



Adult learning in Porponya village, Manya Krobo, Eastern Ghana

Literacy for Life

A Village Aid learning paper

Experiences, lessons learnt and best practice drawn from ten organisations working across West Africa to empower vulnerable adults and their families by building skills in functional literacy that provide practical ways to access resources, claim rights, and improve relationships with people in power.

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Glossary

AVISU	Agency for Village Support
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
LYDO	Lylegloma Youth Development Organisation
MMYDA	Malal-Mara Youth Development Association
MBOSCUA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
REFLECT	Regenerated Freireian Learning Empowering Community Techniques
SLYEO	Sierra Leone Youth Development Organisation
TACYDA	Tankoro Chiefdom Youth Development Association
TADA	Tabostaneh Development Association

Introduction

Village Aid and its partners' work is built around **REFLECT** literacy, a participatory approach originally developed by Action Aid. Many different organisations have now adapted this approach to their own contexts, with a wide variety of skills, experiences and learning.

Community facilitators work to support the learning and empowerment of participants in learning circles. Learning sessions are not conducted in a traditional teacher-student format where knowledge is transferred uncritically. Instead, learners analyse their problems using different

more than just the opportunity to read and write. It provides a way for people to use literacy to bring about social change.



Partner conference in Bakewell, UK, 2007



REFLECT literacy circle in Genji, Lower Saloum, The Gambia

Village Aid and its partner organisations have developed a wide variety of skills and experience in implementing **REFLECT** within different social contexts in West Africa. From 2006-2008, a capacity-building project sponsored by The Baring Foundation supported Village Aid to bring its local partners together for a series of learning conferences. These events took place in Ghana,

participatory tools that raise awareness and promote debate. Diagrams, images, social drama, number games, story-telling, and written exercises



Partner conference in Yonibana, Sierra Leone, 2008



Partner conference in Odumase, Ghana, 2006

the UK and Sierra Leone, allowing partners to learn from each other in different working contexts, and consolidate the skills and experience within each partner organisation. This publication is a summary of learning generated by Village Aid's partner organisations which are making use of adult literacy as a development tool in Cameroon, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia.

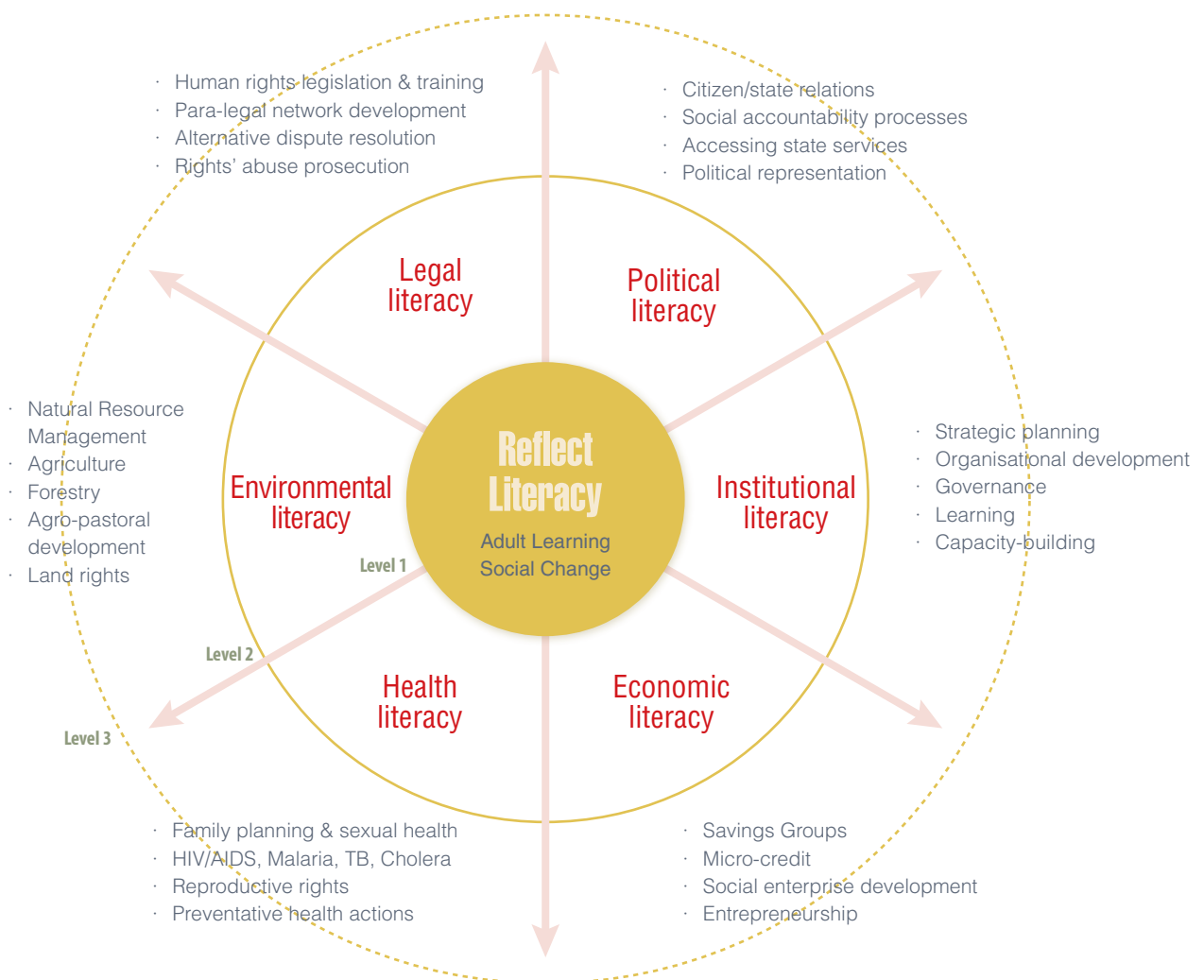
are used to analyse the multiple relationships which affect learners. Learning groups also provide a means by which its members can take legitimate action on issues of local concern. **REFLECT** is much

