SECOND DRAFT

OF

THE MOTHER MANUAL

ON

REFLECT

REGENERATED FREIREAN LITERACY

THROUGH

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY TECHNIQUES

ACTIONAID
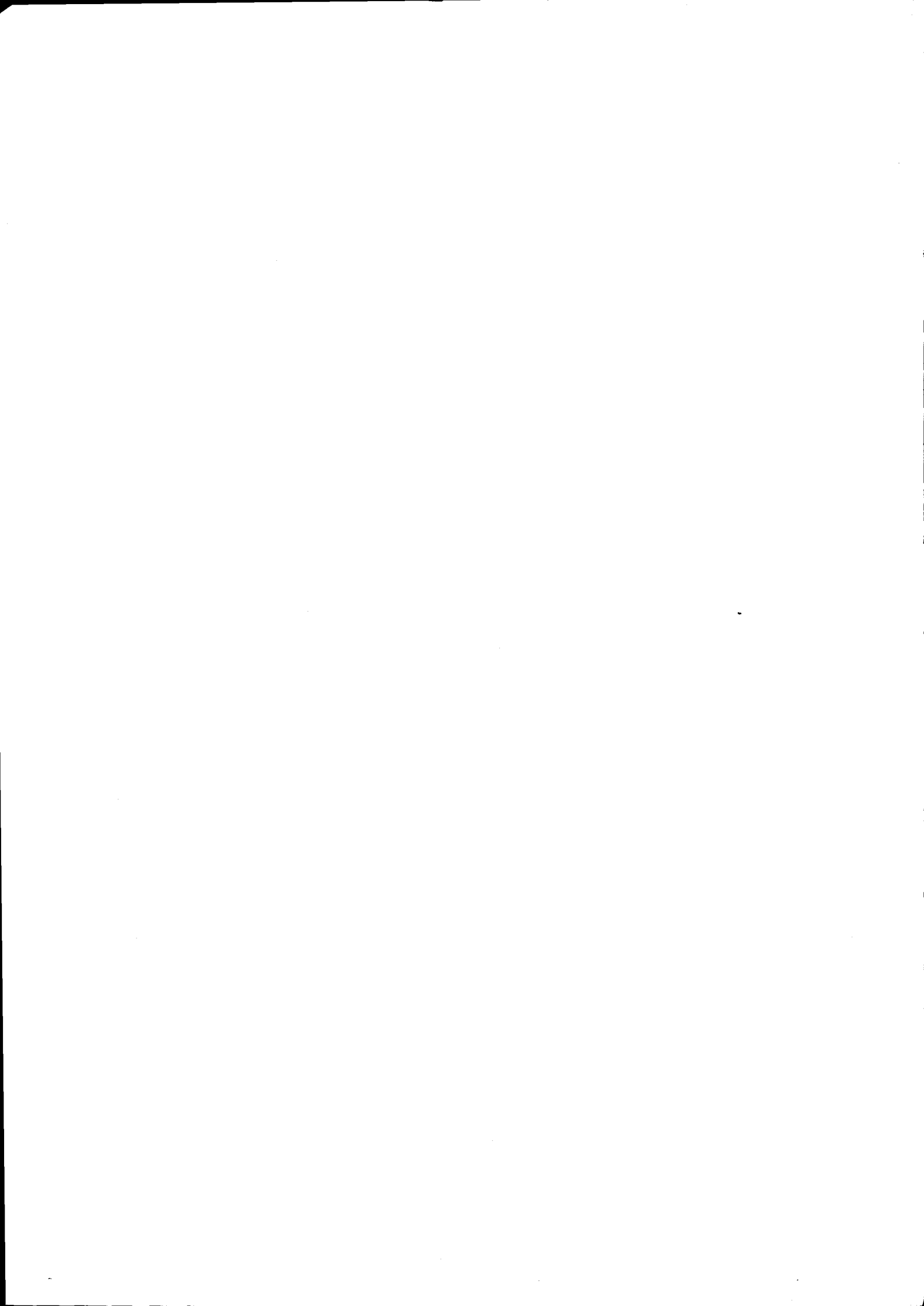JUNE 1995

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FOREWORD

REFLECT is a radical new approach to adult literacy which involves each literacy class producing its own learning materials through the construction of maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams analysing local problems and systematising local knowledge.

The approach was initially developed by ACTIONAID and piloted in Uganda, El Salvador and Bangladesh between 1993 and 1995. The evaluations of these pilot experiences are published by the ODA within their series of Occasional Papers on Education (Consolidated Research Report on REFLECT, 1996). The REFLECT approach has already spread rapidly to over twenty countries and there is a huge demand for training and support.

This "Mother Manual" aims to respond to this demand, providing a comprehensive introduction to the REFLECT approach which will enable you to produce your own local REFLECT manual adapted to the social, economic, political and cultural conditions in which you work.

The core of this Mother Manual is a set of sample REFLECT Units (some developed in detail, some only outlined) from which you can select and adapt your own Units (to make a local manual for literacy facilitators which may have around 20 or 30 Units). None of the Units outlined here are intended to be directly reproduced.

