

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE MALAWI-REFLECT PROGRAMME AND THE UGANDA-FAL PROGRAMME AND A SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE STRATEGIES.

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AUGUST 2008



Malawi: Balamanja circle



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This report has been kept very brief; reference should be made to the country reports for fuller details of each section.

The views in this report are those of the author and not necessarily those of his research team or of ICEIDA.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 I was asked by ICEIDA to make a comparative study of the ICEIDA-supported adult literacy programmes in Malawi and Uganda. This is a process review, not an evaluation. I looked at the ways both programmes are running, and in separate country reports have made suggestions for improvement in each of them. This report brings together the two country reports comparatively and then again suggests ways in which these programmes can be developed over a longer term.

1.2 What is given here is a very brief summary of my arguments; for fuller treatment of any issue, please refer to the country reports which contain detailed evidence for statements made here.

1.3 It is best to start with a very brief profile of each programme as I see them. This is followed by a comparative section with recommendations for development of the two programmes.



Uganda: Kasenyi



Malawi: Mbinda

2. MALAWI: MONKEY BAY REFLECT PROGRAMME (MBRP).

2.1 The climate in Malawi is one of very substantial dependency which has been created in part by the political system and in part by some over-zealous aid provision.

2.2 There is in the country at large a lack of expertise in modern insights in literacy and numeracy. The 'autonomous' model of literacy is the model used and studied by all agencies in the country including the Ministry. The New Literacy Studies (Papen 2005) with the concept of 'the plurality of literacy' (UNESCO 2007) and the literature on literacy indicating that the formal literacy taught in the classroom and REFLECT circles is very different from the informal literacies of the home, the market, the workplace, the church/mosque/temple, although more commonly known in other parts of Africa, are unknown in Malawi except among one or two members of staff of Chancellor College.

2.3 The ICEIDA-supported programme is a REFLECT programme in Monkey Bay under the auspices of the Ministry of Women and Community Development. While there is considerable interest and support at the centre, the organisation is done at District level through the Community Development Assistants.

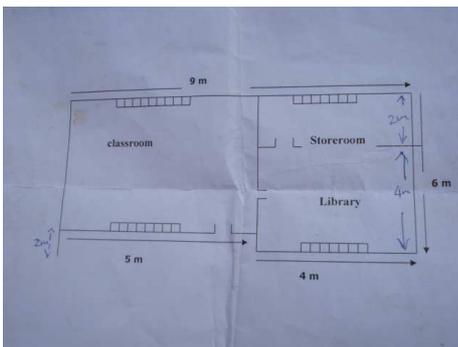
2.4 REFLECT: REFLECT is a programme which aims to empower local groups to engage in transformative development and in the process to learn literacy (and numeracy). The aim of the programme is to be **as unlike school as possible** – a *circle* open to all members of the community debate local development problems (using PRA and graphics to help the discussion) and decide on and implement action points with the aim of transforming their village society. The circle would be under the leadership of a *facilitator* with a facilitators' manual; the facilitator will have been extensively trained for this purpose. For those members of the group who do not possess literacy and numeracy skills, literacy will be learned through the action points. This approach to literacy learning which developed in the late 1990s was agreed as a suitable approach for Malawi by all those involved in adult literacy (Ministry, donors and NGOs) at the time this project was launched (2000-2001).

The result is that a number of REFLECT circles have been formed in the Monkey Bay region and most of these have persisted; in some cases, circles have ceased to function but in most of these cases, new circles have been launched. The persistence of the circles is the most impressive feature of this programme.

But this achievement has been made at the expense of some features of REFLECT.



2.5 Conformist development: The programme is located in the Ministry's National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP), along with other REFLECT and functional adult literacy programmes provided in association with NGOs. Working with NGOs and aid agencies was welcomed by the Ministry since these bodies were seen to have more immediate financial resources than the NALP possessed. But because of this location, two things happened. The first is that the use of the CDAs means that the transformative element in REFLECT has been commuted into what the Ministry calls 'safe development'; as the Ministry acknowledge, the radical goals of REFLECT (including gender issues) have become muted. As currently practised, MBRP is based on the view that the cause of under-development lies, not in the structures of society but in the ignorance or traditional patterns of life of the villagers, especially the illiterate; if they change, all will be well. And so far, all the action points have been community development projects aimed at the benefit of the village rather than individual or family poverty relief; but there is growing demand for livelihood training for individuals or small (partnership) groups.



2.6 The priority of literacy: In many of the villages, the REFLECT programme is seen primarily as a literacy learning programme rather than a community development programme. This helps to explain why in these villages only women attend; few men apparently wish to confess to the need to learn literacy. In other villages where REFLECT is seen more as a community development activity, more men join.

2.7 Like school: Secondly, REFLECT is meant to be *process-oriented*, exposing its circle members to a range of activities without specifying the outcomes. The NALP on the other hand is *product-oriented*, aiming at pre-set targets of the numbers of persons 'made literate' through a process of adult schooling. The resulting compromises are that the REFLECT literacy circles in Malawi are run in some respects like formal adult literacy classes with registers of attendance, with meeting times and terms set by the CDAs, and the language of schools such as 'classes' being used - but without a textbook and (initially at least) without formal tests. What is more, gradually over time, in MBRP informal tests and then formal tests and certificates have been introduced with a concomitant concept of 'graduates' (a concept which is opposed to what REFLECT stands for, consisting as it does of people who are seen to have finished their 'schooling' rather than remaining as on-going REFLECT circle members engaged in a community development project); and with this, requests from some of these graduates for progression into further 'courses' with textbooks have been growing. What is meant to be a long-term non-formal development group is being turned into a more formal programme of adult education classes with

short-term 'courses'. The action points have come to serve the literacy rather than the literacy serving the action points.

2.8 The choice of learning words: This growth of a school model in the REFLECT circles can be seen most clearly in the process now adopted in all of the circles that we saw (although there may be some circles which do not follow this process). The fundamental principle of REFLECT is that a group of adults learns its literacy from and through a development programme which **they** decide on and implement; there is no textbook, the learners learning literacy through their own activities in the development project. But in the Monkey Bay programme, the village meeting (with no fixed membership) debates, decides and (often with the Village REFLECT/Circle Management Committee) implements the development action points, not the literacy learners. The village meeting and/or the VRC/CMC with the facilitator choose a number of words for the learners to learn; the learners choose from two or three words given to them. It is assumed (against the principles of REFLECT) that illiterate women cannot know what they should learn in literacy.