Why does adult literacy matter?

The powerlessness caused by poor literacy is often reinforced by systematic discrimination. Women, girls, widows, youths and ethnic minorities with low literacy are groups of people being excluded from society, the economy and political participation. Access to income, assets and services is often denied whilst their influence on decisions which affect their lives is almost non-existent. Such a situation increases the likelihood that a group will be living in long-term poverty. The **REFLECT** process is

practical applications of functional literacy that have been implemented by partner organisations working with learning groups.

The learning process is reinforced by a monitoring framework that is developed by local partners with inputs from learners themselves, who are asked to define their own measures of success. Long-term sustainability is achieved when each learning group builds the capacity to function as a community based organisation (CBO). This



inherently about challenging power relations and structures of exploitation, marginalisation and discrimination. Linking communication and power can influence groups' ability to participate in decisions which affect their lives. Improving the quality and sustainability of their participation leads to long-term access to natural resources, income, and government services. The diagram above is a framework that captures the different

transformation of learning circles into CBOs with independent governance structures and systems represents a critical step in achieving lasting social change. These local CBOs are able to represent different interests within the community, take actions on issues of local concern, and liaise with other government institutions and development agencies to access required services.

Lessons in establishing literacy projects

Community research and mobilisation:

Community based partners need to have strong links with rural communities if they are to establish legitimacy in the eyes of local people. This means taking time to talk and listen to all community members; chiefs, landowners, farmers, youths, men and women. The purpose of this is to discuss the benefits of *REFLECT* sessions, inform and mobilise the whole community, help identify needs and build a community profile which will act as a baseline for monitoring the impact of the project.



Community mobilization in Northern Ghana

Training of local facilitators:

This is a vital part of the establishment of a *REFLECT* group. Facilitators need to be respected by community members, but above all be committed to empowering marginalised people. Facilitator training in the *REFLECT* process can be enhanced with training in social drama and national legislation. Refresher training is critical to keep facilitators' skills at a high level. Networking between facilitators based in different communities is valuable and allows the facilitator to feel they are part of something bigger and encourages the exchange of learning.