The rest of the Mother Manual covers:

* An introduction to the theory and the method

* Suggestions for background research which you will need to do to prepare an effective local manual

* Suggestions on how to go about designing your own manual

* Observations on different stages in the implementation of a REFLECT programme, from promotion through training to monitoring and evaluation

* Suggested strategies for creating a more literate environment (post-literacy).

* Loose ends and conclusions

We strongly recommend that you read the entire manual before you start to implement any part of it. This is necessary because, for example, it is important to develop strategies for creating a more literate environment before even starting with basic literacy.

The strategies outlined in this REFLECT Mother Manual represent the accumulated learning from REFLECT field programmes to date. However, REFLECT is not a pre-packaged approach, it is not something that you can simply pick up off the shelf and adopt.

Rather you need to invest some time in adapting the approach to your own environment and needs. Although there are certain core principles in the REFLECT approach there is always scope for creative input and innovation which will strengthen the methodology and inform future editions of this (and other) manuals. To date, for example, REFLECT has been applied mostly in rural areas. As urban programmes are started up they will advance the REFLECT methodology and bring in new ideas.

However, whilst REFLECT should be flexibly interpreted it can also be distorted. If the maps and matrices become an end in themselves rather than a means to an end then certain core principles of the REFLECT process can be undermined. For example, in one Salvadorean village a teacher commented that the learners had little time to produce the maps so he did them a favour and produced them at home, bringing the completed versions into the class!

Although the REFLECT approach strongly rejects the use of adult literacy primers (pre-printed text-books) it is extremely consistent with other participatory approaches to adult literacy that have been developed by innovative individuals and organisations at a local level around the world. Indeed many of these participatory approaches (eg using songs, dance, drama, role play, games, language experience, learner generated materials etc) are interwoven in this manual. What REFLECT provides is an overall structure that can enable participatory approaches to be effective on a small, medium or large scale.

We hope that you enjoy this manual and can find creative and effective uses for it. Good luck.

PART 1:

INTRODUCTION: THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY

1.1 The Aim of this Manual

The aim of this "Mother Manual" is to help grassroots organisations, governmental or non-governmental agencies to design adult literacy programmes adapted to local conditions, using the "REFLECT" approach. The manual outlines the REFLECT approach and will help you to produce your own manual for local literacy facilitators (hence this is the "mother" of other manuals).

The REFLECT approach does away with the need for a primer, so the manual which you produce is the essential material for your literacy programme. The preparation of supplementary local materials which are useful (like visual cards) is also explained in this manual.

The REFLECT approach was first developed in three countries: Uganda (Bundibugyo), El Salvador (Usulutan) and Bangladesh (Bhola Island). Evaluations of these three projects are available (and are published in consolidated form by the ODA). REFLECT was adapted differently in each context but certain core characteristics were shared across the three programmes. The facilitator's manuals from these three original pilots are available. Each was prepared in the field on a portable computer by a small core group (of between 4 and 8 people) working over three to four weeks. Most had not been seriously involved in literacy work before.

This manual should give you a good idea how each of these was produced and how you can elaborate your own and plan an effective adult literacy programme, relevant to your area / country and closely linked in to other processes of social change and development.

This is not a training manual as such - though it does aim to help you produce your own manual. People picking this up without a background in PRA would be urged to attend some PRA training. Those who know PRA might equally be asked to clear their minds and be ready to use PRA in quite a different way! Everyone who can is urged to visit one of the early pilot REFLECT projects - in Uganda, Bangladesh or El Salvador - or to write to us for details of when suitable training courses may be run. A list of other contacts is appended.

1.2 Why Literacy?

We cannot start a literacy programme without being clear about the key question: What is the purpose of literacy?

Literacy is a way of:
* remembering
* recording

* representing reality
* communicating across space and time

People who we conventionally regard as "illiterate" have many
means for doing these things already, whether through music,
drama, songs, drums, cloth patterns, oral histories etc. All of
these are based on structured patterns that help people to
remember and / or communicate. Non-literate people are not
ignorant. They have innumerable skills and extensive knowledge:
for example in rural areas they have complex knowledge about how
to plant, care for and harvest a wide range of crops, how to tend
different animals, build houses and make various crafts. They
have the knowledge necessary to survive in what are often very
adverse conditions. In many respects it is sometimes literate
people who are ignorant (even "illiterate" in a broader sense of
the word) - particularly about rural life.

Knowledge of formal "literacy" is not necessarily a good or a
practical thing for people living in rural communities. Many
people have survived quite comfortably without literacy and have
evolved effective strategies for dealing with reading or writing
("literacy events") when they have to (eg by taking letters to
literate friends or relatives, or using a scribe). In such a
context is it worth teaching literacy?

