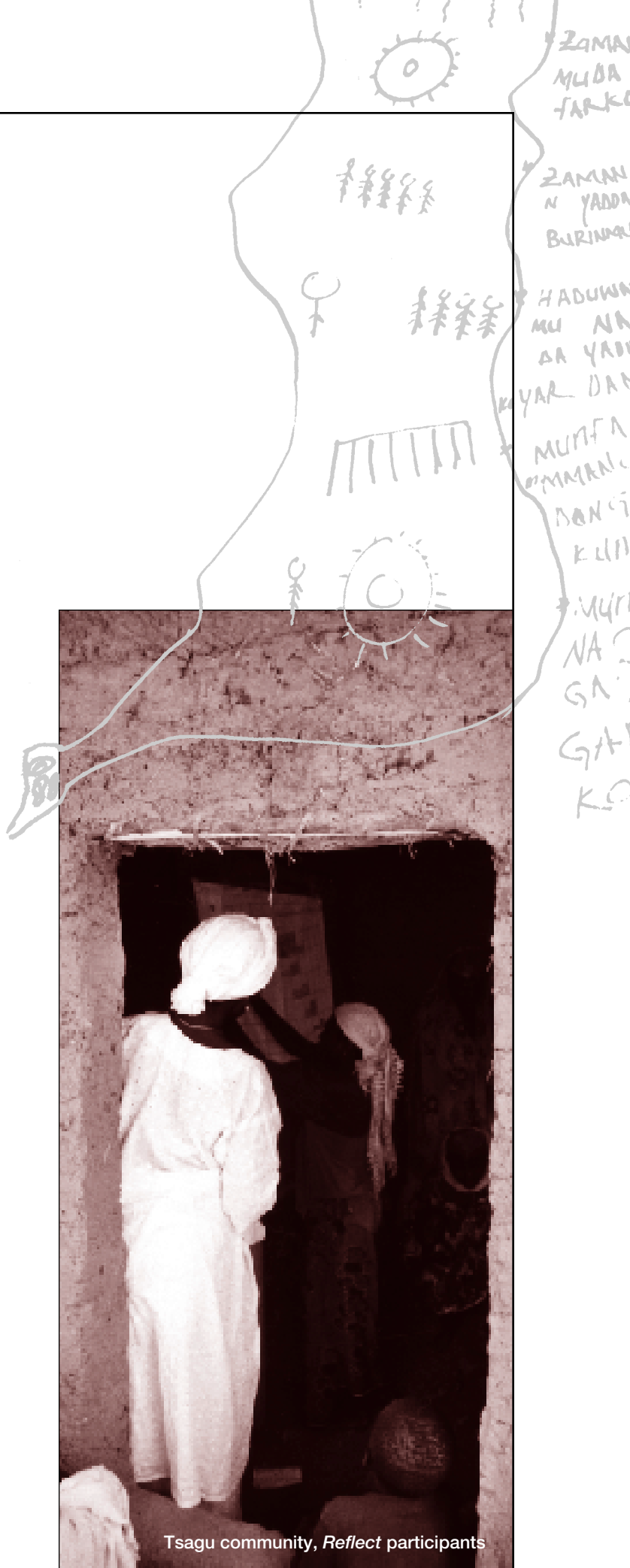
However, if governance relations are to be transformed, it will be important to make certain types of information available to *Reflect* participants. This will require a discussion on how best to introduce such information to the circle – while valuing participants' current knowledge, and enabling them to have control over their learning process. This can be difficult to balance, but access to official documents, budgets, and information about issues beyond the local community (for example through newspaper articles, NGO reports and plans) are necessary



if community members are to understand concepts of rights and government accountability. Moreover, communication can become a way of strengthening rights at a national level – for example through challenging laws which impact negatively on poor people or campaigning for legal policy reform.

**Achieving large scale impact:** while using a governance framework will play a significant role in overcoming some of the challenges identified in this work, it is important to recognise that there will still be many difficulties in changing patterns of government service provision and securing poor people's rights. This is not only because such change processes are very slow and often frustrating, but also because a project of such a small scale cannot be expected to have major impact on governance systems in a country the size of Nigeria. This signals the importance of using the experience itself as an advocacy tool (in the same way as is happening within adult literacy learning) to extend good governance practice. The mechanisms to do this need to be considered throughout the project cycle, to ensure learning and spread is optimised. In this way the small project becomes a model for governance systems beyond the scope of the project.

In the South Africa study which follows, *Reflect* was framed as a way of strengthening links between local government and its constituency. This resulted in direct improvement to services, with minimal cost (both financial and in terms of time) to the local community. This gives a practical example of what a governance framework can do to transfer a project from accessing basic rights to securing these through strengthening government transparency, accountability and responsiveness. As will be seen in the conclusion to this document, both the South African and Nigerian projects have much that they can learn from each other, to strengthen work in *Reflect*, rights and governance for the future.



Tsagu community, *Reflect* participants

# Reflect and governance – the *Idasa* experience

## Introduction

**The *Idasa* (The Institute for Democracy and South Africa) Highlands Community Participation project has been running for two years. Using the *Reflect* approach, the project aims to enhance community participation in a wide range of cooperative governance initiatives. This section gives a brief contextual background – focusing on the recent history of local government in South Africa, and the aims and objectives of *Idasa* (the implementing organisation). It then explores the use and impact of *Reflect* in four Highland communities – Belfast, Dullstroom, Machadodorp and Waterval-Boven. This information is based on interviews with *Idasa* coordinators, circle facilitators and participants, and a review of the documentation carried out by *Idasa* throughout the project.**

## Context

**Democracy in South Africa:** Democracy in South Africa is a fairly recent phenomenon. Following many years of apartheid, where peoples' colour determined their citizenship rights; the first national democratic elections were held in 1994.

The long period of apartheid meant that the large majority of South Africans were discriminated against, excluded from the system, and had no citizenship rights. A massive struggle against the system was pursued and after many tough years finally the anti-apartheid movement succeeded. A new constitution was developed based on democratic principles and the ANC (African National Congress) was elected.

Having fought so hard for this, there is reluctance among many South Africans to challenge the ANC now they are in power, and a lack of awareness around roles and responsibilities within a democracy. For example, many people feel that having voted once there is no need to vote again. This means that government, at all levels, is not being held to account, and unfortunately bad practice is commonplace.

The apartheid years have also led to various other differences between South Africa and other African countries. One particular difference is the form and prevalence of NGOs. Many South African organisations grew up in the 1960s–80s as anti-apartheid movements,

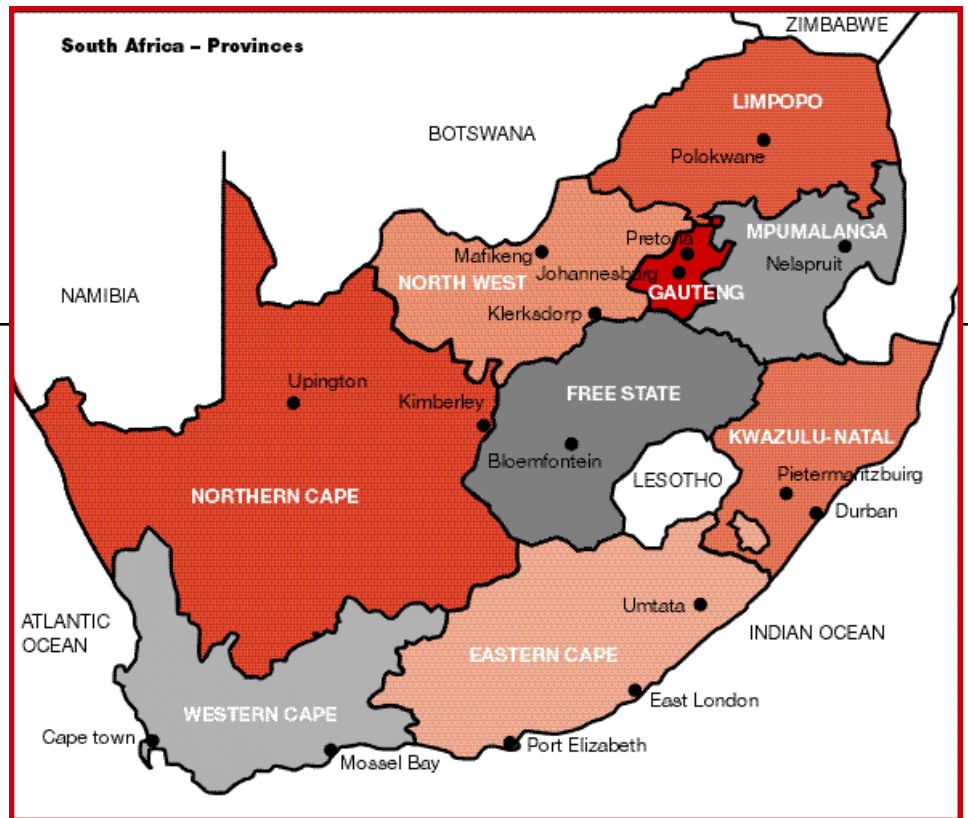
and are unsure how to position themselves post-apartheid. There are relatively few international Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in South Africa, and although there are some small service delivery NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs), there has not been the plethora of community development NGOs found in many countries. As will be seen later, this impacts on people's approach to, and expectations of, community development.

In contrast to many other African countries, South Africa has a highly developed state and social benefits systems (for example offering both housing and disability benefits). The level of education provision is also relatively advanced with reasonably good access to primary schools and high literacy levels as compared to other countries on the continent. This is partly because the infrastructure, for example road systems, is much more developed than in other African countries. However, this does not mean that South Africa is not without its problems, and there are huge inequalities in society (the UNDP Human Development Report in 2003 places South Africa 8th in the Gini Coefficient Index – ie nationally, wealth inequalities are very high).

**Local government in South Africa:** Negotiations about the role and form of local government in South Africa began in 1993. The Local Government Transition Act came into place, and transitional local councils were established with a five-year time frame (1995–2000). The first democratic local elections were held in 2000. During the apartheid years, local representation was divided by colour, which meant that there could be up to five structures in place in any one community – black people had local authorities, Indians had management councils, as did the coloured community, whites had town councils and in some areas there were also tribal authorities. Each group elected their own authorities, with the majority of resources going to the white town councils.

Throughout the period of transition, negotiations took place to establish the form and structure of municipalities and their political, administrative, institutional and financial systems, and in 1998 a White Paper on Local Government was produced.

When addressing the political and administrative systems, the White Paper highlighted the need for active community participation, and legislated for the creation of ward



committees (involving ward councillors and people from the local community). These committees represent people from various interest groups and act as an advisory body for the council.

At local government level there are both ward councillors (who live in the ward and stand as an individual) and party representatives (who stand as party members). The local community votes for both types of councillor. It is only the ward councillor who is obliged to set up a ward committee and work with the local community. There are no clear strategies as to how this should happen, some use open community meetings, others individual nominations, or community structures are asked to offer up representatives. It is hoped that ward committees will meet about once a quarter to take positions on issues that the local council plan to discuss, and to influence their meeting agenda.

Unfortunately the national government still has to issue guidelines for these ward committees (although since the documentation visit occurred the Department of Provincial and Local Government have done further work on this and are in the process of finalising guidelines and an accredited training curriculum) – and although there are some functioning committees, in many areas these still do not exist.

Within the local government there are many new employees who not only have little experience, and often low educational levels, but are also expected to bring together the various groups of people who existed independently of each other previously. This has had severe budgetary implications, as local government is now expected to play a role in redistributing the wealth

while working with a larger geographical focus. Thus these early years of local government have been characterised by trying to resolve problems inherited from the apartheid years, while attempting to play a role in building a new South Africa.

Many organisations, such as *Idasa* are therefore investing a lot of time in building the capacity of local government, enabling them to develop the skills and the systems to work more effectively, and engage their constituents as stated in their mandate. The fact that community participation is legislated for explicitly is progressive, and this legal support for participation should not be undervalued. Not only does it give *Idasa* and other organisations legitimacy to strengthen the communities' ability to engage with local government, but it also requires the local government to listen to, and hear, what the local communities are saying.

*Idasa* first started working in The Highlands (Mpumalanga Province – see map above) in 2001. In May 2003, when the documentation visit occurred the Highlands did not have ward committees (however, these have now been established with the support of *Idasa* and are functioning well), and this was one of the reasons for choosing to implement *Reflect* here. Among the other reasons for this choice were its urban-rural setting and the fact that, unlike some other communities, the structure of communities has not changed much since 1994, there are still towns and townships and high levels of racism. Additionally, there is a low level of understanding of what a person's role is as a citizen, and high levels of poverty and unemployment in the area.

**Idasa:** *Idasa's* mission is to promote sustainable democracy in South Africa by building democratic institutions, educating citizens and advocating social justice. It was established in 1987, with the aim of supporting the negotiation process as South Africa moved towards a process of transition. As this process developed *Idasa* worked at various levels, interpreting the transition for ordinary citizens, providing capacity for a myriad of local initiatives, and supporting strategies to end violence.



*Idasa* provided electoral support in the run up to the first democratic elections, and following this it set up a monitoring arm to track developments in the establishment of the first parliament, and to help people understand this parliament. By 1993 it was developing electoral support programmes, training party agents and engaging in wide-scale voter education – with a view to entrenching the commitment to democracy following its establishment in the constitution.

*Idasa* now runs various national level programmes including the: budget information service; political information and monitoring service; local government centre; public opinion service; Southern African migration project and the all media group. These groups use various methods to build capacity of both government and civil society so as to strengthen: representation of voters; community and public participation; delivery of state services; enforcement of laws and regulations; and articulation of citizen demands. The Highlands community participation project is an initiative (originally housed in the Local Government Centre, and since moved to the Dialogue Unit under the Community Citizenship and Empowerment Programme) which focuses specifically on civil society engagement with local government<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>2</sup> For more information on *Idasa* see: [www.idasa.org.za](http://www.idasa.org.za)



# Organisation and process

## The Highlands community participation project

As discussed in the Nigeria section, the context and recent history of any country provide a framework in which *Reflect* projects are implemented. This section examines how the *Idasa* project was organised within the framework provided by the South African context.

### Aims and objectives

*Idasa* conceived the *Reflect* project with the following objectives:

- to enhance community participation in a wide range of cooperative governance initiatives
- to build the capacity of community leadership so that the community could play a meaningful role in decision-making
- to reinforce a direct participation approach in local government developmental issues
- to help the local government understand and commit themselves to engage with communities as well as creating an enabling environment where participation could succeed and be sustained.