2.9 The circle meetings have thus become to some extent like adult classes with a register of attendance and complaints about the disturbances of children and late comers. Circle members have attended these 'classes' for up to four or five years but without making any progress into further forms of learning; the demand for progression has not been matched with provision for progression. The teaching methods we saw consisted only of choosing individual words (mostly nouns and nearly all abstract, such as 'rights', 'democracy' and 'problem') and breaking them down into syllables **without any discussion** of when and how these words would be used or what they mean (whereas Freire used the term 'generative word' to mean words which generated intense and in-depth discussion about the world they lived in, leading to action, as well as developing new words through syllabic construction, in Monkey Bay 'generative word' means any decontextualised word which can be used to generate other words, also decontextualised, leading to exercise books filled with unconnected words rather than full sentences). The graphics were only occasionally used in the literacy learning circles but more frequently in the village meeting.

No other materials were used in the literacy learning circles. We saw no 'creative literacy' (literacy learners writing their own sentences or other texts) at all (see Malawi case studies for examples).

2.10 Limited achievements: The result of this change within MBRP is that – in the case studies we examined in depth – over a period of five or six years there have been very few clear achievements. We saw few signs that the project has led to increased literacy usage or relief of poverty in this area.

a) There has been virtually no effective literacy learning. Apart from signing their names, the 'graduates' we met were not using the schooled literacy of the classroom in their daily lives; and the action points did not use literacy in them.

a) A number of action points have been completed, but the action points we saw or heard about came from a very narrow range of subjects (e.g. bridges and road clearance) and many of them (e.g. malaria) consisted of exhortations to the villagers to change their ways of living. The main achievement in many villages has been the building of 'learning shelters' (which the circles call 'schools'). These forms of village development are rarely linked to the District Development Plan (e.g. tourism) or to other sector development (health, agriculture, fisheries, water supply etc). The village society has not been transformed by REFLECT – it may be that in some villages the obligation to make the village head the chairman of the VRC/CMC will hold back structural change in that community.

2.11 The changing programme: MBRP has then gradually changed over time into a more formal adult literacy class provision, without a textbook but taking the government tests and awarding certificates leading to a demand for more 'courses', especially in English and small business training. At the same time, there is a growing demand for a programme of livelihood training (no mention has been made of putting literacy into that training) to expand the range of action points available to the circles.

2.12 Bringing the programme back to REFLECT: The programme can be rescued by three things:

a) by bringing back the programme to a true REFLECT - by getting the **literacy learners** to debate, decide on and **implement** a (long-term group) development project and **to learn the literacy practices embedded within that project**. This will become easier now that it has been agreed that livelihoods can feature in this programme.

b) by bringing in a **specialist** in adult literacy to advise on that aspect of the programme. Unlike other sectors of development such as health or water engineering, there is an absence of qualified staff with expertise and experience of modern understandings of adult literacy and its learning such as work-based, family or community literacy approaches. In particular, the process of word-breaking which forms only a small part of adult literacy learning methodologies needs to be supplemented with more modern approaches such as whole language experience (see Appendix below). An expert should be attached to this programme and some staff sent for training in the newer approaches to literacy.

c) In addition, more understanding of how to teach **adults** is needed throughout the programme rather than using primary school methodologies. The teaching we saw was more appropriate to children than to adults.

3. UGANDA



3.1 Climate: There is in Uganda a much greater sense of initiative and less dependency than in Malawi. There is also growing awareness among some NGOs (UGAADEN; LABE) and at Makerere University of the newer approaches to adult literacy as social practice (the New Literacy Studies) (see 2.2 above) as seen in publications and workshops in the country. The Ministry too is interested in these new developments but not yet skilful in them. But such views are not yet penetrating the programme to any significant degree.

3.2 Programmes: The ICEIDA Uganda programme provides support to the government's Functional Adult Literacy Programme (FALP) in Kalangala and Buvuma islands by supporting its two one-year basic stages (FAL 1 and FAL 2) and extending these by offering an English course (EFA) and a Small Business Course (SBC). New materials have been prepared for the latter two programmes. The EFA programme is starting again with new materials and thus was left out of this process review, but the SBC formed a major part of the review. EFA and SBC have been running for two years or more in Kalangala and have just started in Buvuma. Unlike Malawi, this programme does not seek to change the government programme but to implement it as it stands, using the national textbooks at FAL 1 and FAL 2 stages (apparently a new primer has been developed at FAL 2 stage specifically for the islands but I did not see any of these in use). FAL 1 consists largely of basic literacy, FAL 2 of rather more 'functionality'. Tests were taken and certificates issued.

3.3 Functionality: There is great uncertainty about the meaning of 'functionality' in the programme. In the primers, it consists of four elements: community development aimed at getting messages (especially health and nutrition) over and infrastructure building for the benefit of the whole village (e.g. latrines); livelihoods (especially agriculture); group formation; and civic participation. Classes have been formed with the aim to run these as more informal groups engaged in some long-term project(s), most of them livelihood projects. The projects we saw came from a very limited range of development, mainly individual or small group livelihoods but some whole class projects.

3.4 There is **lack of clarity** about the relationship between the literacy learning and the functional elements. Literacy was not used in any of the projects, and many of the graduates we met from these classes did not use the formal literacy of the classroom in their everyday lives, although some did. The literacy learning outcomes seem to be weak, largely because that is not what the participants want – they want livelihoods. The literacy of the textbooks is not the literacy of the projects or of daily life.

3.5 Like school: The programme is explicitly school-like – with set terms, examinations, the language of 'class', 'learners' and 'instructors', and the use of textbooks. Specifically **adult** ways of teaching are not strong although in practice some are to be seen in several classes, especially the SBC. Because of the school-like atmosphere in this programme, there is a strong sense of

progression; and the various levels of certificates awarded are being challenged to establish their equivalency with schooling and their marketable value in terms of jobs.

3.6 Other features: In addition to literacy learning and development projects, this programme is also developing a number of other initiatives such as credit and savings programmes; and it is encouraging some wider debate about literacy. An association of instructors is very active.