Facilitator training in Mile 91, Sierra Leone

Setting the ground rules:

Commitment is improved if participants can generate their own session ground rules. The aim of this is to allow for the creation of a democratic space where all individuals feel comfortable and more able to communicate. The same goal informs the decision of session location and how the session area is set up. Additionally, the practical needs of the sessions need to be considered such as group size, whether things can be hung up and whether the area can be accessed easily, and is conducive for learning activities.



Community multi-purpose centre in Kaur, The Gambia

Lessons in ensuring participation and ownership

Gender Balance:

Women in rural communities often have low literacy levels reducing their suitability to act as facilitators. It is imperative that literacy projects are able to set a positive example of intended change within communities. If the development of women facilitators is prioritised in programmes, then capable **REFLECT** students can be identified and supported to become future facilitators. Many Village Aid partners have achieved a 50/50 balance amongst community facilitators, and this has helped to improve the delivery of gender-specific content.



Leading by example in Many Krobo, Eastern Ghana

Local Participation:

When setting up **REFLECT** sessions within communities it is important to inform local people about the purpose of the activity. Support from local leaders is critical in building the confidence and trust of local people. At first some members of the group may be uncomfortable contributing, the formation of small sub-groups and use of images can increase their confidence. Circle meetings need to occur regularly (at least once a week) and continue for 3 to 4 years. In time, learning groups may be transformed into community based organisations.



Building consensus in Pujehun, Sierra Leone

Local Resources:

Using local resources (seeds, sticks, stones, leaves, string, ashes, cloth) is a continual process with group participants adapting **REFLECT** to their own context so that learning has increased relevance and meaning. In addition to these resources, learning materials such as blackboards, benches, paper, card, chalk and pens need to be provided to improve the quality of learning. This approach of using local resources allows for the culture of learning to become firmly rooted within communities and not reliant on external resources.



Most learning materials can be found locally



The finished graphic stimulates discussion

Lessons in meeting people's needs

Indigenous language literacy:

Many **REFLECT** groups operate in a multi-lingual context with one language for communication locally and one for official or national communication. It is important that learning occurs entirely within the context of a local language as this increase access for adults with no formal education. In time, investigating the connections between power and language often leads people to want to improve their literacy skills in the language of government (in West Africa this is predominantly English or French).



Writing in Krobo language, Eastern Ghana

Numeracy:

Skills in maths and numeracy are improved through exercises such as group savings and business planning. The identification, recognition and writing of numbers need to respond to participants own needs, e.g. telephone numbers, ID cards, medical dosage, numbers of cattle. Tackling problems involving both money and time/dates enables people to consolidate the mathematical skills they already have, and apply these in planning their own lives and income generation activities more effectively.



Budgeting for business in north-west Cameroon

Images:

Participatory Learning and Action means giving people the tools they need to develop their own process of learning, analysis, planning and action. Participant generated graphics provide a core structure to the process of systematising local knowledge and stimulating critical analysis. Their power comes from presenting basic information in a revealing new light which enables participants to perform their own structural analysis. In addition images provide a link to writing by labelling key figures drawn by participants.



Health matrix for preventing disease



Community map for planning resources



Farming calendar for agricultural training

Learning from what people know and value

Social Drama:

In many different contexts in West Africa, social drama has shown itself to be a key intervention that can empower communities to discuss and take action on difficult issues. Key advantages of this technique are ease of use by individuals with low literacy levels and ability to engage with non-group members on controversial subjects. This work is so specialist that independent social drama groups often develop as part of a community programme. These groups provide a critical service to local partner organisations,

bringing communities together, communicating key messages, generating discussion, and helping to expose corruption and human rights' abuses.



Respect for religious values is essential



Challenging gender stereotypes with social drama



Many learners already know some Arabic

REFLECT and religion:

Learners in Eastern Ghana are motivated by a wish to read the local bible in church. MBOSCUDA use the Arabic alphabet as a learning tool. Many participants already have some knowledge, and find this medium more accessible than western script. A Muslim cleric working with MBOSCUDA uses the Qu'ran to raise awareness and encourage men to meet their family responsibilities. This process is being replicated in Northern Ghana and Sierra Leone where Islamic values also influence decision-making.

