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AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF THE REFLECT APPROACH IN RURAL LESOTHO

Gillian Attwood

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities,
University of the Witwatersrand
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Johannesburg, May 2007

DECLARATION

I declare that this work is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted to any other university, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

_____
Gillian Attwood

_____ day of _____, 2007

ABSTRACT

Development, literacy, empowerment and participation are timeworn words that have been woven together in varying constellations over the last few decades. A recent approach to adult education and social change, REFLECT[1], has brought these concepts together in a new manner.

This study, conducted over a five and a half year period, (June 2000 to December 2005), set out to investigate whether REFLECT was responsive to the needs of adults in two rural Lesotho contexts: an income generating co-operative, and a village context. I enquired into participants' experiences of REFLECT, asking whether it could strengthen participants' practices and livelihoods. What benefits were gained? Did literacy practices change? Were participants empowered? What were the challenges experienced?

The theoretical framework of this study has been informed by critical and post-modern theory. These theoretical lenses have shaped my investigation and critique of concepts relevant to the study, namely development, power, participation, and literacy.

Using an Action Research design, data was collected and analysed using participatory and collaborative methods, including focus groups, interviews, document and photograph analysis, observations, as well as journal and field notes. Results are reported as case studies providing a rich description of the project within the two contexts of the study.

Results show that communities which used REFLECT benefited on personal and communal levels. Participants implemented their own learning and development agendas and took action to improve their livelihoods. Human and social capital were fortified; people increased their participation in meaningful decision making; and engaged more extensively in development initiatives. Participants became more self-confident, strengthened their capabilities and took action to access resources and make substantial changes in their lives. In sum, REFLECT stimulated a positive change process.

However, it was noted that implementing REFLECT is a demanding process. Ongoing support is required to sustain effective learning and change, particularly where facilitators are not highly literate and operate in resource poor contexts where development related needs are perceived as more critical than the need to improve literacy skills. The challenge is to create a context where literacy and development are integrally related in practice, with new norms developed to foster sustained learning around development related action.

Keywords:

REFLECT; Literacy; Development; Empowerment, Participation; Cooperatives, Ecotourism; Social capital; Lesotho

[1] Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques

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PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS RESEARCH

In the course of conducting this research and writing the thesis, material from various chapters was published as follows:

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Attwood, G., Castle, P.J., Smythe, S. (2004) 'Women are Lions in Dresses: Negotiating gender relations in REFLECT learning circles in Lesotho'. In A. Robinson-Pant (Ed.) *Women, Literacy and Development*. London: Routledge.

Attwood, G. (2003) 'An Action Research Study of Literacy and Empowerment in the Mountains of Lesotho', *Global Research Perspectives*, vol 3, University of Georgia.

Attwood, G. (2002) 'Participation and power' in *Africa Insight*, 32 (1) March 2002

ABBREVIATIONS

M	Maloti, the official currency of Lesotho. M1 equals, by definition, R1
R	Rands, the official currency of South Africa. R1 fluctuated in worth between $US 0.6 and $US0.75 over the research period, June 2000 to December 2005.
AR	Action Research
DED	German Development Service
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune Virus / Aqcuired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIV+	People who test positive for the human immune virus are said to be HIV positive
IZZ/DVV	Institute for international cooperation of the German Adult Education Association
LANFE	Lesotho Association of Non-formal Education
LCS	Lesotho Cooperative Society
MDT	Malealea Development Trust
NASA	National ABE Support Agency
NRBCT	Nature-based Community Tourism
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques
WFP	World Food Programme

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Development, poverty, empowerment, participation, and literacy are well-worn words that continue to echo through the corridors of universities, development organisations and government institutions in a range of contexts and countries. There are as many different concepts and understandings of the word as there are strategies to address them. This thesis focuses on what these concepts mean in a rural southern African context where an innovative approach to adult education, known as REFLECT, is introduced. I look at how a rural community implements and adapts this approach, and what the consequences of that process are.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the ways in which two central concepts, literacy and development have been conceptualised within the REFLECT approach which forms the focus of this study. I then set out the research problem, describe the research context, and the purpose of the study. The specific research questions are listed, followed by a description of why the study is significant. I describe the research process, setting out the epistemological, theoretical and methodological considerations. Finally I look at the limitations of the study and conclude by providing an outline of the way in which the rest of the study had been organised.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy and development have long been promised to one another. It is widely believed that with improved literacy levels come greater development opportunities, while enhanced development in turn ushers in occasions for further educational progress. However, over the last fifty years sobering experience has challenged not only the assumed reciprocity between literacy and development, but development itself. Development interventions, such as the functional literacy programmes[1] that were implemented with enthusiasm in developing countries in the 1950s and 60s, lost momentum in the 1970s when the anticipated results were slow to manifest. By the 1990s, it was clear that the drive to promote literacy and development had not been successful - more than 850 million adults were still illiterate (UNDP, 2000), and according to the

[1] Functional literacy programmes tend to understand development in terms of individual advancement leading to wider economic development.

World Bank's estimate, in 2001 there were still 1.1 billion people living below $1 per day. In Sub-Saharan Africa the number of people living on less than $1 a day doubled from 165 million to 318 million between 1981 and 2001 (Chen and Ravallion, 2004:31). Furthermore, there is no sign of poverty abating.

> The share of the world's poor living in Africa has risen dramatically. Not only has Africa emerged in the 1990's as the region with the highest incidence of poverty, the depth of poverty is also markedly higher than found in other regions…
>
> (Chen and Ravallion, 2004: 22)

In a world wide review of literacy programmes from the 1970s to the 1990s, Abadzi estimated that fewer than 12.5% of these programmes had been successful in achieving their goal of helping adults to become literate, let alone reap the benefits of development (Abadzi, 1994, cited in Archer and Cottingham, 1996:10). The bright anticipation of earlier years was replaced by disillusionment. In a later book, Abadzi summed up the mood as follows: "The ineffectiveness of literacy programmes has been a major disappointment to development organisations and an educational puzzle that defies common sense" (2003:1). By mid 2004, progress made was equally unimpressive. According to the Global Issues web page, "nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names" (Shah, 2006: www.globalissues.org).

However, a methodological innovation developed in the mid-1990s by a British organisation called ACTIONAID, inspired new hope for re-igniting the relationship between literacy and development. Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT) links literacy and development, placing specific attention on the process of empowerment. Integrating a Freirean approach to literacy, with a participatory development methodology known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), learners (termed 'participants') are repositioned as central in the learning and development process. Local resources and assets form the starting point for all learning and development activities in recognition of participants' prior learning and experience.

Since its initial pilot in three countries (Bangladesh, El Salvador, Uganda) in 1993/94, REFLECT has spread to more than 60 countries with groups as diverse as Afro-Caribbean community organisations in Oxford, returned refugees in Rwanda, members of school management committees in Mali, and midwives and health community agents in the

Amazon Region (Archer and Newman, 2003; Archer and Jellema, 1998; de Aruajo, 2002). Given the rapid expansion of the REFLECT approach, the promising reports of its applications in diverse contexts (Phnuyal et al, 1998), and the profile it has gained within the field of adult literacy, it seemed pertinent to explore its implications for a southern African country where a need for development and further investment in appropriate education has been identified (Gay and Hall, 2000:28). This study examines the ways in which a REFLECT project has contributed to empowering the participants in a small rural community in the mountains of Lesotho. It looks at the way in which the REFLECT project was established, the kind of strategies participants developed to confront the developmental and educational challenges they faced, benefits gained, as well as constraints experienced in the process.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Rural contexts in southern Africa are typically characterised by poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and a lack of resources and basic services. Popular rhetoric has associated these conditions, directly or indirectly, with a lack of literacy and education (Land and Fotheringham, 1999: 12). It has been claimed that literacy and education lead to complex and modern governments, political democracy and social equity, a lower crime rate, better citizens, economic development, wealth and productivity, political stability, and a lower birth rate (Gee, 1996: 26). More recent claims, for example by the UN, have been less grand and all-embracing. A UNESCO discussion document (2001:2) defined literacy as "an indispensable tool for lifelong education and learning … [as well as] an essential requisite for citizenship and human and social development." However, even these more modest claims have embedded within them a belief in the power of literacy as an engine for the same developmental objectives.

The relationship between development and literacy has been problematised, and the capacity of literacy to generate or contribute to development has been critically questioned (Abadzi, 2003; Fiedrich, 1996, 2004; Gee, 1996). Better health and services, access to social and economic opportunities, political stability and a reduced crime rate are not achieved by simply mounting a literacy or education programme. Gee (1996:34) cites a study by Fry who reviewed 140 nations and found that "educational expansion bore little relationship to changing patterns of inequality or economic development".

Lesotho is a case in point. According to the UNDP Poverty Report of 2000, Lesotho has an adult literacy rate of 82%. The rate of illiteracy amongst women between 15 and 24 years of age in Lesotho is the lowest in Africa at only 2%. Yet, Lesotho is still defined as one of the world's 50 poorest countries[2] (One World – Nations Online, 17th May 2006). Research shows that the education system has done little to equip poor households with the means to sustain their livelihoods, especially in the context of declining waged employment[3] (Gay et al, 2000). The 2000 Poverty Report motivates that the education curriculum should include more emphasis on livelihood skills for the jobless, particularly in the mountainous areas where unemployment levels are highest (Gay and Hall, 2000: 28).

In trying to address the question of how literacy programmes might better support development objectives, and contribute to sustainable livelihoods, theorists have pointed to the need for non-formal adult education programmes that are responsive to the particular needs of adults in the context of their lives (Scott-Goldman, 2001; Kell, 1996). Programmes should enable participants to better manage the tasks required to perform in their daily lives and improve their livelihoods. The premise here is that literacy should be viewed as a context-specific practice that can assist people to strengthen their other practices within that context, rather than as a technical skill which is an end in itself. For example, literacy might assist people to acquire information related to better farming, health or small business practices. Literacy skills could support people to write a constitution and register a community organisation, or gain access to development funds or micro-credit loans. The focus is on the 'real' and practical use of literacy, linked to other sustainable livelihood practices, as determined by the participants themselves.

The REFLECT approach is particularly compatible with a sustainable livelihoods approach since it focuses on not only on teaching adult literacy, but also on creating an environment and a process that sustains literacy as part of a broader move towards

[2] Three criteria are used to define the world's poorest countries: low-income (gross national income per capita must be under $750 for inclusion); human resource weakness (using indicators of nutrition, health and education) and economic vulnerability (based on a composite list of indicators related to agricultural production and exports of goods and services).

[3] Over the last ten years, mine employment, previously a major source of cash income for many households, has dropped to about half the figure it was in the early 1990's (Gay and Hall, 2000: 7).

empowerment. Figure 1, sourced from the Reflect website (www.reflect-action.org), illustrates the key elements and principles of REFLECT (see the roots) as well as the many different contexts to which REFLECT has been adapted (see the fruits of the tree).

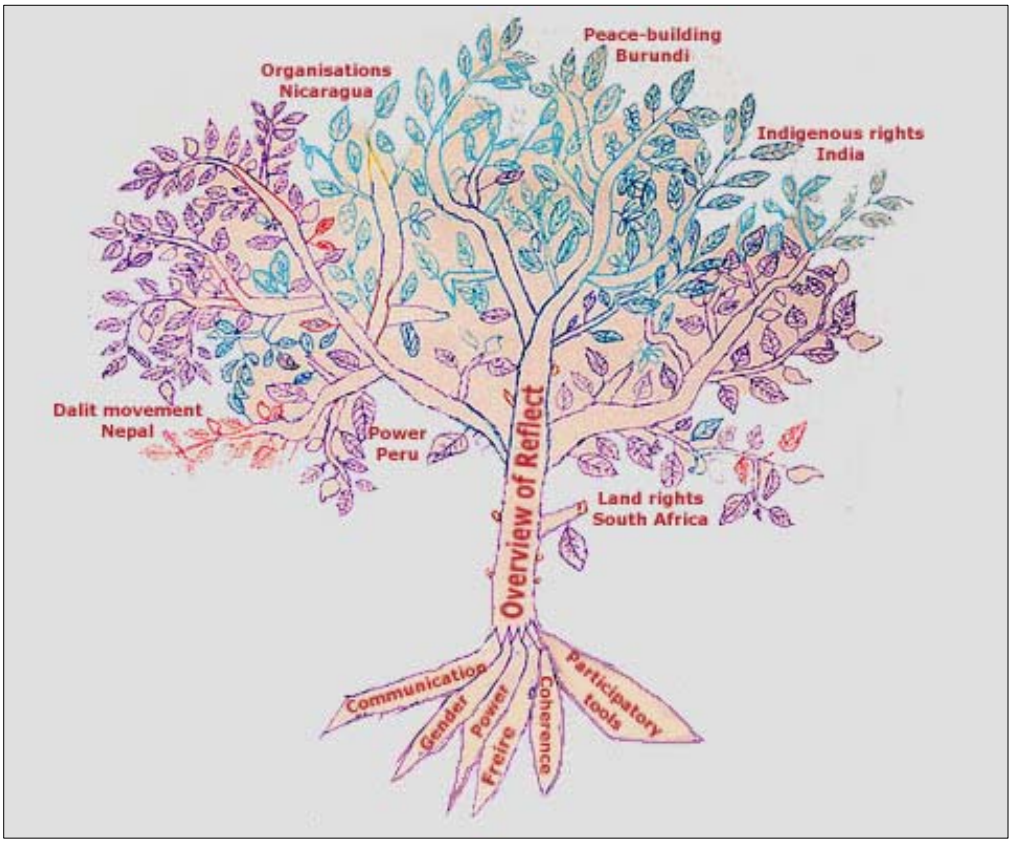


Figure 1: Tree diagram showing the key elements and principles of REFLECT

The tree diagram above simultaneously serves to illustrate one of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools used in REFLECT circles. These tools are visualisation techniques that help participants to reflect on issues or concerns – in this example, groups draw a tree with roots and branches to help them analyse causes and effects or inputs and outputs in different situations. Here the roots of the tree show the key principles of REFLECT, while the branches show how REFLECT has been used in different contexts.

From this diagram, it is evident that REFLECT is more than a new approach to literacy. There is a promised fusion between literacy, communication, empowerment, resource management, health care, and rights.

> The focus [of REFLECT] is on raising the awareness of participants and enabling them to access information or demand services more effectively. …Much emphasis is placed on strengthening people's dignity and self-confidence as well as having an

> impact on improving resource management, health practices, children's education, local community organisation, civic life, etc. … the focus is on people's practical use of literacy, language or other forms of communication to challenge unequal power relationships.
>
> (Archer et al, 2003:35)

This conception of literacy in relation to development acknowledges the social, political and ideological nature of literacy itself. It acknowledges the situated nature of literacy as a social practice, rather than an unproblematic solution. REFLECT encourages a diversity of approaches and applications of the approach, so that learning takes place as part of a process of using and applying the approach within a specific context.

> … REFLECT is seen in a more fundamental way – as an 'operating system' for projects, rather than a 'piece of software'.
>
> (Archer et al, 2003:35)

The challenge of applying this 'operating system' in a rural area of Lesotho has been taken up in this dissertation where the history of disconnect between literacy and development projects has beckoned the use of a more innovative approach, like REFLECT.

THE CONTEXT

Why Lesotho? The answer to this question has its origins in the life experience of the researcher (myself), as well as the context itself. Therefore, as a preface to the study, I begin by describing the broad context of Lesotho, followed by a sketch of the research context more specifically, concluding with a discussion of my own positioning in relation to these contexts.

The broad context - Lesotho

Lesotho is a small country (30,355 sq kilometres in area) completely landlocked by South Africa (see Figure 2). Besides water, the country has few economically significant natural resources, and the extremely mountainous physical nature of the region means that only 10% of the land is arable. There are approximately 2.5 million inhabitants, and at a household level, poverty levels are high. 68% of households in Lesotho are defined as

'poor', and two thirds of the poor are 'destitute'[4], having barely enough cash income to satisfy basic food needs (Gay and Hall, 2000:3).

Inhabitants of Lesotho have traditionally supplemented what can be grown for consumption with wages earned through migrant labour in South Africa, primarily on the goldmines. However, large scale retrenchment of mine workers in the wake of the global drop in the gold price in the early 2000's[5], coupled with declining agricultural production in both the crop farming and livestock sectors has contributed to increasing poverty levels, particularly in the mountain areas.



Figure 2: Map of Lesotho

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project has provided some relief in terms of both employment (approximately 10,000 jobs have been provided) and royalties accruing to the government from the sale of water to South Africa. A 2003 newspaper report stated that the royalties for water sold amounted to an amount of M14 million per month[6] (Thabo, E. in Public Eye, 07 January 2003). However, most of this money was channelled into national accounts to boost increased spending on the civil service and consultancy salaries. This has contributed to Lesotho having "one of the highest levels of income inequality on the continent" (Gay and Hall, 2000:3). Mountain areas are most affected by poverty, with many remote areas still not having access to the most basic of services such as water supply, health centres, schools, roads, bridges, communications, markets and agricultural supplies.

[4] According to the Poverty and Livelihoods Report (Gay & Hall, 2000), the 'poor' are defined as those having less than M80 (less than US$10) per household member per month. The 'destitute' are defined as those having less than M40 (less than US$5) per household member per month.
[5] The gold price did increase in subsequent years, but South African mines did not rehire workers.
[6] M14 million Maluti is equal to approximately US$1 400 000

However, what some see as the 'undeveloped' nature of the mountain areas, others interpret as 'unspoiled'. The natural beauty and spectacular scenery, as well as the traditional Basotho way of life, which has remained largely unchanged in the more remote areas, has the potential to attract an additional source of income in the form of ecotourism. This is particularly significant for the mountain areas that suffer the worst effects of poverty.

One of the more successful models for promoting community development through tourism has been termed 'Natural Resource-Based Community Tourism' (NRBCT). This primarily rural-based model of ecotourism aims to contribute towards community development by channelling money into a community in a number of ways. It may be through the creation of income generation and employment opportunities; or through using tourism to generate funds for community projects; or through the support of business opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

The Malealea Lodge, situated in the Malealea valley in the southwestern district of Mafeteng in Lesotho, overlooks the impressive Thaba Putsoa (or Blue Mountain) range (see photo insert). The Malealea Lodge, situated in the foothills of this mountain range is run as a private commercial concern, but in the spirit of NRBCT, has created a range of opportunities for local people to be brought in to benefit from tourism activities. For



The Thaba Putsoa / Blue Mountain range

example, it has entered into a partnership with the Malealea Pony Trekking Association, a local association that represents horse owners in the area. This partnership has facilitated an arrangement whereby local horse owners can hire their horses to the tourists, and act as guides on day or overnight pony treks. On overnight treks, tourists rent a village hut to sleep in, with money paid to the owner of that hut. Hiking guides also take tourists to nearby places of interest, and a local band and choir provide evening entertainment for tourists.

However, prior to the initiation of this research in 2000, other efforts by the community to establish community-managed (rather than Lodge-managed) income generation projects had not been successful. For example, in 1998, a craft and carpentry Cooperative was set up by local people in an effort to generate income through selling products to tourists. However, this initiative collapsed six months later. A poultry project set up in 1998 at local schools also failed after a short time, as did a dairy project and a communal vegetable-growing project. Community-driven development projects did not have a high success rate.

Given the anticipated need for support of community driven development initiatives, and the conducive contextual conditions (tourism and the willingness of the Malealea Lodge to work with the community), the Malealea valley seemed to offer a fertile situation for an exploration of the educational, developmental and empowering potential of the REFLECT approach.

The research context - Malealea

Two different sites were identified by people in the Malealea community in which to try out the REFLECT approach:

(i) The first was a multi-purpose income generation cooperative. Members of the original 1998 project wanted to use REFLECT to run the Cooperative as an income generation learning circle.

(ii) The second research site can be broadly defined as a 'village' context. Learning circles were set up in villages where members of a community wanted to come together to work on development issues and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. These village learning circles were established after the primary Cooperative

learning circle, and were initiated and facilitated by members of the primary Cooperative learning circle.

A more detailed description of the two sites is given below:

(i) The Malealea Cooperative

The Malealea Multi-purpose Cooperative constituted the primary research context. The Cooperative was re-launched as the first step of the action research process and was set up as both a work place and a learning circle. The Cooperative had three main objectives: to earn, to learn, and to promote development. Participants met daily at the 'Handicraft Centre', an old aeroplane hanger, part of which was partitioned off into a workspace, and part of which was refashioned as a 'shop' (see photo insert) where items produced by members could be sold.



The (first) craft shop set up in the Handicraft Centre / craft workshop

Co-op members engaged in a range of income generating activities over the course of the project. These included sewing, knitting, embroidery, doll making, grasswork, pottery, bead work, art work, carpentry, stone masonry, making products from recycled cans and growing and drying vegetables for sale. Participants learned technical skills that would help them to develop products to sell, and also undertook learning projects related to small business development, financial management, and building local leadership. Health education initiatives, particularly relating to HIV/AIDS, constituted another learning focus within the Cooperative learning circle. The Cooperative was thus a space for people from the community to come together and generate income, while simultaneously learning and sharing skills that could contribute to developing their community. Initially only 18 people committed themselves to the Cooperative, but this number grew to 35 over the life-span of the project.

All learning activities were governed by participatory and Freirean principles inherent in the REFLECT approach. The basic tenet of this approach (described in more detail in Chapter Two) is that learning activities should be related to problems or concerns identified by learners themselves, in this case members of the Cooperative. Problems or issues of concern are identified, analysed and discussed, and a plan of action is created, implemented, and then evaluated. In the Cooperative circle, planned action frequently led to identifying further learning objectives. Members reflected on their learning and action during weekly meetings and at special reflection forums.

In addition to working in the Cooperative, members committed themselves to undertaking development activities in the wider community. One of the aims of the constitution which was collaboratively developed by all members, was "to encourage members of 'Hlaa-hlela le lla ka le leng'[7] Cooperative to engage in community development activities in Malealea" (translated from page 1 of the Cooperative's Constitution – see Appendix 1a and 1b). Twenty members of the Cooperative volunteered to be trained as REFLECT facilitators and facilitate 'learning circles' in villages as a means to meet their commitment to community development.

The Cooperative thus served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it was an active learning circle where people engaged in learning and reflection that supported income generation activities. On the other hand, the Co-op served simultaneously as a 'hothouse' where a cadre of committed facilitators were trained in a practical 'hands-on' way in participatory learning and development practices, which they took out into the wider community and cultivated within the context of village learning circles.

(ii) The Village Learning Circles

Village learning circles were set up in 14 villages over the course of the project. These circles were comprised of community members who were interested in coming together to improve their literacy skills, and advance development projects in their villages. Facilitators trained in the Cooperative circle facilitated the learning and development process in these village circles. Working in pairs, facilitators went into the community to

[7] *Hlaa-hlela-le-lla-ka-le-leng* is a Sesotho idiom which means 'working together to help one another'.

negotiate with the chiefs and villagers about starting a circle and what it entailed. Groups started small, but grew in size over the course of the project, with some groups having as many as 40 participants by the end of the period of research. There were no entry requirements to the circles, other than wanting to learn literacy and take action to improve local conditions. Learning circle participants were mostly peasant farmers, men and women varying in age from as young as 15 to as old as 75. Some of the circles were made up predominantly of shepherds, while others were predominantly farmers. Different learning foci developed in the different circles, depending on who the members were and what their interests and needs were. Initially, some circles focused more on literacy, (particularly those circles with more shepherds), while others focused more on local development action and income generation activities. However, by the end of the project, all village learning circles were focused on action.

Using the same approach as was applied in the Cooperative circle, facilitators worked with village communities to identify problems relevant to their lives. These problems were then discussed and analysed and a plan of action drawn up. Literacy and numeracy learning was integrated into this process. Once action had been taken, participants would reflect back on what they had learned and achieved.

The researcher's position

I began working in Lesotho in 1986 as a volunteer in a pre-school. The next fifteen years saw me continuing to work on and off in various regions of Lesotho in several different capacities: as a primary school teacher, a high school teacher, a volunteer in community work camps, and an evaluator of literacy projects. I also spent 18 months living in a remote village learning to speak Sesotho, the language spoken in Lesotho. All of these experiences were significant in shaping my commitment to and interest in both education and development in remote and resource-poor areas of Lesotho.

I initially gained entry into the Malealea community through Malealea Lodge whose owners were interested in promoting education and development initiatives in the valley as a way to further develop ecotourism. Initially, I spent a period of two weeks talking to key people in the community; meeting with the chief and negotiating a terrain for a project that would serve the interests and needs of the community. A draft plan emerged

from these negotiations and was presented finally at a community assembly. From that point, the project grew steadily into the study presented here.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to explore what might happen when a structured participatory Freirean learning approach, namely REFLECT, was introduced into a rural area of Lesotho. What kind of effect would the process have on literacy, learning and development practices? Could it help people to set and implement their own learning and development agendas? Would it come to occupy a social space within the community? Would it transform people's way of seeing, of living, of relating to one another? Would communities become 'empowered'? In sum, what could a process such as REFLECT contribute to the society?

Within two different contexts, an income generation cooperative, and a village context, communities engaged in a range of different learning and development practices guided by Freirean principles and participatory practices. The specific research questions that framed the study are listed below.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THE STUDY IS DESIGNED TO ADDRESS

1) How did participants in a rural area of southern Africa accommodate, apply and adapt the approach and principles of REFLECT in their respective communities?
2) Were there identifiable benefits gained from introducing REFLECT into Malealea?
3) What kinds of literacy practices developed and in what ways did these practices support development initiatives?
4) Were communities 'empowered'? If so, in what ways? If not, what hindered 'empowerment'?
5) What kinds of challenges and constraints were experienced in the process of implementing REFLECT?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant in a number of ways:

First, this study has given the participating communities an opportunity to engage with issues and reflect on a range of practices in their lives. How this has been of value to them is explored in the findings and final chapters – it is sufficient to note here that the attempt to create opportunities for practical community engagement, learning and enrichment is seen as a significant aspect of this research. This is because a central intention of the research process has been to contribute meaningfully, not only to academic scholarship, but also to the lives of those participating in the research process.

Secondly, on a more general level, this study has contributed to an expansion of the knowledge base of the literature related to REFLECT. An in-depth theoretical and practical exploration of how a community has applied and adapted the REFLECT approach helps to test the methodological framework of REFLECT and explore how well suited it is to accommodating new applications in new contexts.

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Lastly, a thorough study of REFLECT has not been conducted previously in the context of a cooperative, nor in a context where development opportunities are offered in relation to ecotourism. REFLECT has also not been previously applied in Lesotho. The study thus helps to investigate the potential of the REFLECT approach in a number of new contexts both within Lesotho and more broadly. Researchers and practitioners working in any of these contexts might make use of the findings of this study to plan future innovations or incorporate new ideas into their practice.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The purpose of this research has been established, and the research questions have been presented. The process by which these questions were answered is discussed in depth in Chapter Three where I describe the research paradigm, the design of the study and how the research was planned and implemented. The discussion below serves as a prelude to Chapter Three, providing an overview of the different components of the research process and the way in which they articulate with one another.

According to Crotty (1998:4), there are four important elements of the research process, which feed into each other as follows:

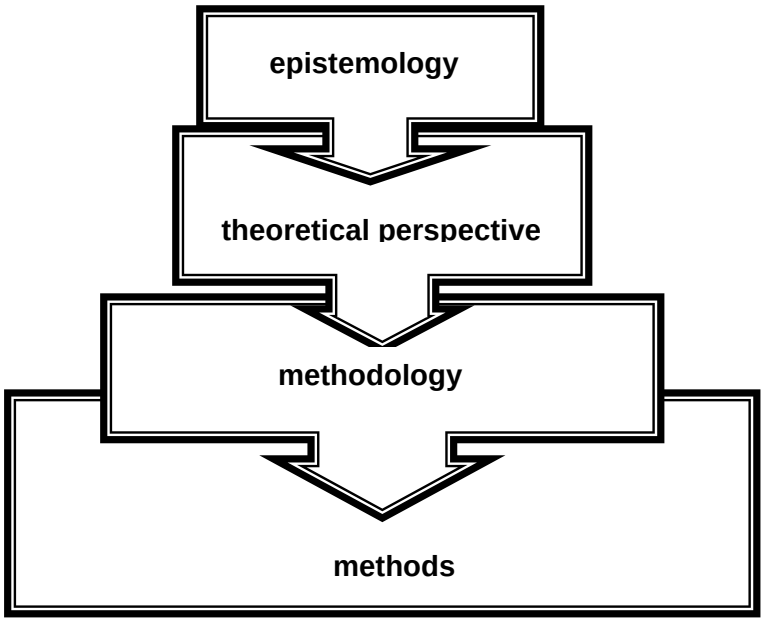


Figure 3: Crotty's four elements of the research process (Crotty, 1998:4)

Our epistemology informs our theoretical position which in turn influences the methodology we use, which then determines the methods we use for our research. It is thus important to take each of these into account, beginning with the epistemological foundation upon which the research is based.

Epistemology

Epistemology is most commonly defined as 'the theory of knowledge'. However, it is not only about how knowledge came to be, it is also about the relationship between the knower and the known, and the role that values play in constructing knowledge (Maykut and Moorhouse, 1994). Popkewitz (1991:15) offers a more useful way of understanding what 'epistemology' means for researchers and the research process:

> *Epistemology* provides a context in which to consider the rules and standards by which knowledge about the world is formed, the distinctions and categorizations that organize perceptions, ways of responding to the world, and the conception of 'self'.
>
> (Popkewitz, 1991:15)

As researchers, we make choices and take actions based on certain beliefs and understandings of the world. These beliefs are rooted in an epistemological framework

that forms the foundation for everything we do. It is therefore important to make my epistemological position clear.

As a researcher committed to social action, I believe that we shape our 'reality' through actions, as much as our 'reality' shapes who we are, and who we become. There is a dialectical relationship between process and context. Our values and beliefs influence the kind of reality we construct and the way in which we construct it. This is not to say that there is no 'reality', but rather that there are multiple realities with which we interact. As researchers, we have an implicit responsibility to acknowledge the influence of our participation and subjectivity on the research process and it's 'reality'. We need to examine our role in the knowledge construction process. The validity of our research depends on this. "Valid enquiry rests on critical subjectivity" (Reason and Marshall, 1987:112).

The epistemology that best fits the above set of beliefs is that of 'constructionism'[8]. Michael Crotty defines 'constructionism' as follows:

> … the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.
>
> (Crotty, 1998:42)

This epistemological stance underpins the qualitative research paradigm where enquiry is generally aimed at "understanding the meaning of human action" (Schwandt, 2001: 213). The epistemological assumptions outlined above have also predisposed me towards selecting particular theoretical perspectives informed by this broader epistemological perspective.

Theoretical Perspectives

Theory helps us to understand and explain society and the human world. It is the lens through which we see the world; it informs the way we define, understand, interpret and represent our experience. An exposition of the theoretical perspectives governing a study is important since any body of theory is also a statement of the assumptions brought to the

[8] Crotty (1998) makes a distinction between 'constructionism' as an epistemology and 'constructivism; as a theoretical perspective.

research task. Two allied theoretical traditions have informed this study, influencing my understanding and interpretation of the research concerns, the research process and the findings of this study. These are critical theory[9] and post-modern theory. There are different views about the compatibility of these two paradigms and the possibilities for synthesising them. These debates are developed in Chapter Two where I illustrate the ways in which the critical and post-modern paradigms can enhance one another.

'Critical theory' is broadly defined by Raymond Guess (cited in Macey 2000: 75) as:

> … a theory that provides a guide for human action, is inherently emancipatory, has a cognitive content and, unlike a scientific theory, is self-conscious, self-critical and non-objectifying.

Theorists such as Karl Marx (1983), Jűrgen Habermas (1972), Paulo Freire (1972a; 1994), Henry Giroux (1994) and Peter McLaren (1995), amongst others, have contributed significantly to the critical tradition, which is guided by notions of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change. Critical theorists take up the concepts of agency, power and empowerment, liberation, and transformation, and attempt to understand how injustice and oppressive power relations are sustained by some over others (Kilgore, 2001, Welton, 1996). They base their work on the assumption that it is possible for an individual as a self-critical rational agent to resist dominant hegemonic structures of oppression and take action to liberate him/herself and others from oppressive societal structures.

However, post-modern theory challenges many of the assumptions made by critical theorists, particularly the notion that there can be a universal truth or universal rule of democracy or social justice (Kilgore, 2001). In fact, any kind of 'unified' view is challenged, including the notion of a unified critical self, centred around a rational ego. Individuals are seen as multiple subjectivities with fragmented identities constituted within a nexus of discourses. Difference and plurality are embraced as a welcome end to an era of rationality (Macey, 2000). Michel Foucault, a French theorist, has made a particularly significant contribution to a post-modern understanding of power, an

[9] Other terms such as 'neo-marxist', 'feminist', 'praxis-orientated', 'Freirean', and 'participatory' also refer to specific perspectives within the broad grouping of critical or emancipatory theory. However, 'critical theory' is the most commonly used term.

understanding which has bearing on this study and its concern with the question of how communities become 'empowered'. (Foucault's thinking on power is explored in more depth in Chapter Two.)

In sum, both critical and post-modern theoretical perspectives have shaped the concepts identified here as relevant, and both these theoretical perspectives have influenced the specific questions and key variables of this study in particular ways. The main concepts around which the research questions have been constructed are:

- Development
- Power and empowerment
- Participation and participatory practices
- Literacy

The theoretical parameters framing these concepts are explored further in Chapter Two; suffice to note here that both critical and post-modern theorists have provided a lens to examine how these concepts can be understood and critiqued in the research context.

Methodology

The theoretical perspective on critical theory (more than that of post-modern theory) has influenced my choice of methodology. Crotty (1998:3) defines 'methodology' as

> the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and the use of methods to the desired outcomes.

An action research (AR) design fits well with a critical theoretical perspective because of its emphasis on problem solving and action for social change and empowerment of participants.

> AR is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. But the social change we refer to is not just any kind of change. AR aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organisation members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so.
>
> (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:6)

Participants, guided by a commitment to engaging in critical analysis and improving practice, engage in a cyclical process of action and reflection. This methodology is discussed further in Chapter Three.

Methods

The theoretical parameters and the principles of the research design have been set out. The methods used to gather and analyse the data collected included focus groups, interviews, observation, document and photograph analysis, as well as journal and field notes. These are discussed in more depth in Chapter Three, as is the process by which data were collected during the various stages of the action research cycles.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While I maintain that the action research design selected was appropriate to the research issues and intended to be of benefit to the participants involved, there were also certain limitations to using this design. These are sketched briefly below, but explored further in Chapter Three. Overall limitations of the study are presented in the final chapter.

Firstly, by the nature of its design, an action research study has certain imperfections as a 'research instrument'. These are discussed in detail in Chapter Three - suffice to say here that given the contextualised nature of the research process, the results are not generalisable to other contexts.

A second limitation of this study relates to the linguistic and cultural limitations of the researcher. As a non-mother tongue speaker of Sesotho, it is likely that I have missed complexities and nuances that would have been uncovered and pursued by a mother-tongue researcher from the community. It is generally assumed that the more a researcher has in common with the participants in terms of culture, gender, race, and socio-economic class, the greater will be the access to the research community, and shared meanings, which in turn assures the validity of the findings (Merriam et al, 2001). However, there are greater complexities to the "insider-outsider' debate and these are explored further in Chapter Three.

In spite of the limitations sketched above, the study has provided new insights into the way a community takes up and transforms both the action research process as well as the REFLECT process itself. The presence of an 'insider-outsider' researcher, as well as the impact of using an approach developed by an 'outside' organisation (Action Aid is a UK-based NGO) provide interesting links into wider debates of topics under review in this study.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This study is organised into seven chapters. This first chapter has provided an introduction to the research context, the principles of the REFLECT approach and the action research design of the study.

The second chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature using the key constructs identified in earlier in this chapter as an organising structure. Key debates are reviewed and their relevance for this study critically discussed.

Chapter Three provides the reader with a detailed picture of the research design, methodology and methods used in this study. One of the main objectives of this chapter is to explain how the REFLECT methodology was implemented within an action research design. This chapter provides the reader with a context for understanding how the data was collected. I have also made an effort to outline the advantages and limitations of the research design and the research process as it unfolded in Malealea so that the reader is better positioned to judge the presentation of the data in the following chapters.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present the overall findings of the research. These chapters 'tell the story' of the research process, integrating photographic and other visual data with textual data in both English and Sesotho. Chapter Four presents data related to the Cooperative learning circle, while Chapters Five and Six focus on the data that emerged from the village learning circles. It should be noted that these findings chapters are organised chronologically and thematically so as to provide the reader with a picture of the process. As such, these chapters are largely descriptive and reflective with more critical comments reserved for the final chapter.

Chapter Seven offers a summary of key issues that emerged from the findings in relation to each of the research questions. Issues are critically discussed in relation to the theoretical debates raised in Chapter Two. In conclusion, I reflect on the limitations and achievements of implementing REFLECT over the course of the study, and offer some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO – ANCHORING A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORY

> …one of the quintessential aspects of modernity [is] the need to compose the world as a picture.
> (Escobar, 1995:56)

Theory is the lens through which we see the world. It shapes our picture of the world. Theory informs the way we define, interpret and represent our experience, ultimately fashioning what we see and believe. "The way we see things is affected by what we believe" (Berger, 1972: 8). Theory provides the parameters within which we understand and explain society. As such, theory has the potential to be restrictive or emancipatory. Schratz and Walker (1995:125) draw attention to the latter:

> Theory is … what makes it possible to see the world differently and so be able to act in different ways … Its concern is not simply to say why the world is as it is, but to provide us with space to think how it could be different.

However, if our theoretical perspectives *and* their underlying assumptions are not clearly articulated, the emancipatory potential of theory to which Schratz and Walker refer may not be realised.

> Without a theory, the assumptions underlying the … intervention are never made explicit. Therefore they cannot be tested against experience, essentially eliminating the possibility of experience-based learning.
>
> (Korten, 1990: 114)

Since a primary aim of this study is to draw out experience-based learning from a study of REFLECT circles in Malealea, the theoretical assumptions that have shaped my thinking and practice must be made explicit. The purpose of this chapter is to lay bare those theories and embedded assumptions that have shaped my picture, my understanding and my interpretation of the research experience.

I have compared theory to a lens through which we see the world. However, it is important to note that a lens is not always fixed; it changes as the world changes. As with the pupil of the eye that expands or contracts with brighter or dimmer light, so will a

theoretical lens change according to an array of contextual factors that influence the way we see and experience "reality". Escobar (1995:148) articulates this as follows:

> … theory production and use take place in a discontinuous terrain, with ongoing and complex processes of appropriations and contestations in various directions.

Perhaps the metaphor of a kaleidoscope better illustrates the notion of changing theoretical perspectives. When gazing into a kaleidoscope, pieces of coloured glass come together to make up an image. This image will change, as the viewer adjusts the kaleidoscope. In a similar way, the theoretical pieces that come together to help the researcher to make sense of data depend on the changing context, and the ways the researcher interprets the data within the context. A certain theoretical perspective does not necessarily mean a prescribed way of seeing, understanding or experiencing the world since perspectives and understandings can shift. And, in fact such shifts can be advantageous, since they can challenge us to rethink the relationships and practices we have taken for granted, allowing us to be open to change, innovation, new meaning and new practice.

> Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.
>
> (Berger, 1972: 9)

So what are the pieces that make up this researcher's theoretical kaleidoscope? There are five main 'pieces' or theoretical components informing this study. These include:

- theories about **development**
- theories about **power and empowerment**
- theories about **participation and participatory practices**
- theories about **literacy**, with a specific focus on **REFLECT**
- theories related to different forms of **capital**, with a specific focus on **human and social capital**
- An additional fragment of the kaleidoscope is that of **eco-tourism**, a factor which has influenced the research context more broadly.

This chapter provides an opportunity to examine each of these pieces in more depth, so as to understand better how the research picture presented in subsequent chapters has been painted.

There are many links and areas of over-lap between the central theoretical components of this study. Figure 4 below presents a graphic representation of (a moment of) this kaleidoscopic effect[10]:

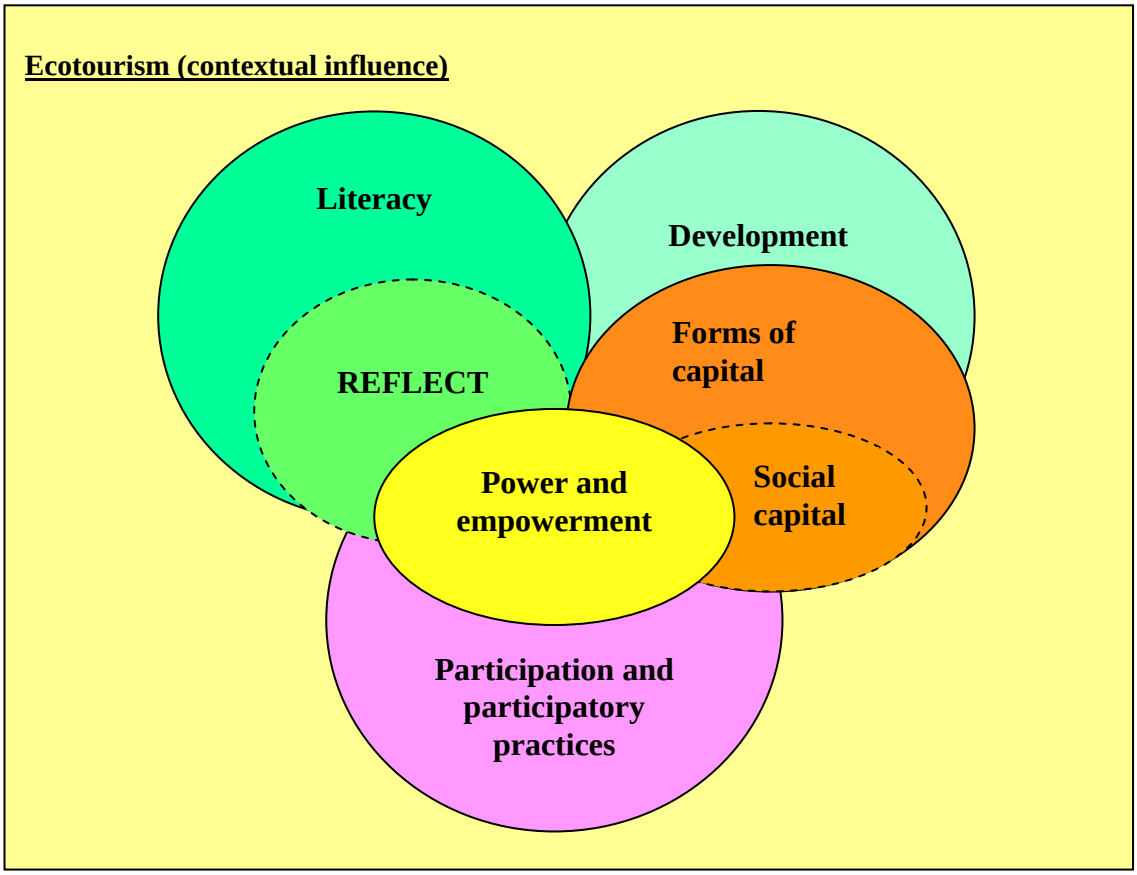


Figure 4: A visual representation of the theoretical components informing this study

Which segment of the kaleidoscope should be examined first? Given the inter-relatedness of the different pieces, it is difficult to extract one piece without simultaneously pulling in the others. However, I begin with an exploration of 'development', since this is a concept that over the last 50 years has become so familiar it almost defies definition.

[10] Arrangement of segments here does not suggest order of importance – segments are subject to rearrangement as are the pieces of a kaleidoscopic lens.

DEVELOPMENT

Ferguson (1990) argues that development has become a value that forms part of our social consciousness. He writes:

> It seems to us today almost non-sensical to deny that there is such a thing as "development," or to dismiss it as a meaningless concept, just as it must have been virtually impossible to reject the concept of "civilisation" in the nineteenth century, or the concept of "God" in the twelfth. …"Development" in our time is a value so firmly entrenched that it seems impossible to question it, or refer to any other standard beyond its own.
>
> (1990:xiv)

Sachs (1992: 4) is less grand about the concept of development calling it "amoeba-like … shapeless, but ineradicable", a term that has spread everywhere. "[Development] is hailed by the IMF and the Vatican alike, by revolutionaries carrying their guns as well as field experts carrying their Samsonites".

Tracing the origins of the term

It is precisely because development has become so much a part of our ideology, that it is necessary to trace the ways in which it has developed and become an integral part of our contemporary social thought. The scope of the field of development is wide, and a range of definitions and understandings of the term exists across contexts. According to Ferguson, the term "development" is used primarily in two ways:

> On the one hand, "development" is used to mean the process of transition or transformation toward a modern, capitalist, industrial economy – "modernisation," "capitalist development," "the development of the forces of production," etc. The second meaning, much in vogue from the mid 1970s onward, defines itself in terms of "quality of life" and "standard of living," and refers to the reduction or amelioration of poverty and material want.
>
> (Ferguson, 1990:15)

Ferguson sees the first position as a movement in history, a movement towards modern industrial capitalism, where 'development' implies the development of the forces of production, the development of 'modern society', of capitalism. The second position can be viewed as more of a moral position, which includes activities and social programmes geared toward the elimination or alleviation of poverty and material want, and the improvement of quality of life.

Over the last five decades there have been a variety of 'formulas' for development, involving a range of combinations of economic growth and social change. In the 1960's, the United Nations integrated the economic and social aspects in their definition of development as "growth plus change" (UN, 1962: 8), with change being defined as "social, cultural as well as economic, and qualitative as well as quantitative". Over the next decade, this definition of development achieved dominance with the social aspect of development continually linked to the economic aspect. In 1975, the World Bank, the largest foreign donor to Third World countries, defined rural development as "a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor" (World Bank, 1975: 3). This trend of integrating the social and economic elements of development continued through the 1980's and 90's into the new millennium. In 2001, in an article written for the World Bank online Development Forum Dialogue, it was noted that:

> One of the fallouts from focusing primarily on the quantity of growth has been the large subsidization of developing nations' physical capital. There are other forms of assets that are at equally important in determining a nation's development potential. These are human, social and cultural capital and a nation's natural capital.
> (Bandyopadhya, 2001:www.worldbank.org/devoutreach/winter01/article.asp)

However, it may be argued that the World Bank's predominant concern remains with economic growth, capital, technology and becoming modern, and that social change programmes to alleviate poverty are invariably embedded within this broader economic agenda, often obfuscating that agenda. Ferguson (1990) argues that there is a central contradiction underlying the attempt to reconcile social and economic change through 'development'. He points out that "the development of capitalism and the elimination of poverty are, if not positively antithetic (as many neo-Marxists argue), at any rate not identical" (Ferguson, 1990:55).

The two primary orientations to development, social change and economic change, continue to define the field of development. Over the years, they have been taken up in different and sometimes simultaneous ways with varying implications for how development initiatives are implemented and understood. Although I have already noted that this study places particular emphasis on a social orientation to change, it is important to explore both the social and economic perspectives in more depth and locate the study in relation to these two orientations. Later in this chapter, these concepts will be explored in

relation to different forms of capital, but it is useful to first explore how development has been defined by others, and how I define it for the purposes of this study.

In search of a definition

According to Youngman (2000:5), "the term 'development' refers to the idea that deliberate action can be taken to change society in chosen directions which are considered desirable". This definition corresponds with the second 'moral' position identified by Ferguson, a definition that also informs this study. However, it is important to question what constitutes 'change', who decides what should change, in whose eyes an action might be considered 'desirable', who chooses the direction of action, and in what context.

These questions relate more fundamentally to the ways in which social reality is conceptualised and represented. Escobar (1995) refers to the ways in which an entire discourse of development has been constructed around certain dominant representations of social reality in the developing or "Third World" countries. He argues that these representations have their roots in a discursive formation that was laid down in the period 1945 – 1955, and that the basic architecture of this discourse has remained unchanged. Over time, the discourse has gone through a series of structural changes and adapted to new conditions through the creation of new development strategies, however "always within the same discursive space" (p42), a space set aside to resolve alleged problems relating to economic and social development. All definitions of development have their roots within this space.

Escobar (1995) also makes the point that the examination of any aspect of development "should be done within the context of the discourse as a whole" (p.43), since the discourse privileges particular positions and forms of power in terms of class, gender, race and nationality.

> [T]he development discourse … has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about and the exercise of power over, the Third World. This apparatus came into existence roughly in the period 1945 to 1955 and has not since ceased to produce new arrangements of knowledge and power, new practices, theories, strategies and so on. In sum, it has successfully deployed a regime of government over the Third World, "space for subject peoples" that ensures certain control over it.
>
> (Escobar, 1995:9)

To illustrate this point, I would like to present a short vignette drawn up by myself, a middle class white woman researcher, describing a day in the life of' a typical participant in the research context:

A day in the life of Mathabo

Mathabo lives in a small village in the Malealea valley of south eastern Lesotho. On most mornings, Mathabo wakes at 4h30 to make a small fire to heat water for washing and cooking. After a simple meal of maize porridge, she leaves for the fields. At the moment, it is weeding season and there is a lot of work to be done. Although this field is the only one the family has, Mathabo is grateful for the food it brings in. Since her husband, a migrant labourer, was killed in a mining accident, she and her family are almost completely dependent on the food they can grow; although sometimes she is able to earn a little extra cash from selling wood or doing washing for people in the village.

She will work until around 3pm, along with women from other households who will also be weeding their fields. Thereafter she will collect wood for cooking the evening meal before returning home. Collecting wood will take a couple of hours, since finding wood these days requires her to walk further and further up the mountain. Deforestation has become a serious problem, but wood is still cheaper than paraffin, which can only be purchased when she has money to spare.

Mathabo's daughter used to share the burden of these chores, but since contracting HIV and then AIDS, she is too weak to manage the work. She can no longer even take care of her two children who now live with her at her mother's home. Besides her daughter and her two grandchildren, Mathabo also has another two sons to take care of. They are now old enough to work, but currently unemployed. As Mathabo works in the fields, she wonders if they are taking care of the two children properly. She wonders how they always find money to drink, while there is never money for things like food and clothing. As she works in the field, Mathabo hopes that if they have gone drinking, they have left the children safely with one of the other women in the village.

When she finally arrives home, Mathabo prepares the evening meal for her family. Preparing for the meal includes making the fire, fetching water from the spring and grinding maize. It is hard to get the men to do this work since it is considered 'women's work', so they leave it for her to do when she arrives home. Once the family has eaten,

Mathabo cleans up and prepares the children for bed. This marks the end of a typical day in Mathabo's life.

This description of 'a typical day' serves two purposes here. Firstly, and most apparently, it provides the reader with a better understanding of the context in which my research is situated, and the range of problems related to development that exist in this context. Certain macro and micro- level issues are highlighted as Mathabo's story is told. An agricultural subsistence livelihood is seen to be a tenuous survival mechanism in an increasingly fragile ecological context. Erosion, desertification and deforestation mean that the resources (soil, water and wood) previously available to support rural livelihoods are evermore scarce, requiring greater and greater effort to eke out an existence. Social and gender roles burden women with a workload that includes that of agricultural worker, food provider, informal trader, primary educator and caregiver. Add to this the social and economic problems related to a system of migrant labour, escalating levels of poverty, unemployment, alcohol abuse and HIV/AIDS.

But secondly, and more subtly, this description serves to position and represent not only Mathabo, but all women (and conversely men) more generally in this 'developing' context. What is presented here is a typified description of the lives of Third World women as an experience plagued by seemingly impossible accumulation of problems. Mathabo/'Third World' women are seen to have limited space and power to act within a scenario of ever darkening circumstances. And, the reader is invited to believe that this description is based on an objective analysis by a 'participant observer' (myself, researcher) of the social reality in this context.

However, these observations are not as objective as they appear. They are part of a historically produced discourse, a way of knowing where certain problems and representations have attained the status of truth. The case of Mathabo can be used to illustrate how 'Third World' women might be presented as the 'other', and how knowledge about them can be framed in a particular way that makes them visible but not audible. Chandra Mohanty, a feminist scholar, has conducted a survey of the ways in which Third World women are represented in literature on development. She concludes that:

> [The] average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-orientated, victimized, etc.) This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.
>
> (Mohanty, 1991:56)

Mohanty makes the point that such representations assume Western standards as the 'norm' against which Third World women are compared. These standards are inscribed into a discursive regime that reinforces the dominance of the modern western knowledge system.

> It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named.
>
> (Mohanty, 1991:54)

Issues of power and empowerment are taken up in greater depth later in this chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to recognise that from this post-modern perspective, power relations are inscribed in discourse, and particular representations (for example, of third world women) are authorised by that discourse which privileges certain perspectives, while simultaneously marginalising and invalidating others.

However, the task of operationalising an appropriate definition of 'development' for this study still awaits. In this regard, David Korten's definition of development is helpful since it acknowledges the contradiction between the development of capitalism and the elimination of poverty. He defines development as

> a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.
>
> (Korten, 1990:67)

This definition emphasises the process, rather than the economic outcome of development. The focus is on the growth of personal and institutional capacity at a local, regional and national level, rather than on economic growth as defined by a group of elite international players, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Korten's definition embodies "the principles of justice, sustainability and inclusiveness" (ibid). It acknowledges that "only the people themselves can define what they consider to

be improvements in the quality of their lives". People are the central focus of this notion of development which challenges the mainstream top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic approaches where people are treated as abstract "statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of 'progress'" (Escobar, 1995:44).

It is this understanding of development as a process whereby people address their own needs that informs this study which attempts to examine how people themselves can identify and address challenges in their lives and move towards an improved existence for all members of a community. However, while opting for an alternative definition and conceptualisation of 'development' that foregrounds people and participatory practices, it is worth noting that even this opositional understanding has a particular place in the history of the development discourse. It is not neutral or exempt from ideological influence – this definition too occupies a certain discursive position within a historically produced discourse. A discussion of the different theories of 'development' will help to illustrate how the definition used in this study has evolved, which will in turn help to illuminate how the exploration of development has unfolded in the research context.

Theories of development

Five primary paradigms of development theory have been identified by Youngman (2000). These are modernisation theory, dependency theory, neoliberal theory, populism and political economy theory (Youngman, 2000). In addition to these paradigms, Leroke (1996) has put forward a postmodern interpretation of development, which "provides a rethinking of development from the perspective on post-modern theory" (p. 222). A brief discussion of each of these paradigms follows.

(i) Modernisation theory

Modernisation theories, developed in the 1950s and 1960s dichotomise societies into traditional and modern societies. Modern societies, the industrialised countries of the West, are seen to provide the blueprint for development throughout the world (Webster, 1990). Moore (1964:89) describes modernisation as:

> A 'total' transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organisation that characterise the 'advanced', economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the Western World.

In modernisation theory, development is perceived to be a linear process, with progress being achieved as societies pass through certain prescribed 'stages' of development to finally achieve prosperity and political stability. Walter Rostow, an influential thinker in the 1960's identified in his 'non-communist manifesto' five such stages of economic growth (Rostow, 1960). The first stage of a traditional pre-industrialised society is followed by a stage where preconditions for development exist, enabling societies to pass through an economic 'take-off' stage, into a drive to maturity, finally reaching an age of high mass consumption. If poorer countries accelerated their progress through these stages, they would reach a state of industrialisation and economic growth. For modernisation theorists, economic growth is the crux of the matter. The development process is all about economic growth, achieved through investment in urban industry, which has benefits that "trickle down" to the traditional sectors of society (Roodt, 1996).

Modernisation theory holds that 'traditional' societies are hindered by their technologies as well as their patterns of thinking, which are seen as redundant and anachronistic. To increase economic activity and production, traditional societies need to take on first world technology and techniques as well as 'modern' values and attitudes (Webster, 1990; Rogers, 1992).

The inability of less developed countries to 'catch up' to developed Western countries is seen to be a result of internal deficiencies, such as low productivity, and a lack of educated and skilled people. Education is seen as a crucial factor for development, a means of promoting economic growth and a necessary precondition for economic 'take-off'. With an emphasis on promoting economic development, rather than social or human development, education and literacy are advocated as an investment in human capital[11]. This kind of rationale has influenced the development of functional literacy, where literacy is promoted not only as a tool to help people advance on an individual level, but also as a skill which will contribute to economic development on a wider scale (Lyster, 1992). Functional literacy has become the dominant mode within the modernisation discourse, and is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[11] Different forms of capital are discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

The assumption inherent in modernisation theory is that national governments direct and control modernisation processes. This has formed the basis for neo-liberal theory, which is also taken up in more detail below.

(ii) Dependency or underdevelopment theory

Dependency theories developed out of a criticism that the contexts of rich and poor countries could be likened in the neutral way suggested by modernisation theory. In Dependency Theory, the two contexts are seen as causally related, with the development of the North being made possible by the underdevelopment of the South[12] whose economic surplus is exploited by the North. The causes of poverty are not ascribed to internal deficiencies, but rather seen as a direct effect of exposure to the economic and political influences of advanced countries in the North (Webster, 1990). The assumption that development can be facilitated by stronger economic and social links with countries in the North is strongly criticised. In fact, it is seen as necessary for countries in the South to disengage themselves from the world capitalist economy and the relentless process of exploitation of cheap labour by multinationals who invest their profits back into their headquarters in the North, further marginalising the South (Corbridge: 1991).

The writings of Paulo Freire emerged from the theoretical context of dependency theory. The economic dependency of developing countries (South American countries in particular) formed the foundation for Freire's theory of adult education, which emphasises 'cultural action for freedom' and 'conscientization'. Freire saw colonialism as a 'cultural invasion' as well as an economic invasion, and attributed cultural alienation and the development of a 'culture of silence' to the state of being dependent: "The dependent society is by definition a silent society" (Freire, 1997: 59). He argued that people needed to develop a critical consciousness that would enable them to "break out of the culture of silence and win their right to speak" and challenge dominant socio-economic structures.

[12] The use of the terms South and North are used to refer to the divisions in economies between poor and rich countries respectively within the new global order. Previously, rich countries were referred to as First World countries, but since the collapse of the communism and the Soviet Union, the Second World no longer exists. Some theorists however still use the terms First and Third Worlds. In this thesis, the terms South and North are used interchangeably with the terms 'developing' and 'developed'.

Dependency theory has thus had an important intellectual influence not only on development theories, but also on theories of adult education. Freirean theories are discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

(iii) Neoliberal theory

Neo-liberalism is the dominant economic and development paradigm in the world today. Neo-liberals believe in the power of the free-market and reduced government intervention in the economy. Free trade and private enterprise are advocated, as is the elimination of protectionist measures. All countries should compete in a world market according to their 'comparative advantage' in providing goods and services. If a country is poor, it is because of erroneous economic policies. This argument, influenced by modernisation theory, has provided the means for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to dictate and prescribe changes to economic policies of developing countries which depend on these institutions to manage their escalating foreign debts. The establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 to promote free trade in a globalised economy has further strengthened the dominance of neo-liberalism and the pervasiveness of globalisation. Through measures such as the Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS), Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the WTO has not only regulated international trade, but also influenced national legislation around the world.

Education, firmly situated within the context of economic globalisation, has not escaped the influence of neo-liberal ideology. Education and training have become a major concern for developing countries competing for a foothold in the global market. A skilled labour force is seen as key in the world of competitiveness, and over the last decade there has been a growing call for adult education to meet market needs by focusing on the development of human capital to grow a superior labour force that will attract global capital (Korsgaard, 1997). Other forms of capital, such as social capital[13], that could be linked to positive education and development outcomes have been ignored. Within this climate, alternative frameworks (such as REFLECT) with the potential to contribute towards social transformation have been marginalized, and adult education's potential to

[13] Different forms of capital are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

effect social development and transformation has been curtailed (Groener, 2001, Youngman, 2000).

In Lesotho, evidence of the influence of neo-liberal policies can be seen in the World Bank's efforts to work in collaboration with the Government of Lesotho, and a range of other international development agencies, including the Africa Development Bank and the European Union, to produce a strategy and action plan for reducing poverty in an 'efficient' and 'sustainable' way. The favoured strategy has been "to reduce poverty and to improve the country's competitiveness through greater integration into the sub-regional economy" (Comprehensive Development Framework, 2006). The implications of this for adult education have been similar to what they have been in South Africa – namely a growing emphasis on developing a skilled labour force as the component that will drive development through meeting the needs of the economy.

(iv) Populism

A range of critiques of neo-liberalism has developed in the wake of evidence that neo-liberal development policies have had little positive impact on countries of the South. These critiques, which can be broadly grouped together as 'populist' theories, promote alternative approaches to development that emphasise the empowerment of ordinary people (Youngman, 2000).

Populist theories question the promotion of industrialisation and large scale, capital intensive agriculture as appropriate development strategies for the majority of people who remain poor and powerless (Youngman, 2000). Instead, populists argue that development strategies should emphasise small scale, industrial enterprises controlled by the rural people who themselves work those enterprises. Worker co-operatives where workers pool their resources and efforts to manage and control their own production unit are one example of such small enterprises. Workers own the cooperative, and membership is restricted to employees. Within the context of this research, a co-operative served as the primary site where the REFLECT approach was piloted (see Chapters One, Three and Four where the research context is described in more detail). The Co-op in question was owned by the members, and profits were distributed amongst employees who worked in it. Decisions about production, working hours, management structures and systems were all made by members themselves. These kinds of strategies give people greater freedom

of choice with respect to production decisions, choices that would not exist under capital intensive strategies imposed by government (Webster, 1990). Structures such as cooperatives challenge the dominant values of individualism and competition that characterise free-market capitalism and in doing so pose alternatives to neo-liberalism.

Youngman's summarises the populist model as follows:

> The populist alternative … stresses peasant agriculture and small-scale commodity production, with a focus on meeting the needs of the poor through self-reliant, localised economic activity using labour-intensive methods and appropriate technology. It proposes decentralised, bottom-up, people-centred planning which will mobilise and empower local communities through participation in decision-making, especially in grassroots social movements and non-governmental organisations. It particularly emphasises the importance of indigenous culture and the environment.
>
> (Youngman, 2000:78)

The roots of the populist model can be traced back to dependency theory, which highlights the polarisation of 'metropolitan centres' and 'peripheral satellites'.

> A whole chain of metropolises and satellites, which runs from the world metropolis down to the hacienda or rural merchant who are satellites of the local commercial metropolitan centre but who in their turn have peasants as their satellites.
>
> (Frank, 1967: 34)

Recognising the division outlined above, populist theories emphasise the development and empowerment of small peasant farmers in local communities. In this way peasants will be able to control the surplus they produce, rather than have it exploited by more powerful players. This position has clearly been influenced by the dependency theory critique of the exploitation of surplus produced by rural peasants.

According to Youngman (2000), theories of feminism, environmentalism, and ethnoculturalism have also influenced populist models of development. However, Youngman tends to combine these theories together without distinguishing clearly between them. In the process, many of the rich contributions that each of these theories has to make to debates within the development field become dissipated. For example, earlier in this chapter I discussed the way in which feminist theory has troubled the positioning of women within the development discourse. And later in this chapter I will discuss how environmentalism has informed the concept of 'sustainable development'.

These alternative approaches (some might call them critical or post-modern in that they challenge concepts and representations imbedded in the dominant development paradigm) are derived from a critique of modernisation and neo-liberal theories, and have brought new perspectives to bear on how ordinary people might be empowered.

The populist model of development is compatible with the tradition of adult education as a popular movement for social change. This tradition emphasises the importance of communities gaining the skills, knowledge and consciousness necessary for forming and managing their own organisations. The emphasis placed on developing a consciousness, and understanding the structural causes of poverty, provides further evidence of how populist theories have been influenced by dependency theory.

Populist theories are highly relevant to the proposed study, which aims to explore educational and development issues related to social change and empowerment of participants.

(v) Political economy

Political economy theories are generally concerned with explaining the relationship between political processes and economic processes (Youngman, 2000). Political economy studies the means of production, specifically capital, and how this manifests itself in economic activity. The term 'political economy' was first coined in the 18th century as the study of economies of states (also known as polities, hence the word "political" in "political economy"). Karl Marx built on and critiqued the most well-known political economies of his day proposing a systematic correlation between labour-values and money prices. He claimed that the source of profits under capitalism is value added by workers not paid out in wages. He made a distinction between 'labour power', which workers freely exchanged for their wages, and 'labour', over which asset-holding capitalists thereby gained control. This practical and theoretical distinction was Marx's primary insight, and allowed him to develop the concept of 'surplus value', which distinguished his works from that of classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Buchholz, 1999; Heilbronner, 1999; Prychitko, 2006).

Marxist social theory provides conceptual tools and an interpretative grid for analysis, although Youngman stresses that Marxism is not a monolithic body of theory, but rather

contains a range of internal perspectives and divergent interpretations. Correspondingly, a number of different types of political economy analyses have developed, which have varied in conceptualisation according to the particular theoretical orientation adopted. However, these analytical frameworks have in common a concern with different 'interests' and their analysis of social reality "in terms of economic organisation of society and the relationship between classes" (Youngman, 2000:9). Most political economy theories give consideration to the relationship between capital, imperialism, class and the state, and how these concepts might be applied to understanding development and socio-economic transformation.

Political economy theories are relevant to the study in that they highlight the complexities of a situation within its wider socio-historical context. Although I do not propose to adopt a political economy approach, I will draw on aspects of the theory to help me gain insight into the "contextual limits" of activities that take place in Malealea, so as to understand the "constraints on action and possibilities of change" (Youngman, 2000:4). According to Youngman (2000:9):

> One of the strengths of Marxist social theory is its comprehensive scope and transdisciplinary nature. It transcends the conventional boundaries of philosophy, history, economics, political science, sociology and psychology, and this makes it a powerful tool for comprehending …complexities…

(vi) Postmodern development

Post-modernism sees 'development' as a discourse within which people are inscribed, a process of power relations. It takes issue with a political economy approach, arguing that development cannot be reduced to the structures and logic of economics, a set of economic interests to be unveiled through analysis. Rather, development is a language that changes over time, a complex process that defines us and implicates us in the process of producing particular knowledge and power relations.

> Development is not about domination or forms of oppression. It is mainly about the complex processes of the production of power relations/knowledge. These ideas are from the observation that domination is a complex process. It is not a linear process of rule.
>
> (Leroke, 1996: 244)

Postmodernism challenges the logic of binary thought inherent in theories of both modernism and political economy.

> From a poststructuralist perspective…there cannot be a materialist analysis that is not at the same time a discursive analysis… There is no materiality that is not mediated by discourse, as there is no discourse that is unrelated to materialities.
>
> (Escobar, 1995:130)

The way in which the development discourse mediates subject positions and constructs a particular framework was illustrated briefly earlier in this section, in the story of Mathabo. Other theorists (Ferguson, 1990; Tapscott, 1995; Mohanty, 1991) have shown in much greater depth the extent to which the discourse of development impacts on the lives of millions of people, not only materially, but also ideologically and politically. In a detailed case study of a Canadian development project in Lesotho, Ferguson (1990) illustrates how the dominant problematic of "development" has generated a discourse about development that has constructed Lesotho as a particular kind of object. Interventions are organised on the basis of this structure of knowledge, and have regular effects, one of which is to expand and entrench bureaucratic state power. Another is to create a particular representation of economic and social life which denies "politics" and its effects. This argument is summarised by Ferguson below:

> The short answer to the question of what the "development" apparatus in Lesotho does … is to be found in the book's title: It is an "anti-politics machine," depoliticising everything it touches, everywhere whisking political relations out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power.
>
> (Ferguson, 1990:xv)

According to Ferguson, the reason why political relations are 'whisked out of sight' is that development agencies are not supposed to be involved in politics. However, they are at the same time supposed to effect social change. Ferguson points to a fundamental contradiction here:

> … any real effort at "social change" cannot help but have powerful political implications, which a "development" project is constitutionally unfit to deal with. To do what it is set up to do (bring about socio-economic transformations), a "development" project must attempt what it is not set up to do (involve itself in polical struggles).
>
> (Ferguson, 1990:226)

In his extensively researched case study of the development problematic in the Thaba-Tseka district of Lesotho, Ferguson shows how "development" as such failed[14], but this failure had many "side effects" which served the purpose of expanding and entrenching state power. Because of the development project, a new road was built linking the capital Maseru with the previously inaccessible Thaba Tseka area. This enabled the Government of Lesotho to establish a new district administration and have a much stronger presence in the area than had existed before (Ferguson, 1990:252). These were powerful effects which expanded and entrenched the state's power as the local governing machinery was augmented. There was ultimately a shift in power relations, but this was depoliticised and ideologically justified in the name of 'development'.

It is important to note that for post-modern theorists, the focus is not on the intentions of different actors, but rather on the non- and counter-intentionality of structural production.

> [O]ne must entertain the possibility that the "development" apparatus … may do what it does, not at the bidding of some knowing and powerful subject who is making it all happen, but behind the backs of or against the wills of even the most powerful actors.
>
> (Ferguson, 1990:18)

Post-modern theory has shaped my thinking and understanding of 'development', providing me with a broader perspective on the ways in which the concept of development has shaped the process of development. Post-modern theory also provides a critical lens on notions such as 'poverty', 'empowerment', 'participation', 'illiteracy', and so on, words which have become signifiers within the web of key concepts that make up the discourse of development (Sachs, 1992: 4; Escobar, 1995: 12). Since these terms are especially pertinent to this study, discussion of them is continued in the sections that follow. In particular, I pay close attention to how the concepts of 'power' and 'empowerment', 'participation' and 'literacy' have developed. I look at the different ways in which these terms have been understood, and the implications of these different understandings for this study.

[14] The project did not achieve its objectives of transforming crop farming or livestock keeping.

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

> It is the development of a realistic, analytical, and critical understanding of power which is central to people learning to be free.
>
> (Inglis, 1998:74)

The concept of 'empowerment' has become key within development discourse. The idea that people can be 'empowered' to take control of their lives and free themselves from the conditions and structures that dominate and constrain them, has over the years gained increasing political credibility and legitimacy within the fields of both development and education. However, central to the debate about how people become 'empowered', is the notion of 'power'. Different understandings of what constitutes power and how power works lead to a variety of interpretations of 'empowerment'. This section explores different understandings of 'power' and how power works. I then explore the implications for this study.

Understandings of power

Power has been defined in a host of different ways by a range of people in divergent fields. However, three main perspectives can be distilled from the cacophony of voices that have spoken on power: a mainstream perspective, a critical perspective and a Foucauldian perspective[15]. These three understandings of power are discussed, as are the implications of these perspectives for the ways in which 'empowerment' can be understood.

A 'mainstream' perspective on power

A mainstream view on power sees power as a quantifiable entity, something that can be acquired or possessed, given to, or taken away from a person, institution or organisation (Street, 1995). It is a zero-sum game: to gain it, somebody else has to relinquish it (Rowlands, 1995). But there are rules governing the distribution of power within this zero-sum game – gaining or relinquishing power is not a random event. Power is an instrument of domination. Whoever wields it, has the ability to get others to do what they want them to do - if necessary, against their will (Weber, 1978). This kind of power is

[15] These categorisations have been used by Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan (1998: 452). However, it is important to note that while these categories help to structure a comparison of the different ways in which power and empowerment have been conceptualised, there are also parallels and overlaps between the perspectives, particularly the first two.

understood to be coercive and is often referred to as 'power over' (Brookfield, 2001b; Rowlands, 1995). Authoritative power is usually wielded by men over other men, by men over women, and by dominant social, political, economic, or cultural groups over those that are marginalised.

Staying with the metaphor of power as a zero-sum game, certain players are perceived to exercise their power more legitimately than others, with legitimacy being defined as 'normal' and 'inevitable', and exercised from within formal, acceptable hierarchical structures (Hardy and Clegg, 1996: 624). Power exercised from outside these parameters is seen as illegitimate and dysfunctional, and as a threat to the established system. Of course, those who decide on the rules of the game most often define legitimacy, whose power is legitimate, and who the players are. In the words of Schattschneider, "[W]hoever decides what the game is about, also decides who gets into the game" (1960: 105). However, legitimacy may be contested if those who oppose it interpret it as repressive. In this case, a move against it would be considered liberatory. Either way, power is still seen as bi-polar, either oppressive or liberatory.

A mainstream perspective on power rests on the assumption that conflict and opposition characterise power relations. In fact, conflict is assumed to be a necessary condition for the exercise of power (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). However, conflict can be suppressed, usually through paralysing the participation of some players, but only as a means for others to gain further power. For example, in a management context, Bachrach and Baratz (1963) observed how powerful players used their power to prevent the less powerful participants from gaining access to the decision-making arena. Certain 'unsafe' issues, usually those reflecting the needs of the weaker players, may be left off decision-making agendas in order for the more powerful players to determine the outcomes from behind the scenes. In this way, the status quo is maintained and the interests of the more powerful are protected. However, even the 'behind-the-scenes' strategy assumes a degree of conflict, whether this is anticipated or actual.

A 'mainstream' perspective on empowerment

From a mainstream perspective, advocates of empowerment stress the need for the 'disempowered' to gain access to power, for example through gaining skills:

> Empowerment aims at the improvement of individual and collective skills to regain control over living and working conditions and their impact on well-being.
>
> (Henderson and Thomas, 1987, cited in Erben et al, 2000: 179)

Acquiring power may also take the form of accessing resources, political structures, and decision-making processes.

> Empowerment must be about bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it. … It is about people being able to maximise the opportunities available to them without or despite the constraints of structure and State.
>
> (Rowlands, 1995: 102)

Empowerment is also concerned with the processes by which people become aware of their own voice and interests, in order that they understand where they stand in relation to others. Theoretically, such an understanding empowers them to participate from a position of greater strength in decision-making, and actually influence decisions and actions. Brookfield, an adult educator, explains how mainstream thinking on empowerment is defined as "…a process through which adult educators find their voices and develop the self-confidence to take control of their lives" (Brookfield, 2001b:2). Empowerment is a constant process of enabling individuals and groups to act individually and collectively (Daly and Cobb, 1994).

The logic underlying the mainstream understanding on empowerment rests on the premise that empowerment is a process through which power is discovered or recovered. It can be redistributed from those who have it, to those who don't.

> [T]he term 'em-powerment suggests that power is a property which can be possessed and transferred between 'agents', from teachers to students, from pedagogies to students … [The implication is that] people can 'give up' and 'share' power.
>
> (Luke, 1995:323)

Power is passed on (or wrenched) from A to B, based on the assumption that B has no power, - or the wrong kind of power, and A has too much power. C may come in as the agent that facilitates this transaction, the liberator who considers it essential for B to

become em-powered. C knows what kind of power B needs, and how to pass this on (Rahnema, 1992). The objective of empowerment becomes the redistribution of power. 'Bad' power is taken from A, the oppressor, and B becomes empowered with a 'good' power. In the process, power and resistance are seen as substantively different as 'bad' and 'good' respectively (Hardy and Clegg, 1996:634). The oppressor, A, imposes a dominant ideology, overwhelming the consciousness of the oppressed, B, thereby creating false consciousness, while the liberator, C, presumes to know, unproblematically, what the interests of the oppressed really are (ibid). Empowerment becomes a process of freeing the ruled from the ruling class by replacing bad (oppressive) theory with good (liberatory) theory. "[G]ood theory would replace bad theory; good theory would enable the realisation of real interests" (ibid). In certain ways, Freire maintained this perspective in his writings about the apathy and orthodoxy of 'the oppressed' and the need for conscientization, led by an intellectual/outsider who would enable people to break through the "culture of silence" which resulted from oppression (or bad power).

However, there is a central contradiction within the argument above. If power and resistance to power constitute a system of power relations, the system inevitably incorporates both possibilities of, and tensions between, domination and liberation. What makes A's power 'bad' and B's power 'good'? In the words of Hardy and Clegg, "Politics is a struggle both to achieve and to escape from power" (1996:634). This contradiction is taken up by both critical and post-modern theorists.

A critical perspective on power

Critical theorists are less absolute than mainstream theorists in their dualistic vision of power as something you either have or you don't. They take greater cognisance of the dynamic and pervasive nature of power, as both overt and covert. For example, critical theorists (such as Brookfield) see power as invested not only in structures and decision-making processes, but also in the process of creating and managing meanings that shape people's lives. It is the acknowledgement of this oblique operation of power that that sets critical theorists apart from mainstream theorists.

Managing meaning happens through the production and interpretation of everyday beliefs and practices. The subtle and unobtrusive workings of power are recognised by critical theorists as operating through ideologies, in deep structures, in culture, and through the

legitimisation of organisational arrangements. Power is used by dominant groups to legitimise their demands, while de-legitimising the demands of others. These workings of power are concealed in status-quo structures of society, in rules, and class mechanisms that manage meaning by fixing it in a particular way that is perceived to be legitimate. But such legitimacy suits the rules of the game, rules with which everyone seemingly complies. Power is used to produce apparent consensus and acquiescence, replacing visible controls by hidden cultural forms of domination. These ideas draw on Gramsci's concept of ideological hegemony, where "a structure of power relations is fully legitimized by an integrated system of cultural and normative assumptions" (Hyman and Brough, 1975: 199).

However, even if power operates unobtrusively through ideological manipulation, it is still understood to be repressive, and still open to contestation. And from a critical perspective, resistance to formal dominant power structures is still seen as a 'good' thing (Hardy and Clegg, 1996: 632); a healthy exercise of power, an "emancipatory tool" (Hardy and Clegg, 1996:636).

> For the critical theorists, resistance was a good thing: it was an opportunity for creative human agency, particularly that associated with subjugated identities such as workers, women, ethnic minorities, to reassert itself against domination.
>
> (Hardy and Clegg, 1996: 632)

However, from a critical perspective, resistance is seen as more than a counter-move that will shift the zero-sum equation. It is seen as a creative force, a means of reshaping meaning and identity, and of raising consciousness and awareness of the existence of political issues underlying the apparently acceptable status quo. From a critical perspective, power "must consider the question of political quiescence; why grievances do not exist, why demands are not made; why conflict does not arise; and why resistance does not occur, since such inaction may also be the result of power" (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998: 456).

A critical perspective on empowerment

A critical perspective on empowerment includes many of the concepts put forward within the mainstream paradigm. Empowerment is about enabling oppressed and disenfranchised members of society to gain access to structures of oppression and take action to overcome these. However, the important difference from a critical perspective is that empowerment

includes an ideological dimension of struggle, whereby disenfranchised groups work to uncover their 'false consciousness' and work towards discovering their 'real interests' that will lead to a radical transformation in the distribution of power. Thus, from a critical perspective, empowerment works at both a structural, ideological, and psychological level. Empowerment

> …include[s] the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space…. [It] must involve undoing negative social constructions, so that the people affected come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have influence.
>
> (Rowlands, 1995:102 - 3)

However, by referring to the notion of a "false" consciousness, critical theorists imply that there must also be a "true" consciousness. There are "real' interests, and by implication "unreal" interests. The underlying assumption suggests that it is possible to autonomously judge what might be in the best interest of others.

The Freirean concept of empowerment rests on the premise that through critical reflection and action, the oppressed can be emancipated from forms of material, cultural and psychological oppression; that there is a way for the oppressed to seize power for themselves. Freire assumes that the oppressors exercise power in self-conscious ways based on explicit intentions to manipulate and dominate. "Language is subverted to meet the needs of the oppressors. Myths are deposited by the oppressors" (Pietrykowski, 1996:84). But Freire does not explain how these myths come to be accepted in the day-to-day life of the oppressed, how they reproduce oppression. It is at this point that post-modern theory can be of use – it offers insight into the workings of power. This is taken up in the next section where I discuss Foucault's observations about power and the ways in which it operates.

Before leaving the critical perspective on empowerment, it is important to note that while Freire subscribes to a more critical paradigm, there are 'moments of post-modernism' in his works (Pietrykowski, 1996:83). Giroux (1994) has described Freire's work as a "border pedagogy", straddling both modern and post-modern worlds. Freire acknowledges that there are multiple readings of the world, and a multiplicity of voices and experiences of oppression - a post-modern perspective. However, Freire privileges certain readings of the world, in particular those that have as their goal the liberation and

emancipation of the oppressed (Pietrykowski, 1996). Freire's understanding is that through the process of education for liberation, systems of oppression can be overcome to achieve emancipation. As such, his argument is governed by a particular "emancipatory logic", which implicitly accepts a unified conception of power (Pietrykowski, 1996: 90). Freire envisions the possibility of complete emancipation as a form of truth. This perception contradicts a post-modern perspective since it implies both a sovereign notion of power and a single truth. Foucault does not see power – or truth - as monolithic. Foucault sees power as "fluid, and existing as a multiplicity of institutional and psychological forces" (Foucault, 1994:337). One can resist power but never escape from it. Even in resisting power, one "creates a set of discourses which, by articulating a particular subject position, also engages in a matrix of power relations" (ibid). Any action that aims to defeat power merely results in the creation of a new form of power. "Foucault and postmodern theorists contend that grand narratives which promise an emancipatory end-state cannot account for the multiple sources of power embedded in discourse itself" (Pietrykowski, 1996: 94). Freire sees power predominantly as a repressive force. In so doing, he neglects or minimises the manifestations and effects of the power relationships within the emancipatory discourse itself (Pietrykowski, 1998: 68).

A Foucauldian perspective on power

In more recent years, the ideas of the prominent French philosopher, Michel Foucault, have become central to discussions about power. Foucault (1980) argued that that the workings of power are much more subtle than previously acknowledged and that rather than seeing power as a bipolar phenomenon, as either repressive or liberatory, we should see power as circuitous, as constantly circulating with no fixed end point.

> Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation.
>
> (Foucault, 1980:98)

According to Foucault, power is continually shifting. It does not have a fixed source that can be tapped by some for use on others. It is not exercised at the will of an autonomous individual, it is not something that can be possessed, something which one person has and can exercise, while another cannot. We are merely "vehicles of power, not its point of application" (1980:98). Power circulates between us, "it flows through us like an electric

current" (Inglis, 1997: 3). Power is omnipresent, it is etched into the everyday actions of every person's life, exercised continually by everyone, not only by the dominant elite.

> Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.
>
> (Foucault, 1980:39)

Power pre-exists us. It constrains how we see, what we see, how we think, and what we know. Power is embedded in social, political and economic systems, and the discourses and the practices that we take for granted. For example, earlier in this chapter I discussed the way in which a particular representation of third world women is inscribed into and authorised by development discourse. These kind of dominant discourses, inevitably support existing power structures. In the words of Foucault:

> … in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.
>
> (Foucault, 1980: 93)

As subjects, we are constituted by the system of power that surrounds us. This is the source from which power and control originates, rather than from a dominant group wishing to shape the world in a particular way. But, this origin of power is unpredictable, "…haphazard and accidental rather than deliberately organised" (Brookfield, 2001b:5). Actors may certainly have intentions concerning outcomes, and may mobilise resources or engage in the management of meaning (as discussed in the sections above), but the desired outcomes are not guaranteed.

> People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.
>
> (Foucault, quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 187)

Power is also not unitary, but often contradictory, and its effects cannot be determined. What some experience as repressive, others might experience as liberatory. Power relations are contextual and infinitely diverse and ever shifting, as individual agents continually adopt and transform them through changing discourses and practices.

Given the above description of the nature of power, it is important to ask how power operates, and what the implications are for an adult education project in the mountains of

Lesotho. Are all individuals merely casualties of the workings of this inescapable omnipresent force of power, or is it possible to hold onto a sense of hope, of human agency put forward by theorists such as Freire (1994)?

According to Foucault, overt authoritarian power has been overtaken by disciplinary power, which works predominantly through surveillance of self and others. Foucault argued that self-surveillance is a particularly effective component of disciplinary power. By getting individuals to monitor and censor their own thoughts and behaviours, the need for external intervention is done away with.

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under Its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power is exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost.
>
> (Foucault, 1980: 155)

Foucault began his analysis at the level of the individual, by looking at how the everyday thoughts and actions of "ordinary people" are organised and shaped. From this bottom level, the level of "infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics", he extended his analysis upwards, looking at how small everyday practices are eventually co-opted "by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination" (1980:99).

Foucault's initial focus on the micro-level was on how power became manifest at what he termed "the extreme points":

> …one should try to locate power at the extreme points of its exercise, …at the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there – that is to say – where it installs itself and produces its real effects.
>
> (Foucault, 1980:97)

Within the context of this study, the extreme points would be the forms of specific practices that develop in relation to the various development initiatives or interventions. For example, within REFLECT circles, certain practices were established, such as the drawing of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) graphics on the ground. This practice would constitute an 'extreme point' which could be a site for an examination of how

power exists within that context, regardless of whether the practice seems liberatory or not.

> … power is 'always already there', … one is never 'outside' it, … there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. …there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network …
>
> (Foucault, 1980:141 – 142)

Usher and Edwards (1994) use a Foucauldian perspective to analyse the proverbial adult education 'circle'. By arranging learners in a circle rather than in rows, the authoritarian power relations are supposedly neutralised as learners and the educator are brought together to discuss as equals. However, Usher and Edwards show how this arrangement serves not to do away with power, but rather just to modify that power. They say that while putting chairs in a circle

> … may create different discursive possibilities, it nonetheless simply reconfigures the regulation of students. They may not be so directly subject to the teacher/lecturer but they remain under the immediate scrutiny and surveillance of their peers. … changing practices do not, then, do away with power but displace it and reconfigure it in different ways.
>
> (Usher and Edwards, 1994:91, cited in Brookfield, 2001a:8-9)

What all this means for an adult educator (like myself) concerned with the potential of REFLECT circles to promote development, education and emancipation, is that it is essential to accept that every one, at all times, is implicated in the workings of power (Brookfield, 2001a: 8). Rather than just accepting the notion of REFLECT and PRA as open, democratic processes, defined, directed and controlled by the participants themselves, it is important to examine how power plays out through everyday practices within these circles. Foucault helps us to see that even practices that supposedly equalise power relations are subject to those very power relations. As educators, it is important to name these practices and expose their workings.

It is also important to uncover the opportunities for resisting power. While Foucault did devote considerable energy to describing how power regulates our daily lives, he did not perceive power as wholly repressive, and was not fatalistic about power. "To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what" (Foucault: 1980: 141-142). He saw power as productive, as well as constraining.

> … the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. … If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one could be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it … traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.
>
> (Foucault, 1980: 119)

Foucault believed that there was always a potential for resisting power. In his words, "…there are no relations of power without resistances" (Foucault, 1980: 142). Foucault did not believe that because power was omnipresent it could not be contested. For Foucault, there was "…no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies… a strategy of struggle…" (Foucault, 1994:346). Thus, power always simultaneously implied the possibility of resistance, a concept with important implications for the notion of 'empowerment'.

A Foucauldian perspective on empowerment

I have argued that, from both a mainstream and a critical perspective, the notion of 'empowerment' holds out a promise of resisting oppressive power. Foucault too believed in the possibilities of resisting power. He said that "there is no power without potential refusal or revolt" (Foucault, 1994:324), but he did not see such resistance as empowerment. Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan sum up Foucault's position on empowerment as follows:

> "True empowerment will not be achieved without a radical metamorphosis of the system, which cannot be achieved by actors who are inevitably entwined within it and which in any case, as Foucault would argue, would simply be replaced by another set of power relations.
>
> (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998:462)

Foucault contested the notion of sovereign or oppressive power exercised from one particular source, and thus did not believe it possible to focus on resisting oppression, for example, by overthrowing the state, or reversing the history of patriarchy or ending racism (Brookfield, 2001a: 17). Foucault saw resistance taking place in smaller scale acts of opposition. These smaller acts of opposition

> are formed right at the point where [power] relations are exercised … [and] resistance to power… exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated into global strategies.
>
> (Foucault, 1980: 142)

Erben et al. (2000) define empowerment as follows:

> … empowerment refers to social change in societies characterised by conflicting interests of different groups and organizations, and realized in social action.
>
> (Erben et al., 2000: 181)

This definition of empowerment is closer to a Foucauldian perspective in that it acknowledges not only the constant presence of power inherent in a perpetual process of change generated through everyday human interaction in every social sector of society, but also the different interests and priorities of stakeholders.

When examining the notion of 'empowerment' from a Foucauldian perspective, the question of whether research participants in Malealea have been 'empowered' becomes inapplicable. What is of significance is the extent to which participants acknowledge themselves as agents of power, and find ways to exercise or subvert that power. Foucault's ideas can push us (the researcher and the participants) to become aware of how the dynamics of power permeate and move between members, how everyday practices are imbued with power which works subtly to perpetuate existing power relations and reproduce 'the natural order of things' (Brookfield, 2001a: 22; Brookfield, 2001b). It is in this way that we will come to better understand the site at which power is exercised and the site at which resistance is possible.

The next section of this review examines the notion of 'participation', looking at the different understandings of this concept and the implications for practice in the Malealea research context.

PARTICIPATION

> Participation … is too serious and ambivalent a matter to be taken lightly, or reduced to an amoeba word lacking in any precise meaning, or a slogan, or a fetish or, for that matter, only an instrument or methodology.
>
> (Rahnema, 1992:126)

Like ‘power’, the notion of ‘participation’ has been understood in various ways. There are a host of definitions and interpretations, with varying explanations of how participation happens and what it does for people. This section maps out the assumptions underlying the notion of participation and participatory practices, looking particularly at how these are relevant to the study. (This discussion of ‘participation’ is also relevant to the notion of ‘participatory action research’, which is discussed further in Chapter Three.) Links are made to preceding discussions of ‘power’ and ‘empowerment’, and ‘participation’ is examined in relation to ‘development’, since the notion of ‘participation’ is an integral aspect of the development discourse. In fact, Kothari refers to participation as “a new grand narrative of development” (2001: 139).

The notion of ‘participation’, ‘participatory practices’, and ‘participatory development’ emerged out of a recognition of the shortcomings of ‘top-down’ approaches to development. The failure of development projects was attributed to the exclusion of local people from the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of development projects and programmes. ‘Bottom-up’ participatory strategies have been seen as an ‘empowering’ (and economically rational) way forward for development (Rahnema, 1992).

> [C]laims to …empowering participants through their involvement in the [development] process, have led to the overwhelming adoption of participatory techniques within development policy and practice.
>
> (Kothari, 2001: 140)

The work of Robert Chambers (1983, 1993, 1997) has been particularly influential with regard to the development of participatory practices. He has dedicated his work to finding ways for local people to use their knowledge to inform the planning and implementation of development projects. Participatory Rural Appraisal (or PRA) is one particularly well-known participatory approach associated with Chambers. (PRA is an essential component of the REFLECT approach and discussed in more detail later in this chapter as well as in the Appendix 2.) However, Chambers is only one of a range of practitioners and institutions who have been concerned with developing participatory practices (Campbell and Burnaby, 2001; Nelson and Wright, 1995; Mohan, 2001). Participation has indeed become not only a widely accepted concept (even by repressive regimes), but also a

politically attractive slogan, and a broadly espoused objective in the fields of both education and development.

Within the participatory discourse, there is no real agreement on basic definitions of involvement and participation. However, there is a general recognition that there are varying degrees of participation, ranging from a top-down approach with minimal participation on the part of beneficiaries, to full control by participants (Taylor, 2001). The REFLECT approach can be classified as highly participatory. It is described in the REFLECT Mother Manual as having a "strong participatory structure" (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a: 6). Using PRA, participants themselves identify, analyse and take action around problems in their communities. PRA assumes, at least theoretically, that participants take control of the process.

Participation and participatory practices (such as PRA) are valued dynamics within the REFLECT approach because they are seen to be an effective means for local people to shape their own development (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a:13). It is assumed that if people themselves shape their development, it is likely to be both more relevant and more sustainable. If people themselves choose to participate, they will be able to take charge of the process and craft it according to their knowledge and needs. One of the fundamental premises of REFLECT is that local development must be based on local knowledge, not outside expertise. And, it is assumed that local knowledge can only be ensured through local participation.

> To develop an effective participatory approach the starting point must be to recognise people's existing knowledge and skills. REFLECT is rooted firmly in a belief that people have this extensive local knowledge. … The starting point must be people's own analysis, on the basis of their immediate environment and experience, not someone else's imposed analysis of their problems, international capital or cultural imperialism.
>
> (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a: 18-19)

There is a cluster of assumptions embedded in these beliefs about the virtues of participation. These implicit assumptions have implications for the way in which knowledge, power and empowerment are perceived. Exposing these assumptions allows one to gain a more critical perspective on participatory practices in the research context.