3.7 EFA and SBC: There is little literacy provision in EFA and virtually none in SBC, it being assumed that the learners at these levels will have adequate literacy skills to cope with the writing tasks of their business activities. The SBC has elaborate materials, flip charts, a comic book, a learner workbook and recorded tapes to be played. But as with FAL, the SBC classes are dominated by the textbooks provided. In both FAL and SBC programmes, no other materials are brought into the classes/circles, either by the CDOs, the facilitators/instructors or by the learners/participants, although I understand some are brought into the EFA classes.

4. COMPARATIVE STUDY.

4.1 The similarities between the two programmes are very striking.

4.2 Both are working with government at local level, and, through similar approaches to decentralisation, both have with a good deal of autonomy to develop the programme as the organisers feel fit.

4.3 Both have been very successful in creating and especially in maintaining over a period of years a growing network of groups of men and women (mainly women) in some of the more remote villages. These groups form a useful entry point for other development initiatives.

4.4 PURPOSE

4.4.1 Both programmes seek to help adults to learn literacy in association with something else – with community development (Malawi) and with functionality/livelihoods (Uganda).

4.4.2 But both are characterised by substantial amounts of uncertainty among all the staff involved about the **primary** purpose of the programme:

- Is its main goal literacy or other forms of economic and social/community development? If, as in Uganda, there is a good deal of livelihood development activity but no literacy, is this success or failure? If in Malawi there is substantial advance in community development (or now livelihoods) but no advance in literacy, is this failure?
- And which form of development? should it be community development projects as it has been so far in Malawi or individual or group livelihood projects as in Uganda?

The key question is - what are the measures of success?

These questions need to be clarified with the appropriate government body.

4.4.3 Both programmes lack specialist expertise in adult literacy – which is the reason why both programmes are using an autonomous model of literacy and numeracy, not the social practices model of literacy and numeracy as seen in the New Literacy Studies. The autonomous model seeks to transfer the formal literacy and numeracy of the classroom out into daily life rather than bringing the informal literacies and numeracies of the everyday into the classroom. This accounts for the failure of many people to put the formal literacy they have been taught into practice in their daily lives. ***In both countries, there is an urgent need at field level to use the services of a specialist in new ways of thinking about and practising adult literacy,*** to be used in similar ways as experts brought in for health and water development programmes.

4.4.4 This lack of expertise and thus of effective and relevant *adult* approaches to learning literacy may explain why, in both countries, the people taking the programme are far more interested in the developmental activities than they are in learning the formal literacy skills offered by the programme. The graduates do not use this formal literacy in their daily lives; the livelihood and community development projects which both programmes encourage do not have any literacy practices in them. In literacy terms, what is learned in the classroom and what the groups do outside are entirely different. ***The literacy being learned must relate directly to the group project, not to a generalised literacy, not just in terms of single words but in terms of the project activities.***

4.4.5 Both have frankly appalling numeracy teaching; ***numeracy teaching needs radical overhaul by an specialist in 'adults learning maths' (see website).***

4.5 PARTICIPANTS

4.5.1 Both programmes have been successful in using the radio to advertise the programme and its achievements.

4.5.2 In both countries, more women than men come to the programme, although Uganda has more men in the classes than Malawi has in the circles. Both programmes recruit more of the fairly well educated and the not-so-poor than the illiterate and very poor. And very strikingly, both programmes are heavily Christian to the possible exclusion of Muslims, mirroring each society in general. ***In both countries, targeted literacy learning groups should be introduced (e.g. for fishermen, for women with young children, for oil palm growers etc) with literacy activities related specifically to that group rather than generalised.*** There is a demand for literacy from specific groups such as fishermen.

4.5.3 The priority of literacy: In many of the villages, the REFLECT programme is seen primarily as a literacy learning programme rather than a community development programme. This explains why in these villages only women attend. In villages where REFLECT is seen more as a community development programme, more men join.

4.5.4 Venues: Both countries have a problem with the provision of suitable venues. The learners in all programmes are required to provide these venues – to pay for the building of a shelter where such shelter does not exist and is felt to be necessary. In both countries, the participants/learners are being urged by the CDOs/CDAs to build almost identical learning shelters at their cost; where this is not possible, groups meet in the open air or in any venue which can be pressed into service, often the facilitator/instructor's home. This is a major deterrent for many people preventing them from participating; and there are clear signs of learning groups in both countries ceasing to exist because of inadequate provision of venues (see country reports). The use of sub-standard venues is the single most important factor in creating the very worst conditions for learning, inhibiting the effectiveness of the programme. For in both countries, there are strong negative attitudes towards the 'illiterate', even among the government officials who are working with them; and the use of poor venues strengthens the feeling that adult education is an insignificant programme, unworthy of resources. Whether seen as a development project or a literacy learning programme, ***adult groups need and deserve the provision of some appropriate meeting place.*** It is impossible (in my opinion) to justify requiring learners or circle members to pay for their accommodation.

4.6 PROCESS: LITERACY LEARNING

4.6.1 Both – under the combined pressure of the organisers (especially the CDOs/CDAs), the facilitators/instructors and the learners/circle participants themselves - have become like primary schools. This can be seen in the seating arrangements, teacher-centred learning (without class discussion, except in Uganda SBC), in class conduct (putting up hands to answer questions), marking of exercises etc. This is true even of the MBRP despite REFLECT's inherent opposition to formal schooling. Adult approaches to learning are not much in evidence, more in Uganda than in Malawi. Both are very tied to the materials available – in Malawi, to the facilitators' manual, in Uganda to the primers; neither programme brings any other teaching-learning materials into the classes/circles. ***Both need urgent training in more appropriate ways of teaching adults, encouraging the learners to share their experience with other members of the class/circle.***

4.6.2 Both programmes are meant to base their teaching on pictures/graphics from which text follows. In practice, neither does this. The Malawi graphics are rarely used in the circle for learning literacy; they do not lead to group discussion; and *single words* only are drawn from the graphic. The Uganda textbooks also provide pictures, but *sentences* are drawn from these pictures, not single words. However, these pictures are not often used in the teaching as they are too small and too indistinct (***a useful project would be to provide these illustrations in the form of laminated flip chart sheets***). In neither case are the learners encouraged to make up their own *sentences* about the picture (what is called 'creative literacy') and learn literacy from their own words. ***The facilitators/instructors need to be helped to encourage the literacy learners to engage in discussion in class, to write down statements from those discussions and to learn literacy from their own statements, not from individual isolated words.***