*Idasa* hoped that the project would:

- encourage community participation
- make community voices heard on local issues
- initiate action to address problems
- create a culture of 'ubuntu' (humanity)
- make information available to the community – encouraging reading of different types of materials
- promote sustained dialogue on local issues
- build capacity around local government issues.

*Reflect* was chosen specifically as a community focused approach, this is in contrast to much of *Idasa*'s other work which is directed explicitly at the government itself. *Idasa* is one of seven organisations working with *Reflect* in South Africa – their *Reflect* work is funded mainly by the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association – IIZ/DWV. It receives no funding from ActionAid.

### Conception of *Reflect*

When asked to describe *Reflect*, the project coordinator (Yoemna Saint) comments: "*The Reflect circle provides a structure for debate and empowers people to engage with the local government...the project aims to develop and educate the community so that they can work with local government. Reflect is a methodology to encourage people to talk about issues and come up with solutions. It enables people to not depend on the government but do things themselves. Through Reflect people become educated – and this flows from the circle to the rest of the community.*"

One facilitator (King) adds: "*Reflect is talking about changing a system or situation, changing our attitude so*

*that we participate in community events and projects. It gives us a good chance to organise ourselves, to unite ourselves and to form local structures.*"

*Reflect* is conceived as a citizenship education project and fits with *Idasa*'s aims of strengthening democracy in South Africa. Although all the facilitators and participants were keen to highlight *Reflect* as a neutral structure, it is highly political in many ways. For example, the target groups in the project are people (mainly youths) living in black locations (townships) – rather than the white dominated towns, and it aims to enhance the participants ability to engage with local government, with the ultimate aim of holding local government to account. This difference in perception is mainly due to the confusion between something being party political (which *Reflect* is not) and political per se, which *Reflect* is.

The importance of *Reflect* not being attached to a political party is clear in the context of South Africa, where there is a high level of expectation that you will belong to a political party (and when living in a black location this is usually the ANC), and tensions arise within many areas between the different parties. Further, prior to the end of apartheid, all organisations were formed with a political basis, and in the post-apartheid era people struggle to define their engagement in community development and their understanding of what is political.

### Project organisation

The highlands community participation project is a small scale project, running in four locations in the Highlands Municipal area in Mpumalanga province. Mpumalanga is South Africa's second smallest province, and according to government statistics it has lower literacy rates than average (75.5% as opposed to 82.2%), and low access to water and electricity as compared to other provinces (for example in 1997 only 20.1% of black households had access to running water, and only 32% had used electricity for lighting). Further, unemployment is high compared to other provinces at 36.4%<sup>3</sup>.

The locations where *Reflect* is being used border on the towns of Belfast, Dullstroom, Machadodorp and Waterval-Boven, and for ease of understanding the communities will be called these names throughout this report. These four towns make up the Highlands Municipality, and the local

government offices are based in Belfast. The towns are situated between 20 and 40km from each other. A project coordinator based in *Idasa* Pretoria (about 200km from The Highlands) is responsible for the overall running of the project, with four facilitators (one in each location) responsible for convening and facilitating the *Reflect* circles.

**Role of *Idasa*:** this is played out on two levels. Firstly, the project coordinator plays a crucial role in the project, not only in the day to day support of the facilitators, but in taking their issues forward and producing units that they can use with their circles. Further, the coordinator provides them with additional learning materials – such as information on communication or presentation skills, or how to do advocacy work – and materials which can be used with the circle, such as sections from the South African constitution, or details on the social benefits system. This enables the facilitators to extend and deepen the discussion at the circle level, while enhancing their own skills on various levels.

*Idasa* also plays a role through its profile and involvement in other projects. *Idasa* works at various levels – both through building the capacity of local government and through research and policy analysis at local, provincial and national levels. As a national NGO, *Idasa* has a high profile and is able to use this to create space within local government for the *Reflect* project – for example bringing facilitators and councillors together – or talking to the council on behalf of the *Reflect* circle.

**Reflect in South Africa:** the *Reflect* circles are also supported by the Southern Africa *Reflect* coordinator and the Southern African *Reflect* Network. This support takes various forms, and enables facilitators to share and learn with peers working on different projects throughout the region, in addition to receiving direct support in the area of training and material development from the coordinator herself. This has meant that the *Reflect* circles have extended their focus beyond the governance issues conceived by *Idasa*, and react to a wide range of local community issues.



## Facilitators

The first stage in the project was to recruit facilitators. To do this the *Idasa* coordinator, went to the four communities, and discussed the project with the Municipality. Possible facilitators were suggested by the Municipality and four facilitators were selected (although one dropped out shortly after the training and has only recently been replaced). *“We were initially looking for people with facilitation skills, but this did not exist in the communities. We were also looking for someone influential in the communities – we therefore went through the peer educators’ structure. The facilitator should be a people’s person – they shouldn’t take sides, but should be able to lead discussions and take them to an action point. This is still a challenge for the facilitators but we hope that this will improve over the next year,”* (Yoemna, Project Coordinator)

Three of the facilitators are young men who have been involved in various community projects, and one is an older woman – who was the deputy mayor of her community prior to demarcation (when changes were made to local government boundaries).

**Facilitator training:** the facilitators then attended a two week training course, run in South Africa at a national level. The training itself was not geared specifically towards *Reflect* and governance, but rather was a general training in *Reflect*. Following the training, the facilitators worked with the *Idasa* coordinator to implement a baseline study. This took place over a six week period and was conducted using various *Reflect* tools – for example using chapatti diagrams to look at organisations in the community, maps to look at services in the community, and matrices to analyse the quality of the services. This enabled the facilitators to gain confidence in using PRA tools before beginning the structured *Reflect* project. Further, it enables the initial *Reflect* meetings (and material development for these meetings) to react directly to locally identified issues, encouraging groups to discuss their priority areas (these are detailed overleaf).

**Facilitator support:** the facilitators are paid (the payment is not a high salary but it is more substantial than the honorarium paid in many places to *Reflect* facilitators) as part-time employees of *Idasa* and as such are formalised in their role. They report to the project coordinator through phone-calls and monthly meetings.

Facilitators are expected to write up every *Reflect* meeting and provide monthly written reports to *Idasa*. In these reports they include information on the number of meetings held and participant attendance. In addition they outline the issues discussed/tools used, give a summary of discussions (including any literacy or numeracy learning, and other educational aspects), highlight any action points (and progress on these), and comment on problems/ give suggestions. These reports are shared with the other facilitators at the monthly meetings and, while successes are congratulated, any problems are discussed. Further,



these reports are viewed by facilitators as an opportunity to improve their writing skills and learn a new genre of writing. At these meetings the facilitators are also able to discuss any additional training needs, and the coordinator shares new unit ideas with them. *Idasa* also provides facilitators with a phone allowance and encourages them to support each other and even visit if possible between the monthly meetings.

The data from the baseline study was analysed by the facilitators and coordinator during a three-day workshop. This data was grouped into nine key issue areas, which then formed the basis of unit development. The issues were as follows: education; road and public transport; electricity; health; water; present structures; economic development; communication and recreational facilities and tourism.

### **Introducing *Reflect* to the community**

Following the baseline study the project was launched in the community. This was done by inviting local structures and interested individuals to a community meeting in each of the locations. *Reflect* was then introduced by *Idasa*, by asking those present: "What would you do if you were mayor, what would you change?" The groups came up with a wide range of issues – from building a sports stadium, to providing a venue for HIV/AIDS education, establishing a farm to sell vegetables to people living in the main town, and skills development projects.

These people were then invited to form a *Reflect* circle, suggesting that through regular meetings they would be able to look at some of these issues. Following on from the initial meeting, facilitators also tried to recruit others from the local community to be part of the *Reflect* circles.

*Idasa* had originally conceived the *Reflect* circles as a way of bringing together representatives from the structures that already exist in the locations. The idea was similar to that of the ward committees, that members of the *Reflect* circle would represent their particular interest group, and the circle itself would become a way of ensuring good communication and organisation – between the various structures and between the community and the council. It is important to note at this stage that *Idasa* did not claim to be working with the most excluded groups or individuals, or to alter power relations within the locations. Rather, the focus was on how the inhabitants of the location as a whole could engage with the local government.

Thus the facilitators attempted to recruit participants from the other structures in the community such as: peer educators; community policing forum; D-stars (a drama

group); love-life (an HIV/AIDS project); and unemployment structures. They hoped that one or two members from each structure would come together to form a group. Unfortunately, people were only willing to attend if they were paid, and there was also tension as people were worried that a rival structure was being formed. Thus this idea was abandoned and individuals were recruited.

Circles now have between 10 and 20 members (with a good balance of male and female participants). The majority of participants are young unemployed residents with primary education (some have secondary education also). In fact, one facilitator, Frank, used their current unemployed status as one way of convincing them to join the circle: "as you are staying at home doing nothing why don't you come and join *Reflect*. We are working together with the community and council (not against anyone) to build a better standard of our own community."

In the second and third meetings various *Reflect* tools were used to set ground rules for the circles, decide when to meet (using daily workload charts), look at the busy times of year (using calendars), explain the background to the baseline study and prioritise (using pair-wise ranking) the issues raised during this study. The groups also came up with a list of objectives and expectations for the circle.

#### **Participants' ground rules; expectations and priority issues:**

**Ground rules:** *punctuality, working together, confidentiality, listening to each other, switching off cellphones.*

#### **Expectations:**

- to see the community participating in local government issues
- to develop skills
- to gain more knowledge (on specific topics such as HIV/AIDS and on local government and NGOs in the area)
- to improve levels of education
- to deal with issues such as rape and child abuse
- to address crime
- to create employment opportunities in the area
- to establish local businesses.

#### **Ranked priorities:**

- **Waternal-Boven:** economic development, crime, tourism and education
- **Dullstroom:** water, electricity, crime, tourism and health
- **Machadodorp:** water, education, housing
- **Belfast:** health, education, water, housing.

**The role of the circle:** as expressed in the *Idasa* literature, the circle is expected to mediate between the community and the council. They ensure that information from the council is made available to the community and they are the 'eyes and ears' of the community, thus they inform the council of the community's needs and interests. They are also expected to liaise and mediate with other structures – to hear their views and opinions, and organise meetings (with relevant individuals, council members and the community) – to promote discussion.

Irris, the facilitator in Dullstroom, comments that: *"The circle also plays a role in letting the wider community know what we are doing. We have distributed pamphlets about our discussions, and we also run community workshops where all community members and structures are invited. In this way people in the wider community know what the circle is doing. This has meant that people who are not involved in the circle often come to the circle members to ask them about particular problems they are having. If the member cannot answer their questions or solve their problems immediately, these problems are discussed in the circle and all the participants contribute to find solutions. The community knows that the circle is working with the local government and the community for community development. We learn and teach each other, and in that way we develop the community and move forwards together."*

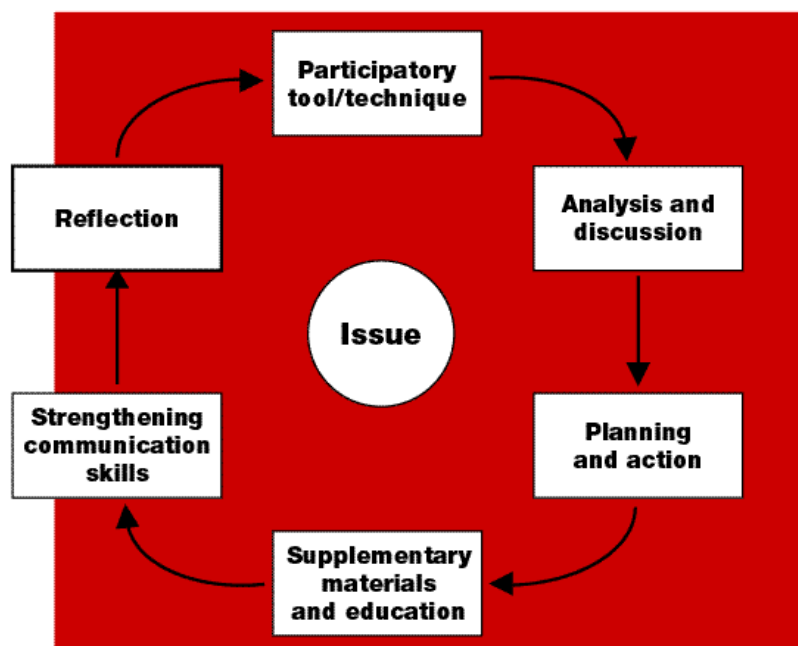
The circles provide a space for people to discuss, analyse and plan. Participants get involved in both community and council events, and they monitor community participation – looking at what sorts of things the community gets involved in, what they enjoy doing etc. The circles have also become a way for people to access skills training – for example masonry work, plumbing and sewing, with the hope that this will lead to employment opportunities.

*Idasa* have encouraged the *Reflect* circles to choose their own names. This has two aims – to give the group a sense of identity and ownership, and also to enable them to secure funding independently from *Idasa*. The names illustrate how the different circles understand their role, and are as follows: Kopanang which means get together/to be united; Tholulwazi, which means to achieve/to get knowledge; Thusanang which means help each other; and Vukuzenzele, which means wake up/stand up and do things on your own.

**Circle process:** the circles meet once a week, and participants are expected to attend every week (they commit themselves, by signing a registration form, to spending one year as a circle participant). Meetings then begin in one of two ways – either someone in the circle has a particular issue they wish to discuss – for example something that has happened in the community, or in one of the other community structures, or the facilitator will start the discussion based on the units provided by *Idasa*:

*"With the Reflect process the problem or issue is at the centre of the process. We choose a tool to look at the issue and together we analyse it. We break down the issues involved and discuss and analyse them. We then plan and act on the issue – this might involve writing a letter or something. At this point there might also be literacy or numeracy learning but in my circle we don't need this. We then bring in supplementary material to help us talk more about the problem. For example, this might be a poster or pamphlet about HIV. We then have education – for this we might invite someone to the circle to talk to us, perhaps a doctor."* (Frank, facilitator)

The process is illustrated by the following diagram:



Various techniques are used to initiate discussion – for example the participants might be divided into two groups and asked either to work on different but connected issues (for example one group discusses HIV, the other AIDS) and are then brought together to share with each other and the similarities and distinctions are drawn out; or, again working in two groups, they are asked to prepare a debate from a particular viewpoint (for example one group puts together an argument supporting corporal punishment in schools, and the other against) this is then presented and debated and two groups agree a conclusion; or a visualisation is used.