A learning circle in Northern Ghana sows seed in a farm, investing in the future of the group



Political Literacy

Political literacy empowers marginalised people through developing their understanding of the different power structures that affect their lives and how to increase their influence within these structures. This allows them to take up a more active citizenship. All Village Aid partners are active in supporting voter registration and participation in local and national elections, as well as playing a monitoring role in the scrutiny of government budgets and performance. MBOSCUDA uses school-building and management in remote communities to bring pastoralist and farming communities together. This has had a significant impact in overcoming conflict and promoting peace between different communities. Advocacy programmes, chief's conferences, duty-bearer workshops and radio campaigns all increase the responsiveness of traditional authorities and accountability of local government. In Ghana, Simli Aid has developed a Social Accountability Process



Promoting parent teacher associations in North West Cameroon

(SAP), which supports community groups to understand, assess and evaluate the performance of vital state services (schools, health, police). In partnership with duty-bearers, communities then create score cards to appraise the performance of state institutions and services against their roles as set out in national legislation.

Legal Literacy

Whilst human rights may be protected in the Constitution, the experience of rights for poor people (especially ethnic minorities, women and children) is often different to that of well connected officials and property owners. MBOSCUDA has pioneered a para-legal extension programme to provide legal advice at point-of-need within rural

Mbororo communities in North-West Cameroon. Since 2003, this has managed to resolve over 700 cases locally, and taken nearly 300 cases to court. This has resulted in a number of legal precedents being set in women's rights, access to land, and tackling corruption in government.



Lawyer Robert Fon and defendant's family outside the court of appeal in Bamenda, Cameroon

Environmental Literacy

Agricultural and forestry initiatives as group activities are instrumental in the development of local communities and their respective food security. Securing long-term access to land is a major problem that is common to many women in rural communities. By working as a group, many have been able to access land in the long-term and invest in farming and forest resources which they will draw on for a lifetime. Simli Aid has planted over 1.5 million economic trees in community-managed forests. Nursery sites and forest management training help to provide long-term environmental security and generate sustainable income through harvesting of non-timber produce.

In the Gambia, AVISU has established 12 community farms with their own wells. These farms provide both food and an income for the group, and serve as demonstration sites for people to improve their own farms. Literacy sessions focus on environmental issues such as the prevention of deforestation and organic farming techniques. Training in food processing and preservation has equipped group members with the knowledge and skills to make garri from cassava, pepper sauce, and jams from tomato, papaya, baobab and



A tree seedling nursery site in Northern Ghana



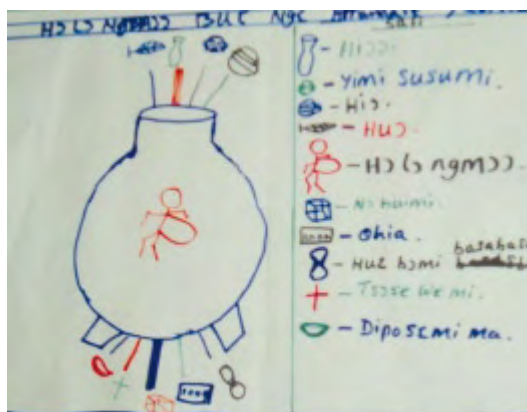
A vegetable garden in Kaur, The Gambia

sorrel. Group management training improves the leadership, management skills and effectiveness of CBO leaders ensuring their viability as a community based organisation.

Health Literacy

SimliAid have worked closely with the Ghana Health Service in 3 districts, combining radio advocacy and social drama to promote the registration of citizens in the National Health Insurance Scheme. This has cut the cost of health services in rural communities, and ensured that people register and attend health clinics. This preventive approach to community health is a great improvement, as lower costs mean people are no longer waiting until it is too late to seek medical treatment. YOWE has developed a series of literacy units which focus on women's health, reproductive rights, and safe motherhood. Learning sessions help participants to understand the needs and concerns of young women, and provide practical ideas on how to plan