4.6.3 Both the circles and the classes are characterised by multigrade teaching; there are beginners and people who have been in the centre for up to four years or even more, all learning the same material. In the current mode of teacher-centred teaching, this mixed grouping hinders learning, for the teacher neglects one group while working with the other. But the mixed nature of the group can be a great help, if the more advanced members, working in small groups, can help the less advanced members, with the teacher circulating and providing assistance. We saw no small group work at all during the visit and we understand from our discussions that small group work is very rare in both countries. ***The instructors/facilitators need to learn how to work in small groups with their learners, so that through peer learning the more advanced can help those who are less advanced and in the process the more advanced will learn yet more.***

4.6.4 The pace of learning in all the programmes we saw was too slow with resulting boredom of the learners; the ability of adults to learn fast what they want to learn has been seriously underestimated. ***The facilitators/instructors need to learn to move faster and to keep the interest of the learners.***

4.6.5 In neither programme is there any concern to build up the literacy environment, to examine the informal literacies of the community and see how they can be used for learning literacy, to encourage the literacy learners to write in the community (see Appendix for examples of such activities). ***The literacy learning groups need to learn to collect literacy texts from their local communities*** (we saw that these exist) ***and to learn to write and read these.***

4.6.6 Both use the out-dated term 'post-literacy', implying an approach to literacy learning which sees it as a once-for-all-time 'injection' of skills rather than an on-going process of development. Both have exactly the same provision for 'post-literacy' – a tin trunk full of specially written booklets in formal literacy. These are not well patronised or effective. Modern approaches to 'post-literacy' (e.g. DFID 1994, 1999) have not yet affected these two programmes. Both see 'post-literacy' as the provision of 'easy readers' which implies a children's learning approach of concentrating more on reading than writing and of progressing from 'easy' texts to 'more difficult' texts rather than an adult approach of learning by using (writing in particular) *relevant* texts. This is one indicator of the out-of-date approach to literacy in both programmes because of the lack of specialist advice. ***Group writing will be more effective to advance literacy skills than the provision of 'easy readers'.***

4.6.7 A list of some thirty possible literacy learning activities is included below.

4.7 PROCESS: DEVELOPMENT

4.7.1 In both countries, under-development is seen as the fault of the poor, and development as a process whereby the poor and ignorant only need to change and all will be well. The deficit technical model of development rather than the critical model is the foundation for both programmes. There is no examination of the structural oppression that goes on or of ways to remedy it. Because of this, when the poor change and the situation remains the same (“I used to be illiterate and poor; now I am literate but still poor”), there is a sense of disillusion. Both programmes are based on the false beliefs that increased knowledge will lead automatically to behavioural change (the case of smoking disproves this) and that increased and improved production alone will bring some measure of prosperity. To teach a person to fish may help to feed the family but it will not necessarily overcome poverty, for that is caused more by the control of outlets exercised by the market than by lack of resources. Both programmes do not address with such issues. ***Both programmes need to take positive steps to encourage the learning groups to engage with systemic causes of their own poverty and to develop action plans to address these issues.***

4.7.2 In both programmes, the range of development activities is very narrow and focused largely on areas where the CDAs/CDOs are strongest. Expansion beyond these limits is made difficult by issues surrounding other extension staff allowances which are very similar in both countries. In both programmes, the circles/classes find it difficult to obtain external assistance with training, expert advice and resources for the projects. Only in Uganda is some credit available to the groups, a provision which although small at the moment is growing. The development activities do not tie up with the District Development Plans or with major regional developments in either country (e.g. tourism in both countries). There are no links between these activities and the other sector development programmes (even when working in the same villages) except in health, and these other sectoral development programmes include no literacy in them. However, in both programmes, the circles/classes have (to a limited extent) become entry points for other developmental sectors; this should be built upon. ***Group projects should be enabled to link with regional/district development plans and be encouraged to use other development staff for advice and support. And literacy should be introduced into other ICEIDA sectoral development (e.g. irrigation; fishery development; health; agricultural programmes etc).***

In one centre, we were told the members wanted to start a vegetable garden. We were shown the plot of land but it had not been dug. When we asked why not, we were told they “had not been allowed” to start work on it. We explored why. It turned out that the CD staff and the agricultural extension staff could not agree who should supervise the project because of fear of losing allowances. So nothing had been done: and the centre members did not feel able to go ahead without such approval. Far from being empowered, this village group was oppressed by the staff of the various Ministries by being prevented from doing what it wanted to do. This was common in both countries.

4.7.3 In neither country is there any discussion of the wider factors which affect the viability of these projects such as transport and marketing, the role of middlemen etc. The projects are seen as simple technical training. There is little pre-production market research to see what is needed and viable, or post-production training on usage, storage and marketing. ***Discussion in the learning groups (rather than more generally in the village as in Malawi) is vital to their health, especially the sharing of the experiences, insights, perceptions of the learners; these discussions must not be dominated by the facilitator/instructor.***

4.8 PROCESS: PERSONNEL

4.8.1 Both lack expertise in literacy (see above 2.2, and 3.1), and this lack of specialist knowledge and experience shows. ***Specialist help with literacy and numeracy is urgently needed.***

4.8.2 Because of this, it is widely recognised in both programmes that inadequate training for the facilitators/ instructors is being provided. The extended training which Malawi initially felt necessary for the REFLECT facilitators has been reduced to the same as NALP instructors. In Uganda too, the initially extended training has been cut back by lack of resources. ***Much more – but above all, much better - training and on-going support are necessary for these people who are highly committed and often able but isolated.***

4.8.3 Both programmes have developed an association of instructors/facilitators. KAFIA in Uganda is more active and is developing a credit scheme; the association in Malawi exists but is at the moment inactive. ***Both country associations need more support.***