Inherent assumptions about knowledge and power

To begin, I wish to explore the assumptions underlying the notion that local knowledge should form the starting point of all local development action. What is implied is that 'local knowledge' is somehow better, 'truer' or purer than other/outsider knowledge. Local knowledge somehow escapes the messiness of ideological influences and power relations that accompany the process of construction of knowledge from elsewhere. Local knowledge becomes reified.

> 'Local' knowledge is seen as a fixed commodity that local people intrinsically have and own. This undifferentiated conception of knowledge refutes the idea that knowledge is socially, culturally and politically produced and is continually reformulated as a powerful normative construct.
>
> (Kothari, 2001: 141)

Mosse (2001:19) acknowledges the constructed nature of knowledge and its association with contextual power relations when he says, "local knowledge reflects local power". To valorise 'local' knowledge as 'truth' masks the complexities of knowledge construction and the existence of power relations at this level. It reinforces the perception that local knowledge is static and that local people are somehow outside of power, even powerless, awaiting an almost magical process (such as PRA) that will 'em-power' them to set free the dormant local 'truth'. The concept of knowledge as an accumulation of social norms, rituals and practices embedded in power relations is concealed.

The notion of 'local' knowledge as different from 'other' knowledge (read - 'western' rational scientific knowledge) serves to reinforce a dichotomy not only between 'insider' and 'outsider', but also between 'powerless participant' and 'powerful outsider'. Kothari (2001:140) remarks on how participatory discourse is characterised by a whole series of dichotomies such as 'uppers' and 'lowers', North and South, professional knowledge and local knowledge. According to Kothari an entire framework has been constructed "in which the micro is set against the macro, the margins against the centre, the local against the elite, and the powerless against the powerful". These dichotomies lend credence to the mainstream conception of power as something that can be acquired by those without it, or taken away from those who have an excess of it (see the previous section). This notion of power can also be contrasted with a Foucauldian perspective on power as unlocalised, as circulating, as "exercised from innumerable points" (Foucault, 1978: 94). From this

perspective, power is not centred anywhere, neither at a micro, meso nor macro level. Rather, power is seen as a process exercised as much in the infinitesimal mechanisms as in the general mechanisms (Foucault, 1980:99). The need for 'empowerment' is transposed by the need to explore the ways and forms in which power is already exercised at local and micro-points. From Foucault's perspective, rather than remaining invisible, social norms and everyday practices become the main site for the investigation of power and social control.

Inherent assumptions about freedom of choice and community interests

Within participatory discourse, an assumption is made that "participation is a free exercise" (Rahnema, 1992: 116). People in a given community choose for themselves whether or not to take part in an initiative or programme. And, it is assumed that those who do choose to participate, will freely and responsibly express their ideas, their desires, and their objectives, ultimately reaching a peaceful consensus that represents the best interests of the general whole. Somehow, participatory practices "make it possible for all the people to organise themselves in a manner best suited to meet their desired ends" (Rahnema, 1992: 121).

The assumption embedded in the above notion is that communities are homogenous, static, consensual and harmonious, and also authentically motivated (Mohan, 2001; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). It is assumed that communities share common needs and interests, and want the best for everyone. Heterogeneity within groups is downplayed as differences in gender, assets, income levels, and religious and political affiliations are smoothed out (Mashinini, 2002). This kind of representation conceals power relations within communities, and masks competing interests at the intra-community level. In reality, power dynamics within communities constrain participation, and define who gets to participate. Often, contrary to expectations, it is not the most marginalised who participate, but those already in a position to access resources and opportunities. In addition, group dynamics can lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful.

Access to participation can also be influenced and manipulated from outside of the group, by the discourse itself. Particular expectations and requirements are subtly inscribed in the participatory discourse that frames participatory practices. Those 'participants' that 'get

in', are those who agree to conform to the process and its requirements (at the cost of being reinscribed into the discourse). Rahnema (1992:116) calls this 'manipulated' participation: "…participants do not feel they are being forced into doing something, but are actually led to take actions which are inspired or directed by centres outside their control".

Cooke and Kothari (2001:6) argue that manipulated participation can easily result in political co-option. For example, participation by the community (in the form of labour, cash or kind) may be a way of transferring some project costs to the community[16]. But co-option can also happen at the level of the discourse itself as participants are drawn into colluding with the terms of the discourse. For example, by agreeing to participate in development, participants concur that they need development (and by implication that they are 'underdeveloped'). They also subtly agree that that they will pursue the goals of the other in the name of their own development or empowerment. By owning the development intention, the subjects of development collude in disguising the more covert political agenda of the development agent. According to Esteva (1992:8), the whole process "converts participation into a manipulative trick to involve people in struggles for getting what the powerful want to impose on them" (Esteva, 1992: 8). While this position may not be a just reflection of the intentions of all who promote participatory processes (see discussion of 'spontaneous' or popular participation below), it does draw attention to the way in which the notion of 'participation' can be co-opted by the development industry, who convert it into one of the many 'resources' needed to keep the development economy alive.

> To participate [has been] reduced to the act of partaking in the objectives of the [development] economy, and the societal arrangements related to it"
>
> (Rahnema, 1992:120)

Thus, rather than 'empowering the disempowered', participatory development can facilitate the illegitimate use of power. "[T]he discourse itself, and not just the practice, embodies the potential for an unjustified exercise of power" (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:4).

[16] The notion of participation as *donated labour* is often contrasted with the notion of participation as *control* (Korten, 1990, Malvichini, 2003).

'Popular' participation

However, perhaps all is not lost for the concept of participation. Rahnema contrasts 'manipulated' participation with 'spontaneous' or popular participation, which is promoted to counter the more hegemonic notion of manipulated participation. Popular participation claims to recognise the ways in which power can be abused by those in the development world. It is promised as a way of "being able to save development from its present crisis and give it new legitimacy stamina for enabling grassroots populations to regenerate their life spaces" (Rahnema, 1992:120). The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) defines popular participation as "the organized efforts to increase control over resources and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control" (ibid). Popular participation is supposedly a way to create collaborative forms of knowledge that underpin more appropriate and sustainable social development.

The popular participatory movement has adopted Freire's notion of praxis (action and reflection) as a critical dimension of participation[17]. It is through dialogical action and conscientization that new forms of knowledge, new understandings of reality, and new power relationships can form to challenge oppressive conditions and structures. However, Freire (and others) have noted that not all dialogical interaction leads to conscientization – a 'false consciousness', (when participants have internalised the values and views of the dominant groups), might lead participants to have a distorted or false perception of their own reality. Freire calls on 'organic intellectuals' as "bearers of higher forms of consciousness" (Rahnema, 1992:125) to enlighten the masses by engaging in conscientization exercises. The assumption is that these 'organic intellectuals' or 'agents of change' are immune from the same 'false consciousness', and that they will not (consciously or unconsciously) use the participatory methods to manipulate the masses. Such an assumption is subject to the same logic as that governing the notion of 'local knowledge'. If there is false knowledge, by implication, there must be 'true' or 'emancipatory' knowledge that is somehow untainted by the power relations that shape and construct all other kinds of knowledge. Such a denial again conceals the danger that emancipatory knowledge can itself become tyrannical.

[17] Freirean theory is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The conception of power inherent in the notion of 'popular' participation is subject to many of the criticisms noted above. Fals-Borda, a prominent PAR theorist, defines popular power as

> … a special kind of power – people's power – which belongs to the oppressed and exploited classes and groups and their organizations, and the defence of their just interests to enable them to advance towards shared goals of social change within a participatory system.
>
> (Fals-Borda, 1988:2)

This perception of power assumes that power can "belong" either to the oppressed or the oppressors. The underlying assumption is that power can be transferred from a central location (where the oppressors are) to strategic peripheral locations where it can be wielded responsibly by those (the oppressed) promoting social change. Thus, 'popular' participation is also subject to the simplified notion of power as either 'good' or 'bad', 'moral' or 'immoral'. The possibility that power, even in the hands of the oppressed, may become another form of social control is not acknowledged. The 'oppressed' are perceived to be a homogenous group, immune from the politics of intra-group power struggles, and committed to the good of the whole. There is thus a naivety about the complexities of power and power relations that characterise understandings of both 'popular' and 'manipulated' participation.

The way forward

So is there hope for the concept of 'participation'? Is there a way forward? What are the possibilities that people can genuinely participate in their own development? These are important questions to ask given that participation is an essential component of the REFLECT approach.

The argument presented here does not deny that there are acts and processes of genuine participation. These might be seen in the sharing of knowledge and the negotiating of power relations within communities. Also, participation in social movements or political activism that challenge injustices in society may involve genuine participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:13). The aim of this section has not been to refute such practices, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which power relations might be concealed within them, ultimately subjecting them to the very same forces they claim to be resisting. There are

several strategies that may help to more critically interrogate the ways in which power operates.

Firstly, it is important to review the essentialist ('some have it - some don't') conception of power that dominates the discourse of participation. Such a view of power promotes a misunderstanding of where and how power is expressed, directing us to look for it in political structures and oppressive acts, rather than in everyday practices. We need instead a more nuanced understanding of power as a hybrid phenomenon that finds expression in multiple and diverse ways, many of which are invisibly embedded in social and cultural practices (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Mohan, 2001).

A revised understanding of power will inevitably also mean that the notion of 'empowerment' needs to be reconsidered and its claims re-evaluated. Rather than seeing the subjects of development as passive and power-less participants who need to be empowered (often according to an outside agenda), we need to examine how people are already exercising power, and look carefully at how such power operates.

> Theirs is a different power which is not always perceived as such, and cannot be actualised in the same manner, yet it is very real in many ways. It is constituted by the thousands of informal networks of resistance which ordinary people put up, often quietly, against the prevailing power apparatus.
>
> (Rahnema, 1992: 123)

However, it is important to note that power is not only expressed in resistance as Rehnema implies here, but also in productive everyday practices (Foucault, 1980).

What are the implications of this discussion for the REFLECT circles in Malealea? The discussion requires that the researcher develop a broader analytical focus. Rather than looking simply at the learning that has occurred, or the actions taken by a circle (which might be taken to indicate 'empowerment'), it is essential to look at the everyday practices that occur within the circles. Looking closely at how knowledge is constructed and where power is expressed within everyday patterns of participation will provide the researcher and participants with more insight into the operations of power and 'empowerment' than will merely observing the outcomes.

LITERACY

Like the other concepts discussed in this chapter, the notion of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' are discursive constructs. According to Prinsloo and Breier (1996), literacy and illiteracy are:

> … concepts of signification within social discourse. Rather than being phenomena 'out there', waiting to be discovered and described, they are reconstituted through discourse, and come into being only as they are understood, explained and incorporated in social practice.
>
> (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996: 21)

Within development discourse, the concept of 'illiteracy' has been constructed in a particular way - as a problem that can and should be eradicated through effective development interventions. This representation of illiteracy is seen in much of the literature about illiteracy and development. For example, the Secretary-General of the 1995 World Conference on Women, Gertrude Mongella, linked women's lack of progress in Africa to the high rate of illiteracy amongst African women. She contends that "illiteracy among women remains one of the most worrisome issues for African development" (Mongella, cited by Aksornkool, 2006). It is often asserted that without literacy, adults are doomed to a bleak and barren future of unemployment, illness and poverty. Two of UNESCO's timeworn slogans are "without literacy, there is no development" and "literacy is the key to health, wealth and happiness" (Rogers, 2004) These views are echoed by the president of the Commonwealth of Learning, Sir John Daniels:

> Literacy, whether achieved as the core of schooling in childhood or through learning in later life, is the passport that allows an individual to participate in contemporary social, economic and political development.
>
> (Daniel, 2004:www.col.org/consultancies/04literacy.htm)

Similarly, the UNESCO literacy portal states that

> Literacy is an indispensable means for effective social and economic participation, contributing to human development and poverty reduction.
>
> (http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL.html)

Apparently 'everybody' knows that a lack of literacy skills retards progress, obstructs access to resources, and excludes people from 'the modern world'. But who is 'everybody' and how have these assumptions come to gain the status of common sense truths? This section looks at competing definitions of literacy that have emerged over the last fifty years, identifying the Freirean notion of literacy, as conceptualised within the REFLECT approach, as the most appropriate for this study. The REFLECT approach is then discussed in detail and considered in relation to debates about power and participation that have been presented in preceding sections of this chapter.

Conceptions of literacy[18]

Conceptions of literacy (in its wider sense) have shifted over the last five decades from an instrumental understanding of literacy as a set of technical skills that can be applied in any context, to a social understanding of literacy as a situated practice, which can lead to critical action. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) explain this range of views using four metaphors: literacy as skills, literacy as tasks, literacy as practices and literacy as critical reflection. These four views can be seen along a continuum, rather than as exclusive of each other:

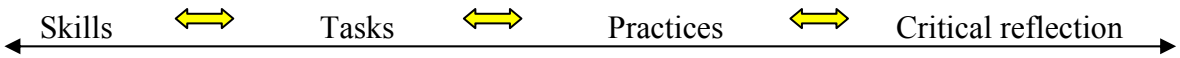


Figure 5: Continuum showing different conceptions of literacy

Literacy as skills and tasks – the autonomous model

The 'common sense' notion of literacy as a set of technical skills that will enable people to carry out essential tasks remains the popular view of literacy. It is assumed that becoming 'literate' will impact positively on a person's life because they will be able to perform practical reading and writing tasks, which will in turn enhance that person's capacity to function effectively and productively in the modern world. This traditional perspective on literacy has been strongly influenced by modernisation theory and echoes instrumental notions inherent in this paradigm: literacy is a way to achieve economic objectives, a vehicle that will transport people from poverty to progress. From this perspective, literacy is bestowed with "particular universal characteristics … giving rise to good effects" (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996:17). One of these good effects is that people will

[18] Before exploring the various definitions, it is important to note up front that 'literacy' refers not only to reading and writing practices, but also to numeracy practices.

be able to fit into and adapt to society as they use their literacy skills to make their way up the rungs of the social and economic ladder. This set of views has become known as an 'autonomous' model of literacy (Street, 1984).

Literacy as a social practice facilitating critical reflection – the ideological model

A contrasting perspective is presented in the 'ideological' model of literacy, which foregrounds human agency, emphasising what people do with literacy rather than what literacy does for people. According to this view, people within a specific context shape literacy according to their needs. "People take hold of literacy in ways that are consistent with local understandings and social practices" (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996: 25). Literacy becomes a collaborative social practice that is understood and valued differently across different cultural settings (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995, Fingeret and Drennon, 1997; Heath, 1983; Scribner and Cole, 1981). The ideological view of literacy as a culturally embedded practice emphasises the need for participants to become actively engaged in the process of shaping a literacy programme relevant to their needs and context. Literacy is seen as a liberating tool that can help people to understand power and oppression and thereby develop stronger agency within their lives.

Paulo Freire (1972a, 1985, 2000) has made probably the most significant contribution to the ideological conceptualisation of literacy by linking literacy to social change. He emphasised the need for learners to become 'conscientised', to enable them to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and take action against oppressive forces in society. He stressed the 'conscientisation' process as a central aspect of learning to read the world as well as the word. "Learners must see the need for writing one's life and reading one's reality" (Freire, 1985: 48). This radical dimension of Freire's work shifted his theory beyond the technical concerns of reading and writing that characterises autonomous approaches to literacy. Other distinctive features of Freire's theory are the notions of learner participation and dialogue between people in a trusting environment where through reflection and action, new understandings, awareness and knowledge can be gained.

> The act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action.
>
> (Freire, 1997: 67)

Freire termed this dialectical movement between action and reflection 'praxis', and understood praxis as the only way to achieve political change. Overcoming oppression "can be done only by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000:33).

However, a limitation of Freire's work is that it is inaccessible to ordinary practitioners, and in practice, it has failed to present a literacy methodology that leads to effective social change (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a). As a response to the need for an approach that could bridge the divide between progressive but inaccessible theory, and practice, a British organisation called ActionAid has developed an approach called REFLECT.

REFLECT

REFLECT is an acronym standing for 'Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques'. As the name suggests, the approach draws heavily on Freirean theory. However, a fundamental premise of REFLECT is that literacy techniques (even Freirean ones) cannot in themselves empower people. For this reason, REFLECT also draws on other theoretical frameworks, in particular the theory of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). The REFLECT approach fuses Freirean and PRA theory together as…

> … two parallel and interweaving processes: a literacy process and an empowering process, based on people-centred grassroots development. This can become mutually reinforcing, with empowerment creating uses for literacy and literacy providing practical skills for advancing empowerment.
>
> (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a: 18)

In short, within the REFLECT framework, literacy is seen, not as a means to achieve empowerment, but rather as a parallel process that, along with PRA, can support empowerment.

Earlier in this chapter, PRA was introduced to the reader as a participatory practice. PRA articulates well with Freirean theory, having its origins within this framework. PRA echoes the Freirean premise that poor communities and unschooled people have a wealth of local knowledge that should be used to form the basis of any effective programme of transformation. However, while Freire emphasises literacy as an instrument for liberation,

Chambers and other PRA practitioners focus on a range of alternative visual techniques that can help non-literate people to participate in transforming their lives. These techniques are based on the idea that through visualisation, people can find ways to 'uncover' local knowledge so that it becomes more explicitly accessible as a context and stimulus for dialogue and development. Examples of these visual techniques include maps, graphics, calendars, and matrices which groups collectively construct on the ground. Locally available material such as sticks, stones, leaves, seeds and so on, are used. The photo insert shows participants in this study using PRA techniques to construct a map to represent various aspects of their lives in the community. (A more detailed description of the range of PRA tools used and adapted by participants in the study is presented in Appendix 2.)



Participants using PRA techniques to construct a map representing aspects of their lives

The strong emphasis on visual literacy within REFLECT draws not only on PRA, but also on the work of Fuglesang (1982) who stresses the importance of linking alphabetic and visual literacy. In his words, "The picture is the link between the oral and written lifestyle and the first step on the way to written abstraction" (Fuglesang, cited in Archer et al., 1996a: 15).

Once participants have constructed pictures (called 'graphics') on the ground, they copy them onto newsprint and then into their books. These graphics form the primary learning materials used by learners. They take the place of prewritten primers, which are seen as an obstacle to linking literacy to local issues, local development and social change. The move away from prescribed primers is consistent with an 'ideological' view of literacy as a social process concerned with applying literacy for specific purposes in specific contexts of use (Scribner and Cole, 1981). Starting from where they are, using their existing knowledge and skills, REFLECT participants develop analytical and reflective skills, as well as literacy skills, all of which can be applied in the wider context, beyond the literacy circle. "REFLECT conceives literacy as something which people can use on their own

terms to explore, develop and apply their existing knowledge or skills" (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a:18). REFLECT thus aims to stimulate development based on people's own agenda.

The fusion between Freirean theory and PRA assists practitioners to affirm participants' experiences, and transform them into action that will develop not only literacy skills, but also social transformation of areas identified by the participants themselves. REFLECT aims to stimulate local development in a practical way that reveals the connections between literacy, dialogue, action and social change. Participants learn appropriate literacy skills, and apply those skills in relation to existing social practices. Furthermore, participants gain an opportunity to reflect critically on those practices in the process.

The conceptualisation of literacy as wider than just reading and writing, as something that people can 'use on their own terms', has implications for the education and development process. If literacy, and education more broadly, happen on people's own terms (as put forward in the REFLECT model), rather than on the terms of the education or development agent, what are the implications for the education and development process? REFLECT is referred to as a "structured participatory methodology" (Archer and Cottingham, 1996a:18). What is this structure and how does it relate to other structured processes that have been put forward in the education and development literature?

Reflecting on the structured process

Alan Rogers (1992) outlines two major types of development processes: the 'input' process, and the 'social action' process. The 'input' process is objective and achievement orientated, and requires some kind of input or intervention (usually from outside) to address a need in the affected group. The social action process is process and outcomes orientated, and thus relevant to the REFLECT process. It moves from the premise that the role of the 'outsider' is to support the affected group to identify and take action themselves to address their problems, rather than wait for an expert to tell them what they need and then provide the input. Participation and liberation are key concepts of the 'social action' development process.

> The goal [of the social action development process] is the liberation and full participation of the oppressed and marginalized target group in the development of

> society as a whole. And the process as well as the goal is liberation, self-reliance: one cannot learn about freedom without experiencing and participating.
>
> (Rogers, 1992: 114)

Rogers (1992) outlines a 5-step model that shows how the social development process unfolds towards the final goal of liberation. This is presented below:

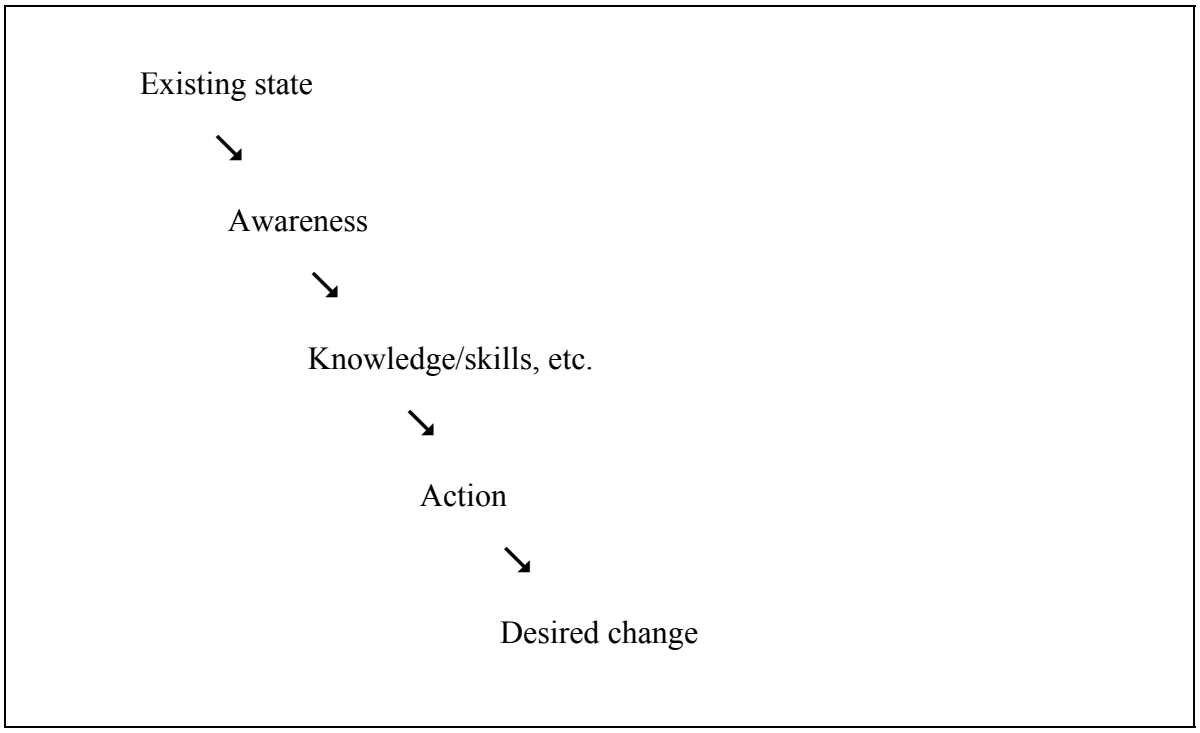


Figure 6: Steps to effective development (Rogers, 1992:119)

> Starting with their existing state or activity, the participant groups will first need to become aware of the necessity to change, then (through a programme of education and training) to develop those skills, knowledge and understandings which are necessary for them to take action, and then to act in such a way as to bring about the desired change. These stages are not all distinct, they frequently overlap, but they are necessary to a fully effective development programme.
>
> (Rogers, 1992: 118)

According to Rogers, education and training are central to this development process, along with attitude formation and change, and decision-making. These three components must be an integral part of the development process if development is to be established as a permanent and continuous process, rather than a once-off intervention.

The REFLECT model, represented in the diagram below[19], provides a useful outline of the steps involved in the REFLECT learning process. Discussion of this diagram makes reference to Rogers' model, showing how four of the five steps he outlines are explicitly considered. It makes sense, therefore, to categorise the REFLECT model as a social change model.

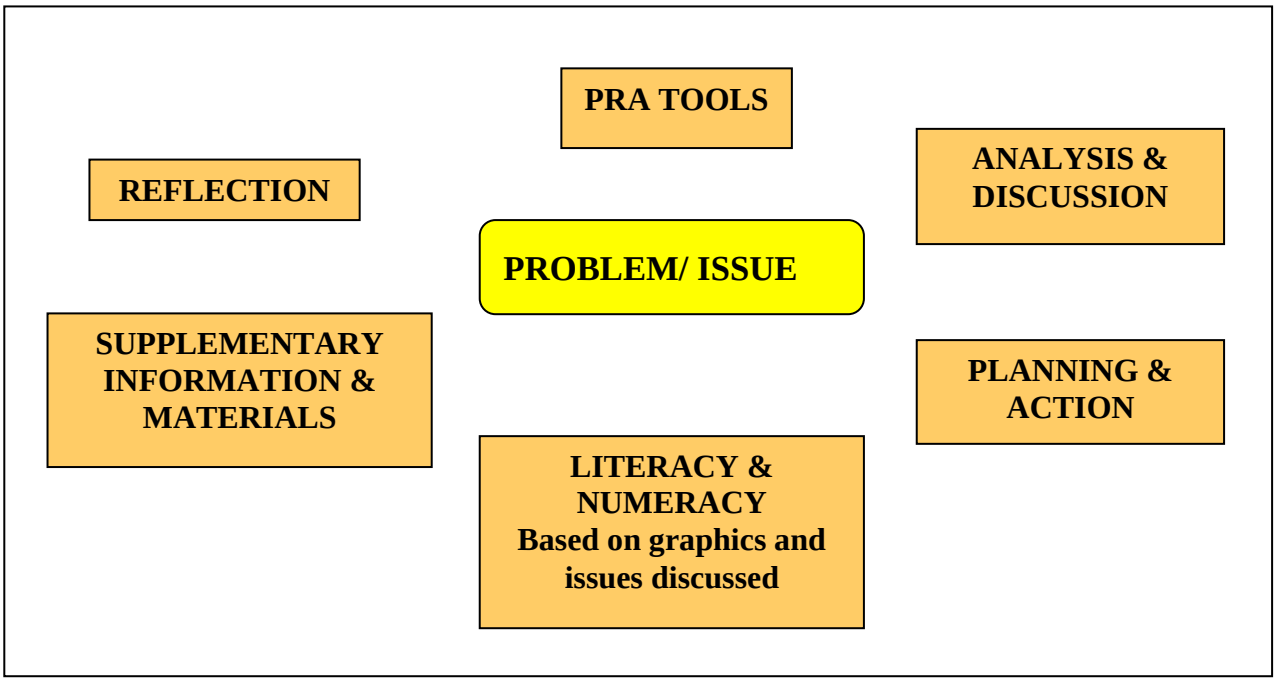


Figure 7: The REFLECT learning and development process

This model shows how a participatory process which starts with a problem or issue identified by the participants as relevant to their lives (existing state). PRA tools are used to assist them in this process of looking at their existing state, and also to enable them to move to analysing and discussing the issue in more depth. Following thorough discussion, participants engage in a process of planning that will lead to a decision to take action to address the issue or problem under discussion. During any of these stages, literacy and numeracy work may be introduced (knowledge, skills, etc.). The decisions of when to introduce literacy and numeracy work will be made by the facilitator and the group according to the interests and needs of the participants. Supplementary information and materials can be used to support participants' literacy skills and to help them acquire more information about the issue under discussion. Education is inherent in all of the steps discussed so far, but is included as an explicit step in the diagram to highlight the fact that

[19] This model was developed and described by Sonja Labuschagne, who was the coordinator of REFLECT in southern Africa from 1999 - 2003.

education may also take the form of an outside resource person making an input based on educational needs of the participants.

The emphasis in Rogers' model on attitude formation and change can be particularly useful in augmenting the REFLECT model, which does not give explicit attention to promoting positive attitudes, or confidence and motivation amongst participants. However, the growth of these characteristics may be implied in the notion of 'empowerment'.

Assumptions about power and empowerment

REFLECT is informed by critical theory and based on a critical understanding of power and empowerment. It is assumed that the REFLECT process provides participants with an opportunity to become 'empowered', meaning participants can learn to identify and analyse problems, and work collectively for social change. The process supposes also that participants will gain insight into the workings of power and reclaim their power as they learn to see the ways in which they have been oppressed.

For example, the way in which power is expressed through gender relations is a key focus of REFLECT, which draws on Gender and Development (GAD) theory. REFLECT takes into account the need to consider gender relations as an integral part of the politics of development. REFLECT promotes dialogue and structured discussions between men and women in an effort to shift power imbalances between men and women, and find a more equitable balance in gender relations (Archer, et al., 1996b; Attwood, et al., 2004; Fiedrich, 2004).

Earlier in this chapter, the notions of being able to shift power (for example, from men to women) were contrasted with a Foucauldian view of power as omnipresent, inscribed and exercised in every-day practices, even within the very circle that marks REFLECT as an emancipatory and participatory process. The Foucauldian analysis of power contests the notion of 'em-powerment' as the transfer of power from one group to another. Power is seen instead as inescapable. This perspective on power pleads vigilance concerning awareness of the oppressive potential of all practices; even those considered 'emancipatory' and 'empowering'. A Foucauldian perspective invites us to consider the ways in which power is locally dispersed and contextually variable, in order that we better

understand the possibilities of resistance at the site at which power is exercised (Brookfield, 2001b).

Assumptions about PRA as a participatory process

PRA is a fundamental part of the REFLECT process, and the main premise of PRA is that local participation is critical to the success of a development initiative. The assumptions inherent in the notion of participation were discussed earlier in this chapter. Building on that discussion, I would like here to critically examine some of the assumptions inherent within the PRA process in particular, and point to some potential pitfalls of using this approach within RELFECT.

PRA challenges the idea that the 'expert' or professional knows best and also challenges western constructions of the world by giving participants in the development context an opportunity to represent their own lives. In this way, PRA seeks to alter power relations in favour of the marginalised (Chambers, 1997). However, as has been pointed out earlier in this chapter, the assumed polarity between insider and outsider is problematic. There is a danger that local knowledge may become valorised or romanticised. According to Mohan (2001:160), "There is a tendency [in PRA] to romanticize and essentialize the poor and the social systems by which they operate." Mohan also questions whether the two groups can be so distinctly separated, whether each group has a distinct rationality with bounded notions of self/other or insider/outsider?

> There is an assumption that … there are distinct realms of knowledge. …One is Western, rational and familiar, the other is local, multiple and strange.
>
> (Mohan, 2001:159)

Goebel (1998) suggests that it would be more useful to blur the distinction between 'western' and 'indigenous' and investigate the outcome of that blurred interaction since "there is very little called 'indigenous' that does not have something 'western' implicated in it" (Goebel, 1998:294, cited in Mohan, 2001: 165). This suggestion is particularly pertinent to the research context which is (and has been for the last 16 years) strongly influenced by western culture in the form of (mostly international 'western') tourism, as well as media like radio.

Another important question to pose is whether the PRA 'tools' (maps, calendars, timelines, matrixes) are the neutral instruments of representation they are made out to be, or whether they are themselves the products of a particular context, namely a western rational scientific context? Is map making and matrix construction an authentic part of everyday life for people in a development context? Mosse (1994) points out that PRA tools assume a particular method of representation and interpretation that is biased towards a linguistically focused Western model of cognition. Robinson-Pant cautions us about how PRA techniques represent a way of thinking that may be peculiarly Western: … we can all see, but do not necessarily understand or interpret pictures (or diagrams) in the same way…" (1996: 545). Therefore, we cannot assume that PRA processes 'fit' the ways in which people perceive and live their lives.

Kothari (2001) too takes issue with the idea that PRA tools objectively reflect people's realities. She argues that if the complexities of people's lives do not conform to the tool, they are simply filtered out:

> The methodological tools and techniques [of PRA] … require a purification or cleaning up of knowledge and experience: a tidying up of people's lives through the exclusion of anything that is messy or does not fit the structured representations implied by the participatory tools. … There is a process of controlling to produce the norm, the usual and the expected.
>
> (Kothari, 2001:147)

Thus it can be seen that while PRA tools may take on the appearance of neutral instruments of analysis, in reality local knowledge is being shaped to fit a particular (western) cognitive model. The tools are biased towards certain kinds of knowledge and to some extent prescribe what counts as knowledge by fixing meaning in a particular way. The kind of knowledge produced depends on what tool is used, how it is used, and who participates in making methodological choices.

Participation in the PRA process is not apolitical. It is structured by a particular set of power relations that influence who gets to participate and who is excluded. It has the potential not only to "reinscribe power relations between expert and other" (Mohan, 2001:158), but also to reinscribe power relations within the community itself. Communities are not homogenous consensual entities, but rather intricately networked groups characterised by competing interests and agendas. PRA tends towards the

consensual view of communities, which conceals differences and power interests at the community level, a view which can in fact serve to consolidate, rather than challenge existing power relations within a given community.

The issues raised above will be explored further in the research findings. What is important to note here is that there is a need to continually question the assumptions imbedded in 'local knowledge', participatory practices and wider everyday practices, which are, in fact, sites of power. It is also important to consider the context in which REFLECT is applied, and the factors which might influence the agendas set by REFLECT participants (and others) who influence the REFLECT process in the context. One such factor that should be more closely examined in the context of this study is 'ecotourism'.

ECOTOURISM

What is ecotourism, and why is it significant in southern African today? Can ecotourism contribute to 'sustainable development'? What kind of assumptions about development are inherent in the ecotourism model? How might these assumptions relate to literacy issues? Since ecotourism is an influential contextual factor informing the research context, it is important to 'unpack' these questions and their implications for the study in greater detail.

Seemingly, ecotourism is a cornucopia of possibilities:

> … a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instil environmental awareness and a social conscience on the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and some claim, build world peace.
>
> (Honey, 1999:4)

Ecotourism is hailed as a more noble form of tourism. Unlike mass tourism, it draws attention to the potentially exploitative impact that tourism can have on an environment and its inhabitants, and voices its intention to minimise the negative impact of the industry. Words such as "responsible', 'sustainable', 'conservation' and low impact' are

often associated with ecotourism travel literature. The US Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people (italics added)" (cited in Honey, 1999:6). Another definition, put forward by the Ecotourism Association of Australia, echoes this, defining ecotourism as "ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation (italics added)" (Beeton: 1998).

The growing awareness of the need to conserve the environment and improve the well being of local people has also informed tourism in southern Africa. Responsible practices in tourism are encouraged through initiatives such as the Imvelo Responsible Tourism Awards, which "pay tribute to members of the tourism and hospitality industry who have implemented sustainable economic, social and environmental programmes" (Groenwald, 2003: xxiii). Responsible tourism is seen as a way to "minimise environmental impacts, benefit local communities and reduce poverty" (ibid).

This emphasis on achieving a balance between the economy, the society and the environment is a growing global trend, and in Third World countries ecotourism is promoted as integral to a comprehensive development strategy (Honey, 1999). Ecotourism is seen as a way of contributing to local community involvement and empowerment of local communities, financially, culturally and ecologically; it's about 'good development'. This model of linking ecotourism with development has seemingly provided the world with an alternative way of addressing poverty, providing jobs and earning foreign exchange, while at the same time protecting and conserving the environment (Murphy, 1998; Richards and Hall, 2003; Williams, 1999, Wood, 2002). This balance between economic growth and environmental conservation has become known as 'sustainable development', a concept which seemingly reconciles the two old enemies of 'growth' and the 'environment' (Escobar, 1995: 195).

Escobar, (1995) highlights the particular logic of the relationship between the environment and economic growth. He points out that the focus is less on the negative consequences of economic growth on the environment, than on the effects of environmental degradation on growth and the potential for growth. "It is growth (read: capitalist market expansion), and not the environment, that has to be sustained" (p.195). Sustainable development is explicitly advanced as a way to "ensure the continued survival

of the goose that lays the golden egg" (Groenwald, 2003: xxiii). But ultimately, it is the egg that is prized, rather than the goose. Products and profits are emphasised over people and places. What is really at stake in ecotourism is not the environment, but global capitalism's need to extend market relations and extract surplus value to as many areas of 'production' as possible. Protecting the environment is a way of preserving it for further commercial exploitation.

It is necessary to look closely at who does the exploiting. With the rise of economic globalisation and the promotion of free markets, the private sector has been identified as the main vehicle for ecotourism development initiatives. In accordance with this neo-liberal development model, there is a push toward privatisation of tourism enterprises, with state-run enterprises being sold off or shut down, and replaced by "private-public partnerships". In addition to major corporate players, international lending agencies have also moved in to provide financing for tourism and ecotourism related projects, again in the name of sustainable development, environmental protection, and economic growth. A 1992 USAID study had the following to say about its own programmes:

> AID's central environmental objective is to promote environmentally and socially sound, long-term economic growth. … At the same time AID has placed high priority on stimulating private investment, free markets and free enterprise. Many officials within AID view nature-based tourism as well-suited for simultaneously meeting both objectives. As a result, there has been an increasing level of activity related to ecotourism within the agency.
>
> (International Resources Group, cited in Honey, 1999: 16-17)

By the mid-1990's, USAID had 105 projects with ecotourism components (totalling more than $2 billion in funding) (Honey, 1999: 17). In southern Africa, one of these has been the establishment of a cross-border megapark that includes ecotourism and community development projects in a huge ecosystem encompassing areas of South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. This initiative has been hailed as "amongst the most promising experiments for promoting biodiversity, improving the quality of life for rural people by providing employment, and expanding nature-based tourism" (Honey, 1999:79-380).

However, while ecotourism is being hailed as a means of "giving nature value" (Pleumarom, 1994: 144) and achieving sustainable development, many terms of the discourse remain hidden. Questions of power that are central to both tourism and

development are hidden beneath the rhetoric of participatory and empowering practices. While some see ecotourism as a pleasurable way of redistributing wealth from the North to the South, Cynthia Enloe highlights the less benign aspect of the travel equation: "Tourism is not just about escaping work and drizzle, it is about power, increasingly internationalized power" (1990: 40). Enloe draws attention to the ways in which Third World countries have been encouraged to engage in tourism as a means of drawing in foreign investment and earning foreign exchange that can contribute towards their debt repayment. "The international politics of debt and the international pursuit of pleasure are tightly knotted together" (ibid.: 32).

The discourse of sustainable development has appropriated the concept of 'ecotourism', along with a particular notion of the 'environment', and 'nature', creating an "ecodevelopmentalist vision" (Escobar, 1995:195). The real workings of power are obfuscated as we are beguiled by the image of protecting nature in the name of development. Escobar explains how this is achieved:

> …the ecodevelopmentalist vision expressed in mainstream sustainable development reproduces the central aspects of economism and developmentalism. Discourses do not replace each other completely but build upon each other as layers that can be only partly separated. The sustainable development discourse redistributes many of the concerns of classical development: basic needs, population, resources, technology, institutional co-operation, food security and industrialism are … reconfigured and reshuffled.
>
> (Escobar, 1995:195)

Understanding how ecotourism is entwined within a wider nest of discourses around neo-liberal development facilitates a critical understanding and analysis of the notions of 'empowerment' and 'participation'. Ecotourism (and participatory development) is presented in the discourse as 'a good thing'. However, we need to ask, 'good for whom'? Who benefits from the ways in which power plays out at the local level of the research context, at regional levels and global levels? How does the discourse - and accompanying power dynamics – which prevail in the global economy filter down to, and find expression at the local level? An understanding of how macro-level ideological constructions, processes and issues are enmeshed with those at a micro-level permits a more critical analysis of the way in which assumptions about development play out and influence the research process and the possibilities open to REFLECT circles. These concerns are considered in the final chapter of this report.

FORMS OF CAPITAL

Earlier in this chapter[20], I referred to human and social capital as forms of capital relevant to this study. The task of this section is to contextualise and discuss these forms of capital in relation to other forms of capital and their significance for this study. Particular attention is devoted to social capital as a form of capital relevant to this study.

Different forms of capital

The traditional economic notion of capital as money, material possessions and property has been expanded by a number of theorists (Bebbington, 1999; Heilbronner, 1999). Different forms of capital that have been identified include the following:

- **Financial capital** takes the form of capital assets (e.g. savings, pensions, investments) that can be immediately and directly exchanged for money to provide people with different livelihood options.
- **Natural capital** which is inherent in ecologies and protected by communities to support life and livelihoods (e.g. a river which provides a farmer with water)
- **Infrastructural/physical capital** is non-natural support systems (e.g. clothing, shelter, roads, computers and communications). These resources must be manufactured, built and installed, and contribute towards people's livelihoods.
- **Human capital** refers to the properties of individuals - knowledge, skills and education - that enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies. Human capital theory, supported by neo-liberal ideology, emphasises the economic reasons for investing in education and training, arguing that greater investment in education will lead to increased productivity in the labour market and in society more generally. From this perspective there is a direct link between education and training and economic growth.
- **Social capital** refers to the relationships among individuals; it is the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible (Cohen and Prusak, 2001:4). People draw on stocks of social capital as a resource to support livelihoods.

- **Cultural capital** is the knowledge, competencies, social practices and educational credentials that lend one greater prestige and respect. Cultural capital is usually acquired through socialisation and education, and reflects membership of a particular social group or class.
- **Symbolic capital** refers to prestige, honour, and the right to be listened to. Symbolic power provides the power to impose meanings that are recognised and represented as legitimate.

Pierre Bourdieu (1985) focused particularly on 'immaterial' and 'non-material' forms of capital, specifically cultural and symbolic capital. He explained how certain types of capital could be acquired, exchanged and converted into other forms, and emphasised the role of different forms of capital in the reproduction of unequal power relations. He argued that unequal social relations are maintained "through a range of social processes that sustain inequalities in the interlocking phenomena of economic capital, human/cultural capital and social capital" (Campbell, 2003:53-54).

Figure 8 below illustrates how interaction between four forms of capital relevant to this study might be represented[21]. The white dotted lines represent the osmotic relationship between the forms of capital which permeate one another, ultimately merging together in a more holistic picture to support particular social relations. It is also important to note that while the four forms of capital are represented equally here, this does not reflect how people actually draw on these forms of capital. Patterns of access and use may shift according to local contextual factors (e.g. the establishment of tourism in the area), ecological processes (e.g. a drought or demographic increase), macroeconomic policies and broader economic changes (e.g. a drop in the gold price resulting in the retrenchment of migrant workers).

[20] See the discussion of 'Development', point (iii) Neo-liberal theory.

[21] It important to note that each of these four broad forms have multiple sub-forms. For example, financial capital includes capital assets as well as physical assets such as property, buildings, cars and even roads (which could be considered physical capital – but have a monetary value).

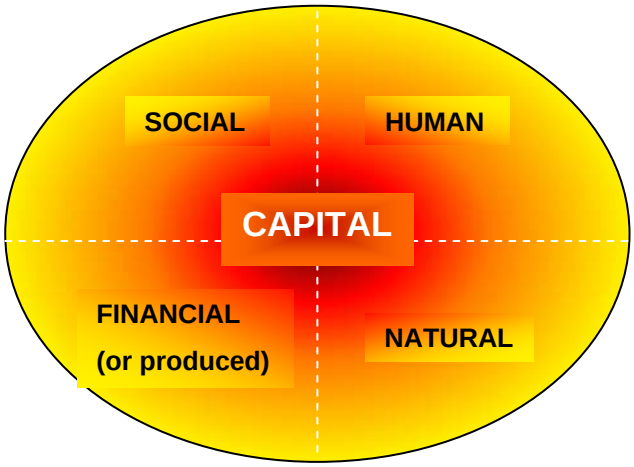


Figure 8: Diagram illustrating the relationship between four forms of capital[22]

Social capital[23]

Of the four forms of capital represented above, social capital has been selected for further discussion. This is because it has been advocated as a promising tool for focusing attention on a range of community-level factors, such as participation and power, factors particularly relevant to this study (Bebbington, 2006; Bourdieu, 1985; Saegart et al, 2001, Pronyk, 2002, Campbell, 2003).

Although social capital exists in relation to the other forms of capital depicted above, it differs from them in that it is not tangible, it is not a material form of capital. In the words of Robert Putman (2000:19):

> Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.
>
> (Putnam, 2000:19)

Social capital is a property of the structure of social organization (Saegart, et al, 2001). However, defining social capital is not straightforward, and the concept has been used by a range of authors in a diversity of social contexts.

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[22] Serageldin and Steer (1994) suggested that these forms of capital are the four pillars of sustainable social development.

[23] This section draws on a 2005 publication by Gillian Attwood entitled 'HIV/AIDS and Social Capital: Supporting Communities in the Context of HIV/AIDS in (Eds.) R. Cervero, B. Courtenay and S. Merriam Global Issues and Adult Education: Perspectives from Latin America, Southern Africa and the United States. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bourdieu (1985) defines social capital from a critical perspective, seeing it as 'a social relation of power' (Swartz, 1997). Social capital is seen to be a form of capital that, together with other forms, works to structure and reproduce the unequal distribution of power in society. According to Bourdieu, economic capital, symbolic capital, cultural capital and social capital are interlinked, and enable individuals to accrue particular assets associated with each. Well connected individuals, families or groups with social capital will be able to mobilise "actual or potential resources linked to the possession of durable networks of more of less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu cited in Mubangizi, 2003:141). Those without social capital will not be able to mobilise these resources. Bourdieu points out that power is always present - even in close networks unequal power relations will exist, with some individuals gaining access to more resources than others. Bourdieu's focus on how power plays out in networks differentiates him from other social capital theorists, such as Putnam (1993, 2000) and Coleman (1988) who focus on trust and the mutuality of social interactions.

Putnam et al (1993) and Coleman (1988) both emphasise the importance of an atmosphere of trust in creating networks and establishing processes whereby people can work together to accomplish goals of mutual benefit. Coleman (1988) uses rotating credit associations to illustrate how levels of trust and obligation in a community operate to facilitate productive activity. Members of credit associations contribute regularly to a central fund which rotates between them, giving each member periodic access to the capital for their own use. However, a high level of trust must exist between members because if one member absconds, the system breaks down. Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam et al, 1993: 36)[24]. This definition has informed a general understanding of social capital as the norms and networks that enable communities to trust one another, take collective action and organise for development. Strong communities are seen to be characterised by strong 'stocks' of social capital – in other words, high levels of trust, reciprocity, co-operation and solidarity amongst members of the community.

[24] However, Putnam et al's (1993) focus on trust as a distinctive feature of social capital has been criticised as neglectful of the economic and political dimensions of social capital (Fine, 2001).

While the trust orientated definition of social capital has been widely accepted, it has also been contested. Woolcock (2000) maintains that a definition of social capital should focus on what it is, rather than what it does. This approach eliminates an entity such as 'trust', which although recognised as vitally important, is seen as an outcome (of repeated interactions, of credible organisations, or reputations), rather than a component of social capital itself.

> 'Trust' is better understood not as social capital per se, but rather as a measure of it. We invest in the networks and social institutions that produce trust, not trust in and of itself"
>
> (Woolcock, 2000: 9).

Woolcock thus opts for a leaner definition of social capital as "the norms and networks that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit" (1998:155). It is this definition that informs my study. I explore how the learning circles have contributed to social capital. Have they influenced norms and networks in any way? How has collective action been shaped though learning circles? Has this been of benefit, and to whom? I investigate whether social capital manifests within social relationships as a resource for use by people in the Malealea community. These are important questions to consider since

> …the extent that access to resources and other actors is the most critical asset that rural people need in order to build sustainable livelihoods, then people's endowments of social capital are vital to their well-being.
>
> (Bebbington, 1999:2039)

I also make use of Putnam's distinction between two forms of social capital – bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Putnam locates bonding social capital within homogenous groups where it serves to unite members of a group in trusting, reciprocal and supportive relationships so that members benefit from whatever resources accrue from being part of that group. Bridging social capital can be located in the connections between groups, with members of different groups benefiting from whatever resources are available through the wider network of their various social contacts. This distinction will be further discussed in Chapter Seven where I look at the ways in which learning circles in Malealea have contributed towards strengthening social relationships and the effects thereof.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a notion of the world as a kaleidoscopic picture, constantly changing and reshaping itself in accordance with our shifting understandings of issues and concerns. Five main components of the kaleidoscopic picture have been described and explored in this chapter. First, I looked at the central theoretical understandings and discourses that shape 'development'. A certain definition of development was selected as relevant to this study, namely that development is

> A process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.
>
> (Korten, 1990: 67)

I then examined theory related to power and empowerment concluding that the critical and post-modern understandings of power can most usefully inform this study. These perspectives challenge me as a researcher to continually examine how all players are implicated in the workings of power, and how everyday practices are consistently imbued with power - even participatory practices which supposedly equalise power relations. The notions of 'participation' and 'participatory practices' were critically examined in relation to discussions about power in order to draw attention to the ways in which power relations shape participation and participatory practices.

Different conceptions of literacy were discussed in order to contextualise an analysis of REFLECT as a social change process that not only facilitates the development of literacy skills and practices, but also supports empowerment. REFLECT as a learning and development process was described in detail, and presented in a diagrammatic form.

The broader context of ecotourism was discussed because ecotourism has been widely hailed as a means to support sustainable development, a vision which has informed Malealea, the context of the study. Discussion examined the ways in which discourses pertaining to development and power intersect with those that structure the concept of ecotourism.

Finally I have looked at different forms of capital and the ways in which these can contribute towards an understanding of the research concerns. Four forms of capital were selected as relevant to the study, and structured into a schema (Figure 8) to guide an analysis of the findings of this study. Particular attention was placed on social capital which was defined as norms and networks enabling people to act collectively. It was identified as a critical asset, particularly within the context of learning circles where collective action and learning is foregrounded.

In summary, this chapter has set out a range of theoretical perspectives that colour the picture of my research world in different ways. I have tried to identify my own particular stylistic preferences within the palette of colours presented. However, it is fitting to note that while I may have certain 'preferences', it can not be said that I have free artistic reign to draw exactly what I see. As a researcher, my knowledge and understandings have been, and still are, subject to the parameters of a discursive structure, which to a greater or lesser extent, predetermine the picture I see, and fix the meaning I interpret. The picture of the research findings is presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six, while Chapter Seven anchors the meaning of this picture in relation to my interpretation of the theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter.

Before that, Chapter Three looks at the research design, the 'artist's sketch', the plan for the picture. In this chapter I explain why I selected an action research design and what the implications of this design were for the research process itself.

CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds on the two previous chapters. In Chapter One, I described the aims and objectives of the research and set out a framework of four critical elements integral to the research process. In Chapter Two, the theoretical frameworks that inform this study were presented. The purpose of this chapter is to describe in detail the way in which the research was conceived, planned and implemented, and show how the research design complements both the research process and theoretical framework already introduced. I also raise concerns and complexities regarding the research process itself and my part within that. The main points discussed are as follows:

- the research paradigm guiding this study
- the design of the study
- the scope of the research and selection of research participants (including myself as a co-researcher)
- the research methodology employed to collect, analyse, interpret and present the data
- issues related to validity, reliability, generalisability and ethics

RESEARCH PARADIGM

In the previous chapter, I used the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to describe the changing nature of theoretical perspectives which are continually influenced by varying contextual factors and our own shifting understandings of the world around us. This metaphor is also relevant to my understanding of social reality (ontology) and the nature of knowing (epistemology). As mentioned in Chapter One, I question the notion of an objective reality that exists independently of how we come to know that reality. What we believe affects what we see, which in turn is affected by what we know and how we come to know it. There is no fixed version of ‘reality’ or ‘truth’; these are constructed and shifting notions influenced by who we are, our values and our understandings.

It is important for a researcher to acknowledge this shifting constructed nature of reality since it has direct implications for research itself. The theories of the researcher influence the focus and the nature of the research since different people will see the same problem from different perspectives and propose different solutions (Selener, 1997:277). Research is thus always value-laden rather than value-free. These views position me within a post-positivist or qualitative paradigm.

A qualitative paradigm makes several philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality. Firstly, reality is not seen as a static measurable objective entity, but rather as a multiple, shifting perspective. The researcher's role is to negotiate meaning, and make sense of the dialectical relationships that exist between theory and practice, as well as between researcher, participants and the context. It is the researcher's role to engage in the process of continually renegotiating meaning within these multiple possibilities and dialectical rhythms. The researcher is an active participant in the construction of knowledge that constitutes reality, rather than an objective observer of an independent reality. She brings herself to the research process, recognising the need for an examination of her position within the research and knowledge production process.

Within a qualitative framework, it is incumbent upon the researcher to reflect on, and be conscious of her positioning and the power relations imbedded within the frameworks and the discourses to which she consciously or unconsciously subscribes, for these frameworks shape both the research process and the product.

To achieve its ends, qualitative research promotes a range of interpretative and naturalistic approaches, where the researcher explores a problem, (usually social and/or human) in its natural setting, "attempting to make sense of or interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:2). The qualitative researcher considers a research design that will enable her to access multiple sources of information, and use a variety of narrative approaches to analyse and present that information so as to build a complex and holistic 'bigger picture' of the question studied (Creswell, 1998:15). The particular research design selected for his study is discussed below.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to explore what might happen when a structured Freirean learning approach, namely REFLECT, was introduced to members of a rural community in Lesotho. I wanted to find out what kind of consequences the REFLECT process might have for literacy, learning and development practices. Could it help community members to set and implement their own learning and development agendas? Would it provide them with an empowering tool to address their concerns and effect changes in their lives? The research was thus oriented to understanding how social change might be facilitated using REFLECT. Given these objectives, an action research design was selected.

Action research defined

Action research has been defined and applied in variety of ways and areas: it has been used in community development, in organisations, in schools, and with farmers – amongst others. The range of definitions and visions of action research can be seen to exist along a continuum – with those practitioners who see themselves as revolutionaries at one end, and those who see themselves as reformers at the other (see Figure 9 below). Revolutionary action researchers tend to subscribe to a radical political paradigm guided by a political analysis of power relations and a belief that significant social change occurs only if power has changed hands and alleviated oppression.

> A distinctive characteristic of this [participatory action research] approach is that, in the long term, those applying it hope to shift power relations within a community and, ultimately, within society as a whole.
>
> (Selener, 1997:8)

At this end of the continuum, researchers tend to distinguish between Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a practice that integrates an analysis and understanding of class and gender struggles, and action research as a research practice that discounts the political agenda. From a more radical perspective, the aim of action research is to bring about change by facilitating a critical awareness and understanding of oppressive practices so that participants themselves engage in critical action to eliminate oppression (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). Reformers at the other end of the continuum believe that they too are committed to social change through action research, but argue that this can be achieved through building democratic spaces and practices, not necessarily through creating a new social order. From this perspective, the aim of action research is to effect change, but not

necessarily to transform the social conditions which characterise their lives. This continuum can be represented as follows:

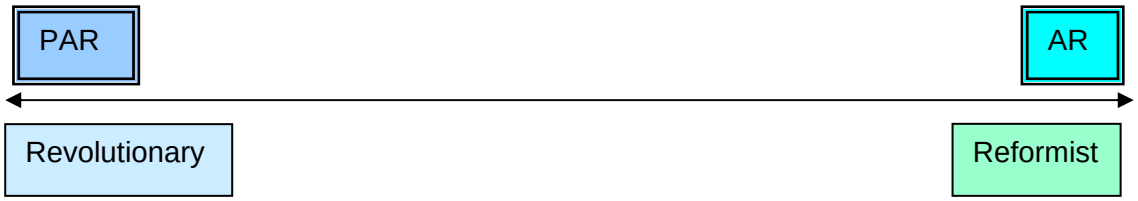


Figure 9: The action research continuum

Where would this study be located along the action research continuum outlined above (in Figure 9)? The aim of this study was to introduce a Freirean learning approach into a rural area of Lesotho. As such, it has been influenced by Freirean theory, both in terms of the research questions posed, and in terms of the theoretical framework that has informed the conceptualisation and design of the study (see Chapters One and Two). From this perspective, the study might be placed towards the revolutionary end of the action research continuum since conceptually, the study incorporated what might be seen as a political agenda – an intention to facilitate social change through deepening critical insight that would grow into critical action. However, on the other hand, eliminating 'oppression' was not an explicit aim of the research. Also, as noted in Chapter Two, I don't subscribe to a mainstream notion of power whereby power 'changes hands' to 'empower' those who were previously 'disempowered'[25]. This study poses a different question – I have asked whether participants developed new understandings of their own agency in relation to social conditions that foster situations of disadvantage, and to what extent were they able to act on those understandings? This kind of research focus positions me toward the 'reformist' end of the AR continuum represented above.

While there are differences in views about the purpose of action research, there are also certain common characteristics that define all positions along the action research continuum. Greenwood and Levin (1998) identify the three core elements of action research as research, action and participation by members of the community concerned. According to these authors, all of these elements must be present for the study to be considered an action research process. Other researchers, practitioners and scholars have

[25] Power issues are discussed in more detail under point 4 below.

also come up with core characteristics (Denscombe, 1998; McTaggart, 1997; Selener, 1997; Stringer, 1999). Those relevant to this study are described below. Thereafter, based on my experience with Action Research, I comment critically on these characteristics.

1. The research problem originates in the community itself. It should be defined, analysed and solved by the community.

Action research is a process that aims to address practical problems and issues that exist 'in the real world', in other words, in a context that is relevant to the participants themselves. Participants engage in a process of critical reflection to identify what those problems and issues might be, and to find ways in which to understand these problems in order to address them better through action. The research should be guided by and relevant to the community's own concerns, it should serve the interests of the participating communities. Action research in this context is not related to testing theories, but rather to facilitating change.

> The analogue of hypothesis testing in action research is some form of change or development that is tested by its ability to enhance the lives of the people with whom it is engaged.
>
> (Stringer, 1999:11)

2. Action research emphasises action for social change and empowerment of the participants.

> AR is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. But the social change we refer to is not just any kind of change. AR aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organisation members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so.
>
> (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:6)

The ultimate goal of action research should be an improvement in the lives of the people involved in the research. The primary beneficiaries of the research process should be the community members themselves who through their collective participation in the research process, develop an understanding of that reality and insight into how to change it through collective capacity (Selener, 1997). This process respects the prior experience and ability of participants to participate and collaborate in designing and implementing their own

programme for learning and social action. They decide what they want to learn and do, and how they will go about it as they work together to achieve change.

3. Communities concerned should be fully and actively involved in the entire research process.

Community members should be involved at all stages of the research process: the definition of the problem, the choice of methods or tools to address the problem, the analysis of the data and the use of the findings. Action researchers make a distinction between 'involvement' and genuine participation. McTaggart (1997) defines 'involvement' as implication, and argues that participation is much more, entailing ownership of the research process.

> [Participation] means ownership, that is, responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice.
>
> (1997:28)

Selener (1997:19) defines participation further by differentiating between two kinds of participation – tactical and technical participation. With technical participation, participants take part in all research activities. However, with tactical or political participation, people exercise control over the research process and the problem they are working on. According to Selener, both kinds of participation should be integrated into the action research process.

4. Action research promotes an analysis of and shift in power relations and control.

Power and the ways in which power is exercised is one of the central themes in action research, and a basic tenet underlying the core characteristics of action research outlined above. Within an action research paradigm, the researcher is encouraged to examine and acknowledge the power that she traditionally has over the research process and product. She should also promote the power of the participants as co-researchers and explore how power shifts back and forth between all research participants. The power and authority that are conventionally invested in the researcher are challenged and replaced by a process of dialogue and consultation between co-researchers committed to a common goal of social change.

> Action research is a form of investigation with interactionist requirements for the researcher – not simply as a participant observer, but as an active social agent.
>
> (Schein, as cited in Merriam and Cunningham, 1989:152)

The experience and knowledge of participants is respected as they work collaboratively to describe and interpret problems and concerns so as to formulate mutually acceptable solutions (Stringer, 1999). Participants themselves identify what they want to do and learn, and how they will go about it as they work together for positive change. This is the 'empowering' dimension of the action research process.

However, the conceptions of power embedded within the discourse of action research require closer attention. As discussed in Chapter Two, the idea that power can be 'handed over' or shared or that participants can be 'empowered' (see point two above) reflects a mainstream understanding of power as a quantifiable entity that can be shifted from one place to another. Power is seen as good when it is in the hands of the participants and not so good when it is in the hands of the researcher who should 'hand it over' in order to empower the participants.

> Control [or power] is a key element in a research process intended to promote social change. Problem definition, data collection, data analysis, and the implementation of results should be in the hands of the oppressed to ensure that research is in their interests. Power relations may predetermine, or at least suggest, who defines the research problem, who is in control of implementing change, and who ultimately benefits. …[A]ny participatory action research is useful insofar as it serves to empower those conducting it.
>
> (Selener, 1997:277-8)

Much of the AR literature assumes this understanding of power relations with the action research design providing the researcher with a means of 'handing over' power by bringing the participants into the decision-making processes and 'empowering' them to become aware of their own voice and act in their own interests. Typical authority relations between researcher and participants are replaced by a more empowering process of dialogue and consultation between co-researchers who 'share' power as they strive to reach a common goal of social change.

While the action research discourse draws on a mainstream understanding of power, it is also informed by critical conceptions of power in the way that it explicitly recognises the subtle workings of power within the process of constructing meaning as part of the

research process. Action researchers are encouraged to reflect on whose meaning is being conveyed and expressed in the research process. They are encouraged to see things "intersubjectively – from one's own point of view and from the point of view of others (from the inside and the outside) (Kemis and McTaggart, 1988:574). This perspective reflects a critical understanding of power as invested not only within structures, resources, and decision-making processes, but also within the process of managing meaning. A critical understanding of power is also evident in the fact that action research includes an ideological dimension. Participants are encouraged to use the action research process to realise their own 'real' interests and develop their capacity to work towards overcoming oppressive structures that inhibit the equitable redistribution of power.

However, from a Foucauldian perspective, the notion that power can be equitably redistributed or taken from one point to another is challenged, since this implies a unified conception of power where power can be possessed and exercised by one person or group. Foucault sees power as unlocalised and circulating between all parties who are immersed in a system of power that is unpredictable, rather than deliberately organised. Power is exercised continually by everyone, not only the researcher. Therefore, from a Foucauldian perspective, the researcher can't hand over or even share power with the participants since power flows between the various parties involved in a more dialectical way. Even if the researcher and the participants have certain intentions and move towards shaping meaning or mobilising resources in particular ways, there is no way of rigidly determining its effects since power relations are contextual with individuals continually adopting and transforming them through their changing discourses and practices.

Thus, from a Foucauldian perspective, the organised format for conducting action research in a way that allows for the redistribution of power relations may be overridden by unplanned and contradictory effects of power. The Foucauldian perspective discussed here certainly rings true for the way in which the action research process unfolded during this study. The process was not characterised by an orderly handing over of power- but rather by a knotted and web-like relationship of constant negotiation of power relations (These relations are described and discussed in more detail in the findings and discussion chapters that follow.)

Praxis – the process of action research

Action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry and learning that leads to systematic action to resolve identified problems. An action research group identifies a shared problem, gathers information about it, analyses and interprets that information and then takes action to transform the situation. This action is then followed by a collaborative review and analysis of what happened as a result of that planned action, creating additional knowledge that either modifies the actions already taken or leads to the implementation of new actions. This continuous cyclical process of reflection and action has been termed 'praxis' which in the words of Paulo Freire is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1972a: 52). Praxis is privileged in the quest to theorise practice while at the same time making theory practical in the sense that it is "…open ended, non-dogmatic, informing and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life" (Lather, 1986:263). Theory should become practically accessible to participants who are actively involved in the process of dealing with the identified problems.

Action research is a particularly appropriate research process for this study because the notion of praxis is also embodied in the REFLECT process. Both processes entail a dialectical relationship between thinking and acting, between theory and practice. Both processes are cyclical - participants begin by critically reflecting on their own situations in order to identify and define a problem or issue they wish to address. They co-generate relevant knowledge about the problem and critically analyse it using PRA tools (or other social research techniques), and then, through a structured participatory process involving dialogue, participants plan what action should be taken. The action may or may not include some literacy and numeracy learning. Once the action has been taken, participants reflect on what happened, based on what they have learned and experienced. Thereafter, they continue with a revised or adapted plan. REFLECT thus exemplifies the dialectical process of action research. Theory and practice are not separated, but rather seen as an intimate and mutually informative.

An evaluative dimension

Efforts to merge theory and practice are closely related to an underlying intention to improve and/or transform practice. As such, there is an evaluative dimension to this research, since according to Patton (2002:10),

> Evaluative research … can include any effort to judge or enhance human effectiveness through systematic data-based inquiry. … When one examines and judges accomplishments and effectiveness one is engaged in evaluation.

It is important to acknowledge that my methodological decisions for this study were influenced on two levels – at the level of methodology and approach related to implementation and development of the research study, I was strongly influenced by Action Research. However, at another level, more closely related to reporting my findings, I was influenced by evaluation theory.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The scope of the study and the sample were defined in several ways. Firstly, a certain geographical area was circumscribed, namely the Malealea valley in the south-western Mafeteng district of Lesotho (see Figure 2 for a map of Lesotho and the beginning of Chapter Six for an aerial photograph of the valley). Within this valley, over a period of roughly a year, two constituencies self-selected for participation in the project: a Cooperative constituency and a village constituency. Chapter One provides a more in-depth discussion of the context and how the constituencies concerned were brought into the study, but what is noteworthy here is that the participants were not systematically sampled or selected, but rather joined the study as part of the natural flow of existing activity in the contexts (Merriam and Simpson, 1995). Also included within Chapter One's discussion of the scope of the study is a brief account of my own position as researcher in the context.

The Cooperative constituency

The initial constituency was a group of 30 adults and youth who came together to form an income generating workers co-operative, officially entitled the Lehlahlellakaleleng Multi-purpose Co-operative. Members of the Cooperative made a variety of products, but focused mainly on producing handicrafts to sell to tourists visiting the Malealea area[26]. Members of the Cooperative agreed to use action research and REFLECT as a means of setting up and running and managing the co-operative, thus becoming the first REFLECT learning circle established in Malealea.

[26] They therefore became known colloquially as 'The Handicraft', a term which participants have sometimes used in interviews to refer to themselves.

The community constituency

The second constituency of participants was formed and then brought on board by a core of 18 Cooperative members who volunteered to be trained as REFLECT facilitators. The facilitators wanted to extend their efforts beyond the Co-operative, and set up REFLECT learning circles in villages within the valley[27]. Their desire to set up village learning circles was in accordance with the Co-operative's constitutional commitment to promote development and the sharing of skills within the wider Malealea community. The constitution was developed jointly by all members of the Co-op to structure, direct and govern activities and procedures within the co-operative. The aims of the Co-operative, as set out in this constitution, were to encourage community development in Malealea, reduce unemployment and establish income generation projects to improve the economy of the Malealea community as a whole by working together and sharing skills with other groups and associations[28]. Establishing learning circles in the villages was the primary means through which Co-op members endeavoured to meet their commitment to wider community development.

At the start of the research project in late 2000, six REFLECT learning circles were set up, with the number of circles growing to fourteen by the end of the research period at the end of December 2005. Eighteen co-op members were trained as REFLECT facilitators and worked in pairs to first recruit members to the circles and then facilitate learning and development in the village learning circles on a bi-weekly basis. By the end of the research period there were between ten and thirty participants in fourteen village learning circles, bringing the total number of village participants to approximately 300.

The researcher as participant

While the Cooperative and the village learning circles described above formed the two primary contexts and constituencies for the action research study, it is important to acknowledge my role as a researcher and participant in the context. Although I was from outside of the research context (in the sense that I had not grown up in, and was not a full-

[27] Details of how the Cooperative and the village REFLECT circles were set up are presented in Chapters Four and Five.

[28] See points b – e, section two of the Constitution entitled 'Aims of the Association' - the constitution is attached as Appendix One.

time resident in the community, and I took on different roles from those taken by to the participants), my position was still as an active co-researcher. I participated as a facilitator in setting the research agenda and defining and analysing problems – especially in the initial stages of the research; I helped to build capacity by running skills training workshops to help participants become more self-reliant; and I raised funds for various actions the community decided to pursue. I was thus deeply implicated in the research process and context.

But was I an "insider" or an "outsider"? Are these fixed positions, or are there more porous boundaries between them? Banks (1998), cited in Merriam (2001:412), is useful in helping to reach clarity on my position in this regard. He identifies four possible positions that researchers might occupy, the last two of which are most relevant to me. First, he says one might be an indigenous-insider "who endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community" and "who can speak with authority about it" (p214). Second, one might be an indigenous-outsider who will have "experience[d] high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture but yet remains connected with his or her indigenous community" (p.214). The third and fourth positions identified ring true for me. The third position relates to that of an external-insider who "rejects much of his or her indigenous community and endorses those of another culture to become an "adopted" insider". The fourth position is that of an external-outsider is "socialised within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research".

Having lived and worked on and off in Lesotho for nearly 20 years (including the research period), I was in many ways an "adopted insider". The sheer duration of the period I had been in Lesotho meant that I had established many relationships with people; I had gained a functional level of fluency in Sesotho; and become relatively integrated into the society, even having built a small house in the community. Although I had by no means rejected my indigenous community, I had moved beyond the experiential and cognitive boundaries that shaped my views on the world as I was growing up. However, at the same time, I was not full-time resident in the Malealea community, and retained my other identities as an academic, a researcher, a student and a member of my home community. As such, I position myself somewhere between position three and four. I was neither an absolute

external-insider nor an absolute external-outsider. Rather, I shifted between these two positions, as shown in Figure 10 below.

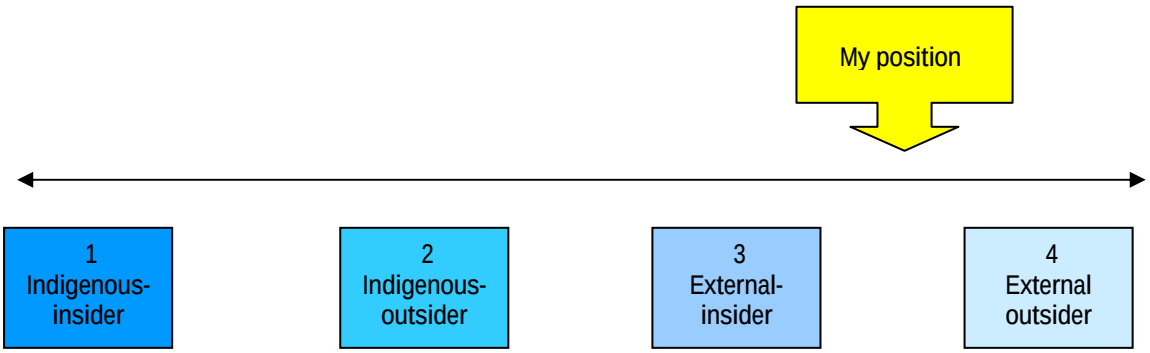


Figure 10: Visual representation of Banks' (1998) typology of possible insider-outsider positions

My claim to occupy this relative and shifting positioning is supported by Villenas (1996:722) who maintains that "as researchers, we can be insiders and outsiders to a particular community of research participants at many different levels and at different times".

A number of factors influenced my positioning as a researcher, as well as the power dynamics between my co-researchers and myself. These included my race, class, gender, culture and educational background. For example, with regard to my race, class and educational background - because I was white, middle class and educated, my co-researchers expected me to have access to resources which they as black, rural peasants with relatively low levels of education did not have access to. And indeed, this was the case – I was able to raise funds, to gain access to certain people (such as the "experts" whom we consulted on various projects) and to mobilise a greater range of resources. This gave me a certain power within the research process.

However, on the other hand, the very same factors that enabled me to mobilise power, were worth little in other situations. For example, at local government meetings and even at some local community meetings, I was considered an outsider and as such a person with little to contribute to these forums. In the first instance, since I had not elected the (mostly male) government representatives, I had little power to voice an opinion. Also, because these meetings were conducted in Sesotho, my participation was inevitably

curtailed. There were a range of idiomatic expressions, proverbs and other non-verbal expressions which I simply didn't grasp. Attempts to translate for me only further highlighted my outsider status. In such situations, my race, class, gender and culture were not means through which I could exercise power.

An acknowledgement of how these various factors played out provides greater insight into the multidimensional power relationship that existed between me and my co-researchers. In some situations they had greater power, while in other situations I did. Power was not a given, it had to be continually negotiated within the context by those present within that context.

There are a number of other less conspicuous levels at which power influenced the research process. Firstly, power was subtly asserted through the very framework of action research. Kothari (2001:142) argues that participatory methods of enquiry simplify the nature of power and are in danger of encouraging a reassertion of control and power by dominant individuals or groups. The very act of drawing in participants can symbolise an exercise of power and 'inclusionary control' over an individual who has to conform to the social norm of that group.

> [P]rogrammes designed to bring the excluded in often result in forms of control that are more difficult to challenge, as they reduce spaces of conflict and are relatively benign and liberal. That is, those people who have the greatest reason to challenge and confront power relations and structures are brought, or even bought, through the promise of development assistance, into the development process in ways that disempower them to challenge the prevailing hierarchies and inequalities in society, hence inclusionary control and the inducement of conformity.
>
> (Kothari, 2001:143)

On another related level, as the initiator of the research, I used my position, and the power associated with it, to introduce the RELECT approach to the communities. I did so believing that the principles of REFLECT were in the community's interests and would be of benefit to development in the area. However, this was my framework, and just because I believed the approach was participatory and potentially beneficial for the participants involved, this did not mean the community embraced it without reservations. In fact, although participants agreed to use REFLECT, they did not respond to REFLECT and PRA as the long awaited opportunity to finally find their voices and express their pent

up local knowledge. There was an element of 'playing the game' of participation because of what they hoped they could gain in the process. They were negotiating power. In Chapter Five I discuss how people initially resisted joining circles unless they were paid or received something in return for their participation. This suggests that participation was not necessarily a value espoused as part of their 'indigenous culture'. To an extent 'participation' was a value that I imposed, as the initiator of the research.

Another tension worth noting in regard to my role as researcher is the tension between the different discourses to which I subscribed. On the one hand, as a participant, I had to communicate with people in a second language (Sesotho) and in a different discourse, one related to more practical day to day issues. And on the other hand, as a PhD candidate, I had to engage with a discourse that in some ways was disconnected from everyday discourse. Academic discourse is characterised by particular disciplinary expectations and problematics, largely irrelevant to my co-researchers. (This is not to suggest that either discourse was intellectually more worthy, they were just different.)

I experienced further tensions between the academic discourse and the development discourse. In his study of development in Lesotho, James Ferguson notes these tensions:

> "[D]evelopment" discourse on Lesotho is distinguishable from academic discourse … the difference between the two types of discourse is due to two different sets of rules of formation for discourse, or two different problematics, and not to any necessary difference in intellectual quality…the "development" literature is full of statements which would be unacceptable in most academic settings, while at the same time many observations and lines of thought commonplace in scholarly literature on Lesotho are effectively excluded from the discourse of "development."
>
> (Ferguson, 1990: 28)

My role as co-researcher in Lesotho often involved 'buying into' the development discourse – to raise the money needed for the projects, to get people to 'play along', and because to some extent the actual REFLECT approach itself is governed by this discourse ("REFLECT brings literacy and development together"). It was important for me to be aware of and recognise that there were different problematics operating, as well as different agendas.

In a similar way, the research agenda as set by the community and the research agenda relevant to a PhD were also different. Participants were concerned with daily survival and

working the system in a way that would help to meet survival goals. It was important to be honest about how and where these two problematics differed and not to conflate them or see them as the same thing. At times I felt like a small seahorse washed between very different and strong currents – the one current took me in the direction of a commitment to assisting people to get resources to meet their needs, while the other current took me in the direction of achieving the academic task of making sense of the actions through a range of theoretical lenses.

RESEARCH METHODS

I have set out the action research methodology and the scope of study. I have also outlined certain tensions inherent in the research context. However, I have not yet explained how the design was actually implemented in the context. How did the process unfold? What steps were taken? What methods were used to collect data? This section aims to answer these questions.

Finding a starting point

The cyclical nature of action research has been described above as a spiralling process of planning, acting, observing and evaluating. But in practice, it is sometimes hard to discern where this begins. McTaggart (1997:27) suggests a starting point:

> In practice, the [AR] process begins with a general idea that some kind of improvement or change is desirable. In deciding just where to begin in making improvements, a group identifies an area where members perceive a cluster of problems of mutual concern and consequence. The group decides to work together on a 'thematic concern'.

Identifying thematic concerns

The notion of thematic concerns is central to both AR and the REFLECT process, lending further support to the choice of AR as an appropriate methodology for this study. McTaggart (1997:30) defines a thematic concern as "a commitment to inform and improve a particular practice". At the start of this study, members of the Cooperative identified two primary sets of 'thematic concerns' which had emerged as they began to establish the Cooperative. The first related to how the members of the Co-op could develop appropriate technical, business and financial skills and systems for generating income. These were all related to being better informed and improving income generating

practices. The second related to how the Co-op group might promote development and literacy in the wider community. This was related to learning more about the practice of community development. These two thematic concerns formed the starting point for the action research process of this study.

The first set of thematic concerns was explored by Co-op members within the context of the Cooperative. The second set of thematic concerns was identified and explored jointly by Co-op members and community members in the wider community context. Table 1 below offers a tabular representation of the participants in the two contexts and their initial thematic concerns:

	COOPERATIVE CONTEXT	**COMMUNITY CONTEXT**
Participants	Co-op members	Community members and facilitators
Initial Thematic concerns	Developing appropriate • Technical skills • Business skills • Financial skills • Management systems	• Poverty • Unemployment • Health and malnutrition • Erosion • Deforestation

Table 1: Participants, contexts and thematic issues related to the study

The thematic concerns identified here shifted over the course of the period of research, and new ones emerged as participants learned from their experience and considered new needs. For example, the issue of HIV/AIDS, not identified initially as a concern in either of the research contexts, became a central focus in both contexts some years into the study as the urgency of the epidemic became more real (See Chapters Four, Five and Six).

The cyclical nature of the research process whereby action and reflection continually overlapped, enabled action plans to be flexible and responsive. Thematic concerns tended to be formally modified during reflection workshops, although they had usually been discussed more informally by participants as events unfolded within the two contexts. My role was primarily at the level of workshops where I facilitated discussion to encourage participants to define issues, ideas and assumptions clearly so they could define more

powerful questions for themselves as the work progressed. The findings chapters provide a detailed account of what the thematic concerns were, and how they were raised and addressed.

Taking steps to implement action research in two contexts in Malealea

Because action research is a flexible process, it can be used differently depending on what the local context is, who is participating, and what their needs and problems are (TCOE, 2001:88). According to Selener (1997:39),

> … there is no "one way" to conduct participatory [action] research. …the "final" methodology will develop inductively, in accord with the unique situation and setting in which participatory research is being applied.

However, there are a number of critical steps that are essential to any action research process. Table 2 on the following page sets out the steps taken in the two research contexts and the kinds of methodologies used at each step by participants[29].

My role in the process depicted overleaf was a facilitative one. I coordinated discussions and workshops, introducing PRA tools to the participants where appropriate. I also provided a degree of leadership, guiding and directing the process to ensure that it didn't get 'stuck' at any one stage. In addition to this, initially I took responsibility for keeping most of the records of events, writing reports on what was taking place and feeding these back to the participants in order to inform the next stage of the process. As participants became more familiar with the process, they took increasing responsibility for tracking, monitoring and documenting the action research process.

[29] A detailed description of the PRA methodologies mentioned here is presented in Appendix Two.

COOPERATIVE AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS		
Step	**Action taken**	**Methodologies used**
1	Preparation for action research	• *Dialogue* and *discussion* with stakeholders to establish a working relationship and outline the AR and REFLECT approach
2	Identifying shared problems and needs to collectively build a picture of the community and develop a sense of a shared purpose.	• *Dialogue* and *team building exercises* to establish rapport • *Problem mapping and story telling in groups* and *discussion* to identify problems and needs
3	Analysing problems	• *Collaborative sorting* exercise to categorise problems • *Collaborative use of PRA tools (matrices, Venn diagrams, rivers, trees, calendars, role plays…)* • *Photography* • *Written records*
4	Planning	• *Dialogue and group discussion* • *PRA tools (matrixes and calendars)* • *Written documents (planning books)*
5	Action	• *Dialogue and PRA tools (matrixes and calendars)* • *Meetings and reports* • *Training workshops*
6	Reflection	• *Dialogue and PRA tools (matrixes and calendars)* • *Photography*

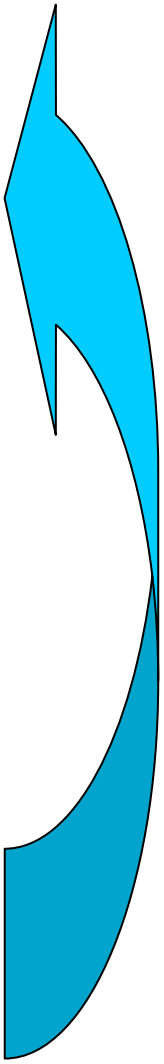


Table 2: Steps taken and methodologies used in the two research contexts

Although the process represented above appears to be linear, it is important to note that in the field, the process is cyclical and not as 'neat' and systematic - some steps overlapped and some were left out as the action research cycles unfolded.

The image of wheel cogs shifting and moving against each other offers a better metaphor for the action research process. Each cog represents one of the steps outlined in Table 2 above, but these are not positioned in any particular order. Any of the cogs may begin moving at a particular time, setting in motion a process whereby the cogs move against one another driving the action research process at different speeds, according to the size

of the cog. This shows the cyclical dynamism of the process but does not imply the sequential nature that is suggested in the more linear tabular representation. My role here was in essence to provide the oil that allowed the cogs to keep turning.

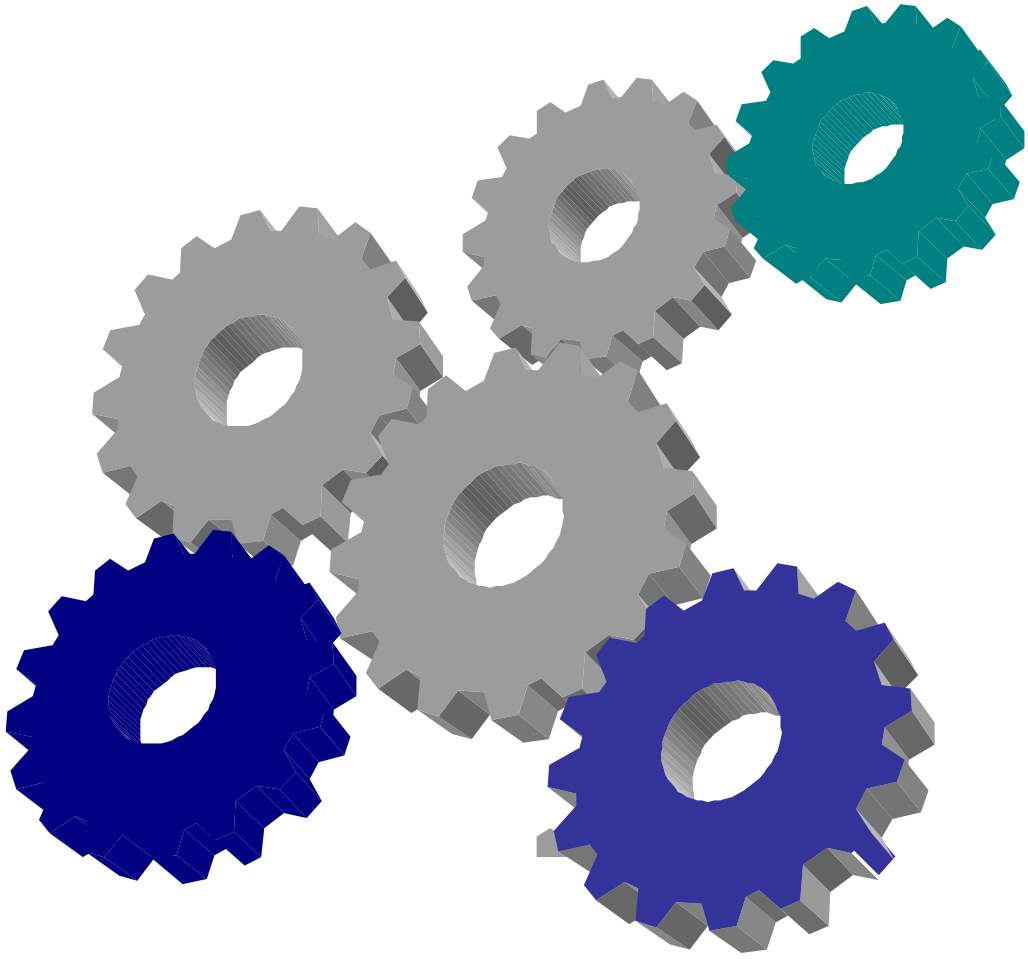


Figure 11: The cyclical nature of the action research process

Monitoring and tracking the action research process – two levels

An important step that is not explicitly represented in either Table 2 or Figure 11 is the monitoring and tracking of the action research process. This took place on two levels – which I have termed a 'ground level' and a 'meta-level' respectively. An overview of these two levels is provided below. This discussion introduces certain data collection methods which are explored in greater depth below.

A ground level perspective

At the 'ground level', participants tracked and monitored the research process within the Cooperative and within their communities. They took note of what the concerns were,

they recorded related discussions; they took photographs and noted the actions taken by the group to address their concerns. Records were kept in different ways, depending on the literacy levels of the participants.

a) In the co-operative, where participants had a stronger tradition of using literacy skills, minutes of meetings were recorded in a minute book, letters and other documents filed, and PRA graphics were copied for record onto large flipchart pages that were then displayed in the Cooperative workroom. These records could be referred back to when necessary, and provided a good chronicle of the action learning journey. Photographs were also used as a means of recording significant moments and action points.

b) Within the village learning circles where literacy levels were not generally as sophisticated, participants recorded graphics and discussion in their books according to their literacy abilities. Some participants just copied the graphics, while others with stronger literacy skills recorded key points from the group discussion as well. The circle facilitators kept minutes of discussions that took place and copied all graphics constructed using PRA tools into their notebooks as a record for the group. Also, each facilitator had a camera to record learning or actions they thought significant.

A meta-level perspective

At a 'meta-level', I wore my PhD candidate hat and tracked the research process as I saw it unfolding within the two contexts. I did this in several ways:

a) Firstly, I kept focusing on the research questions I had drawn up by keeping field notes of what happened in relation to each of these enquiries. I also tried to relate these meta-level research questions to the participants' own research concerns. I followed up my observations and reflections with more naturalistic methods such as interviews, participant observation and analysis of the documents produced by the participants. And I, too, took photographs as a visual narrative of the learning and research process.

b) Secondly, I tried to understand and develop an awareness of my own subjective perspectives and experiences as a researcher through keeping a personal learning

journal[30]. This gave me a space and opportunity to reflect on my own judgements, reactions and impressions about the research process and the research issues (Kemmis et al, 1988).

The two levels at which I tracked the research process are summed up by Kemmis et al as follows:

> Action research is open-minded about what counts as evidence (or data) – it involves not only keeping records which describe what is happening as accurately as possible (given the particular questions being investigated and the real-life circumstances of collecting the data) but also collecting and analysing our own judgements, reactions and impressions about what is going on.
>
> (1988:24)

Data collection methods

A number of different data collection and recording methods are mentioned in Table 2 and in the discussion above. These are now discussed in more depth.

Interviews

Participants in the study were interviewed to follow up on my assumptions and understandings about the research situation. I used both unstructured and semi-structured interviews, depending on the issues under discussion and the kind of detail required. Unstructured interviews were usually conducted to explore general issues further. For example, when visiting a learning circle I used unstructured interviews to find out how the circle was progressing, what issues were being discussed and if any problems were emerging. Semi-structured interviews were usually conducted to gain greater insight into a particular issue. For example, when circles were dealing with gender, I used semi-structured interviews to find out more about particular aspects of gender, such as the role of culture in constructing gender. Interviews were conducted on both a one-to-one basis and in groups. Interviews were mostly conducted in Sesotho with the assistance of a translator. Where participants spoke English, interviews were conducted in English.

Participant observation

As a participant in the study, I had abundant opportunity to collect data through direct observation of events as I witnessed them first hand in the field. Participants were

[30] The journal is discussed in more detail below.

generally aware of my observations, since I was always equipped with a notebook and camera, but this activity became secondary to my participation in events, especially once trust and rapport had been established with the group. I thus played the role of 'participant as observer' (Merriam and Simpson, 1995, Denscombe, 1998). Participant observation was for the most part unstructured – and used as a method to try to gain insight into the meanings that participants brought to the research concerns. However, at times, specific observation schedules were used to investigate a specific issue, such as literacy practices in a certain context (see Appendix 3 for an example of such an observation schedule). According to Denscombe,

> …[P]articipant observation can produce data which are better able than is the case with other methods to reflect the detail, the subtleties, the complexity and the inter-connectedness of the social world it investigates.
>
> (1998:149)

Photography

Photography might well be seen as a method of observation, with the camera as an observation tool.

> The critical eye of the camera is an essential tool in gathering accurate visual information because we moderns are often poor observers.
>
> (Collier and Collier, 1986:5)

However, the old adage that "the camera cannot lie" should be critically examined. The camera is only as good as the person who uses it – and it is important to remember that from a qualitative research perspective human observation is not free from bias, even if that observation is instrumentally assisted.

However, in spite of these limitations, photography was used effectively in a number of ways to collect data. First, it provided an alternative method to overcome language barriers between the participants and myself. Equipped with cameras, participants were able to choose visual moments which they felt were stories worth telling. The photograph of that moment then provided a stimulus for them to explain that experience to me, providing me with another opportunity to deepen my understanding of what was happening in the research contexts.

However, the photographs were not discussed with me alone. Group discussions provided an opportunity for other participants to ask questions about the photographs and what they meant[31]. This extended the level of analysis and contributed towards a shared understanding of what was happening in the learning circles.

> [The photograph] re-presents the photographer's perspective or point of view but then becomes a stimulus for the group's reflections, discussions, analyses and re-presentations. The fixed image serves as a catalyst for an ever-widening discussion of the different realities that are present within … communities.
>
> (Lykes, 2000:20)

Photographs were a rich and accessible source of data for interpretation by participants as they collectively reflected on what was happening in the photo, why it was taken, and how it might be interpreted from different perspectives. This kind of shared reflective learning provided another way to break down the conventional power relations between researcher and researched. Equipped with representational tools, participants themselves decided what to record, and together reflected on what the photos meant, reinforcing, in a practical way, the principle that their views counted. It was not only the outside researcher's view that was worth recording (McTaggart, 1997).

Photography was also a particularly useful method because not only did it help to create a visual record of a process, it also reinforced participants' visual literacy skills, a key intention of the REFLECT process. Taking photographs extended participants' visual processes (Collier and Collier, 1986:13) and helped them to learn more about the nature of the issues in which they were engaged. Opportunities for reflecting on their understandings and existing meaning perspectives were enhanced. Photography thus became a research and learning approach in its own right.

Document analysis

A number of textual sources were produced as part of the research process. Table 3 below shows the range of documents generated:

[31] The use of photography is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Documents	Description (Who produced them, where they were housed, etc)
Visual documents	
PRA graphics	Produced by participants and facilitators in the learning circles and in the Co-op. These were recorded in facilitators' notebooks and kept by the group that had made them.
Photographs	These were taken by the facilitators, each of whom had a camera. After being processed and discussed, these were returned to the facilitator and kept by the learning circles. I also took photographs (see discussion above).
Videos	These were taken by tourists, academics and other visitors to the circles. Copies of these (when made available) were kept by me but accessed by participants.
Artefacts (such as the handicraft produced)	These were made by participants in the Co-op and the learning circles and either kept or sold by them.
Written documents	
Plans for learning circle sessions	Both plans and records of learning circle meetings were made by the facilitators. These were recorded in special A4 notebooks which belonged to the facilitators. However, these were assessed on a weekly basis.
Records of learning circle sessions	
Minutes of meetings (facilitators' meetings, Co-op meetings, community meetings)	These were kept by members of the various committees concerned in dedicated 'minute books'. The books were kept by the committee members responsible within the organisations.
Working documents (E.g. the Co-op constitution)	These were produced by, or as a result of, organisational activities. The documents were housed within the organisation.
Letters and correspondence	
Workshop and training reports	These were generally written by me, and then distributed to the participants, each of whom had a copy.
Financial records of the Co-op and the learning circles	These were made and kept by participants in both the Co-op and the learning circles.
Field workers monthly reports	Monthly reports of activities in both the Co-op and the learning circles were kept by the field worker in dedicated A4 notebooks. These were housed with him, but submitted to me every month. These were key documents to which I referred constantly as there was often reference to other documents listed above. I would then request access to those documents.
Journal and field notes	These were produced by me and are discussed in more detail below.