As Irris comments: *"In the circle meetings, sometimes it is easy to get people to talk, other times it is harder. It depends on the issue – for example when we are talking about tourism or housing, these are the issues that they are most interested in so they will talk about these, and the tools help the discussion."*

## The first unit discussed by the *Reflect* circles was on democracy

- This began with some discussions on understanding democracy, where a tree was used to look at what ‘citizens have to input to make a democracy tree bear fruit’ and what the resulting fruits/benefits of democracy are.
- The groups then discussed democracy and power – looking at whether the government or the people have power, and the legitimacy of this. This discussion was complemented by various handouts looking at different types of democracy, and participants were asked to consider statements such as “I don’t like Peit, so I will not allow him into my house” and “The white students in our school should get textbooks last because they used to get them first, it’s payback time”, to encourage participants to debate on democracy and analyse whether they think democratically.
- Information was also given on representative vs direct democracy, principles of democracy, the different branches and functions of government and the constitution. Participants then discussed the importance of voting, and what they understood by active citizenship – and the need for this to strengthen democracy.
- The final stage in this unit was for participants to use an analogy of a cart full of rocks with a donkey trying to pull cart forwards – unloading the rocks allows it to move forward more easily. The cart then becomes community development with the donkey the involvement of citizens in making decisions that affect their lives, the rocks are obstacles to the participation of ordinary people – and the participants looked at how they could ‘unload the rocks’.

Other units discussed by the groups include: housing, crime, transport, tourism, health and social security.

**Use of tools:** participatory tools and techniques are an essential part of any *Reflect* process – not only do they enable groups to focus and structure discussion, while ensuring those traditionally quieter voices are heard, but they also provide a record of the debate and analysis. Facilitators recognised how useful tools can be within their circle discussions, commenting: “*The tools are good because they help us understand things. They are a simple way of finding a solution/the way forward on things; they show things clearly and help us to keep track of the discussions so that we can find a solution.*” (King)

And: “*The tools help us a lot. People like seeing things, not just talking, it helps in the discussions, as it helps us to demonstrate things as we discuss, to give things structure, so it is not just a piece of paper that says this, this and this.*” (Simphive)

Further: “*You can’t just talk about an issue in one stage – you have to deal with it in stages. If we are looking at community structures we can do a diagram. We can, for example, talk about the ANC – asking how far are they from the community, what is their work – are they doing work for the community or not. We then place them on the diagram according to the way we answer these questions – we can discuss issues and debate, and at the end we come to a conclusion.*” (Irris)

However, despite this positive support for the use of tools, further discussion and observation showed that the use of tools are limited in the circles, as Frank highlights: “*Last year we used the PRA tools and had units on specific issues. Now it is more about discussion*”.

However, this is not necessarily a problem if the groups are able to maintain a culture of participatory discussion and power analysis without the use of graphics. It could be that the tools were useful in the early stages in forming the group dynamic, but that there is no longer such a dependency on the tools. Further, due to the advanced literacy levels of the participants, they are able to keep written records of the discussions without the use of the tools.

More problematic, however, is the tendency that when the tools are used they often seem to limit, rather than open up, the discussion. For example, during the unit on crime, *Idasa* suggested that facilitators used a ranking matrix to look at the different sorts of crime in the area, and where the victims of crime went.

In the Belfast circle the participants began this unit. Having generated the basic information, the participants voted on what scores to allocate the different venues/people and numbers were written in the matrix without much discussion. The focus became on producing the tool, rather than analysing the issue, and discussion on the issue was separated from the tool production (it is worth

|                    | Rape | House-breaking | Hijacking | Total |
|--------------------|------|----------------|-----------|-------|
| Police             | 3    | 5              | 4         | 12    |
| Hospital           | 5    | 1              | 2         | 8     |
| Church             | 2    | 1              | 1         | 4     |
| Counselling        | 5    | 2              | 2         | 9     |
| Traditional leader | 1    | 1              | 1         | 3     |

highlighting that there was quite vibrant discussion around the issue once the tool was completed, however this did not relate back to the tool itself). This was exacerbated by the fact that tools were produced directly onto flip-chart paper, with pens, which meant that there were no moveable objects and it became difficult to challenge another's interpretation.

This signals that, although the facilitators obviously understood that tools could be helpful, they did not really feel comfortable using them, or know when or exactly how to use them. They therefore rushed through their production, separating this from discussion and analysis on the topic. There are various reasons why this was the case. Perhaps because there was little ongoing training on how to use the tools (although *Idasa* has set up a very strong support structure the meetings tend to focus on content issues, and new ideas rather than on practical facilitation tips).

It could also be because the project coordinator, without the involvement of the facilitators, produces the *Reflect* materials. This prevents facilitators from achieving the flexibility of thinking through which tools might be appropriate to use and when. *Idasa* have plans for a writer's retreat where the coordinator and facilitators will produce materials together. This is a crucial step in any *Reflect* process, not only will it develop facilitator's skills and confidence in using the tools, but it will enable them to take ownership of the units and understand exactly why they are initiating the discussion. Material production is not easy, but once facilitators have been involved in doing this they are more likely to be able to work independently and achieve the flexibility of thought necessary to lead a *Reflect* circle and reach deeper levels of analysis.

**Use of external information:** at first glance the structure of the *Reflect* meetings is quite formal, almost like a school. The participants have exercise books, and the facilitator stands and uses flipcharts to introduce the topic. The group, who write any key issues and conclusions in their books, discusses this topic. However, the topics identified for discussion are based on community issues as identified in the baseline, or current concerns participants bring to the circle, thus symbolising a break with more traditional schooling.

However, in a similar way to schooling, a large amount of information is introduced into the circle. This could be anything from extracts of the South African constitution, or information about democracy in South Africa, to local government announcements or official information relevant to the particular community.

It might be that the *Idasa* coordinator provides the external information when presenting the facilitator with the unit, or that the facilitators ask the coordinator for a specific piece of information in reaction to what the circle has been discussing.

The role of the external information is very important, it allows *Reflect* participants to place their issues in the wider context and broaden their understanding of their rights within the new democracy. It is only through the use of this information that issues of governance can really be tackled at the circle level. Without it, discussions will only focus on the immediate issue in isolation from the wider framework. However, it is equally important to consider when, how and what information is introduced into the circle, so as not to take over a process owned by the participants themselves, one which values and builds on their knowledge.

*Idasa* faces a very different challenge from many *Reflect* circles (which tend to focus on drawing out and working with participants' knowledge), that of how to ensure that their own agenda is not imposed on people at the local level. When asked about how local knowledge is valued the project coordinator replied: "We are still not sure how to use people's knowledge within the groups...in most groups people are not confident in their own knowledge and it is hard to get this out." (Yoemna)

If *Reflect* is to be used within a governance framework it is important that these issues are considered- if not, the circle becomes a mechanism of allowing people to engage with the existing government structures rather than defining their own governance systems which they may find more appropriate. Further, people need to feel confident and supported in using the knowledge that they have already, otherwise they will always be approaching the government on its terms, and will not be able to challenge the fundamental power relations that exist.

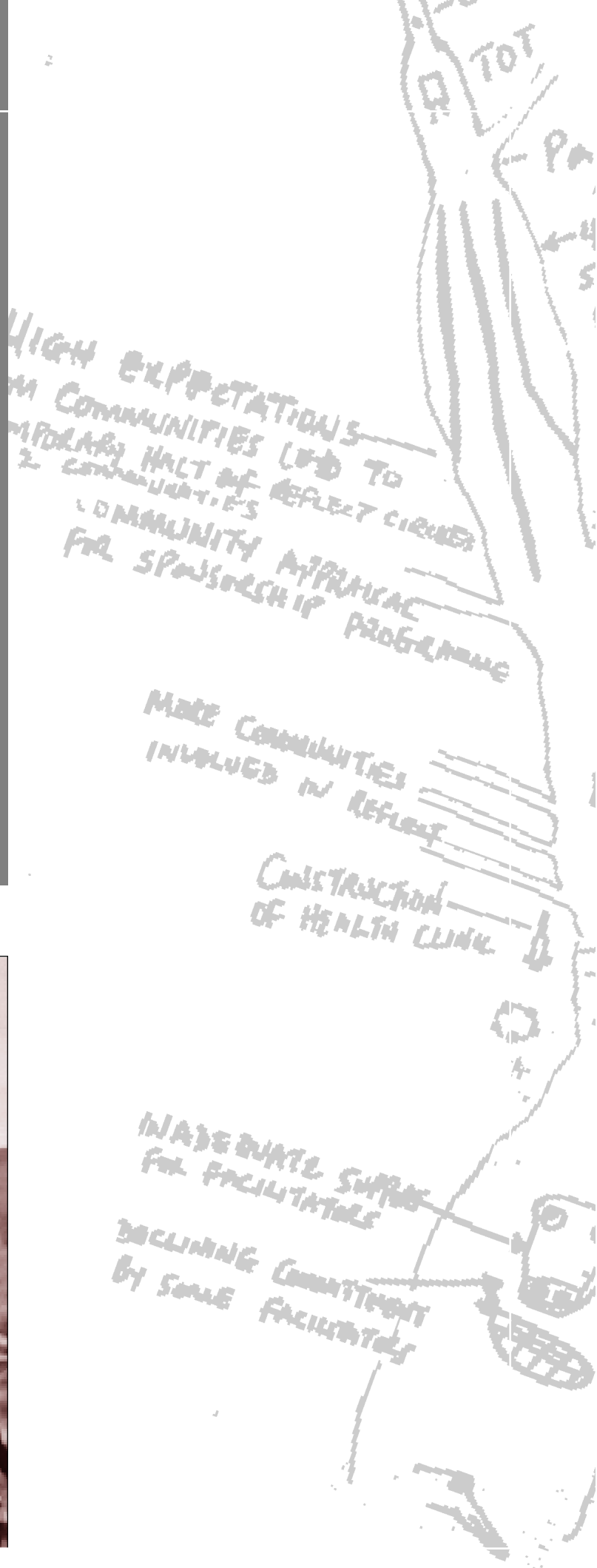
## Reflect and citizenship education

There are various organisations which specialise in education for citizenship, and it is important to examine what makes *Reflect*, as interpreted by *Idasa*, different from these other projects. Further, it is important to examine how external materials are used within this *Reflect* process.

One obvious difference is the fact that learning is based on the real identified needs of participants, and there is no strict curriculum followed by the circles, rather they react and change according to the local issues. Secondly, the meetings are participatory (although as discussed above they could become more participatory if greater use was made of participatory tools and techniques). The facilitator facilitates rather than teaches, and there is a large amount of interaction in the group. This is a significant break from the school format that most South Africans experience. Thirdly, the meetings are oriented towards action-planning – with discussions leading to clear action-points. This is different from many citizenship education classes, which focus on abstract and ideal concepts of citizenship rather than basing the discussions on local level involvement and action. Fourthly, clear links are made between the circle, the council and the wider community – the discussions in the circle are not aimed solely at enhancing an individual's knowledge, but in building links and using that knowledge for the benefit of the local area.



King, facilitator





# Impact

**There have been clear impacts of the *Reflect* project in each of the locations, both at an individual and community level. The diverse range of projects taken up by *Reflect* circles illustrates that, although the facilitators have all been provided with the same material, the actual discussions are rooted in the participants' reality. This section examines various dimensions of impact in the *Idasa* project.**

## Impact on the communities

*Reflect* has created a community structure that is very different from those previously existing in the locations. Discussing the impact of *Reflect* the *Idasa Reflect* project coordinator comments: "In areas where there are not *Reflect* circles, the council often has a problem knowing how to mobilise the community – there is very low participation, and no formal structures for community participation. For example, if the council calls a community meeting on water, people don't go – or if they go they don't speak. People do not know what their role is and there is no forum for debate. This is different in the communities where there are *Reflect* circles – the *Reflect* circle provides such a structure for debate and empowers people to engage with the local government."

The locations are traditionally quite isolated with poor transport links and little contact beyond the neighbouring town. Another significant achievement of the *Reflect* work is that it has brought people together across the different locations. This was particularly important when the local government tried to increase the cost of rates and services – as the coordinator highlights: "The work on rates and services really worked because it was a coordinated effort – it was a Highlands municipality issue with all four communities involved." (Yoemna)

One facilitator described what happened: "...when the council wanted to increase the cost of rates and services we intervened as a circle. The community wanted to fight the local government and kill the municipal manager, they marched into town. So we talked to the community (we had a meeting with the community and the ex-mayor and said to the community 'don't fight let us go and meet with the councillors'). The community trusted us, and gave us the mandate, and so we went to see the councillors. We said that the community is very angry, you need to go and talk to them and listen to them, you are accountable to the community. We asked them to spend more time looking at the issues, and told them that they can't just increase rates and services without consulting the community." (Frank)

This stance was accompanied by similar efforts in the other three locations – and with the continual pressure on the government they eventually backed down and prices were not increased.

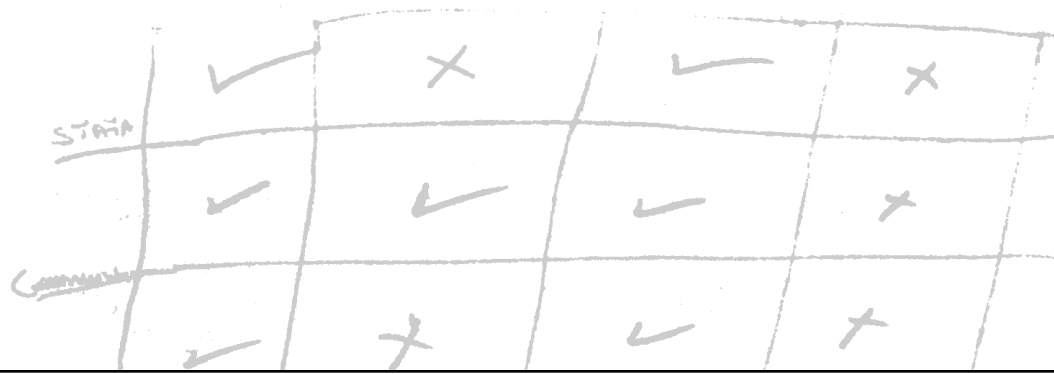
## Views of facilitators on what they have gained from *Reflect*:

"My involvement in the circle is very good and interesting as I have learnt a lot. I feel like I have gained something, and because of this, even though *Idasa* don't pay us very well I will remain with the circle. You learn a lot as a facilitator – I don't know everything, but the participants or the community might know it and they teach me. I have practised my reading and writing in the circle... My involvement in the circle has also affected my life outside the circle. People are respecting me, and asking me to everything. I am running mad, everyday meeting, meeting, meeting. Even the council when they have a problem come and ask me sometimes. My favourite thing about being a facilitator is working with people, knowing people, understanding them, their likes and dislikes." (Irris)

"I was lazy in my reading, even the workshops from *Idasa* have helped me. I have respect from the community and I have learnt how to be a leader... I have enjoyed the work as people see me as their role model, maybe their future leader. I am a person who brings information to them. I am the eyes and ears of the community. People are sent to me for information, and I enjoy it as I am not just giving information I am learning from them. We are friends, a family, they give me advice." (Simphiwe)

"I have really benefited from being involved in *Reflect*. I have developed my skills of talking to people. I now know that I need to think and discuss before taking a further step. We need to be persistent and persevere for change, community change needs to be pushed, we need to make more of an effort. We also need to use the information we have here. I now know how to handle large meetings, how to conduct meetings and recruit people." (Frank)

"I am very lucky in my role as a facilitator because I am not the boss, we are working together, we sit and discuss problems and after that we find solutions. Everyone participates together... To be a facilitator I realise that I have to have an open mind, to be friendly and allow questions. I mustn't reject or undermine someone, just help them find the answer." (King)



In addition to these wider impacts there are also various examples of how *Reflect* has led to change within the different locations. The outcomes of *Reflect* work can be grouped into three areas: improving a specific service (either access to the service, quality of the service, or the accountability/transparency of the service); enhancing economic development or skills; and developing new structures and relationships to strengthen democracy.