If life remained unchanged and there was no prospect of change
then there may indeed be little use in teaching literacy. But
most communities have changed and are changing and there are few
places in the world where literacy has not "intruded" as part of
this process of change. The need to read and write is becoming
more important all the time and it is therefore increasingly a
felt need by those who are non-literate. Where there is no demand
for literacy it would be wrong to force literacy on people. It is
not for us to judge that it might be "good" for others - and
indeed if people are not interested it would almost certainly not
be good for them! However, more and more often there is a demand.
Some of the reasons why adults might want to learn include:

* To read instructions of medicines / prescriptions;
* To read directions, signposts and posters;
* To understand labels on fertilisers / pesticides;
* To help children with their homework;
* To keep records eg of children's vaccinations;
* To start up a small business;
* To keep basic accounts;
* To learn new skills;
* To avoid being cheated;
* To have access to information about agriculture or health;
* To read and write personal or official letters;
* To take positions of responsibility in organisations;
* To read newspapers;
* To get a new job;
* To acquire status / be respected by other people.
* To read religious texts;
* To read for diversion / entertainment;

It is clearly not possible to enumerate the full range of factors
that might motivate adults to learn basic literacy. In fact the

most important motivating factors may remain hidden from planners of literacy programmes. Each cultural group or community will finds its own uses for literacy (over and above certain obvious uses) and we cannot (and should not try to) fully anticipate or control these uses.

The moment of deciding to join a literacy class is an important one for an adult. It represents a decision to invest time and energy in trying to change something in their lives. In many cases it represents a strategic decision to try to change their position, their status or their ability to cope with a changing environment. Time is scarce for most people in such a situation, so dedicating any time represents a serious commitment. Some of course may be drawn in by false promises or expectations (eg that they will learn in a matter of days) and their motivation can thus fall rapidly. Indeed, in most cases the process of learning is harder than people would expect so sustaining motivation must become a central concern.

It does not help the motivation of adult learners if the literacy teacher looks down on them. In a surprisingly large number of programmes literacy teachers are very arrogant and see literacy as the solution to everything, considering illiterate people as "stupid" or backward. The primer-based teaching approach often reinforces this. Such an approach to literacy can do more harm than good - it can undermine people's existing skills and knowledge - and by doing so can undermine any development process. We must respect illiterate people as knowledgeable and capable so that the literacy programme builds on their existing knowledge rather than seeking to replace it.

Literacy is simply another skill - another type of "pattern" to help people remember, record and communicate. It is not the only way, nor always the best way, but in the changing world it is becoming more and more of a necessary way.

1.3   Past Failures

In recent years there has been a growing disillusion with adult literacy work. The "Education for All" conference in 1990 aimed to raise the profile of education as an international issue - but since then, worldwide, the emphasis has been on improving primary education for children. There has been very little investment in adult literacy (with some notable exceptions). In many cases governments and international agencies are forgetting a whole generation and aiming to reduce illiteracy by focusing on children. The tragedy is that the without parallel investment in adults, the prospects of increasing school enrolment (and quality) are slim! An inter-generational approach is vital.

So why is there so little investment in adult literacy? A recent World Bank Discussion Paper provides a clear reason. Helen Abadzi, on reviewing literacy programmes over the past 30 years estimates an average effectiveness rate of less than 12.5%. This figure is arrived at as follows:
* on average 50% of those who enrol in adult literacy drop out

within a few weeks.
* of those who remain, on average 50% fail to complete the
    literacy programme successfully
* of those who do complete, about 50% lose their skills within a
    year for lack of follow-up.

Why do literacy programmes fail? Surely this must be a serious
indictment of literacy methods used world-wide? Although some
level of drop-out at the start of a literacy programme may be
understandable (it is after all hard to learn something so new,
and besides, some people will enrol on anything without much
commitment), beyond that point the failure can only really be
blamed on the literacy programmes.

The one almost universal feature of adult literacy programmes
world-wide is a "primer" in one shape or another (and remarkably,
most primers have very similar shapes and forms). Even radical
literacy programmes often depend on a primer. Abolishing the
primer may be the key to success.

1.4 Introduction to Freire

Challenging literacy primers is not new. The Brazilian educator
Paulo Freire radicalised a whole generation of literacy workers
in the 1960s and 1970s, linking literacy to social change. He
condemned existing literacy teaching which was based on primers:

"There is an implicit concept of man in the primer's method and
content, whether it is recognised by the authors or not .... It
is the teacher who chooses the words and proposes them to the
learners ... the students are to be "filled" with the words the
teachers have chosen. It is the profile of a man whose
consciousness ... must be filled or fed in order to know.

Freire condemned this "banking" concept of education:
"As understood in this concept, man is a passive being, the
object of the process of learning to read and write, and not its
subject".

Freire recognised that the people who were normally the passive
objects of literacy classes should be seen differently:

"Agronomists, agriculturalists, public health officials,
cooperative administrators, literacy educators - we all have a
lot to learn from peasants, and if we refuse to do so, we can't
teach them anything" p25

However, for Freire most non-literate people were unable to
assert themselves. As a result of oppression they were immersed
in a "culture of silence":

"In the culture of silence, to exist is only to live. The body
carries out orders from above. Thinking is difficult. Speaking is
forbidden."

In this context there could be no such thing as neutral
education:

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