Table 3: Documents generated during the research process

These documents were systematically gathered over the course of the research period by all co-researchers - the participants and me. Some of these documents remained with participants, although I copied and made records of a broad sample of these documents (some of which appear in the findings chapters of this thesis). Documents I kept were filed and stored in folders with my field notes (see discussion below). They were organised chronologically and thematically. During analysis, all these different records were cross-checked against each other to give a more complete picture of events and learning and issues related to the research questions.

This particular approach of gathering data on an ongoing basis has been influenced by process-orientated approaches to information gathering - continuous information gathering over the project's life period, not a 'snap-shot' view of the intervention.

> The focus of process monitoring and documentation is not narrowed down to expect outputs or impacts, but includes an account of events and relationships and diverse impacts including those which fall beyond the project as officially understood. In this way process information helps break away from the image of development projects or programmes as closed, static, predictable and controllable techno-rational systems. … In its focus on context and interpretation, process monitoring methods borrow from ethnography.
>
> (Mosse, 1998: 10-11)

Journal and field notes

Journal writing has been widely advocated as a useful learning and reflective tool (Burnham, 1987; Progoff, 1975), and a valuable means to develop new thinking directions (Lukinsky, 1991). Journal writing allows a writer to scrutinise her actions and motives, investigate assumptions and cultivate a deeper level of awareness (Halberg, 1987). Within the context of action research, journal writing is advocated as an important way for the researcher to reflect on and understand her own research perspective and learning during the research process (Kemmis, 1988).

Throughout the research period, I kept a journal recording my personal thoughts, reactions and concerns regarding the research process. My journal was also a space for understanding my own relationship to various people in the research sites and the research sites themselves. Many of these reflections were personal and not really intended to be fed into the research findings, but the journal is also part of the fieldwork record and as such

aspects of the journal are relevant to the study. Where appropriate, these have been fed into the findings (see Chapter Six).

However, as the research progressed, my personal journal often merged into my field notes. Some of what I might have recorded in my journal was recorded as part of my field notes. On occasions when I was very moved or confused or emotional about an issue or relationship, I would revert to the journal and make more extensive entries distinct from my field notes.

My field notes were however the main means by which I recorded my day to day observations of events and behaviours. These notes were organised chronologically in A5 hard cover black notebooks. They included events of the day, my reflections on these events; diagrams; questions; quotes from conversations with people; and ideas and thoughts for further exploration. Some of the notes were what DeWalt and DeWalt 2002:44) call 'jot notes' – "the words, phrases, sentences that are recorded during the course of the day's events primarily as aids to memory." Others were 'expanded field notes' – more extensive and complete than jot notes. Two sample pages from my field notes are represented below. They show questions I had noted for discussion, jot notes, some more expanded field notes, quotations from co-researchers, notes of photos taken, and so on.

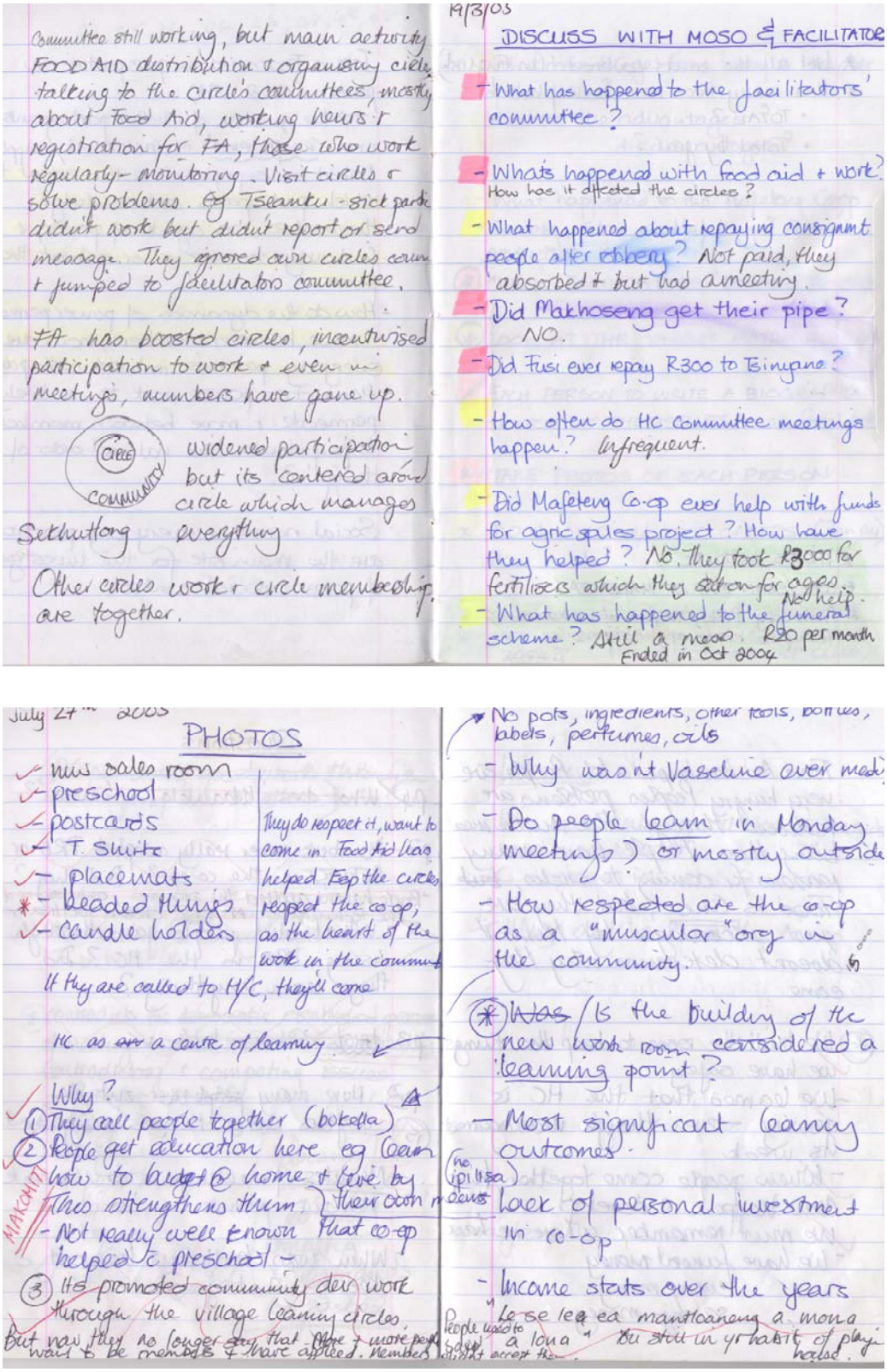


Figure 12: Sample field notes from my note books

In the evening after a day in the field, I would expand these initial field notes. Note the colour coding used later to help me expand the field notes into more organised notes. Also note how I have crossed through or ticked the notes in several places to indicate to myself that these have been noted in the expanded field notes. My field notes were in fact simultaneously data and the beginnings of analysis, which continued as I expanded the field notes. It is important to note that the data collected were by no means 'objective' as I decided what to record, how to record it, how much context to include, who to quote and so on. De Walt and de Walt (2002:143) point out the inherent contradiction of field notes being simultaneously data and analysis, and note the constructed nature of these data.

Analysing and interpreting the data

I have described the different methods used to collect and record data for this study. I would now like to explain how the data was analysed and interpreted. An important principle of action research is that the research process be owned by the group, not the outside researcher (McTaggart, 1997, Greenwood et al, 1998, Stringer, 1999). Participants were thus involved in the analysis at what I would like to call the 'ground level'. However, there was simultaneously another level of analysis that took place at what I would like to call the 'meta-level'. These two levels are described below in more detail.

Ground level analysis and interpretation

At the ground level – in other words in the Cooperative and in the village learning circles, participants analysed and interpreted data in a number of different ways (TCOE, 2001:182-183):

- Through **sorting, categorising and labelling the data**, participants were able to get an overview of what they had found out in relation to the thematic concern.
- By **summarising the data** they collected, participants were able to gain insight into the main ideas or points that were relevant to the research concern.
- By **organising the data** using different strategies – tables, lists, pictures, etc., participants gained further opportunity to work with the data and see it in different ways.
- By **comparing data** from different sources and groups, participants were able to look at how other groups had analysed and solved similar problems. This helped them to develop a better understanding of the issues and how to address them.

- Participants also **looked for patterns and themes** in the data. For example, they looked for problems that recurred across different contexts and situations. In this way they were able to get a bigger perspective on the research concerns.

It is important to note that since many of the participants did not have strong literacy skills, much of the data analysis happened through discussion, often using pictures and graphics as part of a dialogical process. Where participants had appropriate literacy skills, they were able to use text in their analysis. For example, in the Co-operative, text was more often part of the data analysis process. However, in general, in both contexts, the primary means of analysing data was through discussion and asking questions such as why, what, how, where and when. These questions encouraged participants to think more deeply about the data they had collected, to look for explanations, relationships, comparisons and prediction. The questions encouraged them to think not only interpretatively, as they built on their original descriptions, but also critically as they developed explanations that exposed the problem in its context. This process of acting and then reflecting on action taken reflected the notion of praxis discussed earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, in a group discussion, responses could be checked by all participants, strengthening the validity of the analysis and interpretation.

Meta-level analysis and interpretation

My analysis and interpretation of the data was grounded in the analyses and interpretations made by the participants in the two contexts. I drew on and learned from their data analysis procedures, their interpretations and their findings. However, I also reached for a meta-level perspective on these views by expanding their analyses by looking to a wider body of theory for additional explanations, comparisons, relationships, and predictions. I used the same methods to analyse the new data acquired at this meta-level - sorting and labelling, summarising, organising, comparing and identifying patterns and themes. My observations and analyses were recorded and then as a way of verifying what I had recorded, these were fed back to participants during group sessions, community meetings, workshops and interviews. I then reflected on their responses from the meta-perspective once again. And, it was this meta-meta-level of analysis that shaped and informed the findings presented in the following chapters.

Organising and presenting the data

A fundamental action research principle is that the community concerned should own the research process and product. This important action research principle had to be considered in the organisation and presentation of the data. However, I also had to consider the academic requirements associated with producing a PhD thesis. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were tensions between a practical discourse, and an academic discourse. These tensions were accommodated by organising and presenting the data at two levels - a ground level and a meta-level. However, this distinction does not suggest that the two levels were entirely separate from each other – they informed and interacted with one another.

At the ground level

At the ground level, participants in the study took responsibility for organising and presenting data in different ways. Some of them used the photographs they took to present data in learning circles and at meetings. Others used some of the products produced in the Handicraft as data to present to different community forums. Others presented the data verbally to forums they deemed appropriate (such as within Lesotho Co-op Society (LCS) or Lesotho Association of Non Formal Education (LANFE) meetings). The organisation and presentation of data was mostly linked to actions taken by the group based on the data they had collected. This data collected, organised and presented by participants was sometimes expositive (for example when participants presented their work to the National ABE Support Agency, also known as NASA – see Chapter Five); and sometimes descriptive (as when they presented their work and thinking at meetings with one another and with outside organisations – see Chapters Four and Five). The way in which participants organised and presented their data informed my own collection and interpretation of data as I wove together their findings and mine (see Chapters Five, Six and Seven).

At the meta-level

At the meta-level, the data from this study has been organised and presented in a way that conforms more closely to the academic requirements of a doctoral thesis. The action research process has been written up as a case study, incorporating critical comment on the research questions (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). As mentioned above, the data in these chapters is anchored in that data collected, analysed and presented by the group of

participant researchers in Malealea. Their voices and experiences provide evidence to either corroborate or contradict my deliberations about the research questions and other salient issues. Additional data, collected from other sources described earlier in this chapter (my journal, observation schedules, interviews with participants, document analysis, field notes as well as my own photographs) have also been fed into the findings.

The research questions provide the organising framework for more in-depth interpretation of data in Chapter Seven which draws extensively on the data presented in the preceding three findings chapters.

The way in which I have organised and presented the data does justice to the principles of qualitative research outlined at the beginning of this chapter. I have endeavoured to represent the different understandings and perspectives of the research participants, while at the same time acknowledging that my understanding of the research world is actually the decisive frame for this study. The research is thus by no means value free, which is in accordance with a qualitative understanding of reality as a constructed entity shaped by the researchers' multiple and shifting perspectives.

VALIDITY

The notion of validity with regards to action research is a somewhat contested terrain (McTaggart, 1997). Chaudhary argues that action research

> ...should stop seeking validation from the frame of dominant modes of knowledge production. Instead it needs to seek validation from the tenets of its own epistemology. … Falling back on the frame of reference of the dominant mode for validation creates conditions for co-option of participatory research into the dominant mode of knowledge production and use.
>
> (1997: 124)

This argument holds great appeal for me, as a researcher who has worked in a geographically and socially marginalised context with alternative methods of data collection, analysis, and presentation. However, ironically it is these very factors that make it necessary to demonstrate that evidence collected is reasonable in relation to the research aims, and that the conclusions are justifiable.

Validity in this study has been considered in a number of ways.

- Firstly, the research design has been triangulated. I have used different *methods* of collecting and analysing the data (PRA tools, participant observation, interviews, photography and journal writing). Using multi-methods enables one to collect different kinds of data that provide different perspectives on a topic. These can then be compared and checked against each other. "The multi-method approach allows findings to be corroborated or questioned by comparing data produced by different methods" (Denscombe, 1998:85). I have also used different *sources* – I have drawn on my own analyses, interpretations and understandings of the research process and data, as well as those of the participants involved in the study. This approach has helped to ensure that evidence collected is substantiated from a number of different perspectives.
- Secondly, the cyclical nature of the research design has provided a mechanism for a range of possible explanations to be explored. Participants did not simply stay with the first explanation they formulated, but rather tested out explanations through action, which was then reflected upon and evaluated in a continuous cycle, lending a complexity of analysis to the issue under investigation. This helped participants and myself as co-researcher to avoid oversimplified solutions, while at the same time ensuring internal consistency (Denscombe, 1998).
- Thirdly, this cyclical research design had built in opportunities to feed the findings back to participants for evaluation and verification that they accord with the feelings and experiences they originally expressed.
- And lastly, an effort has been made to make visible the influence of the researcher on the research process. Regular entries in a learning journal provided me with a means to scrutinise my actions and investigate my assumptions so as to sharpen my awareness of my own power, bias, and influence on the research process.

Ethical issues associated with action research

Because action research by definition almost inevitably affects the co-researchers and other people involved in the research, it is important to consider ethical issues as a core part of the research process (Denscombe, 1998; Merriam and Simpson, 1995). The activities of the co-researchers necessarily interlink with my activities as the researcher who instigated this study. For these reasons, it has been essential for me to be completely open about the research as an aspect of the wider practices undertaken in the study. The

development of the study has necessarily remained open to suggestions and input from my co-researchers who have also given permission to me to make observations and examine the documents I have used. However, there are instances where I have chosen to protect the identity of those involved in the research by allocating pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity. This is particularly the case where co-researchers have said critical things about one another, or where I have been critical of aspects of their practice (see Chapters Five and Six). It is also the case where sensitive issues related to people infected with HIV/AIDS are discussed. It is in these instances where I felt that confidentiality should be respected.

The strengths of the action research design

The main advantage of using an action research design in a context where participants are 'disempowered[32]', politically as well as economically, is the opportunity it affords people themselves to address the real problems that they experience (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Stringer, 1999). Local knowledge (at what I have referred to as the 'ground level) is respected and appreciated by all co-researchers as worthy of investigation. In this way, 'ordinary people' participate in a meaningful way in a democratised research process. The results of the research are fed directly back into practice so that positive changes might be brought about, and the impact felt directly by the participants.

> [Action research] directly addresses the knotty problem of the persistent failure of research in the social sciences to make a difference in terms of bringing about actual improvements in practice.
>
> (Somekh, 1995: 340)

But besides the changes which action research is designed to support, it also provides participants with opportunities to develop tools and analytical skills for use beyond the research context. In the process of this action research, participants have acquired practical experience and problem-solving skills, which can be and have been transferred to other contexts in their lives. This kind of self-development has impacted on the community beyond the life span of the research process as participants continue the cycle of improving practice and resolving problems.

[32] A mainstream understanding of power and empowerment informs the use of the term 'disempowered' here. This is the understanding that typically informs an action research paradigm.

The limitations of the action research design

There are a number of limitations associated with an action research design:

Firstly, an action research design is demanding for both participants and the outside researcher. A lot is required in terms of time and personal commitment. And there is no doubt that the action research design entails extra work for the participants, who have to balance action against research in situations where the immediate benefits of the research are not necessarily visible, while the need to act is often urgent and seen as a priority.

Secondly, because action research studies are situated in the context of 'real life' processes, participation of individuals within the research process and the research process itself can not be strictly controlled. In the case of this study, participants were part of a larger community development and action process in the Cooperative context and the village community context. It was not possible to control or manipulate all the influences and factors affecting the research in these contexts, or the effects of the research itself.

> Action generates unpredictable effects … Development action is undeniably complex, often unpredictable and locally variable in its effects and significantly influenced by realms over which management has limited or no control (e.g. culture, politics, institutions, policies, costs or prices).
>
> (Mosse, 1998:6)

In effect, the research process lacked internal controls and was to a large extent shaped by what the participants saw as relevant, legitimate and ethical. The results of the research cannot therefore be generalised – they are limited to the specific circumstances and conditions in which the research took place (Merriam and Simpson, 1995). Other factors limiting the generalisability of the results were the intense nature of the research process, and the limited scope and scale of the research which involved only a limited number of participants in just two contexts (Denscombe, 1998).

A third limitation of the study was related to the partnership that existed between myself as researcher and the participants, which at certain stages came under strain. There were tensions between my engagement and detachment, between my insider and outsider status, between my roles as project manager, field worker, researcher and fund-raiser. These tensions of course impacted on the research process. I was continuously juggling

action and research in an effort to find a balance between the two. This is a widely recognised dilemma in action research studies (Merriam and Simpson, 1995).

General limitations of the study

There were a number of general limitations experienced that are important to mention. They relate mostly to the cross-cultural and cross-lingual nature of this research. Language in particular was a constant source of challenge. While my language skills improved greatly over the course of the research period, I still worried about whether I had 'got it right'. Moso Ranoosi, my field worker, spent hours and hours with me discussing more complex linguistic points and dynamics, and in many ways he was my ears and eyes. Still, it is possible that I may not have been able to discern subtle but important meanings due to language and cultural differences as well as personal bias.

This said, it is also worth noting that differences in language capabilities in some ways served as an equaliser. Because participants were more competent that I was, the power imbalances related to education levels were to some extent redressed. Participants also had more space to discuss and debate their positions and perspectives within their shared language group, before sharing them with me. This gave them greater power to decide what to share and what not to share with me.

Another limitation relates to the varied level of literacy skills amongst participants, some of whom could read and write well, and others who could do so at only a basic level. We tried to address this through using a variety of non-literacy based methods. For example, during workshops, we made extensive use of methods such as role play and drama, as well as visual participatory approaches (such as PRA) and photographs, which helped participants to elaborate on their ideas in other ways. Where literacy based activities were used, participants mostly worked in small groups or pairs, relying on those with better literacy skills to assist those with weaker skills.

However, Lykes (2000:19) warns that "there is always 'slippage' in moving from oral to written work, and even more so when one is simultaneously moving from one language to another". Some of the data, especially the written data, was recorded in Sotho and then translated, while other discussions were taped in Sotho and then transcribed and translated. I have tried to remain as faithful as possible to the original Sotho version,

retaining where possible the local phrases and terms within the context in which they were presented. However, in order to facilitate comprehension and fluidity, it has not always been possible to attain a literal translation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that an action research design provides an appropriate framework for the implementation of this study. I have shown how the research was planned and implemented within this design in order to collect data for the study in a consistent and rigourous manner. I have discussed how the data was analysed and interpreted, and brought to the attention of the reader issues related to both the ethics and the validity of the study. This chapter provides a framework for the presentation of the data in the findings chapters that follow.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS FOUR, FIVE AND SIX

The findings of this study are organized in three chapters, Chapters Four, Five and Six respectively. Chapter Four focuses specifically on the Cooperative context. It tells the story of how the Malealea Cooperative - *Hlaahlela-le-lla-ka-le-leng*[33] – learned, used and adapted the principles and methods of the REFLECT approach to establish and manage its operations on an on-going basis. There are two parts to Chapter Four. Part one tells the story of what happened when REFLECT was introduced to the organisation; how the learning and development process within the Cooperative unfolded over the five year period of research from April 2000 to December 2005. This first part is loosely chronologically ordered, but given the non-linear and iterative nature of learning, the discussion has been organised principally in relation to concerns and themes that guided the various learning cycles that took place. (Figure 13 following this introduction provides an overview of the themes and cycles discussed in this part of the chapter.) Part two of Chapter Four builds on the primarily descriptive account provided in Part One. In this section, I reflect more critically on the process whereby members of the Cooperative adopted and adapted REFLECT. I analyse how members used REFLECT, and how it was, and wasn't, put into practice. This discussion lays the foundation for further exploration of my research questions in Chapter Seven.

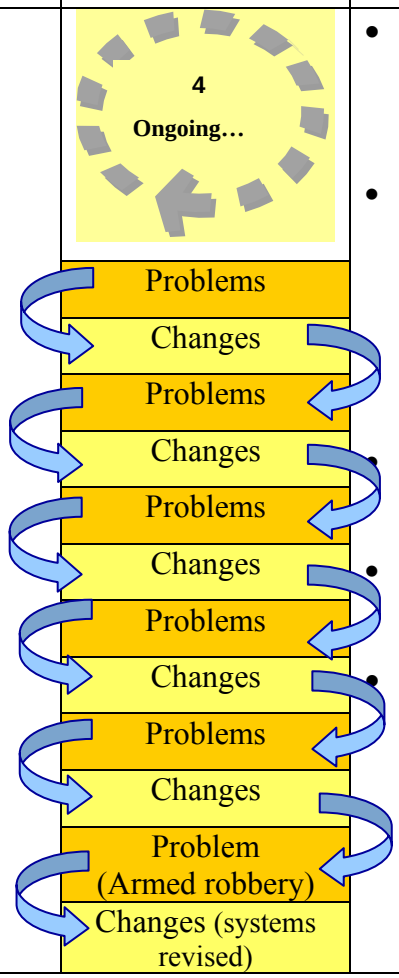
In Chapter Five, the focus shifts from the Cooperative context to the village context. This chapter tells the story of how village 'learning circles' were established in 14 villages in the Malealea valley, and how these groups used and adapted the principles and methods of REFLECT to initiate developments over a five year period.

In Chapter Six, critical events selected from four villages are presented to chronicle the way REFLECT was applied and adapted in the village context. This chapter provides a more in depth perspective on the village learning circles, showing how events unfolded at a micro-level. Ambiguities and deviations from the general trends described in Chapter Five are discussed.

[33] *Hlaa-hlela-le-lla-ka-l-leng* is a Sesotho idiom that can be translated as 'people working together, achieving together, through the help of one another'.

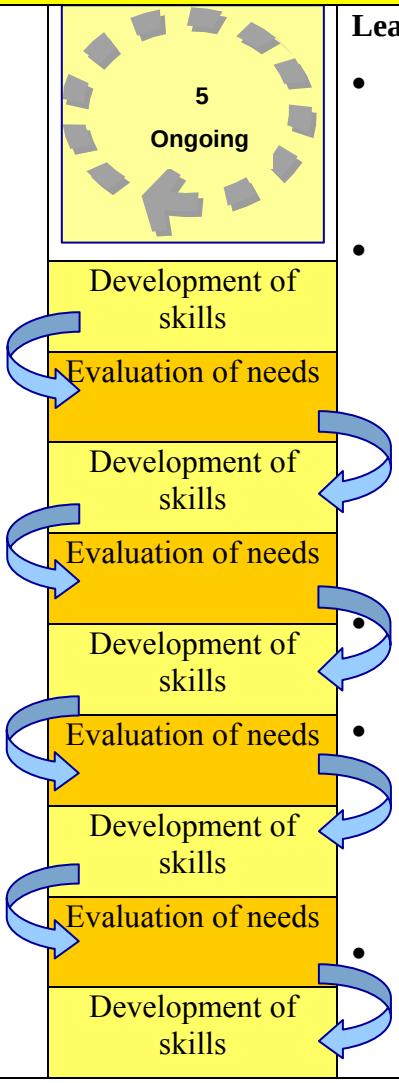
Chapter Seven then takes the reader back to the research questions, which are examined in relation to the findings presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Main findings are highlighted and key issues and themes that emerged are discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

THE EBB AND FLOW OF LEARNING CYCLES IN THE COOPERATIVE
2000 – 2005

Date	Learning cycle	Nature of the issue
2000 – July and August	1	• REFLECT training • Skills training (technical and business)
End August 2000: Problems emerge – divisions in the group, **no collective vision**		
September – December 2000	2	• Group develops a constitution (formal registration as a Cooperative in January 2001) • Production begins, first sales
End 2000 – early 2001: Problems emerge – weak **management** and poor **planning**		
January and February 2001	3	**Systems and structures** • Management strategies 1 and 2 developed in response to identified problems
March 2001 – December 2005		• **Point system** developed and refined in response to emerging problems, changing needs and increased skills of members. • **Savings schemes** (general savings scheme and funeral saving scheme) developed and refined in relation to changing needs and increased skills of members. • **Consignment system** implemented, adapted and improved • **Monitoring systems** developed and improved. • **Agricultural component** established, initially through share cropping, and then through sale of agricultural products.

Beginning of 2001 onwards: Problems emerge related to need for **education** and **skills development**

March 2001 – December 2005



Learning cycles – an overview of themes

- **Business and financial knowledge and skills** (book keeping, budgeting, costing, pricing, selling …)
- **Technical skills development** (grass weaving, working with recycled cans, beading, sewing, making candles, making gel/Vaseline from aloes). Specified skills were selected by members according to their perceived needs and the perceived needs of the market place.
- **Language skills** – learning English to communicate with tourists
- **Environmental management knowledge and skills** (water harvesting, prevention of soil erosion, land reclamation, tree planting).
- **Skills and knowledge to cope with HIV/AIDS**

Figure 13: The ebb and flow of learning cycles in the Cooperative from 2000 - 2005

CHAPTER FOUR - REFLECT IN THE MALEALEA HANDICRAFT COOPERATIVE

PART ONE – THE PROCESS UNFOLDS

Background to 'Hlaahlela-le-lla-ka-le-leng' - The Malealea Handicraft Cooperative

The Malealea Cooperative, 'Hlaahlela-le-lla-ka-le-leng' began in 1998 as 'the Malealea Handicraft Centre'[34]. It was set up with the assistance of a US Peace Corps volunteer who raised start-up funds for a carpentry and generic craft production project. By selling craft and carpentry items to both tourists and others living in the community, members of the project hoped to alleviate economic and social problems in Malealea. There were 42 original members (mostly women) of 'the Handicraft', as it became known. The photo below shows some of the original 1998 members seated outside their new premises – an old aeroplane hanger, owned by Mick Jones (pictured below right).



Some of the original 1998 members seated outside their premises – an old aeroplane hanger

[34] These names are used interchangeably by members of the Cooperative themselves, as well as in this text.

However, only six months into its life, the project collapsed. Original members had divergent opinions of why it collapsed - some blamed individuals, some a lack of knowledge and skills, some poor management practices – but seemingly the overarching reasons were that members were not able to identify their needs and problems, or take action to address their difficulties[35].

In 2000, a number of the original members expressed a desire to revive the project. However, they still faced significant challenges, many of which had plagued their previous efforts: How could they develop a structure that was sustainable? How could they create and implement an effective programme of action managed and owned by the members themselves? How could participating members with limited formal education, and minimal business and management experience gain the knowledge and skills needed to enable them to build their business on their own terms and accomplish the range of activities essential to the effective functioning of that business?

These were the questions that launched my involvement as an adult educator and researcher. I was interested in the role that participatory action learning might play in assisting members to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to create a sustainable learning organisation. In particular, I was interested in whether the REFLECT approach could assist members of the Cooperative to develop the knowledge and skills needed to strengthen the Cooperative. After a series of meetings with key stakeholders in the community, where I endeavoured to understand something of the context of the community and the project, the chief of Malealea, M'e Makhauta Mohale, called a meeting for all those people interested in reviving 'the Handicraft'. At this meeting on the 31st of May 2000, I presented a proposal for how the project might be revived using the REFLECT approach. 18 people expressed a willingness to try this approach and engage with me in a participatory action research project to explore how we might resuscitate 'the Handicraft' and sustain it in the longer term.

[35] These assumptions are based on informal discussions and interviews with original members, and on documentation by the Peace Corps volunteer who worked with the group to secure funding and set up the project.

YEAR ONE - 2000

Getting started – REFLECT and skills training

Re-launching 'the Handcraft' began by introducing the 18 interested people to the REFLECT approach. This small group of people (ten of whom had been involved in the original project, eight of whom were new) were eager to discover how this new approach might be applied in a revitalised organisation and in the community more widely. They committed themselves to a ten day training course, in which they learned the principles and practices of the REFLECT approach[36], and how the approach integrates literacy with general learning and development action (see Chapter Two). They were also introduced to a range of PRA tools which were applied in the training context to issues of concern in the Handicraft and in the wider community. After the training, a 'Facilitators' Guide' was written up by myself and one of the members. This 80 page text captured the training and experiences of the group, and served as a comprehensive set of guidelines for the newly trained facilitators to refer to and use in their practice (see Appendix 4 where the English version of the introduction and overview of this text is attached[37]).

Once the 18 members were more familiar with the REFLECT approach, 'the Handicraft' was set in motion as the first 'REFLECT circle'. Initially the group met every day, and, using a range of PRA tools to facilitate discussion and analysis, tried collectively to find a way forward. The group decided that technical skills training should be prioritised, and selected carpentry and embroidery as two areas of focus that would help them to produce items that could be sold in the Handicraft Centre. Members also wanted to improve their business skills, and so requested training in this area too. The decision to focus on these three skills areas was thus based on existing areas of interest and need as identified by members. Training took place from the beginning of July to the end of August 2000.

At this stage of the project, REFLECT was being used only in the context of training workshops in the Cooperative, and not in regular REFLECT circle meetings (as is the general practice internationally). It was through my prompting and under my guidance

[36] This training was conducted by Carola Addington and Rudzani Kalushi, both of whom were working for the Nkuzi pilot REFLECT project in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, the first South African REFLECT project.

that the REFLECT techniques were integrated into discussion and activities during these training workshops. It was only later that regular meetings became established as a practice within the Cooperative and members started to use the REFLECT principles and techniques on their own (see Part Two of this chapter for a discussion of how REFLECT shaped learning and activities in different contexts in the Cooperative). At this initial stage of the project, members were not sufficiently familiar with REFLECT or the PRA tools to use them spontaneously. They relied on me to assist them with integrating these into discussions, skills training and deeper processes of learning and reflection.

For example, a special session was included within the skills training course for members to use the matrix PRA tool to analyse and better understand the markets which might buy the products they were learning to make. The photo insert (left) shows members constructing the matrix. The different products they were considering making are listed down the left hand side of the matrix, while along the top of the matrix are listed the possible markets for these products.



Members constructing a PRA matrix to help them examine their products in relation to possible markets

By comparing which products might be sold to what markets, members were able to debate the advantages and disadvantages of the different markets and see which ones were saturated and where gaps existed for selling their products. This helped members to evaluate which products might be more viable and profitable, and which products they should focus on during the training itself. The completed matrix was copied to flipchart as a record for future reference by the group (see photo insert).



The constructed matrix is copied onto flipchart as a record of discussion

[37] NOTE: All , training and materials were developed in Sesotho, but where possible English translations of materials were written. The English version of the Facilitator's Guide is provided in Appendix Four.

PRA tools were similarly integrated into the carpentry skills training and the business skills training in order to deepen the level of learning and reflection on issues related to the content of these trainings.

Rifts develop between members

After two months of intensive skills training, members began to produce selected items to sell, and to engage with the business of actually running the Handicraft Centre. However, it soon became evident that even with some business and technical skills in place, there were other problems with which they had to contend. Chief amongst these was the lack of shared goals about what members hoped to achieve together, and how this should happen. For example, what activities should members engage in, and how much time should be dedicated to these different activities? What kinds of rules should they have? Rifts began to appear as members of the group pulled in different directions.

Becoming a Cooperative

After some debate, it was decided that the group needed to craft a joint vision of where they wanted to go as a collective. It was at this point that they began to consider organising themselves formally into a Cooperative[38]. According to the 'National Cooperative Policy of Lesotho' (Hubbard, 1999:6), "a Cooperative brings together people who have a common need that they want to address jointly, or a group of people who want to create employment for themselves". The Cooperative model thus seemed to offer a structure that would fit the needs of the group. The group engaged in a process of learning more about Cooperatives and how they work. They made contact with the national Cooperatives Department which falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperatives and Land Reclamation; they spoke to members of other Co-ops; and they sought the support and guidelines they needed to formally and legally constitute themselves as a Cooperative.

[38] The Cooperative structure had been considered by the original group, but they had never written a constitution or formally registered as a Cooperative.

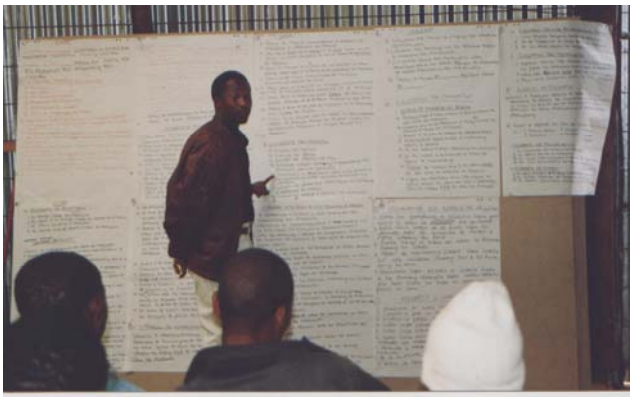
Developing a constitution

After these consultations, the group made a decision to register formally as a Cooperative, and began the process of collaboratively writing their constitution (see photo inserts below). This process, which took about six weeks, helped members to debate and reach a common agreement about what they aimed to achieve together and how they should operate. During this intensive process, members had an opportunity to use the REFLECT principles and techniques to facilitate discussion democratically (see Chapter Two for discussion of the REFLECT principles, process and techniques.) To ensure maximum participation of all members, they worked in small groups and then came together to compare and debate their ideas for how the Cooperative should work.



Members debating the principles of their constitution

The final constitution set out the basic aims and activities of the group, guidelines for membership, payment of membership fees, rights and responsibilities of members, where the operating funds should come from, rules for decision-making, the kinds of meetings that should take place, procedures for selecting and replacing leaders, and the responsibilities of committee members. Guidelines for behaviour and disciplinary procedures were also included. (An English and a Sesotho version of the constitution are attached in Appendix 1a and 1b.)



Members review the final draft of their constitution with Ntate Ramoroosi from the Lesotho Cooperative Society.

The final constitution reflected the agreements on which members would both build and risk their livelihoods. The extent to which the group would succeed as a Cooperative

would depend on the extent to which they were able to manage these agreements and insist that they be upheld. The collaborative, participatory process of developing this document set a precedent for forming not only these initial agreements, but also further agreements, in a way that ensured that all members concurred about the details of these agreements with each other. This set the foundation for holding one another accountable to the collective.

With the constitution written, the group was officially registered as a Cooperative and member of the wider Lesotho Cooperative Society (LCS). (See Appendix 5 for a copy of the official Certificate of Registration.) The process of developing the constitution and registering with the LCS formed a significant learning cycle with important learning and developmental outcomes for the group. It provided them with a clear sense of direction and a more cohesive structure. A committee was elected to make sure the Cooperative achieved its goals and see that members respected the administration and the constitution (Malealea Cooperative Constitution, 2000).

Beginning production

With a clearer vision of their objectives, members of the newly formed Cooperative committed themselves to action. Three teams were formed – a craft production team, a carpentry team and an agricultural team. The craft team used their newly acquired skills to focus on producing embroidered products, grass baskets and dolls for the nearby tourist market (see photo insert for some of the first dolls produced by project members).



The first dolls produced by members of the Handicraft
(the dolls appearance changes over the course of the project)



Two members of the carpentry team at work

The carpentry team chose to focus on the community market, producing mostly tables, chairs, benches and coffins. The photo insert shows two of the members at work.

The agricultural team was not a separate team, but operated in parallel to the craft and carpentry team. When members of the other two teams were not engaged in producing craft or carpentry, they would turn their attention to agriculture. The main reason for this 'add-on' approach was that the group did not possess any arable land for cultivation. Efforts made to secure land of their own failed, and it was only later in the life of the project that they began cultivating crops to sell through sharecropping as a partnership arrangement with people who did have land[39].

YEARS TWO, THREE, FOUR AND FIVE – 2001 TO 2005

Problems emerge

In spite of the progress made in the first few months of the project, problems emerged early in 2001, only several months into the new venture. Interpersonal conflict and clashes seemed to characterise member interaction, and production ground to a near halt, even with the new skills acquired and the new Cooperative structure that was (apparently) in place. The objectives of the association were not being translated into action, members were unclear about their roles and responsibilities, and the management committee was not meeting. During a series of workshops to address these concerns, various PRA tools were used to assist the group understand and analyse the problems, before they sought solutions.

[39] Land in rural Lesotho is generally assigned through a chief, who together with a local development committee, is responsible for all land allocations. However the pressures of an increasing population in Lesotho mean that acquiring unallocated land, particularly arable land, is extremely difficult. It usually entails a process of reallocating land from one person to another. In such instances, there must be a compelling motivation from those seeking the land.

These kinds of problem solving workshops were ongoing throughout the life of the project, although over time they developed into regular discussion forums rather than crisis workshops (see later section in this chapter entitled 'Monday Meetings'). Over the years, members' skills strengthened, and they became competent and capable of assessing a situation, discussing how it might be improved, implementing a change, observing it, and then evaluating it in relation to whether or not they felt they were making progress. This process (illustrated in various incidents described later in this chapter) was implemented with varying levels of success throughout the life of the Cooperative.

But to return to early 2001 - faced with their first barrage of problems, the still relatively inexperienced group began the process of unpacking and probing their problems by using a 'problem audit' PRA tool. In a series of workshops specifically designed to address these problems, members worked in pairs to write down (or draw) on cards the different problems they were experiencing in the Cooperative. By using this tool, everyone (rather than just a few dominant people) had a chance to express how s/he perceived the problems. Problems identified included absenteeism, low productivity, members not taking their responsibilities seriously, letting other team members down, lack of trust and respect for others, and so on. All problem cards were laid out on the ground, and members of the group began to cluster them, looking for similarities, differences and other patterns (see photo insert). Members were encouraged to think about the relationships between the different problems identified. For example, they explored the link between weak leadership and committees not meeting; between interpersonal problems and poor financial management. As members asked questions and sought clarification, connections between issues began to emerge, and members were able to group the identified problems into different categories.



Clustering problems, looking for patterns and relationships between issues

In the final analysis, five main categories of problems emerged. (These are sequenced in descending order of how intensely members felt about their importance):

- interpersonal/ communication problems
- management and planning problems
- financial and business skills related problems
- personal problems and
- practical problems

The matrix reproduced below was developed by Co-op members during a subsequent workshop. It sets out the five problem categories with members' comments:

Interpersonal/ communication problems	A lack of trust, respect and cooperation between members; members are not patient or understanding with one another, there isn't 'love' (*lerato*) and understanding (*kutloisiso*) or trust amongst members, (*ho se tsepane hoa litho)*.
Management and planning problems	• There is a leadership and management crisis because structures such as the management committee don't function well, and don't report back to us. They are not accountable. • Who should be taking responsibility for what aspect of management? People do not have clear roles and responsibilities. • Members have not paid their fees (partly due to weak management structures and lack of a sound financial system). As a result the required materials to carry on working cannot be purchased; • Members do not attend work sessions and don't have a coherent work plan. • Members do not come or leave on time. • Some members do not produce as much as others (laziness? work effectiveness?), yet we all receive the same monies.
Problems related to financial and business skills	• There is no financial system, no proper book keeping, and a lack of transparency about what happens to money earned in the Cooperative. Is it fairly divided? How do we know this? Who is accountable? • Why is there no money to buy new materials? (This was also linked to unpaid membership fees, poor management and poor book keeping practices.) • Customers are not buying and there is little return on items produced. • Not everyone has the skills needed for running the Co-op well.
Personal problems	• Problems at home due to the many additional responsibilities there. • Conflict at home occurs when these duties are neglected because members are

	busy with Cooperative work. • Financial problems • Ill health and poor eyesight also slow down work.
Practical problems	• Sewing machines need servicing. • Materials needed are not purchased on time.

Table 4: Problem matrix developed by members of the Handicraft Cooperative

This problem identification process was a turning point for the organisation. Not only did it help members articulate and share problems, it set the learning and action agenda for the months and years ahead. These were the core concerns that were to be debated and re-debated as they changed shape and form through the successive action learning cycles. As members developed new insights, so they developed and implemented different strategies to address the problems they were experiencing, and so the Co-op developed and grew.

Management and planning prioritised as areas for learning and action

Of the five problem areas, two were prioritised as fundamental for the initial stage of development of the Cooperative: weak management structures and a lack of planning. Members felt that these two problem areas were fundamental to most other problems, particularly a poor work ethic, a problematic work environment and conflict amongst members. In particular, members saw conflict over money as integrally related to a badly managed financial system. For the next year, management and planning became the focal issues around which dialogue and action were centred.

Strategy one: management committees

Soon after the problem audit exercise, a series of meetings was held to discuss how management and planning in the Cooperative could be improved. Members selected 'management committees' as the preferred structures to manage the Cooperative operations. The roles and responsibilities of these committees were debated and discussed in relation to the original problems identified. With these problems in mind, members identified the areas that needed management. These included money, time, production, quality and materials. In addition to the central committee which was to manage the overall functioning of the Co-op (as set out in the constitution), members elected subcommittees to manage the day-to-day operations of each of the three production

teams. The various roles of subcommittee members were identified and written up. For each subcommittee, there was a manager, a treasurer, a quality controller, a time manager, a work manager and a materials manager. These committees were to meet frequently, on a weekly or even daily basis, unlike the central committee which met monthly. Management would thus be much more hands-on and active. The photo insert shows this committee structure as drawn up by the Co-op members. It was posted in the handicraft workroom as a reminder to members of the structure they had agreed upon.



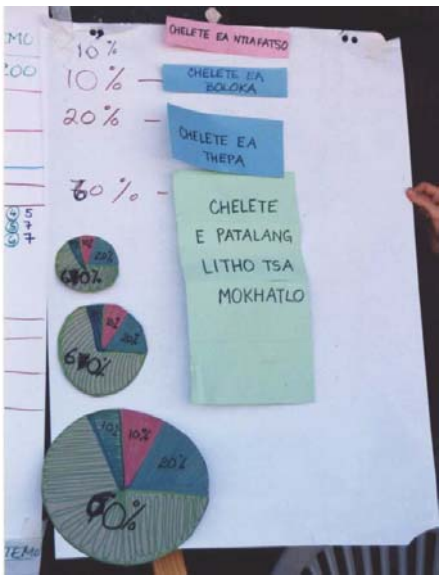
The new committee structure

Strategy two: money distribution

A strategy was also developed to manage the distribution of money in the Cooperative – an area that had been causing much conflict amongst members. Each team was to manage, not only their own production, but also their own money. On a daily basis, members of each team recorded the money earned, and then at the end of each month, the month's takings were divided in the following way:

- 60% shared amongst team members
- 20% put aside for purchasing materials
- 10% saved
- 10% put into a kitty for community development activities.

The photo insert shows the poster representing this information. This poster was also displayed in the Handicraft Centre to remind members of the strategy upon which they had agreed.



Poster showing how members initially agreed to allocate monies from sales

Constitutionally, members had committed themselves to community development work. To meet this obligation, members committed themselves to a certain number of hours working as village learning circle facilitators (discussed further in Chapter 5). Initially, 10% of the Co-op's monthly income was put aside for paying a small stipend to members who facilitated circles. However, this was discontinued when it became clear that the Co-op was not generating enough income for this to be sustainable.

While strategy one and strategy two served as a firm basis for managing both production and money, these strategies were by no means final solutions. They were adapted again and again over the course of the project as members sought new ways to improve their strategies in response to changing situations, and as new problems arose.

Strategy three: the point system

The third management strategy developed by members became known as the 'point system' – basically an incentive based profit sharing system organised around the allocation of 'points'. Individual members could earn points by undertaking various responsibilities. These points could then be cashed in when profits were shared at the end of every month, thus rewarding members for undertaking tasks needed for the effective functioning of the system.

This system was introduced because members felt that all members were not contributing equally in terms of production and in terms of taking responsibility for management. Earning points was seen as a way to motivate people to work harder and take on more management responsibilities.

After revisiting the problems, members began to identify which areas of work needed incentivising. Points were allocated against agreed areas of need in the Cooperative. These were identified as follows[40]:

[40] Like Table Five, this table was also developed by members during a series of workshops, this time in the fourth action learning cycle (see Table Four).

Criteria for point allocation	Points allocated
• **Management responsibilities** (active participation on the central committee or a subcommittee is recognised as undertaking management responsibilities)	• +2 points per week for duties completed well
• **Productivity** (attending work punctually, producing work, and achieving work targets)	• +1 point for every work session attended • -1 point for arriving late • +5 points for each team member if the team achieves the production goal set for the week
• **Learning responsibilities** (attending workshops and training)	• +1 point for attending a workshop/learning meeting
• **Community development responsibilities** (working in the village learning circles)	• +1 point for every village circle meeting facilitated.

Table 5: Point allocation table

Points earned by members were 'cashed in' at the end of the month when the total income earned by each team was calculated. The value of a point was worked out by dividing the total income earned (minus the monies put aside for materials, savings and community development) by the total number of points earned. This gave members the relative value of a point, which was multiplied by the number of points a member had earned to get to the amount paid out to members.

The process of working out the value of a point was a relatively complex mathematical task requiring members to learn and apply numeracy skills. At the end of a month, members worked together in their respective teams to calculate their points and earnings. (The photo insert shows teams engaged in this task). This kind of team work not only encouraged financial transparency, it also provided learning support for members of the team who did not have the numeracy skills required. (Teams were of mixed abilities, and members helped one another to develop the



Teams working to calculate their points and earnings

necessary skills.) And for individuals within the teams, the motivation to learn and share skills was also high, since the financial stakes were significant. No one wanted to lose money because they were not able to understand how the points had been calculated. And no one wanted to be accused of cheating others out of their money.

Literacy skills too were promoted by the point system. To earn points, members had to make sure their activities had been recorded, for example, how many of a certain product had been produced, or what time a member arrived at and left work. Three separate books were kept for recording purposes. These are outlined in the table below[41]:

BOOK ONE	**REGISTER** with 4 sections: (i) Register for attendance at workshops (Name, date and time of attendance, topic of workshop) (ii) Learning circle register (Name of facilitator, village, date of session, topic of session, number of learners who attended, number of hours of session) (iii) Register for members of the sewing/handicraft project (iv) Register for members of the carpentry project (Both of the above registers have 3 sections: name, date, product made.)
BOOK TWO	**WORK PRODUCTION BOOK** (i) At the start of each week, with the work monitor, we enter the target products to be made for that week. This should be worked out in conjunction with the lodge and the stock needed there, as well as thinking about the craft centre which we plan to build. (ii) During the week, we enter the products made. (iii) At the end of the week, we do a stock take, to see if we have achieved out goal, and plan for the next week in accordance with this.
BOOK THREE	**RECORD BOOK** (i) This book is where points are recorded. It is based on the information recorded in the register. (ii) At the end of each week, a designated member will go through the register to record the number of points to be awarded to each member of the Cooperative. (iii) Each member will have her/his own page with the 5 categories above entered into that page. Points will be entered in the appropriate category.

Table 6: Record books

A member was elected specifically for the task of monitoring entries into the respective books. Because there was a direct financial interest for members to record their activities

[41] Like the previous table, this one was developed by members during a series of workshops in the fourth action learning cycle (see Table Four).

accurately, correct records were kept. This was concurrently a means of monitoring organisational activity. The record book system effectively constituted a participatory monitoring system which helped members to evaluate the organisation. They could see who was working, how many products were being produced in what time period, who attended workshops, who facilitated learning circles, how often, and so on.

Over the course of the project, both the point system and the system of recording activities were adapted a number of times to accommodate difficulties, new challenges, new skills acquired, as well as changing needs, roles and responsibilities in the Cooperative.

For example, one of the many ways in which the system evolved was in regard to the production criteria, where members found that close and careful monitoring was necessary for the effective functioning of the Co-op. Members noticed a trend developing whereby members set low production goals in an effort to earn more points. However, this was counterproductive as not enough products were produced to meet market demands, and income in fact declined. Members therefore decided to revise the point allocation for production by instituting a more complex system where the amount of money 'produced' by each member each week was evaluated, and points were allocated accordingly. One point was awarded for every M10's worth of potential income from a product. (This potential income was the amount for which a product could be sold.) A production target for every member was set at M100 per person per week. This meant that very member had to produce products that could bring in R100 per week to the Co-op. As an incentive, members received a bonus of 2 points for meeting the target. So, the system was written up as follows:

M10 produced = 1 point
M20 produced = 2 points
M30 produced = 3 points
etc…
M100 produced = 10 points + 2 points for meeting the **production target**
M110 produced = 11 points + 2 points
M120 produced = 12 points + 2 points
and so on…

Table 7: Revised point allocation table

Each product was costed, and members worked out how many products they needed to make and sell in order to take home a 'living wage'. They then set production targets accordingly. This method also helped members to select product lines that sold well and were time effective to produce. Those products that were too time and labour intensive were gradually discarded because they simply could not generate enough money to enable members to meet their targets.

Production rates and quality of products were monitored collectively at weekly meetings. Each member (or team if they had worked as a team) was required to present the items produced during the previous week. The group as a whole would assess the quality of the items and their monetary value. The photo insert shows members collectively assessing the quality of products that were produced the week before. This procedure was implemented because the group found that some members rushed production at the expense of quality in order to earn more points.



Weekly meeting to assess quality of production

Reflection on continued action and learning in relation to the point system

It is worth noting that the revised point allocation (reflected in Table 7 above) was implemented in 2004, by which time members' confidence, as well as their literacy and numeracy skills had grown considerably. As new problems emerged, so members were required to adapt, to learn new skills, to stretch themselves in different ways in order to cope with the changing demands of the organisation and the context. Also worth noting is that the converse is true: the organisation was able to evolve because members were developing their skills. Had they not taken up this challenge, it is likely the organisation would have remained inert, or collapsed as it did previously.

Savings schemes

Besides the point system, a number of other financial schemes were also introduced into the Cooperative. For example, two different savings schemes were introduced. The first of these was a general savings scheme where members contributed 5% of their earnings each month into a joint account to share at the end of the year. The second savings scheme, called the funeral saving scheme, assisted members to cope with the high rate of death in the community (mostly HIV related). Members paid a monthly contribution to this scheme, and were paid out a set amount in the event of death of a nominated family member (or in the event of the member's own death). Like the point system, both these savings systems were adapted on an ongoing basis. Amounts paid into and out of the schemes changed in response to varying demands on members and changing contextual factors. For example, in the second year of the project, members realised that the number of elected beneficiaries for the funeral savings scheme would have to be reduced from five to three, since the high rate of death in the community was bankrupting the scheme. Similarly, contributions to the general savings scheme were adapted. In bad months, when income was minimal, members opted not to contribute 5% to the general savings scheme, while in better months members would again make contributions. As with the point system, the savings schemes required careful record keeping and monitoring and relatively complex mathematical skills. That members were able to implement and adapt these systems provides further evidence of how they were developing and applying increasingly complex numeracy and literacy skills.

Consignment system

As the Co-op's reputation as a financially stable organization grew, so did the interest of other crafters and small business people from outside the community who were looking for a market for their products. The first outside craftsperson approached the Co-op in July 2001. By December 2004, the Co-op was selling items made by more than ten outside craft producers, adding significantly to their own income and range of marketable products. A system was developed to monitor whose products



An outside producer brings his craft to sell at the Handicraft

were sold when, for what price, and what percentage of profit remained with the Co-op. Negotiations were made with crafters, who in some instances had very weak business skills themselves. Co-op members had not only to negotiate, but also to educate those wanting to sell on consignment as to what the Co-op policies were and how the consignment book keeping system worked. The photo insert shows a hat crafter who rode down from the surrounding mountains to sell to the handicraft Cooperative. This system evolved over time as mistakes were made, and successes achieved. Ultimately members developed a fairly robust system that was acceptable to both the Co-op members and those selling on consignment.

Reflection on monitoring systems

Monitoring of production, sales and quality were central concerns within the Cooperative over the five years of the project, and the various systems implemented and adapted were designed to take account of these concerns. Each of them, in a different way, included a built in monitoring system to ensure that members were accountable for their own actions as well as the growth of the organisation as a whole. These procedures promoted transparency, and strengthened overall management practices. Members gained an understanding of how and why production rates and income and expenditure should be monitored, and began to insist on accountability in regard to production, quality, and financial activities within the Cooperative. At a meeting on the 18th July 2003, it was decided that

> [T]here should be a day at month end when members would be given a report on inflow of every month. For July, the day was 29/07/03.
>
> (Field worker's monthly report, July 2003)

And members were held to this. Just a few months later, in October of the same year, the sales team, who were primarily accountable for income earned in the Co-op, failed to give their report and made decisions behind the backs of other members.

> There was a problem this month between sales people and other members as there was not enough money at month end. These other members didn't want them to deduct 30% material money but the sales people deducted it secretly without having told them. This caused a clash which ended after the Monday meeting. The major problem was in fact caused by the sales people who didn't give members a monthly sales report.
>
> (Field worker's monthly report, July 2003)

Accountability had been one of the major concerns raised in the early stages of the life of the cooperative (see Tables 4 and 5). Members persisted in their demand for transparency and accountability through regular monthly financial reports. They were firm about holding one another to agreements made, and standing up for their rights. This trend contributed towards strengthening ownership of the Co-op by members and ultimately to securing the institutional stability of the structure.

Growth of the agricultural component

As members' confidence, skills and understanding of the business grew, so they began to explore different ways to expand their business and increase profits. Members began to consider what other markets might be tapped, besides the seasonal tourist market, which up until this time had been their main market (with the community and the Malealea Lodge as relatively stable, although low income generating, subsidiary markets). Members directed their focus to developing the agricultural sector of the Co-op erative. Their first effort in this regard was vegetable production. They had still not managed to acquire agricultural land of their own, but made arrangements to share-crop with a farmer who owned land, and who was also a member of the Cooperative. Three acres of butternut (referred to by members as 'pumpkin') were planted (see photo insert), and arrangements were made about how profits from the harvest would be shared between the owner of the fields and the members of the Cooperative.



Butternut fields which were share cropped by a local farmer and members of the Handicraft



The harvest

The yield was good (see photo insert), and members looked forward to selling their produce to the local community market, the Lodge, and markets outside of the Malealea valley. In the minutes of a Co-op meeting on the 7th of April 2003, it was noted that:

> Teboho went to Mafeteng in order to look for market for selling our pumpkin there. While Ntate Koena went to Maseru looking for market to sell our pumpkin too. Teboho and Mahlape took 55 bags of pumpkin with them to Mafeteng and they paid M55 for loading bags of pumpkins on a bus to Mafeteng. Koena took three bags to Maseru at the Agric Office.
>
> (Field worker's report, April 2003)

However, selling the crop turned out to be more complicated than members had initially anticipated. Factors such as the rate of sales, spoilage, and hidden costs had not been anticipated. In the minutes of a meeting later in April 2003, it was noted that,

> A woman who was selling pumpkin for the Co-op in Mafeteng, Me Makhahlane, had said that some bags of pumpkin were getting rotten. Then, it was agreed that one member would go there to change the prices of pumpkin bags and to throw away rotten ones. …The Co-op sent a member to Mafeteng to get rid of rotten pumpkins from the good ones.
>
> (Field worker's report, April 2003)

As members calculated their costs, they reflected on what they had learned from this very labour intensive initiative:

> The bags of pumpkin were on sale in the Co-op [in Malealea] were M12.00 a bag instead of M17.00 - normal price. [This was because many people in Malealea had had a good butternut harvest.] The bags taken to Mafeteng were M14.00 a bag. This was done when members realised that pumpkin was getting rotten. So, members had learned that they were forced to decrease selling prices on these conditions and this made a loss. …
>
> The Co-op members learned that although they sent 55 bags of pumpkin to Mafeteng and M900.00 was expected. There was M545.00 loss and we got only M355.00.
>
> 3 bags are still in Maseru = M51 and someone has to go to Maseru to get this money. If we send a person to Maseru to get M51.00 from selling pumpkin, there would be a loss as it is M37.00 return [by public transport] + M15.00 for food which would be a loss with M1.00.
>
> This is a lesson to the Co-op members they have realised how a market which is too far hampers development of a business.
>
> (Field worker's reports, May and June, 2003)

Following this hard learning experience, members decided that rather than trying to produce vegetables, they would change tack and focus on purchasing fertilisers and seeds to resell to farmers in Malealea:

> Members said that they have noticed that working in the fields has been a problem to them. Then they have decided to put agriculture aside this year and focus on storage and sales for fertilisers and seeds.
>
> (Field worker's report, September, 2003)

The need amongst farmers for fertilisers and seeds was identified as a critical one. Because of the distance from Malealea to town, approximately 70 kilometres, farmers were paying not only for fertilisers and seeds, but also for transport to buy supplies and bring them back. Co-op members felt confident that if they could bring in fertilisers and seeds at a reasonable price, not only would they have a guaranteed market (given that subsistence farming was a primary source of income for most people in the valley), but they would also be offering a beneficial service to the community who would save on transport money.

Each member sacrificed two month's wages in order to accumulate the capital needed to purchase stock. They also invested the communal savings that had been accumulating over the year. In addition to these monies, a loan of M10, 000.00 was secured from the Malealea Development Trust. With this capital in hand, members were able to purchase seed and fertiliser supplies. As members of the wider Lesotho Cooperative Society, they could obtain these at a reduced rate, which enabled them to sell to the community at prices even lower than the prices in town.

> Some Co-op members were sent to town to make a find out on fertilisers selling price and the profit they could make when selling them. Fusi came back with the following outcome from Mafeteng:

Fertilizers types	**Selling price at the Co-op (we will buy here)**	**In shops**
22	M50.00	**M135.00**
25	M52.00	**M150.00**
32	**M55.00**	**M180.00**

> We decided to buy only the two common types in Malealea which are 22 and 25. We agreed that we would sell each bag of 22 for M100.00, and each bag of 25 for M110.00.
>
> (Field worker's report, August 2003)

Permission to make use of a disused government store as a storage and selling point was obtained, and business began. The necessary book keeping systems were designed and

implemented and it soon became obvious that this venture would be far more profitable than selling crafts to tourists. Within the first season, there was a financial turnover of more than M20 000 (about US $3500). It had taken more than two years to achieve the same turnover through selling crafts at the Handicraft Centre. But that side of the business was doing well too, so the two enterprises ran parallel to one another. By the end of the financial year of 2003, the picture was looking healthy and members felt more optimistic than ever about their efforts and the future of the Cooperative as viable way to generate an income.

This optimism was borne out and the Co-op continued to generate an income for members up to the time of writing (September 2006.) The following table presents an overview of income generated by members from November 2001 to December 2005. Please note that these figures do not reflect the monies earned by the 10-15 people on the Art Team who chose to use a separate accounting system from the other teams. Also note that these figures show profits only and do not reflect the 30% monies deducted from takings for materials or the monies deducted for other running costs.

Income generated in the Handcraft in 2001 (November and December only)					
	No of members	Total monthly income	Average income per member	Minimum income earned	Maximum income earned
November	26	3,603	139	96	180
December	26	2055	79	52	145
Totals		**5,658**	**109**	**52**	**145**

Income generated in the Handcraft in 2002					
	No of members	Total monthly income	Average income per member	Minimum income earned	Maximum income earned
January	24	3561	148	6	257
February	21	1944	93	12	134
March	24	1574	107	19	170
April	26	3542	136	39	234
May	24	2336	97	16	150
June	19	1973	104	22	145

July	23	3754	163	38	259
August	22	4156	189	26	307
September	23	3528	153	4	222
October	24	4379	182	31	226
November	25	4086	163	57	243
December	26	2841	114	18	152
Totals		**38,674**	**156**	**12**	**208**

Income generated in the Handcraft in 2003					
	No of members	Total monthly income	Average income per member	Minimum income earned	Maximum income earned
January	25	5,491	220	45	332
February	24	2,813	117	28	156
March	24	3,189	133	24	192
April	23	3,814	166	10	260
May	24	1,969	82	18	125
June	24	1,540	64	14	110
July	24	3,574	145	8	256
August	22	568	26	7	42
This month, August, members sacrificed most of their earnings and pooled them towards stock to start the new agricultural product sales project – hence earnings are very low this month.					
September	22	2124	97	23	
October	22	4187	216	48	282
Earnings paid back to members who had pooled their resources to buy stock in August (these figures are reflected below)					
October	25	2984	119	26	190
November	Robbery on the 26th of November of all the year's takings (±M30,000)				
December	22	4559	207	30	
Totals		**36,812**	**149**	**24**	

Income generated in the Handcraft in 2004					
	No of members	Total monthly income	Average income per member	Minimum income earned	Maximum income earned

January	25	5,217	208	21	345
February	24	2,442	102	19	193
March	22	4,482	204	22	316
April	23	3,468	151	40	209
May	23	3,512	153	12	237
June	23	1,617	70	6	181
July	All earnings were pooled to buy more agricultural stock for resale				
August	22	5,134	233	94	315
September	20	3,575	179	50	346
October	21	7,514	376	88	530
November	20	6,166	308	93	394
December	20	2,330	117	34	133
Totals		**45,457**	**191**	**44**	**290**

Income generated in the Handcraft in 2005					
	No of members	Total monthly income	Average income per member	Minimum income earned	Maximum income earned
January	20	2,507	125	21	204
February	20	3,678	184	10	275
March	20	3,833	192	83	288
April	20	1,925	96	55	134
May	19	4,459	234	124	309
June	19	2,100	111	19	143
July	19	2,230	117	51	169
August	19	2,726	143	39	190
September	19	1,789	94	38	134
October	19	3,147	166	33	250
November	19	3,749	197	42	269
December	20	13,156	502	334	802
Totals		**45,299**	**180**	**71**	**264**

Table 8: Tables showing income generated by members over the five year research period

The average income generated by the Co-op increased gradually over the five year period, as can be seen in Figure 14 below:

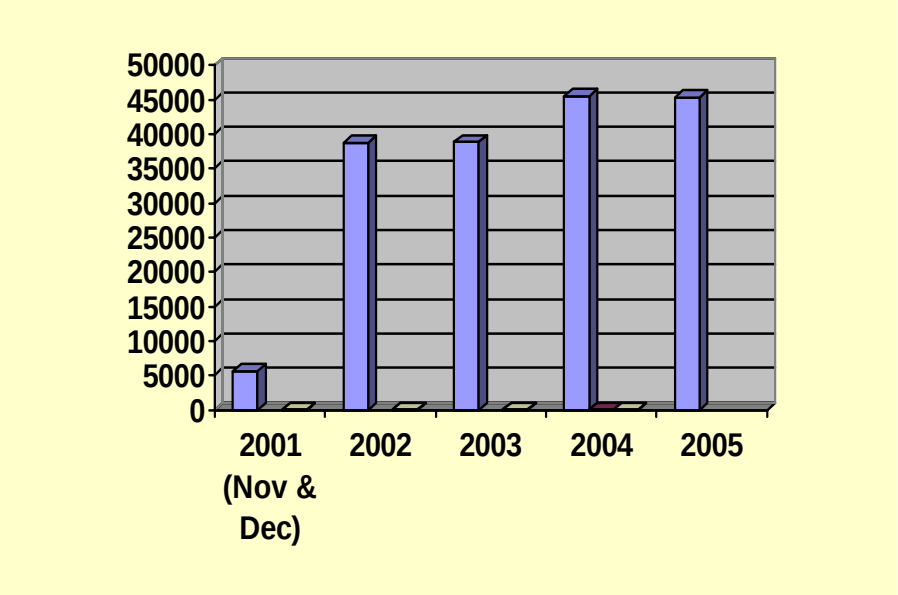


Figure 14: Bar chart showing annual income generated by the Co-op from November 2001 to December 2005

Income patterns fluctuated during the course of the year depending on tourist seasons, as well as members' own life patterns. There were certain times of the year when members were occupied with agricaultural and other life activities. Also note that members did not earn equally. Some members chose to work for only a few days a month, while others worked more consistently and earned more. Earnings were determined by points allocated as described earlier in this chapter.

Overall reflection on systems introduced

The examples discussed above (the point system, the different savings schemes, the consignment system, and the agricultural sales component) illustrate how, over a five year period of action learning, members developed a growing organisation driven by members with a dynamic and increasingly sophisticated knowledge and skills base. (See Figure 13 for a visual overview of the learning cycles that unfolded over the course of the project). Initially, members struggled with very basic record keeping, but after several years of action learning, they had in place a reliable book keeping system, which accommodated records for two different savings components, a complex system for distributing income against points earned, as well as a system for selling agricultural products and other

crafters' items on a consignment basis. At a workshop to reflect on learning in November 2004, one of the members commented:

> *Re ile ra fumana mokhoa oa ho tsamaisa khoebo. Mohlala, ho bona ha thepa e theoha, le ha e atleha, le tsela ea ho bua le batho ba fapaneng. Hape, re tseba ho boloka libuka hore khoebo e tsamaee hantle.*
>
> Over the years we have found a way to manage our business. For example, we know when stock is going down, and when it is selling successfully, and we have also learned how to speak to different people. We also know how to keep records so that our business runs well.
>
> (Co-op member, November 2004)

This learning was even acknowledged by the Lesotho Cooperative Society: in May 2003, the Malealea Cooperative was awarded first prize for the best overall management and book keeping system of all the Cooperatives in the Mafeteng district.

A major setback

On the 26th of November 2003, the Co-op members experienced a misfortune which was to pose the single most significant challenge to the sustainability and future of the Cooperative thus far. At the financial high point of the Cooperative, at the end of their most successful financial year, when members were looking forward to their first relatively prosperous Christmas, a group of four men arrived in a vehicle and held up members of the Cooperative at gun point. One Co-op member was kidnapped and taken hostage in order to secure a safe get away. She was released some distance away from the Handicraft and found alive, but traumatised, the next day. A total of about M30,000.00 (US $5,000.00) was stolen - this included the monthly takings from the Handicraft Centre and agricultural sales, the money put aside for buying new agricultural stock, members' monies invested to accumulate capital, funeral and general savings, and money owed to people selling on consignment.

How did so much money happen to be at the Co-op on one day? And how could someone from outside of the Cooperative have known that this was the case? These were two questions which members asked themselves again and again in the days following the trauma as members tried to reflect on what had happened and why, and what could be learned from this experience.

The answer to the first question of why so much money had accumulated lay in the fact that members had not got into the practice of regular banking in town. Instead, they kept their monies in a safe at the nearby Malealea Lodge. This informal banking arrangement had been made with the Lodge for reasons of convenience and cost. Banking at the Lodge meant that members did not have to make regular trips into Mafeteng, the closest town, which reduced transport expenses. (It costs M40, or US$6, to make the 140km roundtrip from Malealea to Mafeteng and back). Losing a significant portion of their income was a very hard lesson about the need to bank cash regularly, and to calculate numbers on paper, rather than counting hard cash.

The answer to the second question of how someone might have known about the money counting arrangement was more difficult to answer. Firstly, it was not a usual practice to count the money at the Handicraft Centre – monies were generally counted at the Lodge on a random day, rather than by prior arrangement. However, given that it was year end, members of the financial team wanted to do an overall audit of the year and so set aside a whole day for this to take place at the Handicraft Centre. In the interests of transparency, all members had been informed of this, and when they might expect the financial report. It was assumed the information would be kept confidential. Secondly, the date for this tallying and counting was agreed upon only two days prior to the robbery, at the Monday Meeting of the 24th of November. It was clear to members that the only way anybody outside could have known of the event was if someone inside the Cooperative has leaked the information. It had to have been an 'inside job'. And indeed, when the police investigated the incident, this proved true. One of the members had informed her lover of the arrangement to count the cash. He and his friends then plotted the stick-up.

The impact

The consequences of the robbery were severe. Firstly, members lost a significant amount of money, and as a result suffered at both a personal and an organisational level. On the personal level, members lost their earnings for the month of November, as well as for the two months that they had sacrificed their wages to make up the capital needed for the agricultural sales project. Members also lost money invested in the general savings scheme as well as the funeral saving scheme. The latter meant that any member who lost a dependent after the robbery was unable to receive financial support. At the organisational level, members lost all their capital. This meant they were unable to purchase further

supplies and materials needed for both the agricultural sales project and the handicraft project. The agricultural sales project collapsed as a result of this, and progress in the Handicraft ground to a near-halt. Members were not able to meet loan repayments to the Malealea Development Trust and were unable to pay the people who had sold items on consignment. As a result, relationships which had been gradually established over the years were put under strain. The confidence of 'partners' was shaken.

Secondly, members became severely demoralised. Their previous optimism was replaced initially by outrage, and then by an exhausted resignation. Feelings of demoralisation had a strong impact on members' general commitment to working in the Cooperative, and the functionality of the management committees. Members felt there was no longer much to manage.

But possibly the worst consequence was the deep sense of betrayal experienced by members and the breakdown of relationships of trust when members realised that the robbery had been 'an inside job'.

> [The robbery organised by] Moipone has proved that there is lack of love and trust between the Co-op members by sending criminals to the Co-op. Therefore the Co-op members do not trust each other because of that. People are blaming each other.
>
> (Field worker's report, December 2003)

Although members were formally bound by the constitution, on a day to day basis it was these relationships of trust and connectivity that held the group together. Achieving common goals depended on collaboration and cooperation between members and they knew this. A lack of trust had been one of the initial concerns raised at the very beginning of the project (see Table 4), and it was an area of concern that members were constantly broaching. For example, if a member happened to take home a tool or other item belonging to the Co-op, members would bring it up at a meeting and insist that the item be returned. In the minutes of a meeting in April 2003, it was noted that

> Mahlape took a machine from the Co-op without asking for anyone's permission to her house for doing her homework. So it was agreed that the Co-op members should not take the Co-op properties to their houses without agreement.
>
> (Field workers report based on the Monday Meeting minutes, April 2003)

This issue was raised again in October of the same year:

> M'e Matello has appealed to the Co-op members that they should stop taking things [tools/materials] from the Handicraft to their families. She said that she was responsible to ensure that all equipment doesn't disappear but siccoirs [sic] are not there anymore.
>
> (Field workers report based on the Monday Meeting minutes, April 2003)

Members were heedful about bringing one another to task if they contravened agreements made in the interests of the collective since this was the basis on which relationships of trust were to be maintained. However, breaking an agreement by taking scissors home was one thing - the idea that a member might betray the group on this kind of scale, with this level of violence, was quite another. Members were deeply shocked, the very fabric of their network had been ripped, and it would take years to heal the suspicions, rifts and fear that developed from this event[42]. The robbery impacted strongly on members' capacity and desire to work towards common goals – they had to re-establish faith in one another and a rebuild a belief that it was possible to trust one another and work together for the common good.

Recovery and revision of systems

A positive side of this experience was that, despite the shock and loss of confidence in one another and their common cause, members did not abandon ship. Instead, they chose to take account, and re-examine their systems for weaknesses that had made them vulnerable. Revised systems were introduced. From January 2004, money was no longer kept at the Lodge for long periods, but rather banked in town on a regular basis when monies exceeded M1000.00. These banking arrangements were no longer shared with the general membership, but were known only by the members of the financial team. The wider membership was only informed of the financial situation when financial reports were presented once a month. The sales system too was adapted to accommodate tighter security arrangements. The number of people who were allowed to sell was reduced so that fewer people handled money, and accountability could be increased. Socialising with non-members in the work place was discouraged to reduce the chance of others getting to know the sales and money systems.

[42] In an afternoon in March 2005, 13 months after the robbery, I happened to be sitting with members in the Handicraft shed when a non-local and unknown vehicle pulled up to the sales room. Immediately, members rushed out to safeguard the sales woman who had been alone in the sales room, while another member noted down the number plate of the vehicle. It was clear that members were still concerned about their safety and anticipated the worst.

The fact that members did set about revising systems and putting in place mechanisms to help them recover from this setback, attested to the value of the project to members, and the strength of the foundations built in the first few years. Despite the impact, apparently the organisation and membership were robust enough to absorb this shock, and carry members beyond this period of financial and social crisis.

A general note on learning and action processes

Returning to a reflection on the learning and action processes described so far in this chapter, it is important to note that while the overall outcome of the learning and development processes described in the accounts above might be seen as positive, it would be insincere to imply that this was an ordered and clearly planned process. At times, the learning cycles seemed regressive rather than progressive. For instance, when new members were introduced into the Co-op in June and July of 2002, almost two years into the project, members had to revisit the constitution since many of the original problems that had first plagued the group had re-surfaced (interpersonal conflict, lack of skills, and lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities as well as loans not being paid back). Management systems were set back by the robbery at the end of 2003, and then again in March of 2005 when members of the management committee stopped meeting due to weak leadership and a personality clash with the then-chairperson of the Co-op. A range of resulting (and by then familiar) problems returned – members did not carry out their allocated responsibilities, there was poor middle and long term planning, decisions made by the group in the Monday Meetings were not followed up or carried through. The recurrence and similarity of problems that arose over the course of the research period attests not only to the non-linear and continuous nature of the learning and development cycles, but also to the importunate nature of the problems themselves (particularly the management problems). Even when solutions were found, these could not be seen as permanent. As with learning, solutions had to be implemented, and then continually reassessed, revised and reinforced according to the nature of the issues rising in the context at the time. How effectively this process was managed, often depended on the leadership of the time and the management of relations between people.

An overview of the learning cycles and their themes

The focus in this chapter so far has been on the story of the Cooperative, and how financial, management and operational systems were built. Woven into this account, has been a discussion of some of the learning that took place. However, in addition to the (predominantly management orientated) learning cycles described numerous other learning agendas were unfolding in a similarly cyclical way (see Figure 13 at the start of this chapter). Members were continually identifying new areas for learning. Some of these were closely and specifically related to the development of the Cooperative, for example the learning cycles associated with skills development, while other learning cycles related more to members' participation in and engagement with the broader community context outside of the Co-op erative. For example, members decided to learn more about HIV/AIDS as an issue that affected them in the home and the community, as well as in the workplace (see later in this Chapter).

By way of concluding Part One of this chapter, I now present an overview of the various learning cycles undertaken by the Cooperative group during the period of research. Over the course of the five years, members' learning spanned business and financial knowledge and skills, technical skills, language skills, environmental management knowledge and skills, and knowledge and skills to cope with HIV/AIDS. Each of these themes is discussed below, although it is important to note that this discussion provides only a general idea of the learning and workshops in each learning area. (Details of all the workshops would be too prolonged to include.)

Business and financial knowledge and skills

Numerous non-formal education workshops were designed specifically to address members' needs for business and financial knowledge. Areas of learning included, amongst others, investigating and understanding the market; budgeting and buying; costing and pricing; selling; book keeping; managing money and controlling stock. Some of these workshops integrated REFLECT techniques (see discussion below), while others were more conventional workshops run by outside experts such as Peace Corps volunteers and staff of the Lesotho Cooperative Society. The photo insert below shows Co-op

members working through the 'One-up Business Training Course'[43], a training course designed to help small business owners acquire business skills, such as how to develop a business plan.



Members working through the 'One-Up' business training course

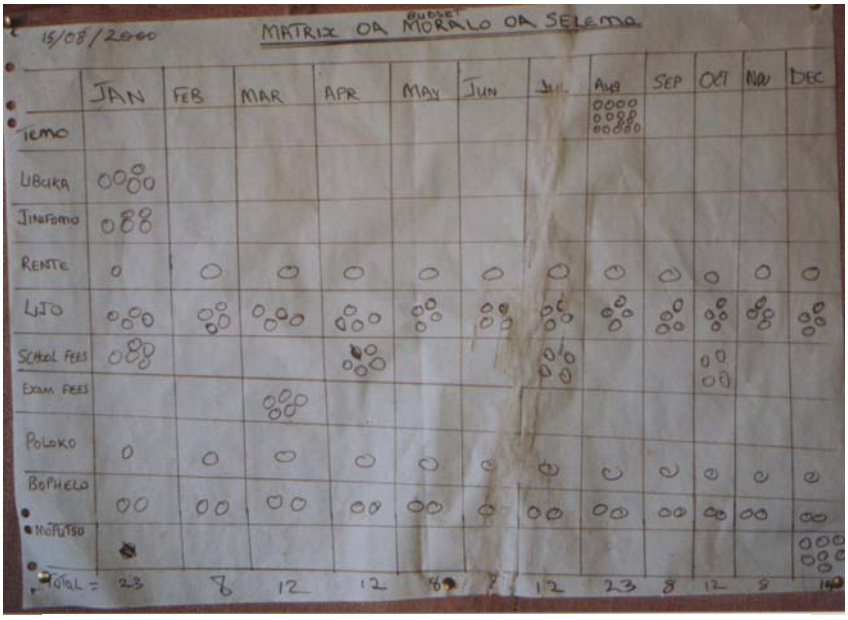
While courses such as 'One-Up' were useful, our experience was that learning in these courses was more beneficial to members if integrated with REFLECT methods and principles. For example, when members discussed budgets, PRA tools were woven into the prepared training materials. The photo insert shows members constructing a calendar to help them create a budget. The months of the year were listed along the top of the matrix, and the different budget items along the side. While constructing this tool, members discussed and debated the kinds of expenditure demanded in different months. For example, they found that the heaviest expenditures were in January when children's school fees had to be paid, as well as transport expenses of people who had travelled distances for Christmas festivities. Another expenditure-heavy month was August when seeds had to be bought for planting crops. The monthly expenditures were indicated at the bottom of each column.



Members using a calendar matrix to help them construct an annual budget

[43] The 'One-Up Business Training Course was designed by the Trident Institute to meet the business management needs of small entrepreneurs entering self-employment. Course materials were available in Sesotho which made the course particularly accessible for the Co-op members.

A record of this budget was made on a large piece of paper (see photo insert) and also recorded by individual members who then had a model for constructing their personal budgets.



A record of the annual budget constructed by members (for reference purposes)

As they constructed this tool, members began to see how they might budget to cope with varying financial demands over the course of the year. Significant discussion about the need for saving and different ways of saving also emerged from this exercise. Members were able to share and affirm their more 'traditional' ways of saving through schemes such as grocery clubs and funeral schemes. It is unlikely that these points would have emerged had we made use only of the conventional business training course materials.

Technical skills

Technical skills training was ongoing over the course of the project. After the initial embroidery and carpentry skills training, members chose to pursue a range of other skills as they endeavored to vary their product range in response to their growing understanding of the needs and tastes of the various market sectors, and their own developing skills base.

Over the five year period under study, technical skills training included:

- Paper making

- Drawing and painting
- Fabric painting
- Grass weaving and basketry
- Sewing
- Beading
- Traditional pottery making
- Using recycled materials
- Silk screening
- Candle making
- Making homemade health and cosmetics products using local materials such as aloe



A member exercising her sewing skills – notice her hat, crotcheted from recycled plastic bags, another of the products produced.

These skills were used to make a broad range of products (see photo inserts) including a much improved version of the dolls (compare the photo insert here with the first dolls made); home made cards, postcards, fabric painted book covers, fabric painted T-shirts, grass hats, grass placemats and grass baskets, traditional dolls, material placemats, cushion covers, school uniforms, beaded bracelets, necklaces and nets, traditional pottery, hats and mats crotched from plastic bags, candle holders, furniture and fireplaces from tin cans, picture frames decorated with matchsticks.



The 'new model' Basotho doll



Hand embroidered sun hats



Fabric painted book covers

Some of the products, such as the postcards, book covers, and dolls, were made exclusively for the tourist market. Others, such as coffins, tin can furniture (see photo insert) and school uniforms were directed at the community market. And there were some products, such as the recycled-tin candle holders, bead work and grass work that were bought by both market sectors.



Recycled can furniture (tables) used here in the pre-school



Members with some of their grass work products

Language skills

One of the learning areas identified by members as an area of need was English communication skills. Originally one or two members of the Co-op could speak English, but as time went on, they felt a strong need for all members to learn English so as to be able to communicate directly with tourists visiting the area and buying their products. This need was addressed by a young Swedish woman, Beatrice Brunner, who was studying for her Masters degree in Teaching English as a Second Language. She spent three months working with members and devised an English communication course called 'Talking to Tourists' (see Appendix 6 for an overview of this course). She also trained four members of the Co-op to continue teaching the course after she had left. This teaching continued throughout the duration of the research project.



Beatrice Brunner working with Co-op members to develop their English language skills. A tourist (seated left) has joined the lesson to help members practice and gain confidence.

Besides technical and language skills which helped members to participate more effectively in the development of the Cooperative, members were also interested in acquiring knowledge and skills that would help them to cope better outside the Cooperative, in the community and in their homes. These identified areas of learning needs can be broadly defined within the categories of environmental management and HIV/AIDS.

Environmental management

At the very beginning of the project when problems were first identified (see Table 4), members noted that they experienced a tension between work demands in the home and work demands in the Cooperative. Members felt that working in the Co-op meant that they were often not able to carry out their responsibilities at home. Fetching water and wood for fuel were two of the major areas of responsibility, especially for women. In an effort to address this problem, learning cycles related to managing the environment were introduced.

Water harvesting

Members engaged in a learning cycle that encouraged them to think about alternative ways of harvesting water. They used a PRA tool, known as a pairwise matrix, to help them compare different water sources and rank these in order of preference. The photo insert shows members debating which water sources would be best suited to their needs.

The sources identified during this discussion included rivers, dams, springs, rain water, furrows[44], and village pumps. Members decided on furrows as an area they would like to learn more about, as this was seemingly the most cost effective and controllable means of harvesting water. (Dams and village pumps required expertise and capital beyond their means; while rivers, dams and springs were dependent on rainfall, over which they had no control).



Members using a ranking matrix to discuss different water sources



Members learning to construct and use a surveying instrument

A permaculture trainer, skilled in the construction of swails (furrows that follow a contour line), was asked to come and help members understand how to dig swails. The photo insert shows members learning to make and use a simple surveying instrument: two sticks of equal length joined by a string with a spirit level attached. Members used this instrument to mark out a contour

[44] Furrows are narrow trenches that take water from one place to another.

line, along which they dug the furrow.

Water running into this furrow would not run down hill, but rather come to rest in the contoured furrow - thus having time to be absorbed into the ground, helping to replenish the water level. In this way, water could be harvested rather than lost to gravity. Furrows dug off main water runoff areas took water to where it was needed for agricultural activity, while at the same time helped to stop water erosion by reducing the flow of water in these areas.

Securing fuel

Another learning cycle was introduced to help members learn new ways to preserve fuel. Members learned how to build fire rings out of recycled tin cans. This device helped to reduce the amount of fuel needed for cooking, while at the same time recycling a waste product. The photos below show members constructing the fire rings and then using them to cook.







Members constructing fire rings to preserve fuel (above)



The fire ring protects the fire as its fed from the side (left)

A circle member using the fire ring to cook at his home (right)



In addition to learning how to preserve fuel, members also took a longer term view of the situation and looked at what should be done to replenish wood as a vital resource. To this end, they engaged in a learning cycle about reforestation, learning how to plant trees for particular environmental conditions. The photos below show members planting trees near the Handicraft Centre during their training workshop.



Learning how to plant trees



Ntate Molomo (pointing) from the Government Forestry Department helps with the training

These learning cycles may not have addressed members' immediate needs for water and fuel at home (with exception of the fire ring), but they did help them to consider and develop longer term strategies to address environmental problems related to water and deforestation.

Knowledge and skills related to HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS was a problem that 'crept up' on members, rather than one that was explicitly identified as a problem early in the project. In 2001, about a year into the project, members began to be concerned about the number of people dying in the community and expressed an interest to learn more about HIV/AIDS. One Co-op member was sent on an intensive training course for three weeks and returned well-informed about the topic. He ran workshops for all the Co-op members, as well as numerous workshops for other groups in the community; chiefs, teachers, school children, their parents and others.

However, no one was willing to actually test for HIV. About a year later, the trainer himself fell ill, and ten months before his death, he tested positive for HIV[45]. He was the first Co-op member to test, although he did so reluctantly and his results were kept in the strictest confidence.

This member's death was a turning point for how HIV/AIDS was addressed as an issue in the Cooperative. Although no one said it openly, people strongly suspected that the trainer's death had been AIDS related. Members had learned about the symptoms, and it was clear that he had suffered from them. Members decided that knowledge was not enough to protect them. If the 'trainer', who knew so much about the disease could fall prey to it, how much more vulnerable were they? Members decided that they should test, and then armed with real knowledge about themselves; they would find ways to cope. A testing clinic was organised at the local clinic and 27 members attended. The photo insert shows the nurses (in blue uniforms) from the government hospital counselling the group prior to testing. However, because of the deep fear and terrible stigma associated with the disease, only seven members actually tested.



Nurses from the Government hospital counselling members prior to testing for HIV

Results of those who tested were never disclosed publicly. Persuading people both within the Cooperative and within the community to test was very difficult because of the associated fear and stigma. As a result, I made a decision to confront the issue from a different angle. I felt that if HIV positive people who were living openly and positively with the disease came and talked to Co-op members and other people in the community, it might give them a more positive perspective and dispel the notion that a positive result would mean certain death.

[45] He tested for HIV as a result of pressure from me after all other medical explanations had been exhausted.

Three HIV+ women from VIKELA, a Johannesburg-based non-profit organisation offering HIV/AIDS support, education, training and awareness services were invited to address the group and the wider community. In September of 2003, they spent three days talking to different groups, and after the third day, a testing clinic was again held. This time 44 people tested, many from the Co-op and others from the wider community.



People queuing to be tested



A young woman giving a blood sample for testing

After the visit, two people chose to make public disclosures regarding their HIV+ status – one a member of the Co-op, and one a member of the community. Their brave stance constituted another turning point for the group in learning to cope with the disease. From this point on, it was not only a matter of encouraging people to find out more about HIV/AIDS and know their status; it was also a matter of helping one another to cope with a positive result.

Members of the Co-op made an agreement that should one of them test positive, they would do their utmost to assist that person to cope. This meant treating the HIV+ member with respect at work, not gossiping about them, and covering for them when they were ill. Although no other member was brave enough to 'come out', several other members did test positive and when they fell ill, rather than gossiping about them, or excluding them, the agreed upon principles were applied.

Conclusion to Part One

Part One of this chapter has presented a description of the main learning experiences, learning cycles and action that took place in the Cooperative over a five year period. These experiences were captured diagrammatically in Figure 13 and then discussed in a

chronological order in this first part of the chapter. However, it is important to note that this chronological arrangement of events should not imply a linear progression of learning. Members' learning was in practice more of an ebb and flow as their understanding and awareness of various practices emerged over time. Part Two of this chapter will pay closer attention to the shifting nature and the outcomes of the learning processes that unfolded in the Cooperative context.

PART TWO - EXAMINING THE PROCESS

The description of learning in Part One of this chapter provides support for a claim that there was significant cyclical action learning taking place in a vibrant and relatively robust Cooperative. However, building on earlier comments about the disorderliness of the process, I now reflect more critically and extensively on these learning processes and how they unfolded, particularly in relation to the REFLECT framework. How did members of the Cooperative use REFLECT? In what kinds of contexts? Did they find it useful? In what ways was it put into practice and in what ways did it strengthen practices and support the development of members' knowledge and skills? These questions are posed and answered by way of responding to the first of my research questions – how did members accommodate, apply and adapt the method, techniques and principles of REFLECT? This discussion will lay the foundation for further discussion of this, and other research questions in Chapter Seven.

This section is structured into several sub-sections. I begin by setting out three key learning contexts in the Cooperative, and examine the learning that took place in each of these contexts, with particular attention to how REFLECT may, or may not, have influenced the learning process. Thereafter, I look at how members applied their skills outside of the Cooperative context, particularly in their interaction with the Lesotho Cooperative Society (LCS). I draw attention to incidents and situations where members were seemingly unable to muster the critical and reflective skills required to confront or to change a situation. Then by way of concluding this chapter, I contrast members' interaction in the LCS context with their interaction closer to home, in the community context.

Key learning contexts in the Cooperative

The Cooperative was considered to be a "centre for learning"[46]. According to one of the members,

> *Batho ba fumana thuto mona. Re re ithuta hore na re ka iphelisa joang. Re ithuta lintho tse re thusang ho haha maphelo a rona le ho phela ka matla a rona, mme hona hoa re matlafatsa.*
>
> People get education here. We learn how to live for ourselves. We learn things that help us to build our lives and to live through our own means, and this strengthens us.
>
> (Makomiti Tenane, in an interview on 18th March 2005)

In what sense was the Cooperative a 'centre for learning'? What kind of things did people learn, in what ways and in what contexts? How did REFLECT influence this learning? Three key learning forums, where learning took place on a regular basis within the Cooperative, can be identified. These are: (i) workshops, (ii) meetings, and (iii) informal discussions.

(i) Workshops

Earlier in this chapter, I noted that when the project first began, there were no regular or dedicated REFLECT circle meetings. Instead, REFLECT techniques were integrated wherever possible into general Co-op activities, such as training workshops and discussion forums. Of these, training workshops formed the most significant context in which REFLECT was implemented in a consistent manner. This trend of integrating REFLECT into workshops, rather than having regular dedicated REFLECT meetings continued throughout the course of the project.

Learning themes for the training workshops were derived from issues, concerns and problems raised by members in the course of other Cooperative activities. Sometimes themes were decided on by participants, and sometimes by me, in consultation with members. For example, it was the participants who requested to learn more about the environmental issues, but it was my suggestion to raise gender as a learning theme (see discussion below).

I generally took the lead in advocating for the use of REFLECT in the training workshops. Although learning topics and themes were usually decided by the group, it was generally through my prompting and under my guidance that a PRA tool would be selected and constructed to help the members 'uncover' their own understanding of an issue, in order to make their knowledge more explicitly accessible for further dialogue and learning. However, although I promoted the use of REFLECT, I did not work alone. As a form of 'counterpart training', I worked closely with two members of the Co-op, both males, Teboho Seema and Moso Ranoosi. (Teboho died in July 2003, but I continued to work closely with Moso – see photo insert.) We planned workshops together, discussed how REFLECT might help people to better understand and analyse issues, and deliberated about workshop activities. The idea was that once members were familiar enough with the REFLECT approach and PRA techniques, they would integrate them into their daily practice in a relatively organic way. My 'counterparts' were to promote and support this integration process[47].



Moso Ranoosi

The ways in which REFLECT was used in some of the training workshops, as well as the learning themes that guided these REFLECT workshops has already been discussed in Part One of this chapter (see for example the discussion of business and financial skills development, as well as environmental knowledge and skills development. See also

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[46] This phrase was used by a number of different members during interviews about their experiences of the Co-op .