It is important to note that all three types of activity have focused on identifying who is responsible for the particular issue, and working within an understanding of rights and responsibility to achieve a particular goal. Unlike the Nigerian experience (and many other *Reflect* experiences around the world) no *Reflect* group has been involved in local infrastructure rebuilding, or creation of adult literacy classes – rather the focus has been on supporting or challenging those responsible to deliver the service.

This gives weight to the argument that circle actions must relate to the local context. As mentioned previously, South Africa has relatively good infrastructure and a high level of government presence; it has the bodies and structures for the specific services. Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, there are people there who have the ability and the mandate to provide the service. This is not the case at present in Nigeria, and thus, as discussed in the previous section, the actions planned relate much more to acquiring the service through community collaboration. Actions pursued by *Reflect* groups are necessarily different depending on their context, and it is important to recognise this when planning interventions focusing on *Reflect* and governance.

One example of how *Reflect* has inspired local people to engage with, and improve, a local service is in Dullstroom, where the circle spent some time looking at safety and security in the local area (and in reaction to the circle discussions the project coordinator developed a unit on crime which was shared with facilitators during the research visit). Crime became an issue because of two murders in the area. *“The first involved a man shooting, and killing, a policeman. However, when the police arrived on the scene, instead of arresting the man, they shot him dead. The circle wanted to know why they did this. We went, as a whole circle, to the police station to talk to the commissioner – who said that they were waiting for the department of justice to pass judgement on the shooting before they take any action, and he has promised to keep the circle informed. Another issue relates to a woman who*

*was killed in the area – the police do not seem to be doing anything about investigating her murder and the circle have gone to the police station asking for progress reports – we are not satisfied with the response we get. We are concerned by the general attitude of the police, who often don’t answer the emergency phone, and then when they do they take up to three hours to arrive at the crime scene. We are planning to invite the commissioner to the circle to talk to him about the level of service.” (Irris, Facilitator)*

Two of the participants added *“The police aren’t here in the location, if a child is raped nothing is done, so we bring the police to the location, we talk to them about what their job is...the police need to know to take matters seriously, to act on what has been reported – there are staff shortages so they don’t do this but they must do...the police need to act, not to relax, they must respond and solve problems ...and we must challenge them.” (Calvin and Yvonne)*

This example illustrates the powerful role the circle has in the community – ensuring that those providing a service are answerable to the community, and actively holding them to account. There are numerous examples of how the *Reflect* circle has interacted with key people in the community, putting pressure on them to explain their actions and enabling the community to pose the questions they want answered. This clear challenge to those in authority is an excellent example of how *Reflect* can strengthen people’s ability to get their voices heard and access their basic rights. This example also illustrates the importance of having an organised structure in which people can act together and give a stronger community voice.

However, the initial action nearly failed because one participant informed the police that the *Reflect* circle was coming to visit them, thus undermining the effectiveness of their action. This led to various debates in the group as they felt that discussions should be kept confidential until appropriate actions had taken place: *“when we speak about something in the circle it is ours, not outsiders”*. In the end the group decided to form a ‘disciplinary committee’ and have elected some of their members to form this committee. The committee aims to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen in the future, and also plays a role in resolving disputes between participants. Irris comments: *“many of the group are young and sometimes they clash, or don’t treat each other well. If this happens the disciplinary committee will sit with them, hear their views and talk through their problems.”*

In a similar way the Waterval-Boven group have also used their *Reflect* experience to strengthen their conflict resolution techniques. The facilitator (King) describes how: *“We had a dialogue about conflict that was happening between music groups. There was one music group (Healing Sound) who had much more support from the local government than other music groups, and this caused conflict. We called a meeting, and each group sent two representatives. I gave Healing Sound the opportunity to explain how they had achieved the exposure that they had. The contact person from Healing Sound explained that they attended music meetings and workshops held around the province, that they went to the councillor to register as a group, and had held local events which they invited the community to. They also attended provincial competitions, and won prizes. Following this meeting the representatives decided to formulate a music committee, they scheduled a date for a first meeting and all music groups sent representatives to contest for positions on the committee. They held elections and now they have a female chair, and three men on the committee. The committee is up and running and will submit monthly reports to the Reflect group. One person from the Reflect group is on the committee. The aim of the committee is to do marketing for all the groups – all the groups are registered with the committee which means that they will all have the opportunity to play if the local government or province invites them to play. This will expose the talent of all the music groups.”*

These two examples show how the circles have built on their understanding of democracy as discussed in the *Reflect* circle groups, and extended their models of good governance to other structures, influencing the way that people interact beyond the circle. In both cases, an election process was followed and specific people were given the power to coordinate certain areas and resolve any conflict. This implies a growing awareness as to how representative democracy functions in South Africa, and it is relevant that the *Reflect* circle in Waterval-Boven were able to work with the wider community to establish the music committee on democratic principles. The music and disciplinary committees themselves have been created with specific mandates, to ensure that people can access particular rights, but also that they behave as responsible citizens. The process of forming such committees also indicates an increased feeling of power by the participants, who have initiated the specific committees which are locally owned and determined, due to a shared agreement on mandate and structure.

In Machadodorp the *Reflect* circle spent some time examining issues around housing. They began by doing a ‘transect walk’ through the location, observing the different houses and talking to a wide range of people. This led to various discussions on the state of many of the houses, and highlighted the issue that everyone pays the same level of rates, even if they do not receive the same level of services. This discussion could have

## Skills and economic development

As mentioned earlier, most *Reflect* participants are young and unemployed. *Idasa* faced various difficulties in sustaining their involvement in a purely governance focused project, which can not be seen to directly impact their livelihood. It has thus been necessary for the circles to look at practical short term benefits, and *Reflect* circles have also been involved in a wide range of income-generating and further education activities. For example, the **Waterval-Boven** circle linked with a local factory who provided the circle with some sewing machines and training, thus enabling circle members to generate income. In **Machadodorp** circle members are taking part in a 12 week skills development course training both men and women in masonry, carpentry and plumbing. In **Dullstroom** the group have invited someone to train them on making floor polish, fabric softener and candles, which they could sell in the main town.

In Dullstroom they are also linking with the local tourist board, to ensure that the location benefits from the tourists in the area, and that the community members are involved in the development of a new facilities centre which will offer training in arts and crafts. Reflective of the current time, and age of participants, all circles also expressed an interest in receiving IT training, which they are currently looking into. As mentioned earlier *Idasa* hopes that, by developing their own identity, the circles will be able to access funding directly for skills development, micro-credit and income generation projects. In addition, involvement in *Reflect* has also enabled many participants to gain employment – unfortunately they do not always stay with the circle once they have found a job. Circles have reacted in different ways to this problem – in Dullstroom they moved the meeting time to the evening. However, one possibility would be to include the responsibility to recruit a new member for the group, if a member is planning to leave, in the original contract – this would keep the circle alive, while supporting people to move onto new endeavours.

remained at this level, however, given the governance framework within which the group were operating, they probed further, asking questions such as ‘who is responsible for our housing and how can we engage with them to improve our living conditions?’

In addition to working with the council to improve access to specific services such as water, the process

The new constitution of South Africa guarantees the right to have access to housing, and the government is committed to prioritising people who have suffered in the past under apartheid – who had no access to land and housing. There are two policies – the Land and Housing policies – that give financial assistance (in the form of subsidies and grants) to people who cannot afford to buy their own property outright. Building of houses, and benefit schemes, are implemented by the three tiers of government (national, provincial and local), who are supposed to collaborate in order to provide affordable housing for all. Thus those people who are living in informal housing are eligible to apply for a subsidy, and are allocated an RDP (reconstruction and development programme) house (or a future RDP house if has not been built yet).

of this discussion also led to exposing corruption at the local government level, as described by Simphiwe, the circle facilitator: *“Some people are living in houses which don’t belong to them. Some people in the informal settlement are looking for housing and the council isn’t doing anything for these people ... Most of the community had applied for housing subsidies, however, many of them have been rejected. They were told that they already had a subsidy – and had a house, but where were the houses? We challenged this by going to the provincial body. The provincial body brought the house title deeds to show to the people that had had their application declined. We realised that the former mayor and councillors had been selling the RDP houses to people from outside the community. Many of people come down from the farms, when the farmers don’t want them to work there any more, and they had been buying our houses illegally. In the Mpumalanga board the title deeds were still registered in the original names. We discussed this with the council, who called the Reflect circle and asked for our assistance, but instead of helping the council we called a community meeting for those people who’d been denied houses, and for those people who’d bought the houses. We discussed for three days, and decided that the people who didn’t belong to the houses must give the houses back to their original owners, they must go to the informal settlement, or go back to the person they bought the house from and challenge them (this has still not been finally decided). We talked to the unit manager (who unfortunately passed away last week) and he suggested that those in the houses could go to the new RDP houses, which are going to be built. We don’t mind what happens to them, it is not our problem, it is the problem of the council. Luckily it is a new council, not the council who originally sold the houses, so they don’t have a problem with us exposing this issue.”*

This is a powerful example of how the *Reflect* circle has reached beyond the local government and now feels able to approach other spheres of government. The confidence achieved through being involved in discussions at the provincial level will also serve to enable the *Reflect* participants to approach other official bodies. However, it is also necessary to consider the last comment made by Simphiwe. The fact that the council has changed and therefore the corruption exposed is that of the old rather than the new council. This highlights the need to move beyond the conception of a *Reflect* circle mediating between the government and the community, to playing a role in challenging the government and holding it accountable, so as not to be afraid of exposing corruption.

### **Developing skills and education: HIV/AIDS**

A key issue facing South Africa at the moment is HIV/AIDS, and HIV was a key topic of interest for many circles. Like many issues HIV can affect every sphere of life, and needs a coordinated approach, working at various levels, if a lasting solution is to be found. This means that the *Reflect* circles not only need to look at raising awareness around HIV and enhancing knowledge, but also consider both individual and community behaviour change, and lobby government and health bodies to take action. It was clear from the questions asked by participants during their discussions around HIV/AIDS that they placed the issue within its broader context, with questions including: whether the government should be distributing ARV medication to all those who are HIV+; what precautions they should be taking when having sexual relations; and how they as youth in the community could organise themselves to combat the pandemic? However, the participants also recognised the need for education on the issue, and behaviour change, as Simphiwe comments: *“There was a young guy who died a couple of years ago, who didn’t know where to go, what to eat. People ran away from him, his family ignored him. When he was dying he told me that I mustn’t rush things, and that I should make sure other people don’t rush things – this still affects me today, he was my friend. We need to know about health issues, especially HIV, we must share our knowledge as we can not run away from this sort of thing. We work with the peer educators and the nurses in the clinic.”* This ability to work on various different levels is a testimony to the fact that groups have been taking a ‘governance’ approach to their discussions: contextualising the issue; thinking about who impacts on it; how to work with different people in different ways; and what changes they need to make in order to initiate improvements in the area as a whole.

If this does not happen it is unlikely that the circle will ever be able to change power relations or promote sustainable democracy. However, this is not a simple process, and should be seen as a long term goal where the current challenges provide the initial impetus for more sustained pressure. This will require circles to gain an overview of the different links they have been making, moving beyond action around a specific service to see how the different services/service provision/providers interrelate and how they can, and should, be held to account.

Although many circle actions have impacted on the community, there have also been many frustrations. For example, as part of their role of trying to improve conditions in the local community, one *Reflect* circle is implementing what they describe as a 'school campaign':

*"In the Reflect group we discussed corporal punishment. We split into two and one half of the group argued why there should be corporal punishment in schools, and one argued why there shouldn't be. Following this discussion we talked more about school – we wanted to do something positive for the school. Many children are leaving school because of the corporal punishment, and we felt that in the high school especially there were no good results for the learners, so we decided to organise a school campaign... We spoke to the learners' representative council [LRC], and the congress of South African students about the campaign. We invited them to the Reflect circle and had a discussion. We worked together to come up with an action plan that would cover the issues of corporal punishment while encouraging learners to study more. The pupils said that they would speak to their families and friends about this issue also, and it was decided that pupils should be encouraged to tell the LRC if they were beaten in schools. We decided to set up a meeting with teachers, parents, the school governing body, school management committee and the LRC to discuss problems in schools. We sent a letter to the school governing body and the school management team inviting them to a circle meeting, but they still haven't replied. We're not sure what we will do now."*

Unfortunately, many circle actions are thwarted because their letters are not replied to, and they are not sure what to do next. This experience shows the need for a diverse range of actions, perhaps implemented simultaneously, in order for change to occur (and this requires training and skills development on advocacy strategies and campaigning techniques). Experience in campaigning for change around the world demonstrates how effective campaigns require strategies for influencing a wide range of stakeholders, and the approach needs to be targeted at the specific group. So, for example, while writing a letter to the different bodies, *Reflect* circles also need to reach out to different audiences – through various means, such as using noticeboards, leaflets, petitions, radio slots or alliance-building (it is also worth noting that, at present in South Africa, a lot of the media is white owned and

dominated and thus not as available as it could be or as open to many of the issues raised by the *Reflect* circles. The *Reflect* group are starting to develop alternative media connections/community radio – but this is a long-term strategy). By approaching an issue from different angles, the strategy is likely to be more effective. This not only means the specific goals are more likely to be achieved, but participants' interest will be sustained as they will see that they are getting some results. This also suggests the importance of moving beyond seeing something as a block/failure and thinking through how it can become a learning experience – as groups use more diverse forms of communication – thus furthering their learning, confidence and the impact of their actions.

