



THE REGENERATED FREIREAN LITERACY THROUGH EMPOWERING COMMUNITY TECHNIQUE (REFLECT) APPROACH AS AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE FOR FUNCTIONAL LITERACY AND SOLUTION TO COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

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MEAS HRD Case Study Series, # 10

Introduction

"Education for all" (EFA) is a pledge that Burkina Faso made to address educational issues, following the recommendations of the World Conference on Education in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990. This pledge is in line with the millennium development goals (MDGs), which advocate the creation of an environment conducive for development and poverty eradication. Education is central to the achievement of these goals (Kam, et al., 2010). However, carrying out such commitments effectively requires addressing shortcomings of the educational system such as lack of access, low quality, and irrelevance. The scenarios that were developed after the general assessment of education in 1994 -- for example, the implementation of the Ten-year Plan for the Development of Primary Education (PDDEB), have attempted to overcome the central factors that hinder the improvement of the educational system (PDDEB, 2001).

The state and civil society have collaborated to make significant progress toward achieving goals in the non-formal educational sector. The non-formal subsystem includes all activities in the non-school context to increase literacy, training and development of a literate environment (MEBA, 2007). A national strategy -- "make-do strategy" -- that spells out the role of each actor has allowed them to work according to their abilities and skills in the joint effort to achieve educational goals. The civil society has thus been given the opportunity to participate in evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes and right to education for all and mobilization of resources from the communities (Kam et al., 2010).

Despite the efforts made by the state, the educational system indicators, especially those of the non-formal subsystem, remain low. For example, a literacy rate as low as 28.4 percent was observed in 2006. The REFLECT literacy approach is among the efforts to contribute to the search for quality non-formal educational delivery. REFLECT is an English acronym for "Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques," which is translated into French as *Alphabétisation Freirienne Régénérée à travers les Techniques de Renforcement des Capacités et Pouvoirs*

Communautaires (Pamoja-Afrique at www.pamoja-west-africa.org).

REFLECT is a training approach that empowers learners to develop entrepreneurial and team spirit to solve their problems. REFLECT is practiced on a transnational scale and remains one of the few non-formal educational approaches that link people in several African countries and others in various parts of the world. A platform for dialogue and advocacy called Pamoja has been created at the continental level (Pamoja Africa) to connect national networks including Pamoja-Burkina (Pamoja Africa Reports, 2006).

This case study attempts to highlight the most valuable aspects of the REFLECT approach as promoted in Burkina Faso. It is an approach that facilitates development of life skills useful for transforming literacy into a sustainable development tool.

Background

In Burkina, the introduction of REFLECT began in 1998 through the presentation of the approach to the Association of the Promotion of Non-formal Education (APENF, supported by ACTION AID. APENF opened nine experimental centers in three languages -- Moore, Jula, Fulfulde -- with technical and financial support from the Literacy/Training Program of the Swiss Development Cooperation in Burkina in 2001. Of the 290 people who benefited from the training, 60 percent were women. The demand for establishment of more REFLECT programs is growing rapidly because of the positive results achieved in the field (Study Report on the AENF formulas and practices, 2008).

REFLECT centers are financed by the Fund for Literacy and Non-formal Education (FONAENF), which is a national non-formal fund in Burkina since the 2008 campaign. In 2009, the number of centers reached 1,085, including 872 centers that were funded by the FONAENF and 213 managed by the APENF with support from the Swiss Cooperation. Currently, about 1,500 REFLECT literacy centers are created per year which are serving at least 45,000 people, of whom more than half are women (MENA Report, 2011). The growing demand for REFLECT centers exceeds the current capacity. This

demonstrates the relevance of the approach in encouraging the real empowerment of the learners.

Challenges Encountered and Solutions Found

The REFLECT approach was introduced to address the concerns of the prospective clients of literacy programs, who were frustrated by the inadequacy of the formal, public educational system, which focused on repetition of information and is not responsive to the expectations of prospective clients as citizens and actors in their own development (Faundez and Mugrab, 2004). In fact, learners of literacy centers remarked that learning was very theoretical, focusing on learning codes and not on relevant topics that meet their specific needs. With Reflect, participants learn the meaning of words and concepts first and then how to write them. Support for vocational training was inaccessible or inadequate. Learners were interested in literacy and aimed to acquire skills to increase productivity, solidarity and reinvestment of experiences back to the community to solve problems in the community through exchange of experience and motivation.