[47] Moso Ranoosi became a very skilled REFLECT facilitator who assisted with training not only in Malealea but in other organizations within and outside of Lesotho as well. He played a prominent role in training facilitators in Malealea and later helped the Lesotho Association for Non Formal Education (LANFE) to implement a REFLECT project. An extract from an email sent to me in March 2005 by Wolfgang Leumer, the director of IZZ/DVV, a German adult education organization sponsoring adult education activities in Lesotho, clearly demonstrates how skilled and respected Moso became:

There is now talk [with LANFE] of an extension or a different huge programme funded by the Global Fund which again will be implemented by a number of knowledgeable NGOs in the field of training and campaigning (Red Cross, PWA, some others whose names I forgot). LANFE is busy preparing proposals to that regard. We arranged for Moso to quickly speak to the proposal writer and the chairperson Mr. Manomeli (Lesotho Manpower Institute??) of LANFE. Both sides agreed to come together Lanfe was particularly making the point that MOSO must make himself available to strengthen the relationships. It seems they think big of Mos.

(Wolfgang Leumer, private email correspondence, 2nd March 2005)

Figure 13 which presents an overview of the leaning cycles and themes). These non-formal learning workshops were an ongoing feature of Cooperative life over the course of the five year project, and there were numerous other workshops in which REFLECT and PRA tools were used to examine a range of issues.

A series of workshops raising awareness of gender issues in the Cooperative and the community more widely, provide a good example of the way in which REFLECT and PRA were used to examine issues of concern. Since gender relations had an important bearing on how patterns of work and leadership were established in the Cooperative, as well as in the wider community, it became important to bring the issue to the fore. In the gender focused workshops, men and women worked in separate groups to look at the ways in which men and women's lives were structured in relationship to gender. Members firstly constructed a daily gender workload calendar and then a seasonal gender workload calendar to examine how the kinds of work traditionally assigned to men and women influenced the way they experienced life on a daily and a yearly basis. (The photo insert shows women in the Cooperative constructing the seasonal calendar.)



Women constructing a seasonal workload calendar that reflects their work as women

Once men and women had completed the construction of their respective calendars, they came together to compare their calendars and discuss their perceptions of workloads and what it meant to be a man or a woman in Lesotho. How did their gender define their workload, and how did their workload structure their lives? They also looked at the advantages and disadvantages of the current workload divisions, and at what kind of possibilities might exist for negotiating changes in workloads, as well as perceptions and behaviours associated with particular genders. This kind of discussion helped to establish a framework for negotiating gender relations in the Cooperative on a more consistent basis. It also assisted members to negotiate gender roles outside of the Co-op, for

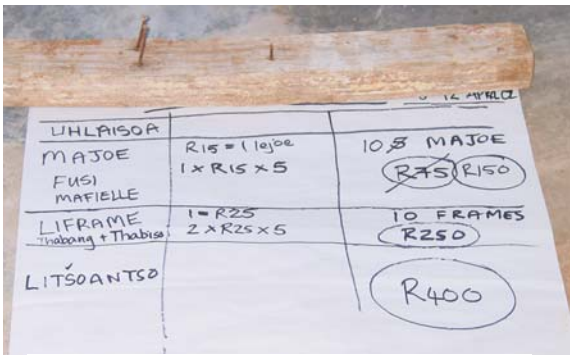
example, in the home. With a heightened awareness of gender, some members were able to address an earlier identified problem – conflict in the home caused by members not managing their traditional (gendered) duties, as well as their additional Co-op duties. The focus on gender better positioned members to negotiate gender roles in both contexts.

Another example of how REFLECT and PRA were used in the Cooperative was in regard to both evaluation and planning. PRA tools such as the timeline and map were particularly helpful in assisting members to reflect back on what they had achieved and think ahead to what they wanted to achieve. The photo insert shows a timeline that members constructed in May 2002 to assess their successes and challenges almost two years into the project. (These kind of meta-analytical review processes were conducted at least once a year, more often where possible.) Using this timeline tool, members were able to construct a visual picture that helped them to review events, both good and bad, that had taken place in the Co-op over a certain period of time. They could discern patterns that emerged and reflect on lessons learned over longer periods of time. This kind of reflective process formed an important part of the action learning process, as well as the REFLECT cycle, and contributed positively to organisational development.



Members constructing a timeline to help them evaluate their progress over a two year period

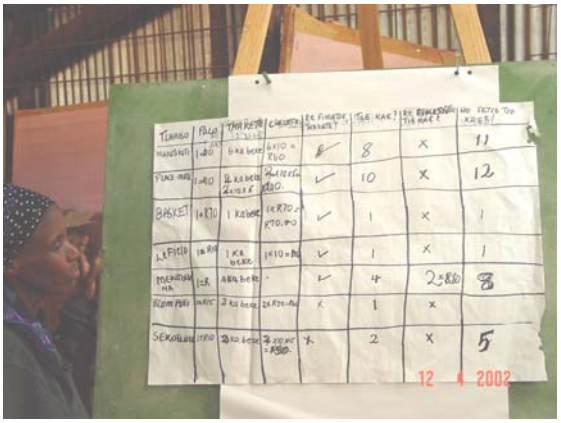
A third example of a how REFLECT was integrated into the Cooperative was in relation to planning and evaluating production. The PRA tool used most frequently for this purpose was the matrix. Members initially began with a simple matrix of just three columns. This matrix helped members to look at the products made, how much could be charged for them, and how many would need to be made to



Planning matrix used by the carpentry team to plan production and pricing

generate a specific income each week (see photo insert on the previous page of a matrix drawn up by the carpentry team).

Over time this matrix developed and became a more sophisticated planning tool with the number of columns increasing to include a weekly production target column, a column to monitor whether the target had been achieved, as well as columns to monitor how many of the items had been made and sold, how much money this had brought in and how many items were remaining in stock. This planning matrix was integrally linked to the 'point system' discussed in Part One of this chapter. By the end of the research period, the matrix had evolved into a tool that members used on a weekly basis to monitor who was working on what product at what rate, overall production in terms of the number of items produced, income generated and points earned by each member or each team. (Appendix 7 contains examples of production, stock and sales monitoring matrices in both English and Sesotho.)



The more sophisticated planning matrix as it developed over time

Of the three tools discussed above (the calendar, the timeline and the matrix), and the other tools used over the course of the project (mapping, pairwise and ranking matrices, trees, venn diagrams, rivers, role-plays, and so on – see also Appendix 2), the tool that members used consistently, at their own initiative, was the matrix. As mentioned above, the target planning matrix was used regularly in for both planning and assessment. Another matrix that was used repeatedly was the planning matrix. This tool helped members to look at what actions needed to be taken, by whom, and by what date. It also encouraged members to think about the kinds of resources needed for achieving the action. This tool was used spontaneously by members when they planned actions within the Cooperative, usually during the Monday meetings (see discussion below). The other tools tended to be used only in training workshops when I introduced them as part of the workshop, or on occasions when Moso or Teboho would initiate their use in trainings or meetings that they facilitated. (The possible reasons for why the tools were not used more frequently in general practice are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Seven.)

From the above discussion it is clear that REFLECT was used extensively in workshop forums. And apparently these non-formal learning workshops influenced members positively. They claimed that their learning helped to inform and strengthen their activities both within and beyond the Co-op. Reflecting on what she had learned from planning and management workshops, one member commented:

> *Lithupelo tsena li re thusitse ho kopana mmoho le ho kopanela mosebetsi ho arolelana tsebo le boithuto ba rona. Ho etsa moralo e se e le tloaelo ea rona ha joale. Ha re qala ho ne ho le thata, empa hona joale hose ho le bobebe. Re qaleletse ho etsa moralo malapeng, likerekeng, le mekhatlong e meng e kang oa ho boloka lichelete. Ha re na le kopano re etsa lethathamo la lipuisano le ho rala seo re tlo se etsa. Ke bile ke rala le hore na ke tla etsang ka mosebetsi oa ka ka lelapa.*
>
> These workshops [on management and planning] have helped us to come together and work collectively, to share knowledge and experience. Planning has become a practice now. When we started it was difficult, but now it's easier and we have started using it at home, at church and in other organisations like our savings club. When we have a meeting, we make an agenda and plan what we are going to do. I even plan what I am going to do with the chores I have to do.
>
> (Mapulane Mpoarane, August 2002)

(ii) Meetings

In addition to the workshops described above, members had an opportunity to discuss, reflect and learn from each other during meetings. There were two main meeting forums – Monday meetings and the committee meetings.

Monday meetings

The 'Monday meeting' (*Kopano ea Mantaha*) was held regularly every Monday from 8h00 to 12h00, and attended by all members. These meetings became established as a practice about a year into the life of the project, and were in many ways the 'heart' that kept the blood of the organisation pumping. They provided a space for members to raise concerns, debate and discuss issues, and plan future actions they wanted to take.

> *…letsatsi la Mantaha ke letsatsi leo re lokelang ho ba le lipuisano tsa mokhatlo ka lona, ho buisana mathata a libeke tse fetileng le ho etsa meralo ea beke e qalang.*
>
> …Monday [is] … the day to discuss issues in the Co-op , to discuss the previous week's problems and make plans for the new week.
>
> (Manako Lesenyeho, November 2004)

It was at Monday meetings that most of the critical decisions affecting the organisation were made. If a member wanted to be heard or have a decision made on any issue, it was done at this forum. Attendance at these meetings was generally very good, with members making a concerted effort to be present - a good sign, indicating a commitment to holding one another accountable, as well as faith in the value of the forum.

In many ways, the Monday meetings achieved what a REFLECT meeting is supposed to achieve – it provided members with an opportunity to collaboratively discuss, plan and decide on action as they learned and reflected together. I assumed that the Monday meetings would provide a 'natural home' for REFLECT to be used on an ongoing basis. And in some ways, this did happen. Many of the REFLECT principles influenced the way Monday meetings were conducted. For example, ground rules were established whereby members agreed that everyone should be free to participate in meetings and have their voice heard. And members strove to maintain these ground rules as they shaped a space where people were able to negotiate, challenge and question power safely. If one member dominated a discussion, this was pointed out to them by other members who gradually became more aware of whose voices were heard and how power played out. Decisions were made collectively and democratically by the group in this space. As mentioned above, no decisions could be made if they had not first been discussed by this meeting.

> REFLECT has helped us to change the way we discuss things – discussions are more democratic, everyone feels free, we don't feel restrained to not say some things. I remember once when Fusi was chairing, and people didn't want to do what he wanted them to do. They saw how he was dominating and they said that next time they would not choose him as a leader. … People now are more aware of how some people dominate, and they insist on participation. For example, in Monday meetings, when we have burning issues to discuss, everyone wants to say something. If someone does keep quiet, it's more because they don't have an interest, not because they feel inhibited. …People also volunteer to lead discussions and insist on order in discussion to let everyone's voice be heard. When people lead, they give chance to people who are quieter. I think this is from REFLECT...
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, March 2005)

From my own observations of Monday meetings, I would certainly agree with Moso's observations that these forums did provide a space for members to discuss issues freely. However, from what I observed, the chairing of meetings was often dominated by a small pool of people, usually one of the men. This arrangement was contrary to the agreement made by members to rotate responsibilities, including chairing responsibilities, as a way

of equalising power and developing skills more equitably. The women were generally reluctant to chair, or to take on positions of leadership or power within the Cooperative. (The influence of gender is discussed further in Chapter Seven.)

However, while REFLECT principles may have influenced proceedings in the Monday meetings, in other ways the process and techniques typically used by groups using the REFLECT approach differed. For example, a conventional REFLECT group will usually focus on a structured learning theme over a period of anywhere between four and ten weeks. During this time they will engage with the elements of a REFLECT learning cycle (first identifying a problem, then analysing it using a PRA tool, then discussing it, then deciding on a course of action, while in the process strengthening literacy and numeracy skills). Monday meetings did not follow this structured process, but instead took on a more conventional meeting format, with discussion focusing on current issues and concerns that had arisen – usually during the preceding week(s). The continuity of focus that characterises the typical REFLECT learning cycle did not characterise Monday meetings. Rather, the meeting agenda was constructed on the spot at the start of the meeting as members raised their immediate concerns. They generally wanted to make decisions quickly, without extensive analysis or use of a PRA tool. The only PRA tool that was used with any regularity in the Monday Meetings was the planning matrix.

> The Monday Meetings are effective only when people are using planning matrix in the Co-op – not only in the learning circles – and actions are taken because of this.
>
> (Field worker's report, September 2002)

Minutes were not recorded in the 'REFLECT way' (captured on a piece of newsprint for all to see and discuss), but were recorded instead more conventionally in a minute book. Apparently members found the structured REFLECT process too laborious and time consuming to follow.

The learning process in Monday meetings was therefore different from the learning process that might be expected to take place in a typical REFLECT group. Meetings focused on discussing issues and making decisions, rather than achieving particular learning objectives. Learning was therefore incidental and ad hoc, rather than pre-planned; although members still recognised and valued this as learning. During interviews

with members about what they had learned, several 'learning themes' emerged. The first was learning related to handling conflict and interaction.

Likopano tsa Mantaha li nthusitse hore ke ithute hore ha batho ba kopane mmoho ho tla ba le likhohlano, empa sena se ka rarolloa ka lipuisano le meralo e mecha. Ke kenetse likopano tsena ka ba ka hlokomela hore lipuisano li bohlokoa ho re thusa ho ithuta moo re fositseng le moo re nepileng, ho bona moo mathata kapa liphoso li leng teng.

Monday meetings have helped me to learn that when people get together, there will be conflict, but this can be resolved through discussion and with new plans. I've seen through these meetings that discussion is valuable in helping to learn where you've gone wrong or right, to see where the problems or mistakes are.

(Makomiti Tenane, March 2005)

Ke ithutile ho se bontse ho koata hoa ka mahlong a batho. Ke ithutile ho kopanya batho mmoho ho buisana le ho fumana mathata.

I've learned how to be calm in the face of my anger. I've learned how to bring people together to discuss and find solutions.

(Fusi Qoane, March 2005)

Ke ithutile hore o ka atamela motho emong ha a entse phoso ka ho buisana le eena. Pele ke ne nkeke ka etsa sena, ke ne ke tsaba. Ke ne ke nahana hore batho ba ka ke ke ba nthata. Empa hona joale ke se ken a le sebete ho buisana ka mathata le ho fumana tharollo.

I've learned that you can approach someone when they have done something wrong and talk to them. Before I would never do this, I was shy. I thought that people would not like me. But now I have gained more confidence to discuss problems and find solutions.

(Masekolo Rakojane, March 2005)

The second theme related to what members learned about the work of running the Co-operative in general. This included learning around planning, goal setting, managing production and quality.

Likopano tsa Mantaha li nthusitse ho utoisisa bohlokoa ba ho etsa moralo oa mosebetsi. Ke hlokometse hore ho ithuta ho etsa li-tagethe ho thusa ho fihlela tlhahiso e ntle.

Monday meetings have helped me to understand the importance of planning around work. I've seen that learning to make targets helps to achieve better production.

(Mamotobaki Lenyora, March 2005)

Ha ke nahane hore re se re ntse re etsa sena hona joale, empa ke hlokometse bohlokoa ba ho etsa moralo le ka moo o leng bohlokoa ka teng bakeng sa katleho

ea rona. Mohlala, hona joale re hlokomela ha lipopi li leng ngata, mme lihlahisoa tse ling li le nyane, mme re ka etsa moralo oa ho etsa lilhahisoa tsena hore re ne re fihlele tagete ea ho etsa M120 ka beke. Ka nako e tsoanang re ntse re ithuta litsebo tse ngata.

I don't think we do this well yet, but I've seen the importance of planning and how it is important for our success. For example, we now notice when the dolls are more, and other things less, and we can make plans to produce other things so that we can still meet our target of M120 a week while at the same time also learning more skills.

(Makomiti Tenane, March 2005)

Ke ithutile hore boleng bo bohlokoa, mme re lokela ho lula re hlahloba boleng le ho etsa bonnete ba hore ha re etse lintho ka tsela eo batho ba se nang ho li reka.

I've learned that quality is important, and we need to keep checking on quality and making sure that we are not making things in a way that the people will not buy them.

(Masefate Lebelo, March 2005)

But in many ways not following the REFLECT process and not having a sustained focus on certain issues may have jeopardised both the quality of learning and the quality of processes that unfolded in the Cooperative context. There were a number of ongoing issues which were not resolved. For example, planning and management were issues that members struggled with throughout the research period, and they acknowledged this as illustrated in the following statements from both 2002 and 2005:

Makomiti complained that Monday meetings are sometimes disorganised as there is not good management in the Co-op. She also asked why does the Co-op committee not meet each month? But there was no answer to this question. It's obvious that the Co-op committee is no longer working.

(Field worker's report, October 2002)

Re etsa moralo likopanong tsa Mataha empa hangata ha re phethahatse meralo ea rona. Ho na le khohlano lipakeng tsa seo re se ralang ka Mantaha le se etsahalang e le kannete hara beke. Likopano tsa Mantaha ke qalo empa ho hlokohala ho ba le tsala-morao. Ke moo re nang le bofokoli teng. Re hloka ho lula re ntse re hlahloba, re hlahloba, re hlahloba meralo eo re e entseng ka Mantaha.

We plan in Monday meetings but we often don't implement these plans. There is an inconsistency between what we do on Monday and what really happens during the week. Monday meetings are *a start* [her emphasis], but there needs to be follow-through. That's where we are weak. We need to keep checking and checking and checking the plans that we make on Monday.

(Hopolang Ranoosi, March 2005)

The ‘inconsistencies’ Hopolang refers to might have been resolved had the group followed issues through more systematically in Monday meetings. The looser structure of Monday meetings meant that certain issues were overlooked when additional pressing issues arose, and plans made were neglected. As a result, the often difficult issues that needed ongoing attention (like management) were not fully resolved, and learning related to these issues was not consolidated. A more structured action and learning agenda with regular opportunities for reflection might well have benefited the Co-op, even if this was more time consuming in the short-term.

Committee meetings

Committee meetings were a smaller forum than Monday meetings, but intended to achieve many of the same objectives – they were a space for democratic debate, learning and reflection, but amongst a smaller group of people, the leadership. Like Monday meetings, committee meetings were held every week. These meetings were attended by the central (or executive) committee members who were elected at the AGM to serve on the committee for a period of a year. The purpose of these weekly meetings was for committee members to think through and prioritise issues that would help members to use subcommittees effectively to reach the goals of the Co-op[48]. Ideally, the committee helped to prepare the agenda for the general Monday meetings by thinking ahead and prioritising the issues that required consideration by the wider membership.

In practice, committee meetings did not take place on a weekly basis, and were not always effective in providing leadership and guidance for the wider membership. The strength of the committee was dependent on who was elected. In years when the committee was weaker, leadership was wanting, while in stronger years, the association achieved more because the leadership was more competent (see Appendix 1a and 1b where the duties of the committee members are set out within the constitution).

In principle, the committee could have used the REFLECT approach effectively as a strategy for managing their own learning as well as guiding the learning of the wider membership. Committee meetings could have provided a forum to try out how a particular PRA tool might illuminate an issue before taking the tool and/or the issue to the

Monday meeting. Committee members might have grown their confidence and skills in this forum, thus providing stronger leadership to the organisation. I had high hopes that this might happen. However, it did not, and committee meetings did not become a model to guide wider practice in the organisation.

> *Tsamaiso e na la bofokoli hobane emong le emong a batla ho etsa lintho ka tsela ea hae, ho ea ka litakatso tsa bona eseng ka ho ea ka molao oa tsamaiso. Hona ho ferekanya tsela eo mokhatlo ho lokelang ho sebetsa ka eona.*
>
> The management is weak because everyone wants to do things in their own way, according to their own wishes and not according to the constitution. This confuses the way that the Cooperative should work.
>
> (Makomiti Tenane, March 2005)

So why did members not adopt REFLECT as a structured practice in Monday meetings or in committee meetings? Why did they choose to retain a conventional meeting format for their meetings and use REFLECT in a more background manner? When I interviewed members about this, they put forward several reasons.

Firstly, on a practical level, members felt that following the REFLECT process would simply take too long in both meeting forums and would not enable them to get through the range of issues they needed to discuss[49]. At one stage we discussed devoting Wednesdays to structured REFLECT meetings on a regular basis in order to process some of the issues they were struggling with, such as management related issues. But members were reluctant to commit yet more time to discussion and analysis since they were concerned this would jeopardise their time for production, which due to the range of activities they were involved in, was already restricted to 13 of the total 35 hour week - less than 40% of the actual time spent in the Co-op (see Table 9 below). Given that craft production was their primary means of generating income, they wanted to reserve as much time as possible for this.

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[48] See Part One of this chapter for a description and visual diagram of how the committee worked with Co-op sub-committees.

[49] Members had experience of the time the process took from their participation in the workshops (discussed earlier in Part Two) and through facilitating their own REFLECT circles in the villages (see Chapter 5).

	Mornings (8am – 1pm)	Afternoons (2 – 4pm)
Monday	Monday meetings	Production
Tuesday	Village learning circles[50]	Production
Wednesday	Training / Workshops	
Thursday	Village learning circles	Production
Friday	Production	

Table 9: Outline of weekly activities in the Cooperative showing that less than 40% of time was spent on production related activities

Secondly, and more significantly, members expressed uncertainty about whether they would be able to design and write the learning units needed to guide the REFLECT learning process in the Cooperative on an on-going basis. (Each REFLECT learning cycle is usually structured around a written learning unit that guides the group through the different stages of the REFLECT cycle[51].) My own observations too were that this was the most problematic area, in both the Cooperative and the village learning circle context. The writing of units was demanding and required expertise in several areas. One had to be able to think through what the learning objectives were to be, how these might be achieved, and which PRA tool would best fit the specified learning objectives. One needed the skills to write down the objectives and activities of the lesson in a way that made sense to others. And one required some content knowledge of the topic, or at the very least materials that could guide one towards acquiring that knowledge.

These requirements were out of reach for most members of the Cooperative. Firstly, few members of the Co-op (in fact only five) had more than seven years of formal education. Many members had five or less years of formal education (see Table 10 below where the ages and education levels of the 21 active members of the Co-op are set out):

[50] All members (but one) of the Co-op facilitated a REFLECT circle in the village on a bi-weekly basis (see Chapter Five and Six for a discussion of the village learning circles).

[51] A visual diagram showing the different elements of the REFLECT cycle was set out in Chapter Two. These different elements usually constitute different sessions within a REFLECT cycle. The written unit sets out guidelines to help the facilitator as s/he facilitates sessions around the specific problem. Appendix Six contains a sample unit (in Sesotho and English) that was used to guide the facilitators through a REFLECT learning cycle in the village learning circles.

Name	Age	Gender	Educational level	Number of years of formal education
Moso Ranoosi	26	Male	Form E	12 years
Mokhameleli Mokati	22	Male	Form D	11 years
Matebello Khosi	39	Female	Form B	9 years
Masekolo Rakojoane	49	Female	Form B/C	9 years
Sosene Lijo	42	Male	Form B	9 years
Makomiti Tenane	47	Female	Std 7	7 years
Mamotselisi Sello	33	Female	Std 7	7 years
Hopolang Ranoosi	26	Female	Std 7	7 years
Mapulane Mporoane	67	Female	Std 6	6 years
Mamophethe Sibisibi	52	Female	Std 5	5 years
Mampolokeng Seema	56	Female	Std 3	3 years
Masefate Ramahaetsane / Lebelo	56	Female	Std 3	3 years
Mamotena Mahao	66	Female	Std 5	5 years
Manako Lesenyeho	42	Female	Std 4	4 years
Mamotobaki Lenyora	56	Female	Std 4	4 years
Matello Ramotsoane	53	Female	Std 3	3 years
Matsepang Matsitsi	38	Female	Std 7	7 years
Thabo Phethoka	49	Male	Std 5	5 years (plus he attended night school during his yeas as a miner in South Africa)
Pinki Lebitsa	29	Male	Std 6	6 years
Magate Sekoeta	50	Female	Std 4	4 years
Fusi Qoane	40	Male	Std1	1 year (he acquired basic literacy skills at a night school which he attended while working as a miner in South Africa)

Table 10: Names, ages and educational levels of core Co-op members

Members' limited formal education experience, coupled with the dearth of literacy materials in the environment, impacted significantly on members' ability to conceptualise, construct and write guidelines for a learning process. It was simply unrealistic to expect people with a few years of formal education to construct REFLECT learning materials. They were not used to, let alone trained, or experienced in working in an abstract mode. Writing was not the medium in which people felt most comfortable expressing their thoughts or planning their lives. Moso Ranoosi, who had the highest level of formal education of all members, and worked with me to write units for the village learning circles, made the following observation:

> The Co-op is like a centre for education. We learn things here. But the environment people live in is such a negative environment with nothing. After everything here [in the Co-op], people go back to the community, and it's a context that brings them down. Their things are more around problems and solving their issues. It's about action. Paper work is not in their blood, they don't live it. That's why their planning of lessons may not seem good. … Living in this community, you get things done by memorising them, not writing them down. There is nothing that forces people to feel like they should write something down. Their level of education also has an impact because people are not used to writing.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, March 2005)

Members' unfamiliarity and insecurity with the specific demands of writing in learning materials in particular, but with facilitating learning more generally, impacted on the way REFLECT was adopted in the Cooperative. The structured way of thinking that characterises the REFLECT process, was just not a mode to which members were accustomed.

> As Co-op members, we often just don't make written plans in the way that we should. We don't follow the REFLECT procedures, the steps of analysing using a tool, and then discussing and writing things down because it's not something we are used to doing in our daily lives. We do it differently, sometimes we don't analyse or discuss things enough, or we don't keep records or what we say and this is why it sometimes fails.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, March 2005)

(iii) Informal discussions

Beyond the workshops and the organised meetings which have been discussed in some depth above, learning also took place through informal discussions amongst members who could frequently be seen sitting together discussing Co-op related matters. These informal meetings often followed on from the formal meetings – members would spontaneously continue the conversation, learning and debate amongst themselves. The photo insert shows members discussing what prices should be charged in relation to potential profits from selling the harvest



Informal discussions amongst members (with literacy playing a role during such discussions)

from their sharecropping efforts. Discussion here involved working out and writing down different pricing options while discussing the potential advantages and disadvantages. While not all informal discussions entailed written records of learning, interviews with members suggest that members nevertheless did learn and gain considerably from interaction with each other, whether this was in the context of a formal meeting or in informal discussions.

The learning in these informal discussion situations tended to be informal and incidental, in much the same way that it was in the Monday meetings and committee meetings. It was unstructured in the sense that there were no specific pre-set learning objectives, members learned 'on the job' as they sought ways to solve their particular concern or dilemma. In this context, members seldom drew on REFLECT techniques, such as the PRA tools, to facilitate their meetings or discussions. REFLECT and the tools were seen as something to be used in workshops as part of a more extensive process, rather than in meetings where quick decisions were needed.

Participants extracted elements of the REFLECT approach that made most sense to them. Some aspects of REFLECT, such as the PRA tools were used less frequently, while other aspects were integrated as part of the culture of the Cooperative. For example, the democratic and participatory aspects of the process became part of the modus operandi of the Co-op. Members became more conscious of power and voice, of who was heard and who got to act in different situations. For example, women in the Co-op were aware of and irritated by Ntate Fusi's tendency to dominate discussions and decision making procedures. They vowed that in the next election they would elect only women into committee positions so as to take the Co-op forward in a direction that was more representative of its members.

> *Re khatetse ke Ntate Fusi. Ka hobane ke molula-setulo, o nahana hore a ka etsa sohle seo a se batlang. O etsa lintho le liqeto a eso kopane le rona. Ha re sa tla mo khethela komiting hape. Nakong e tlang, re tlo khetha bomme mme bontate ba tla bona hore bomme ba tla etsa mosebetsi o motle.*
>
> We are tired of Ntate Fusi. Because he is the chairperson, he thinks he can do what he wants to do. He will do things and make decisions without consulting us. We are not going to elect him again to be in the committee. Next time we are only going to elect women and the men will see how we do things differently.
>
> (Masekolo Rakojoane)

…But it didn't happen this way.

> Ntate Lijo is now the chair. These women feel that for something to happen there has to be always a man as the head. There has to be a man to lead them in order for them to feel that something has gone well. They wanted to put all men in the committee, even though there are mostly women in the co-op, and only a few men. They wait for the men to chair the meetings, they take long to volunteer to do things themselves. I think its because of their culture. They are not being oppressed, but it is rooted in their culture and it is hard to change them from the old habits that they are used to. Some of them are old now, in their 50's, and they don't want to change. I don't know why because they do well, even better than these men do, but they are just used to letting the men take the lead.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, 26 January 2006)

Beyond the Cooperative context …

But how deep was this awareness? How did it inform members' wider interactions and activities? To what extent were they able to transfer their new skills and 'changed consciousness' into other areas of activity beyond the relatively unthreatening confines of the Cooperative context? The Malealea Cooperative's relationship with the bigger Lesotho Cooperative Society provides a fertile context for exploring this question.

The Lesotho Cooperative Society

Cooperatives in Lesotho are organised into two-tier or three-tier structures.

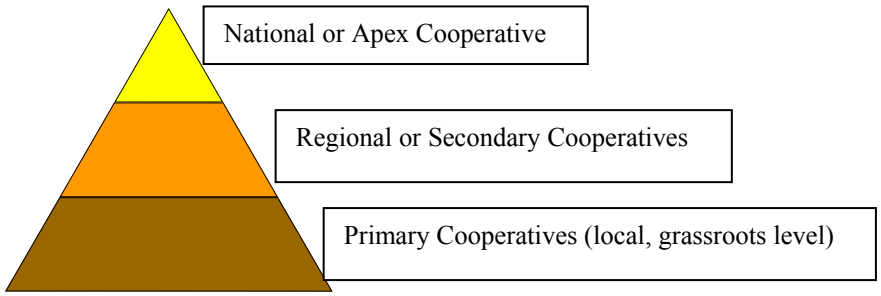


Figure 15: The structure of cooperatives in Lesotho

As a grassroots Cooperative, the Malealea Cooperative fitted in at the primary level. They had some association with another primary Cooperative close-by (for example, Ha Seeiso Cooperative), but most of their interaction was with the regional or district level of the apex structure, the Lesotho Cooperative Society (LCS). The district LCS office was charged with organising and co-ordinating a range of activities at the (Mafeteng) district level, although at times there was wider collaboration with other districts at a national level.

Prior to 1999, government had been actively involved in the management and control of Cooperatives, but in 1999, policy changes aimed to promote greater independence of Co-ops did away with government involvement (Hubbard, 1999:5). The new policy stated that Co-ops belonged to the members who took sole responsibility for managing and controlling them, assuming capacity and skills to be in place at the grassroots level. The LCS was established to play an advocacy and supportive role, working with Government to create a policy environment that was supportive of Co-op activities, speaking on behalf of the Cooperative movement, representing Cooperatives inside and outside of the country and channelling various forms of assistance to Cooperatives, in the form of guidance, advice, and education and training that would promote participation (Hubbard, 1999).

However, my observations were that the level of skill required to manage a Cooperative did not exist at the primary level, at least not in Malealea, and the Lesotho Cooperative Society was not able to deliver effectively in a support and advocacy capacity. Members of the Malealea Co-op lacked the confidence to express their needs to the LCS, or voice their concerns, or challenge the LCS on poor delivery. The section that follows presents some examples of how the LCS failed to deliver to the Malealea Cooperative, and members' responses to these letdowns.

One of the most important ways in which the LCS was supposed to support primary and secondary level Cooperatives was with governance and administration in general. In particular, LCS was supposed to support co-ops to have annual general meetings (AGMs) and elect new governing structures or committees. However, the support provided to members in Malealea with regard to governance and administration was weak and infrequent. Over the five year research period, the LCS staff made only irregular visits to the Malealea Co-op, and it seemed their visits and procedures held the Cooperative back, rather than supported its progress. The following extract from the field worker's report illustrates this. (The LCS was supposed to be providing support to the Cooperative in preparation for their AGM).

> On the day we agreed for the AGM (22nd August 2002), the Mafeteng office arrived late at 12.25 past noon. When they arrived they made an excuse and said they would not help in electing the Co-op committee, but would work on the books only for 2.5 hours from 12.30 – 3pm. They didn't ask the sales people to give them

> the report, but started calculating the daily sales of August 2002 going back to the day when the last committee was elected. They made an excuse that we will start elections after they have finished checking the books. I can say that the Mafeteng Co-op Society has failed our agreement with them as they agreed a week before 22nd of August that they will work on books first before AGM. But that didn't happen. …The AGM date was postponed due to the above work and excuses from the Co-op officers. … So far, people from the Mafeteng Co-op Society Office have come to visit us only 3 times. We are not sure now when the new committee will be elected – maybe at the end of September or October. We are not sure as this can only be done when they are through with the books. But they don't come often and this delays the process.
>
> … On the 27th and 28th August, people from the Mafeteng office were still checking books. They promised that they will come again on Friday the 30th of August, but they did not come again. Even on the following week they did not turn up.
>
> (Field worker's report, August – September 2002)

The election of the new committee finally took place in November 2002, without support from the LCS office and without their completion of the financial audit. This was only completed in July 2003. However, in spite of their obvious frustration with the LCS, members of the Co-op did not challenge LCS staff on their inefficiency.

The above example was not an isolated instance of poor support. At the time of the armed robbery, the LCS did little to provide legal support or representation to the Co-op, which, according to the LCS by-laws, they are obligated to do. The LCS was supposed to have a dedicated lawyer to help Cooperatives in legal cases. The Co-op members were aware of this right and annoyed that it was not fulfilled.

> *Rea tseba hore re na le ramolao, empa batho bana ha ba bontse ba etsa eng kapa eng ho bontsa ho tsotella nyeoe ea rona. Ramoorosi o tlameha ho re fa ramolao oa rona, re utloile hore Moipone le mohlankana oa hae ba batlile ramolao oa bona empa ha ke so bone ramolao oa rona le ha ke le Mafeteng, ha ke e so mobone. Ke tseba feela hore re ne re tsepisoe hore re na le ramolao.*
>
> We know we have a lawyer but these people don't seem to be doing anything about caring about our case. Ramoorosi should give us our lawyer, we have heard that Moipone and her boyfriend have their lawyer, but I have never seen our lawyer, even in Mafeteng I have never seen that lawyer. I know only that it was a promise that we would have that lawyer.
>
> (Co-op member)

Right into the court case, Co-op members still did not have legal representation. They were disappointed in the LCS at the time, and raised the issue of ineffective legal

representation with the district office. However, they made little headway and were resigned to accepting the inadequacies of the apex structure. The critical voice and awareness of power which members were so carefully cultivating in the context of the Cooperative seemed to slip away at the level of district representation.

Another situation where members were reluctant to voice their concerns was in regard to the training provided by LCS. Usually training was decided on by LCS officials, and provided at a district or national level. However, at times the themes of the workshops seemed divergent from the real needs of the Co-op at the grassroots level. For example, several workshops were held to train members from cooperatives around the country on how to produce health products and cosmetics from aloe plants. Yet, minimal attention was focused on managing the production of this product, and marketing it, the areas where support was needed. The first training workshop was held in February 2003, with follow up training in 2004. Members of the Co-ops were expected to cover their own transport, food and accommodation costs for training workshops – in the case of Malealea this exceeded M600 for the two members trained. (This figure is equivalent to more than twice the average monthly income for a Co-op member – see Table 8.) However, the trainees did not produce any products after the training, and as such, no income was recovered from the costs invested in the training. When I asked members in March 2005 why they had not started producing aloe products, they said they did not have the necessary ingredients (like perfumes and oils), nor the equipment (gas burners, pots, bottles etc.) needed. Members finally got a quote for the required ingredients and materials which amounted to M17,033.50. The Co-op could clearly not afford this capital investment and producing the products therefore was not an option. Members did not raise these major logistical obstacles with the district level LCS. They just continued going to the workshops. I was perplexed as to why they did not voice their concerns or request further assistance.

Participation in LCS activities cost members in both money and time. The financial layout was usually to cover members' transport, food and accommodation expenses, perhaps a reasonable request for a flourishing organisation, but a significant burden on the finances of a fledgling operation like the Malealea Cooperative. There were four main areas where the Co-op had to disburse: (i) to attend LCS meetings – usually on a fortnightly basis (with travel and food expenses at about M100 per meeting) (ii) workshops and training

sessions – usually on a quarterly basis (costs dependent on how many members attended and length of workshop), (iii) Cooperative shows at a district and national level – on a quarterly and annual basis respectively; and (iv) fundraising activities such as 'stokvels'[52]. Participating in the 'stokvel' functions cost the Co-op especially heavily, but the obligation to support one another weighed seriously on the Malealea Co-op members.

> Our Co-op was obliged to go to the stokvel in Ha Majake on 13/12/03. We had only six reps who were there on our behalf, but the transport was M30 per person and they ate food which cost M400. Total expenses M580. This was on credit as we did not have the money. This was a matter of must because that other Co-op spent its money on our food before. So, we had to pay back the debt.
>
> (Field worker's report, December 2003)

'The debt' however far exceeded the gain. At their turn to host the stokvel, the Malealea Co-operative made very little profit. It barely covered the costs of attending one other stokvel, let alone the 10 plus they were obliged to support.

The committee met to prepare a stokvel report:

Expenses incurred to buy food and drink -	M6, 639.45
Money made -	M7, 101.60
Profit -	**M462.15**

(Field worker's report, March 2003)

Expenses incurred in participating in LCS activities added up over time, draining members of funds that could otherwise have been invested in the Co-op. Yet this issue was never raised with the LCS. Members continued cannibalising their business. Funds to participate in activities were taken from the monies set aside to buy materials for their business.

> The Co-op members have realised that there is no money kept for the [LCS] Co-op journeys. So, the management committee agreed that the material money should no longer be 30%, but it should be reduced to 25% so that the remaining 5% could be used for journeys, but this will only start next month. For the Mafeteng Co-op Show that is coming up, we agreed that the M200 should be taken from all the different product teams – beads team, doll making team, art team, grass team and the

52 A 'stokvel' is a fundraising event in which a group of people collect money and then sell beer and plates of food at a profit. The Mafeteng office of the LCS organised a series of 'stokvels' whereby each Co-op would have a turn at hosting a stokvel, with the other Co-ops being obliged to support them. This entailed hiring a vehicle to travel to the hosting Co-op and supporting them through buying beer and food.

carpentry team. Each team has paid M40 from their material money to make M200 for the show.

(Field worker's report, May 2003)

In spite of having figures and records that clearly pointed to financial strain, members did not challenge the unrelenting obligation placed on them to participate in LCS activities. When I asked them what motivated them to continue participating, despite their reluctance, members said they felt they would be vulnerable without the political support of a district and national structure. They also valued the networking opportunities gained from interaction, and the insight gained into how Co-operatives in other contexts operate (particularly those not connected to the tourism market). They felt these gains were sufficient reason to 'put up with' the demands and inefficiencies of the LCS.

Seemingly members of the Malealea Co-op were not prepared to voice openly their grievances and concerns, or reflect critically on how they might have effected change in the LCS context. They seemed to be balancing their sense of agency and a consciousness of their voice in the local Co-operative context, against what they might lose by challenging the institutional power of the bigger LCS, a power which ironically, depends in the long term on the strength and ability of its membership to participate democratically and assert its critical voice from the bottom up. Members' experience of working with the REFLECT approach which encouraged democratic participation in the Malealea Cooperative context did not translate directly into effective participation in the LCS forum.

Finding a critical voice closer to home

Closer to home, however, in the context of the community, members of the Cooperative were able to initiate democratic and relevant action that addressed felt needs in both the community and the Co-op .

Within the community context, members of the Co-op initiated several significant developments. One of these was a community pre-school for children between the ages of three and seven (see photo insert below). Members first identified the need for a pre-school amongst their own members, and then amongst the community more widely. They used their muscle as a community organisation to negotiate the use of land for the pre-school, successfully voicing their needs so as to ensure that land was made available to

them[53].While the funding for the pre-school was sourced by the Malealea Development Trust, Co-op members played a major part in driving the 'political' process. They helped to establish the management committee, and had two members sitting on this committee who were instrumental in assisting with the management and monitoring of the running of the pre-school. Later, when financial disputes arose, Co-op members were able to draw on their experiences of procedures in the Cooperative to help resolve these conflicts.



The community pre-school: initiated and co-managed by members of the Co-op

The Co-op members also managed to negotiate land for their own purposes as a Cooperative. They built two new structures on this land: the first was a sales room, and the second a workroom (see photo insert). Funds for building the sales room were again raised by the Malealea Development Trust. However, money for the second building was sourced by members themselves through the American Embassy in Lesotho. Members organised all building and administrative arrangements for this second building. By the time the second building was built, it was clear that members of the Co-op had gained confidence in their administrative and literacy skills (sufficiently so that they could negotiate with a major funding organisation), as well as their collective voice, and their ability to initiate and follow through on action. Members of the Co-op saw themselves as



Right front – the new Handicraft Sales Room; Left – the new handicraft work room (Sponsored by the US Embassy in Lesotho)

[53]The difficulties of acquiring land were explained in a footnote earlier in this chapter.

able and entitled to occupy a decision-making space, as having the right to act and have influence on what happened in their community. And the community too recognised this - the Co-op had gained profile and credibility as people who could make things happen in the community.

> *Mokhatlo o ntselitse lintlhafatso pele ka hara metse… Batho ba ne ba atisa hore "le se le ea mantloaneng a mona a lona" ho bolelang hore le bapala papali ea mantlaone mokhatlong, ka mantsoe a mang le senya nako ea lona ka lintho tsa bana. Ba ne ba atisa ho cho tjena hobane litho li ne li etsa lipopi, hape batho ba neng ba feta ka tsela ba ba bona ba ngoapa fatse ka lithupa ha ba etsa lisebelisuoa tsa lihlopha ka nako eo lithupelo li neng li etsoa hangata ka eona. Empa hona joale, ha ba sa cho joalo. Batho ba batla ho ba litho mme ba entse likopo, empa ha re tlo amohela litho tse ling hona joale.*
>
> The Co-op has promoted development in the community… People used to say "*le se le ea mantloaneng a mona a lona*" which means you're playing that housy-housy game of yours, meaning you're wasting your time with childish things. They used to say this because members were making dolls and people passing by saw them scratching the ground with sticks when they were making graphics during those workshops that were so often held when the Co-op first started. But now they are no longer saying that. People now want to become members and have applied, but we aren't accepting more members now.
>
> (Interview with member, March 2005)

It is interesting to note how members of the Co-op proceeded and responded differently in different contexts. They made their voice heard and took action in different ventures within the community context, but felt less confident to take assertive or oppositional action in the LCS context. However, their responses to why they did not take action in the LCS context suggest that their decision was a considered one, rather than merely a disengagement or disempowered evasion of their concerns. Not taking action was itself an action. The complex and textured nature of how power and empowerment are played out is explored further in Chapter Seven.

Final reflection on REFLECT

Members' actions and achievements in the Co-operative were not guided by the structured written learning units that typically define a REFLECT cycle. Action was prioritised to address a concrete need, and learning needs were secondary to this. The learning themes and cycles described in Part One of this chapter, developed organically and in an ad hoc way in relation to the identified needs, rather than in a pre-planned structured way. That members were more consciously focused on action rather than learning was illustrated in

a reflection workshop held in November 2004. Asked to identify the most significant learning incidents they experienced over the course of the project, members talked about their actions and achievements, reflecting on their learning only in more general terms.

> *Re hahile ntlo ea thekiso ho beha thepa ea rona e bolokehile. Le ntlo ea tsebetso ho ba le sebaka se setle seo re tla sebeletsa ho sona. … Hona joale re na le chelete bakeng sa bophelo ba letsatsi le letsatsi, we na le chelete bakeng sa mafu, hape re na le polokelo ea chelete. Tseo re ithutileng tsona ketsahalong ena, ke hore ha batho ba kopane mmoho lintho lia etsahala. Re ithutile hore Handicraft ea hola leha re ntse re na le mathata ka tsamaiso ea rona.*
>
> We built the sales room to keep our things safely and the work room to have a good place to work. … We now have money for everyday living, we have money for funerals and we also have savings. What we have learned from this is that when people come together, things can happen. We have learned that the Handicraft is growing, even though we have problems with our management.
>
> (Masekolo, March 2005)

The way in which members describe their learning could also be related to a point made earlier in this chapter - members did not have the background, experience or discourse to articulate particular learning objectives - or recognise their achievement. Members tended to recognise their incidental learning in general terms rather than as particular informal or formal learning accomplishments. Their primary identity was as pioneers, rather than as learners.

However, in spite of members being unable to state explicit learning outcomes, it would be valid to claim that the action learning process followed in the Co-op was consistent with REFLECT in that action (and the embedded learning) was based on the needs identified and prioritised by members. The Cooperative environment acted as an 'incubator' – it provided a home for learning through workshops, skills training, practice and experience, most of which were informed to a greater or lesser extent by the REFLECT principles and approach. A significant part of the learning process related to the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Examples of the kinds of literacy and numeracy activities that members engaged in have been described throughout this chapter. These will be further discussed in Chapter Seven, where a comparison is made between the literacy and numeracy skills developed in the Co-op, and in the village learning circles.

Over time, and with varying levels of support (monetary, educational, resources), the Co-op developed a culture of learning and democratic participation of its own. And although REFLECT was not in the end prioritised as a single approach governing all interactions and learning, it significantly influenced the way in which the Co-op's own action learning culture developed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on presenting the learning experiences of the Hlahlela-le-lla-ka-le-leng Cooperative over the first period of the project's life, from 2000 – 2005. Part One set out a descriptive account of the ebb and flow of some of the most significant learning cycles and actions that took place in the Cooperative over this time. Part Two looked more closely at the different learning contexts and kinds of learning that took place, and how the REFLECT approach influenced the learning processes in these contexts. I have shown how members adapted the REFLECT process to suit their own needs, selecting certain aspects of the process (the process of discussing, planning, taking action and reflecting) while overlooking others (some PRA techniques and a structured learning agenda and process). I have noted both the advantages and disadvantages of the adaptations. On the one hand, not adopting the approach wholesale meant that members were thinking for themselves and adapting the approach to fit their situation, while on the other hand some of the problems that might have been resolved through a more structured approach were not. I have also noted that the process of becoming 'empowered' was a complex and contradictory one, characterised by variable responses in different contexts.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that a significant outcome of the experiences of the Cooperative has been the establishment of a dynamic action learning approach as a modus operandi within the Cooperative. There was a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in members' practices, as well as their understandings of their practices and the situations in which they practise. Through consistent reflective practice, problems were processed on an on-going basis. The Co-op has developed into a group able to take initiative, implement plans and generate income on a sustained basis. Based on the experiences of the first five years of its life, the Co-op shows promise of being sustainable into the future. It has a committed and skilled membership, the requisite organisation and infrastructure, and the regard of the wider community.

Chapter Five will describe how REFLECT was applied and adapted in the village context through the village learning circles.

CHAPTER FIVE – REFLECT CIRCLES IN THE MALEALEA VALLEY

Over a five year period, 14 REFLECT circles (referred to as 'learning circles') were set up in villages scattered throughout the Malealea valley. This chapter presents an in-depth account of how these 'learning circles' were established and developed in the village context and how they used and adapted the principles and methods of the REFLECT approach.

The chapter begins by explaining the connection between the learning circles in the villages and the Malealea Cooperative (discussed in the previous chapter). I explain how Co-op members both initiated and sustained the circles. From then on the chapter is structured chronologically, presenting an overview of the progress of the village learning circles year by year. I describe the process of establishing the circles, what they did and what they achieved, as well as the general issues and challenges encountered each year over the five year period. I discuss factors which were common across the learning circles, highlighting certain critical incidents that shaped the development of the circles at a general level. From this account it is possible to see patterns in how circles developed over the research period.

In Chapter Six, I present four case studies of selected village learning circles. These case studies provide an opportunity to recount stories that reflect a more textured depiction of how participants made use of the REFLECT approach in their respective communities. The comparison between the four villages helps to show some of the complexities and differences in how REFLECT was put into practice.

In the final chapter, I look across the three chapters of research results and re-examine the research questions against the backdrop of the description of how REFLECT was implemented in the different contexts, reflecting also on relevant literature discussed in Chapter Two.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CO-OP AND THE LEARNING CIRCLES

In the previous chapter, I referred to the Cooperative as 'the first REFLECT circle'. But in many ways, this group was more than just 'the first circle'. This was the group that became the 'engine' of community development in the Malealea valley. They reached for a vision that extended beyond what they could learn and achieve within the context of the Cooperative; they also wanted to learn about community development and what this meant practically. This was a commitment that members took seriously, writing it into their constitution at the very beginning of their life as an association. According to this document, a stated aim of the Co-op was "[t]o encourage members to engage in work that will develop communities in Malealea" (see constitution attached in Appendix 1).

Building bridges - the Co-operative connects to the community through REFLECT

Working with members to decide what kind of approach would be appropriate to 'develop communities in Malealea', we decided to try REFLECT in the village communities, as we were doing in the Co-op community. Members agreed that facilitating education and action relevant to their respective communities' needs would meet their objective of 'developing communities'. Members thus committed themselves to setting up other circles as a way of achieving their commitment to community development. We devoted a considerable amount of time to looking at how REFLECT could be applied and used for development in the community context, a very different context from that of the Co-op. Separate training workshops which dealt with community issues were held, learning materials that dealt with issues pertinent to the village context in particular were written, and, over time, the two contexts became quite distinct from one another, although always connected through the Co-op, which remained the engine of the wider community development process.

To establish circles in the community context, Co-op members who opted to become 'facilitators', followed a certain course of action. The facilitator/s (some worked in pairs) first approached the chief and after explaining their intentions to him/her, asked him/her

to call a community meeting (*pitso*)[54]. At this meeting, the facilitators would explain that they wished to initiate a community learning and development action group. They explained that the group would meet twice a week, and that during meetings, participants would identify their needs and then take action to meet those needs. In the process they would also engage in learning activities, including literacy and numeracy, which would help them to take charge of, and cope better with their lives. The facilitators also explained that the group would take up agreed-upon development activities outside of the meeting times.

It was in this way that learning circles were gradually set up in villages throughout the valley. Eighteen members of the Co-op committed themselves to undergoing continuous training and community work, and thus became 'village learning circle facilitators'. Over time, this number was to grow to 21 facilitators. Sixteen of these were women, and five were men. In addition to their Co-op duties, the facilitators were expected to prepare lessons, and meet their groups for four hours a week. They were also expected to support the community development activities which their groups identified. In this way, members of the Co-op supported a continual process of development and change in the Malealea community.

Compensating the facilitators

In the first year, Co-op members were not paid for their community work. Instead, they were supposed to receive a small stipend generated from Co-op monies. 10% of all earnings were to be pooled and then divided amongst members who had worked as facilitators in the community (see Chapter Four). However, this model, which we had thought would be sustainable in the long term, did not work. The Co-operative simply did not generate sufficient funds to skim off 10% to re-invest in the community component of their work. Co-op members were not even taking home enough money to cover their basic expenses – they were clearly not in a position to contribute towards subsidising community development expenses.

[54] This is different from the approach typically followed when REFLECT circles are established. Usually facilitators are elected by communities before being trained, but in the Malealea case, the Co-op, as a community structure, initiated the project and facilitators were chosen by virtue of being Co-op members committed to the principles outlined in their constitution.

However, it became more and more clear that members needed some kind of incentive to keep contributing their time and energies to community development work. So, during the second year, Co-op members were 'paid' in second hand clothes which were donated by tourists visiting the lodge. Although this helped, the supply of clothes was inconsistent, and did not provide sufficient compensation for their efforts. Members wanted cash, and they were beginning to feel aggrieved that the time spent in the community was time that could have been used to earn cash in the Co-op. Commitment to community work began to wane, and although the circles continued, it was clear that we needed to rethink how to sustain them in the longer term.

It was only in the middle of 2002, two years after the REFLECT circles had been set up that I managed to secure funding to pay the facilitators a small cash stipend for their work. Receiving payment made all the difference, and the circles gained momentum in the third, fourth and fifth years.

An overview of the way in which the circles developed is presented below. As in the pervious chapter, this chapter is organised chronologically over a five year period, beginning in June 2000 and ending in July 2005. I begin with a summation of how the circles were established, and then describe how the circles developed over time, outlining both their achievements and challenges.

2000 - JUNE TO DECEMBER

June 2000 saw eighteen members of the Cooperative being trained in the REFLECT approach (see Chapter Four). Although conducted within the context of the Co-op, this initial ten day training introduced members to how REFLECT might be used in both the Co-op and the community. Members learned the basic principles and practices of the approach and explored its possibilities for furthering their work in the Cooperative and in the villages.

Despite being in the early stages of establishing their Cooperative, members wanted to try to simultaneously launch the community aspect of their work. There were however several disadvantages to this choice. First, the Co-op itself had not really consolidated its identity as a group. They were an unknown entity in their target community – they had

not yet established a reputation or credibility with the people with whom they wanted to work. I too was an unknown factor at this point. People didn't know who I was, what my agenda might be, or why I was there. And lastly, we were all still feeling our way in terms of the new approach and its possibilities. I had not previously worked with REFLECT, or this community, and as such tended to be cautious. For these reasons the first few months of our efforts to engage with the community were slow.

We began by deciding which villages members should work in. Selection was for the most part logistical – members wanted to work in villages in which they lived, or which were close to where they lived. Since there were no obvious differences either in social structure or disparity of resources between the villages, or between the facilitators and potential participants, this did not seem to pose a problem[55]. After consulting with the chiefs and the respective communities, members/facilitators began convening their groups. This process was followed in each new circle established.

This mode of establishing REFLECT circles differs from the usual practice advocated in REFLECT. To ensure accountability and ownership of the process, it is generally advised that the community members, and the participants in particular, elect their facilitators democratically, before the facilitators are trained.

> The facilitator should be chosen after a process of community discussion, but the final decision should lie with the participants.
>
> (Archer and Cottingham, 1996:66)

However, because members of the Co-op had initiated the community development idea, they felt a strong sense of ownership of the venture, and wanted to lead the process towards fruition. It was thus by virtue of being Co-op members, committed to community development work and ongoing training, that facilitators were selected. They were trained first, and then went back to the wider community to gain entry and establish the circles. While this approach worked in most villages, there were problems in a few villages where the facilitator was not well-liked by the participants. (This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six).

[55] Archer and Cottingham (1996:66) advise that "the facilitator should be local to the community (from the same village or neighbourhood) in order to promote an internal and sustainable community process … [and i]f possible, the facilitator should be of a similar socio-economic level to the participants to promote understanding and harmony".

Once the groups were convened, participants began by constructing a map of the village in which they lived. This visual representation of their reality was used as a basis for identifying the problems and issues in their lives and in the village. From this map, the participants identified a range of issues, concerns and problems that they experienced. For example, a map might show how few toilets there were, or how far community members had to walk to get water or wood, or how erosion had eaten into farming lands. Discussion might also highlight particular social concerns such as envy or domestic violence or alcoholism. The issues that emerged were to be used as the basis for further discussion, learning and action in the groups.

Translating the identified problems into learning and action was not a straightforward process. Following the training in June, I initially assumed that facilitators would be able to take an issue and explore it with the group according to the guidelines for the process that had been set out in the 'Facilitators' Guide'. This document, written by Teboho Seema and myself, set out the principles and techniques of the REFLECT approach as they were taught and learned in the initial ten day training. It was intended as a comprehensive set of guidelines to direct the practice of facilitators (see Appendix 4 where the English version of the introduction and overview of this 80 page manual is attached). I had expected that facilitators would be able to use the guide to plan the content and activities of their meetings around particular learning objectives in relation to the issues identified by their groups. However, I had misjudged what was entailed in relation to how long it would take to establish the groups, as well as the facilitators' skills[56], the amount of training that they had had, and the amount of support they would need.

The lukewarm response from the community to the circles further compounded the difficulty of getting the circles going. Turn-out at meetings was poor and erratic, and many of the villagers felt they should be paid for attending the circles. They suspected that the facilitators were getting something out of it, and they were apprehensive of being 'used' without their knowledge. The newly trained facilitators, who were *not* being paid,

[56] Education levels of facilitators ranged from one facilitator who had no formal education at all, to one facilitator who had completed high school. However, most of the facilitators had between five and seven years of formal education.

and were still developing confidence in their own abilities, and the approach, were quickly demoralised.

However, to their credit, the facilitators persevered. A few groups initiated actions such as environmental clean-ups, but for the most part, the facilitators focused, in a somewhat uncontextualised manner, on basic literacy skills - perhaps because this was an aspect with which they felt comfortable, most having learned literacy at school. But over time it became increasingly clear that the facilitators were struggling and my expectations had been unrealistic. The groups were taking a long time to become established, and facilitators were having difficulty setting development objectives and managing a learning process in relation to these objectives. PRA tools were not being used and some of the meetings resembled traditional literacy lessons with literacy being taught rote style, rather than contextualized as part of a broader discussion. Indeed, persuading facilitators to change their approach to "teaching" literacy was to be one of the ongoing challenges of training the facilitators over the coming years. In response to a question about who had been using the facilitators' manual which set out participatory interactive guidelines for facilitators, an extract from my field notes reads as follows:

> Not many people seem to be using the facilitators' manual. They seem to be floating along rather than following a direction or a particular focus, and they are not drawing on the text as a guide. They also seem to be falling back on literacy activities and neglecting the practical development issues. Perhaps it's a problem of being able to actually identify the issues in order to decide what might be useful to learn in relation to the issues?
>
> (Field notes, September 2000)

The facilitators' insecurity over the approach also affected participants who were completely unfamiliar with the approach and its techniques. One of the participants who took part in a circle commented retrospectively:

> *Morupeli o ne a sa re hlalosetse lintho ka ho hlaka. Re ne re etsa lintho feela, empa nnete ke hore re ne re sa utloisise seo re neng re se etsa kapa re ne re se etsetsang. Joaloka lisebelisua – morupeli o ne a re joetsa mehato eo re lokelang ho e etsa, empa a sa re hlokomelise hore na hobaneng re sebelisa lisebelisuoa kapa hobaneng ho le bohlokoa ho ngola fatse. Ka hona ha rea ka ra nahana le ho utloisisa bohlokoa ba lisebelisuoa qalong. Joale ba bang ba rona ba ne ba sa tsebe hore na ba ntse ba ngoapelang fatse. Ba bang ba rona ba ne ba nahana hona ke monyetla*

oa ho fumana chelete, mme re lokela ho etsa lintho pele re tle re bone na re tla e fumana joang.

> The facilitator didn't really explain things clearly to us. We just did things, but we didn't really understand what we were doing or why we were doing them. Like the tools [PRA graphics] – the facilitator told us the action steps to take but he didn't make us aware of why we were using the tool or why it was important to write on the ground. He didn't build up people's minds or understanding first. So some of us didn't know why we were scratching on the ground. Some of us thought that this might be an opportunity to get money, and we had to do these things first to see how to get it.
>
> (Participant who took part in one of the first circles established in 2000)

Refresher training was held in September in an effort to bolster the facilitators' skills and efforts, and offer them further support. This training focused on helping facilitators to identify learning objectives in relation to issues and develop plans for their meetings. We also looked at how more participants might be recruited and retained. This was somewhat successful in that by the end of 2000, six circles were established. However, these groups were still tentative and facilitators were still struggling to plan their meetings according to a learning agenda. From the evaluation at the end of the year it was clear that we had to revise the way we were doing things. More training and a lot more support for the facilitators was needed.

Achievements in 2000

The first six months of the project saw 18 facilitators trained in the REFLECT approach. We had a cadre of people committed to setting up circles and implementing REFLECT. This was a significant first step along a road which no one had travelled before.

Challenges in 2000

One of the most significant chllenges was familiarising facilitators with the REFLECT approach, new ideas and techniques. With minimal formal educational background to draw on, facilitators had to stretch themselves in ways not previously experienced. Many of the assumptions I made about how quickly people would learn and apply the approach were questioned in these first six months.

Setting up the village learning circles was also much more difficult than I imagined. With facilitators still uncertain in their new role, it proved unrealistic to expect circles to be set

up within a few months. It would take a more time for facilitators to develop confidence in both themselves and the approach in order to establish the circles. It would also take time for the community to trust the process and get a sense of what might be achieved.

2001

By the beginning of 2001, the Cooperative was more established. The constitution was firmly in place and members were beginning to apply REFLECT as a means of resolving some of their own organizational problems within the Co-op (see Chapter Four). They had also participated in a number of training workshops which integrated REFLECT practices as a focus of general learning (for example the water harvesting workshop and various business training workshops – see Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of these workshops). By the start of 2001, members had thus gained some hands-on experience of using REFLECT.

Assessing literacy practices and skills

Feeling a little more confident, we began 2001 with a decision to review the literacy practices and existing skills of the participants of the various circles. I was concerned that the initial focus in 2000 on teaching basic literacy might contribute further to participants' reluctance to join circles. Before we planned for the year, I wanted to know what literacy and numeracy skills existed, and whether the ways in which literacy was being taught in 2000 was embedded in community development interests. We discussed various tools we might use to help us think about people's knowledge and experience of literacy and literacy practices. The different tools were first tried out with the facilitators.

For example, we experimented with the 'mobility map' as a means of thinking about our own literacy practices and needs. The facilitators drew a mind map of all the places they would typically visit in a week. They then discussed what kinds of literacy and numeracy skills were needed in order to cope in these places. For example, at the clinic they might need to read a poster or the instructions on medication they had been given; or at church, they might read the bible. However, the exercise did not work well. Facilitators got sidetracked into discussion about the activities themselves, rather than the literacy and numeracy skills associated with the activities. We did not get the information about literacy practices that we needed.

Given the facilitators' confusion, I decided not to recommend the use of this tool in the circles. Instead, my fieldworker, Teboho Seema, and I developed a board game (see photo insert below) that was to help participants to reflect on their existing literacy practices, as well as the skills they still wanted to learn. I thought that once we had gathered this baseline data, we would be in a better position to help the participants achieve their needs. The game was played first with the facilitators, who in the process were trained in how to use the game in their villages to collect baseline information.



Literacy board game developed to help facilitators collect baseline information about existing literacy practices

The game was played with a dice on a homemade board. Players moved forwards on a series of squares each marked with one of five different shapes occurring in a random order. The aim of the game was to move from start to finish as quickly as possible while answering as many questions as possible. There were five piles of picture cards – each corresponding to a shape on the board.

When a player landed on a shape, they were required to pick up a card. The five sets of cards depicted different contexts or general domains in which people might use literacy: the social, personal, work and public domains. The fifth card was blank requiring the participant to think of any other situation in which literacy might be used. Each card in each set was different, portraying a specific situation, incident or event where literacy might be used. For example, one of the cards in the social domain pile pictured people attending a community meeting. Another in the personal domain pictured a person

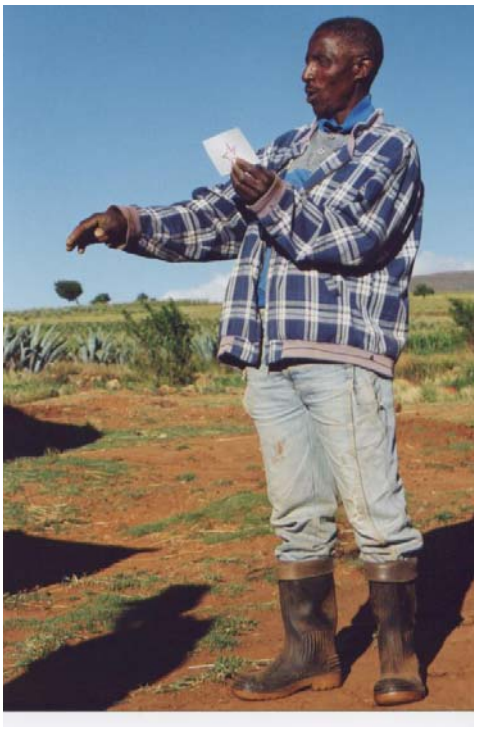
cooking, while another in the work domain pictured people in the fields. (The photo insert shows a card depicting a person sewing in the work domain.) Each player had a counter and moved the number of squares shown on the dice. Whatever symbol a player landed on determined the card picked up - and the literacy domain to be discussed by that player. The player had to discuss the situation depicted (with help from the group if necessary), saying what literacy and numeracy skills might be relevant and also how s/he managed in that situation. Did s/he have the skills or practices needed? If not, how did s/he cope? (A copy of the rules of the game and the guidelines given to facilitators on collecting baseline information as their participants played the game are attached in Appendix 8.)

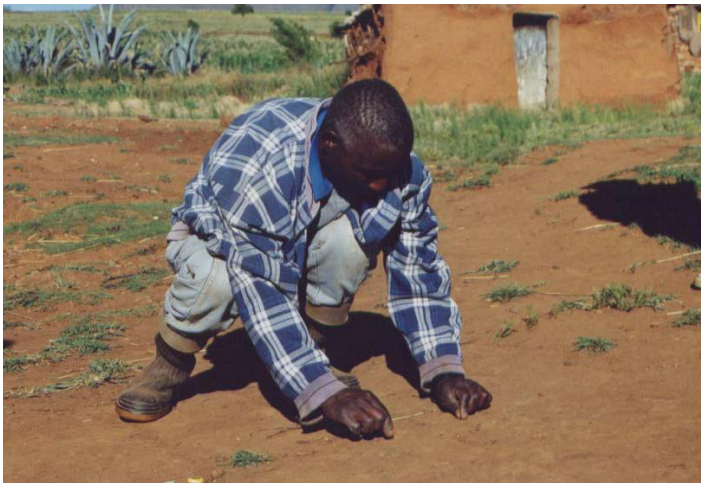


One of the cards from the literacy board game – this one depicts a woman sewing

Playing the game was a literacy activity in itself, developing players' literacy skills as they played. For example, players had to match numbers on the dice to symbols on the board; they had to match symbols on the board to symbols on the cards; and also to decode the images and words on the cards. The participants managed to grasp the game and engaged in rich discussion about how they used - or didn't use literacy in different contexts.

The photos inserts here show a participant discussing the literacy involved in sewing. He explained howhe had developed his own methods to tailor make clothes in spite of having no formal literacy skills. As he couldn't read the numbers on the tape measure, he used a piece of string to measure around a person's waist. He then laid the string on the material to mark it out before cutting. In this way he measured out the cloth he needed.





One of the participants describes how he makes clothes despite not having formal literacy skills.

This discussion helped participants to reflect on and appreciate the diversity of ways in which people coped without formal literacy skills.

The photo insert in this paragraph shows participants in another learning circle playing the board game. Most of the participants in this circle were shepherds of varying ages with little or no formal reading skills. They relied heavily on the pictures drawn in the cards. A lot of discussion about how to 'read' (decode) the pictures happened in this group. Once this was done, they began to describe the different ways they managed large herds of animals despite not having literacy or



Circle participants (mostly shepherds) playing the literacy board game

numeracy skills. Some participants spoke of 'reading' the colours and distinguishing features of the animals such as the shapes of their horns and hooves. Others presented different strategies:

> *Ke bala lipoli ka ho sheba libopeho tsa tsona tse fapaneng. Leha li le tsoeu kaofela, manaka a tsona a fapana, joalo nka hlokomela hore na ke lifeng tse lahlehileng. Hona ho nthusa hore ke lula ke li tseba hore na li kae, hobane ha ke tsebe ho li bala. Hape, ha poli engoe e kena mohlapeng oa ka, ke khona ho e hlokomela ka matsoao a tsebeng a eona. Monga poli engoe le engoe o na le tsela ea letsoao la hae.*



A circle participant playing the board game

I count goats by looking at their different characteristics. Even though they are all white, their horns are different so I can see which ones are missing. This helps me to keep track of them because I can't count them using numbers. Also, if one goat from another flock gets in with my goats I am able to see by the different cuts in its ears. Each goat owner has a different way of marking the goats' ears.

(Shepherd, 6th February 2001)

Ke tseba ho bala ho tloha 1 ho fihla 20, joale ke bala lipoli tsa ka ka lihlopha tsa 20.

I can count from 1 to 20, so I count my goats in groups of 20.

(Shepherd, 6th February 2001)

Ke sebelisa majoe ho bala likhomo. Ke beha lejoe le le leng bakeng sa khomo engoe le engoe ha ke entsa ka lesakeng mme ke etsa bonnete ba hore majoe ao kaofela a bokelletsane nqa e lengoe. Ha li fihla li kena sakeng, ke ntse ke tlosa majoe ka bongoe moo a bokelelitsoeng.

> I use stones to count the cattle. I put one stone down for each animal when I take them out, and make sure that the same stones are in the pile when I bring them home.
>
> (Shepherd, 6th February 2001)

In another circle, a participant who is a farmer and a priest, explained how although he was not able to read and write at all, some people thought he could because of the strategies he used to manage texts.

Ke mamela batho ka hloko ha ba bala bibile mme ke bua litaba tseo motho a li balileng hantle. Ke tseba bibile hape nka hlalosa litaba ha betere ho feta motho a tsebang ho bala le ho ngola. Hona ho etsa hore ho be boima ho batho ho lumela hore ha ke tsebe ho bala le ho ngola.

I listen carefully to people when they read the bible and then I repeat exactly what the person has said. I know the bible and I can explain it better than some people who are able to read and write. This makes it difficult for other people to believe that I can't read or write.

(Sehlooho Makhakhane, 3rd February 2001)

His wife talked about the problems she experienced because of not being able to read and write.

Bothata ba ka bo boholo he hore ha ke khone ho thusa bana ba ka ba kenang sekolo. Ka nako tse ling, ke tlameha ho kopa batho ba bang thuso, mme hangata ha ba lumele kappa ha ba lumela ke ka tsela e sa nepahalang. Ke rata hape ho ka iphumana ke khona ho bala mangolo hobane ka nako engoe ke fumana mangolo a mpolellang ka mokhohlane mme motho ea tlo nthusa ho bala o nka nako e telele pele a fihla ha ke ne ke lokela hore ebe ke se ke ile lefung hang hang.

… My biggest problem is that I am not able to help my children who are attending school. Sometimes I am forced to ask others who sometimes don't agree to help, or they help them in a way that is not right. I would also like to be able to read letters because I sometimes get a letter telling me about a funeral and then the person who should read the letter takes time to come and I should have gone to the funeral immediately.

(Makhotso Makhakhane, 3rd February 2001)

Another participant explained his literacy needs:

Ke rata ho tseba ho bala le ho ngola hore ke tle ke qale khoebo, mme joale ke sa sheba temo feela, e leng bophelo bo thata. Ka nako tse ling ho na le komello mme ke sokela ho fepa lelapa la ka.

I would like to read and write to be able to start a business so that I am not so dependent on farming, which is a difficult life. Sometimes there is drought and then you struggle to feed your family.

(Pitso Mafa, 3rd February 2001)

The data gathered through playing the game helped us understand and appreciate participants' different literacy needs, as well as the ways in which they coped without formal literacy skills. We gained new respect for the range of mechanisms people had developed to cope with the demands of the context. We also gained insight into literacy as means to an end, rather than an end in itself. And we learned that there were several

means to achieving an end. This was a turning point for facilitators who had previously been committed to a notion of literacy as a skill separate from the context and purpose to which that skill was put. And most importantly, we learned that people were ultimately more concerned with their day to day problems, with improving their living conditions, and with taking greater charge of their lives, than they were with developing literacy and numeracy skills per se. This knowledge put us in a better position to plan for the year ahead.

Refocusing on development issues

This did not mean that we saw no need to give attention to developing people's literacy skills. Literacy was to remain a focus of the work, but as a tool in the development process, rather than as a process on its own.

To support the facilitators to refocus on the development process, we enlisted the help of the then-coordinator of REFLECT in southern Africa, Sonja Labuschagne. During her visit, Sonja helped the group to understand how to 'center' people's concerns as a focus of learning and action in the circles. She did this by introducing a visual wheel-like diagram that highlighted various aspects of the REFLECT process:

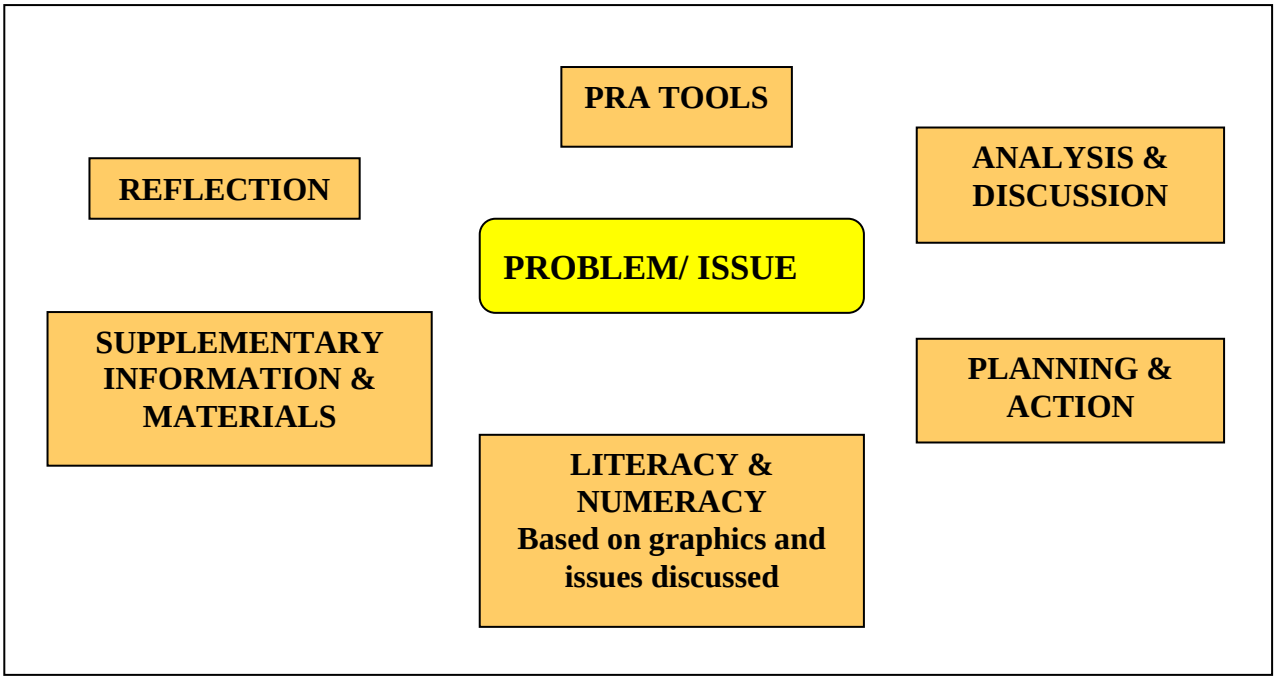


Figure 7: The REFLECT learning and development process (as presented in Chapter Three)

This visual made it much easier and more practical to understand how to proceed with a series of meetings in a logical and coherent manner, while at the same time giving appropriate attention to the fundamental concepts inherent in the process, like development, education and literacy, empowerment, and action.

The workshop also helped facilitators to better understand how to unpack and analyse problems with their groups, and how to tackle an aspect of a problem rather than being overwhelmed by the magnitude of a bigger problem (such as poverty). This helped facilitators to shift their emphasis from literacy and numeracy to solving problems. They began to understand how literacy and numeracy could be integrated as part of a broader development process, rather than fore-grounded as a separate one.

Following the training, we decided to re-launch the circles in the community in order to garner greater community participation. The facilitators wanted to promote a greater awareness of the learning circles and what they could achieve. They created a drama that would be performed at a community meeting (*pitso*) called by the chief. This drama told the story of a proactive community member trying to reclaim an eroded area of land. He built up a stone wall to stop the flow of water and planted trees to stabilize the soil. However, another member of the community tried to sabotage his efforts by uprooting the trees. (This had actually happened, and happened again several times during the course of the project.) In the drama, the matter was taken to the chief (see photo insert) who had to decide how to support development. However, the chief was an alcoholic and dismissed the matter. The facilitators then asked the audience to discuss how they, as a community, could take up development issues in a



Facilitators performing a drama to explain REFLECT to the community

context where development was being marginalised by a number of factors. The learning circles were proposed as a means of taking development forward and the action learning methodology explained.

Following the community drama there was increased interest from the communities and more participants joined the circles. Many of the circles decided to redo the problem mapping exercise so as to give new participants a chance to contribute. The final range of problems identified by participants during the mapping exercises is summarized in the table below:

Poverty	Youth idling
Domestic violence and rape	Envy and jealousy
Drunkenness / alcoholism	Theft
HIV/AIDS	Fighting
Hunger	Erosion
Illness	Shortage of land
Unplanned pregnancy	Lack of development
Unemployment	Drought and water problems
Illiteracy, poor education and school drop outs	Lack of infrastructure (roads, schools, toilets, pumps, clinics, shops …)
Lack of skills	Deforestation (lack of trees and wood)
Lack of knowledge about agriculture	Animal diseases
Poor planning	Politics

Table 11: Issues and problems identified by learning circles in the Malealea valley

An initial list of community concerns had been developed in 2000, but was less comprehensive than the table above. This table was compiled during a facilitators' workshop where facilitators shared and compared the issues and problems identified across their learning circles from the mapping exercise during the second phase of problem identification. The aim of the facilitators' workshop had been to select a few concerns that could form the focus of learning in the circles in the coming months. However, facilitators felt that they needed to take these issues back to the community for prioritizing, as well as further discussion and clarification. Teboho Seema and I then structured a unit that could provide participants with an opportunity to explore these issues in greater detail. Participants were given the list of initial concerns to consider in relation to their own communities. They were asked the following questions:

- What do you think are the most serious issues facing our community?

- Why do you think these issues are the most serious?
- Who is most affected by these issues? (Are there different groups of people who are affected differently?)
- Are there areas in the village which are worse affected than other areas? Which ones and why?
- Can you think of when these problems began to develop? How did this happen?
- What might life in the village be like if these problems did not exist?

Facilitators used a ranking matrix PRA tool to discuss these issues with participants in their groups. Participants arranged the problems across the top of a matrix and down the side. They then compared the problems against each other, discussing which of the two problems being compared was more important for them as a community. In doing so, they were able to rank the different problems in order of importance to their communities.

Literacy and numeracy activities were integrated into problem identification exercises during the map construction, the ranking exercise, and afterwards when facilitators worked with participants on literacy and numeracy exercises related to their discussion. For example, if alcoholism had been identified as a problem, learners might look at how much a person spent on alcohol in a day, a week and a month. Learners could estimate how much a bottle of beer cost, and how many bottles a person might drink in one night. They could then add up the prices of the bottles of beer to find out how much a person spent on beer in a day. These exercises gave facilitators and participants an opportunity to experience how literacy and numeracy might be contextualized as part of discussion about an issue, which helped them to move, slowly, away from traditional literacy teaching methods.

The outcome was that participants felt they had a deeper awareness of the problems facing their communities, and a better vision of the kind of community they wanted to work towards achieving. However, before selecting a particular thematic focus from the identified concerns, facilitators felt they wanted to invest more time in looking at knowledge, skills and attitudes related to both identifying and solving problems. This had proved to be a difficult exercise, and problem solving thus became the next learning focus of the circles. An extract from the introduction to this unit is presented below:

TOPIC: PROBLEM SOLVING

Aims of this unit: To engage participants in activities that will encourage participants to understand what kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes are helpful in identifying and addressing problems in their communities.

By the end of this session, participants should be able:

- To identify problems
- To look at ways of breaking up problems into parts that can be managed more easily.
- To ask questions that will help you to consider different aspects of the problem.
- To explore possible changes in attitude that can help you to address the problems under discussion.

The participants worked through a range of problem scenarios. We looked at different ways of defining a problem, and how the way a problem is defined can influence the solution. For example – if a problem is defined as "I don't have a jersey", a solution is already implied – one needs to get a jersey. However, if the problem is defined as "I'm cold", there might be several solutions, such as building a fire, finding ways to heat the house *or* getting a jersey. We looked at the kinds of questions participants could ask to help them understand the problems. Where did the problem occur, when, how, who was involved, and so on. These questions helped participants to probe problems more deeply, reaching for a more sophisticated analysis of issues. Through these exercises, participants had a chance to begin developing their problem solving skills.

For the remainder of 2001, we chose to keep the focus on general life skills, with a slant towards HIV/AIDS, rather than specific problems identified during the mapping exercises. We wanted to draw attention to the value of people as resources, and the need to develop people and build skills while we tried to develop a more complex understanding of the problems and possible solutions to these problems. We (Teboho Seema and I) designed and wrote several units to enable participants to look at the obstacles that impeded development from a personal perspective, before moving on to look at the social and contextual obstacles to development. We asked participants what might stop them from being where they wanted to be and who they wanted to be. The questions were asked in relation to the image of the ideal community that participants had earlier envisioned. For example, with regards to the problems of unemployment,

unplanned pregnancies, alcoholism, school drop out and poor planning (all identified earlier), we developed the following role play:

ROLE ONE

Your name is Puleng, and you are a young woman of about 17 years of age. Unfortunately your family is very poor and does not have money for school fees. However, you are really keen to finish your schooling so that you can get on in life. You have heard from one of your friends that taxi drivers pay good money if you sleep with them. You do know about the risks of pregnancy and AIDS, but you really need the money and are sure that this will not happen to you. You decide to go for it, but after several months you find that you are pregnant. You have no idea who the father could be.

ROLE TWO:

Your name is Lefu and you are a taxi driver. You are young and you believe that life is for living. You don't want a steady girlfriend because of the hours you work, but you enjoy sex and have money to spend on it. You know that there are plenty of attractive girls who need cash, and you are only too happy to help them out.

ROLE THREE

Your name is Leps, and you are a taxi driver. You are married, with three kids but you only see your family on weekends because of your work. You don't really mind this, as it means you can go to the bar without your wife complaining. You like to end your hard day of work by going to have a few drinks and then going home with one of the attractive young girls who usually hang around the bar looking for money.

Participants volunteered to read the parts and then perform a drama in role. The others watched the role play and then discussed the following questions:

- Do you know people like any of the characters in the role play?
- Do you think Puleng's problems are real?
- How do you think Puleng felt about herself?
- What kind of life skills do you think Puleng has?
- What kind of life skills do you think Puleng is missing?
- What life skills do you think Puleng needs to make different decisions?

Examples given by participants of life skills that Puleng had included a desire to meet her goals, initiative and negotiation skills. Examples of life skills that participants identified as missing and required in order for Puleng to make better decisions included self-respect and self-esteem, decision making skills, understanding the consequences of her behaviour and planning.

Through a range of activities, such as the role play outlines above, participants discussed personal skills they needed to make development happen in their communities. Participants claimed to have developed a greater sense of community and common purpose, as well as a sense of having something to offer. This provided a good foundation from which to explore specific problems identified through the mapping exercise. These were to be taken up early in 2002 when the circles reopened after the Christmas break.

Achievements in 2001

Despite the slow pace of establishing the circles, the circles made progress during 2001. First, more circles were established. We started the year with only six circles, but by the end of the year there were 12. Although they were fragile, they were alive. Secondly, we provided consistent support to the facilitators. Three five-day REFLECT support workshops had been held, as well as a number of one-day workshops.

Photography was introduced as an important focus within these workshops. Facilitators were taught how to use cameras as a means of recording and monitoring their progress. Photography was thus offered to facilitators as an additional mode of recording their activities, another way for them to capture what they thought was important. It was another modality of literacy. This was particularly significant because their reading and writing skills were not strong, and many facilitators felt uncomfortable using this as the primary means of reporting their progress.

They began by learning the basics about a camera, and appreciating the technical aspects of what makes a 'good' and 'bad' photo. They felt excited about learning this new skill, and were clearly pleased to be in charge of the camera rather than being the subject of a photo.



Facilitators learn to use cameras as a means of recording their activities and progress

In later workshops, we discussed and analysed the photos they had taken, looking at what the photos were about, and what they represented. Discussion of the photos enabled facilitators to develop insight into their circles as they reflected on why they had taken the photos they did, what had they captured and what had they not. Analysing the photos provided facilitators with a method of reflection to understand what was happening in their circles.



Facilitators analysing their photos at one of the photo analysis workshops

Taking photographs gave the facilitators a new identity – they started to see themselves, and be seen, as reporters, as chroniclers, as researchers. Taking photographs provided different possibilities for them to engage with the process of keeping records, which they steadily owned more enthusiastically. Having copies of the photos for themselves also intensified facilitators' and participants' sense of ownership and pride in their learning journey. They were participating in collecting information and stories about themselves. They had their own means of recording events which *they* designated significant. They decided what to frame, and when – it wasn't just me gathering data for a PhD. Recording what happened was important for facilitators and participants in their own right and in a medium that was accessible to them.

Facilitators clearly felt more secure in their roles than they had a year before. They claimed they had grown through their efforts during the year. They felt they had taken initiative to launch something that had not been done before and as such they felt more confident, and a sense of pride in themselves and their new skills.

> *Hona joale ke ikutloa ke le sebete ho ema kapela batho ke buisana le bona, e le ntho ke neng ke sa etse pele. Ke qalile hape ho utloisisa le ho nahana ka lintlafatso. Hape ke ithutile ho thusa batho ba bang le ho bala le ngola le ho rarolla mathata hore n nka sebetsa joang le batho ba bang ka lipuisano.*

I now feel more confident to stand in front of people and express myself, which I couldn't do before. I have also started to understand and think more about development. And I have learned how to help other people to read and write and solve problems, and I've learned how to work together with other people through discussions.

(Masefate Lebelo, November 2001)

Ke ithutile tsela ea ho kopanya boithuto le ntlafatso mmoho, ha ke ntse ke ithuta litsebo tsa ho rarolla mathata le tsa bophelo. Ha ke sa fumana mathata a nferekanya haholo hobane ha kea arotse ka likarolo, karolo engoe le engoe e rarolloa joalo joalo ho fihlela bothata bo boholo bo rarolotsoe. Hona hoa nkhothatsa.

I have learned a way to bring learning and development together, while also learning problem solving skills and life skills. I don't find problems so overwhelming anymore because if they are broken into parts, each part can solved until the whole problem is overcome. This is motivating.

(Mamotena Mahao, November 2001)

Ke hlokomela hape hore ha na le tlhokomeliso e kholo sechabeng ea litaba tsa ntlafatso le tlhokohala ka ho karolo ntlafatso. Ke nahana hore re khothalitse sechaba ka bongata ho nka karolo ntlafatsong.

I can see also that there is a greater awareness in the community of development issues and the need to take part in the development process. I think we have inspired wider involvement.

(Teboho Seema, November 2001)

That facilitators had grown was evident when at the end of the year we embarked on an educational excursion through Kwazulu-Natal. In Durban we spent a full day at the National ABE Support Agency (NASA). Three of our facilitators addressed a forum of sophisticated adult educators about their work in the Malealea learning circles (see photo insert). The facilitators then engaged the audience in participatory exercises to demonstrate the principles and tools of the REFLECT approach.



Three of the facilitators addressing the workshop organised by NASA

Thirdly, we had learned more about the communities we were working with. We had gathered baseline information on literacy practices that helped us to understand and appreciate literacy needs and demands in the context. This exercise also gave facilitators an opportunity to shift their perceptions and assumptions regarding literacy.

Fourthly, our efforts had gained a wider profile. We received visits from a number of big organizations which had expressed interest in our work, namely UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), LHDA (Lesotho Highlands Development Association), IZZDVV (Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association) and LANFE (Lesotho Association for Non Formal Education). Each of these organisations had made a visit to Malealea to see the learning circles in action. A short film was also made by the World Library Services depicting the story and activities of one of the learning circles.

Challenges in 2001

Despite the progress made, we were faced with a number of daunting challenges at the end of 2001. At this point, facilitators were still not being paid in cash, although they did receive some compensation in the form of donated clothing. Many of them were walking long distances to their circles. (Not all facilitators were working in the villages where they lived. We expanded not only the number of circles, but also their geographical reach.) Also, preparation of meetings and attending the circles was time consuming and there was a clear tension between participating in income generation activities in the Co-op and the unpaid community development work. For these reasons facilitators' levels of motivation fluctuated, and it became clear that for the facilitators to really give their best, we needed to find a way to remunerate them.

Secondly, I was concerned that facilitators had not yet grasped the REFLECT approach. Some of the facilitators were using the PRA tools in a technicist way, without a deeper understanding of their purpose. They still needed support to match a tool to a particular problem. And the learning units which had been written to guide the facilitators were less effective than I had anticipated, despite providing more structured guidance than was originally the case. I was concerned that some facilitators had a tendency to 'teach' rather than 'facilitate'. Even with these more structured guidelines on how to facilitate, meetings

sometimes turned into 'sermons', rather than sessions where participants were engaged in participatory exercises.

Thirdly, because the focus of learning had been primarily around developing life skills, not all circles had achieved identifiable action points. According to one facilitator,

> *Sehlopha sena ha se etse liketso. Ba ka bolela hore na mathata ke afeng empa ba sa hlokomele karolo eo ba lokelang ho e kuka ho rarolla mathata ana.*
>
> The group is not taking action. They can say what the problems are without seeing their own role in addressing these problems.
>
> (Mamophethe Sibisibi, September 2001)

I worried whether participants were getting enough out of the process, especially given the continued trend of poor attendance. Was this really what they needed? Many participants seemed still not to understand why they were "scratching on the ground" and "playing games" – they had not yet developed a sense of what they were learning and why the circles or the approach taken might be valuable to them.

And finally, there were logistical obstacles to learning. Only a few of the groups had managed to secure an indoor venue for meetings. This meant that in adverse weather conditions, meetings did not take place. And in terms of resources, many of the participants did not have basic stationery, like a book and pencil, as they claimed to be unable to afford these. In some cases I think this was true, but for many of the participants it was also a question of whether they wanted to commit their limited resources to what was still seen as an indulgence of uncertain outcome.

Even after 18 months, the circles were slow in gaining momentum. Commitment to them seemed tenuous, and they seemed so fragile, that I had doubts about their capacity and sustainability as vehicles for change in the long term. How long would people give them? Would it be enough time for them take root within the community? It was with these concerns that we went into 2002.

2002

After the Christmas break, the circles were slow to begin their meetings again. The delay was exacerbated by the fact that facilitators were still not being paid, and since I was not available for the first two months of the year, there was no one motivating the facilitators to meet with their groups. Members focused their energies on their work in the Cooperative. When I arrived at the beginning of March, some of the circles had not yet held a meeting and it seemed that others had collapsed altogether, in spite of having a successful year of experience behind them.

A discussion and strategizing workshop was held with the facilitators to determine a way forward. I was negotiating with a potential funder to pay a small stipend to the facilitators, but if this funding were to come through it would not be until June. We discussed whether the circles should proceed in spite of the uncertainty of funding, and to my surprise there was overwhelming support for them to keep going. I had feared that members/facilitators had lost their initial enthusiasm for the community development aspect of their work. Knowing that they were now aware of how much work facilitating a circle entailed, I probed the reasons as to why they wanted to invest the necessary time and effort, and what they wanted to achieve. The reasons given were very similar to those given at the start of the project. The facilitators felt that encouraging people to work together and take action in the community was a valuable activity, and as members of the Cooperative, they were still committed to development and building skills, including literacy and numeracy skills that could enable members of the wider community to access resources and understand things more clearly. They felt the circles had been constructive and could still provide a means for people to organise themselves and find solutions to their problems. And since they, as facilitators, had come so far themselves, they felt they should not give up so soon.

We therefore planned for the next phase of the project which was to be 18 months to two years. The first three months, April to June 2002, were to be a ‘preparation phase’ where we would collect information about the facilitators’ training needs, and work with the community to generate more support for the circles. Units based on the problems already identified were to guide the circles when they began meeting in earnest with new participants in June during the ‘improved implementation phase’ Those circles that were

still meeting continued doing so, while those which had given up, prepared to begin afresh from June. All circles were to meet regularly from June through to February 2003, whereupon we would have an evaluation of what had been achieved. (Since I was to be away from August 2002 to January 2003, we also discussed plans that needed to be in place to ensure that the circles did not grind to a halt again.)