Unfortunately, at present, the action plans are often very short term and not part of a wider strategy, therefore making it hard to sustain the action if one activity fails (cf. Nigeria). This is something that frustrates all those involved in the *Reflect* project, and will need careful consideration if the *Reflect* project is going to be sustainable, challenge power relations and tackle issues of good governance.

## Relationship with local government

As discussed earlier, democratic local government is a relatively new concept in South Africa and, although there is legally constituted space for community participation, there is a lack of knowledge on behalf of the local government as to how to encourage this (and in some cases this is further undermined by a lack of willingness or interest by those in power to properly engage in community participation processes), and a lack of awareness on the part of the citizens that this is both their right and responsibility – that they can both support local government and hold it to account. The above examples illustrate an increased awareness by *Reflect* participants of their rights and increased interaction with the government officials, but do the examples constitute any change in the relationship between *Reflect* participants and the local government? This governance relationship, which refers to the systems and mechanisms which mediate power relations between community members and local government officials and councillors, and structure how the different groups interact, can be considered on an individual level, for the facilitators, on a circle level, and for the wider community.

**Individuals:** it is clear that, through their involvement in *Reflect*, many community members feel more able to speak to their local government:

*"I now realise that I am someone, and that I have to do something. I can go to the municipality, I can tell people how it works or go on their behalf. I can also help people go to the clinic, I tell them it is your right, there is no problem if you say that the pills are not right – you can ask for better ones."* (Yvonne Mphuzi, Dullstroom)



*"I know that I can sort out a problem – in the housing project, if something is wrong I know to go to the councillor and to talk to him. He will arrange a meeting with the contractor, and then we, the people in the houses, can talk about the problem with him."*

**(Vanessa, Dullstroom)**

*"I am more confident, I am happy and I have more information. I can now talk to the councillor if I see him in the street, ask him when are you going to build the clinic..."* **(Ntombizodula, Belfast)**

*"Before the Reflect group I didn't know that I was allowed to talk to local government, to make my voice heard, and if the local government don't respond we can go to the provincial government. And if they don't respond we can go to the national government and get assistance there. Ever since they drafted the constitution I didn't know that. But when I came here we started to go through it again – it is really important to know our constitution."* **(Dwaneame, Waterval-Boven)**

Although these comments do not necessarily signify a change in power relations between community and government they do show how individuals have mobilised to use the space currently available to them and illustrate a feeling of rights at an individual level, with increased ties between community and councillors/officials (it is not possible to say whether community members view councillors and officials differently, or whether these relationships differ). This is a significant achievement of the *Reflect* work, and shows how communication between the two groups has been strengthened through engagement in the project. This point will be returned to later.

**Facilitators:** the links with local government have been crucial throughout the project, and the role and profile of *Idasa* as an organisation has helped this. Through a separate project (funded by Danida), *Idasa* is doing capacity building work with the Highlands Municipality (one of seven municipalities involved in the project which aims at strengthening municipalities through building the capacity of councillors and local officials), and this has provided opportunities to bring together the facilitators and the council: *"I was invited to an Idasa workshop [as part of the Danida project], and met many of the officials and councillors. Since then they have been very supportive of the work we do in the circle – and they let us use their office to send and receive faxes etc."* **(King)**

All the facilitators discuss their interaction with the local councillors and the support they have received from them for the *Reflect* circle. This regular interaction has also impacted on the facilitators' own aims (see box).

## Facilitators and politics

As highlighted earlier, those involved in the *Reflect* work place high importance on the neutrality of *Reflect* – emphasising its distinctive nature, and the difference between *Reflect* and politics:

*"As a Reflect facilitator I represent everyone, I am a mediator between political parties. I used to think everything was political, but politics can stop you being able to do things, now I am just working for the community, for its success."* **(King)**

*"If Idasa wasn't here we wouldn't have known where to start, how to challenge, it is hard to fight the ANC as we are all members and we cannot fight each other. Idasa gave us neutrality so that we could fight for our rights."* **(Simphiwe)**

However, both facilitators then continue to discuss a future in local government:

*"It is challenging as I am still young, I still need to go and learn – I want to go back to school and learn more, maybe to become a public relations officer in local government."* **(Simphiwe)**

*"...I can see now that I am good enough to work in local government. It is about working with people...am I just going to see someone suffer or will I work with them?"* **(King)**

In many ways it is inevitable that those involved in a project focused on governance will become interested in joining the government structure, and see this as a way to extend the work that they have started (as seen in Nigeria also), and this indicates a positive development – as facilitators begin to acknowledge the role of government in community development rather than merely a vehicle for party politics. However, this also points to a need to extend the concept of citizenship education to look at politics and different ways of engaging with the system, whether through party politics or other means. It is important that people are given the space to *Reflect* on the positive and negative aspects of the current system, how best they would like to connect to it, and understand that entering the government is only one of various possible ways to influence it.



**Circle:** these relationships that facilitators have built up with the local government have allowed the *Reflect* circles wider access and influence. One participant highlighted that the links the facilitator had with the council should have a knock on effect on the wider relationships: “[*the council*] now have open doors for King to use the office so hopefully it [*the relationship with the council*] will get better.” However, there are still various problems. One key issue is that the relationships depend so much on individuals – the municipal manager who was a key proponent of the *Reflect* circles died in an accident in May 2003 (shortly before this research was taken place) and both the coordinator and facilitators were concerned about the impact that this would have on the *Reflect* project. This suggests the need for a broad base of support across the council – to decrease the dependency on one particular individual, and increase the sustainability of the work. There are various ways to do this, and interest by one individual should be capitalised on to lever wider support. The capacity building projects (such as the Danida funded work) could also be a helpful entry point as councillors and officials could be trained, or at least exposed to *Reflect*.

Through the meetings and letters mentioned in their actions it is also evident that participants in the *Reflect* circles feel more able to approach local government and ask questions of them. “*The council was voted in democratically. But they are not working democratically. As a Reflect group we have managed to bring the council to their constituents*”.

However, as highlighted by various facilitators, if the local government does not respond there is a difficulty in knowing where to go next, and it is clear that the power relations have not altered to a great extent. The local government is happy to interact with the circle and the wider community on their terms: “*these people (the councillors) are very clever, whenever there is a development they are calling us. Whenever there is a problem they are running away from us.*” (Simphiwe). But there is a lack of conception of holding them to account, or of approaching them in a strategic way.

The council appears to be tolerating the *Reflect* groups, in a similar way to the village leaders allowing *Reflect* circles to meet in Nigeria. This is evident from many of the comments given by both facilitators and participants: “*At first the council did not want to sit with the Reflect group – they saw us as a threat, they thought we wanted to take their position.*” (Simphiwe, Machadodorp) and “*there is a problem (with the council) as they do not recognise us as a structure, they ignore us... We have just started meeting with the rest of the community, but it is difficult to call meetings as we are not recognised by the councillor.*” (Agnes and Dumsane, Waterval-Boven)

It appears that much of the relationship with the council depends on the circles retaining their ‘neutrality’ and avoiding anything that is seen as political: “*When the council heard of the project they thought that Idasa would expose corruption to the community, there was a bad relationship with no trust. So we sat down with the council and said we are not here to fight you but to help you. There is corruption, and tension between the councillors and the officials, but we avoid dealing with the corruption and get on with other things. People realise that Reflect is not a political organisation, just a circle.*” (Frank, Belfast) “*The local government only has a problem with us if they know we have something on them*”. (Sbongile, Belfast)

The suggestion that circles are actively avoiding uncovering corruption is slightly worrying and suggests a limitation to the project. However, this wariness of exposing the government needs to be understood in the context of the newly emerging democracy in South Africa, which was fought so long and hard for. As suggested in the introduction, many South Africans are very reluctant to find fault with the current government or challenge it, and this impacts on the role the *Reflect* circle conceives for itself.

This suggests that further work needs to be undertaken supporting both *Reflect* facilitators and participants to explore how they can interact with government to support them in developing a democratic South Africa. This will need to involve strengthening accountability systems and enhancing transparency, and further thought will need to be given to the links between participatory and representative democracy. For example, those involved in the *Reflect* project can support their democratically elected representatives while participating in a process of monitoring the policies and their implementation. This can ensure that the representative process is working for all those represented, and strengthen the effectiveness of such a democracy.

However, this is a long-term vision and the current relationship is crucial as a basis for building stronger accountability links in the future. The fact that individuals are able to speak to the local government is a huge step forward. Moreover, the space provided by the *Reflect* circles is creating an opportunity for people to meet and discuss, to find a common voice and access information, and through this slow process it is hoped that the participants begin to understand the circle as a political entity – not in the sense of party politics, but as a body which sides with the poor and marginalised and advocates policies and practices that will improve accountability to them. This will enable the conception of local government to move beyond the current benevolent paternalistic relationship, and challenge the current power relations which mediate the relationship between local government and citizens.

## Relationship with others

**Other levels of government/official bodies:** the *Idasa* coordinator highlights the developing awareness of the various levels of government and other official bodies as one of the key achievements of the project: *“During the baseline survey it was clear that community members had a lack of knowledge of their rights as citizens, their relationship with government, or of government budgets. Now they have this knowledge they can start to challenge the local government on issues – for example the work the groups did on rates and services. They are also starting to work with other government departments – for example education, health, labour, and welfare. It hasn’t just been limited to local government which is really good to see – they themselves did this.”*

The links with these diverse bodies are also evident when discussing with *Reflect* facilitators. For example, on the day he was interviewed King mentioned: *“Today I had meeting with the both the health and water committees. They invited us to run a workshop for them, which we hope to do in the future.”*

Simphiwe discussed the work the circle have been doing around education: *“In education, the school building is good but the standard of education very poor. The teachers are sometimes drunk; they have affairs with children and exploit them. The SGB [School Governing Body] doesn’t know what to do – they just listen to the teachers. And if you are a member of the LRC [Learners’ Representatives Council] you fail at school as the teachers don’t want you there. Teachers are depriving children of their rights.*

*We have written a proposal to the Department of Education to give a workshop to the SGB, LRC and teachers, to inform them of their roles (this would be given by the Reflect circle).”*

Wider links have also been made with the Tourism board in Dullstroom, who have invited Iris to various meetings to discuss tourism in the area, and in Waterval-Boven the *Reflect* participants have linked with the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, and received training in measuring the river health. They can now do this on a regular basis to ensure that the water is suitable for drinking.

The wide range of contact made with the different spheres of government is indicative of the groups’ ownership of the process. They have been able to use what they have learnt through discussions and analysis to identify which organisations are relevant in which context, and approach them as need be. The fact that this project has managed to include various other actors illustrates that the groups are becoming aware of their rights within a democratic country, and are able to engage with diverse governance mechanisms. It also suggests that although *Idasa* were instrumental in making the initial contact with local government, and that their role was crucial in creating a space for this engagement, the communities have managed to build on these early links and continue

making connections on their own. The relationship with *Idasa* itself has also changed during the project.

**With *Idasa*:** as mentioned earlier, the facilitators recognise *Idasa*’s input as crucial for the functioning of the project. This is true on various levels, as discussed by Iris: *“The relationship with Idasa is crucial...I really need the advice and support that they give me, without their involvement the circle would not be functioning as it is. Not only do they give me encouragement and help me think through any problems I might have, but they also provide books and other materials which I can use to extend circle discussions.”*

### Impact of *Reflect* on *Idasa*...

The project coordinator comments that beyond senior management, who receive monthly reports on the work, *“people at the other levels of the organisation do not know that much about the work with Reflect and there has not been any integration of the Reflect project with Idasa’s other work. There are no systems to feed information from the circle into Idasa, or to get other people from Idasa to help support the Reflect circles.”*

Much of the work carried out by *Idasa* nationally focuses on research and dissemination of information on budgets and other government policies. Unfortunately there is a lack of integration of the *Reflect* work with this wider work – thus the information coming out of the *Reflect* circle is not used to inform research and advocacy priorities, and likewise the results of *Idasa*’s wider research is not made available to the *Reflect* circles for them to extend the analysis of their local context.

Moreover, in developing the local government capacity building project, *Idasa* has not considered how *Reflect* facilitators and participants could play a role in training councillors or officials. This means that the unique perspective of those living in the locations will not form part of the capacity building, and the skills and confidence gained by those involved in *Reflect* will not be explored to their full potential.

Both these areas highlight significant gaps in the *Reflect* and governance project, and also mean that the relationship between *Idasa* and the community has not developed to its full capability – it is still a relationship where one organisation supports the other rather than a mutually reinforcing partnership. This means that *Idasa* has not been able to benefit, as an organisation, from its involvement in *Reflect*. Learning from Nigeria demonstrates that this lack of organisational commitment to *Reflect* is a missed opportunity. Such involvement may have enabled *Idasa* to re-evaluate its systems and structures of self-governance to become more accountable and transparent to its staff, thus providing new models of governance, which could be used to strengthen democracy in South Africa.

However, as Simphiwe continues: *“If Idasa wasn’t here we wouldn’t have known where to start, how to challenge. Idasa gave us a start and we wouldn’t have started without them, but we can carry on without them now.”*

Although the *Reflect* circles are now functioning with more autonomy, it is apparent, despite what Simphiwe says, that they are still quite dependent on *Idasa*. The facilitators rely on *Idasa* for material development and support, and also for the financial incentive. However, it is also evident that this relationship has been changing and that the materials *Idasa* produces react to the circle discussions rather than vice versa. As mentioned earlier, the idea for the recent unit on crime came from the facilitators themselves, and *Idasa* appears to be gradually withdrawing from the project and encouraging the facilitators to move the project forward alone.

**With the wider community:** initially *Idasa* and *Reflect* were treated with a lot of suspicion, with people thinking that *Reflect* was a political party. However, this perception has transformed as the project develops: *“At first many people in the community thought Reflect was a political party. Now they realise that the aim of Reflect is to bring information to the community and encourage the community to participate in local government issues. The community supports the circle, and more people from the community want to come and join the circle. They always remind me that I must organise a workshop on local government and community participation for the wider community.”* (King)

*“The relationship with the wider community is very good. This has happened one step at a time, we go to meetings and talk to people, and people realise that we are working for them .... There have been times when the community has seen the Reflect circle as a threat, they thought that we were an opposition party, but now most people know that we are not.”* (Simphiwe)

*“We are youth, a lot of people think we’re just playing, but some people do understand and are happy. At least we are together and we are doing something helpful.”* (Ntombizodwa, Belfast)

This last comment in particular demonstrates the impact the *Reflect* work has had on the youths involved in the project. As mentioned earlier, democracy is relatively new in South Africa, and youth interest and awareness in democracy is key for its success. Through their involvement in *Reflect* they are not only learning about how to behave democratically, but are developing leadership skills and interest in participating as civil society develops in South Africa. This impacts on how the community members relate to each other, and the possible futures they imagine.