The REFLECT approach is perceived as an innovative and responsive approach that:

- Places the learner in the center of his/her learning process and enables him/her to develop his/her potential skills. Unlike the formal education system, the teaching/learning is done in the local language to facilitate access for the majority of learners.
- Discusses community concerns using the Accelerated Method for Participatory Research (MARP) tools such as the discussion tree, the preferred method of classification, diagrams, planning and implementation of solutions and experiences at individual, family and community levels. Learners are organized into small groups to monitor the achievements at all levels. Observations, checklists or interview guides are used to collect data to provide feedback during the exchange meetings with communities.
- Creates and develops mutual solidarity among members of a community to preserve their interests and assert their rights.

The REFLECT approach is based on a solid but basic diagnostic process that allows learners at each center to identify the major problems from their perspective, analyze, prioritize and plan the implementation of solutions to identified problems. After that, a training program ("study plan") is developed. The study plan is a reference document that provides all the topics to be addressed, the activities to be performed by the learners and facilitator of the center, the appropriate equipment to be used, and also lists the tasks to be evaluated by the facilitator to assess learner skills. The study plan is specific to each center because it takes the needs of the community into account.

The problems that learners and communities are not able to solve are developed into a planning contract called "Ideas for Action". Ideas for action contain commitments and detail information for further consideration and solution. The information contained in "Ideas for Action" is transformed into development projects. Monitoring committees are formed to seek funding to implement the projects. These reinvestments and commitments of learners and communities enable them to solve their problems.

The REFLECT approach allows communities to initiate a dialogue on major challenges affecting them that eventually will lead to finding solutions that will improve on the livelihood of the population. The development of capabilities to read, write, count and address sociocultural issues and environmental challenges start with the teaching/learning process that focuses on the needs of communities.

The implementation of literacy programs using the REFLECT approach is not immune to organizational and pedagogical challenges. Among the challenges confronting effective implementation of REFLECT are:

- Inadequate training of the facilitators of the centers. The rudimentary nature and short duration of preparation for the training limits the ability of these actors to truly serve as facilitators. The training curricula are often weak, and sessions are sometimes poorly implemented. Ultimately, the concerns of communities are not being fully taken into consideration. The ongoing functional training infrastructure that was established is expected to address these problems.
- Lack of ideas for action. Indeed, in the absence of ideas for action, REFLECT cannot claim to be an enabling and dynamic method.
- Lack of funds to implement identified ideas for action means that projects capable of generating substantial resources could not be implemented.

Success Factors

The main factors of success of REFLECT programs are:

- The teaching / learning (study plan) programs are built out of the needs of beneficiaries. The development of problem diagnosis before learning enables actors to adapt the topic to the real concerns of beneficiaries. This makes learning more motivating, participatory and empowering.
- Learners actively participate in the teaching/learning process. The learner is the key player for his/her own learning process. This is in line with the suggestion expressed by Pauli Freire in his book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* -- to make the learner the focus of learning (Freire, 1983).
- The learning process links theory to practice. This facilitates the acquisition of skills by the beneficiaries to use instruments to achieve technical efficiency;

- Learning in the first year is achieved without the spelling book. This eliminates memorization by the learners. (Memorization does not necessarily mean mastery or control of subject.)
- Participatory tools such as the Active Method of Participative Research (MARP) and Gender and Development (GED) encourage participation and ownership of the knowledge acquired by learners.
- The active participation of the community in the teaching/learning process builds a relationship between the center and village to discuss socioeconomic and cultural issues.
- The approach combines development and literacy. This is possible through the reinvestment of learning (knowledge, know-how), including the implementation of ideas for action, technical training and development of local dynamics.
- The development of a literate environment contributes to the sustainability of teaching / learning achievements.
- The actors responsible for monitoring and evaluation and trainers are retrained regularly

Lessons That Could be Applied Elsewhere

- The MARP and GED tools could be used by training institutions to conduct an in-depth basic diagnosis.
- The involvement of beneficiaries in the learning process facilitates the commitment of the beneficiaries in the process, active participation and community empowerment.
- The development of the teaching / learning topics (study plan) taking needs of the beneficiaries into account will lead to quality teaching.
- Combining literacy training with development facilitates the application of acquired experiences (Niameogo, 1998).
- Theory and practice should be aligned in the teaching/learning process to promote the ownership of knowledge.
- Developing a literate environment (production of training materials by learners, which can be communicated to a larger audience) contributes to the sustainability of learning experiences.
- Investment in ongoing retraining of facilitators and trainers can enhance the quality of teaching/learning.

Conclusions

The REFLECT approach has become one of the most important educational alternatives used in non-formal education in Burkina. It takes into account community concerns and facilitates the mastery of technical and instrumental knowledge needed to develop skills for socioeconomic development.

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This Case Study was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development, USAID. The contents are the responsibility of the MEAS Consortium and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Technical editing by Leslie Johnson, Michigan State University, and production by Andrea Bohn, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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January 2013 - MEAS Case Study Series on
Human Resource Development in Agricultural
Extension

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