PREPARATION PHASE: APRIL TO JUNE 2002

Training

For the first training session of 2002, we again invited Sonja Labuschagne to Malealea. She spent a week refreshing facilitators' skills, revising the principles of the approach and consolidating their understanding of REFLECT. We drew on the problems that had already been identified (see Table 11) in order to explore how these might be tackled. We looked at how to write units and plan meetings within a unit. We talked about the importance of establishing clear learning objectives and how we could achieve them.

We also decided to train a new group of facilitators since seven of the original facilitators trained in 2000 had dropped out[57]. More careful selection of facilitators was made against revised criteria. They were still to be members of the Co-op (given that they had motivated this initiative and written it into their constitution), but they were also to have some literacy skills and a commitment to community work. Of the ten new people trained, only six ended up meeting the criteria to work as facilitators.

Harnessing community support

Facilitators decided to perform community dramas as they had done in 2001. This time the dramas were not only performed at one general *pitso* (community meeting), but were taken round to villages and performed several times to inspire interest and participation in the circles. The plot of the drama was similar to the original one, posing questions about how development should be taken forward by the community.

[57] Facilitators dropped out for a variety of reasons. Three found jobs outside of Malealea, one was ill; one was too busy with other activities in Malealea, one felt he did not want to work without being paid and one was the facilitator who had no formal schooling – he simply could not cope.

In order to organise the performances, the facilitators elected a delegation to go around to the chiefs, introducing themselves, explaining what REFLECT was about and what the goals and objectives of the circles were, and requesting the chief to call a community meeting to explain to the community. Of course, the facilitators were now more informed, more confident of what they were doing and they also had some models of success to refer to, and so were altogether in a better position to make a more convincing case for setting up circles than they were in 2000. The fact that they approached the chief as a delegation, rather than as individuals or pairs, also lent them more authority. Notices went out to the headmen of villages and adverts for the drama were put up in shops around the villages encouraging people to attend the performance and join the circles.

Another way in which the community was invited to join the learning circles was through skills training workshops held at the Co-op. Community members who were either members of previous circles, or prospective members of new circles, were invited to get to know the Co-op members at these workshops. They were also urged to take the learning back to their communities. If community members were then able to produce items for sale, the Co-op offered the community a place to sell their wares. Some examples of workshops attended include the workshop on recycling cans to make fire rings and furniture (see photo inserts below and Chapter Four where this was discussed in more detail).



Members with their finished fire rings



Members being shown how to use the fire rings. (Note that literacy was integrated into this learning with members being given a booklet including information on how to use the ring, recipes and other information related to deforestation.)

Another workshop focused on how people could save fuel by using an insulated cooking box, and another on making fuel bricks out of recycled cardboard boxes (see photo inserts).



Learning to use an insulated cooking method



Making a fire brick

Another workshop taught members how to dry fruits and vegetables so that they could be stored (see photo insert).



Preserving fruit and vegetables using a drying rack

Although these workshops were not run using the REFLECT approach, they nevertheless met the aim of inspiring greater community interest in the work in which the Co-op was engaged. And they attested to the Co-op's stated commitment to community development through shared knowledge. These workshops also helped to prepare the community for work to be done in the circles in that they reinforced the focus on development-orientated learning, and provided a hook for further learning and action in the circles. My field notes reflecting on the workshop read:

> The workshops went well, although I would have liked to see the *education* component of the workshop less rushed and more integrated into the activities. For example, the link between deforestation, erosion and preserving fuel wasn't really made strongly enough. Still, we can pick up on these issues in the circles as we build units around the issues. There is a lot we can do with literacy and numeracy around recipes for cooking using the fire ring.
>
> (Field notes, 24th April 2002)

After the workshops, members from the community who had participated in the can workshop continued to work making can products at the Co-op two mornings a week for several months. This helped to further strengthen relationships and cultivate a climate conducive to strengthening the role that Co-op members could play in the community learning circles.

Those circles that were active (at this stage, the number of active circles had declined to four) also picked up momentum with our renewed efforts to harness community participation. Although they still had just a few participants (the numbers ranged from four to ten participants in a circle), there were now identifiable actions and learning taking place. One circle was digging pit latrines, another was digging holes to dispose of ablution water, another reclaiming an eroded donga (gulley) and another trying to fix the water supply to the village.

Unit writing

Six units were written during the 'preparatory phase' of 2002. An *introductory unit* was rewritten for those groups that would start afresh. (See Appendix 9 for a series of lessons from the the revised introductory unit.) This unit helped facilitators explain the REFLECT approach and collect some baseline information about participants. The *life skills unit* was rewritten for more recently established groups to help them gain some of the skills which other groups had reportedly found useful. Themes for other units were extracted from issues that were identified in the problem maps. Themes included *deforestation*, *land degradation*, *land holding size*, and *income and expenditure*.

Initially, we tried to hold unit writing workshops with all the facilitators to get their input and develop their skills in this area. However, these workshops did not go well. Facilitators felt confused and frustrated and progress was painfully slow. After two weeks of trying, we decided the workshop costs (in terms of resources, and members taking time out of Co-op activities) were not worth it. The group recommended that Moso Ranoosi, Teboho Seema and I should develop these units, and involve facilitators at a later stage.

IMPROVED IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: JUNE 2002 – DECEMBER 2003

Funding was secured to pay facilitators from the beginning of June, so from this time onwards, facilitators received cash rather than clothes for their efforts. Circles were re-launched with facilitators being paid per meeting. But linked to this payment, more structured demands were made of them. They were expected to keep regular records of their preparations for each meeting, as well as a record of what happened in the meeting, and outside of the meeting in terms of actions taken by the group. With new units written to help guide facilitators, we felt optimistic about the road ahead.

Moso Ranoosi was employed in a formal position as a field worker who would monitor the implementation and support facilitators in the field[58]. Moso played a vital role in sustaining the circles over the following six months. In fact, during this time, he was solely responsible for all coordination and management aspects of the project since I was out of the country altogether[59]. He introduced monthly training workshops where he worked with the facilitators through each of the units we had written (see above) to guide the process while I was away. He helped the facilitators to prepare their sessions and he monitored their records. He supported them in the field and coordinated a variety of activities which the circles undertook. He also sent me monthly reports of what took place in the circles. The next section describes these six months, July 2002 to January 2003, which in many ways defined the future direction of the project.

During July, circles were re-established and consolidated. New participants were introduced to the REFLECT approach through the introductory unit, which also served to refresh the minds of those participants who had been part of the original circles established in 2000 and 2001.

By the end of August, there were nine circles in operation again, with increased attendance at most of the circles. (Poor attendance of circles had been a major obstacle in the previous years.) One of these circles was a new one, established in Sekhutlong village,

[58] Teboho Seema had become ill, and was no longer able to work in the project. He passed away on the 1st of July 2003.
[59] I spent five months, from August 2002 – January 2003, as a visiting scholar at the University of Georgia in the USA.

in which we had not previously worked. Moso's August report outlines this progress as follows:

> There are nine existing learning circles at the moment. These are Makhoseng, Tsoeunyane, Ramotsekhoane, Moreneng, Tseanku, Makhetheng, Letlapeng, Tsinyane and Sekhutlong which has just started. Facilitators are still attending their learning circle meetings well. Participants' attendance differs from one circle to another, but there has never been a learning circle with less than five participants …. Most of the L/Cs have eight to ten on bad meeting days. Sekhutlong has 21 participants and Makhoseng when it's a bad day has 15 people. Sometimes there used to be 25 participants at Mokhoseng's meeting. So participants' attendance is still good up to now except for Moreneng, Tseanku and Makhetheng where there used to be as few as five participants, but this does no happen too often.
>
> (Field worker's report, August 2002)

Circles began by working through the unit on *deforestation*, and as far as possible facilitators tried to keep the learning themes and rate of progress consistent across the different circles. This was difficult given that the more recently established groups were slower at progressing through the introductory and life skills units. Moso's report conveys his effort to keep learning coordinated across the groups:

> Most of the leaning circles are in Lesson Four and Five of the deforestation unit. … I visited six learning circles before the week of the monthly workshop when they were doing lesson three of this unit. Some circles have still not completed the life skills unit, but I asked them to come back to this unit later so that we can all continue with the deforestation and other units in the next months.
>
> (Field worker's report, August 2002)

At the next monthly workshop in September, Moso returned to the aspects of the introductory unit to help guide facilitators through a process of collecting more baseline information about their participants. (Now that the circles were more firmly established it was more feasible to do this.) He also introduced the facilitators to the next unit which helped them to understand how they could address the theme of *land degradation* with their groups. However, some of the groups took longer to work through units than others, which posed a problem for coordinating workshops.

In spite of these challenges, Moso's report of activities in September conveys a sense of optimism, progress and achievement:

> The learning circles are all lively. There are now ten existing circles, one more than last month. These are Tsoeunyane, Sekhutloong, Moreneng, Makhoseng, Tamotsekhoane, Tseanku, Makhomalong, Makhetheng, Letlapeng and Tsinyane, with 20 facilitators active. Sukhutlong now has 31 people in it while Makhomalong has ten people. All learning circles are through with lesson three of the deforestation unit and there are actions taken by all learning circles. Most of the learning circles are already doing the unit on land degradation except for the two new learning circles which are still working on some of the introductory things they need to do.
>
> But the circles are really going now. People have dug holes for planting trees everywhere. They've all ordered forestry trees from Qaba site [the government tree nursery] where they are available. The only problem is transport to bring them to people's villages. There is a kind of delay from the government officers because they said that their lorry needs to be repaired so that they can take the trees to all the different villages in Malealea. Every one of the participants from the learning circles need at least 100 trees because they have dug 100 holes each at their homes.
>
> Despite the transport problems, some learning circles are still going ahead, e.g. Tsinyane and Makhetheng contributed money and hired a van to carry their trees from Qaba site to their villages. Each of these learning circles contributed M30.00 and total of M60.00 for hiring a van. They brought 900 trees. Makhetheng took 300 trees, while Tsinyane took 600 trees. Participants of Tsinyane Learning Circle have again contributed M3.20 each for hiring another van for 800 trees. Their total contribution is M60.00. Fusi and one participant are going to get the trees on 17/09/02. I think this is a good idea not to wait for the government lorry but to do something. But it is also a problem because not everybody in any other learning circles can afford this.
>
> (Field worker's report, September 2002)

October, November and December saw the learning circles continuing to work on land related issues. The monthly workshop in October prepared facilitators to look at land holding sizes, and how changes in land holding sizes over the last decade impacted on people's lives and livelihoods. Moso's report reads:

> I introduced a unit of land holding size to facilitators. I divided them up into two groups of ten people each. Each group chose a village of which they want to show its situation ten years ago and now. They considered population, land sizes, vegetations, animals, and services. The two different maps were drawn in each group and people had a chance to look at what has changed over time and they discussed the effects of these changes on their lives. They will do this unit with their groups in the next month.
>
> (Field worker's report, October 2002)

The issues of deforestation and erosion were again highlighted as circles compared what their communities used to look like and what they looked like currently. Most of the circles were inspired to continue with their tree planting initiatives over the last three

months of the year, particularly given that these last months brought with them the much needed rain that would keep their trees alive. Participants were either engaged in raising the money needed to transport trees to Malealea, or planting them when they arrived. The circles closed for the long Christmas break around mid-December.

Monies needed were raised by the circles in different ways. In some circles, such as Tsinyane, participants agreed to contribute a certain amount of money each. However, in most circles participants could not afford to do this, and so raised money through hosting 'stokvels'[60]. An agreement was made amongst the circles to support each other in this activity. Circles took turns to brew beer and prepare food that was then sold to members from other circles, as well as the wider community. A container of beer was sold for about 50c (the equivalent of a US dime), and a plate of food for a few rand (about US$0.50). The profits made were put towards hiring a van or starting a small business activity such as baking homemade bread. Certain circles also held concerts to raise money. At these events, the choir would sing a requested song for cash. If someone else wished to have the song changed, they could do so by buying the next song.

Achievements in 2002

There were a number of changes and achievements on 2002. Most significantly, this was the year that saw facilitators being paid in cash for the first time. I had initially resisted paying people in cash because I had assumed that for the project to be sustainable, it had to be resourced totally by the community themselves. (Hence we had tried the scheme of taking 10% of the profits from the Co-op to subsidise the community development aspect of the work.) However, this was not successful and it became obvious that for the project to continue, facilitators needed to be paid for the work they were doing. And when introduced, the cash payment made a significant difference. The facilitators took their work more seriously, becoming more 'professional' in their approach, which in turn had an impact on how the project progressed. This progress could be seen in a number of ways:

First, not only did the number of circles increase, but their capacity did as well. The 12 fragile circles at the end of 2001 had diminished to four at the beginning of 2002. But by

the end of the year, we had 11 circles going again, and this time the circles were stronger. They had a sense of purpose and direction, and there was a growing sense of ownership of the process and the circles by participants themselves. There was a feeling of 'this is for us', rather than 'this is for someone else in the hope that we will eventually get something out of it'. Members of the circles were becoming more invested in taking action that they themselves had chosen. This could be seen for example in the way that members mobilized their own resources to secure money to transport trees from the forestry division to their villages. Rather than waiting for the government or an outsider to provide, they directed the action. Over 3000 trees had been planted by the end of 2002, with more trees on order and holes dug ready for their planting. Some circles had also begun to collect money for small business initiatives. For example, Tsinyane village circle had started baking bread to sell to passers by. They also started making fire rings out of tin cans to use themselves and sell to others in the village. (This initiative was led by those participants who had learned how to do this in the skills training workshop held at the Co-op in the first part of 2002.)

Secondly, learning had become more of a focus in the circles. The development of units which provided more support to facilitators, as well as the additional training in the first half of the year, helped facilitators to better understand the approach and gain confidence with regard to their role of facilitating learning. Land related concerns formed the focal learning theme, with participants looking at how erosion, deforestation, and the changes in land holding sizes contributed to the overall degradation of land and the impact this had on their livelihoods. Action focusing on planting trees to reforest the area, and making fire rings to preserve fuel, was relevant to this learning.

Thirdly, the circles were beginning to gain a sense of identity as community structures that could work together to achieve things collaboratively. For example, it was through collaborative efforts of supporting one another's stokvels and concerts that circles were able to raise funds needed to hire a van to transport trees to their villages. And, villages that were closer together pooled their money to cover these costs.

[60] As pointed out in Chapter Four, a 'stokvel' is a fundraising event whereby a group of people sell beer and plates of food at a profit.

> Sekhutlong ordered 1500 trees and planned a collective effort with Makhoseng and Ramotsekhoane learning circles to contribute money to hire a lorry for transporting their trees. The owner of the lorry charged them M150.00 return, from Qaba site to Malealea. So, participants have put their money together but they are still waiting for rain to come so that they can plant their trees when its wet.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, September 2002)

Circles had begun to realise the possibilities of collective action through organizing themselves as a network.

And lastly, the facilitators, acting on behalf of the circles, had begun to make contacts and establish relationships with structures and organisations outside of Malealea. For example, they had forged a link with the Forestry Division to get trees free of charge. The Co-op, on behalf of the learning circles, also pursued a relationship with the Lesotho Association of non-Formal Education (LANFE). Extracts from Moso's reports illustrate how this happened:

> Mamahlape met a person who works at LANFE in Maseru. She told Mamahlape about loans or donations which are given to members of LANFE. Co-op members agreed that we should write a letter to LANFE to ask them to come and see our learning circles' progress and also to consolidate our friendship with them. And if possible to ask for money aid from them for our learning circles. … A letter was written to LANFE on 19/08/02, whereby they were asked to come and see our learning circles and to consolidate our friendship.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, August 2002)

> On the 11th of September, I [Moso] went to Maseru to the office of LANFE with a letter from the Co-op, whereby LANFE director was asked to allow our Co-op to become their members. LANFE officers allowed us to be their member and we paid M50.00 for registration. I was given a LANFE constitution, an information sheet about LANFE and a sheet on behavioural expectations from a LANFE member. Then the Co-op became a consolidated member of LANFE. LANFE promised to come to Malealea next week on the 16th of September.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, September 2002)

Challenges in 2002

The challenges faced at the end of 2002 looked quite different to those we had faced a year before. We were no longer so apprehensive about the viability and durability of the circles – these had gathered a promising momentum of their own. Concerns at the end of 2002 related rather to the facilitators who were still struggling in a number of areas.

First, despite having more structured written learning units and monthly training sessions that helped them to use these units, facilitators still needed support to plan and prepare for meetings with their groups.

> …Some facilitators said they don't know how to make good preparation, as they don't know how to write lesson plans from the units in short in their preparation books. But I am already dealing with that by helping them as individuals to plan neatly.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, August 2002)

No only did facilitators find the planning of meetings difficult, they also struggled to implement some of the suggested learning activities set out in the units.

> I made most of the facilitators repeat a lesson three of the deforestation unit, more especially the planning matrix as it was not completed at first.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, September 2002)

And they struggled to keep records that would help them monitor their participants' progress over time.

> …The other thing, facilitators files on participants progress [baseline and continuing data] are ready, but facilitators are still reluctant to fill in these files regularly. I am trying my best to help them.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, October 2002)

These struggles were seemingly related to facilitators' own difficulties with tasks requiring particular literacy and numeracy skills. Only five of the 20 facilitators had gone beyond primary school, and none of them had completed high school. As such, they had limited experience and confidence to engage with literacy based tasks, and were somewhat reluctant to do so. Moso's report describes the facilitators' disinclination to read materials in preparation for the monthly workshop:

> Workshop progress: we started with a unit of information about participants. In fact, I gave the facilitators this unit and the unit of land degradation before hand. But people told me they didn't have time to read through the two units when I asked them to give a feedback, but I think maybe it is because they don't like reading at home.
>
> (Fieldworker's report, August 2002)

Secondly, although facilitators were now being paid, there remained a tension between balancing the work demands of their work in the Cooperative with the demands of their work as facilitators in the community. This tension is illustrated in the following report of discussion at one of the Monday Meetings:

> Some facilitators (M'e Makomiti) were complaining about others who were preparing their circle lesson plan during the Handicraft work. They agreed that nobody is allowed to prepare on that time people can only do their lesson plans during lunch and after work. They were also complaining about time that other facilitators took for learning circles whereby others are taking half a day away from the handicraft and arriving around lunch time. Also on these two days a week most of the members go for circles and this affects the production of the Handicraft especially dolls production.
>
> (Teboho Seema's report, August 2002)

And thirdly, a logistical challenge presented itself in the form of how to coordinate learning with action points that were starting to become context specific in different circles. For example, the Tsinyane circle, which had started making bread and fire rings for sale, were eager to learn more about business, while some of the other groups were still trying to plant trees and learn about deforestation, while yet another group which was building toilets were concerned with issues related to health and sanitation, an issue on which we had not yet written a unit. Given that circles were proceeding at different paces, and facilitators had varying support needs, coordinating and providing appropriate assistance to the different groups and facilitators was a huge challenge, especially since Moso was at this stage still coping alone in my absence.

2003

The learning circles started up again in mid-January after a month's break. Moso held a facilitators' workshop in which he introduced facilitators to a unit on income and expenditure. This unit aimed to provide the participants with an overview of how to work with and manage money. Since many of the circles had by now begun, or made plans to begin, collecting money for income generating projects, the timing was right.

I returned to South Africa and the project at the beginning of February 2003 and was delighted to find a number of activities underway in both the village circles, and amongst

the facilitators themselves who were fast developing a sense of their own identity as a group.

Committees formed

The facilitators had formed a 'facilitators' committee' which met regularly to discuss circle issues and coordinate actions amongst the circles. The committee encouraged facilitators to interact and visit one another's circles. They also supported facilitators in a range of ways. For example, if a chief was obstinate and opposed a circle's planned actions, a delegation from the committee would visit the chief and negotiate on behalf of that circle, finding out what the obstruction was and why planned actions were being frustrated. In one village, the circle wanted to start a communal garden but the chief would not give them land. After the facilitators' committee had met with the chief, land was granted and a better relationship with the chief was established.

Each circle too had formed its own committee. These committees facilitated the general activities of the circle. For example, where funds were raised, a treasurer would manage these funds. Other committee members would speak to the chief or write letters and keep records. This development shifted the overall responsibility for the circle and its advancement away from the facilitator to the participants themselves. It also shifted the balance of power in the groups, giving participants access to power in different ways.

An association between the various circle committees was also formed to coordinate wider activities amongst circles and liaise with the facilitators' committee. There were thus the beginnings of some new opportunities through cross-fertilization between different villages in the valley. In an interview with Moso at the beginning of February 2003, he noted:

> …the learning circles have brought people together and people from various villages are now discussing issues. It's a way of building strong relationships between villages, making friends and even resolving conflicts.
>
> (Moso, 5th February 2003)

Reviewing progress, finding a way forward

By February 2003, the facilitators had made good progress in terms of working through the units that had been developed in mid-2002. The only unit that Moso had not covered with facilitators during the monthly workshops was the revised life skills unit.

However, there were still concerns about the way in which facilitators were using the units. I was uncertain how the learning content of the units was being related to real life issues. Moso shared this concern:

> Some facilitators are doing units but not linking their actions to the units. They are just going through the unit, but then doing something else when it comes to action. They are not thinking critically about suggestions for action. I think the facilitators need more guidance with the critical skills.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, 5th February 2003)

Critical thinking skills were the most difficult to nurture, particularly the Freirean notion of critical thinking as an understanding of the personal, social and structural dimensions of a situation. Facilitators and circle members tended to act without considering the deeper social implications of the problem and their actions.

For example, organizing 'stokvels' was a common approach to generating income for circle activities. It was through stokvels that circles raised the money to hire a van to bring in trees for planting. But in spite of an acute awareness of alcoholism as a problem besieging development in the community, there was no deeper analysis around the contradictions of encouraging people to use limited resources to buy alcohol, even if the profits were to go towards development activities. The photo insert shows community members in Ha Ramotsekhoane village making merry at a stokvel in February 2003.



Community members at a stokvel organised by the Ha Ramotsekhone circle

Also, in some cases the focus on income generation overtook members' focus on *why* they were raising the money. For example, members sometimes got so involved in making baskets or drying peaches, or organizing stokvels, activities which could take up to a month to organise and implement, that they lost sight of the objective or activity for which they were fundraising.

We decided to work with the facilitators to review and reflect on the learning and actions which had taken place over the preceding six months before making new short term and long term plans. What lessons had we learned and what obstacles still remained? We set a date for a reflection and planning workshop to take place at end of February 2003. At this workshop, each circle reported on their progress, and thought about their goals for the year ahead.

The facilitators' reports were positive. Although the circles were at different points in terms of their progress through the units, facilitators felt that the circles had gained a profile, and were becoming credible in the community as structures in their own right.

> *Batho ba metseng ba hlokometse bo teng ba lihlopha ba bile ba bua ka tseo lihlopha li li etsang. Hona ho khothatsa batho ba metse e meng ho etsa lintho tse tsoanang. Hona joale ka ha batho ba utloa litaba tsa lihlopha ho baithuti, eseng ho batsamaisi, ba tsepa lihlopha haholo. Pele ba ne ba nahana hore batsamaisi ba shebile menyetla ea bona le lipuisano tsa bona. Empa hona joale, ba fumana litaba ho tsoa ho baithuti, mme ba khotetse haholo.*
>
> People from the villages are aware of the learning circles and are talking about what they are doing. This also motivates people in the other villages to do more too. Now that people are hearing it from the participants rather than the facilitators they trust it more. Before they thought that the facilitators had their own interests and agenda, but now that they are getting it from the participants themselves, they are more convinced.
>
> (Mapulane Mphoroane, February 2003)

They felt participants were committed to the process and were making headway with regards to achieving goals. They were excited about their practical achievements and wanted to continue with the actions in which they were currently engaged – raising money for trees, and building meeting places, small income generation activities, and so on.

But in terms of achieving the learning objectives, facilitators confirmed that they felt less confident of their progress. Many of them felt they had become more involved in the

action points, and had not done justice to the 'learning' aspects of the units. When I probed further, it became clear that they were not sure what being 'analytical' or 'critical' really meant; they were uncertain whether participants were 'analysing' issues, or 'discussing' them, or what the difference between these was. This lack of clarity echoed Moso's observations that facilitators needed support to develop critical skills. Facilitators were also struggling with literacy and numeracy. They were finding it difficult to cope with the varied levels of ability in their groups, which impacted on other learning focused activities, like reading supplementary materials. There was some resistance from participants who wanted to get on with action and not 'waste time' on literacy and numeracy activities. The facilitators requested more time to continue with learning units related to land issues, deforestation and income generation. They felt that their action points were constructive and with more effort could be related to a more fore grounded learning agenda. They requested more time and more assistance to focus on the learning objectives of the units. The facilitators, Moso and I agreed that circles should continue with their plans while focusing more explicitly on the learning agenda of the existing units until June when we would reassess. Moso and I would support the facilitators in the field and be available before meetings to help them relate their actions to learning objectives.

Focusing on critical skills

I was, however, concerned about *how* to help the facilitators focus on the learning and critical components of the process. I was troubled by Moso's observation that the circles were pursuing action without paying sufficient attention to critical reflection, yet I was unsure of exactly how these skills could be further developed. How could we encourage the facilitators to cultivate a more critical perspective when they were clearly struggling with basic skills? How could critical skills be made more apparent and tangible? I saw the requested period of review as an opportunity, not only for facilitators to consolidate the learning objectives of units already covered, but also as a hiatus in which we could focus more particularly on strengthening facilitators' critical skills.

Gender as a lens for focusing a critical perspective

An area we had not yet explored was that of gender, and in many ways this issue seemed to offer an excellent possibility for developing and sharpening analytical and critical

skills. This was an issue heavy with opportunities for challenging opinions, assumptions and firmly held beliefs.

However, gender had not been directly raised by participants during the problem mapping exercise or during discussions in circles. Yet indirectly, it shaped many of the issues that had been raised, and it influenced how circle plans were implemented (Most of the facilitators and participants were women which shaped who took responsibility for what, when and how). And although some might argue that the focus on gender was imposed in that the explicit concerns about gender were mine, rather than those of the participants and facilitators[61], I felt justified introducing a unit on gender because the REFLECT approach positions gender as an integral part of both understanding and transforming the ways in which oppression operates and power is distributed.

> … [G]ender analysis should be an implicit part of the REFLECT process. Facilitators need to gain an understanding of gender and how they would apply it in their work with REFLECT. …[A] gender focus is now a central aim of REFLECT and any organisation implementing REFLECT that overlooks gender is not doing REFLECT.
>
> (Metcalf and Gomez, 1998: 96-7)

Not only should the facilitators have focused on gender as an implicit part of the REFLECT process, but this focus also provided a good context for facilitators and participants to deepen their analytical skills as they engaged more critically with structural issues related to social change.

> A gender focus implies the redistribution of social powers in order to create a more democratic distribution of power. To work with a gender focus implies deconstructing: to develop a critical vision, to distance ourselves from our culture, our values, our ideas and concepts, our ways of thinking and feeling in order to construct a new culture based on relations of equality and equity between men and women.
>
> (Metcalf and Gomez, 1998: 95)

So, in addition to supporting facilitators to focus on their learning objectives, Moso and I wrote a unit focusing on gender issues. This was used in parallel with other units which facilitators were 'revising' with their groups. While writing the unit, we were particularly

[61] Chapter Seven examines how constantly striving to meet learners' needs as defined by them, can in fact reinforce limited and distorted patterns of thinking.

mindful of how we could encourage facilitators and participants to sharpen their critical skills.

The unit activities required participants to examine the different kinds of work done by men and women, the ways in which workloads were distributed between men and women, and the possible reasons for this. How were men and women's lives shaped through the activities in which they engaged? Facilitators and participants were urged to examine and question their assumptions and common sense notions of why certain kinds of work were 'women's work', while others were seen as 'men's work'. They were asked to think about how their lives were shaped through the types of activities in which they engaged. For example, men saw it as their 'work' to participate in community meetings and public gatherings where important decisions were made. Why was this activity not considered to be appropriate work for women? Participants were encouraged to think about the kind of impact this had on women, and how their lives were affected by not being involved in decision making processes.

The regular monthly training workshop gave facilitators an opportunity to work through the unit experientially before introducing it to their groups. Heated debate was generated as facilitators considered questions that encouraged them to be critical by distancing themselves from the norms embedded in their culture, traditions, values, ideas, and ways of thinking. These debates enabled facilitators to gain fresh insight into what it might mean to 'think critically' about an issue. They were better prepared to introduce the unit to their circles and to encourage participants to be more critical. However, strengthening and sustaining these skills was to remain a challenge throughout the life of the project.

By the end of July, most of the circles had completed the gender unit, and some interesting discussions and shifts had taken place in circles. For example, participants claimed to have rethought some of their assumptions and in some instances even taken action to challenge normative expectations and behaviours related to gender.

> *Ke se ke kha metsi hona joale, ho ena ho lebella hore ka linako tsohle mosali oa ka o tla etsa sena. Ka nako tse ling, ha a tsamaile kapa a na le mosebetsi o mongata, kea pompong. Mme o tla fasa liphoofolo ha ke le sieo… ke ne ke nahana hore ke tlholeho hore basali le banna ba etsa mosebetsi e sa tsoaneng, banna ka masakeng, basali ka matlong, empa hona joale kea bona hore e ka ba hantle ho arolelana mesebetsi ena koafela.*

> I go and draw water now, instead of always expecting my wife to do this. Sometimes when she is away or busy, I go to the pump. And she will tether the animals if I am not around. …I used to think it was just natural for women and men to do certain kinds of work, men in the kraal and women in the house, but now I see it can make sense to share these tasks.
>
> (Sekhutlong learning circle participant)

Moving ahead with generating income

Having consolidated their learning related to a range of issues from environmental issues (erosion and deforestation) to social issues (land holding size, gender, and so on), participants were becoming progressively more confident of their capabilities, and increasingly sure of what they could achieve together as a group. Their energies shifted back into thinking about how they might work cooperatively to generate income, and circles started planning how they could implement their business ideas.

By September 2003, most of the circles were in various stages of implementing income-generation projects. They requested more units focused on business skills, now wanting to strengthen their skills in this area. To meet these needs, Moso and I developed additional units to help participants think through issues related to their businesses. As they worked through these units, they were guided to consider the merits and demerits of a range of business ideas, and what makes for a successful business. Relevant literacy and numeracy skills were integrated into the units accordingly, and we consolidated earlier learning related to income and expenditure. Drawing on our experiences in the Cooperative, we developed units to support participants to understand concepts like 'the market', 'quality' and the importance of setting and meeting production targets. Facilitators too were able to draw on their Co-op experiences as they worked through these units with village circle participants. Some of the circles started to produce craft items that were sold through the Handicraft market outlet, benefiting the learning circle participants who made the items, as well as the Cooperative that profited from the small mark-up on these items. There was a good feeling of synchronicity between the Co-op and the village learning circles at this point.

HIV/AIDS hits home

However, around this time, something happened to change the flow of activities in both the Cooperative and the circles. At the beginning of July, we lost an active and central

member of the Cooperative, also a facilitator, to AIDS[62]. The close proximity of this issue to people's lives finally brought it to the fore as a central concern that impacted on everyone in a direct and real way. The facilitators and participants decided that they needed to pursue this issue in both the Cooperative, and in the circles, with much greater urgency and seriousness.

A new unit was developed by Moso and me to help the facilitators address the issue of HIV/AIDS more openly in both the Co-op and in village circles. In addition to encouraging participants to develop a better understanding of HIV/AIDS, the unit also encouraged participants to test for the HI virus, and support those who tested positive. Facilitators decided that they should all test first, as a way of knowing what they were encouraging their participants to go through. A testing day was scheduled at the local clinic. Counsellors from Mafeteng Hospital came to Malealea and facilitators as well as other members of the Cooperative were invited to test (see Chapter Four). However, one of the counsellors scared people off by telling a story of a woman who had "gone mad" after hearing of her positive status. This exacerbated people's fear of the disease and reinforced negative perceptions, and as a result, only five facilitators actually tested on the day. However, we continued to encourage people to go for tests in Mafeteng, and over the coming two months another three facilitators did so. But people remained scared and the rate of testing was slow.



Nurse counsellors from the Mafeteng hospital encouraging people to test for HIV

[62] The cause of death was not openly disclosed at the time, but members were nevertheless aware of it through family members and through recognising the symptoms. It was only months later that the cause of death was confirmed.

To counteract fear of testing, I decided to try and bring in more positive role models of people who had accepted their HIV+ status and were living healthy productive lives. In November 2003, three HIV+ volunteers from a Johannesburg based organization, Vikela, came to address the Co-op members, the village learning circles and the community at large. They addressed the Co-op members, visited some village learning circles, and also addressed several other public forums. The photo insert below shows a Vikela member visiting the Sekhutlong learning circle where they talked to members about how they had come to terms with their status, and provided educational input, including a condom demonstration. On the third day of their visit, a testing clinic was held and 44 people volunteered to test. Some of these were facilitators, some were members of the Co-op, and others were people from the wider community. One of the facilitators who tested positive chose to disclose her status to the rest of the Co-op members. This was a turning point for the organization in terms of taking the HIV/AIDS bull by the horns.



A condom demonstration for members of the Sekhutlong learning circle

Following Vikela's visit and the facilitator's disclosure, the facilitators renewed their commitment to work for education and action about the disease. We encouraged people to prevent infection by using condoms and reducing the number of their sexual partners; we encouraged people to test, and provided support and care for those who were tested positive. Regular testing clinics were run at the local clinic on a monthly basis for the first six months of 2004. These were organised and staffed by Morija Hospital with whom we had also formed a partnership.

Achievements in 2003

During 2003, several steps forward were made. First, 11 circles were now established, ten of which were robust. They were no longer the flimsy structures in danger of imminent collapse that they had been two years previously. Rather, the work done in 2002 was consolidated and further strengthened in 2003, lending much hope for the sustainability of the circles. Some comments from participants in November 2003 reflect this optimism.

> *Lihlopha li khotlaletsa lintlafatso ka hare ho metse. Li re thusa hore re hlokomele ka se ka hlokahalang. Hape lia eketseha, ba bang ba kopitsa tsebetso ena.*
>
> The circles are promoting development in the community. They are helping us to recognise what is needed. And they are spreading, others are copying this initiative.
>
> (Participant in Tseanku circle)

And in spite of my concerns (see 'Challenges' below) about whether educational objectives were being met, participants claimed that they were indeed learning from their participation in the circles. Asked what they were getting from their participation in the circles, they responded as follows:

> *Ke ithutile ka mefuta ea mobu e fapaneng, le hore na nka lema eng mobung ofeng. Ho joalo ka haeka re khutletse bocheng hape. Re sebelisa likelello tsa rona. Joaloka batho ba baholo re kopana le bacha, ebe re fumana maikutlo a macha. Empa, ke ithutile hape bohlokoa ba seo ke neng ke se ntse ke se tseba. Mohlala, ke ithutile hore litsebo tsa ka tsa ho etsa mapotjoana li bohlokoa hobane nka etsa lintho tsena ka li rekisetsa bahahlaoli ba tlang Handicrafteng. Ke ithutile litsela tse ncha tsa ho etsa lintho, hape ke elelitsoe hore ke sebelise seo ke se tsebang.*
>
> I have learned about different soil types and what to plant in which kind of soil. Its like we are youth again, we use our minds. As older adults we come together with younger people, and get new ideas. But I have also learned the value of what I already know. For example, I have learned that my skills of making a 'mapotjoana' [a clay vessel traditionally used for drinking beer but no longer in common use] are valuable because I can make these and sell them to the tourists visiting the Handicraft. I've learned new ways of doing things and been advised to use what I know already.
>
> (Participant in Makhoseng circle)

> *Sehlopha se ntlafalitse litsebo tsa ka tsa ho nahana ka kakaretso. Leha ke le lapeng, ke nahana ka seo ke ithutileng sona mona. Se nthusitse hore ke tsebe ho laola chelete ea ka. Ke ithutile ho etsa moralo, le ho sheba hore na lintho tse bohlokoa haholo ke lifeng. Ha ke reka, ke etsa bonnete ba hore ke qala ka ho reka lintho tseo ke li hlokang haholo. …Ee, ka nako engoe ke ne ke ntse ke etsa ntho ena pele, empa*

hona joale ke hlokolosi haholo mme ke khona ho baballa chelete ebe ke e siela litlhoko tsa mantlha tse ling.

The circle has improved my general thinking skills. Even when I am at home, I think about what I've learned here. It's helped me with managing my money. I've learned how to plan and prioritise things. When buying, I make sure that I first buy the things I need most. … [In response to my question about whether she did this before…] Yes, I sometimes did do this before, but now I am much more aware of it and save the money I have left over for other basic things.

(Participant in Ha Ramotsekhoane circle)

Ke fumane keletso ka hore na ke phele joang hantle. Mohlala, nka iphilisa joang ka ho etsa le ho rekisa mosebetsi oa joang. Hape, ke na le tsimo e nkuoeng ke kholeho ea mobu, empa hona joale ke ntse ke lema lifate e le ho leka ho ntlafatsa sebaka sena.

I have got advice about how to live better. For example, how I can earn a living from making and selling grass work. I also have a field that was eroded but now I am planting trees and trying to improve this piece of land.

(Participant in Makhetheng circle)

By the end of 2003, participants had also begun to take more control of, and responsibility for the circles, the process and their progress. There was a distinct commitment by participants to the circles. Each circle had formed its own circle committee, and an association between the circle committees had been formed which saw the circles beginning to work together as a network. For example, the stokvels were coordinated by the overall circle committee to enable circles to support one another by attending each other's events. These kind of income generation activities also showed how participants were becoming gradually more invested in their circles, both financially and personally. Participants were steadily taking ownership of the circles, seeing them as *their* structures of which they were in control. In one village (Tseanku), the participants even took charge of who facilitated their circle. When a suggestion was made to change the circle's facilitator, they wrote a letter to the facilitators' committee saying the following:

Ke le mogoli o sehlopha Tseanku ke laela ke sehlopha hore re se battle madam e emong ;m;e Sehlomeng o ntse a lokile o ntsa a ba khotsofala leha a le mong. He re hloke motho ofe kapa ofe.

As the secretary of the Tseanku circle committee, I have been nominated by the circle to write this letter to say that the circle doesn't want another facilitator. Sehlomeng is still okay. She still satisfies us even if she is working alone. We don't need any other person.

(Secretary of the Tseanku circle committee)

Attending the circles was no longer perceived to be something for which participants should be paid. (It was noted earlier in this chapter that when circles were first initiated, many of the participants requested payment for participating.) Nevertheless, the expectation of compensation for participation was hard to shake – even as late as the beginning of 2003, participants from one village, Mokhomolong, refused to participate in improving a road through their village unless they were 'paid' in old clothes that were collected from tourists visiting the lodge. (This is discussed further in Chapter Six.) But the earlier suspicions had shifted – the circles were no longer seen as a way of getting people to work for nothing. By the end of the 2003, there was a much stronger sense of the participants being in charge of the circles as structures they could use for their own benefit.

During 2003, the circles slowly developed a higher profile, both within the community and more widely. Within the community, the circles had attracted wider attention, cooperation and participation. Even previously disinterested and sometimes uncooperative chiefs were coming around - by the end of 2003, several chiefs had joined the circles as participants. And beyond Malealea, 2003 saw the circles establish a solid working relationship with the forester employed by the local division of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. He supplied us with trees to plant in the villages and provided educational input to the circle members. We also established a good working relationship with the Mafeteng and Morija hospitals, as well as the local clinic.

In relation to the facilitators' skills, we had identified and taken steps to address their weaknesses, particularly their tendency to lose sight of the learning objectives of their sessions, and their struggle to critically analyse ideas and events. Facilitators' confidence and skills had gradually improved over the course of the year as they attended monthly workshops, and the focused refresher training that was organised during June. By the end of the year, the facilitators, and to some degree the participants, had begun to strengthen their analytical and critical skills.

We had introduced a clear focus on gender and made several strides towards encouraging people to see the connection between how gender practices influenced everyday life. This

was the beginning of our efforts to sharpen critical skills and create an awareness of disempowering gender practices in the Co-op and the community more widely.

We had faced the issue of HIV/AIDS and prioritized this as a focus area to be addressed in the circles. Several facilitators had tested, and one facilitator had disclosed her positive status to the Co-op members, and the members of her circle. She was the first person in Malealea to publicly disclose her status, and as such took a brave, groundbreaking step against a pandemic beginning to strangle the entire region.

Challenges

There were, however, still a number of challenges facing the facilitators and circles. Facilitators still needed support, particularly with regard to integrating learning into their activities. Without the guidance of the structured units written by Moso and myself, facilitators were inclined to focus almost exclusively on discussion and activities, neglecting the more explicitly educational aspects of the learning cycle. For example, activities that were focused on developing participants' literacy and numeracy skills tended to be overlooked, and facilitators seemed disinclined to search for supplementary materials related to the issue at hand, or invite people to address their circles on an issue. This could also have been a question of limited resources and access to information given that the valley had no telephone or electronic form of communication. However, the fact remains that facilitators were more inclined to work with their groups on action than education about action.

Related to the point above, facilitators were still somewhat reticent in their use of PRA tools. They hadn't integrated them into their practice in a way that showed a confident understanding of the tools, or a belief in their inherent usefulness as a way to unpack and understand issues or problems more deeply. My field notes in November 2003 note some concerns in this regard:

> I visited Ha Ramotsekhoane circle today where the group was looking at the issue of HIV/AIDS. They were supposedly using a tree to look at the causes and effects, but started off with general discussion about the causes and effects, making notes on the board, rather than capturing their thoughts on cards that could be clustered around the roots and branches of the tree. When it came to constructing the tree, it seemed they were just repeating the earlier discussion, and there was a feeling of just going through the motions, not really seeing the point of using the visual

> representation for something they had discussed already. I wondered how the process of constructing the tree really helped, especially since they had already written the causes and the effects on the board.
>
> (My field notes, 22 November 2003)

If a tool was *not* put forward in the unit, facilitators seemed somewhat at a loss as to what tool might be used to assist them to really understand a problem better. PRA tools had not become 'second nature' in the way that I had anticipated or hoped they would. For example, when planning an event, the facilitators had to be prompted or reminded to use the planning matrix, or they would simply continue planning in their habitual ways, discussing the issue for a while before deciding on a course of action to take.

Allied to my concern about how facilitators were using the PRA tools, was a concern that facilitators were still not actually writing units. They would of course put forward the issues that were of concern to their communities, and request units to be developed around certain themes, but the units themselves were developed by Moso and myself, rather than jointly with the facilitators. Facilitators were only just managing to plan their sessions from the units. At this stage it seemed unrealistic to expect them to be able to construct a unit with separate learning objectives for each session that dovetailed into a larger learning objective that defined the unit as a whole. But I wondered if the process of writing units would not have helped them to understand better how the PRA tools related to the overall objectives of the unit as a whole.

2004

The learning circles resumed their meetings and their activities in the second week of January 2004. Some circles were planting trees; others were occupied with constructing roads in their villages, while others were continuing with agricultural and income generation activities. Most of the circles were using the learning units written in the previous year to guide their meetings.

A new facilitators' committee was elected to continue supporting the circles to operationalise their action plans and work together in a more Cooperative way. They wanted to coordinate and advise about decisions regarding activities and events in the circles. The committee planned to visit all the circles to motivate participants as part of a

campaign to promote the learning circles. The committee also took on a new commitment - raising money to keep the circles going. At this point, we had funding only until the end of 2004, and were unsure of where we were to get funds for 2005. While it may have been unrealistic to expect the facilitators' committee to raise the amount of money needed to keep the circles going (about M80,000 or $13,500 per year), the fact that the facilitators wanted to keep the circles going beyond 2004 and were prepared to try and raise the money to do so, speaks volumes about their commitment to the process.

Reviewing and planning

At the end of February 2004, an evaluation and planning workshop was held with all the facilitators, the objective of which was to 'take the pulse' of the circles, assessing how far they had come in the preceding year, and think about where they were going in the course of the coming year. Facilitators used the 'river of life' PRA tool to reflect on their progress (see photo insert). They constructed a picture of the flow of their development and learning activities over their circle's lifespan (between one and three years). Facilitators had to identify the key events, successes, challenges, and actions taken by their participants. They had to think about whether they had succeeded in attracting participation from the community, and what they, and their participants, had learned in the circles. They then had to represent these reflections metaphorically, using rocks or other obstructions in the river to show difficulties; wide fast flowing waters, inhabited by fish and other river life to show progress, and so on.



A facilitator uses the 'river of life' tool to construct a picture of his progress over the previous year



Facilitators discuss their progress as they copy their graphic onto flipchart

After constructing their rivers, facilitators copied their representations onto news print as permanent records of their circles at this point in time.

With a good visual picture of where they had come from, each facilitator then presented a report outlining the range of present, and proposed activities. These reports reflected an exciting engagement with development related issues. I quote extensively from my field notes which illustrate the diversity of activities in which circles were engaged, and the range of activities planned for the year ahead[63]:

> **Tseanku** are also still busy with the HIV/AIDS unit, although they are almost through with it. They are repairing the road, and participants have planted trees in their gardens. They still want to plant forest trees in a communal area. They also submitted an application to the Malealea Development Trust to start a chicken rearing project, but they have had to withdraw it as only one member has the skills needed for this, and her skills are a bit shaky. It's unlikely that she will be able to train the other circle members - it seems too logistically complicated. They are thinking about rearing pigs as an alternative because this is easier. They also want to cultivate a plot and grow vegetables to eat and sell. They have collected some money from stokvels, and have started a loan scheme with this money, whereby members can borrow between five and 50 Maluti at an interest rate of 10%.
>
> **Makhetheng** have one pig which is doing well. They have planted about 150 trees around people's homes, although some of these died in the drought. They have secured another site where they want to plant vegetables and an orchard, and have already dug 20 holes for the fruit trees. But they need to find some way to get fencing to secure this area from animals. The circle encouraged the community to join them in digging a dam for water. However, the hole had to be filled in as it was an erosion hazard. They lost a few potential circle members in this failed endeavour. However, they are planning to continue encouraging wider participation in their circle. And they are also looking for an area to plant forest trees. They are currently busy with the HIV/AIDS unit.
>
> **Letlapeng** have managed to stop animals from grazing in an area where they have planted trees and now officially designated as a 'development area'. This really shows that they have generated a sense of communal responsibility and ownership

[63] Some of these circles are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

pf the initiative. The trees are doing well, although some died in the drought. They are planning to build a shop since there is currently no café in the village and have already started collecting stones for this building. They also want to start a garden and an orchard. Their loan scheme is doing well – they have a kitty of M900 collected from stokvels, and interest on loans already in process. They too are busy with the HIV/AIDS unit.

Sekhutlong Despite a difficult start, with people saying the group was of no use and a waste of time, this circle has made excellent progress. They have secured communal land for planting forest trees and have dug holes in this area, as well as at their homes where they also want to plant trees. They are also currently repairing the road into the village, although this is not yet complete. They have collected enough money from their stokvel to buy a pig which will be raised by the circle. They also want to build a shelter where the group can meet instead of continuing to meet in one another's homes. They are busy with the HIV/AIDS unit.

Ha Ramotsekhoane have engaged the whole community in a project to sanitate the spring which was polluted and also being used by animals. The circle has planted over 1000 trees in a communal land area that the chief allowed them to use. They have also secured a dedicated area to plant thatching grass, of which there is a shortage due to it being destroyed by animals. The chief has called a pitso to get the community involved and they are collecting stones for the building. The shop is also still going well, although the circle members feel that a lot of money is being paid out to the sales person and the night watchman. There was also a break-in at the shop which demoralised members. However, Moso has been having workshops with the circle members to try and help them manage their income and expenditure. Their prices are now okay, and they are restocking, but they still need more support with their business skills to monitor the money coming in and going out. They also need to strengthen their record keeping (keeping invoices, receipts of stock bought, and so on.) But they feel they are learning slowly.

Makhomalong circle is not making very good progress. Members of the circle were given clothes for helping to fix the road, but this was only a once off incentive, and members have since stopped coming to work on the road because they did not receive clothes again. Circle members have planted kikuyu grass near the tap to try and get rid of the mud in this area. Some members of the circle have dug holes at their homes for disposal of rubbish and dirty water. 200 trees have been ordered for circle members to plant at their homes.

Makhoseng struggled to secure land but after getting advice from other facilitators, they approached the regional chief who has requested the village chief to be more Cooperative in granting land. They now have three sites to work and have even applied for and received a Form A land agreement for these sites[64]. They want to

[64] At this time, the system of land allocation in Lesotho required that a certain procedure be followed. The applicant had to apply to the chief who would send officials to measure the land, after which time a Form A would be granted officially recognising the land application. If the application was favourably considered, a Form C would be granted giving the applicant rights to use the land. However because of the time it took to grant a Form C after the Form A had been granted, it was common practice for applicants to start using the land once they received a Form A. This system changed in 2005 when local government was introduced and took over the process of allocating land.

start a small vegetable garden on one site and plant forest trees on the others. They have already planted 1500 trees and have placed an order for 200 more trees to plant. They are also repairing the road into the valley to be able to take oxcarts along there. (They need to take fodder into the valley and transport grain to the mill.) They plan to work on fixing the dongas in the area, and secure a water source for irrigating the garden. They are busy with the tree unit.

Moreneng This circle started with 21 members but some have dropped out because of illness and having babies. Some also said it was a waste of time, but when it came to taking action, lots of people in the community wanted to take part. They have secured communal land to plan forest trees and have already dug holes for these trees. They still need to place an order for more trees, and they want to start an orchard. They are also repairing the road that leads to the high school. There were no meetings in January because the facilitators were ill, however they started meeting again in February. The circle has got stronger since M'e Mamahlapi's arrival as a facilitator. They are currently busy with the HIV/AIDS unit.

Lithabaneng experienced some problems initially from people in the community who questioned the value of the circle. There were also some problems from some destructive members of the community who uprooted the trees planted by the circle members. However, the members of the circle have continued meeting, and have now dug holes for more trees to be planted closer to circle members' homes. They have placed an order for 500 more trees. They have made good progress on constructing the road into their village and plan to continue with this. They haven't yet secured communal land because the chief has not been Cooperative, but the facilitators' committee will be meeting with the chief to encourage him to grant use of the land. They want to start a communal garden on this land. They also want to strengthen the participants' literacy and numeracy skills. They also want to build more toilets in the village and repair the eroded areas around the fields. They are currently busy with the HIV/AIDS unit.

Tsoeunyane have also not managed to secure use of communal land, but the circle does have the use of a field for growing vegetables. They have planted seed that was donated by a farmer from the Eastern Cape[65]. They haven't dug holes for trees but they are planning to plant trees around their homes. They are also planning to reclaim some of the dongas in the area. They have started constructing the road into their village and this has attracted more members into the circle, but have requested the facilitators' committee to visit the circle and encourage others to join. They are busy with the HIV/AIDS unit.

Tsinyane have made good progress after their initial slow beginning. Initially people didn't understand where the circle was going and didn't see its use. But then when they began planting trees, things changed, more members joined the circle. They have already planted more than 1600 trees in the areas around the village. They have constructed a dam which is now complete. The circle members are using water from the dam to irrigate their gardens, which are coming along well. They are revising the tree unit as they are busy with planting more trees.

[65] This farmer visited a learning circle while he was staying at the Lodge. He happened to have bags of seed with him and donated few kilograms to the project.

(My field notes, 26th February 2004)

While I was delighted with the progress of the circles and the range of actions described above, I was still concerned about how learning and action were being integrated. Was there enough of a focus on the learning agenda? It was apparent from the facilitators' reports that there was an intense focus on a development agenda, almost to the exclusion of any explicit discussion about learning. Only one circle said that they wanted to strengthen participants' literacy and numeracy skills. Also, one facilitator had reported that the participants found the learning meetings 'a waste of time', but yet said they were prepared to participate in the action points. Why was this? Was it because the facilitator's skills were weak, or was it because the learning materials written to guide the facilitator were problematic? Or was it because learning was just not seen as a priority for circle members?

My second worry related to the relationship between the learning meetings and the actions being taken by the different circles. Of all the circles, Tsinyane was the only one where the theme of the learning unit around which the group's bi-weekly learning meetings were structured, corresponded closely with the actions taken by the group. Coordinating the various learning agendas and action points of the different circles was a logistical challenge. How could Moso and I keep up with writing the materials, training the facilitators to use the materials, and coordinating the learning themes and actions across 11 circles? These questions were to vex us throughout the year.

New circles started

However, the coming months of 2004 saw the circles continuing to meet for the learning sessions, and work consistently on their various projects. I began to feel more assured about the learning materials. In May of 2004, two new circles were started, each with over 30 members each. Representatives from these villages approached the facilitators' committee and requested that circles be started in their villages. Since we were on a tight budget and could not afford to train and employ new facilitators, the facilitators' committee accommodated these requests by splitting up facilitators who had been working in pairs. Each of these groups was then run by one facilitator, rather than two, with no increase to the running costs.

HIV/AIDS rears its head again

In August of 2004 we lost another member of the Handicraft, also a facilitator, to AIDS. Although the cause of her death was never stated, people were aware of it. This event once again forced us to question whether we were doing enough to address the HIV/AIDS issue. Had it been enough to focus on HIV/AIDS for just a few months? How much impact had this had in the community? Had we succeeded in creating a space to openly discuss the disease and take concrete steps towards addressing it? (These concerns would be addressed again at the beginning of 2005.)

Food aid

In September 2004, the Lesotho Association for Non-Formal Education (LANFE) hosted a three day meeting to celebrate Adult Learners' Week. Some of the facilitators from Malealea were invited to present the work they were doing in Malealea, and network with others in the education and development field, including some government representatives. As a result of their presentation and networking, the facilitators learned that communities already engaged in community development work were eligible for food aid from the government. This information was rigorously followed up by the facilitators. They established what procedure they should follow to secure food aid, and then with remarkable speed and efficiency got each circle's committee to record the names of those circle members who were eligible for food aid on the two key criteria: participation in community development projects, and an income below a stipulated level defining them as 'very poor' (information which I had been struggling to get them to collect for some time). The circle committees elected participants to take issues to the facilitators' committee, who then linked up with the Food Aid officials to push through an agreement.

Within a short space of time, the paper work was completed, and trucks of food aid were being delivered to the Handicraft Centre in Malealea on a monthly basis. About 300 circle members had qualified for food aid, and the organization of its distribution was undertaken by the facilitators' committee.



Food aid is delivered to and stored in the Malealea Handicraft Centre



Each recipient of food aid was required to sign and date receipt of their ration of food aid. This was another way in which literacy skills were reinforced as people applied literacy skills in a meaningful way.

A circle member signs for her ration of food aid

The photos below show something of the size of the monthly food distribution operation:





Circle participants gathering at the Handicraft Centre to collect their food aid rations

The introduction of food aid into the learning circles was a significant achievement for a number of reasons. First, this initiative was conceptualized and driven entirely by the facilitators themselves. They did not consult me or involve me in any way. There was no need for outside support or encouragement. The facilitators considered the circles 'theirs' and felt free to make decisions and initiate actions which *they* considered beneficial to the circles. As such, the food aid initiative demonstrated a sense of ownership of the learning circles. Secondly, it was through their social networks that the contacts for food aid were established, and through their actions that the necessary steps were taken to ensure

delivery. They gathered the required information, consulted with the chief and wider community, travelled to Mafeteng to complete the paperwork, all in order to secure benefits for which they learned they were eligible. This achievement was again a sign of tangible empowerment.

The introduction of food aid as an incentive for community development work changed the circle dynamics. Members were motivated to pursue their plans with renewed enthusiasm, and furthermore had the required energy to do so, having a better nutritional intake. However, the extrinsic source of motivation concerned me. Would this divert the learning agenda, with people coming to circles for food rather than because of a commitment to learning and development? For how long would the food aid be supplied? What if the food aid was withdrawn? Would the circles continue to function without it, or would they collapse like so many other projects when support was withdrawn? Was receiving food aid not in opposition to the values to which we were committed – values such as self-sufficiency, learning for development, and self-empowerment? However, when I raised these questions for debate with the facilitators, while they understood my concerns, they did not share them. They saw the initiative as a great learning experience. They were excited about how successfully they had organised this major undertaking. They had gone through a proper process of community consultation, having discussed it with the circles' members, the circle committees, as well as the chief and the village food aid committees. These meetings had taken place without my or Moso's involvement. They also felt that this was something that would make a tangible difference to people's lives in terms of providing a much needed source of nutrition. If the initiative failed, they were prepared to take responsibility for it, since they had organised it and motivated for it. They said they were tired of waiting for outsiders to fulfil promises, and were pleased to be doing something for themselves. They saw the food aid as something which they had earned through their hard work - it was not perceived as a hand out. As such, my questions were mute. Whether the food aid succeeded or failed in the longer term was irrelevant. This was a turning point for the facilitators and the circles - responsibility for the process had shifted in a new way. The facilitators and circle members had taken charge, and saw the circles and their actions as their project for which they were accountable. Their success did not rest entirely on my fundraising abilities – they had taken initiative to shape their own destiny using means to which they saw themselves as legitimately entitled.

New circles, new facilitators?

In the middle of September there was another request from yet another village wanting to start a new learning circle. This request again went through the facilitator's committee, which again accommodated it by reshuffling the facilitators so that one pair was split up to work separately, thus opening a new circle at no additional expense to the project. However, I had began to wonder whether we should not start training a new cohort of facilitators. New requests kept coming in, and some of the facilitators were getting on in years and beginning to struggle to walk the distances to their circles. Should we not train some of the younger participants from the circles to be facilitators? When I raised this for discussion with the facilitators, there was unanimous agreement that we should *not* take this suggested avenue. They felt this would divide the group as all the participants would want to be trained. There would also be conflict between the new facilitators and the existing facilitators who were used to working together as members of the Co-op and as facilitators. They also felt that being a member of the Co-op was an important aspect of being a facilitator. The Co-op members had initiated the circles and had had a long history of voluntary work in the circles. They had endured difficult times and felt that others would give up in the face of such obstacles. They also felt that having struggled and worked as volunteers for so long, they deserved the payment which they were now receiving. Although it sounded to me as if the facilitators were protecting their interests, I respected their resistance to this move.

Evaluating our learning

At the end of September, a facilitators' workshop was held to engage the facilitators in reflecting on critical incidents and what they had learned from these incidents. The theme of this workshop was related to my earlier concern about how learning and action were being integrated. The purpose of this exercise was to foreground learning, and encourage facilitators and participants to focus on what *learning* was coming out of the actions taken, rather than focusing on achievements and actions, as had been the trend over the year.

Working in groups, facilitators began by identifying the events, positive or negative, that they considered most critical in the life of their circle (see photo insert).

After discussion, each facilitator mapped out the critical incidents relating to their circle on a timeline (see photo insert below). The facilitators then reflected on what they had learned from these incidents, and whether that learning had influenced them to change their practice in any way. If so, they were required to say what the consequences of those changes were. Once this evaluation exercise was completed, and facilitators were familiar with the process, facilitators went back to their circles to repeat the exercise with their participants.

The observations and conclusions made during these workshops taught me how difficult it was for participants to express or articulate their learning in the terms that I, as an educator, took for granted. My expectations had been that facilitators and participants would be able to provide an account of



Facilitators reflect on their learning in small discussion groups



Using a timeline to map out critical incidents

their learning outcomes. These expectations were not met. Instead, what emerged were a range of observations about learning, which after some analysis could be broadly divided into several categories:

The first category of observations was obvious, even trite. For example, participants said "we learned that planning a business helps us to make more money", or "we learned the importance of having vegetables in the garden, the value of eating them and also selling them." I wondered whether these really were new learning insights, or just cursory considerations of the more evident aspects of people's learning.

The second category of observations was slightly more thoughtful, and showed evidence that participants had related the content of the learning sessions to the actions they were taking. For example, one group commented that they learned how planting different kinds of trees in different areas helped to stop erosion in different ways and improve the environment. Another group commented on how they had learned to think about the causes and effects of different problems, and why it was important to address the causes, rather than just the effects of a problem.

However, some facilitators were able to get participants to probe even deeper and reflect on what they had learned through actions taken. For example, the Makhoseng circle participants commented on what they had learned about the complexities of development work through the actions they had taken:

> *Re ithutile hore ntlafatso ha e ea otloloha. Mohlala, motseng oa rona, ha morena a ne a sa batle hore tsehetsa ka merero ea rona ea ntlafatso, re ne re imetsoe. Re ithutile hore morena ea nang le bofokoli o etsa hore batho ba se ke ba eba le thahasello ntlafatsong. Hape o liehisa ntlafatso. Re ithutile hore ho bohlokoa hore morena e be karolo e khothaletsang batho ho nka karolo ntlafatsong. Haeba batho ba sa nke karolo ntlafatso, ha ba hlokomele bohlokoa ba eona, mme ba ea e senya, ka morero kapa ba sa hlokomele.*
>
> We learned that development is not straight forward. For instance, in our village when the chief didn't want to support our projects, we struggled. We learned that a weak chief makes people not to have interest in development, and slows it down. We learned that it is very important for the chief to be part of encouraging the people to get involved in development. If the people are not involved in the development efforts, they are not aware of their importance and will consciously or unconsciously destroy them. They may not be aware of how their actions damage the efforts of others. There is a need for more education about this.
>
> (Makhoseng circle participant)

The observation above showed that this participant had thought more critically about what the group was doing, about what promoted and impeded their efforts and what still needed to be learned to achieve their longer term vision.

Following this series of learning focused workshops, I was somewhat reassured that despite the focus on development, learning was still happening, even though participants did not find it easy to articulate this learning. I also noticed that the learning that was taking place was not in the sense of measurable improvement in literacy and numeracy skills, but in the broader sense of relating the content of the learning sessions to the actions taken, and in the deeper sense of cultivating reflective and critical skills.

October, November and December saw circles continuing to work on their various projects. Many of the circles had by now begun income generation projects and all of them were working on improving the roads to their villages. These initiatives were to continue into the 2005.

Looking beyond Malealea – LANFE adopts REFLECT

During 2004, another significant development took place beyond the boundaries of Malealea. This was the Lesotho Association of Non-Formal Education's (LANFE) initiative to set up REFLECT learning circles in four pilot districts around Lesotho. LANFE had visited the Malealea circles several times and were interested in implementing the REFLECT approach. After consultations between LANFE, and their funder, the German Association for Adult Education (IZZ/DVV) (see photo insert), it was agreed that LANFE would pilot the REFLECT approach, setting up three learning circles in four districts of the country. In May, I trained a group of 12 facilitators to run these learning circles. By September, these groups were operational, but were in need of support in the



A meeting between members of LANFE executive comittee, Wolgang Leumer of IZZ/DVV and myself to discuss LANFE's strategy for taking REFLECT forward in Lesotho more widely.

field. LANFE approached Moso to work as a field worker. When he decided not to take up the offer, two of our other facilitators applied, one of whom was appointed but decided at the last minute not to accept. While I felt uneasy about LANFE's move to employ the Malealea facilitators. who were now valuable assets to the Malealea community, I was thrilled that the facilitators had gained the skills and confidence needed to apply for outside positions. It was indeed a tribute to the years of work in Malealea that another organization was now adopting the same approach and making overtures to employ people from the project.

Achievements

The learning circles had consolidated yet further during the course of 2004 and had little doubt about their capacity to continue into the future. There was a sense of real accomplishment, that the circles were now making a noticeable difference in the lives of people in the Malealea valley. The second facilitators' committee had been elected and continued to function well, coordinating the activities of the circles. Two new circles had been started through the facilitators' committee, and were progressing well. Overall, the circles had built up an impressive track record of achievements, in some cases relatively small and in some cases on a larger scale. For example, some circles had planted trees, while other circles had established gardens, reclaimed dongas, constructed roads, and in the case of Tsinyane, built a dam. Circles had a real sense of their own potential, and had woken others in the community to the notion of what was possible through collaborative effort.

The circle members and facilitators had a sense of identity and ownership and felt empowered to do things for themselves. They had started two new circles, they had secured food aid, and gained a profile and respectable reputation amongst organizations such as LANFE, the World Food Programme, and the Co-op Society, as well as the local clinic, and the Mafeteng and Morija hospitals with whom we still worked. The German Development Service (DED) had worked with the circles on several water and reforestation projects, and the local division of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs were continuing to supply us with trees. The circles had become organised entities which other organizations could connect with, and work with cooperatively. Since circles had already identified their needs, and constituted themselves as a group taking action, it was easy for an external organisation to form partnerships with them, making the notion of

'development' more workable. Even people visiting Malealea as tourists, like the Eastern Cape farmer mentioned, and Royston School who helped to raise money for Tsinyane circle's garden, were able to see what people were doing and make a concrete contribution that they could see benefited people directly.

I felt assured that the learning agenda was on track, even though literacy and numeracy were still not a focus of this learning. I had to remind myself that people were not living in a 'reading culture', and indeed, there were very few texts available to read. There was little incentive to focus on these skills.

That LANFE had been inspired by the Malealea circles, and decided to implement the approach was also encouraging. Seemingly Malealea had become a model for REFLECT practice in Lesotho.

Challenges

Coordinating a consistent learning agenda across 13 different learning circles, each with varying activities, proved to be a major challenge in 2004. Many of the circles were drawing on learning materials that had been developed in previous years, but were still relevant to their actions. For example, circles were dealing with deforestation and reforestation on an ongoing basis. Similarly, with income generation projects, the need for business skills was ongoing. However, Moso and I knew that we had to work out a solution to this concern, as circles would eventually have worked their way through the materials that had been developed, and we were unsure of how to tailor the writing of new materials across the range of needs.

The best solution of course would have been for facilitators to develop their own materials, but this was not feasible for the same reasons it was not feasible in 2003 (see earlier discussion). Another solution would have been to carry on developing generic units that facilitators could use when and if appropriate for their circles. However, I felt the coordination of learning was already somewhat haphazard, and with the circles increasing in number and size, it was becoming increasingly difficult logistically to monitor how the learning materials were being used and what people were learning. We needed another solution that would enable the circles to proceed on their respective

projects at a pace suitable to them, while at the same time coordinating a consistent learning agenda.

Related to the problem of the 'cafeteria approach' whereby facilitators picked learning units as needed, was the lack of a methodical development of literacy and numeracy skills. The units had been written to guide a more structured progression of skills, but if used in a different sequence, would likely not achieve the same results. And secondly, the varying literacy levels of participants in the circles continued to prove a challenge for facilitators who struggled to cope with the irregular demands of barely literate and literate people in the same group. Furthermore, the lack of reading materials continued to prove a major challenge – if people did not have texts to read, what incentive was there to encourage the literacy aspect of learning?

The third major challenge we continued to face at the end of 2004 was that of HIV/AIDS. We had made efforts to focus on this issue, but it did not seem that we were making great headway. People were still dying, and more and more people were continuing to be infected. What was needed was a more constant and enduring approach that would enable people to slowly transform the social environment into a space where HIV/AIDS could be talked about openly, accepted, and addressed in constructive manner. People needed to shift their understanding of HIV/AIDS as an individual misfortune, to understanding it as a social concern affecting everyone. This would mean much more than a mere unit providing basic information and education for a month or two. It would mean an ongoing and enduring effort to bring HIV into the social consciousness in a new way, not associated with fear and stigma and hidden suffering.

2005

For 2005, I managed to secure more funding for the circles from a group of Dutch companies, known collectively as Inter Company-Fundraising. It made sense to use this funding to support the circles to address the three major challenges outlined above. This could be done by rethinking the ways in which the circles were functioning.

Redefining a direction for 2005

We decided that the overall objective of the year should be to work at both a community and individual level to mitigate the causes and effects of HIV/AIDS in Malealea. Our aim was to focus on prevention of infection as well as support of those already infected. We would try to do this by strengthening the network of local people working collaboratively to create a health enhancing environment. With a consistent focus on HIV/AIDS throughout the year, we hoped we could contribute towards developing a space where HIV/AIDS could be talked about and addressed more openly. However, at the same time, we did not want the circles to lose the momentum they had gained in relation to their engagement with development projects. In fact we saw these efforts as complimentary to efforts to address HIV/AIDS. For example, having sources of clean water, vegetable gardens and orchards, constituted an important step towards achieving our aim of creating a health enhancing environment. We wanted to keep these initiatives going. We decided therefore to dedicate one of the two weekly meetings to HIV/AIDS related education, and the other meeting to development related activities.

Weekly meeting one – focusing on HIV/AIDS

For the HIV/AIDS component, Moso and I collaboratively wrote a set of learning materials to guide the facilitators progressively through a structured and focused HIV/AIDS learning programme. As with the other materials, these materials were also based on the REFLECT approach. PRA tools were integrated into the learning curriculum, as were the discussion, analysis and action components of the learning process. Action points were focused around encouraging participants to engage in open informed discussion about HIV/AIDS, to test, and to accept and support those who tested positive. We also made a concerted effort in these units to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills through providing texts for readers to read. Soul City produces an attractive, well constructed and colourfully illustrated set of reading materials in Sotho, available free of charge. These were distributed widely to participants – who for the first time had interesting and relevant texts with which to engage. This greatly increased their motivation to focus on developing literacy skills.

An additional advantage of synchronizing the curriculum for all 14 circles, was that circles would proceed at more or less the same pace, making it easier to monitor the

learning and use of the materials across the circles, as well as the actions taken with regards to addressing HIV/AIDS.

Weekly meeting two – focusing on development

In the second of their weekly meetings, circles were free to continue with their chosen development focus – whether this was an income generating project, an agricultural project, reforestation activities or the development of some kind of infrastructure like a road, a preschool, a little shop, or toilets. Each circle was able to continue with its specific development plan without disruption. And, as part of his routine monitoring, Moso would move around the circles finding out what kind of educational support was needed for these projects. If circles needed focused short workshops, such as helping someone to set up a book keeping system, Moso would provide this input, or source someone to provide it. If new units were needed across a few circles, after the need had been identified, Moso and I would write these materials as we had done in previous years.

This new approach enabled us to address the challenges which faced us at the end of 2004. From January onwards, Moso and I wrote learning materials on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, depending upon how quickly participants moved through the materials. Generally, it took between six weeks and eight weeks for a circle to complete a unit – a unit being made up of six to eight guided lessons (see Appendix 10 for a list of units developed over the course of the project). This regular and systematic way of developing materials enabled us to monitor how they were being used, and adapt them accordingly.

Unit one – placing HIV/AIDS in a wider context

The first unit began by focusing on illness in general with the objective of placing HIV/AIDS in a wider context. Participants identified a range of illnesses affecting people, and then used a tree PRA tool to look at the causes and effects of these illnesses. Facilitators then helped participants to focus more specifically on HIV/AIDS and encouraged participants to question why this disease could not be discussed with the same openness as other diseases, and what the consequences of this were. Participants spent time discussing the causes and effects of HIV/AIDS, looking particularly at social and economic factors that make people vulnerable to HIV/AIDS – factors such as migrant labour, unequal relationships between men and women, poor access to health services and other factors. We then moved into discussion about the disease, providing accurate

information to participants about HIV/AIDS. Participants were encouraged to draft questions, which were discussed and answered by the group and/or the facilitators, who were to monitor the provision of accurate information. Once participants felt confident that they had enough information, the circles challenged one another to a quiz, to which the wider community was also invited (see photo insert), moving the discussion about HIV/AIDS into a more public forum. Each circle drafted a set of questions about HIV/AIDS, which were then posed to the other group. Points were awarded for correct information, and the circle with the highest point score was entitled to a cash prize which could be used to buy something to further any of the circle's development projects, for example a wheelbarrow, pipes, and so on.



Members of two nearby circles meet to challenge each other during a a quiz about HIV/AIDS

Unit two – women and HIV/AIDS

The second unit focused on creating an awareness of the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS, looking at the biological and social reasons why women were more vulnerable to infection than men, and what could be done to address this. Since the majority of circle participants were women, we felt this was an important discussion to have. We used a case study of a mineworker and his wife to guide participants through a discussion of how families coped with migrant labour; how being away from their wives and husbands for long periods increased the likelihood of men and women finding other partners, and how this placed them at greater risk. They looked at how women often relied on men for income, and how this dependency increased women's vulnerability to infection from men. Women could not insist on safe sex (with a condom), and often had to agree to sex without a condom because of their subordinate position, both financially and culturally. The case study also encouraged participants to talk about how sex work, violence, abuse and rape increased women's risk of infection.



Members perform a role play to explore ways of negotiating condom usage

Using role play, (see photo insert) participants were encouraged to try out various ways of negotiating condom usage with their partners, particularly in a climate where condoms imply unfaithfulness, with the associated complexities of blame and guilt. Participants then wrote six-line stories about their own HIV/AIDS related ideas or experiences. The stories had to relate in some way to the learning theme of the unit, namely the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS. But participants were free to develop accounts in their own words and in the light of their own priorities. After reading these out to the group, discussing and debating the messages that each story presented, the group selected one story, or a combination of stories to be worked into and performed as a drama.

The circles worked for several weeks constructing their dramas. Four 'community drama days' were then organised whereby in groups of three or four, circles performed these dramas for one another and the wider community. These dramas covered a wide range of themes related to HIV/AIDS, providing both entertaining and informative performances. The photo insert shows a shebeen (pub) scene enacted by one circle who organised their drama



A drama about the role of alcohol in the spread of HIV/AIDS

around the theme of alcohol and how use and abuse of alcohol could place both men and women at increased risk. The group showed how women often resort to sex work as a means of generating income, and commented on the dangers of unprotected sex in a context where liquor and money flow freely.

Another performance depicted the risks of consulting traditional doctors who use razor blades. A young woman visits the traditional healer after learning she is HIV+. He says she is bewitched and cuts her with a razor blade in order to release the evil spirit (see photo insert).



A drama depicting the risks of razor blade incisions made by traditional doctors

Her mother and sister, who are accompanying her, are also 'diagnosed' as bewitched, and cut with the same razor blade. They are consequently both infected with HIV.

Following each performance, the performing circle had to facilitate a discussion with the audience, asking them questions that would encourage them to reflect more deeply about the message of the performance, weighing up the pros and cons of the various behavioural possibilities that were open to characters in the performance, even developing accounts of alternative options that characters might have tried. This interaction and process of dialogue with the audience consolidated the educational aspect of the edutainment. The photo insert shows the audience



The audience engaged in discussion after a drama performance

talking amongst themselves about a question that has been asked about the performance. The performances were well attended, obviously enjoyed and talked about in wider contexts for some time afterwards.

Monitoring the process and making revisions

Although facilitators were pleased with the ways in which participants were engaging with the activities, there was one aspect of the approach with which they were unhappy. Up to this point, the various activities, namely the quizzes and the dramas had been incentivised through offering the winning team or the best drama performance a cash prize. This cash could be used by the group to further their development projects in any way they chose. For example, one group bought a wheelbarrow and seeds for their garden. Another group bought a pig to raise, while another bought stock for their shop.

However, circles complained about the competitive aspect of the activities. They said that they were finding the competitions to be divisive, and requested that the approach be changed so that they were not competing against one another but working more collaboratively together. This was an important insight that helped Moso and I to revise the approach and thus avoid the danger of circles working against each other rather than alongside one another. From this point onwards, the approach was changed so that if cash incentives were offered, all circles had an opportunity to win. For example, in a later unit, (see discussion about treatment under unit six below) circles compiled an album of local herbs used to treat HIV related ailments. All circles which produced an album meeting specified criteria were entitled to a cash prize that could be used to develop their circle's development projects. And the albums became shared resources, rather than assets that set circles apart from one another.

Unit three – voluntary counseling and testing

The next unit addressed the issue of voluntary counseling and testing. The aim of the unit was to provide participants with an opportunity to find out more about testing and move towards overcoming the fear surrounding it. We looked at what a test was, what happened when one took the test and why it was important to test. At the end of the unit, circle participants made posters to advertise the testing days. The posters gave simple information about why and when one should test, and these were displayed in shops and other public places in every village. Although testing clinics had been taking place on a

monthly basis from February onwards, we wanted to make these more public and encourage more people to take advantage of this service and get to know their status. We aimed to create a climate where testing became more of a 'norm', a regular service that people would take advantage of in the same way as they did the health clinic.

Unit four and five – focusing on literacy in relation to HIV/AIDS

During the next two units, participants focused intensely on developing their literacy skills. Using the attractive colourful comic magazines produced by Soul City, participants gathered together to read two stories about a group of characters whose lives were affected by HIV/AIDS. The stories in these comics raised many of the central concerns with which participants had been engaging, although in a new way through the lives of the characters. This served to reinforce the educational messages about HIV/AIDS and invite participants to engage with the issues from a new angle. Also, the opportunity for each participant to have a text of their own, greatly incentivised reading. Even those participants who were not able to read well, were able to follow the pictures as others read aloud.



Facilitators read Soul City comics as they prepare for the learning units which drew on these materials

And after reading the text as a group, participants would engage in additional discussion and reading and writing exercises that helped to further support and develop not only their literacy skills, but also their understanding around HIV/AIDS issues. These activities were varied and structured to support participants' skills development in various ways. Some exercises were orientated around developing basic literacy skills, while others were more advanced. For example, participants are pictured below (see photo insert) playing a board game in which they move a counter along a board, with the ultimate objective being to reach the finish point. To play the game, participants must throw a dice and then read the instructions written on the square on which they land. These instructions tell them to

move forwards or backwards depending on whether they have taken positive or negative steps in relation to coping with HIV. For example, if one eats correctly, or exercises gently, one moves forward, while if one has unprotected sex or fails to go for a regular check-up, one moves backwards. Those participants, who were not able to read well, paired up with others who could, thus being able to participate in the game while simultaneously strengthening their literacy skills.



Participants engaged in playing a board game about HIV/AIDS

Unit six - treatment

In this unit participants were encouraged to learn more about different ways of treating HIV related illnesses as well as AIDS. They were given information about antiretroviral treatment but also encouraged to think about herbal and home remedies for treating opportunistic infections. In this way they were encouraged to draw on local knowledge in treating HIV related illnesses. They pooled their knowledge and also interviewed other people in the community to gather data about different ways of treating illnesses. Using this knowledge, they then compiled a written record of local knowledge about herbal remedies that could be used to treat opportunistic infections. The inserts below show sample pages from the herb albums of two circles.

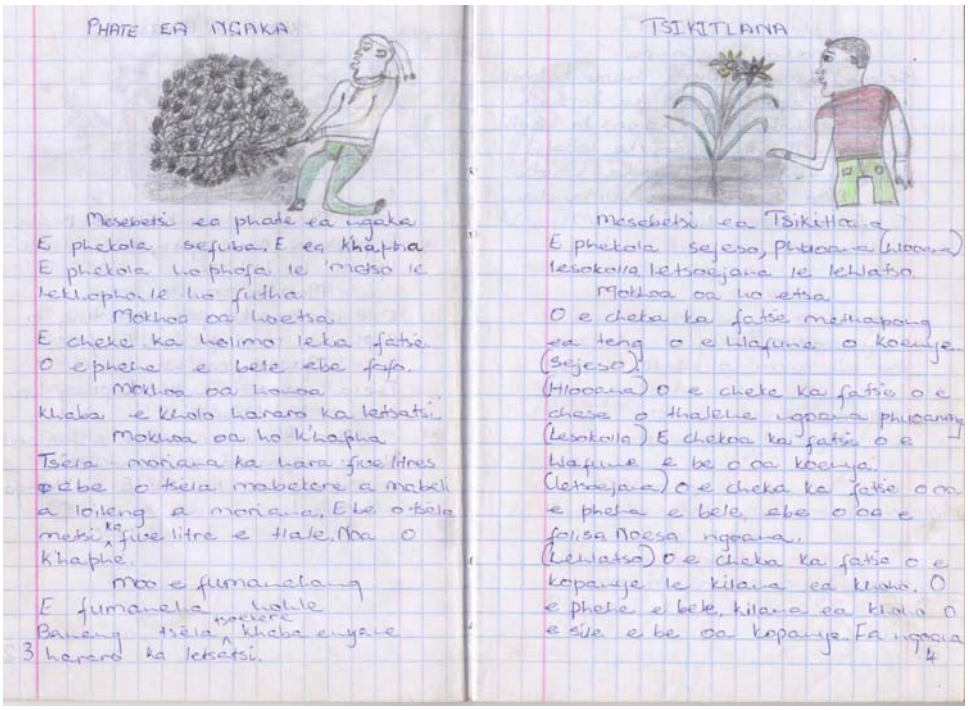


Figure 16: Extract from Makhomalong's herb album

Phate ea Ngaka

Uses of this medicine (Phate ea ngaka) It cures flu. It cleans the stomach. It chases away night mares and it cures rashes. Cook it and use it just like the other above medicines.

Preparation procedures:
Uproot it to use its roots together with its vegetation. Cook it to boil and let it cool to ambient temperature.
Stomach cleaning procedure
Add 2 cups of the boiled strong medicine in a 5*l* container of warm water. Drink in the whole 5*l* to induce vomiting. This act cleans the stomach.
Where can it be found
It can be found everywhere especially in summer. Add little sugar to a prepared mixture and give to children three time a day.

Tsikitlana
This is used as a medicine for children under the age of two.
Uses of this medicene
It cures poisoning (sejeso), head problems to children (phuoana), vomiting (lehlatso) and severe pain on the chest or back between the shoulders (letsoejane).
Preparation procedures
Uproot it and chew its roots and swallow the extract (for treating poisoning).
Dry its roots, burn them and slightly smear the child's head (cures the softness of the head).
Use it like you would to cure poisoning
Cook its roots to boil, cool it and give a portion to a child to drink (in cases of severe pain).
Take a chicken kidney and mill it, mix with the boiled roots and give the mixture to the child to drink.

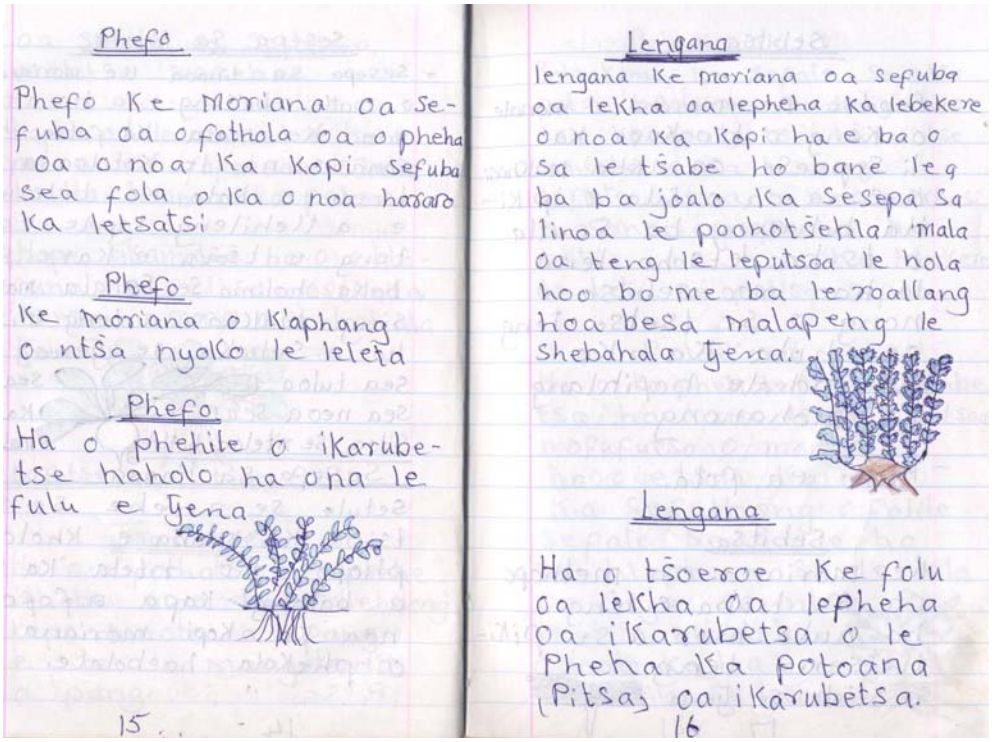


Figure 17: Extract from Lithabaneng's herb album

Phefo

This is a medicine for curing common cold & flu. You take the upper bush, boil it in water, drink it from the cup about three times/days. This medicine can also be used to clean and reduce the stomach acidity through forced vomiting. Also, when boiling this you can cover yourself with a blanket to inhale the vapour. This act facilitates the curing process.

Lengana

This is a medicine for curing flu. You take its leaves, boil it in a tin and drink it from a cup but be warned it is very bitter, just like "Pohot'sehla and Sesepa-sa-linoa" (other medicines). It is grayish in colour and when fully grown, it can be used as wood for cooking. To cure flu, you can also boil the water and then cover yourself with a blanket to inhale the vapour. Or empty the boiled medicine in a basin and cover youself over the basin until the vapour evaporates.

It is important to note here how participants integrated literacy and numeracy into this activity, writing out not only the recipes, but also the measurements of various ingredients. In this way they were able to strengthen their literacy skills, while at the same time preserving valuable knowledge that is generally not written down. Such knowledge is potentially very useful for treating HIV infected people in rural homes where there is no access to pharmacies, or even a clinic. This was thus a good example of how literacy and numeracy could be used to support existing practices. By the end of the unit, each circle had a complete record of herbal knowledge which could be used by participants in the

group. These albums were also circulated amongst other circles who could see what options other groups had come up with. In this way, knowledge was shared widely.

Overall objective

The overall objective of all the units was to create collective possibilities for engaging with the issue of HIV/AIDS. Through dialogue, discussion and communal engagement, we hoped to extend the space for communal engagement and influence the social context to be one where people felt more able to confront HIV/AIDS. We hoped that these more public activities (the community quizzes, the public dramas, the posters, the comics, the games, the herbal albums, and the HIV testing days) would generate debate, even controversy, and so break through the silence, secrecy and denial that were contributing towards the spread of the epidemic.

Achievements

The year 2005 was in many ways the high point in the project's life. We consolidated the achievements made in 2004, and continued on the path to overcoming many of the obstacles that had been challenging us over the years. The facilitators had grown immensely in both confidence and skill. They were able to manage the learning process in the circles, while at the same time understanding how this was situated in a wider development context. They had developed the capacity and self-assurance to decide on projects, initiate them and follow through with their implementation. The food aid initiative was a case in point. It was organised entirely by the facilitators who mobilized the circles' committees and successfully implemented a system whereby work teams were monitored and food distributed in a well managed and fair way.

The circles were becoming more of a force to be reckoned with. The community had begun to understand what the circles could achieve, and numbers of participants had swelled to over three hundred by July 2005. There were also more requests to open circles in distant villages which had heard about what the learning circles in Malealea were doing. LANFE approached Malealea again to help them with their circles, and Moso undertook to train a new cohort of facilitators for LANFE. Two facilitators of the Malealea circles were included in this training, with the idea being for LANFE to

gradually take on the Malealea facilitators in an effort to integrate the Malealea project into a sustainable wider national REFLECT programme[66].

In terms of learning, by the middle of 2005, we had established a consistent and more structured learning agenda across all the circles. This was an advantage as it meant that circle participants were able to share conversations and dialogue across circles rather than only amongst participants in one circle. A more interactive climate had been established through joint activities and there was a growing sense of community and purpose among the circles. And there was a real sense of people learning more about HIV and AIDS. The quality of this learning was measurable through the kinds of questions asked and responses given at the public quizzes and the community drama performances. A Canadian HIV/AIDS specialist, Professor Phillip Berger[67], attended one of the community quizzes (see photo insert). He was very impressed with the accuracy of knowledge and level of questions asked and answers given, saying that he doubted that some of the questions posed could be answered by Canadians who have greater access to information and resources.



Professor Phillip Berger attending one of the community quiz competitions

[66] Due to administrative delays within LANFE, this had not yet taken place by the end of 2005.

[67] Prof Berger is the Medical Director of St Michael's Hospital, a teaching hospital in Toronto. He was in Lesotho for three months to provide assistance to a HIV/AIDS hospital in Leribe.

The extent to which this learning was being internalized could be gauged by people's willingness to test for HIV. By July 2005, 71 more people had tested for HIV. Of the people who tested positive, 20 had joined a support group which was set up as a new REFLECT circle at the local clinic. The group began a candle making project to generate income (see photo insert) The numbers in the support group gradually grew as more people came to terms with their status and gathered the courage to join the group. This was a major success. The fact that people were meeting, disclosing their status to one another, and taking positive collaborative action meant that the terrible silence of only a year earlier had been broken. People were testing, seeking support, getting information and generally taking charge of their lives. This was a success in terms of people 'coming out'. It seemed that our objective to create a more accepting space was being achieved. People knew about the disease and were seeking advice and help and support through appropriate structures.



The HIV support circle making candles

Also, because we had managed to introduce relevant texts that proved to be popular with participants, there was more reading happening. People were for the first time in the five years of the project beginning to engage with texts – at first the comics, and then the other Soul City texts that were also available in Sesotho. The photo insert here shows two people engaged in reading one of these texts. They had acquired



Two participants engage in reading while waiting for the clinic to open

this text through the circle, but at the time this photo was taken, they were not in a circle meeting – they were just waiting for the clinic to open.

In terms of developing materials and training, Moso and I had established a rhythm that seemed to work. We were developing materials consistently and monitoring them carefully against needs as we went along. We were also conducting regular training sessions to ensure that facilitators were able to use these materials while being supported appropriately to progress according to the needs and pace of their respective groups.

Challenges

By the end of July 2005, the challenges facing the facilitators and the circles did not appear to be overwhelming – as long as funding was available to pay the facilitators, the field worker (Moso) and the other expenses associated with keeping the circles going. Moso and I had by this time come to terms with the fact that facilitators needed continuous support to use the learning units and work in the field. This we accepted as a part of the context. I hoped that as Moso gained greater confidence and experience, he would be able to develop learning units on his own. But until that point, we agreed that the project had gained a respectable momentum and was progressing well in a way that was both manageable and sustainable.

However, there were still some unanswered questions and aspects of the project which we wanted to develop further. For example, I was interested in further sharpening participants' critical skills. To what extent were participants thinking critically? What did it really mean to people to think critically in this context, and how was this making a difference to people's lives? How could the gains made so far be consolidated and further reinforced? These were questions that indicated progress and heralded the promise of further innovation. And by now we had learned to trust the process and the participants to bring about that innovation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a general overview of how the village learning circles were established and how, over a five year period, they gradually gained momentum to become significant vehicles for mobilising communities around both learning and action agendas.

The achievements and challenges have been noted and I have traced the ways in which the challenges were systematically addressed.

The next chapter presents a closer account of the stories of four learning circles. These case studies will provide the reader with deeper insight into how the circles applied the approach. What were the struggles like closer to the ground? How did circles resolve their difficulties? These case studies are intended to ask the same questions about REFLECT, but from a different angle. The voices of the participants, rather than the facilitators are more present in the next chapter.

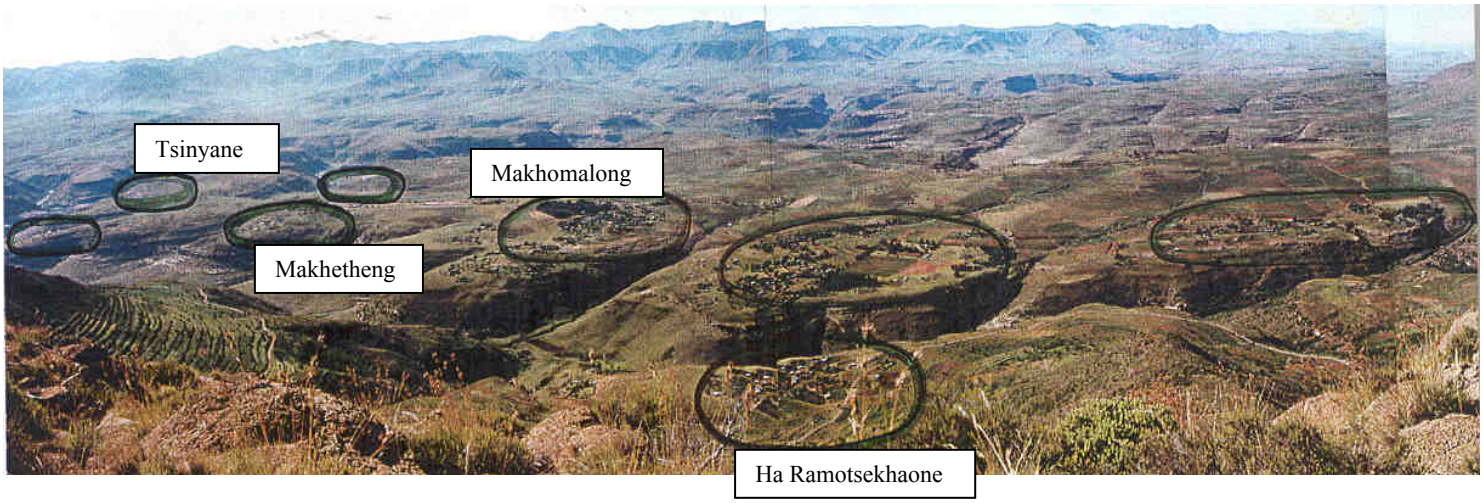
CHAPTER SIX – THE STORY OF REFLECT IN FOUR VILLAGE LEARNING CIRCLES

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five described some of the issues common across learning circles in the Malealea valley. But while there were many common themes across circles, each learning circle also had its own unique story, fashioned by the particular composition of participants, facilitator(s), and contextual factors peculiar to that village. This synthesis was in turn influenced and shaped by dynamics and events occurring in other circles in the valley. There was thus a continuous evolution of each circle's story.