4.8.4 There are many indications of limited community support for both circles and classes. Both have local committees of which the chief feature is their inactivity (with some notable exceptions in both countries). But they have no resources and their responsibilities are limited; in many cases, membership of these is seen as an obligation rather than an opportunity. To revive them, they need more work to do (not less) and more resources to do it with. This will attract a more able and more committed person to CMC/VFC membership. ***I recommend strengthening and resourcing of the village support committees so that they can make and implement decisions about training and project implementation in the circles/classes.***

4.8.5 In both programmes, supervision is seen as inspection rather than support and mentoring. ***The CDAs/CDOs need intensive training in support approaches.***

4.8.6 In both programmes, the report forms (monthly in Malawi, quarterly in Uganda) ask the instructors/facilitators to provide similar statistics which they do on an inadequate basis, with the result that the statistics are inaccurate and some are meaningless. ***Narrative reports from circle facilitators/class instructors would be more useful and accurate data should be collected.***

5. DIFFERENCES

5.1 What then are the key differences which both countries could benefit from?

5.2 The first and most obvious is that Malawi does not use a textbook, while Uganda does. But the facilitators in Malawi use the REFLECT manual like a textbook. And if (as suggested above) both were to bring other materials into the class/circle for learning, wherever those texts came from, this difference would diminish; and some of the circles in Malawi already use school textbooks at the request of the participants. ***Both programmes need to learn to use the words of the learners and to bring anything (especially books which the Malawi circle participants never handle except at the so-called 'post-literacy' stage) into the circle.***

5.3 The teaching methods we saw in Uganda show much greater awareness of adult learning principles, seeking to draw on the experience of the learners. This was not always the case but it

was a feature of several of the classes we saw. ***Malawi needs to start developing ways of adult teaching; word-crunching is not an adult learning process.***

5.4 The action points in Malawi are general short-term (often one-off) community development projects; the projects in Uganda are mainly livelihoods and long-term. The action points in Malawi are normally run by the village or a committee, the Uganda projects by the learners themselves. The short-term and community nature of the Malawi action points (e.g. building learning shelters) make them difficult to use for literacy learning; the long-term livelihood projects in Uganda are more appropriate for literacy learning although in practice they are not so used. ***Malawi needs to develop long-term projects on which the literacy learners work and from which they learn. Both need to put literacy into these projects.***

5.5 I would like to see Malawi drawing on the growing expertise in the New Literacy Studies approaches that is to be found in Uganda.

5.6 I would like Uganda to draw on the Malawi REFLECT ideology of 'circles' to break its school-like model of adult learning group – this is not appropriate for adults. This also applies to the REFLECT circles in Malawi in practice.

6. BUILDING A NEW STRATEGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION:

6.1.1 I start from the position that ICEIDA, as a bi-lateral agency, will be working with the respective governments and will seek to strengthen the capacity of government and other agencies at both central and local level to carry on the work after the donor intervention has ceased. This does mean that ICEIDA needs to be clear about its own objectives.

6.1.2 I am assuming that, because ICEIDA will be working with the respective Ministries, the primary concern in this programme will be with **literacy** – and with using some form of development projects for learning and using literacy. The test of the programme will be the increase of literacy use in the community.

6.1.3 I am taking literacy in its widest sense, to include both formal and informal literacies. There will be pressure to learn formal literacy in order to pass the test and supply the appropriate Ministry with statistics. But this form of literacy is more difficult for the participants to learn, for it does not relate to the literacies in their daily lives. I therefore propose that both programmes **start** with helping the participants to develop the informal literacies of a development project and move from that to the more formal and testable literacy.

6.1.4 While I set out below my strategy, I believe this should be run past the current facilitator associations to obtain their views on it and any adaptations that they may wish to make shall be taken into consideration.

6.1.5 I wish to see **a smaller, more intensively resourced and trained programme** rather than an extensive but shallower programme as at present. This will be more effective. The pressure for more numbers should be resisted. The programme should be supported for a limited number of years and support should be tapered out rather than cut off. The aim should be to make each learning group economically self-sustaining with literacy as an integral part of the project.

6.1.6 Appropriate venues must be provided from the start and paid for initially by the programme. Building a learning shelter can be a viable development project provided the funds for building it can be obtained from other group activities – but once achieved, it will not lead to a long-term sustainable project; and while the group is working on this project, they will need to have somewhere to meet and to learn literacy; this should not be done in the open air or in inappropriate accommodation.

7. PROJECT LITERACY.

7.1 I see a new literacy programme to be built out of the existing two literacy programmes in both countries; I call this revised programme **PROJECT LITERACY**

7.2 THE PROGRAMME:

I can see both ICEIDA programmes being built on much the same principles, as follows:

7.2.1 The project group

The focus will be on a group which is engaged on some relatively long-term developmental project or focused on some special common interest.

7.2.2 The group can be the **existing** circles in Malawi/classes in Uganda; or it can be a **new group**, one formed for this purpose or an already existing group (for example, a group within one of the other sectoral development programmes): as the leading UNESCO agency engaged in adult literacy has recently reported, "adult literacy programmes should work in partnership with organizations working in such areas as agriculture, animal husbandry, water development, forestry management and public health" (Ouane 2008 page v). It can be a women's group, a men's group or a mixed group. It will be formed either by **open recruitment** or by drawing on a **special interest group** such as fishermen or TBAs. But it will be necessary for it to have a **fixed membership** which can be marked by a very small subscription from each member which will go to the start-up costs of the project. Each member will share in the profits of the group.

7.2.3 The focus of the group will not be literacy learning, although that will be a major feature of the initial stages of the life of the group. The focus will be a **long-term development project** (e.g. poultry or pig rearing; vegetable, oil palm or fruit cultivation; building a bridge or a learning shelter) which will make the group economically self-sustaining over many years. Funding support to the group will be limited to the initial few years and will then be gradually withdrawn.

7.2.4 The group would be (as with UNDP in Malawi) a **mixed group** of 'literate' and 'non-literates'. But I do not propose that the non-literates be sent to a special literacy-learning group but that the whole group together learn the literacy practices of the project (keeping accounts and records of group decisions, reading texts about the project etc). Those who can already read and write will help the non-literate to learn these practices.

7.2.5 Some sense of **coherence** between groups engaged on different projects shall be built up and maintained in various ways; by a common programme title; by exchange visits, by a common or similar T-shirt with a slogan written by the participants, by a common newsletter sharing experiences which will be written by the group members.