The links with the wider community have moved beyond a passive acceptance of the *Reflect* circle to an active seeking out of members, asking them to get involved in

various community issues. This respect and support by members of the wider community has given *Reflect* participants motivation to continue their involvement in the circle and start new initiatives with enthusiasm, for the betterment of their community. This has not only rendered the projects more sustainable, but has also meant that the community voice is stronger and the actions more effective. Communication with the wider community has played a large role in garnering this level of support.

## Role of communication

Communication is central to *Reflect*, and the aspiration is that by practising new ways of communication within the *Reflect* circles, individuals and groups will enhance their ability to get their voices heard in debates which affect them outside the circle. As such, communication has been a key part of the *Idasa* project, which aimed to enhance oral communication in different contexts and encourage participants to read and analyse different types of materials. The role of communication can be examined on four levels: individual, within the circle, with the official bodies, with the wider community.

Unlike many *Reflect* circles, most of the participants in this project are literate, and the coordinator emphasises that it is unlikely that the same level of discussion would have been reached had this not been the case. While it is true that the facilitators would have had to work differently had their participants not been literate, it is also possible that they would have been able to achieve similar outcomes, but using different types of communication. For example, currently the *Reflect* circle relies on a lot of written information, and reading and analysing this information plays a significant role in the discussions. However, if such material was presented in pictorial or audio forms participants with lower literacy abilities would still be able to engage with the information available. Lack of basic literacy should not be seen as a block for work around governance issues, rather creativity must be used to overcome the reliance on the written word, and value other forms of communication.

**Individual:** comment on the wide range of knowledge they have gained from their involvement of *Reflect* – for example through reading extracts from the constitution, or information on corporal punishment. In fact, many circle discussions begin in reaction to reading a particular document, one that it is unlikely that the participants would have accessed before, or considered reading on their own. This demonstrates one aspect of communication and information in the circle – of engaging with external information.

This is relevant on various levels. Firstly, it is likely to be the first educational experience participants have had where their learning is based on materials directly relevant to them. Not only are their reading skills being developed but, through encouraging dialogue and debate (on issues which affect them directly), the participants are provided with many opportunities to speak in ways that they have not previously.

**Within the circle:** another impact on communication is due to the relationship between the facilitator and participant, which is clearly different from that of a teacher and student. This leads to the development of new types of communication skills.

The focus on valuing individual's opinions is something that many of the participants will not have experienced before, and it enables them to feel more confident of their voice and their views. This plays a vital role in strengthening communication beyond the circle.

**With officials:** for example Sbongile from Belfast comments: *"I come to the circle because I gain a lot, I was not aware that if I had a problem I had a right to go to the municipality (eg re rent) or that I could go to the teacher to ask about my child in school."* This indicates that her enhanced understanding of rights means that she is now able to communicate on these issues with people in official positions. This demonstrates two aspects of communication – of speaking with different people, and of speaking about different issues.

Communication also plays a significant role in the projects undertaken by *Reflect* circles, as shown in the examples given earlier. In these examples communication needs to be understood as two-way. Not only are discussions from the circle leading to meetings and letter writing to the local council, but also official information is being analysed by the participants, and they are ensuring that decisions that affect the community are not passed without their involvement and deliberation.

**With the community:** as quoted earlier, the *Reflect* circle also plays a role in communicating their discussion to the wider community, through distributing pamphlets, holding community meetings and going door-to-door in the community. Community meetings (which are called in a variety of ways, sometimes through word of mouth, or in other cases through using a loudspeaker), have taken place in all the locations. Here, community members are updated on circle discussions, and there is sometimes a small element of education also, for example, on how the local government works. Another way the circle communicates with the wider community is through the pre-existing community structures. For example, circle members might be on other committees where they can share information and ideas, or members of other structures are invited to attend circle

## Perceived challenges

Those involved in the *Reflect* work identify a wide range of challenges, which relate to their particular position in the project and specific aims they have. For example, the project coordinator identifies various issues, such as the lack of organisational support, language issues (as she is not able to speak Zulu it makes it difficult to communicate with many of the participants); sustaining participants and facilitators; and getting support from local government. One facilitator highlighted the difficulty in knowing that he was paid while the participants weren't, another identified his lack of training in *Reflect*, a third the lack of space to create a library so that participants could access/borrow various relevant documents/ publications. Participants highlight the frustrations which come out of not being able to achieve what they have hoped: *"there are some challenges, sometimes we are not able to do what we say we will do and people accuse us of not keeping out promises, we lack community support as they don't understand what we are here for."* (Ntombizodula) And this challenge of sustaining actions, especially if the targeted body does not react to initial contact, is recognised by all those involved.

By strengthening different aspects of communication many of these challenges can be overcome. For example, if there was stronger communication about the project many misunderstandings would be avoided; and there would be more organisational and community support.

meetings, with the understanding that they will feed back to others. This not only allows information from the circle discussions to be passed on, but also enables the wider community to learn about ways of organising and see how the *Reflect* circle members relate to each other. Thus, by osmosis, wider governance related issues are passed onto the community.

*Idasa* and the facilitators have further plans for extending wider community involvement, using a diverse range of communication. This includes:

- use of notice boards to advertise what topics they are going to discuss, and what happened in the discussions
- producing pamphlets about the discussions
- having open meetings with the broader community
- developing a local newsletter on local governance issues (this will talk about housing, water, electricity etc)
- using community radio – this might help develop job opportunities for participants (in Waterval-Boven the group have managed to link with the local radio already and hope that this will happen very shortly).



As seen on the previous page, communication within the group takes place on a wide range of issues – from housing to HIV, from education to domestic violence. The fact that the group are able to discuss such a wide range of topics, many of which are surrounded by various taboos, indicates that a deep trust has been formed within the *Reflect* circle. However, it is not possible to comment on whether all *Reflect* circle members are able to contribute equally to discussions, and it is important to consider the types of power relations and stratification which exist in the circle and the wider community.

### **Diversity in the community**

Diversity needs to be considered on two levels. Firstly it is important to think about who is attending the *Reflect* circle, and whether they are representative of the wider community. Without such consideration, however much emphasis is put on *Reflect* as a 'neutral' process, it will not be possible for this to be the case. By working with a particular constituency the process automatically becomes political, as it gives a stronger voice to one group's wishes over and above any other.

In this project the *Reflect* participants are self-selecting, as those interested in community development and local government (and with time to spare). Further, many of the participants are young, educated but unemployed, and as such it is likely that they will have similar interests when considering community development. This implies that, although the group may wish to be the eyes and ears of the community, it is likely to hear some voices slightly louder, and notice things that are more relevant to them.

This may not be a problem if *Idasa* is explicit about an aim to work with youth and strengthen their voice (something that is very relevant and powerful in South Africa at this time, given the current situation of lack of employment, increase in youth crime and disillusionment with politics). Moreover, it is important to note that *Idasa* is not claiming to work with the most poor and marginalised within the locations, their aim was to strengthen community engagement, as a whole, with local government. However, this project design could be criticised on the grounds that it does not consider the impact it will have on the wider community.

### **Power relations in a community**

In early *Reflect* projects the community was viewed as a homogenous entity, with individual needs understood as synonymous with community needs. However, it was soon recognised that communities are very diverse, with complex power relations that experience different types of discrimination and opportunities. If a programme is not targeted explicitly at the most poor and marginalised, it is likely that their voices will not form part of the process. Further, any development in the community could lead to further inequalities and reinforce power relationships. It is therefore necessary to consider these issues when planning an intervention on governance – to examine how different voices are heard within the project, and in relation to the government.

A second level of diversity comes from within the *Reflect* circle itself. Although *Reflect* as a process relies on achieving some level of consensus on a particular issue, in order for action to be forthcoming, it is also important that circle members are given equal space, and are able to contribute equally. The reason behind the use of participatory tools is to create a conducive atmosphere, where those traditionally quieter voices feel able to contribute. However, as discussed earlier, these tools are not being used by facilitators, as much as they could be, thus they are having to find other ways to encourage people to participate.

When considering diversity at circle level it is relevant to note that government at all levels is dominated by men, and that three of the facilitators are men also (although the gender balance between participants should be considered as a positive influence). Much of the contact with local government is through the male facilitator, and as such the possibilities of redesigning the government structures so that they recognise diversity, and adapt to *Reflect* it, are limited. There are various reasons why fewer women enter the government, but governance systems and mechanisms, designed mainly by men, are unlikely to change if women are not given the space to engage with them. It could be that *Idasa* needs to think through ways of engaging a broader range of people and creating conditions for equal participation, both within the circle discussions and when those discussions lead to linking with external people.

# Challenges and recommendations

## learnings from experience

As indicated above (box page 51) there are distinct learnings which *Idasa* as an organisation should take on board (specifically integrating *Reflect* into their wider programme and policy work). However, there are also learnings that can be taken from this experience for *Reflect* practitioners internationally, and particular points which *Idasa* could take forward to strengthen the work which they are currently doing.

### Organisation

**Role of the organisation:** *Idasa's* profile and contacts played an essential role in initiating the *Reflect* project, and they were able to use their links to create space and meetings for the *Reflect* facilitators. Change processes can only happen as a result of sustained pressure from above and below, and the mixture between government capacity building and strengthening civil society means that both aspects of *Idasa's* work are more effective due to the existence of other. However, for either project to be truly effective, *Idasa* also needs to think through systems of allowing the *Reflect* discussions to impact on their wider work (as detailed in the box 'Impact of *Reflect* on *Idasa...*' page 51) – not only the focus of research they undertake but also the processes of decision-making, training and dissemination of information. A more integrated approach would enable the *Reflect* work to be more sustainable, and increase its impact beyond The Highlands area of South Africa. One area that could be key is the monitoring of budgets, and production of local statistics, both of which could be used by the circle for further analysis, and by *Idasa* at a policy/advocacy level. Further, *Idasa* should ensure that their expertise in other areas is made available to the *Reflect* circles – for example people from the Budget Information Service could train *Reflect* facilitators and pass on this knowledge.

### Communication

**Balancing internal and external knowledge:** this is something that the coordinator acknowledges struggling with. The importance of both types of knowledge is necessary to ensure governance systems are not imposed on local populations, but rather developed and owned by them. At present the facilitators are very dependent on the coordinator to access information for them, and as the project develops it would be good to see them accessing such information themselves. One of the benefits of a developed infrastructure means that there are internet points available locally and facilitators could be supported to use these directly. This would mean that they could access information directly relevant to their circle's discussion, rather than guiding the discussion so that the information provided by the coordinator can be used. By using a broader range of communication techniques it is also likely that local knowledge will be brought out, and used to strengthen the process.

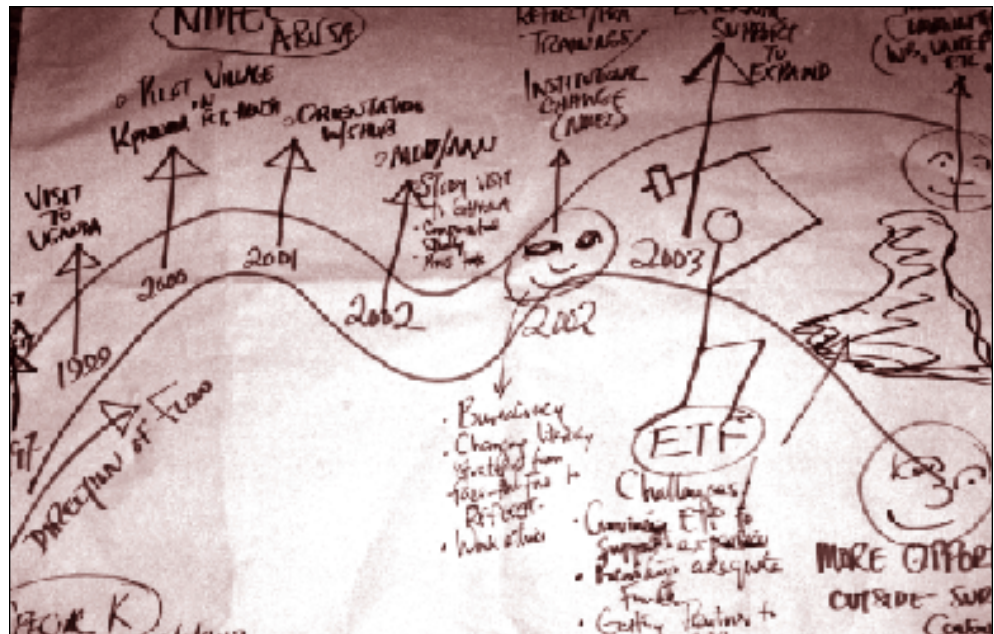
### Diversity of communication – within and beyond the circle:

as commented above, much of the information used in the circle is externally produced written material. By using different types of information, presented in different formats, it is likely that the circle discussions will be extended and deepened. This is also the case for the way information is presented by the circle. *In place of writing endless letters to relevant bodies, circle members could be encouraged to use different media, such as photos, radio, report cards or drama to illustrate their points. The circle should also be encouraged to access official media channels: newspapers, local TV and video. This would attract different audiences and raise the profile of the issue while simultaneously increasing pressure on those in power to react. In addition, it is likely, for example, that the use of local or national newspaper articles, photos and cartoons could be relevant to discussions, and it would be useful if facilitators received more training in accessing different types of information and in advocacy and campaigning skills.*

### Methodology and impact

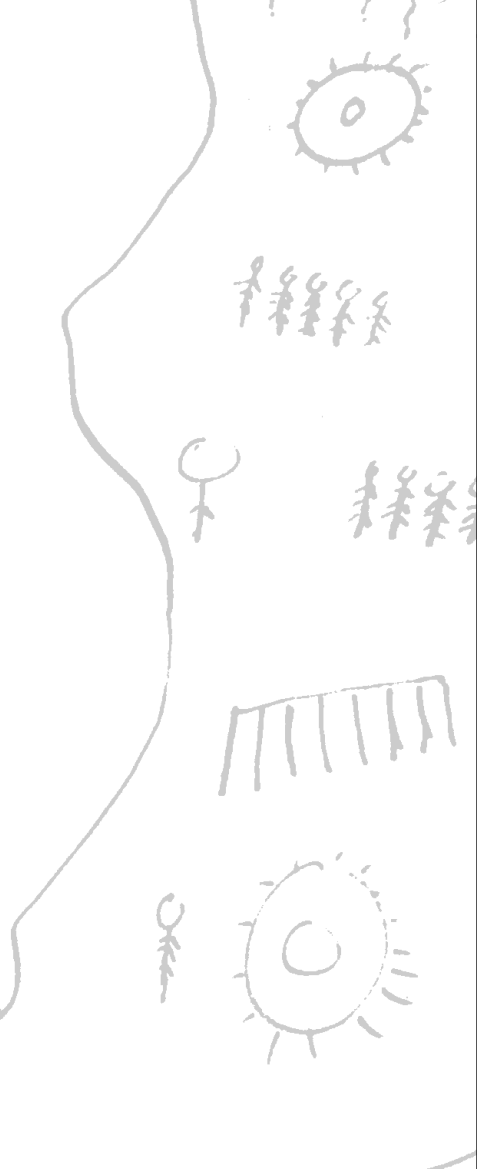
#### Use of tools and techniques in strategic action plans:

although the potential of tools and techniques are recognised on a theoretical basis by the facilitators, they are currently unable to convert this into practice. This not only limits the discussion, but can mean that actions are taken before proper planning takes place, and without a strategic framework. This could perhaps be a simple training matter, but facilitators need to gain a deeper understanding of why they are using the tools, and to feel ownership of this process, so that the tools can guide the discussion and allow analysis to grow and deepen. *The plans to include facilitators in future unit development are very positive, and it is hoped that through this facilitators will achieve the flexibility to enable them to use the tools to their full potential. In the same way as diverse modes of communication can enhance discussion, sequencing and linking tools can be an effective way of ensuring that plans are appropriate and strategic. Facilitators should be encouraged to think from the issue to the tool, rather than vice-versa, with different tools being used to examine the same issue from different vantage points. This work will also strengthen the sustainability of the *Reflect* group – as*



they move from work on specific issues to playing a more strategic role with government which involves monitoring and accountability and challenging power relations.