> And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and become yet other stories…
>
> (Salman Rushdie, 1990: 72)

This chapter offers a narrative account of the evolution of four learning circles in different villages - Makhetheng, Ha Ramotsekhoane, Tsinyane, and Makhomalong. The geographical location of these circles can be seen on the photo below showing the valley of Malealea and some of the 14 villages – ringed - where learning circles are located.



An "aerial" photograph showing the location of the four villages (labelled) whose stories are presented in this chapter

The stories of these four villages have been selected to illustrate a particular dimension of the complexities and nuances that characterised learning circles at a micro-level. Makhetheng village represents a 'typical' village learning circle story. Many of the events that occurred in Makhetheng circle also occurred in other circles, and this story thus provides the reader with a good general sense of what opportunities and obstacles were encountered. Ha Ramotsekhoane offers insight into the way in which interpersonal dynamics and traditional beliefs influenced learning circles. Tsinyane is presented as the learning circle 'success story', while Makhomalong is presented as an account of a circle that failed, but then like a phoenix, rose from the ashes to grow into a strong cohesive group. Had four other stories been selected, different dynamics would have come to the fore. Every story differed, even though circles all used the REFLECT approach.

There are four sections to each account. I begin by telling the story of how the circle evolved, and then reflect on the learning, the benefits, and the constraints experienced by the participants and facilitators of the circle. These four areas of exploration relate to the research questions that frame the study as a whole.

Makhetheng village learning circle

While the story of Makhetheng learning circle is unique, in many ways it also represents the 'typical' learning circle. It was not chosen because it was particularly 'good' or 'bad', but rather because it is representative of characteristics and trends experienced in Malealea learning circles more widely. In its development, in the actions taken, in its successes and challenges, we get an in-depth picture of the general experience of a learning circle in Malealea. For this reason, it is useful to begin with this story, which will act as a backdrop against which the stories of other learning circles are narrated.

The Story

Like many other circles, the Makhetheng circle was initiated towards the end of 2000. Upon request, a community meeting was called by the chief of Makhetheng village, and the newly trained facilitators explained the REFLECT approach and invited people to join the learning circle. The facilitators explained that this would be a space where people would work together on development related concerns, while also improving their literacy skills and learning in general. There was a muted response to this invitation. Most people

felt they could read and write well enough for their needs, and were not really sure what was meant by 'development'. Others felt that it was a bit late to start to read and write – what would be the point? In general, people did not really see the purpose of joining the circle. The facilitators managed to recruit three or four participants, who attended irregularly, usually after being cajoled from their houses at the start of each meeting.

At this early stage, the facilitators too were still somewhat unsure of the approach and their own abilities. In some ways, they were taking a leap of faith, unsure of how the process would unfold; trying to convince people of something they themselves were not yet fully convinced. Also, at this point their communication skills and confidence were shaky. Later they would have little hesitation in addressing community forums, but at this early stage they were still unsure of themselves and the approach they were promoting.

The group made slow progress. The facilitators focused on basic literacy and numeracy exercises with which they felt most confident. However, this did little to capture the imagination or enthusiasm of the participants. Later, after some additional training, the facilitators began to understand how literacy could be situated within the context of development related activities. In order to reorientate the discussion and activities of the group in relation to development, the facilitators participants to map the community (see photo insert) which they wanted to address.



Map of Makhetheng village as constructed by participants of the learning circle. This graphic was copied from the PRA map constructed initially on the ground.

Water was prioritised as the most important concern, and the group set about trying to find out why the standpipes that supplied water to the village were not working. They created another map of the water pipeline and the position of the standpipes, identifying which ones worked and which did not, discussing various possibilities as to why water flowed in some at some times and not in others. They finally decided that there must be a block in the main pipe supplying water to their village, as there was water in the village above Makhetheng.

Using a map of the pipeline which participants had drawn up, they identified various points at which the blockage might have occurred, digging up the pipe to see where the flow was restricted. The problem was finally located at the catchment tank at the primary school where there appeared to be a blockage. This was cleared, the tank cleaned and the taps in the village supplied water again.



Digging up the pipe to see where possible blockages might be



Cleaning out the catchment tank at the primary school

This success was significant in that the group felt greatly encouraged by their achievement, and others in the village were impressed by what they had done. Their action gave the circle some credibility, and provided members and non-members with a better understanding of what the purpose and the potential of the group might be with respect to development. They had used literacy skills in an applied way (through constructing maps) to plan and guide an action which had led to action that improved the lives of those in the village. They felt they could do things for themselves and participate in their own development, rather than wait for government, or some other party, to solve their problems.

However, their success was short lived – the problem was only temporarily solved. After a few weeks, the taps were once again dry. The group tried the fix the problem in the same way, but without success. The problem was obviously more complex, requiring expertise beyond the means of the circle members themselves. The next step would have been for the group to write a letter requesting support from Rural Water Supply (RWS), the government department responsible for maintaining the water supply to the villages. However, this did not happen because people were disillusioned with the service delivered by RWS, and felt that their efforts would be futile. They resigned themselves to

walking the distance to the one functional standpipe some distance from the village. (Resignation felt by members of learning circles when actions failed was not uncommon.)

Despite their setback, the group did not give up completely. They continued working though the learning units written (by Teboho, Moso and me) to guide the circles' learning process. These were primarily focused around life skills and financial skills, as well as reforestation. A unit on income and expenditure helped members to understand how they could improve their budgeting skills at home and in the circle. They joined the stokvel fundraising activities that were being organised collaboratively between all the circles in an effort to raise funds for circle actions. (This was after the facilitators committee was formed and activities were organised across circles in an attempt to forge connections and muster wider support for the circles.) After raising some money in this way, they were able to hire a truck to transport trees to their village (see photo insert), and these trees were planted at members' homes.



Hired truck delivering trees to plant in Makhetheng village

The circle slowly gained momentum. They were able to buy a pig (see photo below), which they hoped to breed, and also use a source of food for Christmas.



Four of the Makhetheng circle members with their new pig

Over time, more members were recruited; the facilitators attended more training workshops, and steadily gained confidence as their skills and understanding of the REFLECT approach improved.

However, the setbacks were not over. A severe drought meant that many of the trees planted at members' homes died. While disheartened, members were not deterred. They secured land from the chief on which to start a woodlot, dug holes in preparation for planting when the rains came and began excavating a dam which they could use for irrigating the trees in case of another drought (see photo insert).



Circle members discussing the excavation of their dam

But progress was once again curbed when the woodlot site was withdrawn following complaints by other community members that the site was in fact communal grazing land. The dam also had to be filled in, because the site chosen was inappropriate. A German engineer who was working with Tsinyane village (see the case study of Tsinyane to follow) advised us that the dam was in danger of creating a serious erosion problem. Members had chosen to excavate the dam on a slope because they correctly believed that

this was a good catchment area. However, because of the steep gradient of the slope, the dam wall would not have been able to withstand the force of incoming water when it rained. The wall would very likely have broken, taking with it the earth below the dam, leaving a donga in its wake. Limited knowledge and expertise with regard to where and how to build a dam sabotaged members' plans.

Notwithstanding this, the pig they had bought with funds raised from the stokvel was thriving, and later had piglets which were sold to raise additional funds. Feeling encouraged, they once again approached the chief for a site to develop, and this time they were granted a site, which, because it was some distance from the village, was definitely not going to be contested. Using the funds they had raised, they began a garden, buying seeds for vegetables which would keep their families supplied with a constant source of nutrition (see photo insert).



Circle participants planting apple trees in their newly established garden

However, cattle got into the garden and destroyed their efforts. At this point, two Dutch tourists offered to provide funds to support the Makhetheng circle. These two people had returned to Malealea to do voluntary work with the learning circles for a period of three months. They donated money for the Makhetheng circle to buy apple trees and put up a wire fence for their garden (see photo inserts). With the fence in place, the



Putting up a fence to keep the cattle out

crops and trees were protected and members felt encouraged to continue their efforts. They still struggled with water, which had to be carried in buckets from a source about a kilometer from the garden. However, a neighbouring farmer with a dam allowed them to use this water source at times when his dam was full. At the time of writing, the garden continued to do well, providing members with a steady source of food, except in times of drought when the water source was dry and the crops suffered. In an interview in 2005, members claimed that securing the garden was one of their most important achievements as a group.

> *Engoe ea lintho tse bohlokoa haholo tseo re li entseng re le sehlopha ke ho etsa serapa. Re sebelisana mmoho mme re lemela malapa a rona lijo, le ka nako tse ling, re atleha ho rekisa lihlahisoa tsa serapa sa rona.*
>
> One of the most important things we have done as a group is to build our garden. We work together here and grow food for our families, and even sometimes we are able to sell from the garden.
>
> (Makhetheng circle participant)

Learning

In terms of learning, members claimed they acquired a range of skills and knowledge, including improved planning and organizing skills, budgeting skills, agricultural skills, fencing skills, and knowing more about HIV/AIDS. Members stated that learning about real life issues, such as HIV, was most important and meaningful. Members found that learning was most useful in a context where it could be applied, such as in the context of looking after their health or managing money. When fundraising through activities such as stokvels and concerts, people had to count and record monies raised and keep records of how this money was used (see photo insert on the next page).



Managing money constituted an important learning practice and literacy skill

This learning was more widely applied to other situations in their lives.

Ke ithutile ho etsa moralo oa ho sebelisa chelete. Ha joale, ha ke ea shopong, ke etsa lethathamo la lintho tseo ke lihlokang, ke sheba hore na tse bohlokoa haholo ke lifeng, ebe ke qala ka tsona pele.

I have learned how to budget. Now when I am going shopping, I make a list of the things I need, see which are the most important, and buy these items first.
(Makhetheng learning circle participant)

Ke ne ke tloaetse ho reka ke sa etsa moralo. Empa hona joale, ke lula fates, ebe ke nahana ka litlhoko tsa lelapa la ka. Ke sheba lintho tsa mantlha pele tse kang phoofo ea papa, parafini, le sesepa. Kamora lintho tseo ke tla nahana ka lintho tse ling tse kang raese le nama. Haeba ho se na chelete e lekaneng, ke tla reka mahe le linaoa ho ena le raese le nama. Ke sheba menyetla le mathata a lintho pele ke etsa liqeto. Ke ne ke sa etse sena pele.

I used to just buy without planning. Now I sit down and think about what my family needs. I look first at the basic things like maize meal, paraffin and soap. After this I will think of other things like rice and meat. If there is not enough money, I will buy eggs and beans instead of rice and meat. I look at the advantages and disadvantages of things before making decisions. This is not something I used to do.
(Makhetheng learning circle participant)

However, in general, people were less enthusiastic about literacy and numeracy related activities than they were about development orientated activities. They seemed to find the literacy activities of the learning cycle tedious, preferring analysis and discussion of problems, and action that would address their problems. But where members could see the direct benefits of improving their literacy and numeracy skills, they were willing to apply themselves to improving their skills.

> *Ho bala le ho ngola, ha se ntho eo ba e thabelang haholo hobane baholo ba bona ba tseba ho bala le ho ngola mme ho lekane litlhoko tsa rona. … Ha ke na bonnete ba seo re ithutileng sona ka ho bala le ho ngola, ha ke na bonnete ba litsebo tse ncha tseo re nang le tsona, empa ke tseba hore ke ntlafalitse litsebo tsa katsa ho bala le ho ngola ka ho itokisetsa lintho tseo re batla ho li etsa. Re etsa meralo ea lintho tseo re tlo li etsa, tse kang ho etsa lethathamo la lisebelisuoa tsa serapeng, le lithoko tsa tsona, joalo ka manyolo le lipeo pele re lema. …. Lintho tseo re ratileng ho ithuta ka tsona haholo ke ho etsa chelete le meralo ea ho e sebelisa. Pele re ne re nyahama, empa, kamora ho etsa moralo oa ho sebelisa chelete, re ile ra utloisisa ka moo ho etsa mekete ea lipina ho re thusang ho kenya chelete pokothong. Hape re thabela ho bala libuka tsa lipale tsa Soul City. Re li rate hobane li re joetsa ka moo batho ba atlehang ho phela le HIV ka teng, le maikutlo a fapaneng ka HIV. Hona ho ea re khotatsa.*
>
> To read and write is not something that pleases people a lot, because most of us already know how to read and write enough for our needs. …[*On being asked what they had learned to read and write*]…I'm not sure what we have learned to read and write, I'm not sure what new skills we have, but I know that I have improved my literacy skills through preparing things that we want to do. We make plans of what we are going to do, like making a list of the things we need for the garden, and how much these will cost, like fertilizer and seeds, before we plant. …The thing that we have enjoyed learning about is about making money and budgets. We were nearly depressed before, but after making budgets, we understood how singing and concerts could really help us to generate income. We also enjoy reading the Soul City comics[68]. These we like because they tell us about how people cope with HIV, and their different feelings about HIV. This encourages us.
>
> (Makhetheng learning circle participant)

Benefits

Participants felt that the main benefits of belonging to the circle were the opportunities to discuss things together as a group, agree on decisions, and act collectively.

> *Re ithutile hore ho etsang lintho mmoho hoa thusa. Pele ho ne ho le thata ho etsa liqeto re le sehlopha, empa hona joale ho utloisisa ha betere mme ha emong a hlahisa ntho, ka e buisana ebe re fumana tsela ea ho phethahatsa tharolo ka bobebe ele ho sheba moo re ka ntlafalang ka tlahiso e entsoeng.*

[68] The way in which Soul City materials were used in learning circles was discussed in Chapter Five.

> We have learned that doing things together is helpful. Before, it was difficult to make a decision as a group, but now we understand better and when someone suggests something, we may discuss it, and we find a way to move quickly to a resolution and see how we can improve on the suggestion that has been made.
>
> (Makhetheng learning circle participant)

Participants did not feel so alone with their problems. They were able to get support from one another on both a personal level, and on a practical level. Participants also felt that they developed as individuals, gaining more confidence to speak out and do things for themselves.

> *Sehlopha ke sebaka seo batho ba kopanang ho buisana ka lintho mmoho ebe ba arolelana maikutlo. Hona ho nthusitse le haeba ke na le mathata lapeng, ha ke ea sehlopeng kea a lebala. Ke khona hape ho fumana thuso ka mathata a ka a lapeng – akang litlhoko tsa lelapa –ke atleha ho fumana litlhoko tse ling tsa tsena ka lintho tseo re li etsang sehlopheng. Re lema meroho mme hona ho re thusa ho qoba litsenyehelo tse sa hlokahaleng. Hap eke ithutile ho bua le batho le ho ikeketsa lintho le ho iphumanela lintho ka bonna. Joaleka hona joale, ha ke fumana chelete ke se ke na le tloaelo ea ho boloka chelete le litho tse ling tsa sehlopha hore e tsoale e be ngata. Re leka ho boloka chelete selemo kaofela, empa haeba batho ba bang ba ena le mathata, ba hula chelete pele ho nako.*
>
> The circle is a space to meet people, discuss things together and share feelings. This has helped me. Even when I have problems at home, when I go to the circle I can forget them. I am also able to get help for my problems at home - like some of the family needs - I am now able to meet some of these needs through the things we do in the circle. We plant vegetables and this helps to avoid unnecessary expenses. I've also learned how to speak to people, and how to do things for myself and how to find things for myself. Like now, when I get some money, I have developed a habit of saving money with other circle members so that it gets to be a bigger amount. We try and save the money for a year, although when people have problems they sometimes take it out before time.
>
> (Makhetheng learning circle participant)

The feeling of being able to do things for themselves gave participants a greater sense of being able to direct their own destiny, harnessing available resources along the way.

> *Re ithutile ho iketsetsa lintho ho ena le ho emela ba bang ho re fa ho hong. Ke nnete hore re ntse re fumana tsehetso ho tsoa ho ba bang, joalo ka Trust, empa le ha re fumana tsehetso re na le maikutlo hore re iketsetsa lintho ka bo rona. Hobane re na le serapa mme re se re na le tsela ea ho fumana tse ling tsa lithloko tsa rona, re ikutloa re khotetse haholo ho tsoela pele ka katleho. Ha feela re ntse re tsoela pele ho rala le ho itokisetsa, le ho etsa lintho mmoho, re tla tsoela pele ka lintlafatso ka hara motse oa rona.*

> We have learned to do things for ourselves, instead of just waiting for others to give us something. It is true that we still get support from others like the [Malealea Development] Trust, but even if we get support, we still have a feeling that we are doing things for ourselves. Because we have made a garden and now have a way of providing for our needs, we feel encouraged to carry on, and go further. As long as we carry on planning and preparing, and doing things together, we will continue with developments in our village.
>
> (Makhetheng learning circle participant)

Through collaborative action, the group had found a way to generate income, to learn new things, to develop a stronger sense of community and to take action to improve their lives.

Constraints

Besides the considerable contextual constraints which participants experienced (such as drought and having to walk long distances to fetch water), there were also certain constraints that pertained to them as participants within the circle. For example, one of the major constraints related to members' lack of skills and expertise. Several of their actions, including the repair of the water pipeline and the excavation of a dam, had to be abandoned because of lack of expertise. Members thus limited themselves to taking action in relation to what they were most familiar with – agricultural activities. They were not able to stretch themselves to exploit other opportunities and prospects available in a context characterised by tourism. For example, members did not look beyond their own community to raise money. They considered stokvels, concerts and selling vegetables or their pigs – they did not think about making and selling craft or other items to tourists who had disposable cash income. The Malealea Development Trust was open to supporting circles financially with development related activities. Some circles were able to think creatively about such opportunities, applying to the Trust for funds to start a candle making project, to build toilets, or to roof a building for the circle's use (see Ha Ramotsekhoane case study below). However, members of the Makhetheng circle were slow to take advantage of such opportunities, limiting their actions to growing vegetables and fruit, and planting trees. These familiar activities were manageable, and while they were likely to succeed if there were good rains, they were not particularly innovative or challenging - they did not stretch members to learn new skills and apply themselves in new ways. Members continued with what they already knew well.

Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle

Like the story of Makhetheng learning circle, the story of the Ha Ramotsekhoane also provides an illustration of how members of a circle worked together to learn and promote development in their village. However, this story provides insight into different issues, particularly interpersonal dynamics and traditional beliefs, and the ways in which such dynamics and beliefs influenced the learning circle and its progression.

The Story

The Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle began at the end of 2000, when the circles were launched for the first time. However, this was one of the circles that collapsed shortly after it was launched. The two original facilitators who worked with this group lived more than an hour away from Ha Ramotsekhoane village, and over time, they lost their enthusiasm and motivation to prepare their sessions and walk the distance to the circle, especially since at this time, facilitators were working on a voluntary basis. Also, members' attendance was somewhat erratic, and facilitators became disillusioned when they arrived to find only one or two participants at a meeting. They were not able to sustain the commitment on a voluntary basis, and the circle broke up.

A year later, towards the end of 2001, Ntate Pinki, a resident of Ha Ramotsekhoane, and also a circle facilitator, moved from the village where he had been working and started working in his own village. He said that participants in the other circle were asking to be paid to attend meetings and the group was collapsing. Working in Ha Ramotsekhoane was convenient and furthermore, the people in Ha Ramotsekhoane were eager to restart their circle and did not demand payment for attending, as the participants in his previous circle had done. Pinki himself believed very strongly in the value of voluntary service, and wanted to carry on working with the circles.

Following a community *pitso*, the group was reestablished, with shepherds (mostly young men) being the majority of learners recruited to the circle. However, over time, the composition of the circle was to change. Working with shepherds proved to be a challenge. Firstly, due to the seasonal nature of their work, shepherds had to move their animals to new grazing areas at different times of the year, and were unable to attend circle meetings regularly. Even when there were grazing pastures close to the village, they

left early in the morning, and returned at sunset. This made meeting difficult. Secondly, since many of them had never attended school, their learning needs were different to other members of the circle who had had some previous schooling. The facilitator found it difficult to address varying needs simultaneously. And thirdly, the shepherds were not able to participate in the action points planned in and around the village since they were frequently away with their animals. The shepherds gradually dropped out, leaving a small group which consisted mainly of women. In retrospect, it would have been better to have a circle specifically dedicated to shepherds, designed around their movements and particular needs.

The group continued to meet, slowly gaining momentum. They began by working through the unit on envy. (The theme for this unit was identified by learning circles in 2000, and the unit was constructed in order to help community members talk about envy as a social force inhibiting development initiatives.) The discussion helped the group to develop a stronger sense of unity, and motivated them to think about how to work together for the good of the village. They talked about what the needs of their community were, and decided to prioritise the establishment of a preschool. Pinki asked his wife to work on a voluntary basis with the children and so a little school was begun.

> *Hobane ke utloisisa bohlokoa ba mosebetsi oa boithaopo, ebile ke thusitse mosali oa ka ho hlokomela sena le ho bona hore na o ka thusa sechaba joang. O lumetse ho sebetsa sekoloaneng sa likonyana a sa pataloe.*
>
> Because I understand the importance of voluntary work, I also helped my wife to see this, to see how it could help the community. She agreed to work in the preschool not being paid.
>
> (Ntate Pinki, Facilitator of the Ha Ramotsekhoane village)

One of the circle members offered her house as a meeting place, while other circle members helped to get the preschool registered[69] by meeting with parents and working together with them to hold concerts to raise the money needed for the registration fee. At the time of writing in mid 2006, the preschool was still going strong. Parents had realized the value of the school, and were paying a M20 monthly fee to keep it going. Pinki's wife was receiving a stipend generated from these fees, although if parents were unable to afford the M20 monthly fee, they could pay her in maize or sorghum from their fields.

[69] By law, all preschools in Lesotho need to be registered with the Government Education office.

Another significant action that the group undertook was the planting of trees and the protection of existing woodlots around the village. As they worked through the unit on reforestation, participants began to see trees and woodlots as an asset to be protected and developed.



Ha Ramotsekhoane circle participants planting trees

Re ne re nahana hore lifate ke lintho feela tseo re ka lisebelisana; re ne re sa bone bohlokoa ba tsona. Mohlala, re na le lifate tse ngata tsa liperekisi ka hara masimo a rona, mme re ne re sa li tsotelle. Empa, ka mora ho buisana ka sehlopheng, re hlokometse bohlokoa ba ho sireletsa lifate tsena hobane ke moruo oa rona mme ha rea lokela ho tlohela batho ha ba li sakha.

We used to think that trees were just something to use; just trees, we didn't see them as something valuable. For example, we have many peach trees in our fields; we just took them for granted. But after talking in the circle, we saw the importance of protecting these because they are our wealth and we shouldn't just allow others to cut them down.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane circle participant)

With a growing awareness of the value of trees as a resource that was being plundered, they asked the chief to call a *pitso* to discuss the issue. At this meeting, the circle led a discussion about the environment and their natural resources. Following the discussion, the community agreed that there should be restrictions on the cutting of trees. Only in the case of a funeral in the village should a tree be cut down, and shepherds were to be stopped from cutting wood in the forest. The restrictions were to apply to people from Ha Ramotsekhoane as well as people from outside of the village, since people from other villages were cutting trees and removing the wood without the chief's permission. It was agreed that the felling of a tree would require approval of the chief.

At this community meeting it was also agreed that an area, previously designated as a protected area for growing thatching grass, should be re-established.

> *Ha re ntse re hola, re ne re boleloa ka linako tsohle hore sebaka sena e ne le sebaka sa mohlomo ho ruleloa matlo, empa re ne re sa bone joang ba mohlomo moo. Le mohla re se re entse pitso, ho no ho ntse ho se na joang bo metseng mono. Joale re etsa qeto ea rala hore sebaka sena se boele bosoneng ka ho beha joang hore bo hole e le hore re bo sebelise ho rulela matlo. Batho ha ba ea lokela hore re tseba pale ea sebaka sena, ba lokela ho bona lintho tsena maphelong a bona.*
>
> When we were growing up, we had always heard that this was the area for grass to be used for thatching buildings, but we did not see grass there. And even up until the time we met at the pitso, there was no grass growing there. So we decided to make plans so the place could retain its name, by letting the grass recover as an asset to be used for buildings. People shouldn't just say we know the history of this place, but they should see these things in their own life.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane circle participant)

After the grass had been reestablished, people were able to repair the roofs of their houses. This had become more and more difficult to do, because as the population increased, so did pressure on natural resources, and areas previously protected were gradually given up to grazing and not allowed to recover. For example, the valley below them, previously dedicated to thatching grass, had not been able to recover for several years. "We realized we had to do something for ourselves."

Restrictions on cutting wood also prompted members to consider alternative ways of generating income.

> *Hape batho ba ne ba atisa ho rekisa patsi metseng e meng. Hangata ba ne ba nahana hore ena ke tsela e lengoe feela ba ka ba phelang ka eona, hobane ba le haufi le patsi. Hona joale, ba fetotse maikutlo a bona. Ba hlokometse hore patsi ha ea lokela ho ba mokhoa o le mong feela oa ho kenya chelete. Re lokela ho hlokomela lifate le ho nahana ka lintho tse ling tseo re ka li etsang, haholoholo sebakeng sa ha re holile, mme re sa khone ho rekisa patsi. Ho tla etsahala eng? Ho tlameha ho ba le mekhoa e meng ea ho ba le chelete.*
>
> People also used to sell wood around other villages. They used to think this was the only way of surviving because they are close to the wood sources. Now they have changed their minds, they realise that wood shouldn't be the only way of making money. We need to look after the trees and we should think of other things that we can do, especially for when we are old, and we are no longer able to sell wood. What will happen? There must be other ways to earn money.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane circle participant)

The circle decided that one way of generating income would be to start a small shop in the village. Together, members of the circle built a structure, and then through stokvels and concerts they raised funds to roof the structure and buy stock to start their shop. They felt exceedingly proud, not only that they had a structure of their own, but also that they had a new means to generate income. Members of the learning circle also dried peaches to sell in the shop (see photo insert), providing an additional source of income and stock. Furthermore, the shop provided members with an opportunity to acquire new skills - none of them had any previous business experience. It also provided a service to the community, where there had been no shop at all.



Home made dried peaches (amongst other items) for sale in the little shop set up by circle members

Ho ba le khoebo ka hare ho motes oa rona ho bolelang hore batho ha ba sa ea hole ho reka lintho tsenanyana joaloka mollo kapa kerese. E re fumantsa litlhoko tse motse oa rona mme e thusa batho haholo ba se ba holile ba tsofetse le bana ba banyenyana ba hloloang ho tsela noka ha e tletse. Haeba re hloka ntho re e fumana ka hara motse oa rona. Joaloka litho tsa sehlopha, le rona re ne mokhoa oa ho ikenyetsa chelete.

Having a shop in our village means that people no longer have to walk far to buy simple things, like a box of matches or a candle. It addresses needs in our community, and helps people, especially the old people and the young children who struggle to cross the river. If we need something we can get it here in the village. And as circle members, we also have a way of making some money.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane circle participant)

Moso and I held several workshops to help members and the facilitator to understand fundamental business skills such as how to work out costs and profit. We helped them to set up a basic book keeping system and left them to continue their business, with the help of their facilitator.



A workshop on costing and pricing to help members of the learning circle improve their business skills

However, our assumption that the facilitator would be able to guide them to develop the business proved wrong. Even with the support of the workshops and several units designed to help people with generic business skills, the shop floundered, and failed to generate the profit that we had all hoped for. The greatest problem was that circle members were unable to cope with the numeracy demands of this small business. They based their prices on what other shops charged, rather than working out what their costs were, and what their profits should be. They did not factor the high transport costs into their prices, and thus found that they were unable to make a profit.

> *Teransepoto ea re bolaya. Re lokela ho palama re ea hole ho reka lintho tsena, mme hangata re na le chelete enyane ho reka thepa ea khoebo. Ho na ho bolela hore re sebelisa chelete engata ho palama likoloi tsa baeti, ka nako tse ling chelete e fetang ea thepa re ilo e reka – ke litsenyehelo tse boima ho tlisa lintho moo re phelang.*
>
> Transport is killing us. We have to travel far to buy things, and usually we only have a small amount of money to buy stock. This means that we spend a lot of money on transport, sometimes more than we have for stock – it costs us a lot of money to bring things here to where we live.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Because of their poor numeracy skills, keeping books was an ordeal. At first they got around the problem by employing one of the member's children as a sales person, leaving her to record the sales and work out the numbers. When this did not work out, they rotated the shop duties amongst themselves, with each member having a day of service in the shop. But this strategy also failed, because members were unable to accomplish the task of recording their sales. Furthermore, they felt that since it was their shop, they could take items on credit, and the stock was soon depleted. Finally, they elected one member to run the shop, paying her a stipend of M25 (about US$4) every two weeks. For a few months, the figures were "checked" by circle members every Sunday, but the habit fell away, seemingly because members did not have the ability to monitor the income and expenditure. It was thus left up to the sales person to run the shop, more or less alone. Fetching the stock from town was also left up to her, with other members saying she was obliged to do this since she was getting paid. She became disillusioned, saying that circle members had broken their agreement to run the shop together. The sales person also introduced new control measures, restricting the credit available to members of the circle. They were allowed to get credit only once, and not again until they had repaid their previous debt. Not understanding why it was important for the business to control credit, members started to feel resentful, saying that she was 'taking over'. They began withdrawing their support for the shop, which further jeopardized the business.

In additional to members' lack of skills, they also experienced several other set-backs in relation to the shop. A mentally ill person from the village broke into the shop and stole a sizeable portion of the stock, as well as the cash.



Hole in the wall where somebody broke into the shop



Members counting their losses

People were afraid to approach the thief to retrieve the stock because the week before he had stabbed his father. Another setback occurred when a member, who was keeping the shop money in her house, had it stolen by her own children who were visiting her from Maseru. While distressing, these setbacks were short-lived, and not as undermining in the long term as members' lack of business skills and knowledge.

A more successful initiative undertaken by the group was the sanitation of a water source for the village. For four years preceding the initiation of the circle, the village had been struggling with water. At the time that the circle identified problems in their village, water was singled out as a primary concern. The water system installed by Rural Water Supply (RWS) was not functioning and people were drawing water from two unprotected springs (see photo insert), both of which were also used by animals. As a result, the water was polluted and people were often ill, in addition to being greatly inconvenienced by not having a reliable water source.



An unprotected spring – the main water source serving the village

Re ne re noa metsi a litsila, le ka nakso tse ling, lipahlo li ne li hlatsoetsoa ka selibeng ke M'e Malebohang ea nang le lefu la hlooho. Liphoofolo li ne li noa moo. Re ile ra bona hona ho le bothata bo boholo mme re ile ra etsa qeto ho leka le ho fumana tsela ea ho nka liketso khahlanong le bothata bona e le ho tlisa ntlafatso e paraletseng motseng.

We were drinking dirty water, and sometimes clothes were even being washed in the water by Maleboheng, a woman with mental problems. Animals were also drinking there. We saw this was really a problem, and so decided to try and find a way to take action around this problem in order to bring wider development to the village.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Members of the community joined members of the circle to try and identify why the original water source was no longer effective. After some investigation, (see photo insert) members found that the water source had been diverted, and was no longer flowing into the original catchment area. Some villagers believed that this was because a snake was angry, and they were reluctant to try and re-access this source. It was clear that the problem could not be easily solved by members of the community or the circle.



Circle members inspecting the original catchment area

At this point, we sought expertise from the German development worker who was still working in the area. He assessed the original source (see photo insert), and announced that it had been diverted because of the growth of the roots of the trees. According to him, it would be very difficult to access this water source again. He suggested that the water sources then in use be examined, and if possible santiated. Together with the circle members and other people in the community, he identified which was the stronger of the two sources in use. He suggested a way to sanitate this source and secured funding for this project.



Roland Ulrich from DED helps circle members to assess the original water source

The circle approached the chief, who called a *pitso* to discuss the matter. The community agreed to provide the physical labour required, and work was begun. Under the guidance of the water engineer, the community and the circle members carried out the construction necessary to sanitise the source and make the water safe.



The water source before …



… and after completion of the new protected structure

Another successful project initiated by the learning circle, and undertaken by the community as a whole, was the construction of an access road from the village into the valley below it.





Circle and community members constructing an access road from their village into the valley below

Sechaba se utloisisitse hore ho etsa mila ke tlhoko ea emong le emong motseng. Re ne re hloka ho theolela mehoma ka kholong ho ea lema le ho nka lijalo tsa rona ka litonki le lipere ha bobebe. Batho ba ahileng pela khohlo le bona ba ne ba hloka mila ho nyolla lintho lijo tsa bona ka khohlong, empa ba ne ba sitoa ho lokisa mila ba le bang. Le bona ba re thusitse ka metsi ha re ne re hloka metsi, ke ka hona re ba thusitseng le rona. Hape ba ne ba hloka mmila oa mehoma e huloang ke liphoofolo. Mme re ile ra etsa qeto ea ho re kaofeela hoa rona re tla etsa mosebetsi mmoho. … Hona joale likhomo li ka hula mehoma li nyolosa le ho li theohela ka hara khohlo.

> The community saw that building a road was in the interests of everyone. We needed to be able to take our ox plough down into the valley in order to plough our fields there and collect our harvest on donkeys or horses easily. The people at the bottom of the valley also needed the road to get food out of the valley, but the road could not only be maintained by them. Also, they helped us with water when we did not have water, so we wanted to help them too. They also needed a road to walk with their ox ploughs. So we decided that we should all work together. … Now the cattle can pull the ox ploughs up and down into the valley.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

This initiative was successful because it brought together not only the people of Ha Ramotsekhoane village, but also those in the village below. By undertaking the project jointly, they were able to help one another to achieve their common goals. This gave people an enhanced sense of community.

> *Re ne re sa tloahela haholo ho sebetsa mmoho ka hara motse. Le ha re ne re ea pitsong, re ne re sa atise ho lumellana ka lintho. Re ne re batla hore maikutlo a rona a mameloe. Hangata re ne re sa utliosise hore na re ka fumana tsela entle joang ho tsoela pele molemong oa e mong le emong. Re ntse re le bahaisane joalo, re ne re sa sebetse mmoho hantle. Morena o ne a tlameha ho ema ho liella taba e le ho fihlela qeto ka pele. Empa, ho sebetsana mmoho ka nako tsohle, ho re entse hore re utloisise batho ha bobebe ho feta pele, le ho ntlafatsa litloaelo tsa rona.*
>
> We were not really used to working together in the village. Even when we went to the pitso, we didn't always agree on things. We just wanted our opinions to be heard. We didn't always understand how to find the best way forward for everyone. Although we were still neighbours, we did not work together so well. The chief still had to stand up and say this is my final word. But having to work together with someone regularly, you get to understand people better and you can improve on what you used to do.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

The group grew from strength to strength. They decided to build a new structure that would have two rooms, one for the shop, and one for a meeting place for the circle. They applied to the Malealea Development Trust for funds, and completed the building within a matter of months. This building, constructed from rocks, was far stronger than the previous one, which was just wattle and daub. It was also less vulnerable to thieves.



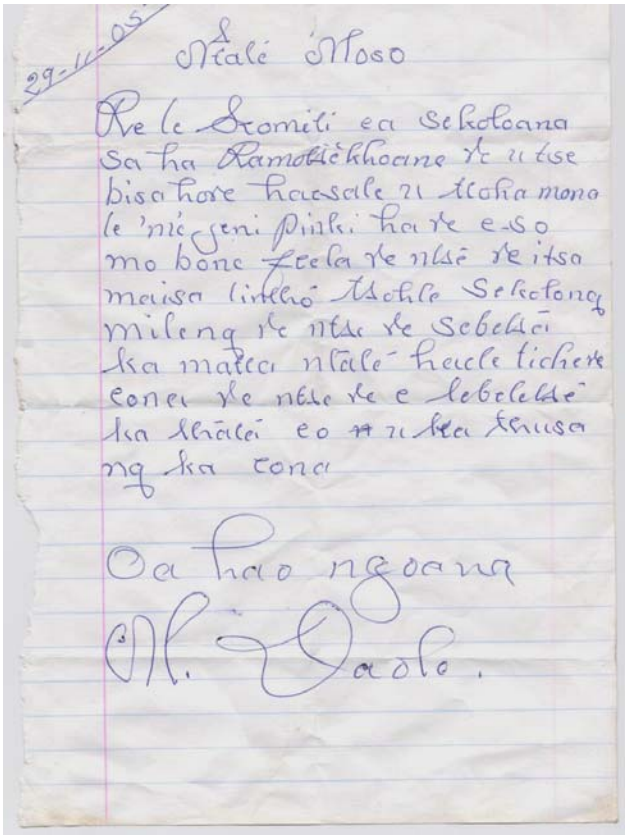
The original wattle and daub learning circle shelter / shop



The new stone structure houses the shop while the adjoining shelter is used for circle meetings

The shop struggled on, making some money, although its progress continued to be confounded by participants' poor business skills. In December 2005, the shop was functioning, albeit not as successfully as it might have been.

But just as the picture was looking hopeful, at least from an outside perspective, problems arose. Pinki was having financial problems, as well as problems at home with his wife, and with one of his neighbours. Pinki was disturbed by these conflicts, and felt sure that someone must be working against him with the aid of witchcraft. In October 2005, Pinki left the circle, apparently to work so that he could repay money he owed to someone in another village. However, he left without telling the circle participants, who were upset, as they were left without a facilitator. They wrote two letters to the facilitators' committee requesting assistance. Moso and I met with the circle to try and resolve the situation. Pinki reappeared for this meeting, saying he had been away earning money, but was returning to the circle. However, he disappeared again. Participants of the circle wrote another letter of concern, this time to Moso. This letter, encapsulating their concerns is presented and translated below:



29-11-05 Ntate Moso

We, as the learning circle committee of Ha Ramotsekhoane, would like to inform you that since the time when you left here with M'e Jini [Gillian], we have not seen Pinki but we are still continuing by ourselves with everything in the circle. We are still working hard on the road but we don't have a facilitator-teacher. And we are still expecting to have a facilitator, whoever you can send to help us.

Yours
M. Taole
[Chair of the learning circle committee]

Following new discussions with Pinki, where he alleged that circle members were using witchcraft against him, Moso and I made a decision to train one of the participants to take over facilitation of the circle. Pinki could not be persuaded that it was safe for him to return to the circle, and thus withdrew as a facilitator at the end of 2005.

Learning

When interviewed, participants of the Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle were positive about their learning experience within the group. They claimed to have improved their reading and writing skills, and learned more about development in general.

With regard to reading and writing, participants were particularly enthusiastic about their learning which they felt had helped them in an applied way. For example, they talked about how they had learned to plan and run their shop.

> *Ke ithutile ho etsa morala o motle. Hona joale ke etsa lethathamo la lintho tseo ke hlokang ho li reka, jaoleka ha re hloka lintho tsa shopo. E nthusitse hape ho beha litheko tsa lintho tseo re li rekisang ka shopong e le hore ba bang ba tle ba bone hore na lintho ke bo kae.*

> I have learned how to plan better. Now I make a list of the things I need to buy, like when we need things for the shop. It has also helped me to put prices on the things in the shop so that others can see how much things are.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

I was more reserved about their progress in this regard, perceiving that their business could have been making much more money had their skills been better. However, in spite of my reservations, they were sure that they had advanced. And to their credit, keeping a small business ticking over, even with a minimal profit margin, was in many ways a success not previously attained.

The reading materials that participants most enjoyed were the Soul City materials on HIV/AIDS. Again, participants claimed that they enjoyed this reading matter because it related to an issue directly affecting their everyday lives.

> *Leha o ikutloa o nyahame mme o utloa eka ha hona moo o ka eang, o ka bala buka mme oa fumana likeletso bukeng. Libuka tsena li re khotalitse hore re batle ho ithuta haholo le hore re thuse ba bang ho ithuta haholo. Monna oa ka o ne a sa batle ho bua ka taba ena, empa ke ile ka siea buka katlung, mme a e bala ea ba re atleha ho bua hanyane ka buka le ka lintho tse ka hara eona.*
>
> Even when you feel depressed and feel there is no where to go, you can read and get advice from the book. These books have encouraged us to learn more and to help others learn more. My husband didn't want to talk about this, but I left the book around the house, and he read it and then we were able to talk a little about the book and the things in the book.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

> *Re ithutile hore na lefu lena ke eng, le tsoaetsana joang, le hore na re ka itsiriletsa joang. Haeba re fumana tsoaetso, rea tseba hore hona le meriana eo re ka e sebelisa le hore na re ka itlhokomela joang e le hore re phele nako e telele. Libuka tsena li re thusitse ho fumana tlhahisoleseling ena.*
>
> We have learned about what this disease is, how it is spread, and how we should protect ourselves. If we get infected, we know there are medicines we can take and how we can look after ourselves to live longer. The books have helped us to find this information.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Besides strengthening their literacy and numeracy skills, and learning more about HIV/AIDS through the reading materials and discussion, participants felt encouraged by what they learned about development, and achieving things collectively.

Re ithutile ho thibela kholeho ea mobu, ho hlokomela patsi ea rona, le mokhoa ho ikenyetsa chelete. Hape re ithutile haholo ka bophelo ba rona le ba bao re phelang le bona. Re ithutile hore let'soele le beta phoho. Mmoho re ka fihlela katleho ho e na leha re sebetsa motho ka bo mong.

We have learned how to prevent erosion, to look after our wood supplies, and to earn income. We have also learned a lot about life and each other. We have learned that a whole community can kill a bull. [This is an form of expression meaning that there is strength in collective action.] Together we can work together to achieve something rather than just trying to do things on your own.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Benefits

Seemingly, as was the case in Makhetheng village, the main benefit of the circle was that it helped participants with development, giving them skills and strategies to bring about solutions to their problems. By discussing issues and taking action together, they made progress more quickly.

Haeba u bapisa tsela eo lintho li neng li etsahala ka eona le ka moo li etsahalang ka teng hona joale, pele re ne re nahanye ho sebetsa butle, empa hona joale, re etsa lintho ka pelenyana, ebile re khotaletse ho ba le sepheo. Ka ho nka karolo ka sehlopheng, litloahelo tsa batho li se li fetohile. Hona joale re sebetsa ka thata ho ntlafatsa bophelo ba rona.

If you compare the way things used to happen and how things are happening now, before there was a low rate, people were not encouraged, but now people do things faster and are more encouraged to have more commitment. By taking part in the circle, people's habits have changed. Now we are working hard to improve our lives.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Batho ba bangata ho hlaha libakeng tse ling, ba bua ka lihlopha tse ka hare ho Malealea, mme ba ea botsa hore na ba tla fumana lihlopha neng metseng ea bona. Morena oa Ha Makoanyane o itse le eena o rata ho bona lintlafatso tse joalo li etsahala sebakeng sa hae. Batho ba rata lintho tse etsahalang mona, lintho tseo ba li utloileng ba bile ba bone li etsahala mona.

Lots of people from other places are talking about the circles in Malealea and asking when they might get circles. The chief of Ha Makoanyane [a village outside of the Malealea valley] said she would also like to see such development happening in her place. People like things which are happening here, which they have heard about and seen happening.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

There were also a number of benefits that participants felt in terms of tangible changes to their day to day lives.

> *Hona joale re fumana joang bo rulelang bo re neng re se na bona pele. Re ne re se na chelete ho reka joang ba matlo, empa hona joale re atlela ho rulela matlo a rona ka ho arolelana joang bo re bohlomoetseng sebakeng se babaletsoeng.*
>
> We can now get thatch which we didn't have before. We did not have money to buy thatch, but now we have been able to fix our roofs by sharing out the thatch that was allowed to recover in the protected area.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

> *Liphoofolo tsa rona li bofa mekotlana ea liphoofo ho tsela khohlo ha re ilo sila leloaleng. Hape re ka laela batho ba kulang lipereng, ho na le ho hira koloi eo litsenyehelo tsa eona li leng turu.*
>
> [Because of the new track] our animals can take maize across the valley for grinding at the mill. Also, [because of the track] we can take sick people to the clinic on horseback, instead of having to hire a vehicle which costs a lot of money. [The village was accessible by another road, but this was a much longer way around so people tended not to use it.]
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Even though Ha Ramotsekhoane was one of the smaller circles, participants felt that the group was a source of motivation for others in the village because of their networks within the village.

> *Leha e le mona ho e na le litho tse 13 feela ka sehlopheng hona joale, re bomme ba nyetsoeng ke bontate mme re na le bana. Nako eohle re khotaletsa ba malapa a rona le bahaisane ho kenela ntlafatso, le ho nka karolo liketsong tse kholo mosebetsing oa ntlafatso. Hobane re na le sepheo, re bua le ba bang, mme hona ho oa ba khathatsa.*
>
> Even though there are only 13 members in the circle now, we are women who are married to men and we have children. We always encourage our families and neighbours to join in development and take part in heavy activities. Because we are motivated, we talk to others, and this encourages them.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

And participants felt that on a personal level, they got encouragement through being members of the group.

> *Ho ba le batho ba bang ho mpile khothalo. Ha motho a le mong, o lula a touta ka bothata nako e telele, empa ho tla sehlopheng ho thusa ho felisa mathata ana.*

> Being together gives me courage. When one is alone, one goes over and over problems, but coming to the circle helps to relieve those problems.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

The participants also saw the education process itself as a benefit. They claimed that they had developed a new appreciation of education through their participation in the circle. This in turn influenced their attitudes towards the education of their children.

Sehlopha se nthutile hore ke nahane bocha ka ho isa bana ba ka naheng ho lisa liphoofolo. Se nkentse hore ke ikutloe ke batla ha bana ba ka ba kena sekolo e le ho ba rutoa mekhoa ea ho phela hantle. Mohlala, hona joale ke bua le bona ka litaba tsa kokoanahloko ea HIV. Ha ke kholoe nka be ke etsa joalo haeba re ne re sa bua ka eona sehlopheng.

> The circle has helped me to think about whether I should send my children to look after animals in the pastures. It has made me think about sending my children to school, and teaching them different ways of living. For example, I am now talking to them about the HIV virus. I don't think I would have done this if we hadn't talked about it in the circle.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Constraints

The primary constraint experienced by members of the learning circle in Ha Ramotsekhoane was related to difficult interpersonal dynamics within the circle, as well as between the members of the circle and the wider community. Intra-group dynamics were difficult for a number of reasons.

First, gender relations shaped particular kinds of interactions in the circle. Men were reluctant to join the circle; they thought that sending their wives was sufficient representation. They did not seem to think the circles warranted their attention.

> *Bontate ba sa batleng ho kena sehlopha. Bontate ha bao hobane ba re ba batla basali ba bona ba kena sehlopheng mme hona ke tsela eo ba tsehetsang lihlopha ka eona. Ba romela basali ba bona joaleka baemeli ba bona. Ba reng bona ba na le mosebetsi o mongata oa liphoofolo le ho ea masimong. Hona ke nnete ho ba bang ba bona, empa ba bang ha ba tle hobane ho le thata ho bontate ho kopana le bomme. Ba tla tsehetsa ntlafatso empa ha ba batle ho lula mmoho le bomme.*
>
> Men do not want to attend the circles. There are no men because men say that they want their wives to be there and this is how they say they are supporting the circles, they send their wives as their representatives. They say they are busy with animals and other activities in the fields. This may be true for some of them, but others don't

> come because it is hard for men to come together with women. They will support development, but they don't want to sit together with women.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

The few men who did attend circle meetings found it difficult to engage with issues discussed in the circle, especially those related to HIV. Two men left the circle because of the talk about condoms.

> *Bontate ba tlhohetse sehlopha ha re ne re qala ho bua ka likhohlopo. Ba re AIDS ha se ntho eo ba batla ho bua ka eona. Empa ke nahana hore bontate ba botsoa ho tla likopanong tsa sehlopha. Ba rata ho noa joala, ebile ba ka tlohela sehlopha ha ba ea joaleng.*
>
> The men left the circle when we started to talk about condoms. They said that this AIDS was not something that they wanted to discuss. But I think men are lazy to attend the circle meetings. They like to drink beer, they can even leave the circle to drink beer.
>
> (Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

Drinking was a factor that influenced circle attendance, not only in Ha Ramotsekhoane, but in other villages as well where both men and women's attendance was negatively affected by alcoholism (see the discussion of Makhomalong learning circle below).

Secondly, intra-group dynamics were influenced by the variable way in which members of the circle cooperated with one another. For example, while circle members generally worked well with the one another and the villagers on collaborative projects such as the sanitation of the spring, they found it difficult to run the shop cooperatively. They therefore delegated the responsibility to one of the members, then complained that she had taken over, and was doing everything - shopping and selling. They felt distanced from the enterprise and were disinclined to support the shop.

Thirdly, general village gossip and troubled interactions between members of the community overflowed into the circle. When people in the community started to see the possibilities created by the learning circle, they were more enthusiastic about joining. However, some circle members accused newcomers of being opportunists, wanting to join because of what they could get out of the circle, rather than because they were committed to learning and development. This angered some new recruits who decided to stay away from the circle because of these insinuations.

Ho fumana batho ba bacha ho kena sehlopha ke bothata. Batho ba bang hona joale ba batla ho kena hobane ba bona menyetla. Empa ho na le litsebo tse reng ba batla ho fumana monyetla feela. Hona ho kotsi, hobane ho thibela batho ho ikutloa ba phutholohile ho nka karolo ka matla ka sehlopheng, ebile ho thibela ba bang ho kena. Batho ba bang ba bacha ba tsoile sehlopha hobane ba utloile ba bang ba re ke boramenyetla. Hona ho hobe hobane joaloka batho ba baholo re leka ka hohle ho bontsa batho hore sehlopha le motse ke ntho e lengoe. Re ka bona hona ka mohlala oa tanka oa metsi le mila ebileng teng melemong ea motse kaofela. Sehlopha se khotatsa le ho qala lintho molemong oa motse kaofela.

Getting new people to join the circle is a problem. Some people now want to join because they see the opportunities, but there is gossip that they are taking chances. This is harmful, it stops people from feeling free to participate actively in the circle, and even prevents others from joining. Some new people have resigned because of what they heard people saying about them being opportunists. This is bad because we as older people are always trying to show people that the circle and the village are one thing. We can see this with the example of the water tank and the road which benefit the whole village. The circle is just there to motivate and initiate things on behalf of the village.

(Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle participant)

And finally, the participants and the facilitator also experienced some difficult dynamics. The facilitator was at times absent from the circle, at one stage for a period of a month. The participants were upset that he left without letting them know, and there was ill feeling towards him when he returned. The facilitator then wanted to leave the group because he felt that the participants felt badly towards him and wanted to bewitch him.

Litho tsa sehlopha li leka ho ntoea. Ba nkoatetse hobane ba ne ba batla ho koala shopo, ke ile ka ba thiba. Hape, ba bang ba bona ke metsoalle ea mohaisane oa ka eo ke sa mo batleng. Mme, ba sebetsang mmoho le eena hoba khahlanong le nna. Ke ile ka ea ngakeng ea lethuoela mme o ile a nchebisa seipone ka bona hore litho tse peli tsa sehlopha le moahisane emong be ne ba leka ho senya khotso ea lelapa la ka ka ho qabanya mosali oa ka le nna. Ngaka ea ka e ntjoetsitse hore ke lokela ho ba hlokolose hobane ba nketsetsa leraba; ba tla nthata haholo ho feta pele, ha ba ntse ba etsa makholonthithi a ho ntoea.

Members of the circle are trying to bewitch me. They are angry because when they wanted to close the shop, I discouraged this. Also, some of them are friendly with my neighbour who I don't like and they have joined with her against me. I went to a traditional doctor and he showed me the mirror where I saw two of the circle participants with my neighbour. They were trying to disturb the peace in my home by causing trouble between me and my wife. The doctor told me that I should be careful because they are trying to set a trap for me; they will love me more than ever, while in the meantime they are trying to bewitch me.

(Ntate Pinki, facilitator of Ha Ramotsekhoane learning circle)

Pinki felt so strongly about this that he requested a 'transfer' to another circle, and then left the circle altogether. He did not trust the members of his circle any longer. They in turn found it difficult to trust him because he had left the group on several occasions without telling them of his plans.

What is evident from the above discussion is the way in which traditional and cultural beliefs about both gender and conflict aggravated, rather than enhanced, the progress of the circle. Cultural beliefs stipulated that men should be responsible for discussing serious matters, while women could talk about less weighty issues. Men struggled to sit and discuss issues with women. This was particularly true for issues related to sexuality, where men were not prepared to have their authority questioned in any way by women. Talking about condoms challenged existing sexual practices and was therefore an uncomfortable topic for the men in the group. Traditionally, men and women did not talk about these matters openly. (This was not the only circle where men refused to discuss HIV/AIDS related issues. However, in other circles, because there were more men, facilitators were able to resolve the problem by grouping men and women separately for some of the discussions.)

Traditional beliefs about witchcraft influenced circle dynamics as well. Pinki's conviction that members of the circle wanted to bewitch him, rather than just take him to task for being absent, led him to leave the circle. Because he believed the matter involved spirits, he believed it to be outside his control, and he did not try to address the concerns which the circle members were raising. His consultation with the traditional doctor sowed seeds of doubt and distrust in Pinki's mind, and he refused to discuss issues with circle members. This undermined and threatened the well-being of the group which depended on open discussion.

In early 2006 this matter had not been resolved and we were in the process of training one of the participants of the group as a facilitator. I admit to feeling out of my depth on this issue. Because the concept of being bewitched is not something which I subscribe to, it was difficult for me to truly appreciate this perspective, and also difficult for Pinki to express it to me. I had to be careful not to dismiss it altogether because *I* did not believe in it, while at the same time try to recognise how such beliefs could cloak a multitude of interpersonal and power dynamics.

Tsinyane

Tsinyane is in many ways the learning circle 'success story' and has been selected as a case study for this reason. Participants in this circle worked together to make perceptible differences to their community and the well-being of the people living there. Their achievements provide an excellent example of what a circle can achieve. But, like any other circle, the group had its own particular dynamics. What makes this circle's story different to Ha Ramotsekhoane's circle is how members of the circle managed to negotiate the exercise of power by circle members and the facilitator in different ways.

The story

After the *pitso* was held to explain the concept of the learning circle in October 2000, seven people joined the circle. Ironically, when it was first established, this was the circle about which I had the most concerns - it seemed to me that the facilitators were the weakest of the cohort, and I had serious misgivings about whether they would be able to hold the group together. Ntate Paseka[70] had been a mine worker and had very limited literacy skills. M'e Matebello was old, and seemed reticent and uncertain about herself and her abilities as a facilitator. When I visited the circle early in 2001 to observe and assess the group's literacy practices and skills (see Chapter Five), the participants struck me as having a definite sense of purpose and strong literacy skills, stronger than those of the facilitators. My journal reflecting on this visit states:

> All of the women in the group can read and write. It seems from playing the literacy game[71] that they really want help with generating income and acquiring skills related to bookkeeping and managing the associations and groups of which they are already members. …Are these the right facilitators for this group? Will the participants have enough confidence in them to guide the process? Do *I* have enough confidence in them? I think there are going to be problems here.
>
> (Journal entry, 3rd February 2001)

[70] Name has been changed to protect the facilitator.

[71] The literacy game was discussed in Chapter 5.

But in spite of my apprehensions, the circle continued meeting, focusing on general life skills. At this stage, they were being guided by the units written by Teboho and myself. However, in spite of the structured guidance, I had reservations about whether the facilitators were really identifying with the REFLECT approach. They seemed to be going through the motions of meeting with participants, but not engaging them in learning through discussion. Ntate Paseka in particular preferred the traditional approach of standing in front of the participants to 'preach' (see photo insert), rather than allowing them to learn through dialogue and sharing experience.



The facilitator "holds forth" in front of the circle

M'e Matebello resigned from being a facilitator after about six months as she was often ill, and could not manage the facilitation. One of the participants, M'e Matsepang, joined the refresher training workshops in 2001, and then took on the role of facilitator as the circles were re-launched around the valley (see Chapter Five). This proved to be a positive step forward for the group, as M'e Matsepang's gentle approach and easy way with people was to balance out Ntate Paseka's more authoritarian style of facilitating.

Despite having only six participants in 2001, the circle kept meeting, albeit somewhat reluctantly. One of the participants reflected back on this period:

> *Ha re ne re qala sehlopha, re ne re sa rate ho tla sehlopheng. Ntate Paseka o ile a khotalla ho re khatatsa, nako eohle ka moralo thuto oa hae, mme re ne re sa bone sepheo sa seo re se etsang. Re ne re na le mabaka a mangata ao re lokelang ho a phetha, mme re ne re bona hore o re senyetsa nako.*
>
> When we first started the circle, we didn't really want to come. Ntate Paseka kept bothering us, always with his lesson plans and we didn't really see the purpose of what we were doing. We had many things to do at home and he seemed to be wasting our time.
>
> (Tsinyane circle participant)

But the group managed to see out a relatively slow course of learning and action in 2001. They planted a few trees at their homes, and implemented other small actions associated with the learning units that guided their meetings.

The turning point came when one of the other village learning circles began constructing pit latrines in their village. This initiative inspired other circles to think more widely about their own development plans. They realized that while being guided by the units, they were free to initiate any action. The Tsinyane circle participants began to think more practically and widely about their own village level development goals, and became the first group to systematically mobilise for development on their own terms in their community.

The circle had by this point mapped out their village and identified a range of concerns. People were hungry, ill, and poor; there was very little in terms of infrastructure like roads or schools or even shops; there were several badly eroded areas of land in and around the village, and there were many people who were unemployed. The group chose to prioritise the building of a road into the village and sunk their energies into this backbreaking task, working steadily for several months to repair the road (see photo insert). The road was in bad shape, completely impassable by vehicle which meant that supplies could not get into the village other than by foot or donkey.



Construction on the road begins

People could also not get emergency medical assistance and the transportation of corpses to the morgue and back was difficult. (Due to HIV/AIDS, there was a high mortality rate, and the state of the road posed a problem for people wanting to bury their loved ones.) At the time, however, I wondered whether prioritizing the roads was really wise in the light of more pressing needs such as hunger and illness. Wouldn't it have been better to keep people alive rather than worrying about how to transport them into and out of the village

when they were dead? However, as this was the action which the group had decided upon, I did my best to support them.

By the end of August of 2002, the road was improved to the extent that a van could easily pass along it. This brought an increased flow of people into the village, including tourists who would follow the road down to the village.



A photo showing the old track alongside the newly constructed road

The participants decided to use the money that they had raised through stokvel activities (over M400) to build a small shelter. This shelter was to be used as a meeting place for the group, as well as a little shop where they could sell *liphaphata* (traditional Basotho bread) to passing tourists and other local people who were using the new road more and more.



Members construct a shelter to be used as a shop and a meeting place

Members of the circle also began making clay vessels and grass baskets, which were intended to be sold to local people and tourists passing through the village. There was clearly an industrious spirit in the group. And their resourcefulness also extended into developing the area around the village. Circle members planted trees to combat erosion in a donga on the outskirts of the village, and planted trees in and around the village more generally. By the end of October 2002, there were 1600 small trees in and around the village. Moso's report for this period sums up some of the achievements as follows:

> They used their own money which they contributed to hire a van to transport their trees from Qaba site to Tsinyane. Each one contributed M3.15 to hire a van twice. They have also taken cans from the H/C [Handicraft] for making fireplaces. This learning circle has started a business on selling "liphaphata" [traditional basotho bread] to tourists and guides passing by and other people from the other side of the river when they go shopping. 19 people contributed M2.00 each for their start.
>
> (Moso's report, October 2002)

Because circle numbers had swelled to 19 participants, participants felt encouraged to continue with their efforts. They bought seeds and started to develop a communal garden to address the problem of hunger and poor nutrition. After being allocated a site by the chief, they began work.



Despite the arid terrain, members began constructing a vegetable garden

Their stated intentions were to improve nutrition by growing food for their own families; generate income by selling vegetables to other members of the community and to tourists passing through, and to combat unemployment in the process.



The garden after several months of work

As they were working in the garden plots, a passing tourist stopped to talk to the group. On finding out their intentions, she donated money for ten apple trees. These were procured and marked the beginning of an orchard within the garden.

However, water was a great problem as it had to be carried uphill from a source some distance from the site where the garden was being developed. This was exhausting and threatened the sustainability of the initiative. After some discussion, the group decided that they wanted to build a dam to catch water for irrigation. They approached the Development Trust for assistance. However, the Trust had neither the funds nor the technical expertise, so on the community's behalf, as a trustee, I approached the German Development Service (DED) an NGO which was working in the area. Representatives from DED arranged to visit the Tsinyane community, now accessible by road. After speaking to the group, looking at the previous actions the group had taken and the notes the learning circle had made about why a



DED officials meet with the circle to discuss building a dam

dam was needed, they agreed to assist with technical advice and financial assistance.

The next several months were spent planning the dam and securing the land rights. The group then got down to the hard labour of constructing the dam. Because financial assistance from the NGO was limited, the community was required to provide all labour to excavate the dam, and to supply the rocks needed for the dam wall. All this work was done by hand – with picks, shovels, and wheelbarrows. Several tons of soil and rock were moved, and a finally, after several months of backbreaking work, a small dam of around 300,000 liters was built.



The dam is excavated … and the walls go up

During the process of excavating the dam, several issues arose. The most serious of these was the community's concern that the dam wall designed by the engineer would not hold the water. This concern was raised during learning circle meetings and was then taken to the engineer. He was resolute that the wall would hold, so the community consulted with two other experts. The first was a retired American dam engineer who happened to be visiting the lodge as a tourist. The second was another visitor to the lodge, a South African farmer who had built several dams on his farm. Both of them advised that

additional supporting walls be put in. Participants then went back to the German development worker and insisted that the design be changed. He wasn't pleased, due to the extra costs that this entailed, but finally conceded. Additional supporting walls were built to secure the dam wall.



The circle members meeting with the engineer to discuss their concerns about supporting walls

With the dam complete, the community awaited the rains. After the first rains, the dam began to fill (see photo insert). And as the dam filled, so did the holding tanks which were installed below the dam. With water in the tanks, circle members were able to continue their gardening activities with renewed energy.



The dam fills for the first time



The gravity fed tanks installed below the dam provide a means for irrigating the garden

Roland Ulrich, from DED, held agricultural workshops with members of the Tsinyane learning circle, teaching participants different ways of retaining soil nutrition and fertility, rotating crops and conserving water. Hedges were planted around the garden, and trees

next to and above the dam to act as a wind buffer and secure the earth which was already showing signs of erosion and desertification that would exacerbate the silting up of the dam over the longer term. A group of students from a high school in England donated more fruit trees, and these were planted throughout the garden, giving the community apple, apricot, and several varieties of peach to harvest over the coming years.



Trees planted around the dam and garden area as a wind buffer



Apricot tree bearing its first fruit – November 2005

Members of the circle were concerned about the dangers that the dam might pose to children and others in the village who were not able to swim. They wanted to fence the dam with mesh wire to prevent any drowning incident. On their behalf, I approached the Irish Embassy which granted funding to fence the dam and the garden. Again, the community provided the labour (see photo insert), with the Embassy putting up the funds for materials.



Fencing the dam and the garden

The circle worked their garden with continuing enthusiasm throughout 2003 and 2004, while at the same time continuing with the other projects they had begun. The road was a relentless challenge, needing constant maintenance due to the rains which frequently undid the work that had been accomplished. We finally invited a roads engineer to help the group understand how to camber the road so as to minimize the rain damage. This helped significantly, although maintenance work was still ongoing.

Over time, the garden area, now fenced and thriving, became more and more of a communal space. The participants decided to rebuild their meeting place within the fenced garden so that it would be more central and also protected. After collecting stones, and building the structure itself, the circle applied to the Malealea Development Trust and was granted funds for a door, windows, roofing, and a toilet.



A new meeting place is built within the grounds of the garden

The garden had become a central focus of the community. Most of the families in Tsinyane village had a family member active in the circle, and most people had been allocated some area within the garden. The project was undoubtedly a success.



The garden thrives with community and circle members allocated vegetables plots to work.

In 2005, the focus of learning shifted to HIV/AIDS. Participants engaged with this topic enthusiastically, again setting a trend for other circles to follow. Following the quiz and the drama competition (see Chapter Five), participants carried on engaging with the learning materials, learning more and more about the disease. This was a group in which HIV/AIDS issues were discussed openly, and, unlike in circles such as Ha Ramotsekhoane, gender issues did not seem to scare off the men (although they were again in the minority.) However, the major factor that set this group apart from other circles was the way in which participants motivated one another to test for the virus.

By October 2005, 15 of the 30 participants had tested. Five of them tested positive. Remarkably, these people decided to disclose their status to the rest of the circle, and soon afterwards, plans were put in place to form a support group for HIV+ people within the circle, and in the village more widely. Some of the husbands and wives of those infected also tested positive, and circle members began to realize the extent to which their community was affected, and that action was needed.

> *Sehlopha sa tsehetso se ikemiselitse ho thusa mang le mang ka hara motse ea kulang. Ka ha re ithutile haholo ka HIV/AIDS re hlokometse hore ho hlokohala ho nka liketso haholo litabeng ena. Batho ba nyelisoa ke ba bang ba tsireletsoa ke sehlopha. Re ba thusa ka ho ba khella metsi a hloekileng, ho ba phehela le ho ba hloekisa haeba ba hloka joalo, hape le ho ba hlatsoetsa. Haeba batho ba hloka lijo, re etsa bonnete ba hore ba ea li fumana. Mme hape re ba fa meroho ho tsoa jareteng. …Che, ha re bataloe ho etsa mosebetsi oo. … Ho fihlela hona joale, re se re thusitse batho ba bane ba kulang ka hara motse.*
>
> The support group is dedicated to helping anyone in the village who is sick. Since we have learned more about HIV/AIDS we have become more aware of the need to take more action. People who have been discriminated against by others are taken on by the circle. We help them by taking them clean water, cooking and cleaning for them if they need it, also doing their washing. If people need mieliemeal we make sure that they get it, and also we give people vegetables from the garden. …No, there is no payment for this. …So far, we have helped four people in the village who are ill.
>
> (Participant from the Tsinyane learning circle)

The nursing sister at the clinic was impressed with the activities of the Tsinyane group, particularly the way in which they took on and broke down the stigma associated with being HIV+. People spoke freely about it, and all five people who tested positive joined the wider HIV+ support group, ‘Pholosa Lichaba’.

'Pholosa Lichaba' was formed as more and more people came forward for testing. Although anyone who tested positive could join the group, many of the members were people from the various learning circles who came as a result of their drive to get people to test. Moso helped to get the group going, facilitating the weekly meetings using REFLECT principles. The support group was thus in many ways another learning circle, although it had its own committee and constitution. Over time, the group started their own projects, a garden project in the clinic grounds, as well as a candle making project and a project with laying hens to sell eggs. Members of the group met daily to make candles which were used in the Lodge, sold to tourists as well as to local people.



HIV+ members of the Tsinyane circle join Pholosa Lichaba support group

The relationship between Pholosa Lichaba and the learning circles was representative of the cooperative associations that were forming between the village learning circles and other groups in the community more widely. This more extensive mobilization was what we had ultimately aimed to achieve – an extended dialogical space where there was communal engagement with HIV/AIDS issues in a way that influenced people to confront the issues more positively and constructively. The Tsinyane learning circle was

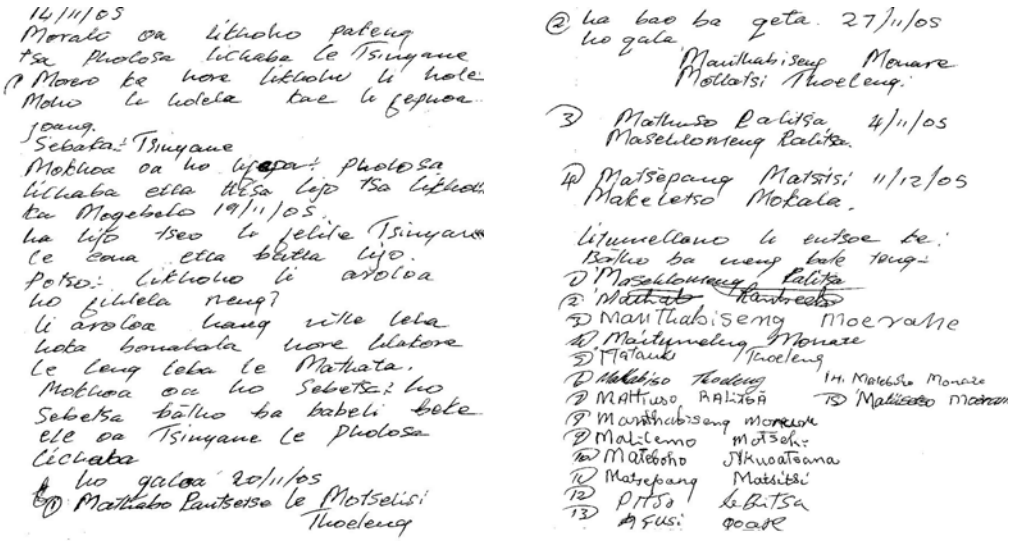
instrumental in leading this new direction, with other learning circles soon following suit (see discussion of Makhomalong circle below).

Tsinyane's support of HIV+ people could also be seen in their other activities. The circle had formed a traditional singing group, which took part in a national support day for HIV+ people, held in Maseru. Participating groups had to sing a song by Francis Ntlhoki, a well known gospel singer in Lesotho. The song was entitled "Re tla e hlola" meaning "We will defeat it [HIV/AIDS]", and explains different ways in which people can protect themselves against HIV.



The Tsinyane circle's choir compete (and win) at a competition in Maseru

The Tsinyane group won the singing competition, and a prize of five chickens which they brought back to the village. The learning circle then made an agreement that they would share the chickens and their chicks with the Pholosa Lichaba support group. By sharing the chickens equally, both groups would benefit and have a way to aquire eggs and more chickens, both of which could be sold to raise funds for their groups. The written document (presented and translated below) sets out the agreement between the two groups, showing how they would both take responsibility for tending the chickens and sharing the profits.



14/11/05

Plan of chickens with Pholosa Lichaba Support Group and Tsinyane Learning Circle

Our intention is to clarify how the chickens should be raised, where they should be kept, and how they should be fed.

Place: Tsinyane village
Ways of feeding them: Pholosa Lichaba will bring chicken food on Saturday the 19/11/05. When this food is finished, Tsinyane [learning circle] will also contribute food
Question: When will the chickens be shared?
They will be shared immediately if we see that one of the groups has a problem looking after them. [But if there are no problems], they will carry on with the agreed way of working [Tsinyane learning circle raising the chickens on behalf of both groups]
Way of working: There will be two people working together every week, one person from the Tsinyane learning circle and one person from Pholosa Lichaba. Starting from the 20/11/05:

1) Mathabo Rantsetse and Motselisi Thoeleng
2) When those finish on the 27/11/05, the people starting will be 'Manthabiseng Monare and Motlatsi Thoeleng
3) Mathuso Ralitsa 4/11/05 and Masehlomeng Ralitsa
4) Matsepang Matsitsi 11/12/05 and Makeletso Mokala

These agreements were made between the following people who were present in the discussion:

Masehlomeng Ralitsa
Mathabo Rantsetse
Manthabiseng Moerane
Maithumeleng Monare
Mathabiso Thoeleng
Mathuso Ralitsa
Manthabiseng Monare
Malilemo Motseki
Mateboho Nkuoatsana
Matsepang Matsitsi
Pitso Lebitsa
Paseka Qoane
Mateboho Monare
Matiisetso Moerane

At the time of writing in January 2006, the chickens were doing well (see photo insert), being looked after at the home of one of the learning circle members. A healthy and supportive relationship had developed between the two community groups.



A Tsinyane circle participant takes care of the Support Group's chickens

Learning

Participants in the Tsinyane circle learned in several ways. First, they learned through engagement with, and discussion of, the content of the learning units during their bi-weekly meetings. Secondly, they learned through reflection and discussion of the actions taken by the group and interactions with one another. In this learning circle, the different modes of learning seemed in concert, more so than in the other learning circles where at times, learning from units and actions taken appeared to be discrete.

Learning through engagement with units

As participants engaged with the learning units, they were exposed to new information. This seemed to be most appreciated, and most valuable, in relation to HIV/AIDS. The topics of the other learning units - life skills, deforestation, soil erosion, budgeting, and so on – were useful, but not as much as those related to HIV. Participants seemed hungry for the opportunity to learn more about HIV, how it was spread, how it could be prevented, and how it could be treated. It might be argued that at the time the topic was introduced, participants were more motivated and 'ripe' for learning, having built up a strong foundation on which to consolidate further information; but more likely it was because the information was urgently needed. People around them were dying and there was a desperation to learn more about what could be done to stem the tide.

Other learning that participants gained through engaging with the units was related to literacy and numeracy. A few of the participants, especially those who joined later,

could not read and write before joining the circle. They claimed that the circle had helped them to build literacy skills.

> *Hona joale ke tseba ho bala le ho ngola lebitso la ka, le mabitso a mang, le mantsoe a mang.*
>
> Now I can read and write my own name, as well as other names, and some words.
>
> (Tsinyane learning circle participant)

In terms of fostering the desire to read, the Soul City materials were particularly inspiring for participants. Even people with weak literacy skills wanted to know what the stories were about. Every one wanted to take the comics home to continue their reading there, which was not something that happened prior to the arrival of the comics.

However, most of the people in Tsinyane had relatively good literacy and numeracy skills, even prior to joining the circle. What they gained through the learning units and the exercises therein, was a motivation to continue learning and strengthening their skills.

> *Seo ke se hlokometseng ke hore haeba re ne re sa ka ra fumantsoa monyetla ona oa ho ithuta, nka be ke se lebetse litsebo tse ling tsa ka. Ka ha ke ne ke se ke lutse hae ho se na ntho eo ke e balang kapa ho e ngola. Hona ho mphile monyetla oa ho ikoetlisa seo ke se tsebang, le ho se sebelisa.*
>
> What I have realized is that if we had not had this chance to learn, I would have forgotten my other skills, because I was just staying at home without anything to read and write. This has given me an opportunity to practice what I knew, and to use that.
>
> *Ke ithutile haholo ka meroho, le ha ke ne ke ntse ke etsa sena pele. Ke ithutile hore na ho bohlokoa joang ho lema meroho e fapaneng serapeng se le seng, eseng mofuta o le mong feela oa moroho. Selemong sena e lokela ho ba moroho o jeoang metapong, selemong se tlang ebe oa mahaba, le ntho e kang mokopu. Hona ho thusa mobu ho lula o matlafetse.*
>
> I've learned more about vegetables, even though I was doing this before. I've learned how it is good to plant different kinds of vegetables on one plot, not just one kind of vegetable. This year it should be a root vegetable, next year a leafy one, and then something like pumpkin. This helps to keep the soil healthy.

Ke ithutile ka ho boloka chelete le ho etsa meralo ea ho e sebelise, mme hona ho nthusitse, eseng mona sehlopheng feela, empa le ka lintho tse ling tsa ka, joaloka ho roka ho o ke o sebelisang ho kenya chelete.

I have learned about saving and budgeting and this has helped me, not only here in the circle, but also with my other activities too, like my sewing which I use to raise money to live better.

(Tsinyane learning circle participants)

Learning through action and interaction

The way in which the Tsinyane participants were able to practically apply what they were learning to their daily lives was a strength of the circle from early on. It was what set them apart from other circles.

Ka lebaka la li-units tsena le ho ithuta ka HIV, re atlehile ho etsa lintho. Joaloka selemong sena sa 2005, re ile ra ba hlokolosi haholo ka tlhoko ea ho etsa liketso, mme ke ka hona re thehileng sehlopha sa tsehetso. …Re bona tlhokahalo ea ho sebelisa seo re se tsebang le hore ba bang ba tsebe lintho tsena.

Because of the units and learning about HIV, we have been able to do things. Like this year, 2005, we have become more aware of the need to take action, and this is why we formed the support group. …we see the need to use what we know and make sure that that others also get to know these things.

(Tsinyane learning circle participant)

In implementing their learning through a range of actions taken over the course of five years, participants found a use for the knowledge they were gaining. And as they relentlessly pursued their activities, they also created an appetite for more information and knowledge on an ongoing basis. Through their actions they were inspired to learn and through their learning they were inspired to act – the perfect action learning design.

However, it should be noted that the balance between modes of learning was not always in harmony. At certain times, such as with the HIV units, actions were closely linked to the content of the learning units, but at other times, the action itself, rather than the content of the learning units, drove the learning. This was true for the building of the dam, the fence, and the gardening activities. At the time of these actions, learning units covered during the meetings related to budgeting, soil erosion, deforestation and so on. While these topics may have been tangentially related to their

gardening actions, there was at the same time another dimension of learning related to agriculture that was being acquired outside of the learning units.

And then there was a further dimension of learning that was acquired through interaction between participants. Some of this was related to agriculture - for example, an older woman in the group taught the others traditional ways of making insecticide through catching and burning locusts and then sprinkling their ashes on the crops; but other learning was related to different activities:

> *M'e Matsepang o ithutile ho etsa li-placemat ka Handicrafteng mme a re ruta ho li etsa. Re ntse re ithuta hape tsebo ea ho etsa lipitsa tsa letsopa joalokaha bonkhono ba rona ba ne ba etsa. …. Re ne re batla ho rekisetsa bahahlauli lintho tsena, empa ho fihlela hona joale ha re so etse ka ha boleng bo se botle ho lekana, leha ho le joalo, re file Ntate Roland lintho tse ling tseo re li entseng e le mpho ka ha a re thusitse ka letamo.*
>
> M'e Matsepang learned how to make place mats in the Handicraft and she has taught us how to do this. We are also learning the skill of making clay pots, like out grandmothers used to do. … We wanted to sell these things to tourists, but so far we haven't because our quality is not good enough, although we did give some of the things we made to Ntate Roland as a present for helping us with the dam.
>
> (Tsinyane learning circle participant)

All in all, the Tsinyane circle provided a fertile learning environment for its participants who owned and shaped the space and opportunity according to their needs as well as their environment.

Benefits

There were very clear benefits for participants of the learning circle, as well as for the community more widely. These benefits were realized in different ways – at a concrete and practical level, as well as at an individual level, and a social level.

At a practical level, participants of the learning circle worked together to transform a fallow inhospitable area of ground into an agriculturally active oasis. The practical fruits of their toil were a large productive vegetable garden, orchard, water source, and communal building, all fenced and protected from animals and humans. In addition, a range of forest trees had been planted around the garden, as well as in the village more generally. This area has become a permanent resource for those currently

in the circle, as well as those who may come after. The older members often talked proudly of how they had invested in their children's future.

> *Le haeba ke shoa hona joale, ke tseba hore bana ba ka ba na le mokhoa ho ipilisa. Rona, re entse phetoho – re na le mila e kenang Tsinyane mme re na le serapa senang le metsi hore lintho li mele hantle mona nako e telele.*
>
> Even if I die now, I know that my children have something that will help them survive. We have made a difference – there is a road into Tsinyane and there is a garden that has water so things can be grown here for a long time.
>
> *Ho na le lintho mona tse ka thusang ba bang le kamoso, lintho tse neng li le sieo mona pele.*
>
> There are things here now that can even help others in the future, things that were not here before.
>
> (Tsinyane learning circle participants)

Also at a concrete level, participants had created a valuable resource in an environment where resources were minimal. Through the garden and the orchard they had an additional source of nutrition for themselves and their families, as well as a source of income through selling the harvest.

> *Re na le chelete enyane ho thusa lapeng. Lintho lia tsamaea hantle ho feta pele, hona joale re na le mokhoa oa ho fumana meroho serapeng le litholoana lifateng.*
>
> We make a little money to help at home. Things at home are a little easier, now we can get vegetables from the garden and fruit from the trees.
>
> *Ke bone ka moo lintho tseo re ithutang tsona mona li re tliselitseng mokhoa o motle oa ho phela. Re kopana mmoho mme ka tsela ena re ka fumana chelete ka lithloko tsa mantlha.*
>
> I have seen how the things we learn here have given us a better way to survive. We come together and in this way we can get money for basic things.
>
> (Tsinyane learning circle participants)

At an individual level, participants also felt they had gained through their participation in the circle.

> *Ke itsepa haholo mme ke na le tumelo ea hore nka etsa lintho haeba ke sebelisa matla ao ke nang le ona.*

I have more faith in myself and more confidence that I can do things if I draw on the strength that is within me.

Hona joale ha ke sa robala ke lapile, hape ha ke sa shebile lijo tsa liphallelo feela. Hona ho etsa hore ke ikutloe ke khotetse. Sehlopha se nthusitse haholo, ke ikutloa ke ntlafetse leha ke se ke tsofetse – nahana feela nkabe ke etsa eng ho ja ke ne ke monyenyane lilemong – lintho tse kholo. Empa le hona joale, ke na le meroho le lithuso tse fapaneng tse tlileng ho nna ka ho kena sehlopha.

Now I don't go to sleep hungry, and I'm also not just holding out my hand for food aid. This makes me feel better about myself. The circle has helped me a lot, I feel that I have improved, even as an old person – imagine what I could have done if I was younger - enormous things. But even now, I have vegetables and also other kinds of help that have come to me through the circle.

(Tsinyane learning circle participants)

At a social level, participants felt that they had achieved a lot together, and they felt this had "brought love" to the community.

Re bona botle ba seo re se entseng, le lintho tse ntle tse hlahileng ka lebaka la ho sebetsa ka thata hoa rona. Hona ho tlisetse lerato motseng mme haeba Molimo a rata re tla atleha haholo ho feta mona. … Likhoho ke tsela e bontsang lerato. Li bontsa ka moo re ikemiselitseng ho tsehetsa ba bang ba kulang. Hape sehlopheng sa tsehetso, batho ba na le tsela ea ho bontsa hore ba tsotella ba bang.

We see the beauty of what we have done, and the good things that have come through our efforts. It has brought love into the community and if God will, we can be even more successful. …[In response to my question about how they can see that the circle brought love in the village…] The chickens are a way of proving the love. They show how we are willing to support others who are sick. Also the support group, people have a way of showing that they care about others.

(Tsinyane learning circle participant)

Participants felt the group to be a real source of strength. It gave participants an opportunity to achieve things together that they were not able to achieve alone.

Ke sehoai. Khale ke tsebile ho lema meroho le lifate tsa litholoana. Empa, ha sehlopha sena se ne se sa thehoa, nka be ke sa tsoela pele ka lintho tsena tseo re li entseng. Ke ne ke se na sebaka sa ho ikoetlisetsa lintho tse kang tsena tseo re li entseng. Ke ne ke tla itulela hae feela ke re ke holile mme ke lokela ho phomola ke hona.

I'm a farmer. I have always known how to grow vegetables and fruit trees. But if this circle wasn't formed, I couldn't have carried out the things that we have

done. I didn't have a place to practice the things that we have done. I would just be sitting at home saying that I'm old and it is time for me to rest.

(Tsinyane learning circle participant)

Bophelo bo fetohile, ha bo sa tsoana le pele. Ee, ke nnete, re ne re ntse re itimela malapeng pele, empa ho tloha re le mona, re ntlafetse haholo ho ba mmoho mme re etsa lintho ka kopanelo re le motse. Ho re thusitse ho ba le tsebelisano mmoho. Le bao ebang ba ne ba sa hlokomele sena ba ithutile ho se rata.

Life has changed from before. Yes, its true, we did plant for ourselves at home before, but since then we have improved through coming together and doing things communally through a collective effort. It has helped us to work cooperatively. Even those who were not aware of this have learned to like it.

(Tsinyane learning circle participant)

Ke ikutloa eka ke tsoela pele. Hae, nka lema lintho jareteng ea ka, mme joaloka motho ke ntse ke iteka ho lema meroho lapeng, empa o fumana hore liphoofolo tsa bahaisane lia senya. Bonyane mona, lijalo li tsereletsehile ke terata mme re bona litholoana, re utloa e khothetse haholo ha re bona meralo ea rona e etsahala.

I feel like I am going forward. At home, I can plant things in my own garden, and as an individual I am still trying to grow vegetables at home, but you find that the neighbours' animals cause destruction. At least here the crops are protected by a fence and you can see the outcome, you feel more encouraged when can see your plans come to life.

(Tsinyane learning circle participant)

Constraints

Despite the circle's many successes, it too had its share of difficulties along the way. Some of these were more generic problems experienced across circles, while others were problems particular to Tsinyane learning circle itself.

One of the problems, common to other circles as well, was that at the initial stage of the project, people in the community did not understand the purpose of the circle, and were doubtful about what it could achieve.

Re bile le nako ea selemo re sa utloisise ka sehlopha. Empa Ntate Paseka ha a ka a nyahama. Leha M'e Matsepang a eba morupeli, re ile ra khotala mme ra qala ka ho utloisisa lintho haholo.

> We had a period of about a year not understanding what the circle was about. But Ntate Paseka did not give up. When M'e Matsepang became a facilitator, we were encouraged and began to understand things more.
>
> (Tsinyane circle participant)

As time went by, the group began to appreciate the purpose of the learning circle. Learning and action were interwoven and their achievements helped to motivate them further. However, the group focused more on action, and facilitators found that the literacy component of the REFLECT cycle was the most difficult for themselves, as well as the participants. There were several reasons for this. First, Ntate Paseka's own literacy skills were tentative, so he often struggled with the content of the learning units as much, or even more, than the participants. This was not something that he wanted people to see, and therefore avoided the focus on literacy in an effort to remain respected.

Secondly, the lack of available and appropriate reading materials posed another major challenge to encouraging people to engage with written materials. Participants' reading opportunities were restricted to a very limited choice of texts – children's school books, calendars, the occasional newspaper or magazine[73]. It was only when the Soul City materials were brought in that participants started to take a real interest in reading. M'e Matsepang, one of the facilitators of the circle made the following observation in regard to the Soul City materials and other reading materials:

> *Pele libuka li fihla re ne re ntse re e na le thahasello, empa ho se na lintho tse ngata tseo re ka li balang. Empa libuka tsa HIV/AIDS le libuka tse ling li entse phethoho e kholo. Libuka tsena li monate mme re rata ho tseba ho re na ho etsahetseng ka hara lipale. ….Hang ha re qetile ho bala libuka mme mohlomong re sa fumane libuka tse ling, mohlomong re tla tsoela pele ho leka ho bala, re tla iphumanela libuka tse ling ka bo rona re ipalle. Mme rona joaloka bathusi re ka fa baithuti tataiso ea hore ba tsebe moo ba ka fumanang libuka tsena teng, ho ka ba thusa, empa ha ho bobebe ho fumana lintho tse baloang mona. Haeba ke ea toropong nka fumana lintho tse ling tseo nka li balang, joaloka koranta ea litaba, empa ha se hangata ke rekang koranta. Ke boemo ba chelete; ha se ntho eo nka atlehang ho e reka nako eohle. Ka nako tse ling, nka e reka haeba ke utloa litaba tse mphang thahasello ho bala, joalokaha ho e na le pheko ea AIDS, kapa mohlolo o mong, ke hona nka ntsang chelete*

[73] Often newspaper and magazines were more prized as toilet paper than they were as sources of information. After training workshops, I was initially delighted when facilitators requested to take home the flipchart paper that had the notes on it. I was later to discover that this was not displayed on the walls, or kept for reference, as I had fondly imagined, but rather used for a more practical purpose.

pokothong ea ka ka e reka, empa ha ho se joalo, le khale … Nka mpa ka mamela radio haeba mashala a le teng.

Before the books arrived, we were still interested, but there isn't really that much to read. But the comics and other books have made a big difference. The comics are interesting and we want to know what happens in the stories. … [Asked what she thinks will happen when all the Soul City books have been read] …Once we have read the books and if we are not able to get more books perhaps we will still try and read, we will look for things that we can read, and if we as helpers [facilitators] can also give participants guidance of where to find these things, it could help, but it is not easy to find things to read here. If I go to town I might find something to read like a newspaper, but I hardly buy a newspaper. It's a matter of money; it's not something I can always afford. Sometimes I will buy it if I hear of something I am interested in, like if there is a cure for AIDS, or some kind of miracle, then I will take out my money and buy it, but otherwise not. …. Otherwise I listen to the radio, if I have batteries for the radio.

Other problems in the circle related to interpersonal dynamics, particularly power dynamics, which characterize most human interactions. Ntate Paseka added a particularly interesting dimension that serves well to illustrate the kind of power issues that emerged in circles.

Ntate Paseka is an ex-mineworker, and as such was steeped in a socialization process that associates masculinity with authority (Walker, Reid and Cornell, 2004). For Ntate Paseka, being a facilitator was a position of authority, and as much as we sought to revise this understanding, he could not let it go. Unlike M'e Matsepang, who referred to herself as a 'helper' (see quotation above), Ntate Paseka saw himself as a father figure with certain associated privileges. For example, he would borrow money from the circle and not pay it back within the agreed timeframe. When asked about this, he got very upset and questioned whether the same rules should apply to him as facilitator as to other 'ordinary' circle members or villagers. If old clothes were to be distributed to the group, he would have first choice as the facilitator, although this privilege would not apply to M'e Matsepang. Ntate Paseka liked to portray an 'in-charge' image.

Ntate Paseka o na le tloaelo ea ho laela, hangata o re fa litaelo, kapa ha re buise hampe mme ka nako tse ling re a mo fetohela. Baithuti ba bang ba ntse ba na le litletlebo ka tsela eo a sebelisang matla a hae ka eona, haholoholo ha re tla cheleteng, hobane a nka chelete a rona le ha ka lehlakoreng le leng a le hantle, o khothatsa batho le ho ba fa matla. Joalokaha re ne re haha ntlo, o ile a

fana ka litaelo tse ntle mme batho ba etsa ka pelenyana ha a balaetse. Empa ka linako tse ling, o nka monyetla ka ho hlomphuoa ke sehlopha le matla ao ba mo fileng ona. Ka nako tse ling o tsosa batho ka hore o tla ba tebela sehlopheng ha ba sa phethe litaelo tsa hae. Ka nako tse ling oa halefa. Mme ha emong a etsa phosa oa ba halefela, e leng tsela e seng ntle ea katamelo ea motho. E liehisa sehlopha ho ntsetsa pele seo ba batlang ho se etsa hang hang. Re batla ho buisoa joaloka batho ba baholo. … Batho ba aneha ka ho fapana. O batla hore batho ba etse lintho ho li qete, empa batho ba ea koata. Ho halefa ke ntho engoe e ba etsang hore ba ikutloe ba batla ho filhela ho hong hobaneng ba tsohile seo a ka se buang ho bona. Empa batho ba nka ho halefa ele engoe ea libopeho tsa hae, empa ba hlopheha ha ba na le chelete hobane ba tseba hore o tlo ba etsetsa liqeto tsohle ka chelete ea bona, mme hona ho ba khatatsa moyeng.