7.2.6 I see each group being supported by a **village support group/committee (VSG)** which contains some members who are **not** members of the project group but not any ex officio members.

It may be argued that charging a small sum will exclude the very poor, both in terms of money and in terms of the image of the programme. I would answer two things to that: first, that the very poor do not come and will be on the whole unlikely to come; the existing members of both the circles and classes already spend money on items for the programme; and secondly, if this is found to happen, then the VSG and the community as a whole can be encouraged to raise funds to pay for some of the very poor to join the group.

7.3 THE GROUP PROJECT

7.3.1 Learning development: In order to help the group to choose a viable project, there will be an interesting pre-course stage. In this, I see the CDAs/CDOs (not at this stage a facilitator) running a short course with this group about the various kinds of 'development', the possibilities open to them. There will be some direct contact with the District Development Plan; there will also be some market research to see whether the chosen project is needed and whether its products will be marketable, what are the factors in society which will advance or militate against the project activity. Group formation will form part of this stage. Only after this has been done and a written proposal for the project has been received from the whole group (e.g. signed by everyone) will the group be resourced.

7.3.2 The project is most likely to be in one of the following two fields:

a) *social community development* – improving the community infrastructure (e.g. clean water supply and sanitation; irrigation; forestry users groups; health provision such as malaria control etc). The problem here is with funding this project and making the group economically self-sustaining.

b) *livelihoods* – a group (not an individual) income generation project – agriculture, fishing, production for the tourist market etc.

These two can of course come together – for example, many agricultural projects will require some form of water control (flood relief or irrigation); tree nurseries can be combined with other small scale farming projects etc. Some training projects can be directed to the employment field, for example TBA/midwifery training.

The projects will not be limited to the range of expertise or interests of the CDOs/CDAs. A very wide range of projects can be developed including working with other sector programmes of ICEIDA or other agencies.

7.3.3 I see **initial resources** being made available to the group and VSG; but after a time any funding shall be on a reciprocal basis, tapering to an end. The group will aim to become self-supporting within a reasonable time frame (say four years or less).

7.3.4 A **facilitator** shall be appointed who is relevant not just to literacy but to the project (e.g. a literate farmer, fisherman or TBA). Training of the facilitators on group leadership, adult teaching and project management (and development and literacy) shall be provided, not just once but several times during the life of the group. An active facilitator association and network shall be built up and resourced.

7.3.5 The facilitator (in association with the VSG and where appropriate with the CDOs/CDAs) shall be free to bring in any **specialist assistance and training** from any source throughout the programme, and not be restricted to the training and support available through the CDOs/CDAs.

7.3.6 Funding: If allowances need to be paid, funding shall be made available **to the group and/or VSG** for the first year or slightly longer for this purpose; after that, the group must generate enough funds to meet its own needs. An annual statement of accounts shall be submitted by the group, and where appropriate individual statements of project income and expenditure also be submitted.

7.4 PROJECT LITERACY

7.4.1 The programme in each country shall have the services of a **specialist in literacy as social practice**. This is essential for the effective functioning of the programme.

7.4.2 Literacy requirements will be written into the proposal. Each group will maintain a minute book of its meetings, and the minutes will be written up by different group members rather than one 'secretary'. Non-literate members will take their turn in 'writing' minutes **by mediation**. Other forms of writing will be required: e.g. written narrative (and illustrated) reports of the project at regular intervals together with an annual meeting; sight of the individual record books kept by each member of the group; written notices of the project and its products; publicity of the project inside the village, etc. The non-literate members of the group will participate in all the literacy practices of the group through mediation; mediation is to be seen as a supportive process, not a disadvantage, for over time it leads to the development of literacy skills (Kalman 1999; Mace 2002).

7.4.3 To assist the movement from the informal literacies of the project to the more formal 'schooled' literacy, **texts** relating to the project shall be provided by the CDOs/CDAs (not just once but throughout the life of the group) and by the facilitator/instructor/group leader and the group members themselves. These will be used to promote the project and shall form the basis of literacy learning for all members of the group. One meeting every week or every two weeks shall be a 'reading' meeting when such texts are read and discussed. Creative writing and other exercises need to be included. The members of the group, either individually or in small sub-groups, shall be encouraged to prepare (in written or oral/mediated form) extended narratives about the project.

7.4.4 A **critical dimension** must also be written into this project. Regular discussions of issues relating to gender, the economic and social structures affecting the project, legislation and regulations, etc shall be held and reported on (a written summary of every discussion shall be kept in the minutes of the group). It should be the responsibility of the CDOs/CDAs to ensure this is done; and the written summaries shall provide indication of discussions surrounding the project.

7.4.5 Access to NALP/FAL tests: For those who wish to take the NALP/FAL test and obtain a certificate, **a special short course shall be run each year**, using the textbooks written for the test; this will be open to anyone to take. The numbers of those within the group taking the test and obtaining the certificate will be part of the monitoring and assessment of the programme.

7.4.6 For those who wish to take an **English course**, EFA will continue to run in Uganda alongside this and EFA can be introduced in Malawi if the District agrees. I suggest that a short **SBC** be offered for any of the members of the group who wish to take it. EFA and SBC certificates can be offered alongside the NALP/FAL certificates.

7.4.7 Each year, **a written statement** from **every member** of the group will be required. Those whose literacy skills are inadequate for this task can provide such a statement through mediation in any form (e.g. by member of family, member of group or friend etc). In this way, the levels of literacy skills can be monitored. Mediation should be seen as a positive strategy for learning and not as a regrettable necessity.

7.4.8 A **report** will be kept by the facilitator of every member and the pieces of written work done by them. Every year he/she shall compile *with the group members* a statement of progress made in literacy activities. The aim is that every member shall maintain a written record of the project and its products.

7.5 DEVELOPING THE NEW STRATEGY

7.5.1 The measures of success

The following will be taken as measures of success for the programme

- The numbers of participants of the group and its meetings as recorded in the group minute book.
- The progress of the project as shown in the formal annual (narrative) report.
- Financial statements of income and expenditure of each project.
- The progress of the non-literate and other members of the group in literacy as revealed in their individual progress reports.
- The numbers taking and passing the NALP/FAL tests and certificates awarded.

