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## REFLECT Approach : Promoting Functional Literacy and Participatory Community Development



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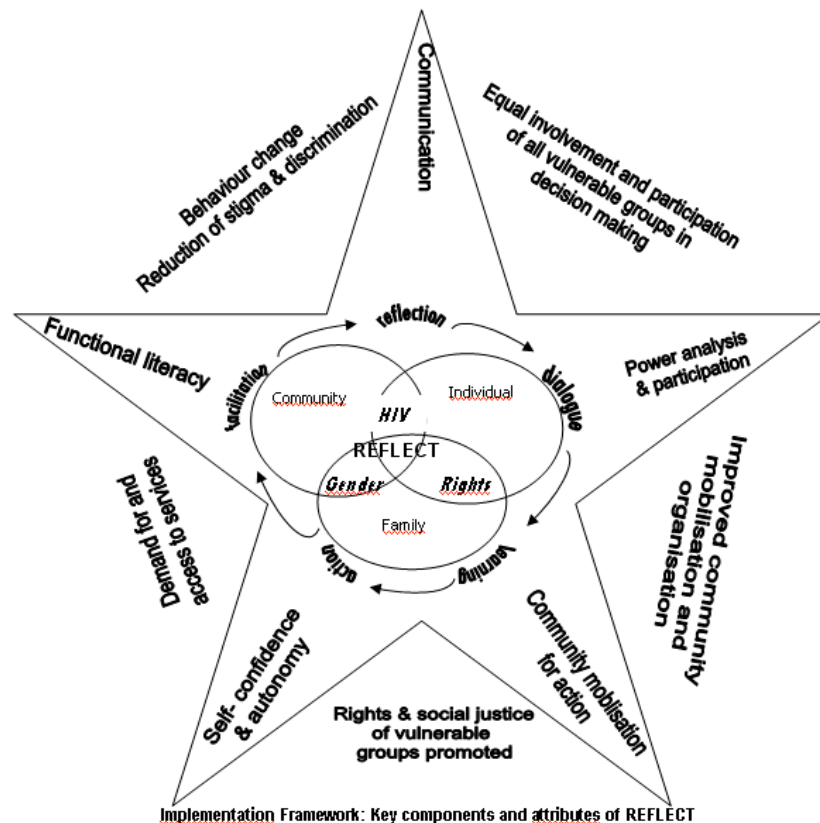
### Synthesis

How do we integrate and provide an opportunity for vulnerable and marginalised poor communities to participate in decision-making and shape their own destinies? REFLECT provides a solution and an effective platform for vulnerable poor rural people who are normally excluded to be involved and actively participate in development of their society and give them a sense of belonging. It promotes functional literacy and participatory development.

### Objective :

The purpose of the REFLECT(1) approach is to empower and enable communities to participate actively in problem identification, analysis and to develop practical solutions to address them. The approach aims at bringing about social change and learning through providing a democratic platform for debate and dialogue at community level.

### Methodology :



- (1) The acronym, REFLECT stands for REgenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques. It is a comprehensive and an innovative community empowering approach to social change and learning. It fuses theories of Paulo Freire (Brazilian Educationist) with participatory approaches. [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org)



Literacy classes as above have improved literacy and other communication skills among illiterate adults in Traditional Authority Msamala, Balaka District, Malawi.



Portable stoves (above), afforestation and natural resource conservation projects, microbusinesses and village savings and loans groups, among others, have evolved from the REFLECT process in the project area.

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REFLECT is implemented through village meetings and adult literacy classes normally known as circles, with facilitation of trained local volunteers. The process uses participatory tools aimed at promoting self-reflection and action.

Community issues identified during baseline survey are integrated in the facilitator's user guide. The projects developed through this process may be implemented independently through self-help initiatives, or with external support from the project implementing organization or through linkage to other service providers including government departments.

### **Benefits of the Approach**

REFLECT empowers groups normally socially excluded (including the illiterate poor) to engage in wider community processes of development and social change, enabling them to participate in problem analysis and developing practical solutions to improve their lives.

In CU's Msamala project these include afforestation and natural resource conservation, portable stove production, micro-enterprises, village savings and loans and home solar systems.

Other benefits include developing functional literacy, which in turn increases willingness of the newly literate to send their own children to school, improves communication skills and increases the self-confidence and autonomy of the marginalized vulnerable groups, mostly women, to contribute to community development.

### **Results**

- 1,478 illiterate adults (85 men and 1,393 women) have now become literate, reducing adult illiteracy by 6.2% in the project area
- 21 stove production groups have been established and 110 stove marketers retail fuel-efficient wood burning stoves with over 15,524 stoves in use by households
- 147 village savings and loans associations established (membership 68% women) and €30,000 in savings mobilized
- Planting of over 6 million trees
- Conservation of 440 ha of village forest areas
- Establishment of 45 bee-keeping groups and 15 vegetable processing groups, improving livelihoods for vulnerable people.

### **Sources**

**Concern Universal** Interim Evaluation Report, 2011 and Annual Progress Report, 2011, and [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org)