Ntate Paseka has an authoritative style, often ordering us around, or talking roughly to us and sometimes we resent this. Some participants still have complaints about how he uses his power, especially with regard to money, because he takes our money, although on the other side, he is good, he encourages people and strengthens them. Like when we were building the house, he gave good instructions and people do it more quickly when he has given them a word. But he sometimes takes advantage of the group's respect, and authority they have given him. Sometime he threatens people that they will have to leave the group if people don't cooperate with his instructions. Sometimes he is angry. And when someone does a mistake, he often shouts angrily to them, which is not a good way of approaching someone. It slows the group down although it is intended to speed it up. We want to be talked to like adults. … The effect on people is different. He intends for people to get things done, but people become offended and upset. Shouting is something which makes them feel like they have to achieve something because they are scared of what he will say. But people accept his shouting as part of his character, but they worry when they have accumulated money, because they know he will make most of the decisions about the money and this worries them.

(Tsinyane circle participant)

Ntate Paseka's authoritarian style was inclined to negatively influence the learning as well as the action process. For example, as mentioned above, he did not like to expose how weak his literacy skills were, and avoided the learning process. And if he felt a particular way, or inclined towards a particular decision, the group would have a difficult time challenging him or taking another decision.

That circle members bought into this situation further compounded the problem. They kept electing him to be chairperson of the circle's committee, even though theoretically facilitators were not supposed to be available to serve on their circle's committees. When questioned about this, participants said that he was good at speaking out and making decisions.

M'e Matsepang, Ntate Paseka's co-facilitator made the following observations in relation to money, power, and responsibility in the group:

> *Ntho engoe eo ke ithutileng ka sehlopha ke hore bathusi ba hatella baithuti hobane ha re ba fe monyetla oa ho iketsetsa liqeto tseo ba batlang ho li etsa ka chelete ea bona. Baithuti hangata ha ba thabele hona hobane ba sa bone seo re se etsang ka chelete eo ba e bokelelitseng. Morupeli o nka chelete a sa tsotelle maikutlo a bona. … Ha re ne re qala baithuti ka bo bona ba ne ba tsepela bathusi ho ba etsetsa ntho engoe le engoe, ba ba fa matla a ho ba etsetsa lintho mme e se e fetohile tloaelo ho morupeli ho etsa sena, ka hona baithuti ba ikutloa hore ke bona ba lokelang ho jara boima mahetleng a bona. Mme, kaofela re li phoso boemong bona.*
>
> Something I have learned about the group is that we as the facilitators are suppressing the participants because we don't give them a chance to decide on what to do with monies. The participants are mostly not happy about this because they can't see what we are doing with the money they have accumulated. The facilitator [Ntate Paseka] takes the money without really considering their views. … When we started, the participants themselves entrusted the facilitators to be doing all these things for them, gave them the authority to do things for them, and it has become a habit for the facilitators to do this, and the participants feel they [the facilitators] should be the ones to carry the weight on their shoulders. So, we are all to blame for this situation now.
>
> (M'e Matsepang, Tsinyane circle facilitator)

However, in spite of the complexities of the situation which had they had created, the participants found a way to reconfigure the power dynamics. They revised the money saving system in such as way as to subtly remove Ntate Paseka's control, while allowing him to retain the illusion of being in charge.

> *Re arotse sehlopha lihlotsoana tse peli, Karolo A le Karolo B. Bobeli ba likarolo li etsa mokete oa lipina mme ba bine tlholisanong ho etsa chelete. Ntate Paseka o ikarabella Karolong ea A, moo eleng bacha boholo, ha M'e Matsepang a ena le Karolo B, boholo ke batho ba baholo. Karolo engoe le engoe e na le komiti le ramatlotlo … Ho qoba tsebeliso ea matla, morupeli ho lokela ho ea ho ramatlotlo ho kopa chelete, empa ramatlotlo a ke ke a mo neha kantle ho tumello ea sehlopha. Joale, hona joale hona le batho ba bangata ba keneletseng ho bolokeng chelete, mme ha ho bobebe ho Ntate Paseka ho re motho a le mong a mo fe chelete. Hape, re kopile M'e Matsepang ho boloka chelete ea Karolo A e le ramatlotlo oa bona, hore Ntate Paseka ha a batla chelete a tle a tsebe ho ea ho M'e Matsepang hang hang mme rea tseba hore M'e Matsepang a ke ke a mo lumella ho nka chelete. Ka hona a keke a ea ho ea sebelisa matla a hae hampe sehlopheng. Hona e bile qeto ea sehlopha. Ka nako tse ling, o ntse a ea ho ramatlotlo ho kopa chelete. Joaloka hona joale ba ne ba ile Maseru tlholisanong e ka nna ea eba o se a alimile chelete. Ha a e patale.*

Ha se morupeli e mobe, empa bothata ba hae ke ba chelete le ho sebelisa matla a hae hampe, haholo ha a lebane le chelete.

We have divided the circle into two groups, Group A and Group B. Both groups have a choir and we sing in competitions to raise money. Ntate Paseka is in charge of Group A, which are mostly the youth, while M'e Matsepang has Group B, mostly the older participants. Each group has a committee with a treasurer … To avoid the power issue, the facilitator has to go to the treasurer, and ask for money, but the treasurer can't hand it over without the permission of the group. So now there are more people involved in keeping the money and it is not so easy for Ntate Paseka to get someone to give him money. Also, we have asked M'e Matsepang to keep Group A's money for their treasurer, so that if Ntate Paseka does want money, he has to ultimately get it from M'e Matsepang and we know that she won't allow him to take the money. So he can't go and misuse his power with his group. This was the group's decision. Sometimes he still goes to the treasurer for money. Like now they have just been to Maseru for the competition, he might have borrowed. He doesn't pay it back. He is not a bad facilitator, but his problems are around money and misusing his power in relation to money especially.

(Tsinyane circle participant)

Another instance of where the group was able to negotiate power dynamics was in relation to the building of the dam wall. They were adamant that more supporting walls should be put in place, and managed to insist that this happen, in spite of the challenge this posed to both the "expert" and the budget that had been stipulated for the project. What was important about this event, irrespective of whether the walls would or wouldn't have held, was that the community felt they could and should raise their concerns. Even when they were rebuffed by the "expert", the German engineer, they did not give up, but sought additional advice from other people in the know. This scenario offers a good example of participants' growing ownership and confidence in their own thinking, as well as their ability to negotiate power. They were adamant that it was their labour that had been spent, and their garden that was at risk of washing away should the wall collapse. They were thus determined to find out more and be heard on the issue. They refused to be silenced by the expert holding the purse strings, and negotiated their way to a hearing

Overall conclusions of the Tsinyane learning circle

Tsinyane learning circle was successful for a number of reasons. First, the individuals who joined the circle were exceptionally committed to their own development. The people who originally signed up had demonstrated this commitment even prior to

joining the circle – many of them were already members of other community groups, such as singing and sewing groups. Their belief in and commitment to communal action provided the structure and support to hold the group together, even through trying times.

Secondly, the Tsinyane case study illustrates the value of local initiatives and knowledge. The community took charge of what they wanted to do in the way that they wanted to do it. They understood the dynamics on the ground and how things should be done. (To me, it did not make sense to start by fixing the road, but I was later to see how none of the other work, such as building the dam, or getting advisors in, or encouraging tourism, could have happened without a passable road. I simply had not understood the importance of access.)

However, this said, the group also had a good balance between initiating action and recognizing the need for assistance. When they did not have the expertise to take action, they found a way to secure the assistance they needed by approaching the Trust, or asking tourists or myself or others who might give assistance. However, this advice was never just taken at face value – it was considered and debated by the group who then decided whether the advice fitted their needs.

Another related strength of this group was their involvement in activities at both a conceptual and implementation level. For example, with the construction of the dam, they were thinking about and discussing the design of the dam, not only digging or carrying rocks. In this way, learning was integrated with action, which enabled the circle members to keep developing projects.

And finally, the community was able to negotiate power relations in a number of different ways. They found a way to work with a difficult and domineering facilitator; they secured land needed for both a garden, dam and forest area around the dam (a significant achievement, given that finding land is one of the major obstacles to development in the area); and they negotiated with a German expert around the design of the dam. They were successful at bargaining; at recognizing the need for give and take in a way that could sustain the life of their group.

This case study illustrates how a strong group of people can become a force to be reckoned with if they develop an effective strategy and acquire some support. Even in a situation where resources are extremely limited, the Tsinyane circle showed how they were able to make a difference to their own lives. That said, however, one should not underestimate the value of support, in the forms of finances and expertise. Even the strongest group of people will find it difficult to subsidise their own development without resources. Circle members often found it extremely difficult to balance the demands of their day to day lives (where family members might be ill, food minimal and energy levels low), with the demands of the communal projects they had undertaken. The rewards of their labour were often several months, if not years into the future, and it was not always easy for people living on the edge to hold onto the promises of what is to come.

Makhomalong

The Makhomalong circle has been selected as a case study because it is the circle that came closest to total collapse. The circle faced many problems, a discussion of which will highlight another dimension of complexities and challenges associated with implementing REFLECT at a micro-level.

The story

The Makhomalong circle was launched alongside the other circles at the end of 2000, once the facilitators had completed their REFLECT training. Following a community gathering, where the approach was explained to the community, two facilitators, a mother and daughter team, began working with a group of about 20 people – both children and adults. Not only was the circle of mixed age levels, it was also of mixed literacy levels - there were five participants who could not read and write, three of whom were shepherds.

Right from the beginning this circle had problems. Attendance at meetings was poor, and the facilitators were not able to keep pace with the learning that the other groups seemed to achieve. They were always more than a few sessions behind with the units. I wondered what the participants were actually learning. Whenever Moso, or myself,

attempted to visit the circle to observe what was happening, the scheduled meeting did not take place.

In terms of actions too, the pace of development was slow. The circle did not appear to have a development agenda or a sense of direction. Over the three year period that the circle limped along, members dug a few holes at their homes for disposing of grey water (water that has been used for washing); they dug some holes in which they intended to plant trees (which were never planted), and they planted some kikuyu grass in places around the village which were very muddy or where erosion threatened. They also did a little work on a small stretch of road in the village. However this latter effort was abandoned because circle members had been expecting old clothes in return for their efforts, and did not receive them. Seemingly people were willing to work for a reward of some kind, but not willing to take responsibility for development of their village for themselves.

The circle was finally closed in August 2004, although the circle had nearly collapsed in the preceding months. I had been paying the facilitator in the hope that the circle would recover. I was also afraid that closing the circle would cause ill feeling, and be a disincentive to other circles.

There were several reasons why this circle did not work. The first reason was to do with the young facilitator, Lebohang[74], who had poor interpersonal skills, very likely related to her drinking problem. When M'e MaLebohang, her mother, worked with her, the mother tried to cover this up, writing her lesson plans for her and generally keeping the circle going as best she could. I knew the circle was weak but believed that it might recover, particularly through the efforts of Lebohang's mother. However, MaLebohang was not in strong health and found this a difficult task. She finally could not bear the responsibility any longer, and asked to be moved to another circle, leaving Lebohang on her own.

It was at this point that I paired Lebohang with another newly trained facilitator who I knew to be both dedicated and of sober habits. I hoped this would turn the circle

[74]Names of the facilitator and her mother have been changed for ethical reasons.

around, but by this time (towards the end of 2003), the circle was already unstable. The new facilitator was faced with an almost non-existent group, and found the task overwhelming. As she explained later …

… Ho ne ho le thata ho sebetsa le sehlopha. Ha ken e ke ea sehlopheng, ke ne ke sa fumane baithuti kapa Lebohang. Ke ne ke lokela ho ea phempeseleng ho ea mo batla, le ho mo qobella ho ea sehlopheng. Hona e ne e se ntho entle hobane Lebohang o ne a se na mokhoa o motle oa ho buisa baithuti, haholo ha a ne a tahiloe. O ne a ba rofa ho bontsa matla a hae. O ne a nahana hore a ka ba buisa joalo hobane ene ele morupeli… Ka nako tse ling baithuti, haholo bao e neng e le thaka ele ngoe le eena Lebohang, ba ne ba taoa, mme hona ho ne ho mpefatsa boema ba litaba hobane ba ne ba halefelana, ba sa tsotelle litaba tseo ho buaisanoang ke tsona. Hona ho ile hoa nyahamisa baithuti haholo. Batho ba baholo ba bangata ba ile ba tsoa sehlopha. Ha ke ne ka ba botsa hore na hobaneng, ba ne ba re ha ba na nako ea ho roahakoa ke Lebohang. Ba ne ba sa rate tsela ea a sa ba hlompheng ka eona, joale be emisa ho ea sehlopheng. E ne e le bana feela ba eang sehlopheng hobane ba bitsuoe.

Ke ile ka ea ho M'e oa Lebohang ho leka ho buisana le eena ka mathata ao, empa le eena o ile a mpolela hore ha a ntse a sebetsa le morali oa hae, o ne a tlameha ho etsa lintho tse tsoanang, ebile a mo ngolla moralo thuto bukeng ea hae ea morupeli, e ne e shebahala o ikelitse oona ebe Lebohang o fumana mokholo oa kae. Kannete, ke ne sa thabela ho sebetsa moo. Batho ba baholo ba ne ba sa tle likopanong, mme kannete ke ne ke se na nako ea ho bapala le bana. Ke ne ke ikutloa eka ke ne ke sa etse mosebetsi oa ka, ke ne ke sa thuse motse ho arola mathata a bona hobane ho ne ho se na batho ba baholo ba ka buisanang lintho ka botebo, mme ba nke liketso. Ntho ena e ne e sa phepetse tsebo ea ka. Kamora hore ke buisane le M'e oa Lebohang, ke ile ka etsa qeto ea ho qala sehlopha se seng motseng oa haeso. Ke ile ka bolela Moso ha ke bone molemo oa ho lema lifate Makhomalong empa ke lula Ha Patela. Ke ne ke sa batle ho bolella Moso hoo e hlileng e leng bothata ka ha ke ne ke sa batle ho bua hampe ka morupeli emong. … O na le bothata ba ho noa haholo, ke sono …. Ke ile ka bolela Moso hore ke batla ho qala sehlopha sa ka moo ke tla hlokomela bohlokoa ba lintho tseo ke li etsang.

… It was really hard working with the circle. When I went to the circle I would not find participants, or Lebohang. I would have to go to the shebeen [bar] to find her and persuade her to go to the circle. This was not good because Lebohang did not have a good way of talking to the participants, especially when she was drunk. She talked harshly, showing her authority. She thought she could talk to them like that because she was the facilitator. … sometimes the participants, especially those that were Lebohang's peer group, were also drunk, and this made it worse because they were shouting at each other, not even caring what the discussions were about. This discouraged participants even more. Many of the adults left. When I asked them why, they said they did not have time to be insulted by Lebohang. They did not like the way she disrespected them, so they wouldn't attend. Only the children would come to the circle because they were called.

> I went to Lebohang's mother to try and talk to her about the problem, but she said that even when she was working with her daughter she had to do the same, even going so far as writing her lesson plans for her in her facilitator's book to make it look like she had done it so Lebohang would get paid. Really I was not happy working there. Adults were not coming to the meetings, and really, I didn't have time to play with children. I felt like I was not doing my work; I wasn't helping the village to deal with the problems because there were no adults who could discuss things deeply and take action. It was also not challenging my knowledge. After I talked to Lebohang's mother, I made a decision to start another circle in my village. I just told Moso that I didn't see the purpose of planting trees in Makhomalong, when I lived in Ha Patela. I didn't want to tell Moso the real problem, as I didn't want to gossip about another facilitator. …She has a problem of drinking too much, and it is sad. … I just told Moso that I wanted to start my own circle where I could realise the benefit of the things I was doing.
>
> (Manako, facilitator)

Similar sentiments were also expressed by members of the circle.

> *Lebohang o ne a sa sebetsa hantle le batho. Batho ba ile ba tsoa sehlopheng hobane ba ne ba sa hlompuoe joaloka batho ba baholo, empa ba ne ba nkuoa joaleka bana. Hona ho ile hoa nyahamisa batho ho kena sehlopha. Mohlala, ka hara sehlopha re lokela ho ruatana le ho thusana. Empa Lebohang o ne a roahaka batho le ha e le ba tsofetseng ha be ne ba sa atlehe ho bala hantle. O ne a re ebile bana ba betere ho ba feta ka ho bala. Bothata bo ne bo hlaha ho morupeli ka bo eena.*
>
> Lebohang didn't work well with people. People went out of the circle because they were not treated like adults, but rather like children. This also discouraged others from joining. For example, in the circle we are supposed to teach each other and help each other. But Lebohang would insult someone, even someone elderly, if they were unable to read properly. She would say that even a child could read better. There was a problem with the facilitator herself.
>
> (Makhomalong circle participant)

In addition to the problematic behaviour of the facilitator, and the drinking in the village more generally, an additional, and probably related problem was that the people living in Makhomalong village seemingly did not see the potential of the circle. They thought it was for children, a passing fad, and they were reluctant to commit time or energy towards it. This made it particularly difficult for a new facilitator to turn the circle around.

> *Batho ba ne ba sa tsotelle sehlopha. Ba ne ba nahana hore ke ntho feela ea bana, hobane ho ne ho ena le bana ba bangata ba sehlopheng. Ba ne be se tsotelle ho fihlela ba se ba hlokomela seo metse e meng e se e etsang, tsela eo*

ba neng ba etsa lirapa tsa kopaneng, le ho lokisa mila ba bile ba fumana lijo tsa phallelo.

People did not take the circle seriously. They thought it was just a thing for children, because there were so many children in the circle. They didn't take it seriously until they started to see what other villages were doing, how they were making gardens and fixing their roads and getting food aid.

(Thabo Phethoka, facilitator of revived circle)

It was the realization that the village was 'losing out' that motivated Ntate Thabo to revive the Makhomalong circle at the beginning of 2005. Ntate Thabo had been one of the original facilitators trained in 2000, but had dropped out after eight months because he felt he could not afford to work as a volunteer.

Ke ne ke hloka ho hlokomela lelapa laka. Ke ne nke ke ka tsoela pele ke sebetsa ka boithaopo, ke sa fumane letho.

I needed to look after my family. I couldn't carry on working as a volunteer getting nothing.

(Thabo Phethoka, facilitator)

However, as a member of Makhomalong village, Ntate Thabo became concerned that the people in his village were lagging behind in terms of development.

Ke bone hore ba ne ba se etse lintho tseo batho ba bang ba metse e meng ba li etsang. Ho ne ho se na lirapa tsa meroho, mila e ne e le mebe, mme batho ba ne ba sa tsebe letho ka HIV. Ke ile ka etsa pitso motseng ho botsa batho hore na ba ka kena sehlopha haeba se qaloa hape. Ba ile ba lumela ba tla se kena hobane ba ne ba hlokometse hore ba morao ho feta metse e meng, ha be leme lifate kapa ho etsa lintho tse ling tse pakahatsang hore ba kopane ka motseng, le tsela ea ho sebetsana mmoho.

I saw that they were not doing things that other people in other villages were doing. There were no vegetable gardens, the roads were bad, and people did not know anything about HIV. I had a meeting in the village to ask if people would attend the circle if it started again. They agreed that they would join, because even they saw that they were behind other villages, not planting trees or gardens or doing other things that showed that they had unity and a way or working together.

(Thabo Phetoka, facilitator of revived circle)

However, when he approached me about reviving the circle, I was skeptical. I was deeply concerned about what had happened in the circle previously, and felt that had the circle continued, it might have jeopardized the reputation of the circles more generally. The contextual problems associated with Makhomalong village seemed

overwhelming. Many of the worst effects of tourism were evident in this village which was closest to the Lodge and most directly impacted by tourism. Residents received the most visitors and the lion's share of money from village tourism. However, this money was spent primarily on alcohol, rather than used in more constructive ways. A culture of dependency and begging had developed as people became used to receiving handouts. Given the history of the circle, I thought it would be too difficult to overcome these contextual problems.

Since we were on limited funds, I said that I could not afford to experiment with possibilities. However, we agreed that if Ntate Thabo could show that he and the participants were serious, and keep the circle running for a period of three months, and then I would consider paying him. He insisted that even if he never got paid, he would still work with the circle. Despite his declarations, I remained skeptical, but he was determined. He and Lebohang joined forces and re-launched the circle. Lebohang however was not given the three month 'probation' offer. I made it clear that there were no funds to pay her, and that if she worked, it would be as a volunteer. I was sure that she would not get around her drinking problem and would drop out, particularly if she was not being paid. However, I was proved wrong…

Thirty seven participants signed up, 29 of whom were still attending regularly after three months. Lebohang too was still working with the circle. The meeting times had been changed to the early morning to circumvent the problem of participants coming to the circle drunk, and it seemed to be working - neither Lebohang nor the participants were coming drunk or late.

> *Hona joale sehlopha se kopana hoseng joale ha ho sa na bothata ba botaoa haholo, hobane batho ba ea hoseng ha ba eso noe joala ba ntse ba le hantle mme ba utloisisa hantle seo ho boisanoang ka sona ka sehlopheng.*
>
> Now the circle meets in the morning so there is no longer a problem with drinking, because people go in the morning when they are still sober and fresh and can understand well what is being discussed in the circle.
>
> (Lebohang - Makhomalong facilitator)

The circle continued to meet regularly and was well attended. They successfully tackled the task of repairing the roads through their village. Even cars with low clearance were able to pass along the roads with ease. Participants also engaged

enthusiastically with the learning units around HIV/AIDS. This circle had one of the highest testing rates amongst the circles, with 13 members of the circle having tested by November 2005.



Members of the Makhomalong circle meet regularly. Here they work with the Soul City materials

Members of the circle decided to form a support group to help people in the village who were sick or children who had been orphaned. This group was elected by circle members, and was made up of four women and two men. They would go to a sick person's house, wash the patient, fetch water, take them food, and wash their clothes. A community meeting was held to let everyone in the village know of this initiative so they could be sure that they would be called upon in times of need.

> *Re ile ra etsa pitso hobane re ne re batla ho etsa bonnete ba hore haeba batho ba na le mathata ba ka hlahisa ba fumana thuso mathateng a bona. Hona ho ne ho ba thusa ho ikutloa ba lokolohile ba bile ba khotetse. Ha re batle batho ka ba ikutloa ba kheseha ba bile ba tsaba.*
>
> We called a meeting because we wanted to be sure that if people have problems, they can speak out and get help with their problems. This will help them to feel relieved and encouraged. We don't want people to feel alone and scared.
>
> (Makhomalong circle participant)

Not only did circle members support sick people in the village, they also made a special effort to support one another as circle members. If a circle member had a death in the family, others members collected money to buy candles and other items that were needed by the grieving family.

The circle's plans for 2006 included developing a communal vegetable garden, a medicinal garden, and an orchard on a site they had already secured. They also planned to build a dedicated meeting place for the circle, as at the time of writing in early 2006, the group was still meeting at the home of one of the participants. Planting forest trees was also on their agenda, as was building toilets, securing a better water source for the village, and starting a small chicken business. The future of the circle certainly looked bright.

Learning

When asked what they had learned from being part of the circle, on a general level, participants stated that they had learned about development and also about how to work together.

> *Kopano ke matla. Leha e le mona re sa sebetsa mmoho nako e telele joaloka lihlopha tse ling, hona le lintho tseo re seng re li fihletse, tseo re ke ke ra li etsa haeba re sa sebetsa mmoho – lintho tse kang ho lokisa mila. Re ithutile hore ntja peli ha e hloloe ke sebata.*
>
> Unity is strength. Even though we have not been working together as long as the other circles, there are things that we have achieved that we could not have done if we were not working together – things like repairing he road. We have learned that 'two dogs won't be defeated by a wild animal'. [an idiom meaning that if people come together they can overcome their problems].
>
> (Makhomalong learning circle participant)

> *Re sebelitse mmoho ho etsa lintho tse ngata, le ho bokoletsa chelete. Mme ka ho etsa sena re ithutile haholo ka ntlafatso le hore na ha re sebetsa mmoho re ka tsoela pele joang tseleng e isang katleho ea bohle. Re ithutile hape ka ho boloka lirekote le ho boloka chelete hobane re ne re lokela ho boloka chelete e bolokehile. Taba ea chelete e re baketse mathata a mangata sehlopheng sa pele mme ha re batle hore seo se ka etsahala hape.*
>
> We have worked together to do many things, even raising money. And by doing this we have learned a lot about development and how through working together we can go further along the road that benefits everyone. We have also learned about keeping records and saving money because we have had to keep the

money safe. The issue of money caused us many problems in the first circle, and we do not want that to happen again.

(Makhomalong learning circle participant)

More specifically, people appeared to have gained much from the HIV/AIDS units. They clearly enjoyed learning about this issue and found the learning useful in a practical way. One participant explained how the knowledge she had gained about local herbs would help her in her work as a support group member.

Pele re qala uniti ea kalafo, ke ne ke sa hlokomele litlama tseo re nang le tsona tse ka re thusang ho alafa mafu a fapaneng. Selemong se tlang re tlo ba le serapa sa litlama tsa meriana. Re tla lema litlama tsena e le hore litho tsa supoto korupu li tle li sebelise ha li ntse li etsa mosebetsi oa tsona motseng. Le litho tse ling sa rona li ka sebelisa litlama tsena ha li kula.

Before we did the unit on treatment, I was not aware of the herbs that we have that can be used to help with treating different kinds of ailments. Next year we are going to start a special garden where we can grow these herbs so that members of the support group can use these plants when they are doing their work in the village. And even the other members can use these if they are ill.

(Makhomalong circle participant)

Some participants, particularly those who had been members of the circle for a longer period, claimed that they had improved their literacy skills.

Pele ke ne ke sa tsebe ho bala le ho ngola. Hona joale nka bala le ho ngola lebitso la ka, le ho bala motsoao a ngotsoeng ha ke chakela libaka tse ling. Hape, ha ke amohela mangolo, nka leka ho a bala ka bo-nna, ho ena hore nako eohle ke kopa batho ho mpalla lintho tsa ka.

Before I didn't know how to read and write. Now I can read and write my name and I can read some of the signs when I am visiting other places. Also, when I receive letters, I can try and read them myself, instead of always asking other people to read things that are meant for me.

(Makhomalong participant, member of the original and the revived circle)

Another important aspect of learning was related to what the facilitators themselves learned from their experience of facilitating the circle. Lebohang in particular seemed to have learned something about herself from the experience of having her circle closed. Also, it was during this time that her mother passed away, and this experience had a profound effect on her. When asked why she had continued working with the new circle, despite not being paid for the year, she said,

Ke potso e thata, empa ke hobane lintho tse etsoang ka sehlopheng, haholo ho ithuta ka HIV. E nfetotse. Ka nako engoe, he re kopana re le sehlopha, emong o hlaha ka maikutlo a hae a molemo, maikutlo ana a hae a o thusa haholo ha o le lapeng. Hona tjena, ha e sa le M'e a hlokohala, e se e le nna e lulang lapeng, mme ke hlokomela lintho lapeng. Ho ba sehlopheng ho nthusitse ho ithuta haholo ho thusa ba bang. Ke ile ke angoa ke batho bao ke ba ratang haholo ha ba bolaoa ke lefu lena, mme ke ikemiselitse ho arolelana seo ke ithutileng le ba bang, ho ba thusa ho hlokomela batho ba phelang le tsoaetso ea HIV, le ho phutela setopo ha motho a qeta ho hlokohala. Ke ile ka khetheloa ho ba supoto karupu ea sehlopha hore ke tle ke etse sena, mme hona ho tla mpha monyetla oa ho arolelana le ba bang seo ke se tsebang.

It's a difficult question, but it is because of the things that are done in the circle, especially learning about HIV. It has changed me. Sometimes when we meet as a circle, and someone shares their feelings or kindness, these feelings help you when you are at home. Now, since Mom died, it's me staying at home and looking after things. Being in the circle has helped me to learn more about helping others. I have been affected by people close to me dying, and I am committed to sharing what I have learned with others, helping them to look after people who are HIV+, even how to wrap the body after someone has died. I was elected onto the circle's support group, and this will give me a chance to share what I know with others.

(Lebohang, unpaid facilitator of the revived Makhomalong circle)

I asked Lebohang whether she would leave the circle if the focus shifted away from HIV, which she had said she was particularly interested in. She said,

Che, kutloisisa ea ka ka ntlafatso e fetohile. Le haeba sehlopha ha se e so ee hole ka lintlafatso, ke khothalitsoe ke seo ba bang ba se etsang ka hara Malealea mme hape ke tsepa hore ka letsatsi le leng re tla fihlela seo batho ba bang ba seng ba se fihletse. Hona joale ke bona hore ntlafatso e amana joang le bophelo le hore na hobaneng ho le bohlokoa ho tsoela pele ka lintho tse ling tse kang ho lema lifate, ho lokisa mila le tse ling. Mohlala, batho ba kulang ba hloka metsi a hloekileng, likoloi li hloka ho kena motseng ho nka bakuli ho ea sepetlele, le litopo ho ea mmoshareng. Hape, batho ba hloka ho ithuta. Haeba motho a kula mme a sebelisa lintho tse litsila, kapa a sa koaele lijo o tla lula o kula, ho ena hore a fole, joale ho bohlokoa hore batho ba ithute lintho tsena ka bohloeki le lintho tse ling tse ka ba tusang ho phela bophelo bo botle.

le haeba re etsa lintho tse fapaneng ka sehlopheng, joaloka ho lema lifate kapa ho ithuta ka litsebo tsa likhoebo tsenyane, ke tla nne ke tsoela pele ka sehlopha hobane ke hlokomela hore lintho tsena li bohlokoa ho re motho a phele hantle. Ke bone bohlokoa ho ba mmoho le batho mme ha joale, ke motlotlo ho bona ka moo maikutlo a batho a ka thusang ba bang.

No, my understanding of development has changed. Even though the circle hasn't really gone far with development, I am inspired by what others in Malealea are doing and also hope that one day we will achieve what others have

already achieved. Now I can see how development relates to life and why it is important to go on with other kinds of things like reforestation and building roads and other things. For example, vehicles need to get into the village to take people to the hospital or even dead bodies to the mortuary, sick people need clean water. And people need to learn. If someone is sick and uses dirty things, or doesn't cover food, they will stay sick instead of recovering, so it important for people to learn these things about hygiene and even other things that can help them to live better. I have seen the importance of being together with people and now I appreciate how people's ideas can help each other.

(Lebohang, facilitator of Makhomalong circle)

Also pleasing was the way in which the facilitators themselves seemed to be interested in supporting one another's learning and well-being. When I asked Ntate Thabo why he asked Lebohang to join him when she had previously caused problems he said,

Ke mo khothalelitse ho tsoela pele ho sebetsa le ha a ne a sa pataloe. O na le litsebo; lintho tse ling ebile mefokolo ea hae feela eo ke tsebang hore a ka e matlafatsa. … Ha ke na bonnete ba hore na a fetohile e le kannete, kapa ke ka lebaka la hoba a sebetsa le nna, empa ha a sa etsa lintho tseo a neng a li etsa.

I encouraged her to keep working even though she too was not being paid. She has skills; the other things were just weaknesses which I knew she could improve on. …Now she is better, and I am helping her to see a better way of doing things. … I'm not sure whether she has really changed, or whether it is because I am working with her, but she no longer does those things she used to do.

(Ntate Thabo, facilitator of the revived Makhomalong circle)

Ntate Thabo's concluding remarks to me during our last interview in November 2005, illustrate how he had come to value the circle, both in terms of what it had already achieved and what it could still achieve.

Ke batla ho o khothaletsa ho tsoela pele ka ho tsehetsa lihlopha e le hore re tsoele pele. Batho ba hloka ho lema lifate . Re ka li sebelisa e le patsi le ho iketsetsa chelete ha re li rekisa. Hape re hloka ho lema joang maralleng, le ho ntlafatsa phepelo ea metsi ka hare ho motse oa lona. Hape re hloka ho kenyeletsa marena litabeng tsena. Thupelo eo re bile le eona e re thusitse ho ithuta litsebo le ho tsoela pele ho ntlafatsa botsibi ba rona, mme ha re batle ho lahleheloa ke tse bohlokoa tseo re li entseng.

I want to urge you to carry on supporting the circles so that we can go on. People need to plant trees. We can use these for wood and to make money for ourselves. Also, we need to plant grass on the hills and improve the water supply into our village. We also need to engage the chiefs in these matters. The

training we have had has helped us to learn skills and keep improving our knowledge, and we don't want to lose the gains we have made.

Benefits

A major benefit of the group was that it brought people together. I had previously felt quite pessimistic about this village and how the flow of money into the village from tourism seemed to have created a difficult context in which to promote an empowerment orientated philosophy of development. However, these sentiments were challenged by the resurrection of the learning circle.

Batho ba ea bona hore sehlopha se ka ba molemo motseng, mme batho ba sebetsa hantle mmoho. Hona ho ba thusa maphelong a bona. Mohlala, hone ho se na mila moo likosekara li ka tsamaeang teng le batho ba ne ba sokola ka ho khanna likiribae ho fumana metsi le patsi hobane mila o ne o se motle. Ha re ne re qala sehlopha, re ile ra ea ho morena mmoho re tsehetsane ho fumana setsa.

People are seeing that the circle can be of use to the village and people are working well together. This helps them with their lives. For example, the road was not there for carts to move along, people even struggled when wheeling their wheelbarrows to fetch water and wood because the road was not good. When we started the circle, we all went to the chief together to support each other to get land.

(Participant, Makhomalong learning circle)

There was a tangibly different feeling within the circle. People took an interest in one another and supported each another, not only within the circle, but also in the village more widely.

Labobeli hoseng pele sehlopha se kena, ke ile ka bolelloa hore hona le monna a phelang a le mong ea kulang. Ke ile ka arolelana bothata bona le sehlopha leha e ne e se setho sa sehlopha, litho li ile tsa etsa qeto ea ho nka bukana ea hae mme ba ea kliniking ho mo kopela meriana ho mooki. Kamorao ho moo, ba tla bona hore na ba mo fumanela chelete joang ea ho patala ngakeng ele ho bontsa tsehetso ea bona. Hona ke mohlala oa ka moo sehlopha sa tsehetso se sebetsang ka teng. Ba buisana hore na ba ka bokeletsa chelete joang bakeng sa mathata ana le ho bokoletsa chelete ka litokofele.

On Tuesday morning before the circle, I was told that there is a man living alone who was ill. I shared this problem with the circle and even though he was not a member of the circle, members decided to take his health book and go to the clinic and ask the sister for drugs for him. After that they would see how to get the money for him to pay for the clinic in order to show their support. This is an example of the ways in which the support group works. They discuss how to contribute money for these problems and even raise money through stokvels.

(Ntate Thabo, Makhomalong circle facilitator)

Sehlopha se tlisitse phethoho, haholo ho sapoto kurupu eo re e qalileng. Pele batho ba ne ba kulela ka matlong a bona ho se nang motho a tsebang phoso e teng kapa se hlokahalang molemong oa ho thusana. Batho ba ne ba sa tsotellane. Hona joale ba ea chakelana mme ba bona hore na ba ka kena joang ka lithuso tse fapaneng. Hona ho etsa phetoho sechabeng le tsela eo batho ba ikutloang ka eona ka ba bang hobane hona joale ba ka hlokomelana. Batho ba ne ba atisa ho hloea ba bang ha ba ne ba belaela hore ba na le AIDS, empa hona joale batho ba fumane litsela tsa ho tsehetsa batho ho e na le ho ba furalla.

The circle has made a difference, especially the support group that we have formed. Before people would just be sick in their houses without anyone knowing what was wrong or what was needed in terms of help. People didn't mind about each other. Now they visit each other and see how they can come in with different kinds of help. It makes a difference to the community and the way they feel about one another because now they can care for one another. People used to hate other people if they suspected that they had AIDS, but now people have found ways to support people instead of abandoning them.

(Participant, Makhomalong learning circle)

Batho ba utloelana bohloko ba bile ba ea tsehetsa haholo litabeng tsa HIV/AIDS.

People now feel for one another, and support each other, especially on HIV/AIDS issues.

(Participant, Makhomalong learning circle)

There was a greater sense of optimism and purpose amongst members. This was boosted when the group won first prize in an HIV/AIDS drama competition between learning circles in Malealea (see Chapter Five).

Re fumane moputsoa oa pele tlholisanong ea tsoantsiso hang fela ha re qeta ho kenela lihlopha. Re ne re thabisitsoe ke hona mme re ile ra itela hobane re ne re hlokometse hore re morao mme re ne re batlang ho ba maemong ao ba bang ba leng ho ona, joale hona ho re khothalitse hobane re ikuloile hore re ka etsa seo ba bang ba se entseng. Le hona joale litho li ntse li re li batla ho bontsa hore ha ba eso be khahlanong le lihlopha – ba ne ba sa li kenela hobane ho ne ho sena molaetsa o hlakileng ka mosebetsi oa lihlopha. Empa hona joale ba ea li utloisisa mme ba bona hore ba ka tsoela pele joang. Ba batla ho ea pele.

We got the first prize in the drama competition immediately after we joined the circles. We were happy about this and we did our best because we realized we were behind and we wanted to be up to the same standard, so this encouraged us because we felt like we could do what others were doing. Even now circle members are still saying that they want to prove that they have never been against the circles - they didn't join before because there was not such a clear

message about what the circles are all about. But now that they understand it and can see from others how to continue, they want to go forward.

(Participant, Makhomalong learning circle)



Makhomalong circle performs the winning drama at the community drama festival

I was struck by people's willingness to give Lebohang another chance. Even people not in the group wanted to see Lebohang succeed, and it was the facilitators who requested that Lebohang be paid for the work that she was doing in the circle. M'e Manako who had previously found it so difficult to work with Lebohang commented:

Lebohang o matla e le kannete, mme Ntate Thabo o na le sepheo. Ke na bonnete ba hore Lebohang o koatetse motho e kang Ntate Thabo, ea tlohetseng ho sebetsa le sehlopha sa hae a emisitse ho sebetsa le lihlopha nako e telele, ebe a ka etsa mosebetsi o motle ho feta oa Lebohang. Emong le emong o batla ho iponahatsa ka botle hobane ba ile ba oela pele, mme ba sebetsa ka thata. Hape, Ntate Thabo ha se motho ea bolokang litaba tse mpe, a ka tlaleha Lebohang haeba a ea sehlopheng a tahiloe.

Lebohang is really strong, and Ntate Thabo is motivated. I'm sure that Lebohang feels bad that someone like Ntate Thabo, who left another circle and then dropped out for so long, can do it better than she can. They both want to do their best because they failed before, so they are working hard. Also, Thabo is not someone who keeps secrets, so he will report Lebohang if she goes to the circle drunk.

(Manako, facilitator who used to work with Lebohang)

This represented the good will felt by people in the group, also evident in the way that the circle formed the support group to help sick people in the village, and in the ways that members found to assist one another both practically (as in helping one another during times of stress, like death) and with skills. Ntate Thabo summed up the feeling in the group in the following idiom; "*Bana ba monna ba arolelana hlooho e tsie*." Literally, this means 'children of one man share the head of a locust'. Figuratively the meaning is that regardless of how little there is, it can still be shared; even a tiny thing could be of value to others. The proverb, which refers particularly to advice, knowledge, and skills (rather than food), was cited in the context of a discussion about how circle members shared their knowledge with one another. Ntate Thabo gave an example of members sharing their knowledge of local herbs so as to equip all members with a greater collective understanding of how to help themselves and others when ill.

Constraints

There were a number of constraints experienced in the first phase of the circle's life. These have already been raised in the narrative of the events of the circle above, so will be only briefly highlighted here in order to reinforce how they contributed towards the collapse of the circle.

Phase one

Alcohol abuse was the cause of many problems experienced in the first phase of the circle's life. The general culture of drinking in the circle not only curbed the progress of the circle, but contributed to its collapse.

As a result of the chaos in the circle, there was a high drop out rate, and the circle was dismissed by people in the village. Children were brought in, I suspect to boost the numbers, rather than because the facilitator wanted to address their needs. This compounded problems because the facilitators were not trained to deal with children. As a result, the needs of both the children and the adults went unmet.

Phase two

Participants were inclined to carry conflicts and ill feeling from life in the village with them into the circle meetings. This occurred to a greater or lesser extent in every circle, since no circle was an island - the bi-weekly meetings were merely moments in the wider life of the village. Ntate Thabo had the following to say about conflict:

> *Ka nako tse ling batho ba tlisa likholoano tse hlahang kantle ho sehlopha ka hare ho sehlopha, mohlala, haholo ha sehlopha se qala, batho ba ne ba batla Lebohang a lelekoe sehlopheng. Empa kamora hore ke buile le bona ka lintlafatso le bohlokoa ba ho lebala mahloeo ba amohetse Lebohang e le mothusi oa bona hape.*
>
> Sometimes people bring conflict from outside of the circle into the circle, like for example, especially when the circle started, people wanted Lebohang expelled from the circle. But after talking to them about development and the importance of forgetting hatreds, they have accepted her as their helper too.

However, Ntate Thabo felt that the existence of conflict within the circle was not an insurmountable obstacle:

> *Leha e le mona batho ba tlisa mathata a bona le ba bang sehlopheng, hona ha ho emisi sehlopha ho tsoela pele. Sehlopha ka nako engoe se sebelisoa e le sebaka seo ho rarolloana mathata ho sona.*
>
> Even though people do bring their problems with one another into the circle, this doesn't stop the circle from going on. The circle is sometimes even used as a space to resolve problems.

My greatest concern regarding the revived Makhomalong circle related to the use of food aid as an incentive to motivate community development action (see Chapter Five). I questioned whether participants were really committed to learning and development, or whether they were just driven by the food aid received through the learning circles? When I probed this issue with the facilitators, Ntate Thabo told me,

> *…Phallelo e thusane ka ho ekeletsa batho sepheo sa ho etsa liketso, empa ha re ne re qala sehlopha khetlo la bobeli, re ne re se na bonnete ba hore na re tla fumana phallelo kapa ha re na ho e fumana, empa batho ba ile ba batla ho tsoela pele ho sebetsa. Re sebelitse likhoeli tse tharo pele re ka ra fuoa lijo tsa liphallelo.*

> … The food aid did help to motivate people to take action, but when we started the circle for the second time, we were not certain whether or not we would get food aid, but people still wanted to carry on. We worked for three months before we got any food aid.
>
> (Thabo Phethoka, facilitator of Makhomalong circle)

Lebohang was of the same opinion.

> *Hona joale ba ntse ba tsoela pele ka ho lokisa mila mme nnete ke hore liphallelo li a ba thusa, empa hona joale ha ba na ho emisa le ha liphallelo li le seo hobane ba se ba utloisisa ntlafatso ha betere. Leha mosebetsi o ka oa tsamaea butle mme batho ba bang ba ba leqe haholo.*
>
> Now they are continuing with building the road, and yes the food aid does help them, but now they wouldn't stop even if the food aid stopped because now they understand development better. Although the work might be slower and some people might be more reluctant.
>
> (Lebohang Mohale, facilitator of Makhomalong circle)

The role of food aid in the circle was ambiguous. According to Moso, in the period before participants received food aid, there was wider participation from other people in the village in their road repair activities. People who were not circle members would join in the work on the road. But once circle members started receiving food aid, non-members said they did not want to work when others were being rewarded and they were not.

This was a real dilemma. I realised that the food aid made an appreciable difference to people's nutritional well-being. People who were previously living on very low nutritional intake were now able to work because they had the energy to do so. However, at the same time, some people were not receiving food aid, and that effectively translated into exclusion from the activities in which circle members were involved. I was troubled by this division, and by the thought of what would happen if the food aid was stopped. Would it create a dependency from which the circles would not recover, or did they really have an understanding of development that would push them to continue, as Lebohang claimed? At the time of writing (December 2005) the food aid was still being supplied, so the question remained unanswered.

However, what was encouraging about the circles, was the way in which groups were inspired by one another. Makhomalong village felt left behind other villages in terms

of development, and so indirectly benefited from the efforts of other circles, and from their own sense of pride. Because they felt as if their village had been set aside, they wanted to shape up against the other circles.

> *Batho ba hlokomela hore sehlopha se molemo motseng. Re hlokometse ba bang ba tsoelang pele hantle, mme ha re batle ho salla morao, re batla ho ba boemo bo tsoanang le bona.*
>
> People are seeing that the circle can be of use to the village. We are aware that others are continuing well, and we don't want to be left behind, we want to be in the same position as others.
>
> (Makhomalong learning circle participant)

Given the collective momentum generated by the circles, it is likely that in the event that food aid did stop, and some circles continued working, others would follow suit. This is especially likely if circles have built up a resource base of their own – such as a garden, orchard, woodlots, or income generation project. Such a base gives circles additional motivation to continue working, over and above a sense of community pride.

CONCLUSION

The four stories recounted above have provided deeper insight into the workings of village learning circles on a day to day basis. These narratives are by no means comprehensive or complete – they are merely a version of a chapter or two in an ongoing life, a life that even at the time of writing continued to grow, and change.

What is evident however, even from the partial pictures presented, is the way in which events and dynamics between people on the ground shape and influence the REFLECT process. In every context where the process was applied, it manifested different results, changing and reshaping itself according to the will and desires of those participating. That said, in spite of the differences between circles, there were also commonalities. Participants in each circle went through a learning process, acquiring new insights, skills, and strategies as they applied their efforts to the development of their respective villages.

The final chapter of this study follows, and in it, by way of concluding, I revisit the research questions that have given form to results presented in the preceding three chapters. I reflect on key issues that have emerged in response to each research question and relate these back to the literature that has informed this study. Some conclusions are presented and recommendations for further research are also offered.

CHAPTER SEVEN - REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The REFLECT approach was introduced to communities in the Malealea valley with the expectation that the approach would facilitate a process of learning, community development and social change. The preceding three chapters have presented a narrative account of how people in the Malealea valley accommodated, applied and adapted the REFLECT approach over a five year period. I have described how the process unfolded, what actions were taken, what was achieved, what participants learned, and what the benefits and constraints of using the process were. The task of this final chapter is to reflect on this account, and scrutinise it in terms of what it means, not only in relation to the research questions posed at the start of the study, but also in relation to relevant literature set out in Chapter Two. Key issues and themes that emerged are considered and analysed as part of the discussion under each research question. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the significance of this study in relation to the larger context.

REVIEWING THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY IN RELATION TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

The overall purpose of this study was to explore how a rural community in Lesotho would use the REFLECT approach to deal with issues and challenges experienced in their daily lives. This intention is reflected in my first research question which asks: **'How did participants in a rural area of southern Africa accommodate, apply and adapt the methods and principles of REFLECT in their respective communities?'** The preceding three chapters have largely answered this question by setting out a detailed account of the way in which REFLECT was applied and adapted in the Co-op and the village learning circles. However, by way of summary, I provide a general overview of the main points that emerged from both contexts described in this narration, as well as a brief review of points specific to each context. After this review, I discuss the key issues that have arisen in relation to relevant theory.

Overview

There were two main contexts in which REFLECT was used. It was first introduced into the context of the co-operative, and later into communities in villages scattered throughout the Malealea valley. In both these contexts, REFLECT was used as a process to coordinate and manage activities and learning in a focused and systematic way (i.e. the process was organised, although not always tightly structured or linear). It provided a way forward, setting out a course of learning and action which enabled people to think through and act on issues in an orderly way. REFLECT provided participants with a means to establish aims and set about meeting their goals. It provided a forum for creating a joint vision and taking steps to realise that vision. For example, in the case of the Co-op, REFLECT was used to develop a constitution which defined the future of the organisation and shaped the activities undertaken by that organisation. In the circles, REFLECT assisted circles to establish ground rules and set objectives as well as a focused learning and development agenda shaped by members' needs and interests. (Prior to using REFLECT, people had engaged in community actions, but such actions tended to be sporadic, and not focused around an ongoing cycle of learning and action. As a result, plans and actions were often not realised or concluded.)

REFLECT provided participants with a method to build up their organisations and community groups. Members of circles strengthened their existing practices and nurtured their skills further as they worked through structured learning units. Members could identify, articulate, communicate, and analyse issues that affected their lives, which enabled them to gain greater insight into those issues. Using REFLECT, circle members were able to assess a situation, see relationships between problems and prioritise concerns to be addressed. Relevant action was implemented and to a greater or lesser extent, monitored and modified. For example, in Tsinyane village, the original action of starting a small vegetable garden grew into a substantial project, where not only was over an acre of vegetable plots established, but also a dam, an irrigation system, sanitation for members and a structure for the circles' meetings built. Over time, circles developed a core of people with a dynamic and increasingly sophisticated knowledge and skills base. (The nature of the skills developed is discussed further under the second research question below.)

REFLECT provided a means for people to organise themselves and work collectively in different contexts. Inevitably there were clashes, but the approach, built around an organised space for dialogue and discussion, offered a ready forum for mediating conflicts. While some conflicts were not resolved (for example, the conflict in Ha Ramotsekhoane which saw the facilitator leave the circle because of accusations of witchcraft), in general, conflicts were addressed sufficiently to enable circle members to continue to work together cooperatively.

The most obvious adaptation of the REFLECT approach was in terms of its focus - development issues were a stronger focal point than literacy issues. (Reasons for this are discussed later in this section.) However, there was still a relationship between development and literacy, numeracy and communication skills; it was a matter of where participants directed their energy. Arguably, developing literacy skills received less attention than developing communities through action, but overall, development initiatives created a meaningful use for the development and application of literacy skills and practices.

The cooperative context

Within the context of the Co-op specifically, members drew on the principles and methods of REFLECT to develop their organisation. The creation of the constitution was the starting point, followed by the development of a number of systems to manage the production and sales of crafts; as well as finances. (These systems included a 'point system' – an incentive based profit sharing system organised around earned 'points'; savings schemes; as well as management and administrative systems. Chapter Four explained in some detail how these systems were developed, adapted, and improved.)

In addition to the systems mentioned, REFLECT also shaped the format and procedure of meetings which were modified to include REFLECT principles and practices. On a regular (weekly) basis, members would assess a given situation, discuss it, analyse it, make changes and then monitor and evaluate those changes. This process was also followed, albeit less regularly, in subcommittee meetings. However, only certain PRA tools, specifically the planning matrix, were used regularly during these meetings. The matrix was also the favoured PRA tool as members developed

methods to monitor the rate and quality of production, as well as sales and income (see Appendix 7 for examples of these matrixes). This tool helped members with monitoring, which in turn promoted accountability and a commitment to transparency within the organisation.

However, although PRA tools informed certain practices within the Co-op, they were not extensively adopted or 'internalised' as part of everyday practice. Members found that the process of constructing tools prolonged their already lengthy weekly meetings. They were reluctant to schedule additional meetings as this would have cut into production time. They therefore chose to circumvent the more structured learning process and the construction of tools. Achieving action points was their primary objective. In my opinion this compromised the analytical aspect of the REFLECT process, as well as the learning potential inherent in actions achieved. Explicit learning outcomes were not stated, and therefore not achieved as members endeavoured to achieve specified actions. In the longer term, learning was more often achieved incidentally than by design, particularly as workshops and other external educational interventions made by me were gradually phased out and members took responsibility for all aspects of the Co-op's existence.

Yet despite the focus on action over learning, according to members, the Co-op was still seen as a "centre of learning". The nature of what members learned is discussed further under the second research question below, but it is important to note here that the Co-op acted as a 'hothouse' for members to develop their facilitation and leadership skills and acquire a hands-on understanding of REFLECT in practice. As they developed the Co-op's constitution, and the various strategies used to manage the activities of the Co-op, so members deepened their understanding of REFLECT and how it could be used. This understanding equipped members to take on the role of establishing and facilitating village learning circles in the context of the wider community. The Co-op acted as the 'engine' that drove the village learning circle initiative, with members 're-fueling' in the Co-op. Throughout the life of the project, the facilitators met as Co-op members, discussing and implementing their community work as an important component of their identity. Ongoing training workshops provided facilitators with continued support to facilitate learning and action within the circles on an ongoing basis.

In brief, through REFLECT, the Co-op developed a cadre of skilled members committed to a culture of action and democratic participation, and to a lesser extent learning. REFLECT significantly influenced the way in which this culture developed, not only in the context of the Co-op, but also in the context of the village learning circles. The reasons for the apparent variance between learning and action are discussed at the end of this section.

The village context

Initially, communities in the villages were sceptical about the purpose and value of the proposed learning circles. Facilitators had difficulty recruiting participants, and experienced low morale during the initial period of trying to establish village learning circles. However, because the facilitators had seen REFLECT work well within the context of the Co-op, they persevered and continued to be committed to the village learning circles.

Most of the circles began by focusing rather narrowly on functional literacy. However, as facilitators gained confidence, this focus broadened to looking at literacy within the context of action that could be taken to improve the well-being of people living in the communities. This shift was inspired by one circle's achievement - Moreneng circle constructed several pit latrines in their village. This single event was a turning point in that it encouraged other circles to think beyond the margins of learning functional literacy and consider how their groups and REFLECT might be used to implement action that would make a difference to their lives and livelihoods. Once this conceptual shift was made, circles slowly gained momentum, following the trend that had been established in the Co-op. Action led the development agenda, with learning integrated into that agenda rather than constituting the main focus. Learning ensued as participants planned actions, and sought skills (including literacy skills) and information needed to implement those actions.

However, unlike the Co-op, throughout their existence village circle members were guided by structured learning units (written by Moso and me). These units emphasized specific learning objectives, usually related to some action taken by a group. For example, testing for HIV was related to learning about why it was

important to test and what the test results meant. Because regular REFLECT circle meetings were designed around specific learning objectives that simultaneously promoted action, members came to understand how learning and action could be integrated.

In addition to specific learning objectives built into the learning units, incidental learning also occurred in relation to action points. For example, participants learned a great deal from their experience of building a dam in Tsinyane village. However, this learning was *not* focused around a learning unit. Thus, participants' learning and action were not determined by learning units alone. They took initiative to implement action according to needs that emerged, learning in the process.

Over time, the facilitators and the participants of circles took increasing responsibility for what happened in the circles, as well as greater ownership of the circles. This was particularly evident in the formation of various committees. The facilitators formed a 'facilitators' committee', which gave them a collective voice. Through this committee, facilitators helped one another to overcome obstacles and implement plans. For example, in Lithabaneng village, the chief was unwilling to grant the circle land on which to plant trees or start a garden. The facilitators' committee met with the chief concerned, negotiating on behalf of the group as a whole. The chief found it difficult to dismiss the request from a delegation and thus granted the land. (Chiefs would often dismiss a single facilitator, but be more willing to listen to a representative structure such as a committee.) In addition to the facilitators' committee, members in each individual circle formed their own 'circle committee'. These committees gave the participants a voice and shifted the power away from the facilitator. A larger collective committee was also formed to represent all the circle committees. Representatives from the smaller circle committees were chosen to serve on this larger committee which liaised with the facilitators committee as well as other organisations or entities in the community (such as water committees or roads committees). In this way, an extensive network was created, with the learning circles woven together into a larger association which in turn networked with other organised groups. These networks created an environment most conducive to the creation of social capital (see discussion below).

Reviewing the summary in relation to theoretical debates

While the evolution of REFECT in the village learning circles was different to its evolution in the Co-op, there are a number of common issues which emerged in both contexts. Three key issues warrant further discussion in terms of how they reflect theoretical debates outlined in Chapter Two. The first of these relates to the participants' clear focus on action, rather than learning; the second relates to participants' use of PRA tools; and the third relates to the way in which human and social capital were developed through learning circles and the various committees that were formed under their auspices.

A focus on action, rather than the learning process

First, it is noteworthy that participants in both contexts had a strong sense of themselves as 'community activists'[75], and chose to prioritise local level actions as the most important aspect of the process in which they were engaged. This resonates with the definition of development operationalised in Chapter Two, namely that development is

> a process by which members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.
>
> (Korten, 1990: 67)

According to their aspirations, people in Malealea saw development - equated with improving their quality of life – as a priority. Developing their resources and capacities was critical. They were concerned with their own development agenda, as defined by circle members themselves, rather than an agenda defined by an outsider such as myself, or the lodge, the chief, local government or even national government. They were interested primarily in how they could improve their lives according to their needs and capacities. In this way they adopted an 'inside–out' approach, as opposed to the more conventional 'outside-in' (rather than top-down) approach of an expert from the outside advising people inside a community. This 'inside-out' position advances a conception of development that emphasises the empowerment of ordinary people in local communities. It endorses the tradition of adult education as a

[75] See discussion under Research Question Two.

popular movement for social change, and indeed substantiates the view that a participatory, empowering approach is relevant to people in rural communities. It challenges the conventional 'top-down' approach where experts provide the answers, effectively excluding local people from the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of development projects. That local people used *their* knowledge to further their development according to how they interpreted their needs, challenges the neo-liberal perspective on development as a process of boosting economic growth through skills training and human resource development that contribute towards a skilled labour force.

That people took charge of how they wanted to see their lives change, determined not only what they did, but also what they learned. Learning needs were not defined by outside experts or government task teams[76]. People themselves determined their learning agenda according to their aspirations and self-identified development objectives - staying healthy, accessing basic resources and generating income. Learning was seen as a complementary activity that supported action towards these objectives, rather than a starting point for action. This supports a process and outcomes orientated 'social action process' (Rogers, 1992) that was described in Chapter Two and illustrated in Figure 6 of the same chapter. Here knowledge, skills and learning form part of an integrated process that sees participants taking action towards achieving a desired change.

This integrated perspective mirrors the understanding of literacy put forward in the literature about REFLECT where literacy and empowerment are seen as an intersecting duality, as elements enabling each other. There is interplay between knowing, doing, acting and reflecting, not as separate activities, but as fundamental processes. Figure 18 on the following page represents this process graphically:

[76] Even Moso and I did not determine participants' learning needs. With the exception of the unit on gender, all learning units were developed around learning needs identified by the participants themselves (see Chapters Four and Five)

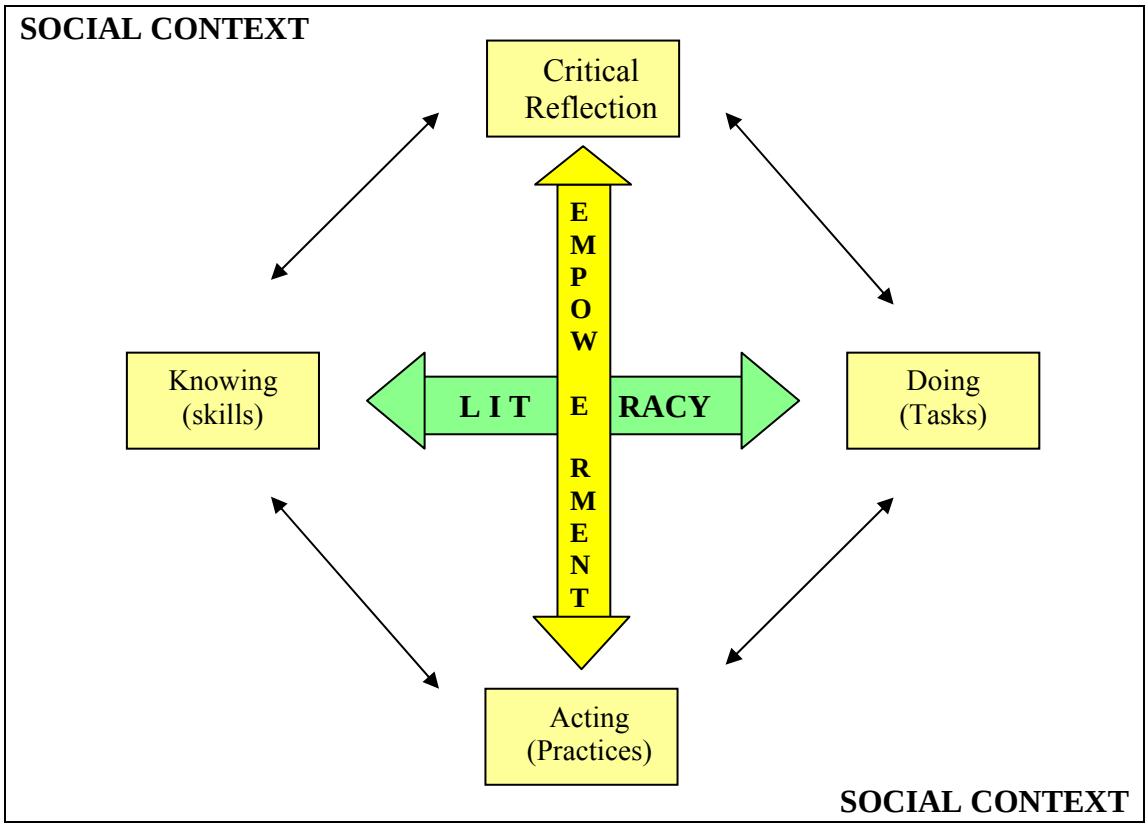


Figure 18: A Diagrammatic representation of how action and learning are integrated in the REFLECT process

This diagram draws on Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning, where reflection and action are seen to exist in a dialectical relationship. This model echoes Freire's (1972a) notion of praxis whereby learners engage in a dialectical movement from action to refection upon action to a new action. As such, even though participants were more explicitly occupied with action, and in fact may have invested more energy in this part of the cycle, they were simultaneously engaged in a transformative dimension of learning.

And even though participants were not always focused on learning literacy, the tasks and activities in which they were engaged often demanded that they exercise literacy. For example, income generation projects demanded that participants' keep written records of their income orientated activities. Learning literacy was therefore assimilated into the process of achieving their action points, with participants learning literacy by engaging in actual literacy tasks. Rogers (2000) terms this approach the 'literacy comes second' model, and defines this as a process whereby learners "start

with developmental activities and fit literacy in as one of the many different sets of skills and knowledge the groups will find themselves acquiring in the course of that activity" (ibid: p 8). According to Rogers, the goal here is not for facilitators to help someone *learn* literacy skills, but to help them *use* literacy skills in their daily lives. Learners fit literacy into what they are already doing. This notion reflects the ideological view of literacy whereby participants "take hold of literacy in ways that are consistent with local understandings and practices" (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996: 25). Human agency is prioritised - what people do with literacy is seen as more important that what literacy does for people.

Literacy issues and concerns are discussed further in this chapter under Research Question Three. It is sufficient to note here that literacy was incorporated into the process of achieving action, rather than prioritised as a distinct activity. As such, it is clear that the findings support theories related to REFLECT and social change models of adult education (Archer and Cottingham, 1996; Freire, 1972a, 1994, 1997; Giroux, 1994, Rogers, 1992; Youngman, 2000).

The use of PRA tools

I have noted in the summaries above that I was surprised that the full range of PRA tools were not internalised by either the facilitators or the participants, and were not used frequently enough to become a comfortable practice. This surprised me because the broader objectives of the PRA process were internalised – namely developing an awareness of an issue, and looking for and finding appropriate solutions to bring about change. I feel sure that the broader objective associated with PRA – namely placing control over local development processes in people's hands – was achieved.

The puzzle then is why the full range of PRA tools were not taken up to a greater extent as part of everyday practice. Other than the matrix, PRA tools were only used when they were structured into the learning agenda by either Moso or me. This raises the question of whether the facilitators and the participants really understood the deeper tenets of the PRA methodology. Did they perceive PRA as an analytical methodology that could help them to probe their situation, reach consensus, make decisions and take action to improve their situation? I think not – I think the PRA tools were often divorced from the wider process of which they were a part.

Participants went through the motions of using the tools, but did not grasp the more critical components of this part of the process of change[77]. As such, I believe that the critical and analytical aspects of the REFLECT process may have been compromised.

Another possible explanantion for why PRA was not taken up enthusiastically was that at times the tools seemed too prescriptive, ironically since one of the original aims of participatory approaches such as PRA was to "move away from the limitations of blueprint planning and implementation towards more flexible and context-specific methodologies" (Guijt and Shah, 1998:5). Because participants seemed to have only a superficial understanding of the principles of empowerment underlying the use of PRA tools, they tended to use the tools in a more technical, than empowerment-orientated manner. These were time-consuming exercises to be completed before they could get on with the really important stuff of action. PRA became a mechanical *moment*, rather than an ongoing longer-term *process* of challenging inequalities and negotiating power imbalances.

But why was the matrix, and the planning matrix in particular, favoured as a PRA tool different from the others? There are several possible explanations for this. The first is that the planning matrix was a genuinely useful tool in assisting facilitators and participants to plan, act and achieve concrete results. Facilitators were also familiar with this tool having used a variety of forms of the matrix in the context of the Co-op[78]. Other tools, (for example the river of life and the venn diagram) made different demands on facilitators and participants, and were not always seen to be advancing participants' ultimate goals; they did not yield immediate outcomes. They required more imagination, analysis and reflection - a different set of skills from planning. Participants had to think more laterally. Also, some of the other PRA tools were more likely to expose weaknesses in systems and a lack of resources which were more difficult to deal with. And furthermore, because facilitators themselves were not comfortable using these tools, their weaknesses as facilitators were more likely to be exposed to participants. The matrix on the other hand provided facilitators with an opportunity to display their leadership and profile themselves. Because the planning

[77] Facilitators' and participants' struggle with criticality is discussed further under Research Question Five.
[78] See Appendix 5 for an example of the matrix used for monitoring stock.

matrix provided a visual picture of a group's plans, facilitators could take credit if they could show that their groups were planning concrete action, particularly in a context where action was positively valued.

The development of human and social capital

The third issue that arises from the summary presented under Research Question One is related to the development of human and social capital. The theory underlying these concepts was discussed in detail in Chapter Two – it is sufficient here to remind the reader that human capital relates to the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health that are important for the pursuit of livelihoods. Social capital on the other hand relates to the social resources upon which people draw in order to strengthen their livelihoods. These resources include networks, memberships of groups, relationships of trust and access to wider institutions of society.

It can be said that human capital was developed in the process of circle members working together to achieve their various goals. As they worked together, they acquired knowledge and learned a range of skills[79] which assisted participants to increase their productivity and generate economic returns, particularly in those instances where income generation projects were successful. By improving their skills, disadvantaged rural people were able to become more financially self-sufficient and improve their livelihoods, and as such, the prophesies of the proponents of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) were fulfilled.

However, as is discussed above, the development of human capital was closely associated with broader change objectives which were defined not by individuals, but by circle members as a group. Hence, the development of human capital was intricately linked to the development of social capital generated through collective efforts and co-operation between circle members committed to achieving common objectives. It was the social relationships between people that provided the context for the development of human capital; it was through connections between people that members were encouraged to develop and implement their skills along the path to achieving their objectives. Social capital as a theme is explored further in the

[79] These are discussed further under Research Question Two

discussion pertaining to Research Question Two below. It is sufficient to note here that human and social capital were developed in concert with one another. This has important implications for community development initiatives which are concerned with developing either of these forms of capital.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

My second research question asked whether there were **any identifiable benefits gained** from introducing REFLECT into Malealea. This section highlights the benefits described in the preceding three chapters. Benefits have been organised into two primary categories: those gained by participants at a personal level, and those gained at a community level. Table 12 summarises these benefits which are discussed in detail thereafter. This section concludes by considering the documented benefits in relation to theoretical debates about various forms of capital.

A. Benefits gained by project participants at a PERSONAL level
(i) Redefined identity
• Enhanced self-esteem and confidence, as well as personal agency • Sense of purpose, meaning and belonging through a commitment to community work • Sense of identity as pioneers and community activists • Sense of pride and achievement in accomplishments • Sense of connectivity to one another and larger organisational networks • Sense of themselves as learners and mentors to one another
(ii) Knowledge and skills:
Learning and skills related directly to using the REFLECT approach • Ability to analyse, reflect on, and evaluate • Ability to identify and prioritise problems • Ability to ask questions and examine issues • Communication skills • Planning, organisational and managerial skills • Ability to work effectively with one other • Literacy skills

Knowledge and skills related to experiences acquired through participation in REFLECT learning circles and associated projects • Financial management skills • Knowledge and skills related to managing income generation projects (including the cooperative) • Knowledge and skills related to environmental management • Knowledge and skills related to health in general, and HIV/AIDS in particular • Revaluing of traditional knowledge and skills • Technical knowledge and skills • Leadership skills • Knowledge of development and enhanced capacity to mobilise and manage resources related to improving well-being
B. Benefits gained at a COMMUNITY level
i. Social momentum generated to drive development collectively • People were encouraged to join community action groups • Networks established • Collective resource base expanded **ii. Strengthening of community groups and organisations** • Knowledge and experience of group structures and procedures shared with other groups and organisations • REFLECT principles and practices (e.g. dialogue, discussion, questioning) taken into other organisational contexts • Indirect benefits: greater transparency, confidence in one another, trust, and ownership of processes.
Economic benefits
Environmental benefits
Infrastructure related benefits
Health and sanitation benefits
Educational benefits

Table 12: Benefits gained from introducing REFLECT into Malealea

The more detailed discussion of benefits that now follows is presented following the same sequence as appears in Table 12 above.

A. BENEFITS GAINED BY PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AT A PERSONAL LEVEL

There were two main areas of benefit to participants on a personal level. Firstly, participation in circle meetings and activities helped participants to redefine their sense of themselves. Secondly, it exposed them to a range of new knowledge and skills which enhanced their changed redefined sense of self. These are now discussed in more detail:

Redefined identity

Through their experiences, facilitators and learning circle participants discovered a new sense of who they were, what they could do, and what their role was as members of the community. This was experienced and expressed in a number of ways.

Enhanced self-esteem, confidence and sense of personal agency

Participants' self-esteem and confidence improved as they spoke out, shared ideas, and engaged in different community projects. Learning new skills (discussed in more detail below) further contributed to a greater sense of personal agency and ability to take charge of their lives. The following quotation captures a sense of these changed perceptions and redefined sense of self:

> *E mphile sepheo. Ha ke sa lula kae ke sa etse letho. Pele ke ne ke furaletse thuto ea ka ea pele empa hona joale ke sebelisa tsebo ea ka hape. Ke na le boikemelo. Haeba ke hlokomela ntho engoe e phoso ha ke sa thula. Ha ke sa etsa joalo, ke se ke bua litaba. Lehaeba ke sebetsa le batho ba rutehileng haholo, ha ba buisana ka lintho, ke ikutloa ke phephetseha ho sebelisa boko ba ka ho etsa bonnete ba hore ha ke salle morao.*
>
> It has given me purpose. I am no longer sitting idle at home. Before, I had abandoned my previous education, but now I'm using my knowledge again. I'm more confident. If I notice something wrong, I won't keep quiet, I no longer do that, I speak out. Even if I am working with people who are more educated, when they discuss things, I feel challenged to use my brain to make sure I am not left behind.
>
> (M'e Mamophethe, Member of the Co-op and facilitator)

Sense of purpose, meaning and belonging though a commitment to community work

Participants created new relationships through interacting in new ways and developed a sense of purpose and belonging, feeling that they could contribute towards society.

> *Hona joale ke hlokomela hore ke na le karolo eo nka e bapalang mme ha ke mong. Ke ne ke atisa ho ikutloa ke hloka ho etsetsoa ke ba bang hobane kannete ke ne ke se na tsela ea ho iketsetsa lintho, empa hona joale kea bona hore nka etsa lintho mme nka sebetsa le ba bang ho matlafatsa sechaba..*
>
> Now I can see that I have a role to play and that I am not alone. I used to feel dependent on others because I didn't really have a way of doing things for myself, but now I see that I can do things for myself, *and* [her emphasis] work with others to do things together to build the community.
>
> (M'e MaTsepang, member of the Co-op and facilitator)

Sense of identity as pioneers and community activists

Another aspect of facilitators' and participants' redefined identity was associated with their sense of themselves as 'pioneers', as capable 'community activists'. There was a tangible sense of commitment to and ownership of the process of development:

> *Hona joale kea e bona joaloka boikarabello ba ka hobane ka ha ke le karolo ea sechaba ke tseba litlhoko tsa batho mme ke utloisisa tsebo ea bona. Ke tseba mokhoa oa ho atamela batho le ho buisana le bona ka puo ea bona. Ha se hore ke boikarabello ba motho ea hlahang kantle ea sa utloisiseng hore na liphephetso tse re tobileng ke li feng. Hape hape ha se ho morena ho bona hobane ba tsoalloa boikarabello ba bona ho ena le ho khetheloa bona ka lebaka la litsebo tsa bona.*
>
> Now I see it [development] as my own responsibility because as a member of this community I know the people's needs and understand their experience. I know how to go to people and speak to them in their own language. It is not up to someone else from outside who doesn't understand what the challenges are. And it's also not up to the chiefs because they *inherit* [his emphasis] the responsibilities rather than being chosen because of their skills.
>
> (Member of Tohlang learning circle)

Sense of pride and achievement in accomplishments

There was a genuine feeling of achievement and pride in what participants had accomplished. They felt they had contributed to the development of their communities, and left a legacy for their children and grandchildren.

Bona seo re se entseng mona. Re na le jarete, le letamo. Li teratetsoe mme hona ke seemahale se tla lula se le teng leha re se re shoele. E ikarabela motseng oa rona. Ke se ke tsofetse hona joale, empa bana ba ka ba tla bolella bana ba bona hore 'e ne le nkhono oa lona ea lemeng lifate tsena mme a etsa jarete ena. E ne le nkhono oa lona ea thusaneng ho cheka letamo lena'.

Look at what we have done here. We have a garden, and a dam. It is fenced and this is something that is going to stay here even after we are dead. It belongs to our community. I am old now, but my children will tell their children that 'it was your grandmother who planted these trees and made this garden. It was your grandmother who helped to dig this dam'.

(Member of Tsinyane learning circle)

Sense of connectivity to one another and larger organisational networks

Part of seeing themselves as pioneers and community activists included a concept of themselves as helpers, as mentors, as people who bring others together, encouraging cooperation. Facilitators felt this particularly strongly. "We have inspired wider community involvement. We have helped to bring changes to our communities" (Ntate Thabo, facilitator of Makhomalong learning circle).

The way in which different people, men and women, young and old, were brought together comes across in the words of a participant in the Sekhutlong circle:

Ho joalo kaha eka re khutletse bocheng hape, re sebelisa lihloho tsa rona. Joaloka batho ba baholo ba tsofetseng, re kopana mmoho le batho ba bacha mme re fumane maikutlo a macha ho bona. Hape re buisana ka lintho le banna. Hona ho re thusitse ho amohelana le ho theholetsana re na le kutloisiso e chatsi ka ba bang.

Its like we are youth again, we use our heads. As older adults, we come together with younger people and get new ideas. We also talk about things with men. This has helped us to appreciate each other; we have a better understanding of each other.

(Participant in Makhomalong circle)

This participant clearly felt that the circle had given her a chance to work with people and access ideas in a way that she was not able to do outside of the circle. Participants saw themselves as part of a bigger group, they felt they belonged and had a space to share problems with others, as well as help one another to solve problems. There was also a feeling of belonging to a larger social and organisational network. Through their activities in the Co-op and the learning circles, participants had connections to

LANFE, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Malealea Development Trust (MDT) and a range of NGOs.

Sense of themselves as learners and mentors to one another

Facilitators and participants expressed opinions (albeit less frequently) that indicated that their changed sense of self included a sense of themselves as 'guides' and 'learners'. This can be seen in the quote below.

> *Likopanong ke atleha ho tataisa lipuisano ka ho botsa lipotso le ho etsa likhothaletso tse fang batho monyetla oa ho nahana le ho araba ho tsoa ho seo ba se tsebang. Batho ba ea nthlompa ke hona hobane e ba thusa ho utloisisa le ho ithuta.*
>
> At meetings, I am able to guide discussions through asking questions and making comments that give people a chance to think and answer from what they know. People respect me for this because it helps them to understand and learn.
>
> (M'e Matsepang, facilitator of Tsinyane circle)

In general, facilitators seemed to have gained a stronger sense of personal empowerment than members of the learning circles. This was likely due to their dual role as members of the Co-op and facilitators of the learning circles. They received a lot more training, had more contact with outsiders and other organisations and were generally more involved on a number of levels. (For example, rather than just attending the circle meeting, they were required to prepare for and reflect on sessions through oral and written reports.)

Knowledge and skills

In spite of participants' stronger sense of themselves as 'community activists', rather than 'learners', a great deal of education and learning did take place over the course of the project. When asked about this learning, participants claimed to have acquired a range of knowledge and skills through their involvement in the Co-op and the village learning circles. These have been grouped into several subcategories, each of which is discussed below.

Knowledge and skills related directly to using the REFLECT approach

The first category of learning relates directly to participants' use of the REFLECT approach. As they followed the structured learning process built into the learning

materials, participants acquired a variety of skills and a range of knowledge that served them well in the context of the learning circle and more generally. The kinds of learning acquired are summarised in Table 13 below. Examples from practice are given as well as references to relevant sections of the findings chapters where these examples are discussed in more detail.

Knowledge and skills related to experiences acquired through participation in REFLECT learning circles and associated projects

The second category of learning relates to knowledge and skills acquired by participants through experience within the context of the circle and its wider activities. This learning was still indirectly related to the use of the REFLECT approach, as activities were guided by the general method and principles of REFLECT, but the learning was not always structured into learning units. It was often acquired through non-formal workshops or informally through experience. The kinds of knowledge and skills acquired are incorporated into Table 13 below. (This table elaborates on a section of Table 12.)

Benefits gained by project participants at a PERSONAL level	
(i) Knowledge and skills related to use of the REFLECT approach	
Knowledge and skills gained	**Explanation / examples from practice**
❑ **Ability to analyse, reflect and evaluate** ❑ **Ability to identify and prioritise problems and see relationships between them**	Members of the Co-op analysed their practice, and identified five central concerns. These were prioritised and a 'point system' was developed to address these concerns. The point system was an incentive-based profitsharing scheme which allocated points to members who undertook action that addressed any of the five central problems identified. address these concerns. *See Chapter Four – sections entitled 2001-2005*
❑ **Ability to ask questions and examine issues**	Members of the Co-op questioned why items were not selling, how the quality could be improved, how production could be increased, and so on. (*See Chapter Four – 2001-2005*)

	The learning circle members questioned why HIV+ people should be ostracised and asked how they could be better cared for. (*See Chapter Five – 2005*)
❑ **Communication skills** (including speaking in public, voicing personal opinions, negotiating different views constructively)	Through working together, participants learned to understand and communicate with others better. Participants and facilitators commented on how their experience in circles had given them better insight into people and taught them to co-operate. *We have learned through others, learned different views, learned to listen and get on with others in the community and at home.* *(M'e Mamotseliso, facilitator)* (*See also case studies in Chapter Six)*
❑ **Planning, organisational and managerial skills**	Every circle, without exception, achieved several successful action points (from construction of roads to establishing HIV support groups). Effective implementation of these projects testifies to the development of the skills mentioned. (*See Chapters Four, Five and Six)*
❑ **Effective team work and ability to cooperate** effectively with team members	Knowledge and skills were shared within and between learning circles. For example, the Tsinyane support group worked with Pholosa Lichaba to raise poultry that would generate income for both circles. (*See Chapter Six - case study of Tsinyane village*)
❑ **Literacy skills** (reading, writing, basic numeracy, financial literacy) (*These are discussed in more detail under Research Question Three.*)	A range of literacy skills were developed to different levels by participants in the different circles. Participants claimed that these skills helped them to manage their lives, particularly the financial aspects of their lives related to managing their personal finances. (*Examples are given throughout the Chapters Four, Five and Six.)*

ii) Knowledge and skills related to experiences acquired through participation in REFLECT learning circles and associated projects	
Knowledge and skills gained	**Explanation / examples from practice**
❑ **Financial management skills**	Through the various income generation projects which circles were engaged in, members had to learn about managing money (*see Chapters Five and* Six). Participants learned about budgeting, saving, costing and pricing. Co-op members acquired a range of skills and knowledge related to banking – they learned about saving, interest rates, withdrawal procedures, bank charges and so on (*See Chapter Four*).
❑ **Knowledge and skills related to managing income generation projects** (including the cooperative)	Participants learned about ways to generate income – from livestock, to sharecropping to selling vegetables to running a shop. In the process they acquired planning and administrative skills as well as project management skills, and had an opportunity to apply financial skills gained. Participants learned the importance of organisational guidelines, such as a constitution, required for the successful operation of a group (*see Chapters Four, Five and Six for examples illustrating these skills*).
❑ **Knowledge and skills related to environmental management**	Working on environmental projects, such as reforestation and reclamation of eroded areas, enabled participants to learn about varieties of trees, different soil types and environmental conditions. Participants also learned about water harvesting and water catchment. (*See Chapters Four, Five and Six)* They learned about protecting and managing resources such as grasslands, water and trees. Knowledge and skills acquired supported better farming and environmental practices in the valley.
❑ **Knowledge and skills related to health in general and HIV/AIDS in particular**	In addition to what members learned about HIV/AIDS through the structured learning units (*see Chapter Five – section entitled 2005*), participants also gained additional knowledge and skills through activities such as setting up support groups. In these contexts they were able to apply their knowledge and skills and

	learn more through discussions with people actually infected and affected by HIV. Discussions and activities helped to break the silence and reduce the stigma surrounding HIV, and gradually people became more willing to confront HIV through testing and disclosing. This was also promoted by incentives attached to disclosing – financial support to travel to clinics, being members of support groups, receiving nutritional supplements.
❑ **Revaluing of traditional knowledge and skills**	Traditional knowledge was reassessed and reaffirmed during circle discussions. As members shared information about coping, they were reminded of traditional ways of treating human and animal illnesses, of protecting natural resources and creating craft. Older circle members remembered things their parents and grandparents had taught them. For example, in Tsinyane village, an old woman remembered how her grandmother had made organic pesticides by burning locusts and sprinkling their ashes on plants. Members used this method to rid their gardens of locusts. Local knowledge was thus reintroduced into circulation, safeguarding it from being forgotten and lost to future generations.
❑ **Technical skills and knowledge:** • Sewing, knitting, embroidery • Beading • Grass work • Pottery • Candle making • Making cosmetics and creams (aloe jelly) • Using recycled materials (for fire rings, candle holders, furniture) • Agricultural skills (share	Co-op members had more opportunities to gain skills given that they met more frequently, had more access to resources and equipment, and had more formal training workshops. (*See Chapter Four for a discussion of training workshops in the Co-op.)* However, this learning was often passed on by facilitators to their circle members. For example, when participants were taught Zulu grass work, facilitators went back to their circle members and taught them the skills they had learned in the workshops. (*See Chapters Four, Five and Six for more examples of skills learned in the Co-op and the village learning circles.*)

cropping, crop rotation, fertilising, eradicating insects) • Preventing erosion • Fencing	
❑ **Leadership skills**	Opportunities to encourage and support circle activities enabled members to develop and exercise leadership capacities and skills. They learned to stand up in front of other people, and express opinions publicly. Working on numerous committees helped people to learn to work together, communicate and negotiate with chiefs, community leaders, local government officials and others. Organising events such as stokvels, support groups, and projects helped people to strategise, plan and implement plans. They also learned flexibility as plans had to be adapted and renegotiated (*Chapter Six has numerous examples of skills mentioned above – see for example the Makhetheng case study – refilling the dam illustrates how participants learned to adapt plans.*)
❑ **Knowledge of development and enhanced capacity to mobilise and manage resources related to improving well-being**	Through their efforts, participants defined for themselves the meaning of 'development' in the Malealea context. They increased their personal and community (see below) capacity to identify, mobilise and manage resources in a way that improved their well-being and met their needs. Chapter Five and Six presents examples of how groups built preschools, established gardens, planted trees, and so on - actions which illustrate how participants mobilised and managed different resources to improve their well-being. They came to understand development as a process that they could shape through their ideas and actions, rather than as something determined by outside people (such as the government) or forces (such as the environment).

Table 13: Knowledge and skills acquired through participation in REFLECT processes and projects. (This table extends a section of Table 12)

B. Benefits gained by project participants at a COMMUNITY level[80]

In addition to benefits that accrued to individual participants, the community as a whole benefited from the establishment of REFLECT circles in the valley. These benefits are discussed below:

Social momentum generated to drive development collectively

A significant benefit of the REFLECT project was that it brought people in Malealea together in new ways and created greater opportunity for working together collectively. In the process, momentum was generated that would not have been possible through the individual efforts of people working on their own. Participants shared experiences and problems of both a practical and personal nature, and many commented that they felt less alone. They also shared knowledge, skills and resources, helping one another to achieve collective goals. In this way, a tangible sense of cooperation and a feeling of goodwill were created. Participants felt they could trust and rely on one another. This sense of trust extended beyond the confines of the circles into the villages as well. For example, when circle members volunteered their time and resources to help ill people in the village, the community appreciated their efforts and valued the vehicle of the support group as a resource. Indeed, people in the village often came to rely on the support groups as much as, or more than, their families.

As more people participated in circles and their projects, people gradually gained confidence in themselves, in one another, and in the potential of participating collectively in a group. Groups and societies began to emerge everywhere - people joined grocery clubs, savings groups, funeral/burial groups, a range of committees, stokvel groups, work teams, dance groups, and choirs. These groups were often separate from the learning circles, many having their own constitutions, their own means of generating income and separate systems for managing themselves. Initiatives such as these became dynamic, and as people joined them, more opportunities for networking were created, sustaining the momentum. After five years, there were over 500 people participating in circles and their related projects and groups, with no sign of activities abating.

[80] See Section B of Table Seven

Often groups that were started by circle members or inspired by circle activities chose to retain a link with the learning circles. A particularly good example of such an initiative is '*Pholosa Lichaba*'[81], the support group for HIV+ people. The group was started as circle members began to test positive and found they needed a specific kind of support which was not available through the learning circle – people wanted to confide in and share with other HIV+ people who understood their challenges from the same perspective. However, membership of *Pholosa Lichaba* was not limited to circle members only – anyone who tested HIV+ could join. And *Pholosa Lichaba* continued to work closely with the learning circles, hosting joint fundraising activities and educational events (see the case study of Tsinyane village in Chapter Six). The social momentum of efforts to address HIV/AIDS was sustained as all groups worked together in their own ways to address the epidemic and support those infected and affected.

That networking was highly valued, was evident in the fact that as circles became more established they organised regular gatherings which provided opportunities for networking. The photo inserts below show members of learning circles from across the valley attending a celebration event in late 2005 which was initiated and organised entirely by the circles themselves to celebrate their work and achievements.





Celebratory events between members of circles in the Malealea valley

[81] 'Pholosa Lichaba' means ` Deliver the Nations`. 'Nations' in this sense refers to populations from different places, and reflects the acceptance of anyone who is HIV+.

A similar event was organised in March 2006 for all the circle support groups, *Pholosa Lichaba* as well as support groups from other areas in the district. In this way, networks were extended beyond the valley. As circles formed associations and partnerships with other structures, they extended the space for communal engagement. By May 2006, associations and partnerships had been created with the following local organisations - the Malealea clinic, village water committees, burial societies, and local government. On a district and national level, associations and partnerships had been formed with the Lesotho Cooperative Society (LCS); Lesotho Association of Non-Formal Education (LANFE); The World Food Programme (WFP); the Malealea Development Trust (MDT); the German Development Service (DED); Morija and Mafeteng Government Hospitals; the Department of Forestry; the US Embassy; Royston and City Schools (both in the UK). Having the circles in place made it possible for other players, such as those mentioned above, to move into communities quickly since circles had already established common goals and a way of working together.

Also, because of the focus on learning (particularly in the learning circles), people joining community groups had an increasing skills base, further strengthening the prospects of long term sustainability of other groups and initiatives. The way in which learning and skills were shared is summarised in the quotation below:

> I have developed an interest in community life. Being part of the circle has raised my awareness in development, and in sharing skills, like how to run a business. For example, as a sales person in the Co-op I have learned skills. And I have taken what I have learned here and helped Ntate Pitso [a member of the village learning circle] with his shop. I have shown him how we keep books to help him run his business better.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, 2001 - when he was still a village circle facilitator)[82]

The quotation above also illustrates how, as a result of the stronger network created between people, there were more collective resources, both actual and potential, on which to draw. In this case, a learning circle member was able to draw on Moso's skills to strengthen his business. But it was not only individuals who offered resources, it was also collectives. For example, through the support groups, people were able to get access to care when they were ill at home; through Pholosa Lichaba

people were able to participate in generating income and gain access to psychological support, nutritional supplements and certain subsidies; through savings groups and burial societies they were able to access money in times of need; and through the circles themselves, they were able to access the collective efforts of the group and its achievements.

The benefits that were generated from the experience of those in learning circles and related projects were also passed onto people outside of Malealea. The greater stock of resources that accrued as community structures strengthened was shared with groups and organisations which came to visit the learning circles in Malealea. These groups included some partners (such as LANFE), as well as the Peace Corps, Skillshare Lesotho and informal community groups.

Strengthened groups and organisations

The knowledge and skills gained through participation in REFLECT circles equipped members to build up other groups and organisations in Malealea (see (i) above). Members were able to take what they learned in the context of REFLECT circles and apply this to their activities in a number of ways.

First, participants' knowledge and experience of group structures and procedures enabled them to assist other groups with processes to facilitate more successful group workings. For example, where groups did not have a constitution or similar such guidelines, they were encouraged to develop them. Groups were also encouraged to discuss goals and action plans which helped them to focus their activities. In short, they developed a strategy to proceed as a group. The following quotation illustrates this point:

> *Mosebetsi oa lihlopha oa tsoana le mosebetsi oa mosebeletsi oa bophelo. Re etsa lintho tse tsoanang e leng liketso tsa lintlafatso, leha mokhoa o sebelisoang o fapana. O nthusitse ho e etsa hantle hobane o fana ka mokhoa a lateloang tsela ea ho buisana litaba mmoho. Ka hona ho na le karohano enyane lipakeng tsa basebeletsi ba bophelo le litho tsa sechaba.*
>
> The work in the learning circles is similar to the work of a health worker. We do similar kind of development activities, although the method is different. It [REFLECT] has helped me to do it better because it gives us a strategy; a way

[82] Interview conducted in English, therefore translation is not provided.

of discussing things together so there is less of a separation between the village health worker and community members.

(M'e Manako, facilitator of the Ha Patela learning circle)

One of the facilitators, who was also a chief, described how she used what she had learned in her REFLECT circle in her role as a chief.

Ke nka seo ke ithuleng sona mona ka ho sebetsana mmoho le batho mme ke se sebelise pitsong ho khothaletsa ba bang ho sebetsana mmoho. Ho nthusitse ho khothaletsa ba bang ho etsa mosebetsi oa ntlafatso ka tsela e pharaletseng. Tsebo e ncha eo ke e fumaneng e fetotse bophelo ba ka. Joalo ka morupeli ke ithutile hore ho ho nna ho etsa liketso le ho khothatsa batho. Pele, joaloka morena, ke ne ke lebeletse lintho ho tsoa mmuso mme li fetisetse sechabeng. Empa ke ithutile ha se feela ho fetisa molaetsa, le nna ke lokela ho nka karolo. Morena o nka bokarabelo ba ho khothaletsa sechaba ntlafatso le liketso tse ling tse hahang sechaba.

I can take what I have learned here about working together with people and use it at the *pitso* [village assembly] to encourage others to also work together. It has helped me to encourage others to do development work in a bigger way. The new knowledge I have gained has changed my life. As a facilitator I have learned that it's up to me to take action and motivate people. Before, as a chief, I just expected things from the government and then I would take it to the people. But I have learned that it is more than just passing on information, I also have to take part. A chief should take responsibility for encouraging development and positive action in the community.

(M'e Mamotena, chief and facilitator of Tsoeunyane circle)

In addition to a strategy, REFLECT also offered certain principles and practices that were taken into other contexts. For example, the practice of dialogue, discussion and questioning, which also served to promote transparency and accountability, was carried forward as a practice, thereby extending areas for dialogue beyond the circles.

Clearer strategies and guidelines helped groups to work together better. Having constitutions and agreements in place helped members to hold each other accountable. As people worked together, so they developed greater confidence and trust in one another. They developed a stronger sense of ownership of community groups and organisations, contributing to the longer term sustainability of those groups.

Economic benefits

In addition to the benefit of creating and sustaining greater social momentum, REFLECT circles contributed towards small scale economic development in the Malealea valley. This happened in a number of ways. First, every circle established some kind of income generation or self-help project. These ranged from shop keeping, to rearing pigs or chickens, to cultivating vegetables to producing craft[83]. People derived an additional source of income from participating in such projects, whether in the form of cash earned or food distributed by the World Food Programme[84]. Secondly, the food aid secured by the learning circles removed the threat of starvation for the very poor and provided them with the nutritional intake needed to participate in projects, particularly those requiring hard physical labour such as constructing roads or dams or even gardens.