7.5.2 Fitting in with the existing programmes: This strategy can fit in with the REFLECT ideology in Malawi, for in this programme, circles will be formed (but with a fixed membership), the literacy learners will choose and implement a project, and those circle members who need to learn literacy skills will be using the literacy activities of the project for the learning of literacy skills – all of which are part of the REFLECT circle ideology. In Uganda, this approach can be fitted into NALP-FAL if NALP will agree to the groups using the textbooks during a part of the programme rather than the whole, while the group engages on the project activities in other meetings.

7.5.3 If ICEIDA and the appropriate Ministry do not wish to start a completely new programme, the existing groups can be adapted in the following ways:

7.5.4 Malawi: The existing circles already consist of a mixed group of 'non-literate' and 'part-literate'. Each existing circle will fix its membership and each member will pay a small subscription (not much more than buying an exercise book and pencil). They can be asked to engage in discussion and debate on (local) development with assistance from the CDAs, using PRA and graphics if they so wish, and then **the group members** will choose a long-term group project which they will **implement**. They will then learn the literacy practices of that project. [The UNDP goat-rearing project did not learn the words for 'goat' or 'pen'. Our project literacy will start with such words but go on quickly to keeping a record of and writing narratives about the project and reading texts about the project, not just individual words]. The circle will eventually become self-sustaining economically. This will be fulfilling the intended REFLECT programme.

7.5.5 The existing facilitators can continue. Some funding will be directed to the circle (with VSG, if agreed) for a period until the circle becomes self-supporting. The programme as above will then follow; the same approach to taking and passing the NALP test as at the moment will be followed, but the NALP textbooks will be used for this short course.

7.5.6 Uganda: Again the combined FAL 1 and FAL 2 make up a mixed group. Again each group will be asked to fix its membership, undertake a period of study of (local) development and choose a long-term group project to implement. They will then learn the literacy of that project. The existing facilitators can continue if they so wish.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Which literacy? The New Literacy Studies have demonstrated that there is a plurality of literacies and that the literacy taught in the classroom is very different from the literacies used in everyday life and livelihoods. All literacies have their own functionalities, although the classroom literacy is dominant in society. However, it is not easy to learn the formal literacy of the classroom and then transfer that to the informal of everyday life; it is easier to move from the informal to the formal.

8.2 My overall objective is to put usable literacy (informal) into livelihoods (poverty relief) and everyday life so as to improve the quality of life and the viability of the livelihoods; and then to move from that to the more formal (certificated) literacy of the classroom which has great benefits in society:

- It opens access to formal jobs (if there are any; it does not create jobs)
- It enhances an individual's status in society
- It opens access to schooling (for those who wish to pursue that route – normally very few and mostly younger adults)
- It opens access to a wide range of culture (for those who can gain access to the literature and who can afford the time for general reading).

But to start with this formal literacy will not enhance the livelihoods or the normal activities of everyday life.

8.3 Which method? Adult learning theory says that the best way to help adults to learn any activity is for them to **do** that activity rather than to learn **in preparation for** doing something. One learns to cycle by riding a bike, not attending classes on riding. So it is with literacy. To help adults to learn literacies is best done by **using** informal literacies in a specific project context.

8.4 That can be done by getting the participants to undertake a project and putting the embedded literacy of that project into it; and moving from there to the more formal literacy of the tests and certificates.

8.5 The traditional approach and the REFLECT approach are both based on teaching the formal literacy of a classroom and developing from that the informal functional literacies of community development projects and livelihoods. In other words, to learn a generalised uniform 'literacy' first and then apply that to some form of development. That approach has been shown to be largely ineffective – although a few adults have benefited from this approach, in general, it has failed. Starting with the formal literacy and moving to the informal literacies of livelihoods does not seem to work (it is felt to be 'irrelevant'); project literacy does.

8.6 And this will involve using new methods of teaching literacy. As again one of the foremost 'experts' on adult literacy has recently said, "Gone are the days when alphabetic methods of literacy teaching were used. ... Today, ... adult learners learn to read *meaningful groups of words* with relevance to their lives on the very first day as adult learners" (Bhola 2008 page 9, my italics). Malawi especially and Uganda in a smaller way are both using out-of-date methodologies: they both urgently need expert advice on literacy/numeracy learning. To develop an effective learning programme, we need to break away from the syllabic destruction of individual words taken out of their context and develop approaches that teach *groups of words* and numbers together at the same time in a particular context. Such groups of words can come (orally) from the literacy learners and be written by the facilitator for them to learn to read and write for themselves. This will mean breaking away also from the simple-to-complex sequencing which characterises children's learning and learning **for** (subsequent) doing, and adopting the more **adult** approach of learning **through** doing. The tasks will need to be broken down into smaller units so that the learners can see progress and are not overwhelmed by the size of the whole task; and in this the facilitators will need help and training.

8.7 The aim of the whole programme (together with other steps suggested in the country reports in developing creative literacy throughout the local community; see Appendix) is to increase the spread of daily life literacy activities throughout the villages – not just special ('post-literacy') reading but regular writing, reading and written forms of calculation which will contribute to

better communication and problem-solving. If in the process, some more people take a test and gain a certificate, that is a useful spin-off but not the primary goal of the programme.

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APPENDIX

THIRTY SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN REAL LIFE

While in Africa, I drew up for both countries a list of some thirty different projects which could have been undertaken in the literacy learning groups – all of which I have seen in other literacy programmes. The following is a copy of the combined list.

These are all being **done in small groups**, not as lone exercises – adults learn co-operatively by asking the help of others, not individually as at school.

With all of these activities, there must be extensive discussion; they should not be done mechanically. The aim is to challenge the learners to **think** about what they are doing, not just to do it (e.g. copying). There should be lots of talk in the adult classroom.