**Power analysis:** there is a lack of power analysis at every level within the project. This links partly to a confusion in understanding around 'political', and also to a lack of conception of diversity in the community. The lack of power analysis prevents the *Reflect* group from moving from supporting the government on an information basis, to improving the accountability of government. The circle participants and facilitators are weary of being perceived as political, and therefore unwilling to rock the boat. This leads to them tackling safer issues, one by one, rather than considering the systems and mechanisms which guide their relationship with the government. The need to tackle these systems is further supported when considering the lack of understanding/inclusion of diversity in the community. Those attending the *Reflect* circle are finding ways of engaging with the government within the current system rather than thinking through how the power relations can be improved, and challenging the system to become more open so that more marginalised people can also engage with it. *Idasa needs to support the circles if they are going to start looking into issues of transparency and accountability, as this could expose corruption. Further, Idasa needs to think through whether they are trying to reach other more marginalised groups within this project, or if they are satisfied with developing a particular group within the location – and whether such a group really can be the 'eyes and ears of the community'.*



# Summary and Conclusions:

## key issues in *Reflect*, rights and governance

This final section highlights the main areas that should inform any *Reflect* and governance project which aims to strengthen people's ability to secure their rights. It begins with a collection of issues which are pertinent in a rights and governance context – summarising why the specific issue is important, and then using examples from the Nigerian and South African experiences to explore the point further. The focus here is specifically on governance because of its importance as a framework for this type of project. However, the final subsection links governance ideas back to a rights based approach, arguing why it is important to consider both dimensions, and how they relate to each other.

**The importance of context:** *governance is essentially about power relationships, and contextual factors provide a framework for relationships to develop. Context affects how Reflect is conceived and implemented, and the impact of the work. These factors influence the opportunities that Reflect circles have to link with people at all levels of government, and further shapes the types of engagement perceived as possible and desirable.*

Nigeria and South Africa differ greatly in their historical and present day context. For example, although both countries have a history of non-engagement with the government, the exact form this has taken is different in each case – Nigeria has recently emerged from a long period of military dictatorship; while South Africa suffered from the apartheid regime.

In **Nepal** the approach to governance is very different to the experiences outlined here. In place of being democratically elected the parliament was recently selected by the king. There are huge structural inequalities in society and a caste system, which leave large groups of the population with little access to land or services, and no political party to represent them. This means that those involved in *Reflect* are less focused on strengthening the democracy as it currently exists, but more concerned with transforming it into something more inclusive and representative.

Thus *Reflect* is used by a wide variety of people's and social movements. These social or people's movements have differing aims and objectives, and use *Reflect* to differing extents. However, in all cases *Reflect* is part of a larger process in which different groups of people unite with a common specific aim (for example to achieve land reform, dalit rights etc). Many of these movements link local level work with national level movements for change. There is less of a project focus and a much more explicit overall goal than in many other *Reflect* projects.

A social movement is a very different type of organisation from either a national or international NGO, and therefore faces differing issues when working with *Reflect* and governance (for example its funding base is likely to be very different, it will have a different way of working with the people involved – as members rather than beneficiaries, and is likely to have less access to the government).

*Reflect* has been used to strengthen the grassroots involvement in the movement, and enable people at this level to access specific rights that are relevant to the movement. It is conceived as a way of organising within the movement, and is led by those involved rather than having an external organisation implementing a project. Thus it becomes part of a sustained effort around an issue – linking local level action to national mobilisation, raising the profile of the most marginalised groups in society so that the government takes their situation and condition into account. Participants in *Reflect* have used diverse media to get their voices heard beyond the local context, for example through taking part in mass rallies and encouraging press coverage.

The remoteness of many of the communities, and the limited access to services and the local government, is relevant in Nigeria. Conversely, South Africa has a relatively well-funded government structure, with tax collection and redistribution systems which function more effectively than many other African countries, and, on average, citizens have a higher level of education (although, in terms of resource distribution, South Africa is among the most unequal countries in the world) and this impacts on its governance possibilities.

**The implementing organisation (role and profile):** *it is not only the country context, but also the implementing organisation which impacts on the possibilities for a Reflect process. Any organisation considering working with Reflect and governance needs to first reflect on their role within any process and the constraints and opportunities they face due to their organisational aims and objectives, profile and structure.*

*Idasa* in South Africa is a national NGO which has good links with the government. It carries out research and runs training for elected members and government officials, and thus has a high profile, influence and access to key players in government at all levels. This means that it can draw on a certain amount of support for its work with *Reflect* – taking advantage of prior contacts, and linking the *Reflect* work into its wider initiatives supporting strong and accountable government. One key example of this is the work it does on budget analysis, which can be used to inform *Reflect* circles.

In Nigeria, ActionAid Nigeria (an international NGO) coordinates the *Reflect* programme and works with a mixture of government partners and locally based civil society organisations. This impacts on both the framing of the *Reflect* work (as linked to the ActionAid international strategy of *Fighting poverty together* using a rights-based framework) and the target of the work, focusing on the most poor and marginalised communities. AAN has some links with government at national level, but the implementing organisations have differing connections at local and state level and this leads to different levels of support to *Reflect* circles. As part of an international organisation, AAN has to question whether they can be considered part of civil society in Nigeria, or if they are external actors. This again impacts on the types of relationships they can expect with the government.

**Facilitators: training, recruitment and support:** *facilitators are frequently identified as the key to any effective Reflect process, and this is clearly the case with regards to Reflect and governance. In many contexts it will be the facilitator who has the direct link, and impetus, to enable community members to meet with local government and other officials. They play an active role in forming the democratic space, which can then be replicated as a governance model. Moreover, through ongoing contact with other facilitators and the*

*implementing organisation, they can access additional information for the circle, and link their circle with other circles who are discussing similar issues.*

In both Nigeria and South Africa training has tended to focus on content rather than process, and lack of confidence in participatory methodologies was evident in both locations. However, it was also clear that many facilitators were confident and dynamic and played a very supportive role to the *Reflect* circle.

Facilitators in Nigeria were chosen by the community, using a mixture of criteria identified by the implementing organisation and the community themselves (which ranged from being humble, to being respected by the community and literate in English). The facilitators took part in an initial two-week training workshop but thereafter the level of support depended on the organisation working in the particular area (this ranged from non-existent to monthly meetings). This meant that there was a huge variety in levels of facilitation and the confidence facilitators had in the different communities, and much greater dependency on the ability of the individual facilitator to support the *Reflect* process. Further, as facilitators have very little opportunity to meet together it is difficult for them to collaborate and work together on a specific issue.

In South Africa facilitators were chosen by *Idasa*, and were expected to have a high level of skill and education. They participated in a two-week training workshop (which also included facilitators from other *Reflect* projects in South Africa – thus the training was quite general). They then developed their skills further through carrying out a baseline survey in their particular community (using *Reflect* methodologies). The current support systems to facilitators are very structured and effective. This consists of regular meetings, ongoing training on specific areas and phone conversations with the project coordinator. (This enables facilitators come together and share among themselves, thus furthering learning and linkages between the circles, and making action more effective – one example of this was when the local council tried to change the level of rates). The facilitators also had good linkages with the local government – and have been involved in training days with government officials/elected representatives. This has meant more access to the government and support by them for the circle's work.

**Conception of Reflect (understanding, role, process):** *Reflect projects take as their basis the nine principles as highlighted in the preface. However, every organisation adapts Reflect in order to achieve its particular aims and objectives, and some projects focus more deeply on specific principles most relevant to their work.*

*Although specific rights can be secured within a limited timeframe, if government is to act accountably on a continuous basis they need to be continually held to account – and the Reflect circle can play this role. Thus, in*

*this context, Reflect cannot be seen as a project with a limited timeframe, but something that is about organising and acting democratically, which continues indefinitely. This means that community ownership is crucial so that people continue to meet, even when the implementing organisation withdraws its support.*

In line with *Idasa's* key focus of strengthening democracy in South Africa, *Reflect* was conceived as a way of engaging with democratic processes at a local level, and the circles began by considering 'what is democracy?'. The circle was to be 'the eyes and ears' of the community and play an intermediary role between local government and individuals in the community. *Reflect* members organised and spoke to officials and councillors on behalf of community members, while at the same time ensuring that relevant information from local government reached the wider community. *Reflect* circles were made up of mainly young people (often unemployed) and met once a week. Themes for discussion either came from the *Idasa* coordinator (who reacted to locally expressed needs when writing units) or from the group members themselves, reacting to something that had taken place in recently. Sometimes visuals were used, at other times the focus was more on discussion. There was a large emphasis placed on extending discussion through the use of external information and official documentation (eg extracts from the South African constitution).

In Nigeria the focus of *Reflect* circles was quite different – with most work being concentrated in isolated communities with little government presence and limited access to basic services such as education and health. The *Reflect* circles were introduced as 'community development meetings', and played a role in furthering general community development – enabling communities to secure their 'basic rights'. In some villages men and women met separately while in others a mixture of community members attended the groups. They began by discussing local community issues, prioritising these and constructing an action plan. The action plans often resulted in community led action, such as infrastructure development (for example the construction of a primary school, clinic or borehole) or adult literacy classes to enhance community literacy levels. The groups received differing levels of support from local government and implementing organisations. The emphasis was on community led initiatives to ensure access to basic services.

**Action and reflection:** *action and reflection is an integral part of any Reflect process, and this cycle is crucially important when working within a governance agenda. Although actions might have a specific focus, the ultimate aim is to strengthen good governance – enabling the community to have greater influence at the local government level and ensuring that there is transparent and accountable decision-making and implementation. This means that any action has a role in shifting power relations between the community and government.*

This level of systematic reflection and analysis was missing in both the Nigerian and South African experience. Participants tended to treat each issue separately and reflected on their achievement of any activity in isolation, losing focus on the wider picture. This has meant that when government has not responded to letters/visits, or not completed their promises, participants in both locations have been stalled in their process. By considering each event separately participants do not achieve the same level of analysis and learning, and are not able to acquire the same amount of evidence to support any claim they make about the official bodies. Both projects will need to strengthen this aspect if *Reflect* is to have a long lasting impact on governance relations, or enable people to secure their rights.

**Role of communication:** *communication is a key linking factor between Reflect and governance, and is crucial for the strengthening of governance mechanisms, and the transformation of power relations. Any Reflect project will need to consider which material is most relevant to enable people to engage on issues of governance and rights, and which types of communication are most appropriate. This will often include accessing external information which Reflect groups can critically analyse, as well as encouraging circle members to have confidence in their own ways of communicating, and using these in new settings. Moreover, there are certain skills (specifically advocacy, mobilisation and campaigning techniques), which facilitators and circle members need to develop in order to strengthen good governance. This will support their efforts to develop communication strategies and enhance their ability to engage a wide constituency in the struggle to ensure that governance systems are democratic, open and responsive to all, including the most marginalised and voiceless members of society.*

Inevitably communication played a key role in both Nigeria and South Africa. However, the form and process were quite distinct and spanned both written and oral communication (with a greater emphasis placed on externally produced material in South Africa, whereas in Nigeria all communication was generated by the *Reflect* circle themselves). The main focus of communication can be grouped as follows:

- *literacy learning through production of own materials:* for example adult literacy classes which were started in Nigeria, or writing of letters/petitions to local government which were a recurrent theme in both Nigeria and South Africa
- *reading and analysing external documents:* for example reading of the constitution and other official documents (including specific government policies and notices issued to the community) in South Africa
- *speaking on diverse issues in distinct settings:* community meetings gave different people the opportunity to meet and exchange views on topics ranging from the condition of local services to corruption of government officials. Further, many



participants reported talking to their local representatives and other powerful individuals/institutions for the first time. Moreover, many individuals gave examples of how communication in the family had also changed.

**Another example of how communication has played a key role in strengthening governance relationships and local accountability comes from Orissa, India.**

In October 2001 ActionAid and Collective Action for Drought Mitigation in Bolangir organised a social audit in nine villages of Jharnipalli. The process started in advance with a street play to inform people about their right to information concerning government services. Political support for the process from the District Collector forced government officials to open up their files, including full details of work orders and accounts. A team of volunteers reviewed these and then visited villages to verify whether reported work had taken place and whether local people had any evidence/suspicion of corruption. It was important to encourage villagers to participate without fear of recriminations. Key information was collected onto clear charts and a sequence of presentations was agreed. On the day itself over 2,500 people gathered. For the first time ever local people were able to challenge government officials directly, exposing corruption and collusion. This led to the suspension of and criminal proceedings against the secretary of the local council. This example shows the wide variety of communication methods used to reach a wide range of people and involve them in a *Reflect* and governance process. It was important to use such a range of methodologies to engage with the diverse groups of people living in the local area. If the organisations had not translated the material into plays and charts the most marginalised members of the population would have been excluded. Moreover, when the project coordinators began to develop micro-plans with the local population they worked in peer groups, to ensure that the different perspectives were represented.