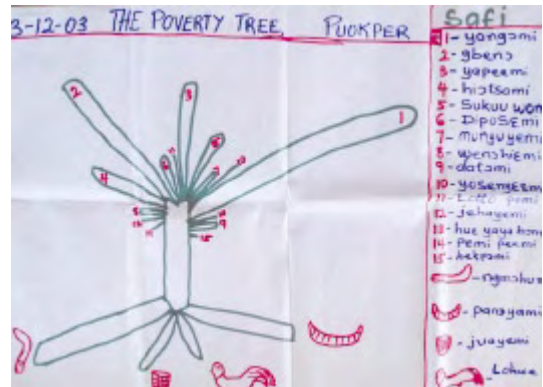
families more effectively. YOWE also campaigns strongly on issues of HIV/AIDS, supporting people living with HIV/AIDS to access medical services from the state and promoting care and support from within communities.



Identifying the needs of pregnant women in Eastern Ghana

Economic Literacy

REFLECT learning and finance from micro-credit allows for learning group members to put into practice their own ideas for enterprise development. The increase in income from successful initiatives empowers individuals (especially women) to influence decisions and 'be heard'. In Eastern Ghana, YOWE manages a number of credit funds that focus on the different needs of specific groups, including people living with HIV/AIDS, single mothers, and young people in urban centres. A bee-keeping project has resulted in the extensive uptake of honey production amongst learning groups. Improved financial management has helped social enterprise groups to succeed in the long-term, benefiting entire communities. In The Gambia, AVISU has established a micro-credit scheme that is very popular with local communities. The government and other international agencies have used AVISU's community network and



The poverty tree analyses income (roots) and expenditure (branches)

infrastructure to distribute additional credit funds. Savings and credit services are available to learning groups and individual entrepreneurs, provided they develop a sound business plan, for which training and support are provided. A greater appreciation of how local economies can be improved by keeping money in local circulation has now developed.

Institutional Literacy

Good governance is needed by civil society as well as by state organisations. Village Aid has a responsibility to its supporters and funders to ensure that our partner organisations are effectively governed, that finances are properly managed, and that the projects we fund make the biggest possible difference in the lives of the beneficiaries. To achieve this, Village Aid supports the institutional development of its partner organisations. SLYEO is one partner that has undergone significant organisational changes over the past 3 years with support from Village Aid and other partners. A 5 year strategic plan helped SLYEO to establish a board of directors, develop its staff policies, and employ international volunteers. SLYEO are now setting a positive example of good governance to other NGOs, and supporting 5 partner CBOs in their own organisational development. Village Aid has developed a partnership framework

which is now used to improve the effectiveness of working relationships between organisations. This framework sets out targets for organisational development, with the different roles and responsibilities of all partners clearly defined. The result is stronger accountability between partners and more confident leadership within local organisations.

SLYEO workshop training CBO leaders in good governance



Contributing Partners

Partner Non Governmental Organisations



MBOSCUDA is supporting 30 learning groups in North West Cameroon



Based in Tamale, Simli Aid supports 60 literacy circles in 5 districts in Ghana's Northern Region



YOWE is working in 35 communities in Ghana's Eastern Region



AVISU support 30 learning groups in Lower Saloum in The Gambia



SLYEO supports 4 local community organisations with 65 learning groups in Sierra Leone

Partner Community Based Organisations

- ADA** Abanbeke Development Association supports widows in particular to develop local enterprise in 9 communities in Obudu, Cross River State, Nigeria
- EOCDF** Eastern Obolo Community Development Foundation is playing a key role in the development of communities in Eastern Obolo, Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria
- LYDO** Lylegloma Youth Development Organisation is a local community organisation supporting 15 learning groups in Pujehun District in Sierra Leone
- MMYDA** Malal-Mara Youth Development Association supports 21 learning groups in Malal Chiefdom in Tonkolili district, Sierra Leone
- TADA** Tabostaneh Development Association supports 9 learning groups in Kholifa Mabang Chiefdom in Tonkolili district, Sierra Leone
- TACYDA** Tankoro Chiefdom Youth Development Association supports 15 learning groups in Kono District, Sierra Leone

Funding and Strategic Partners



Village Aid supports local organisations in Africa to secure long-term positive social change.

The Baring Foundation

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