Here they are:

ACTIVITIES INSIDE THE CLASS

1. Some of the groups in both countries sang **songs** – but we did not find any facilitator writing down the words of these songs for the learners to read. They could then make up additional verses.
2. Some of the classes started and finished with **prayers** – but again the opportunity to write these on the blackboard for the participants to learn was not taken; and again make up new prayers.
3. It is possible for the group to design their own motto, badge or T-shirt **logo** with words rather than leave this to the organisers (in the language of *their* choice, not necessarily in English as most of the existing T-shirts are).
4. It is common elsewhere for groups get the learners to talk about their **life histories**. Parts of these are then written up by the facilitator in the learner's notebook and the learner reads his/her own words.
5. Many groups have used **local histories** of the village – stories from the past collected by the learners – to learn to read and write, again first spoken and then written by the instructor and then used for learning literacy. Some of these have been published.
6. Some groups get the learners to make up **stories** which are told and used for learning (see box below)

Stories: One of the most exciting lessons I have ever attended took place in a coastal village in Tamil Nadu in the late 1970s. I planned to spend ten minutes in that circle before moving on to another – but I stopped for two hours. When I arrived, there were small groups all talking excitedly with lots of laughter. The facilitator told me that in their area, it was customary for women to tell each other stories they made up each evening, so she had asked them in four small groups to make up a story – “I simply told them, ‘Imagine you are a fish...’”, she said. The participants told their stories out loud: one was about avoiding being eaten by a big fish; another about being nearly caught by some men in a boat with a net; another about a big storm and diving down deep to get into calmer water; the fourth told about the coral the fish saw upon the bottom of the sea. Everyone was interested in every other story. As they told their stories, the facilitator wrote lots of key words on the blackboard – I noticed she spread them all over the board, she did not keep the words from one story in one part of the board. At the end of the stories and after discussion, she asked them in their groups to write down into their notebooks only the words from the board which related to their own stories – again there was much discussion about which words belonged to which stories as they were scattered across the blackboard. As she said to me while they were writing, “When they are at home, the words will remind them of their story and their story will remind them of the words”. This was true adult literacy learning in the REFLECT mould – using their own words to help them learn literacy. No moving from simple words to complex words, no breaking down into syllables, just learning to read their own words as they spoke them. And they were all keenly interested.

7. In Yemen, the women learners make up and learn to write their own **poems**
8. Books of **recipes** have been compiled by women's groups, first spoken, later written; they learn the literacy of cooking

9. In Nepal, mothers with small children keep a **baby book** in which they write the name, date of birth, weight, height, food etc of their children and show off with great pride. There are many women with infants in the FAL classes and they can be encouraged to do the same; this would turn a 'problem' of children in the classes into a resource for learning and provide much grounds for discussion; it combines health with literacy.
10. Some women bring **their children's school books** into the literacy learning circle for others to share.

LITERACY IN THE COMMUNITY

11. Many classes elsewhere have sent the learners out into the community to copy **all the written signs** on the buildings and then return and learn to read them and discuss them – who wrote them, why, what is their meaning etc. In several villages, we got the learners to map these texts (around the school or clinic or police station or local government offices or church/mosque or temple etc, both where they are and where they are not!) like a PRA graphic, again leading to much discussion and learning
12. In Sierra Leone, the groups have collected and spoken and then written up local **proverbs**, traditional songs and sayings
13. Many of these and other items have been produced in a small occasional **newsletter** which the group writes and circulates round the village; the CDOs can provide resources to duplicate these newsletters.
14. In India, many villages put the class **blackboard** (when it is not being used in class) outside the learning centre under a verandah and use it as a village **newspaper**, with members of the group writing up some item of news (the weather, the size of the fish catch, local births or marriages, village meetings or political events etc) or a poem every day
15. In a programme in Pakistan, every learner keeps a **literacy corner in their own houses** in which they keep every bit of reading and writing material they can find
16. Some groups ask each of the learners to keep a **journal of what they read at home**, especially what they read to their children. In it, they also write what the children read out loud to them. They start off by getting the children to write these lists, but gradually they learn to write them themselves.
17. Some groups have a group **outing**, say to the capital or a nearby large town or some other site of interest – and write up a **report** about the visit
18. In Bangladesh, some village literacy classes run a **small stationery shop**, one member going into town once a month to buy notebooks, pencils, envelopes, stamps etc and selling these in the village
19. In other groups, the women are helped to write the literacy associated with the **birth** of their child (registration), with **marriage** (every women is encouraged to get a marriage certificate) and with a **funeral**.
20. Some write about village **ceremonies** and the activities of village **committees**
21. **Religious** activities provide many opportunities for reading and some for writing – hymns, prayers, religious texts etc
22. Many learners write real or imaginary **letters** to others
23. Many take real **bills or receipts** which they have received; they engage in discussion in the group, sometimes even rewriting them in simpler language to see what they would look like, identifying the real difficulties with these forms for people who have limited literacy skills and experience.
24. Many groups write about **health** matters in their family or community lives, especially **visits to hospitals**.
25. **Local politics** often form the basis for some writing – e.g. getting the women to design a poster about some issue or other, or a petition to the local politician.
26. In one programme in Pakistan, every learner has to have a '**buddy**' who is not a group member and the participant teaches to the buddy what they have learned in the class session

27. In India, one women's group learned reading (and writing) through a **water pump manual** which the village had been provided with along with the pump. Finding **similar material** in the village and bringing it into the learning class is part of the role of the instructor and CDO.

THE CLASS ITSELF

28. The literacy learning class itself can provide some occasions for writing – e.g. a **written report of each lesson**, or of the discussions which (ought to) take place.
29. **Writing involved in the programme** itself – we did not find any written records of the literacy classes except the register, the facilitator's lesson book (not every facilitator kept one) and the instructor's quarterly reports. What writing is done is done by the facilitator, not the literacy learners. Some of this could be done in association with the learners – for example, the monthly/quarterly report could be prepared by the whole class, not by the instructor alone, either orally for beginners or in written form by those who have the skills to do so.
30. The **class project** (growing bananas or water melons, rearing pigs or poultry, etc) will have literacy activities connected with it (keeping records of planting and fertilisers etc, of pests and diseases, or records of purchases and sales, etc). All these should be done in the classes.

There are many other writing and reading activities which an imaginative instructor and his/her group can identify in their local context – videos shown in the landing sites, local events like a storm etc etc.

It may be argued that 'illiterate' learners cannot do any of this. Experience proves that those who are non-literate can engage with all of these orally and that others will write down their words and then the learners can learn to read their own words. It can be done – because in every case it has been done.