There are also various 'deliberative democracy' techniques, used by *Reflect* practitioners which can be used to widen the space for participation in decision-making and policy influencing – thus strengthening communication, information sharing and good governance. For example, citizens' juries, scenario workshops, public meetings and visioning exercises all give opportunities for citizens to interact with their representatives and hold them to account. For more information see PLA Notes 40, February 2001 [www.iied.org/sarl/pla\\_notes/](http://www.iied.org/sarl/pla_notes/)

The use of external information was commendable in the case of South Africa, however, there were dangers that this was given higher status than the knowledge which already existed in the circle. This is a fine balancing act, and perhaps an important area for learning and exchange between Idasa and AAN (whose overwhelming focus on internally produced information meant that external information was not seen as valid or relevant in their *Reflect* work). As mentioned in the introduction external information and skills have an important role to play in any *Reflect* process – but decisions as to what information to use, what skills to access and when must be taken by the *Reflect* group, when they have the confidence to analyse and criticise this material as appropriate.

**Building relationships:** *there is a diverse range of relationships that need to be considered from the participant perspective within a project focusing on Reflect and governance. These include the relationships within the Reflect circle, between the circle and the wider community, the community and government (at different levels) and the community and implementing organisations. Further, the importance of coherence means that organisations will also need to reflect on their own communication and decision-making systems to ensure these are as equitable and democratic as possible.*

In both South Africa and Nigeria a clear impact is shown on all these relationships – for example, in Nigeria the initial distrust of the *Reflect* circle has given way to ever increasing participation in the community meetings and projects.

Another example from Nigeria comes from Tsagu community. When we met with the circle members as part of this research they completely dominated and led the discussion – demanding Anfea-Bauchi listen to them rather than vice versa. This is an example as to how *Reflect* enabled the community to form relationships on their terms, which is something that could be replicated in their relationships with other government bodies.

In South Africa the relationship with local government has acted as a gateway to give community confidence to approach other official bodies (such as health and education authorities, or provincial government). This illustrates the knock-on effect of changing relationships in one area, and how by altering power relations in one area the community feels able to repeat this in diverse contexts. It is also clear that by establishing the relationships on their terms the communities are challenging the traditional power relations which exist between elected representatives and their constituents. Moreover, the local government has approached the *Reflect* circle for advice and support. The extent of impact on the implementing organisations varies greatly depending on the specific organisation. For example, *Idasa* in South Africa reports no change in their way of operating as individuals or within the organisation, whereas various partner organisations in Nigeria not only give examples of how *Reflect* has influenced their

organisational structure and decision-making procedures, but also individual behaviour in their personal relationships outside work. The role of the implementing organisation is clearly crucial in promoting positive ways of working at community level and it can be supposed that if they 'practise what they preach' this will lead to a stronger and more sustainable impact.

**Gender and diversity:** *governance systems often exclude wide parts of the population because of their design (which are usually geared towards men/more powerful people in society). Reflect has long emphasised the heterogeneity of communities and understood that power and other factors impact on people's abilities and desires. It is important that these considerations inform any work in the area of governance, and that the different spaces people occupy are recognised and analysed, so that the models of governance propagated within Reflect embrace this diversity and challenge current power relations at every level throughout society.*

In both contexts understanding of gender and diversity was relatively weak. This is likely to be the case when projects are focused specifically on governance and rights issues, and it is easier to focus on the community as a whole rather than individuals in the community. Therefore more sustained effort must be made to bring in these issues.

However, while gender analysis had not formed part of the discussions in either context there were some reported impacts on gender relations – for example increased communication within the family in Nigeria, and increased access to information by women in the community.

**Political processes:** *issues of politics and representation inevitably arise when working with governance framework, and the exact form these issues take will be dependent on the country context. In many countries around the world political processes do not function effectively and the most poor and marginalised are usually the most under-represented. Although there is clearly a need to ensure the voices of marginalised people are heard within government, it is not clear what the best way of doing this is. There are wide reaching debates on the benefits and problems of both participatory and representative democracy, on how deliberative democracy can strengthen representative processes and discussions on the role of political parties. In some contexts it might be appropriate to form a new political party, in others more impact may be made through joining a party which already exists. However, it is also worth noting that Reflect circles are generally set up to hold those in power to account and strengthen the democratic process through the creation of a vibrant and vocal civil society. Here the distinction between politicisation and party politics remains pertinent and it is important that the Reflect process is not compromised through engagement in party politics.*

Although, in the early stages of their Reflect process, both projects emphasised the fact that they were not a political

Analysis of power relations should be at the heart of any Reflect and governance process. Latin American organisations working with Reflect highlight the importance of subjectivity – and starting analysis from the point of view of the individual. This implies considering gender and other power relations, and how they affect people's ability to communicate and access their rights. Groups working with this focus have developed and adapted many Reflect tools to look specifically at gender and diversity issues. These tools can either be used by peer groups, or by mixed groups to discuss different perspectives together.

Examples of such tools include:

- **Venn diagrams** – of power relations in the family, community or organisation. This involves looking at who has more power in the given context, and why this is.
- **Discussions** on pros and cons of being male or female. There is unlikely to be agreement on this and it is likely that any discussion will be context specific.
- **Role plays** – with men acting as women, or children etc. and a discussion of how the role play developed, and what sources of power there are and how these affect relations.
- **Silhouettes** – of men or women, ideal or real, general or specific roles. The key is to show how different parts of the body are used to play different roles.
- **Rotating voice** – to ensure that those who are silent have space to participate, and analysing who is speaking when.
- **Body mapping** – used in both Canada and Ireland to discuss issues of gender violence and perception of self – with the focus of violence against women being a human rights issue.
- **Drawing each other** – men drawing how they see women, and women how they see men.
- **Gender workload charts/calendars** – looking at the way men, women, children etc. spend their day and how the much time is spent working.

All these techniques are just ways of starting discussion on gender relations and should not be seen as ends in themselves.

By recognising diversity and stratification within rights and governance, groups will not only be more able to promote new, alternative models of governance which enhance access and participation, but also will be more likely to predict areas of conflict and difficulty which may arise as rights are accessed and governance relations are challenged.

party, (and this was key to getting community support for the initiative) politicisation of participants and facilitators became a key component of the process. This took various forms – including enhanced understanding of rights and responsibilities, and increased linkages with the local government. There was also interest among facilitators in joining formal government structures.

In one village in Nigeria both the facilitator and the village chief highlighted the importance of representation at local government level. The village chief commented: “*If you don’t have someone in local government presenting your needs it is easy for people to ignore them,*” and went on to support the idea that the facilitator stood for election at local government level. In South Africa, although originally the ‘neutrality’ gave the facilitators the ability to work with *Reflect*, many now expressed interest in working in local government. In both cases community members and implementing organisations will need to make decisions as to whether participants can continue to participate if they do actually enter an official government body – and consider the effect this has on power relations in the group.

**Rights-based approach and governance:** The concepts of governance and a rights-based approach have a lot to offer each other. Governance provides a political dimension, and highlights the mechanisms which need to be in place in order for people to secure their rights – it provides a framework in which to develop a process for a rights-based approach. However, the concept of rights also influences the form and understanding of governance. A rights-based approach is based on principles of equality and equity, accountability, empowerment and participation. When applying these issues to the concept of governance the importance of transparency and accountability is clear – as is the centrality of power analysis, human development, and participation<sup>4</sup>.

Thus the two concepts converge to give a fuller understanding of how rights can be secured on a permanent basis. This requires a more developed conceptual framework than was seen in either the South African or Nigerian experience and suggests a more strategic approach which links all analysis, action and reflection to achieving the ultimate goal.

By examining the key positive characteristics of both experiences, it is possible to understand how the rights-based approach, and governance framework can link together and support each other.

■ **Nigeria:** the support and enthusiasm for community led initiatives was remarkable in Nigeria. People dedicated time and energy to improving access to basic services rather than being paralysed by the lack of government presence. The commitment shown here is something that should be harnessed, and can only be achieved if local people feel ownership of

their *Reflect* process. This illustrates the care that must be taken for a group process to emerge, and also shows the need to balance the sustained pressure of influencing local government with practical solutions to the present situation. Moreover, it highlights the importance of focusing explicitly on those rights that are obviously missing. It is unlikely that community members would organise themselves to demand political and civil rights, unless they first had access to economic and social rights – thus it made sense to focus on the basic services. However, by linking the concept of rights to basic services to a wider understanding of governance and citizenship rights it is likely that the work would have greater impact (ie it would have been beneficial to link the lack of basic services to the current limitations of political and civil rights).

■ **South Africa:** the status of the *Reflect* circle as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the community, and the continual meetings between community members and the officials/local representatives are enabling communities to hold their local government to account and enhance the quality of service provision. This has been complemented by the use of official documents within the *Reflect* circle, which have both extended discussion and analysis, enabling *Reflect* participants to place their experiences in the wider context, and understand how rights and responsibilities work in a South African context. This clearly enhances the impact of the circle and makes it more sustainable and more likely to have long-reaching impact into the future.

## Final comments

The insights and ideas expressed in this document are only an introduction to the area of governance, rights and *Reflect*, which could be interpreted in a variety of ways.

The challenge now is whether *Reflect* can move beyond being an approach which mobilises people to engage with current governance structures (and enhance their access to services) to one which transforms these structures and the power relations which they reinforce. Understanding power is central in this aim, and power analysis is at the heart of *Reflect* and governance. But *Reflect* participants alone cannot achieve such structural change. It requires the active engagement of organisations such as AAN and *Idasa* to advocate for stronger governance mechanisms at every level, in which people can participate more effectively and with greater equality.

Hopefully the achievements of these two projects will inspire others to take up the challenge, to *Reflect* on their own work and consider how they could use *Reflect* to strengthen grassroots governance and enhance people’s ability to secure their rights.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Reality of Aid’ <http://www.realityofaid.org/activities/ThemeStatement.htm>

# Abbreviations and Glossary

**Action Points:** the actions agreed on by *Reflect* participants, following discussions/analysis in the *Reflect* group

**ANC:** African National Congress (currently the ruling party in South Africa)

**ANFEA:** Adult Non-Formal Education Agency (State level – Nigeria)

**AAN:** ActionAid Nigeria

**CBD-NGO Forum:** (Community Based Development-NGO Forum – Nigeria)

**CBO:** Community Based organisation

**COWAN:** Country Women Association of Nigeria (National NGO)

**CSACEFA:** Civil Society Coalition on Education for All – Nigerian Coalition which campaigns on the ‘Education for All’ commitments

**CSO:** Civil Society Organisation

**FPT:** *Fighting Poverty Together* (ActionAid’s Strategy)

**Freire:** An influential Brazilian educationalist/philosopher – who believed in the power of education – which could be liberatory, or used to oppress, and is never neutral

**Gini Coefficient:** a number between zero and one that is a measure of inequality. If a country has nearly equal distribution of resources the Gini Coefficient is near zero, if it has very unequal distribution the coefficient will be nearer one.

**Idasa:** Institute for Democracy and South Africa (South African NGO implementing a *Reflect* programme)

**Locations:** The predominantly black areas, built during the years of apartheid in South Africa – usually built on the outskirts of predominantly white towns

**LG:** Local Government

**LRC:** Learners Representative Council – council for school pupils (South Africa)

**MSO:** Muslim Sisters Organisation (CBO – Nigeria)

**NGO:** Non-governmental organisation

**NMEC:** National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (Nigeria)

**Party Representatives:** stand for local election as party members but do not necessarily come from the local area (in South Africa)

**PRA:** Participatory Rural Appraisal

**Reflect:** Participatory approach to adult learning and social change, which provides the basis for most of the work discussed in this document. Literally the acronym for “regenerated Freirean literacy through empowering community techniques”

**RBA:** Rights-based Approach

**RDP:** Housing: Reconstruction and Development Programme – government subsidised housing (South Africa)

**SGB:** School Governing body

**SMC:** School Management Committee

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme

**Ward Councillors** who live in the ward and stand as an individual (although they usually do belong to a political party) (South Africa)

**WIN:** Women in Nigeria (National NGO)

**WTO:** World Trade Organisation

# Reflect Networking and Support



*Reflect* work internationally is supported by CIRAC – a network of *Reflect* practitioners. CIRAC was established in March 2000 as a democratic space for *Reflect* practitioners from diverse organisations across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. It seeks to promote the solidarity of *Reflect* practitioners around the world in order to strengthen international exchange and learning, and build a wider movement against poverty and injustice.

CIRAC is inclusive of all *Reflect* practitioners and links over 350 organisations using the approach in 60 countries. CIRAC practitioners communicate with each other through publications and practical resources, an e-mail network and a bilingual (soon to be trilingual) website. In addition there are feedback systems from meetings and links to training and exchange workshops around the world. The International Education Unit, based in ActionAid UK plays a secretariat role to CIRAC – facilitating communication and encouraging people to share and learn from each other. The secretariat is accountable to the CIRAC coordination team. CIRAC is coordinated by two people nominated from each region every year, and annual meetings are held (most recently in Bangladesh in January 2004) with balanced representation from the varied organisations and networks around the world (email: [katem@actionaid.org.uk](mailto:katem@actionaid.org.uk) for more information).

There are also various national and regional *Reflect* networks, which play a supporting role to *Reflect* practitioners, offering advice, training, and encouraging practitioners to innovate in their *Reflect* practice.



**pamoja**  
Africa Reflect Network

Of particular significance is PAMOJA. The PAMOJA Africa *Reflect* Network is an Africa-wide non-lucrative participatory education and development initiative established in year 2002 by African *Reflect* practitioners. It exists to facilitate learning, sharing and the continuing evolution of *Reflect* experiences in Africa, in order to build a critical and enlightened mass of men, women, boys and girls empowered to realise their rights, ideals and values.

PAMOJA aims to facilitate the formation and strengthening of PAMOJA *Reflect* Forums within Africa (at national level, within in each country), promoting inter-agency collaboration and solidarity, facilitating the continuing evolution of *Reflect* and the emergence of distinctively African approaches. It provides capacity building opportunities for *Reflect* practitioners and promotes cross-country collaboration and innovation around key thematic issues in Africa. At the moment the main focuses of work are HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution, education and governance. PAMOJA also aims to influence the relevant policies and practices of governments, NGOs and donor agencies, through a combination of grassroots mobilization, people's organisation and publications that take their base from people's knowledge and experience, with the primary intention of strengthening people's control over their own lives (email: [pamoja@infocom.co.ug](mailto:pamoja@infocom.co.ug) for more information).