It is most likely that the contribution towards economic development will be sustained in the longer term where villages have built up a resource base – whether this be in the form of a food garden, an orchard or a woodlot. These resource bases should provide security for people who will be able to continue eating and/or selling vegetables, fruit and wood in the future.

Environmental benefits

Land degradation, soil erosion and deforestation are serious environmental threats in Malealea. In an effort to address these problems, circles reclaimed eroded gullies through building stone gabions (walls) and establishing vegetation to hold soil in affected areas. Circles have also established woodlots to serve as future fuel sources. (Over 20,000 trees were planted in the valley over the course of the five years of the circles' existence.) Circles have also made fuel-saving devices such as 'fire-rings' from recycled cans. These devices help conserve energy during the cooking process, thereby reducing the amount of fuel needed (see Chapter Four). Grass lands have been protected from animals and thereby allowed to recover from overgrazing. And lastly, water sources have been protected to improve the availability and accessibility of clean water. In addition to the health benefits of clean water (discussed below),

[83] The statistics of income generated through craft production were presented in Chapter Four.

[84] As mentioned in Chapter Five, people involved in community development programmes were eligible for food aid from the World Food Programme.

improving water sources also meant that people no longer dig in riverbeds, or ground springs - actions which were potentially damaging to these important environmental features.

Infrastructure related benefits

The need for developing better infrastructure was identified by all of the learning circles. Considerable effort was invested in repairing roads. Ten of the 14 circles built and/or maintained roads into their villages. Small buildings were erected, mostly for use by the circles as meeting places or store rooms for gardening equipment. Two learning circles built shops. Two learning circles built pre-schools, with plans to build pre-schools in more villages at the time of writing (May 2006). In addition to these buildings, members of the Co-op built a sales room and a work room as part of expanding their business. The Co-op also initiated the building of a community preschool, sponsored through donations made to the Malealea Development Trust.

Apart from the construction of roads and buildings, learning circles also worked to establish gardens and orchards. Nine of the 14 learning circles set up gardens, three of which were fenced. Irrigation was secured in different ways. Tsinyane built a dam (see Chapter Six), while other villages harvested water in different ways – mostly through tapping water off other sources and gravity feeding it to the gardens.

Ha Ramotsekhoane village constructed a water catchment tank that protected the water source from animals and other forms of pollution, giving villagers a safe and clean source of water. Khorong village built catchment and silt tanks and laid pipes from a water source several kilometres away[85]. This provided water to the village which had previously had no protected or piped water whatsoever. Several other villages made efforts to repair water tanks, water pipes and standpipes.

Health and sanitation benefits

Participants linked ill health and disease to poor sanitation facilities and thus set about constructing pit latrines and digging holes for disposal of rubbish and grey water. Pit latrines were built for the use of the general community, thus spreading the benefit of

these facilities as widely as possible. However, rubbish holes and holes for disposing of grey water tended to be dug by individuals close to their homesteads.

In addition to improving sanitation facilities, participants also confronted the HIV/AIDS epidemic. They educated themselves about the disease, they engaged in discussion and debate and held public drama and quiz competitions to raise general awareness. By the end of the research period (December 2005), over 400 people had tested for HIV, 75 people were on antiretroviral treatment and 40 people had disclosed their status.

The improvement of water sources has been described above, but is important to note that there were important secondary health benefits as well. Safe water sources meant that there was a general improvement in health because people were drinking clean water. Hygiene also improved with improved access to clean water. These two improvements in turn lightened the patient load at the local clinic, translating into better health care for other people who needed it in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic[86]. Also, since women and children no longer had to spend as much time fetching water from distant water sources, they had more energy and time engage in other activities, like growing vegetables, which promoted the well-being of the family. Vegetables could also be watered more easily – a problem that had confounded many who tried to grow vegetables for home use.

Educational benefits

REFLECT circles helped to promote education and engender a culture of learning within the valley of Malealea. They provided support for an ongoing cycle of learning and development, and became a forum where members could engage with, and learn from, one another. The dialogical space of the circle also provided a safe space for participants to explore issues that might not otherwise have been explored (for example, HIV/AIDS, sexuality, gender, jealousy, income generation and management of money). Collaborative learning practices were established as a 'norm', and circles became 'learning communities'. According to Miller (2000:1) 'learning communities'

[85] This project was initiated by the learning circle, but expanded to include all people in Khorong village. The project was sponsored by 'Aqua for All', a Dutch organisation.
[86] Observation made by M'e Makhahliso Manyeo, the nursing sister in charge of the Malealea clinic.

are communities where learning is recognised as relational, connecting human beings to each other and the world, as they take responsibility for participating in the creation of that world. The words of one of the participants echo this concept:

> Batho ba fumana thuto mona. Re ithuta ho iphelela. Re ithuta lintho tse ka re thusang ho haha maphelong a rona le ho iphilisa ka bo rona mme hona ho ea re matlafatsa.
>
> People get education here. We learn how to live for ourselves. We learn things that help us build our lives and to live through our own means and this strengthens us.
>
> (Makomiti Tenane, facilitator of Sekhutlong circle)

Through participating in circles, and becoming learners themselves, people developed a heightened awareness and appreciation of the value of education and were more inclined to encourage their own children to attend schools. This was evident in the efforts made by circle members, many of whom were parents, to establish preschools in their villages. Circle members built the preschools themselves, using local materials where possible, and applying to the Malealea Development Trust for funding to buy what could not be procured locally (doors and windows, roofing timber, and so on). The photo insert above shows members of the Sekhutlong circle building their village preschool from local stone. Over the course of the project, three preschools were established by learning circles. These were open to children of all people in the village, not only those who were members of the learning circle.



Circle members building a pre-school in Sekhutlong village

Over time, education was promoted throughout the valley, not only through the learning circles, but through other initiatives as well. For example, the Malealea Development Trust set up a scholarship programme to enable children who could not

afford school fees to attend school. The Trust also played an important role in developing resources at local schools. Three primary school classrooms were built, a wind turbine was set up to provide the high school with electricity, and a library was established at the high school. This library provided a satellite service to the primary schools by means of a 'donkey library' – a donkey would take books out to the four primary schools on a weekly basis (see photo insert). At the time of writing (May 2006) there were efforts to extend this service to the preschools as well. In this way, a culture of learning and reading was gradually supported throughout the valley.



The "Donkey Library"

The learning circles played an important role in supporting the promotion of this culture since they were meeting regularly to learn, plan and engage in community actions. This routine became a practice that supported a culture, not only of learning, but also of development.

Discussion of benefits gained in relation to theoretical debates

I would like to bring my discussion of benefits gained to a close by considering these in relation to the four different forms of capital presented and discussed in Chapter Two (see Figure 8), namely:

- social capital
- human capital
- financial capital
- natural capital

The benefits discussed above can be considered in relation to changes in access to these four forms of capital, with greater access contributing towards building resources, strengthening capabilities, and creating meaningful livelihoods for people in Malealea.

Human capital

Participants accessed human capital through strengthening their sense of self, through redefining their identity, as well as through developing their knowledge, skills and educational resources. Participants strengthened their capacity as they improved their ability to read and write; to analyse; to reflect; to evaluate; to engage in discussion; to debate; to question; to challenge and to voice their opinions. By strengthening these capabilities people became agents of change able to decide on appropriate actions, effect change and build a better quality of life. They took conscious decisions to protect their human assets. For example, members of the Coop protected their people by questioning why there was such a high death rate, mobilising resources to learn about and test for HIV, forming support groups and addressing the issue of stigma. In the learning circles more generally, human assets were protected as members focused not only on HIV/AIDS, but also on other health related concerns such as sanitation and protection of water sources. This meant that people were less vulnerable to infection. With skilled and healthy people to implement plans, it was possible to follow through on development initiatives. Investing in human capital was thus an important course of action. (Other examples of how participants invested in human capital can be found in Chapters Four, Five and Six.)

Social capital

Two types of social capital were developed – *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital (Putnam, 2000). *Bonding* social capital was developed as people worked together in the community. As members defined common goals, pooled resources and collaborated to achieve their goals, so they developed a growing sense of connectivity and shared identity – this constituted bonding social capital. Bonding social capital grew not only amongst members within circles, but also between members of different circles and other groups that were initiated by circles, for example, the HIV support groups, funeral societies, grocery clubs and singing groups; also committees that were involved in projects like the preschools and gardens. In the process of working together, social ties between people were strengthened and community members came to rely on and trust one another more. They looked to each other for help and support.

Bridging social capital was developed through relationships and connections between members of learning circles and people in outside organisations and institutions. Bridging social capital linked the circles to other groups with an interest in development. These contacts widened participants' access to new information and opportunities and shifted patterns of access to assets and institutions in favour of the community. For example, the close working relationship that developed between Ntate Molomo of the Forestry Division and the learning circles enabled members to access trees for planting as well as education about reforestation (see Chapters Four and Five). Food aid was accessed and distributed to members of circles through their connections first with LANFE, and then through the World Food Programme. It was also through their networks that participants linked up with NGOs that assisted them with health and water projects (such as the strengthening of HIV support groups, the dam in Tsinyane village and the spring in Ha Ramotsekhoane village – see Chapter Six). *Bridging* social capital thus assisted members of learning circles to maximise their own efforts to promote their interests and well-being.

There was a close correlation between *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital - the existence of bonding social capital facilitated access to bridging social capital and vice versa. The existence of an organised network of groups in place in the community made it easier for outside organisations to mobilise their services in that area. At the same time, assistance from outside organisations motivated and supported communities to work together more closely to achieve their goals. And because communities had already defined their own development agenda, initiatives with partners from outside of the community were more likely to happen on the communities' terms, rather than on the terms of the outside organisations. Strong stocks of bonding social capital thus augmented the value derived from bridging social capital.

Power and social capital

A sense of shared power developed amongst members of the different circles. This was evident in the way members collaborated to achieve collective goals, such as the construction of preschools and community roads, the planting of woodlots and the generation of income. As networks between circles strengthened, relations of reciprocity were reinforced, with members learning to trust one another more.

> Learning circles have united the Malealea people together through the groups that exist in different villages, and also uniting people in individual villages who have a way to come together and discuss things and do things together.
> (Participant's comment - SWOT analysis, 9th November 2005)

The growing trust between circles became evident in the more frequent organisation of cooperative events involving all circles, as well as the trend towards pooling resources between circles, rather than amongst members of one circle. Social support, in the form of emotional support, practical help and material assistance was increasingly mobilised as a resource. People helped one another resolve disputes (for example through the facilitators' committee), plant trees, raise funds (through stokvels) and learn (through community quiz competitions and dramas).

However, the power associated with social capital was not *always* equally shared or distributed between participants within a circle, or between different circles themselves. The case of Tsinyane illustrates this clearly – here there was a power struggle between the facilitator and the participants, with the facilitator taking advantage of his position within the network and participants demanding accountability from him (see Chapter Six). This power struggle emerged in a different guise when the facilitator married one of the circle participants. At the time of the marriage, the circle participant had already openly declared her HIV status and was a member of *Pholosa Lichaba* support group. However, after getting married, the facilitator, now the participant's husband, forbade her to attend support group meetings, despite his public backing of this group. His wife was not able to contradict him and dropped out of the support group. This anecdote evokes some scepticism about whether social capital really did contribute towards changed norms (in this case cultural norms) for the common good, or whether it was used rather to meets needs when convenient. Scepticism about changed norms was also raised just shortly after the official research period ended. In the month of May 2006, there were three murders in the Malealea valley. While none of the murderers were circle participants, two of the murderers were children of circle participants. Can one really claim that the accumulation of social capital had been socially enriching? If so, could one not have expected parents to have been able to influence the norms of their children? According to Coleman (1988) and Edwards (2000), social enrichment means

behaving differently towards each other, not just adding on more social contacts through which resources can be mobilised. "The most important characteristics of social capital are "norms" not "forms" – values like reciprocity and attributes like trust" (Edwards, 2000: http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/summer00/textonly.asp?id=67).

However, the scenarios described above do not suggest that social capital is an ineffective force for social change – rather they illustrate the complex nature of social change, and the need to consider the many interrelated factors acting on the formation and distribution of social capital. Unequal social relations are maintained through a range of social processes:

> …social capital is an outgrowth of a much bigger set of variables all acting together, such as politics and state formation, culture, history and patterns of material inequality. So while "more social capital" may help to combat poverty, it will do so only when other favourable conditions are present.
>
> (Edwards, 2000: http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/summer00/textonly.asp?id=67)

Campbell (2003:54) refers to this as a "complex dialectic of enablement and constraint". She claims that the process of participation is characterised by

> …the dialectic of enablement (grassroots community agency: the enablement of local people) and constraint (structural obstacles: resistance to change by powerful groups; unequal power relations between local stakeholders).

Having networks in place at the micro level does not necessarily change the broader political forces at play, particularly in rural areas where communities are marginalised partly due to their geographic and economic isolation. However, from a Foucauldian perspective, "power is a space of *possible action*, where social subjects strive to exert their effects" (Jovchelovitch, 1996:19). Whenever a community participates in activities and initiatives to enhance its interests, and reconstruct its reality, it actualises the power it holds to participate in the shaping of its way of life (Campbell, 2003:55). It is this ambiguity that is critical to an understanding of social change. According to Campbell,

> [s]ocial change through participation can be properly understood only if one understands the ambiguity of power relations and the double-edged nature of

> power. The dialectic of constraints and possibilities is the motor of social change.
>
> (ibid.)

Coleman (1988) paints a more hopeful picture of the possible impact of smaller units of change. According to his research, parents involved in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) were more prepared to be involved in school affairs when they were organised in smaller districts. Parents in large PTAs didn't feel their voice mattered, and the benefits were not clear to them. That circles were relatively small in size (20 - 30 participants per circle) meant that participants felt their voices could be heard and their plans operationalised. Local community action was thus foregrounded even though the context was characterised by broader political constraints.

Human capital linked to social capital

The presence of social capital influenced the accumulation of human capital, and vice versa. A social relationship is a resource that can facilitate access to other resources, and investing in social networks can have effects on the disposition of power and other resources that lead to the further development of human capital (Bebbington, 2002:3). At the same time, the human capital contribution made by individual participants to a social network influenced the significance of that network.

In Malealea, people brought their education, skills, language and other abilities to bear on the collaborative processes in which they were involved. But the social networks in which individuals were embedded provided a context for people to realise their potential (Burt, 2000). According to Foley et al (2001: 217) "…the social capital argument insists that we will see higher yields from the same human capital in communities that have more social capital". There is thus a greater likelihood that human capital developed can be used for the good of the community as a whole to one degree or another if communities have more social capital. It is important to recognise this link between social and human capital as this shapes the patterns of access to resources.

Financial capital

The economic benefits of small scale income generation projects opened up access to financial capital for participants of learning circles and members of the wider community who took part in associated activities such as grocery clubs, singing groups and food gardens. While these benefits were marginal, they were nevertheless significant in the lives of people who had previously had extremely restricted access to financial capital. Through income generation activities people gained opportunities to increase their personal capacities to mobilise and manage resources, becoming empowered in the process. Korten (1990:67) defines empowerment as:

> a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.

Drawing on this definition, it is possible to claim that individuals and groups were empowered, as they were able to produce goods of value; goods which frequently generated benefits for others as well. While some members of the community were not able to access cash directly, they were able to access food and nutritional supplements through the WFP or the HIV support groups. The collective efforts of the group thus shifted the distribution of power in the community in favour of those who had been previously excluded. Through the efforts of the circle members, a greater number of people had access to financial capital directly and indirectly.

Environmental benefits linked to natural capital

The environmental benefits may be classified as both 'natural' and 'infrastructural' in nature. Both these types of benefits ultimately contributed towards the preservation of natural capital so critical for sustaining people's livelihoods. 'Natural benefits' included the sanitation of springs, the reclamation of eroded areas, reforestation through the planting of woodlots and orchards, the protection of thatching grass and so on. The 'infrastructural' benefits included the construction of roads, toilets, dams, preschools, community meeting places, and shops. These infrastructural aspects helped to sustain natural capital in different ways. For example, well constructed roads helped to contain erosion; the presence of woodlots meant that vegetation was protected in the longer term and the presence of dams helped people to harvest natural

resources such as water which in turn meant being able to harvest crops. Natural and infrastructural benefits thus worked together towards creating a sustainable environment.

Conclusion to discussion of Research Question Two

This discussion has illustrated that REFLECT circles widened participants' access to four different types of capital – human, social, natural and financial. These were of phenomenological and hermeneutical value as well as environmental and material value. "People's assets [or different forms of capital] are not merely means through which they make a living: they also give meaning to the person's world" (Bebbington, 1999: 2022). Participation in circles enabled members to build their capabilities to be and to act, and to access produced and physical resources (cash income, water and land) useful for building their livelihoods. Participants thus enhanced their capabilities to engage more constructively with their world, and effect *change to* that world; change which was defined by them on their terms. In this way, people added to their quality of life, and enhanced their capacity to confront the social conditions that produce poverty. Access to different forms of capital, not only

> … allow survival, adaptation and poverty alleviation: they are also the basis of agents' *power* to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources.
>
> (Bebbington, 1999:2022)

Learning circles provided a vehicle for participants to engage with and build different forms of capital required for their well-being. Social capital in particular proved to be a valuable means by which participants gained access to other forms of capital.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

My third research question asked, '**What kinds of literacy practices developed and in what ways did these practices support development initiatives?**'[87]

The ideological view of literacy which informs this study deems that context significantly influences literacy practices. According to this view, literacy is a culturally embedded practice - people use and shape literacy in ways that make sense to them according to their needs in a particular context. From this perspective, it is important to discuss literacy practices in the cooperative and the village circles separately. I look first at the differences between the contexts, and then examine the kinds of literacy practices developed in each context, as well as the processes that engendered these practices.

Table 14 provides an overview of differences between the two contexts. Five main areas of difference between the co-operative circle and the village circles are highlighted: the objectives, the kinds of activities they engaged in, the levels of interaction amongst members, membership of groups and the extent of their social networking.

Differences between the two contexts in which literacy was practised		
	Co-operative circle	**Village circle**
Objectives	• Primarily income generation orientated	• Primarily development orientated
Activities and learning	• Related primarily to income generation • Undertaken on a daily basis • Focus on literacy is implicit	• Related primarily to development • Structured in relation to bi-weekly circle meetings • Focus on literacy is explicit
Levels of interaction	• Intense levels of interaction between participants who see each other every day	• Moderate level of interaction between participants who meet bi-weekly

[87] Discussion in this section is based on a 2003 publication by Gillian Attwood entitled 'An Action Research Study of Literacy and Empowerment in the Mountains of Lesotho' in *Global Research Perspectives*, vol. 3, University of Georgia.

Membership	• Dual membership of Co-op and village learning circles	• Members of village learning circles, but not Co-op
Social networking opportunities	• Considerable exposure to networking opportunities (due to dual membership of Co-op and village circles)	• More limited opportunities to network

Table 14: Overview of how the research contexts differed

The **co-operative learning circle** was established as a collective with the primary objective of generating income. Members of the Co-op used REFLECT to help them achieve this objective, integrating income generation orientated learning into that process. Learning activities were focused on acquiring skills and knowledge that could help members to achieve their goal of earning income. Literacy was an implicit part of that learning process – but did not form a separate focus in the same way as it did in the village learning circles. Co-op members met on a daily basis as they came together to learn skills and engage in making crafts and carpentry that they could sell. There was an intense level of interaction amongst Co-op members on a frequent (daily) basis.

Co-op members did not however meet only as work colleagues in the context of the Co-op. They also met as 'development colleagues' in their capacity as facilitators of village learning circles - a role taken on to meet their constitutional obligation of furthering development in the community more broadly. They therefore had dual membership of both the Co-op and the village learning circles. As a result of this, facilitators were exposed to many networking opportunities. In their role of 'Co-op member', they had access to the Lesotho Cooperative Society and the wider cooperative network; they also had access to tourists who were their main market; as well as the Malealea Lodge which purchased crafts from the Co-op. In their role of 'facilitator', they had access, not only to members of their learning circles, but also to chiefs and members of local government, as well as other organisations involved in community development work. The facilitator of a circle was often the contact person sought out to liaise with organisations on behalf of the circle.

The wide network which members had access to in their dual role as both Co-op members and facilitators, pushed them to develop a variety of literacy practices. In the role of 'Co-op member', there were literacies they had to learn that were specific to the Co-op context (discussed further below); they also had to develop a certain level of literacy in English in order to communicate with tourists. In the role of 'facilitator', they were required to develop yet other set of literacies which would equip them for this position. (For example, they had to keep a register of attendance, read the facilitators' guidelines, prepare meetings, keep records of these meetings, read their participants' books, and write monthly reports). They also had to learn to take photographs, which constituted another kind of literacy.

The **village learning circle** context presented a different scenario. The circles' primary objective was to develop their communities according to their identified needs. (The focus was thus broader than income generation per se, although generating income was identified as a need in most villages). A structured learning agenda, developed according to contextual needs, guided learning in village circles. Literacy and numeracy were explicit components of this learning agenda, with literacy and numeracy exercises consciously built into activities. For example, when learning about reforestation, participants read pamphlets from the forestry department, as well as information about the characteristics and uses of different kinds of trees and where these should be planted. They then wrote a letter to the tree nursery requesting certain species of tree, saying why they had chosen these trees, how many they wanted, for what area of land. These activities required participants to apply both literacy and numeracy skills[88], while at the same time meeting the specific development objective of combating deforestation.

Since village circle members met formally only twice a week, the level of interaction amongst village circle members was less intense that it was in the Co-op where members met on a daily basis. There was also not the same consistent demand for applying literacy as there was in the Co-op, either through development activities, or networking activities. Circles did interact with one another, but this did not place any

[88] These activities were adapted according to participants' levels of expertise. The example given here was an exercise for 'advanced' learners – beginners and intermediate learners had more simplified exercises.

new demands on members to develop an innovative set of literacy practices (as it did in the Co-op). Even when circle members met with chiefs, local government and development organisations, they could often get by without developing new literacy skills by drawing on those present who were more literate. These were in many cases people on circle committees, or the facilitator, who tended to act as the contact or liaison person.

Table 15 (below) provides an overview of the kinds of literacy practices that developed in each context, as well as the factors that influenced these practices. The focus of literacy activities is highlighted, as well as the opportunities available for reinforcing literacy practices in each context.

Factors shaping literacy practices in the two research contexts		
	Co-operative circle	**Village circle**
Focus of literacy activities	Related to income generation and production of craft • Financial • Managerial • Administrative • Technical	Related to development activities • Varied, no specific focus
Opportunities for reinforcing literacies	• Texts spontaneously produced as part of everyday organisational practice. • Many opportunities to practise literacy inside the Co-op – led to wider application of literacy beyond the Co-op • Literacy materials reasonably accessible and also spontaneously developed within the circle • Demand for literacy • Literacy established as a 'norm'	• Texts constructed as part of structured learning units, not a spontaneous practice. • Literacy practised less consistently in the circles – constrained opportunities for applying literacy skills, especially outside of the circle • Literacy materials difficult to acquire, not developed spontaneously as part of regular circle practice • No noticeable demand for literacy, participants could find a way 'around' it if necessary. • Literacy *not* established as a 'norm'

Table 15: Overview of literacy practices and factors influencing those practices

Literacy practices that developed in the two research contexts were different. Within the co-operative, **financial literacies** were a major focus of activities. Financial literacies included all practices related to managing money: book keeping, budgeting, banking, stock-taking, costing and pricing, recording income and expenditure, saving, fundraising, writing financial reports, and distributing income. In addition to these financial literacies, certain **administrative and management literacies** were also required. Participants used literacy to plan activities, to monitor activities, to organise and minute meetings and to ensure the smooth running of an organisation. A major literacy achievement in relation to this was the collaborative writing of a constitution that governed Co-op activities. When the circle joined the Lesotho Co-operative Society (LCS), their literacy activities were extended further. As a member of LCS, the Co-op circle had to manage a bank account, attend meetings and training sessions, read pamphlets, read and write letters and submit narrative and financial reports to be audited. Within the Co-op, members also developed **technical literacies** as they counted, measured, and weighed materials they worked with. In short, there was a constant demand for participants to exercise literacy and create texts as part of their everyday practices. Literacy became a 'natural' part of everyday practice; it was a tool which members used to empower themselves and strengthen the organisation. If members had not developed the required literacies, the Co-op could not have functioned as an income-generation project. This was a good example of "empowerment creating uses for literacy and literacy providing practical skills for advancing empowerment" (Archer and Cottingham, 1996: 18).

Within the village circles, literacy activities were primarily related to development activities undertaken by the group. For example, when participants decided to learn more about health issues and HIV/AIDS in particular, literacy and numeracy learning were related to this concern. Participants read Soul City comics to practice and extend their literacy skills as they became more informed about the issue. They learned about what foods should be eaten and what treatment options were available. They learned how to monitor body weight and budget for medical related expenses.

However, although literacy was integrated into the learning process in village circles, it was not assimilated into activities to the same extent as was the case in the Co-op.

Even though texts (such as the traditional herb album discussed in Chapter Five) were created, they were not integrated into everyday practice in the same way as texts in the Co-op were. There was not a demand for these texts, and literacy was therefore not established as a 'norm' in the same way. In certain circles where income generation projects, such as shops, were well-established, literacy practices were more of a 'norm', but this was the exception rather than the rule.

Exposure to meaningful texts was a serious constraint in the village learning circles since they existed in an environment that was essentially literature barren. This constraint was exacerbated by the fact that village circles did not network with outside organisations to the same extent that the Co-op did. Because of this, the need for literacy was not impressed on them in the same way. Participants preferred to invest their energy in actions that would improve their lives, rather than read to inform their lives.

It is important to note however, that despite the differences between the two contexts outlined above, there were also similarities in how literacy was used across the two contexts: Texts were always introduced and used by participants as a part of social action directed to addressing an issue that was relevant to the lives of the participants. The relevance of literacy related action gave *meaning* to the texts in the sense that they reflected the life experience and social knowledge of the group. And because the texts supported participants' achievement of something that was important to their lives, literacy had a *use*. These similarities between the contexts are important because they illustrate the social nature of literacy practices, a notion which is fundamental to the REFLECT approach.

The main difference between the Co-op and the village learning circles was that in the Co-op, literacy was practised more consistently as an integral part of daily operations. Literacy in the Co-op was routine rather than occasional. Literacy events were regularly occurrences, developing steadily into a *practice*. And because there was regular *use* of literacy, a *demand* was created for literacy to be practised because if this was not done, participants found that the Co-op didn't function effectively. And through regular practice, literacy became the '*norm*'. And from the 'norm', new practices were continually established as the business grew and changed, with literacy

gaining new meaning according to the context. In this way a cycle was developed. This cycle is shown in Figure 19 below:

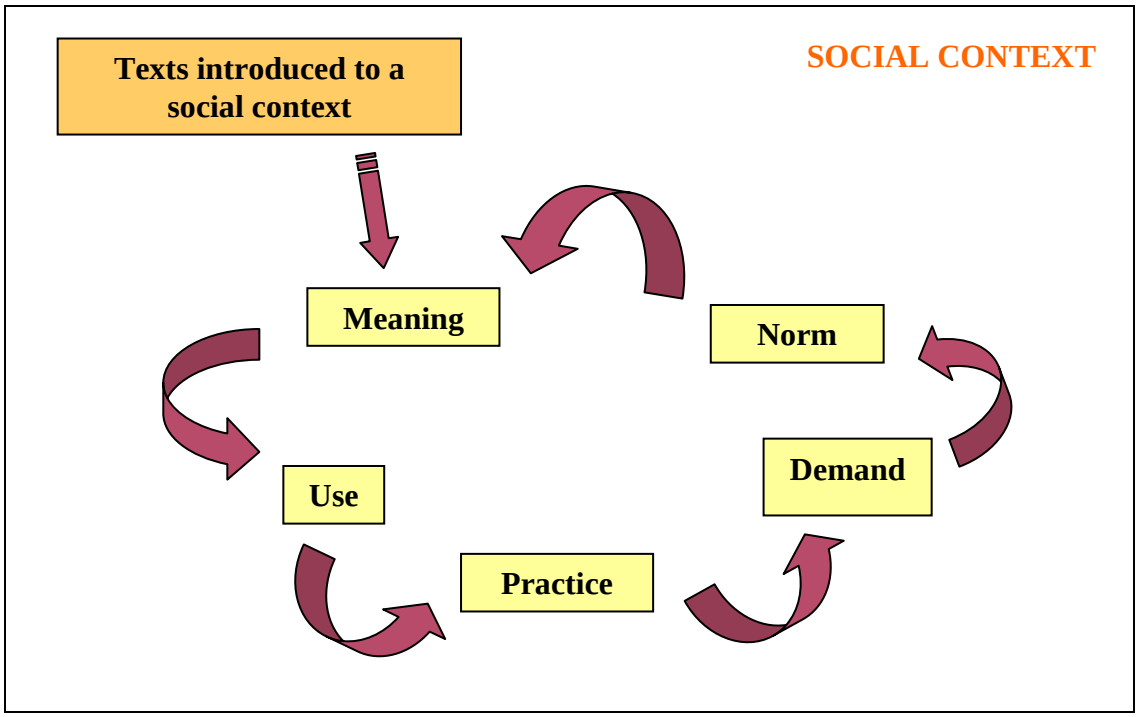


Figure 19: Cycle showing how literacy became a 'norm' within the Co-op

This cycle was only partially completed in the village learning circle context. Texts were introduced in a meaningful way, and they were useful, but literacy practices were not as established in the village circles as they were in the co-operative. This was because literacy did not form part of everyday practice in the same way it did in the Co-op. It was not spontaneously used as a daily practice within the village circle. And because it was not established as a practice, the demand for literacy was not as strong as it was in the co-operative, and literacy was not established as a norm.

One of the obstacles to introducing literacy into the village circles regularly was the unavailability of literacy materials. Materials had to be specially sourced from other places, which required money, time and commitment. For example, the Soul City comics were brought in from South Africa, and the forestry brochures had to be fetched from Maseru, a two hour journey from Malealea.

The fact that literacy practices were less established in the village circles became evident when participants were asked how they used literacy outside the village

circles. They struggled to explain what difference literacy had made to their lives in the community, or how they used literacy in every day practices. On the other hand, participants in the co-operative circle spoke easily of how they used their new-found skills in their lives outside the Co-op circle. People spoke of feeling more motivated to read, of changing their budgeting practices at home, and of starting informal savings clubs.

> *Ke qalile mokhatlo oa polokelo motseng. Re batho ba 25, mme khoeli le khoeli re beha chelete ho e bolokela ho reka korosari e sebelisoang lapeng. Re na le melao e ngotsoeng e tsamaisoang tsebetso ea mokhatlo, re ile ra isa molao ona ho morena ho etsa bopaki ba setempe, le hore a tle a kene lipakeng ha re ena le mathata. Re na le buka ea ho rekota le ea ho kena re boloka le metsotso. Ke nna ea bolokang libuka. ….Ke ithutile lintho tsena ka mokhatlong. Ha pele ke ne ke tloaetse ho lula hae.*
>
> I have started a savings club in the village. There are 25 of us, and every month we each put money in to save for buying groceries. We have rules written down about how the club should work, and we have taken these to the chief to get her stamp, so she can intervene if there is conflict. We have a record book and an attendance book and we keep minutes. I am the bookkeeper. … I learned these things in the co-operative. Before I just used to stay at home.
>
> (M'e Mamophethe, member of the Co-op)

This suggests that the Co-op circle participants had internalised the literacy practices to a greater extent than people in the village circles, whose learning seemed to have been focused predominantly on the development activities undertaken by the circle.

The literature barren context in which the village circles operated further contributed to the slow rate of acquisition of literacy by participants in the these circles. A literacy survey of text resources in Malealea revealed the limited availability of texts: some texts were accessible at schools, in the churches, and to a lesser extent at the clinic, but no libraries or learning centres existed in the community and newspapers, magazines and books could not be purchased locally. In addition, the pattern of people's daily activities made few literacy demands. Mobility maps illustrating village circle participants' daily activities showed that people spent most of their days engaged in physical activities in their fields, looking after animals, looking for wood, drawing water or washing clothes at the river. Occasionally people went to town or visited the shop or clinic, and on Sundays people went to church, but these contexts demanded limited literacy skills. Overall, reading and writing were not an integral

part of daily life. And because village circle participants had not established literacy practices in the circle, they did not see the need for, or have the confidence to create uses for literacy in their everyday lives. These circumstances support an argument for building literate communities as well as literate individuals.

> Create a context in which there are lots of literacy activities, and you will increase the motivation for learning literacy. Instead of literacy learning being supply-led (that is the providers take the initiative), there will be increased demand as people with no or few literacy skills see many others using literacy and will want to do the same.
>
> (Rogers, 2001:45)

The contrast between literacy practices in the Co-op and the village learning circles emphasised the importance of the above statement. As a result, efforts to build a literate community were made through establishing a library at the high school (also open to the community), at the four primary schools, and through establishing the 'donkey library' (see discussion under Research Question Two). The photo inserts below show books arriving (through the efforts of Irish volunteers); a local youth being trained to process the books; and children exploring them.



Books arrive



A local lad is trained to process books



Exploring books

Circles also made a concerted effort to make and display more notices and posters in shops and other public places around the communities. Gradually literacy gained ground as a practice in the community, as is demonstrated in the photo insert below which shows community members making notes at a community *pitso*. It is in this way that literacy was progressively established as a norm – the more people used it in everyday life, the more it became an accepted and desired practice.

While the description of literacy practices in the village and co-operative contexts takes into account the socially constructed nature of literacy, the *critical* dimension of literacy practice has not been addressed. How did the practices that developed support empowerment of participants? This question is closely related to the questions of what and whose *purposes* were served by literacy. Stein as cited in Fingeret and Drennon (1997: 64) says,



Literacy is applied as people take notes at a community *pitso*

> When we talk about "purposes" … we are not talking about these context- or time- specific accomplishments, but more about fundamental purposes that express the social and cultural meaning or significance of these accomplishments for individuals engaged in defining themselves as competent actors in the world.

Stein goes on to identify four larger purposes:

> Literacy for Access and Orientation
> Literacy as Voice
> Literacy for Independent Action
> Literacy as a Bridge to the Future
>
> (Stein cited in Fingeret et al, 1997: 64)

In the **village circles**, letters written to the chief, the Forestry Division or the facilitators' committee suggest that literacy served participants' purposes by providing them with a way to voice their needs with regards to securing something they wanted (land or trees or a particular facilitator for their circle). In voicing their needs through letters, participants gained access to power structures (the chief, the Forestry Division of the Government, the facilitators' committee) and resources (land, trees, people), which in turn supported independent action (growing vegetables to generate income, and planting trees to reforest the area, or people to teach skills). Thus, the purposes served were voice, access and independent action.

In the **Co-op**, as literacy was gradually integrated into every day practice, members became more self-assured and comfortable using literacy as a way of achieving their objectives. In other words, literacy supported the purpose of *independent action* within the co-operative. And as members grew more confident about using literacy, so they were able to extend their participation and gain access to new and more demanding sites of practice such as the Lesotho Co-operative Society, and the bank. In this way, they used literacy to reinforce independent action within the organisation, asserting their rights and making their voices heard in broader forums.

While participants in both the village and the co-operative contexts have certainly made progress with regards to using literacy for their own purposes, it is important to ask if this has been 'empowering' in terms of challenging the deeper power dynamics that underlie how literacy is used in society. Has literacy been empowering in the critical sense of revealing the connections between literacy and social change, between micro and macro power structures? Or has literacy been empowering for some individuals who have gained access to the 'system' without gaining a deeper understanding of how that system works, and how it might be transformed? Has the REFLECT approach as used in Malealea gone far enough to push a critical restructuring and redistribution of power? This question is explored further under the next research question.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

The fourth research question asked, **'Were communities 'empowered'? If so, in what ways? If not, what hindered empowerment?'**

The notion of empowerment has attained a place of prominence in the discourse of education and development. However, Brookfield (2000) warns that the word faces the twin dangers of 'evacuation' and 'reification'.

> Evacuation (of meaning) describes the process whereby a term is used so often, to refer to so many different things, that it ceases to have any distinctive meaning. Reification describes the elevation of a word or idea to a realm of discourse where it appears to have an independent existence separate from the

> conditions that the word was produced and used. The word becomes revered, imbued with mystical significance, and beyond the realm of critical analysis. This is the fate that has befallen "empowerment."
>
> (2000:42)

Given the lack of clarity surrounding this term, it is vital to re-examine what 'empowerment' means and what understanding of power is inherent in this concept. Where does such power come from? How is it developed? What does it look like in practice? It is only once assumptions have been unpacked, that one can start to say whether communities were empowered and in what ways. In Chapter Two, I presented three different perspectives or understandings of 'empowerment'. These are briefly summarised here:

The first understanding of empowerment, termed a 'mainstream' understanding, stresses the need for the 'disempowered' to gain access to power through resources, political structures and decision making processes. This understanding implies that people have been dispossessed of power, but through the process of empowerment, they can make up for an absence or deficiency of power. This notion of empowerment positions the *dis*-empowered as power-*less* subjects, and as such, undermines the agency that people possess to exercise power in various ways. It assumes people need to gain power through a process of becoming conscious of their own voices and interests. This notion of empowerment also assumes that the power gained is in essence a positive, rather than negative force (the latter being more often associated with state power).

The second understanding of empowerment, termed a 'critical' understanding, has much in common with the 'mainstream' understanding of power - empowerment is perceived to be an enabling process whereby oppressed people gain access to resources and structures of subjugation and oppression and take action to overcome these. A critical understanding of empowerment incorporates an ideological dimension of struggle. Disenfranchised groups work towards uncovering their 'false consciousness' and in the process realise their 'true interests' that lead to a radical transformation in the distribution of power. The Freirean concept of empowerment inherent in the REFLECT approach, can be described as critical since Freire stressed the need for critical reflection and action that would free the oppressed from

ideological subjugation. It advocates that people become aware of power, and develop the ability to undertake a structural analysis in order to expose the workings of power and make shifts towards collective action and more equitable relations.

The third understanding of empowerment is a post-modern understanding, informed primarily by the work of the Michel Foucault. Foucault contested the notion of oppressive power exercised from one particular source, and thus did not see empowerment as a process of resisting oppression from any particular direction. He also did not see power as a negative force concentrated in the hands of the state or a few elite, but rather as a productive force dispersed throughout society.

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think that one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.
>
> (Foucault, 1994:61)

Foucault understood empowerment as smaller acts of opposition "formed right at the points where [power] relations are exercised…" (Foucault, 1980:142). According to this perspective, empowerment is not so much the result of resisting power in order to achieve liberation, but more the process of acknowledging oneself as an agent of power and exercising that power at the level at which one lives. Empowerment is not achieved as a final completed state, but is rather a fragmentary, contradictory and constant process of becoming.

In addressing my research question about whether or not participants were empowered, I have drawn primarily on the Foucauldian understanding of empowerment which circumvents any one particular notion of 'truth' or 'power'. (The Freirean notion of empowerment implicitly accepts a unified conception of power in that it claims that it is possible to educate for liberation[89]). I have focused instead on the extent to which participants acknowledged themselves as agents of power, and found ways to negotiate power (rather than how they liberated themselves from

oppressive power). I have looked at how power was exercised, both productively and repressively, in small scale acts at a local, communal and personal level, rather than in large scale acts at government or state level. After all, according to Foucault (1980:99):

> Hegemonic or global forms of power rely in the first instance on those 'infinitesimal' practices, composed of their own particular techniques and tactics, which exist in those institutions on the fringes or at the micro-level of society.

Productive enactments of collective power

At a local and communal level, a number of examples illustrate how power was exercised productively and constructively. First, through the formation of the cooperative and the village learning circles, people demonstrated a form of collective power. They came together to achieve shared objectives, and in their commonality, they harnessed a form of social power and influence which they would not have wielded as individuals. Using this social power, they were able to access other forms of power such as economic power in the form of resources and funding. For example, as a collective they were able to access food aid from the World Food Programme; they got funding assistance through the Malealea Development Trust and the US Ambassador's Programme, amongst others. As a collective, they also had greater sway with local government and the chief, and were in this way able to access land[90]. By working together, not only as circles, but also in committees and support groups, participants were able to gradually influence community attitudes towards development in general, and HIV/AIDS in particular.

With regard to HIV, it was largely due to the collective power of learning circles that HIV support groups were established at village level and at a wider local level. At the village level, support groups were formed by people infected and affected, and these groups played an important role in resisting the tendency to stigmatise, isolate and alienate HIV+ people. They took the lead in opposing the dominant discourse of stigmatisation and denial, supporting HIV+ people in small practical ways. They talked and worked with people who declared their status; they fetched water, washed

[89] See discussion in Chapter Two.

clothes and brought food to people too sick to care for themselves. In these ways, community members positioned themselves as activists willing to take a stand against oppressive norms which isolated people who were ill with HIV/AIDS.

With such support, HIV positive people were able to gradually assert themselves and take action. One of the ways they took action was through forming a support group specifically for people who were HIV positive. This group worked to reclaim their power and social standing in the community. They started income generation projects – candle making and egg production. They raised their own funds for the latter project: R25000 from World Vision. They mobilised themselves as a constructive and productive force within the community. *They* took leadership on the issue and defined their own direction as HIVpositive people in command of their lives.

As a collective, members of the learning circles established certain rules which they mutually agreed to observe. Members then exercised their power in enforcing these rules. For example, when a member was found to be involved in the armed robbery of the Co-op, she was expelled from any further participation in or association with the Co-op or its members. In losing her membership, she not only lost the power she had had as part of the social collective, she also lost her social standing in the village more generally; this she had partially gained through her association with the Co-op. Status as a form of social power should not be underestimated - it was played out in many ways, some of which are described below.

Through their collective power, participants were able to access wider networks such as the Lesotho Cooperative Society (LCS), the World Foord Programme (WFP) and the Lesotho Association for Non-Formal Education (LANFE). Through these wider collectives, they extended their contacts and acquired resources such as training and food aid, and, to a more limited extent, funding. However, it was the access to human resources, the elements of exchange and dialogue that members seemed to appreciate most about their participation in wider networks.

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[90] As noted earlier, land is a limited commodity in an area where population pressures have created a high demand for land. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of how the Co-op accessed land.

It is interesting to note, however, that participants' were reluctant to use their power as a collective to challenge existing networks or fight for changes within these networks. For example, members did not confront inefficiency or incompetence from people in positions of power in the LCS or LANFE. When these organisations failed to support members (see Chapter Four), members did not take up the issue, even though they voiced their discontent at the local level amongst themselves. Members felt that they had too much to lose if they challenged the larger structures. They seemed to appraise the power they had gained at their local level in relation to the force of power in structures at higher regional and national levels, and made a conscious decision not to jeopardise what they had gained, or what they might still gain through participation in these organisations. From a Foucaldian perspective on empowerment (see Chapter Two), members may be seen to have acknowledged the fluid and dynamic nature of power, as a process to be managed over time. As members continue to gain greater conviction regarding their collective capacity, it is likely that their confidence to resist and thereby alter existing power relations will develop. Their gains to date suggest that this is highly probable.

The ways in which members employed resources (both financial and human) offers a further example of how they mobilised power (or were 'empowered') at a local and communal level. The resources gained were translated into productive capacities: the ability to earn a living through making craft; to run an organisation; to plan and implement significant community development actions (such as building preschools and creating gardens); to analyse and reflect on progress made; and to establish and participate in wider structures such as support groups, savings clubs and funeral societies. Members of the co-op and facilitators in particular led their communities not only by earning an income for their families, but also by contributing towards development initiatives in the broader local community. They modelled alternative practices and established new norms in which community members were positioned as active change agents both collectively and individually.

Productive enactments of power at a personal level

Empowerment at a local and communal level was accompanied by simultaneous empowerment of participants at a personal level. In the course of their activities as a collective, individual members gained knowledge and skills, and steadily realised

their power to take charge of their lives; to address their concerns. They created forums where individuals had the dialogical space to create different possibilities for themselves and the collective. Foucault's (1980) integral notion of "power/knowledge" (see Chapter Two) seems relevant here. Through discussions and reflections, participants built up an understanding and reinforced local knowledge of their context. This empowered them to act locally – they created gardens and orchards, built roads, improved water sources, planted woodlots and so on. These concrete initiatives were pathways for participants to express power in new ways, together and individually.

At the individual personal level, many participants expressed a feeling that they could now voice their opinions and concerns, even when they were acting on their own outside of the group. They were also able to read and write for themselves, and run their own businesses (at varying levels of competency). They had gained experience in problem-solving and decision-making. The overall result was that participants gained greater personal confidence; they felt more self-reliant, which helped them to shape a redefined vision of themselves as agents of change (see discussion under Question Three).

Repressive enactments of power

While the events described above illustrate productive and even liberatory enactments of power, repressive enactments of power existed simultaneously, often in more subtle and concealed ways. To claim that the learning circles constituted an unproblematic state of equality where participants shared an egalitarian space would be to deny the omnipresence of power and power relations. Equality in the learning circles was a theoretical state invoked by ground rules, rather than an actual state. In reality, submerged power relations continued to shape and influence the expression of dynamics in the learning circles and in the community more widely. Despite ground rules that committed participants to the principle of sharing power, and despite the PRA methodology that provided a framework for realising this principle, power dynamics were not simply done away with. In the words of Foucault, "It seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in" (1980:141).

A closer examination of how the PRA process played out in the circles presents an example of how even an apparently constructive and empowering practice was characterised concurrently by repressive power dynamics that defy a simplistic notion of 'empowerment' as a process of gaining access to power. The repressive aspects of power are evident on two levels, a methodological level and a social level.

First, at the methodological level, PRA inscribed certain power relations. Theoretically, PRA tools (seasonal calendars, ranking and other matrices, and tree diagrams) open up opportunities for everyone, literate and non-literate, to participate in debate, empowering participants to discuss their realities in their own words on their own terms (see Chapter Two). However, participants are *not* free to see their realities on their own terms. The tools encourage participants to understand and explain issues in a particular way prescribed by the tool itself. The tool represents the general experience rather than the specific. As participants reach consensus, as they must do when using a tool, specifics are necessarily excluded. Life experiences that do not fit the framework are not included and not represented. In this way, PRA tools organise people's disordered varied experiences in particular ways, screening out differences and deviations from 'the norm'. The tools prescribe and homogenise certain representations of knowledge and experience. " … PRA already presupposes the frame of what can and cannot be done as it canonizes the kinds of vizualisations acceptable" (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001:182). In this way, particular social norms are reinforced and PRA takes on a form of social discipline which de-legitimises realities that do not fit those that emerge from the PRA process. The danger of homogenising experience and rewarding conformity in this way is that power relations and structures in the community are masked (Woodhouse, 1998:144).

> [P]articipatory techniques can conceal inequalities and in certain circumstances reify them. What counts as 'local knowledge' is very often the effect of specific kinds of techniques of power, of regulation and of normalisation. …[T]hose drawn in under the gaze of participatory development practitioners can and do represent powerful cultural norms.
>
> (Kothari, 2001:152)

Raising a related concern, Robinson-Pant (1996) argues that by making reading and writing part of the PRA process and the PRA graphics, practitioners affirm the

dominant (Western) model of literacy and in doing so run the risk of not only excluding illiterates, but also negating local literacies. Power is subtly exercised in these acts of exclusion and negation. (However, she argues that in a similar way, in instances where local literacies are used, power might be exercised by choosing one local literacy over another in a given context.)

Secondly, on a social or communal level, the process of inclusion and exclusion from the learning circles revealed certain power dynamics. Theoretically, anyone can join in a PRA process, with participants being invited to share their ideas and collaborate in analysing situations. However, in reality this was not the case – certain people were 'in' while others were not, and even within the group, certain people were more 'in' than others as dynamics with a circle shaped participation in particular ways. The process of inclusion and exclusion became more apparent as the circles began to mobilise resources and different forms of capital (social, human, financial, and natural)[91]. As circles became more successful at generating income, so membership became more attractive to those outside of the circle, but at the same time, membership in those circles became more restricted. For example, members of the Co-op restricted access to new members at a certain point because they feared that admitting more members would threaten their earning opportunities (see Chapter Five). And in the learning circles, only those members who joined circles before a certain date were eligible for food aid. Those outside were excluded from this opportunity, as well as other income generation opportunities such as the village dance groups[92]. Similarly, when the Malealea Development Trust secured funding to repair bridle trails in the valley, the work teams in each village were monopolised by the learning circles. Team members were paid a stipend for the work done, but most of the money went to learning circle members who had used their power to ensure priority in the selection process. The Co-op and the learning circles thus became 'in-groups', using their power to protect their own interests. Those outside of the Co-op and the learning circles were excluded from opportunities open to those who were 'in'. The way in which power relations shifted demonstrates the contradictory and diverse way in which power relations operated. On the one hand, some experienced

[91] See discussion under Research Question 1.
[92] Village dance groups performed for tourists who paid for this opportunity.

(the intended) productive liberatory effects, while others experienced (unintended) repressive effects.

Within the group, local relations of power, authority and gender shaped who participated and in what ways. For example, even though men were in the minority in circles, they were generally given more say because patriarchal norms supported this practice. Another way in which men wielded power was by adamantly refusing to discuss certain issues (such as HIV and sex) with women. This kind of self-exclusion and non-participation was a means of exercising power, a means that was also forceful enough to disrupt the participatory practice that (theoretically) governed the circle.

The influence of local power relations was evident in how certain participants were outspoken while others preferred not to express their views. These 'choices' were inevitably made, not as a result of participants' free will exercised in an arena of equality, but rather as a result of certain power relations between people within the circles. Questions of who spoke out, and who assumed leadership were shaped by broader power relations. That men 'slipped' more easily into leadership roles, and women into supporting roles bears testimony to this. The more outspoken participants (men and women) in the circle tended to be those more accustomed to using power outside of the circle, and so continued to exercise such influence. This again illustrates how existing power relations perpetuate themselves, subtly reinforcing the interests of the already powerful.

The more outspoken participants were also often most influential in shaping the representation of reality to which the group supposedly conformed. It was their voice that became the normative view, once again subtly reinforcing the interests of those with the agency to speak out. For example, in Chapter Five I explained how a list of community concerns identified during community mapping exercises were compared using the matrix ranking PRA tool. The objective of this exercise was to enable communities to decide for themselves which of the problems they had identified should be prioritised for resolution.

> It should be local people who discover their own interests, problems, needs, solutions and actions. It should be the local people who, using appropriate tools, empower themselves for their future.
>
> (Nochez, 1999:32)

However, when I attended some of these ranking exercises, it was my observation that the more assertive participants got their issues ranked higher than those who were reticent. During debate about the importance of problems, those who spoke louder and more forcefully were heard. It also seemed at times that *who* people were influenced whether they were listened to, rather than what they had to say. This illustrates how the creation of knowledge is not a neutral phenomenon, but rather a product of social relationships characterised by particular power relations (Mosse, 2001:17).

Reconfiguring power relations

Power was not only enacted either productively or repressively. Power relations were continually reconfigured, renegotiated and reorganised. As argued above, existing power relations *influenced* the expression of power within learning circles, but they certainly did not *determine* the way power relations unfolded. For example, within the Tsinyane learning circle, the facilitator took advantage of both his gender and his authority as a facilitator to exercise power for his own benefit. He borrowed money from the circle members and refused to adhere to the conditions of repayment, believing that as the facilitator of the group he should be exempt from such conditions (see Chapter Six). One of the strategies used to reconfigure power relations in this circle, and others, was the establishment of committees to facilitate different aspects of the circles' affairs. A treasurer was elected to control money, and held accountable to the group. Others took responsibility for voicing the needs of the group to the chief or those in authority; others represented the group's voice in writing, or kept records. These strategies helped to safeguard the abuse of power ensuring that power was distributed amongst members. The individual circle committees, the general circle committee and the facilitators' committee shifted the balance of power in and between circles, creating different possibilities and opportunities for accessing power. The facilitators' committee could be challenged by the circles' committees, and vice versa.

Committees were effective vehicles to challenge power relations on other levels too. For example, through the committees, 'ordinary' people were able to question traditional positions of power (such as the chieftancy):

> The committee encouraged facilitators to visit one another's circles, and supported facilitators in different ways. For example, if a chief was uncooperative, a delegation from the committee would petition him/her to support the circles and their work. In one village, the circle wanted to start a communal garden but the chief would not give them land. The facilitators' committee met with the chief to discuss the issue. Land was ultimately granted to the circle.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi)

(That people did stand their ground with authority figures lends further credibility to the argument that participants found strategies to negotiate new ways of exercising power – their participation in a circle helped to strengthen their confidence to speak out and act in their own interests.)

Disruption of traditional power relations and the "normalising gaze"

It was not only through the establishment of committees that power relations were reconfigured. When chiefs started to participate in the circles as 'ordinary members', traditional power relations were also disrupted. Chiefs were involved in discussions with participants, having the same say, rather than the final word, as was custom in the traditional context outside of the circle. Similarly men and women were also brought together on equal footing in the circle. Women do not traditionally participate in decision making forums such as a *pitso*, but in the circles, women outnumbered men, and were genuinely involved in making decisions. Basotho traditions also customarily require a degree of distance between youth and the elderly, with the elderly granted more respect and power on the grounds that they have accumulated greater wisdom and life experience. Young people are not expected to question or challenge their elders. However, this dynamic was also re-examined as young and old people came together in the context of the circle. Young people's ideas were voiced and heard in the same way as those of older people. Older people also learned from the wisdom of younger people. "As older adults we come together with younger people, and get new ideas." (Participant in Makhoseng circle) These examples disrupted what Foucault (1980) calls the "normalising gaze", common sense ways of

understanding the world, relationships, and existing power dynamics. In being repositioned as 'equal', traditionally accepted versions of 'normal' were brought into question, contributing to the disruption of accepted power arrangements.

The power of the researcher

My own role as a researcher also warrants attention since the power dynamics between myself and participants cannot be disregarded. As a white professional, I entered the context with funding to implement REFLECT, and this gave me a privileged position and a certain power. That power enabled me to gain access to the community and introduce a new approach. I was introducing REFLECT in the interests of those with whom I was working - the participants were to gain the means to take control over their own development process through their participation in analysis, planning and action, with some literacy skills thrown in to boot. However, while participants were consulted and apparently wanted to try the process, there was another unstated dimension to the apparent willingness to collaborate. One participant acknowledged this later, saying he had only stuck it out in his learning circle because of what he hoped he might gain through participating. (This quaotation was cited earlier in Chapter Two.)

> *Morupeli o ne a sa re hlalosetse lintho ka ho hlaka. Re ne re etsa lintho feela, empa nnete ke hore re ne re sa utloisise seo re neng re se etsa kapa re ne re se etsetsang. Joaloka lisebelisua – morupeli o ne a re joetsa mehato eo re lokelang ho e etsa, empa a sa re hlokomelise hore na hobaneng re sebelisa lisebelisuoa kapa hobaneng ho le bohlokoa ho ngola fatse. Ka hona ha rea ka ra nahana le ho utloisisa bohlokoa ba lisebelisuoa qalong. Joale ba bang ba rona ba ne ba sa tsebe hore na ba ntse ba ngoapelang fatse. Ba bang ba rona ba ne ba nahana hona ke monyetla oa ho fumana chelete, mme re lokela ho etsa lintho pele re tle re bone na re tla e fumana joang.*
>
> The facilitator didn't really explain things clearly to us. We just did things, but we didn't really understand what we were doing or why we were doing them. Like the tools [PRA graphics] – the facilitator told us the action steps to take but he didn't make us aware of *why* we were using the tool or *why* it was important to write on the ground. He didn't build up people's minds or understanding first. So some of us didn't know why we were scratching on the ground. Some of us thought that this might be an opportunity to get money, and we had to do these things first to see how to get it.
>
> (Participant who took part in one of the first circles established in 2000)

Participants did not intrinsically respond to REFLECT and PRA as the long awaited opportunity to finally free their voices and express their pent up local knowledge. There was an element of 'playing the game' of participation because of what they hoped they could gain in the process. In Chapter Five I discussed how people had not wanted to join circles unless they were paid or 'rewarded' in some way in return for their participation. This lends further weight to the contention that participation was not necessarily a value espoused as part of a 'noble village culture'. To some extent it was a value that was imposed by the research process. Craig and Porter (1997) have argued that participation can be used by development professionals as an instrument of control (see Chapter Three). It is important to acknowledge that as a researcher with access to resources, I exercised power which influenced people's participation and the unfolding of events in Malealea.

Were participants empowered with critical reflection skills?

Before concluding this section, I return briefly to the Freirean notion of empowerment and ask whether participants were empowered in this sense. In other words, did their participation lead to empowerment by transforming participants' consciousness? Did participants become aware of the structural sources of their oppression and of how their own views of the world and their thought processes (for example with respect to gender relations) – that is their consciousness – contributed towards this oppression? Did participants achieve an awareness of unjust dominant ideologies that equipped them to challenge the causes of their oppression?

The short answer to this question is 'no'. Ideological critique was not significantly present in either of the contexts in which REFLECT was used. Participants did not uncover hegemonic assumptions or deepen their ideological understanding of oppression. Submerged power dynamics for the most part remained unspoken. The only learning unit in which power was overtly discussed was the gender unit where power associated with different gender roles was considered and debated. However, beyond these discussions, participants did not apply critically reflective skills to examine structural elements of power. They didn't ask why power relations (and other issues of concern) were as they were. Some of the reasons as to why participants did not develop sharper critical reflection skills are discussed under the final research question below.

In concluding discussion of this research question, empowerment in the context of Malealea was about acknowledging, discovering, exercising and negotiating power in new and different ways. The learning circles provided a space in which people could perceive and enact different possibilities as a collective, and as individuals. The site of their struggle was local, personal and communal. Their efforts were not directed at challenging state power or even the power of the Lodge as the major economic player in the valley. However, their local struggles enabled them to resist a social positioning of rural people as marginal, poor, ignorant, passive and subordinate. These perceptions are easily internalised by rural people, and thus in many ways the struggle in this context was as much personal as political. In resisting their own internalised perceptions of themselves, they simultaneously, although inadvertently, resisted the wider political influences that positioned them within poverty. Their struggle was to define and enact a productive constructive role for themselves in their own communities. They did this by finding ways to earn income, and engage with their physical and social environment in ways that would improve their well-being. They produced a discourse and a set of practices in which they were positioned as agents, both individually and collectively. "This is a quiet, low-profile revolution at a local level which subverts the fundamental tenets of a [capitalist, patriarchal, and predominantly urban-focused]…society" (Rule, 2002:284).

RESEARCH QUESTION FIVE

The final research question asked, '**What kinds of challenges and constraints were experienced in the process of implementing REFLECT?**'

Implementing REFLECT in the Malealea context was not an easy achievement - there were a number of significant challenges and constraints experienced in the process. Some of these were contextual, some of these were related to the approach itself and some were related to the people participating in the process. While these challenges and constraints were interrelated, for the sake of clarity, I have grouped them into different categories. First, I discuss challenges and constraints that emerged in relation to the facilitators. I then take into account the challenges encountered in relation to learning materials and development of the curriculum, thereafter looking at the

challenges posed by the process itself. I look, too, at the constraints imposed by the culture and context in which REFLECT was introduced, and conclude by looking at the challenges posed in relation to sustainability.

The facilitators

Facilitators are a key element of the success of any REFLECT programme. It is in many ways the facilitators who drive the learning and action agendas in circles, and the success of the REFLECT approach relies on skilful facilitation. Given this, it is critical that the selection of facilitators is carefully considered. However, in the case of the Malealea project, facilitators were self-selected. They were existing members of the Co-op who decided to use the REFLECT approach as a vehicle for community development. There were a number of key challenges that arose in relation to this.

The profile of the facilitators who participated in the project presented certain challenges. Some facilitators were more suited than others to the role of being a facilitator in terms of their personal attributes and qualities (being community minded, having a strong commitment to others, having drive and energy). These factors made a visible difference to the quality of learning and action in the circles. This is apparent in the case study of Makhomalong village, presented in Chapter Six, where a facilitator who did not have the personal attributes[93] found it difficult to make her circle work.

Some facilitators (and participants) had wider life experience than others. This was important because they were able to use this as a resource within the circle. However, in general as a group, the facilitators were not highly skilled and did not have great experience of contexts different to Malealea. This impacted on their work in that they felt more comfortable undertaking activities that were familiar – agricultural activities, environmental activities and small business ventures. I can't help wondering whether, if we had had more widely experienced facilitators (and participants), they might have taken advantage of unexplored opportunities that were available in the context, for example tourism.

Some facilitators were more confident and resourceful than others, and therefore managed to harness resources and work with their circles more effectively. In some cases, confidence was related to educational achievement - with people being more hesitant to act or make decisions if they felt uncertain about their skills. Facilitators had varying levels of formal education. None of the facilitators had completed high school (excluding Moso); 16 had seven or less years of formal education, while four of the facilitators had between nine and 11 years of formal education[94]. The REFLECT Mother Manual (1996:66) states that "the real issue is not how many years they were at school but whether they are basically literate and whether they have other qualities of a good facilitator". However, considering the demands made on facilitators (see discussion below), I think that the level of formal education did influence facilitators' ability to implement REFLECT. With more formal education, I believe facilitators would have been more confident - and better equipped - to cope with their varying responsibilities (particularly those that were related to administration).

Facilitators (and participants) required certain kinds of knowledge and understandings as well as a range of skills, some of which were difficult to nurture in a context where the educational background of people was disadvantageous, and resources were limited. Fundamental to these skills, was the able to think critically.

Criticality

One of the major obstacles experienced by facilitators was acquiring the ability to think critically, a problem because critical analysis is a core tenet of REFLECT practice. According to Archer (2000:259), REFLECT is "a structured participatory learning process that facilitates people's *critical analysis* of their own environment and issues…" (my emphasis). The struggle to think critically hindered facilitators' and participants' progress and compromised their practice in a number of ways. For example, in the discussion above (under Research Question Four), I noted how participants tended to avoid examining the workings of power because they lacked critical skills. They tended to shy away from exploring more complex issues, like

[93] She did not prepare for circle meetings, was not sober when attending, and gossiped about the participants causing conflict amongst the group.

[94] A table listing years of formal education of Co-op members was set out in Chapter Four.

power (and gender and poverty), that required critical analysis, preferring instead to focus on simpler issues and practical tasks.

Before one can say *why* facilitators had such difficulty with critical skills it is necessary to define more specifically what criticality means, and what critical skills are. According to Brookfield (2000:35), "Critical reflection is not an unequivocal concept. It is, rather, a contested idea. How the term is used reflects the ideology of the user." There are two primary intellectual traditions informing the concept of critical skills in REFLECT. First and foremost, the philosophy of REFLECT has been influenced by the intellectual tradition of 'ideology critique', a term associated with thinkers from the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory.

> Critical reflection as ideology critique focuses on helping people come to an awareness of how capitalism shapes social relations and imposes – often without our knowledge – belief systems and assumptions (that is ideologies) that justify and maintain economic and political inequity. …Ideology critique contains within it the promise of social transformation…
>
> (Brookfield, 2000:36)

Paulo Freire's work has been deeply influenced by ideology critique, and in turn, this tradition has informed the REFLECT approach which places a strong emphasis on recognising structures of oppression, and achieving radical social change through transforming these structures (Archer, 2000). However, REFLECT has also been influenced by the language and concepts of 'Gender and Development', which holds that "[t]hrough collective and individual reflection and analysis men and women can mobilise to address some of their practical needs (which do not always involve challenging the oppressors)" (Archer and Cottingham, 1996:18). From this perspective change can be focused at the local community level, and not necessarily at the national and international levels. "By undergoing detailed local analysis and organising to address local issues, some of [the] local structures of oppression can be realistically and effectively challenged" (ibid).

Secondly, and to a lesser extent, REFLECT has been influenced by the tradition of analytic philosophy and logic. Here critical thinking refers to skills of analysis and

argument, although disconnected from any particular ideology critique (Brookfield, 2000).

> Criticality [is] about broadening and deepening one's understanding of the world through the pursuit of knowledge. The quest require[d] analytical tools linked to higher-order cognitive skills: the ability to question, to analyse, to compare and contrast, to synthesise and summarise, to present and substantiate a point of view, to think logically.
>
> (Rule, 2002: 151)

The skills outlined above are the very skills that REFLECT facilitators are asked to exercise as they work with participants to analyse their local contexts and "build their own multi-dimensional analysis of local and global reality, challenging dominant development paradigms and redefining power relations in both public and private spheres" (Archer, 2000:261). Facilitators are expected to assist participants to question, to analyse, to discuss, to compare different issues and then, based on what they have synthesised, reach a logical conclusion that will inform a plan for achieving appropriate action that will effect change in the community. (Many of these words are the exact words that appear in the REFLECT cycle setting out the steps in the learning process – See Figure 7 in Chapter Two.) REFLECT is therefore informed by both traditions of thought – ideology critique which emphasises social transformation, as well as analytic philosophy and logic which emphasises argument analysis and logic.

I would like to return now to the question of why facilitators had difficulty cultivating critical skills. There are a number of intertwined reasons for why this is the case. To begin with, criticality depends on the ability to ask penetrating questions that will subvert the obvious, and also "link question and answer to actions" (Freire et al, 2000: 225). But the very act of asking questions was extremely difficult for facilitators. This can be related back to an authoritarian culture and education system which expects and rewards answers, rather than questions. According to Freire (2000:222):

> The authoritarianism running through our educational experiences inhibits, even if it does not repress, our capacity for asking questions. In an authoritarian atmosphere, the challenge implicit in a question tends to be regarded as an attack on authority.

Freire describes how he was once asked, “What does it actually mean to ask questions”, a question which he defines as “the basic question”. He goes on to say that “the first thing which anyone who teaches should learn is how to ask questions. …the source of knowledge lies in enquiry, in questions, or in the very act of asking questions” (ibid,: 224). Learning to ask questions has been a new experience for facilitators and a learning experience which is still ongoing, not only for facilitators and participants, but also for me. I found this one of the most challenging aspects of learning to be critical and helping others to learn to be critical.

One of the reasons for the difficulty is the assumption that asking questions is a straightforward process. As a result, not enough support is given to people to ask the kinds of questions that will disentangle connections between the personal, social and structural dimensions of a situation. As a result, people don’t reflect critically on the deeper implications of a problem or an action. More attention needs to be given to not only *how* to ask questions, but also *why* questions should be asked. From my observations, facilitators did not have a strong sense of the purpose and usefulness of questioning, and this compromised their ability to be critical.

An example, mentioned briefly in Chapter Five illustrates this. Participants’ preferred way of raising money for their circles was through *stokvels* (events where alcohol is brewed and sold to raise money). However, facilitators and participants failed to ask questions that would have helped them to connect alcoholism and poverty directly to these everyday events in their lives. These kinds of contradictions remained invisible in a context which supported that contradiction. (Stokvels are a culturally accepted way of raising money.)

In addition to having difficulty with critical thinking skills, facilitators also found it challenging to understand the rationale behind the use of REFLECT tools and techniques. Facilitators would use some PRA tools, but often in a mechanical way, going through the motions, not with an understanding of *why* a particular tool was being used to address a specific problem. For example, in Ha Ramotsekhoane, I observed a session where a tree tool was constructed to ascertain the causes and effects of illnesses in the village. However, this was done after the group had discussed and made clear notes on ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ on the blackboard. I was

puzzled as to why the facilitator would want to repeat a process, the results of which he had already achieved through another means. It was clear that he did not have an understanding of the purpose of the tree tool (which was to help participants visualise the causes and effects in a different way than is possible through traditional group discussion).

Linked to this, facilitators (and participants) seemed not to fully comprehend the reason for analysis and discussion preceding action. In their eagerness to achieve a certain action, they would sometimes shortcut the analysis and planning components of the REFLECT cycle, moving straight into the action. This can be seen in the case study of Makhetheng presented in Chapter Six. Here the group acted too quickly to build a dam, creating severe risks of erosion because the implications of their action had not been fully considered. This suggests that the group had not really understood *why* analysing and planning for an action were crucial components of ensuring the success of that action. There seemed to be a tension between engaging in critical and analytical processes and a felt urgency to improve livelihoods. The challenge was to get facilitators and participants to see how critical and analytical processes supported, rather than took time away from action.

Finally, facilitators had difficulty planning and managing the learning process in relation to actions taken. This is linked to the point above. In some circles one would find that the structured learning unit which participants were working through did not correspond to the actions that were being taken by that group. This meant that actions taken were not always fully considered, and the learning potential of such opportunities was neglected.

The learning focus tended to slip into the background if not constantly brought into focus through structured units. For example, in the context of the Co-op, where members worked without structured learning units, members would sidestep analytical and reflective learning processes such as evaluations or appraising systems if these were not consistently advocated (usually by Moso or me). In other words, learning had to be constantly advocated in order to be sustained as a focus of activities.

The issues which have been raised above underline the challenges faced in terms of providing support to facilitators. According to Land et al (1999), the skills and experience of a teacher or facilitator are a vital factor in the success of a method, as is the way that the teacher uses the method. If a teacher believes in the method and is confident in using it, this impacts positively on the learning experience of the learners. The issue of support was thus critical to the success of the implementation of REFLECT in Malealea. The relatively limited educational background of facilitators amplified this need, and it was a constant challenge to provide appropriate assistance to support facilitators. Since I was neither employed in Malealea, nor a full-time resident, the support I was able to offer to facilitators was not as substantial as I would have liked.

Learning Materials and Curriculum Development

Related to the difficulties of supporting facilitators, was a set of challenges associated with the development and use of learning materials and the curriculum.

The most challenging aspect of implementing REFLECT was developing learning units. In the context of village learning circles, facilitators relied heavily on learning units to guide their progress through selected learning themes. It was important therefore that the units be easy to use, detailed enough to provide adequate support, as well as appropriate for both the facilitators' and the participants' needs. This was a challenge chiefly because facilitators were not involved in the actual writing of the units, although they did shape the content of the units in terms of the themes that participants wanted to engage with. However, the actual writing of the learning units was left to Moso and me.

In the first few years, I tried to involve facilitators in the writing, but this was unsuccessful, and had to be discontinued because the costs of the writing workshops did not justify the outcomes. The facilitators' main difficulties in writing units were related to their limited literacy skills as well as the problem highlighted above; namely that facilitators' teaching skills were relatively limited. They found it difficult to establish learning objectives and find ways to meet those objectives. Even identifying appropriate PRA tools was a struggle for many facilitators. These difficulties were

related not only to the conceptual demands of the task, but also to facilitators' general insecurity with writing and their unfamiliarity with educational writing. This was not surprising given that many of the facilitators had not completed primary school. I consider it a considerable achievement that facilitators were able to prepare their own lesson plans from the learning units.

However, that facilitators were not more actively engaged in developing learning materials was a serious constraint and threatened the sustainability of the programme. It meant that they were largely dependent on someone else to develop the materials to guide their process. (Challenges related to sustainability are discussed further below.)

Coordinating and monitoring the use of learning units across 14 learning circles was also a challenge. Initially circles were free to pick and choose from units according to their needs. However, after some time, it became apparent that the quality of learning and action was too disparate across the circles. It was also difficult to write a progressive development of skills into units as we were not sure which units were being used by whom, and when. We addressed this by coordinating learning in a more synchronized way across the 14 circles. This was easier to monitor and facilitators were able to support each other as resource people to a greater extent. The difficulty with this approach was that when circles were engaged in actions specific to their contexts, the content of that learning unit did not directly support the action. For example, some circles were establishing income generation projects but engaged in learning units related to HIV/AIDS. However, an advantage of synchronizing the learning themes across the valley was that circles were able to support one another with similar actions. For example, village support groups assisted one another to address problems experienced in relation to setting up and running income generation projects.

Within the context of the Co-op, structured learning units were not used in the same way as they were in the village learning circles. Learning themes were developed more spontaneously, and learning was integrated into practice through a series of workshops rather than through regular weekly meetings (although weekly meetings were held and also offered learning opportunities). One of the challenges of adopting this approach was that there was not a ongoing focus around a particular learning

theme. Co-op members would shift from one area of learning to another, without necessarily having consolidated their learning before changing focus. I wondered if the quality of learning was not compromised as a result of this. (For example, in Chapter Four I pointed out that there were a number of ongoing issues, such as those related to planning and management that were still unresolved at the time of writing in 2006.) A more structured and systematic action and learning agenda might well have benefited the Co-op more.

Defining the learning agenda and shaping the curriculum

For the most part, the learning agenda and curriculum was determined by participants' needs. While this is pedagogically sound in terms of honouring learners as authorities on their own needs, in another way, the 'meeting needs' approach can serve to constrain learning. There are times when learners limit themselves to what is familiar and comfortable, rather than taking on what might be challenging or even threatening. For example, it was not participants who identified 'gender' as a learning need. Yet, it was clear that gender issues underscored many of the other issues that were identified as problems (domestic violence, rape, HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancy, and so on). As such, I made a decision to introduce gender as a learning focus. While this may have gone against the adult education principle of constructing a curriculum around learners' own definitions of their needs, it challenged learners to consider issues from a different perspective, suggesting an alternative way of seeing things which broadened their original perspective. According to Brookfield (2000: 41), "Students who define their need as never straying beyond comfortable ways of thinking, acting, and learning are not always in the best position to judge what is in their own best interests".

This raises power issues since it clearly illuminates the position of power that I was in. I *could* make the decision to introduce this theme and develop learning materials around it. And I did. It is important to acknowledge this because as adult educators we make choices. We are not value free, or power free, and it is important to acknowledge the ways in which we do use our power and wear our ideology. The framework of REFLECT is itself informed by a particular ideological position, which shapes the learning process, and it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that this is the case.

Other organisations wishing to implement REFLECT would be well advised to select and recruit at least some facilitators who are able to accomplish the tasks that our facilitators struggled with. This would empower the facilitators to drive the process to a greater extent. In terms of sustainability and integrity it is important to have a cadre of people who are able to participate more actively in driving the learning agenda of the circles. A facilitator who can recognise what a group needs to learn and how this learning might be realised is a great asset to that group. A facilitator who can conceptualise (in the form of a learning unit) the process by which the learning objectives might be achieved, holds out greater hope for the sustainability of that group.

The next set of challenges posed were by the REFLECT process itself.

The REFLECT Process

While the challenges cannot be termed 'constraints', they still deserve mention as important elements contended with in the process of using this approach.

REFLECT is a demanding process, and its rewards are not immediate. It was sometimes difficult for participants to balance their immediate livelihood needs against what seemed like a slow learning process, which while related to their livelihoods, did not always seem to be directly helpful. People felt an urgency to attend to issues such as farming, looking after their families and their animals. However, they did not feel the same urgency in relation to discussing gender or power. These issues seemed more 'academic', especially because the reality of creating change in their own situations was so difficult. For example, women might talk about gender issues in the circle, then go home to a husband who would beat them for being late. While it is completely possible to justify the time engaged in discussion from a pedagogical and social change point of view, the benefits of the process were not always immediately obvious to the learners.

The REFLECT process is also demanding in terms of what is expected of facilitators. Unlike a traditional literacy programme, facilitators are expected to be agents of social

change, rather than just 'twice a week teachers'. Not only did they have to prepare for sessions, and make a record of what transpired in each session, they also participated in action points entailing hard physical labour. Facilitators were also called upon to negotiate with chiefs or other figures of authority, arbitrate interpersonal conflicts, coordinate events and deal with issues arising from them. They were also required to report back to the Co-op and attend monthly training sessions. Clearly, this was demanding in terms of both time and commitment.

Because the approach was unfamiliar to the community, it took time for them to accept and be convinced of its merits, which were often only visible after a lot of work and a long wait. The facilitators too took time to grasp what was required of them. Circles were slow in being established, gradually strengthening as both facilitators and participants alike gained confidence in the process.

Context and Culture

There were certain elements inherent in the context, some situational, and some cultural that presented particular challenges.

First, all the facilitators, without exception, were from the same socio-economic context as the participants. The REFLECT Mother Manual (1996:66) encourages this as a means of promoting "understanding and harmony" between the facilitator and the participants. However, because most of the facilitators had similar educational backgrounds to the participants, they faced the same educational challenges and struggles. While in theory, this might not have been a disadvantage (the argument being that facilitators have a better understanding of learning difficulties if they are still learning themselves (Archer and Cottingham, 1996:66), in practice this was not the case. Facilitators felt they *should* know more than the participants. As a result, they would avoid activities which they found challenging or which they were not comfortable doing. For example, they would avoid the more demanding literacy and numeracy activities in order to "cover up" not knowing the answers. They did not feel comfortable admitting they didn't know or were unsure about the answers.

Part of the difficulty of admitting weakness relates to a culture and context which has been defined by clear hierarchies of gender, class and age (Epprecht, 2000). An

authoritarian influence associated with a hierarchical culture has shaped both the domestic and educational context in Lesotho. Just as the head of the household is expected to make the decisions, so the teacher is expected to know the answers. Getting facilitators to shed the teacher image and adopt a facilitator identity was a challenge, related of course to fostering an understanding of the different roles played by each. Letting go of the 'teacher' identity was also partly related to the status that accompanies the role of 'teacher' in a society where education is associated with respect and status.

Contrary to the expectation that in a small valley like Malealea, there might be relative homogeneity and harmony between and within villages, this was not the case. There were a range of interpersonal and cultural tensions which manifested in complicated interpersonal dynamics, which inevitably spilled into the learning circles. These were related to a number of factors. Culturally, men are considered superior to women, and this belief hindered participatory practices as women kept electing men into positions of power, feeling more comfortable in supportive rather than leadership roles. This hindered women's development of confidence and leadership skills and reinforced existing power dynamics. There were also other challenges posed by practices such as the abuse of alcohol and gossip and belief in witchcraft. These practices and beliefs were often a source of conflict and hostility between people, which inevitably seeped into learning circles and negatively influenced the learning and action processes unfolding there.

Sustainability

There were a number of concerns in relation to the sustainability of the project.

Chief amongst the concerns about sustainability was the issue of funding. Whilst the project was run on a relatively small budget, there were certain expenses which had to be covered. These included materials for circles, food at workshops, photocopying of learning units, stationery and so on. But the most significant expense by far was paying facilitators. Chapter Five describes in detail why it was important that facilitators be paid, rather than work on a voluntary basis (which we initially tried to encourage). In brief, facilitators needed the money; they simply could not afford to volunteer substantial time away from their livelihood activities if they were not paid

for it. Being paid was a great incentive and supported facilitators' continued commitment to the project.

Funding was secured through international donors, and/or research grants raised by me. There were some negotiations with LANFE about taking over funding of the Malealea project, and while this might have provided one solution, it would still have meant that sustainability depended on whether the NGO concerned could raise the funds required. Another solution would have been for facilitators and participants to raise the funds themselves through either the Lesotho Government or the networks they had built up over the course of the five years of the project. (They had connections with the MDT, Irish Aid, the US Embassy, amongst others.) However, it should also be noted that fundraising requires a particular set of skills and literacies which would need to be developed in order to make this a viable option.

That said, facilitators and participants did start to secure their own resources. Even though these were for projects, rather than for the running of the learning circles per se, the fact that they were able to secure some resources considerably strengthened the prospects of the long-term sustainability of the initiative. When communities accessed additional support (through government, tourists, and other partnerships), they were able to mobilise their own agendas more effectively, and take greater ownership of the circles and related projects. This was illustrated when facilitators accessed Food Aid, which proved to be a significant motivating factor with regard to the development of the circles. At the time of writing in mid 2006, the Pholosa Lichaba HIV+ support group had just secured R25,000 from World Vision to start an egg production project.

There remains, however, an ongoing need for support in terms of both funding and capacity building. This is a challenge (rather than a constraint). It is a reality that projects need resources to run. It is also a reality that facilitators need ongoing skills training and capacity building, particularly if they are to take over the development of learning units (which will be necessary if the learning focus of the circles is to be retained). The problem arises when the power to secure that support lies with only one person. This poses a threat to the sustainability of the project as it breeds an unhealthy dependency and skews power relations.

Other factors that need to be considered in thinking about the long term sustainability of the learning circles in Malealea relate to the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. (That literacy levels were not more vigilantly monitored was a limitation of this study.) However, implementing effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms again suggests a need for funds and expertise.

There is also a need for ongoing support in acquiring appropriate literacy materials, at least until such stage that a literature rich environment can be sustained.

There will also be an ongoing need for technical and financial support for circle projects such as dam building, sanitating water sources and other projects which require professional input and expensive materials. Circles can only be expected to subsidise limited expenses related to development. For this reason, it is important for circles to maintain a network with other NGOs as well as government departments which can assist communities with projects.

Furthermore, it would be advantageous if there was wider mobilisation, with more learning circles set up in other areas. Such a step would encourage and promote a greater force for social change beyond the confines of one isolated area. LANFE has already begun this process.

CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD: REFLECTING ON LIMITATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

This chapter has offered an overview of the challenges and achievements of implementing a REFLECT project in a rural area of Lesotho. By way of concluding this study, I reflect briefly on the overall limitations and contributions of this five year study and then offer some suggestions for further research.

Limitations

The discussion of Research Question Five above sets out the major challenges and constraints experienced in the process of implementing REFLECT. However, a number of other general limitations pertaining to the project are worthy of discussion.

First, it is important to note that this project was implemented at a micro-level – within an area of about 70 to 100km², occupied by a population of about 5000 people in about 20 villages. The positive changes initiated at this micro-level should not seduce us into believing that village organisations can of their own will and effort effect change on a wider level. It would be foolish to assume that these advances are going to mobilise resources and change significant power structures maintained by national and international systems. There is a need to look beyond changes at the micro-level, to the meso, and macro levels where policies are formed.

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> …the achievement of a just, sustainable and inclusive development outcome depends on accomplishing such changes across nearly every sector in every nation. It is an essential, but tedious process that must be replicated hundreds of thousands, even millions, of times to achieve the needed transformation of the institutions of global society. Furthermore, each individual step toward transforming a policy of an institution is subject to reversal by the still larger forces generated by backward looking national and international institutions and an invalid development vision.
>
> (Korten, 1990:123)

Korten's rather pessimistic warning raises a number of concerns that should be considered in relation to this project and the way in which it unfolded.

Firstly, there was minimal support from government, which was generally slow to deliver services to remote communities. Theoretically, it is the government's responsibility to provide citizens with many of the services which circle members were trying to secure for themselves (water and roads, for example). And although circles can only be applauded for taking this responsibility upon themselves instead of waiting for government to take action, it does beg the question of whether government is then absolved of its commitment to provide services to its citizens.

There is clearly a need for transformation of structures that manage and control the distribution of resources at the governmental level. There is also a need to build the capacity of communities not only to question so-called 'expert' NGO workers (as happened in Tsinyane), but also to question and challenge chiefs, elected representatives and government officials who don't deliver. There is a need for communities to question the policies that are in place and how these are, or are not, implemented.

However, it is also important not to put the State in the place of an NGO in terms of expectations of delivery. That would merely reinforce the idea that social welfare is best provided from above, whether this be the government or an NGO. The idea is for people to take charge of their lives and devise systems through which communities can organise themselves, pulling in others as partners. Local control and participation are essential components of such a process - and of a more direct democracy.

There is also a need to acknowledge that even if communities do develop a strong voice and are able to oppose corruption, ineptitude and inaction on the part of government, there are larger power structures in place that are maintained by international systems against which even the strongest village organisations are powerless. At a more macro-level, there is a need to challenge and change global policies and institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation, that consistently advantage the resourced countries over those that are ill resourced.

Achievements

In considering the future of the process of social change begun in Malealea, these broader issues cannot be ignored. However, it is also important to celebrate the achievements of a relatively small group of people who were willing to try out the REFLECT approach. Their participation resulted in a range of benefits for their communities and themselves, all of which have helped to fulfil broader development goals in Malealea. People have set and implemented their own learning and development agendas and resulting actions have been valuable in terms of improving livelihoods in the valley. Human and social capital have been fortified through the efforts of participants in the REFLECT project, people have improved their participation in meaningful decision making and promoted wider community

engagement in development initiatives. In the process, participants have become more self-confident, which in turn has enabled them to take greater action to make substantial changes in their lives. In sum, REFLECT has stimulated a positive change process in the Malealea valley. The circles have come to occupy a social space in the community and provided an opportunity for people to change their way of seeing the world around them and relating to one another. The words of one of the project participants sum up these gains:

> Attending circle meetings has become part of people's lives. It is in them – it's not like before when people had to be persuaded to go there. They are motivated to go because they know that they are going to discuss things about their development, things that will help them to improve their lives. They just go to the meetings automatically and it's like they are going to miss something if they don't go to the meetings, so they rush there now.
>
> … We have achieved a lot here over the years. What we have done has changed people themselves, it has not only had an impact on the environment in terms of the actual developments, but it has also changed people's lives.
>
> (Moso Ranoosi, July 2006)

In conclusion, this study has provided a unique opportunity to conduct a rigorous application of participatory and developmental approaches and observe an education and development process unfold organically. It has been a privilege to participate in the facilitation of such a process and follow the resulting struggles and successes. I hope that the observations recorded here make a contribution to knowledge about REFLECT and its capacity to generate literacy, development and empowerment in a rural community.

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APPENDIX 1: CONSTITUTION (IN ENGLISH AND SESOTHO)

APPENDIX 1a: CONSTITUTION (*ENGLISH VERSION*)

LAWS OF: HLAA-HLELA-LE-LLA-KA-LE-LENG MULTIPURPOSE CO-OPERATIVE

ADDRESS OF THE ASSOCIATION:
Malealea store
P.O Makhakhe's 922
MAFETENG 900

ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION:
(i) Knitting
(ii) Sewing
(iii) Embroidery
(iv) Carpentry work
(v) Leather work
(vi) Vegetable production

AIMS OF THE ASSOCIATION:
(i) To encourage and help members of the co-operative to use business to generate income for their well-being.
(ii) To reduce unemployment and establish income generation projects to improve the economy of the Malealea community.
(iii) To assist members to find markets for their produce.
(iv) To encourage members to engage in work that will develop communities in Malealea.
(v) To encourage members to work in co-operation with other associations and groups.
(vi) To share skills with other associations and groups.
(vii) To raise funds for members of the association through providing members with loans.

MEMBERSHIP:
(i) Members who wish to join will not be discriminated against by race, gender, class, ethnic group or religious affiliation.
(ii) Member should pay a membership fee and agree to the terms of the constitution.
(iii) A member should be 18 years or older.
(iv) Members of the association should be committed to development of the Malealea community.
(v) A talented person who has the skills needed by the association, may be invited to join.
(vi) Members should reside in the Malealea area, and be able to attend all work sessions and meetings of the association.
(vii) Prospective members should apply to the central committee in order to be considered for membership.
(viii) Full-membership will be announced by the committee at the Annual Meeting.

(ix) Members should abide by the constitution.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS OF A MEMBER:

(i) Members should be punctual.
(ii) No member should come to work drunk, or drink while at work.
(iii) Members have full responsibility for the properties and assets of the association, which should be respected.
(iv) Members have to work hard in order to improve the growth of the association.
(v) Every member of the association should take responsibility for ensuring that the association meets its aims.
(vi) Members are expected to respect the name of the association and exhibit attitudes and conduct appropriate to the guidelines set out in the constitution.
(vii) Members should follow the activities of the association.
(viii) Members should co-operate with the committee members and other members with managerial responsibilities.
(ix) All members have equal power and responsibility with regard to making decisions and setting policies.
(x) Members have right to both lodge a formal complaint about another member of the association, and defend themselves against alleged accusations.
(xi) Members have right to check all the books of the association without any disturbances.
(xii) Members have a right to elect new committee members at specially convened meetings if committee members are not working according to the principles set out in the constitution.
(xiii) Members may be expelled if they do not abide by the principles and guidelines set out in the constitution.
(xiv) If a member is absent from a meeting of the association for three consecutive meetings without reporting, that member may be given a verbal warning, followed by a written warning and then expelled from the organisation.
(xv) Members have a right to loan money from the association and repay the loan at an interest rate of 10% per month.
(xvi) If members do not repay their loan at the agreed rate and at the agreed time, they may be expelled from the association.
(xvii) Members can reclaim their membership fee if they are not able to continue participating in the activities of the association. However, membership fees may only be reclaimed if no outstanding debt exists. In cases where debt exists, the amount outstanding may be subtracted from the membership fee paid.
(xviii) No member may use the association as a forum to promote the interests of any political party.
(xix) If a member is deceased, all properties belonging to that member may be signed over to another person specified by the deceased.

ASSOCIATION MONEY:

(i) Registration money
(ii) Membership fees
(iii) Fines paid by members to the association
(iv) Fundraising
(v) Interest on loans
(vi) Profit generated from the sale of products and services of the association.
(vii) Interest on money saved in the bank.

(viii) Donations to the association.
(ix) All moneys of the association will be used according to the aims and the constitution of the association.
(x) Membership fees will be M_____ plus a registration fee of M_____

MEETINGS OF THE ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:
(i) At the end of every year there will be an Annual General Meeting for all the members of the association.
(ii) This meeting will review the financial progress of the association and examine the books from that year.
(iii) The committee will report on all work done in the year.
(iv) Members will elect a new committee every year.
(v) Members will review the service and performance of the cooperative over that year.
(vi) Members will make plans for the next year.
(vii) An announcement of the AGM should be made at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
(viii) Decisions will be democratically taken according to majority of members. However, at least 50% of members should be present in order to take a decision.
(ix) Financial rewards for hard work may also be made at the AGM

GENERAL MEETINGS FOR THE MEMBERS:
(i) General meetings will be held at least three times in the year
(ii) Discussion at general meetings may concern any issue relevant to the association.
(iii) Plans for improvement of the association may also be discussed at General Meetings.

EMERGENCY MEETINGS:
(i) Solutions to problems should be sought at emergency meetings which may be called at any time.
(ii) Here discussion may concern only the issues at hand.
(iii) In order to take a binding decision, 40% of members should be present at the emergency meeting.

THE COMMITTEE
The committee is comprised of members of the association who are elected every year by members at the Annual General Meeting. Committee members should be elected for their commitment, hard work and leadership qualities.

This committee is made out of seven members. They are as follows:
- Chair-person
- Vice chairperson.
- Secretary
- Vice secretary
- Treasure
- Advisory member (one)

- Advisory member (two)

DUTIES OF THE CHAIRPERSON

(i) To lead the meetings of the association.
(ii) To sign on behalf of the association.
(iii) To administer the association according to the constitution.
(iv) To take responsibility within the association.

DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY

(i) To write letters and any other relevant documents for the association as deemed appropriate by the committee.
(ii) To keep minutes from the meetings of the association.
(iii) To write announcements of meetings.

DUTIES OF THE TREASURER

(i) To keep financial records of the association.
(ii) To prepare a financial statement of the association for presentation at the AGM.
(iii) To take responsibility for the safekeeping of monies of the association.
(iv) To sign on behalf of the association.
(v) To keep the members' registration book.
(vi) To take responsibility for monitoring and collecting interest on loans granted to members of the association.

GENERAL WORKINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

(i) The committee's work is to achieve all the goals of the association.
(ii) The committee should take responsibility for ensuring that members respect the principles of the constitution.
(iii) The committee should help with administration and services of the association.
(iv) The committee should work together with members and any smaller association committees to ensure the success of the association.
(v) The committee should ensure that all the association assets and properties, including books and materials are being kept well and being used properly.
(vi) The committee should keep a clear record of the properties of the association and any debts of the association.
(vii) The committee should support the treasurer in ensuring that any appropriate person, from the association or outside of the association, has access to financial records of the association at all times.
(viii) The committee should encourage members to pay their membership fees.
(ix) The committee should listen to, and consider advice from the Association Register Manager of the Lesotho Co-operative Society.
(x) The committee should accept new members according to the guidelines set out in the constitution. The names and numbers of new members registered throughout the year should be announced at the AGM.
(xi) The committee should call meetings and take decisions according to the guidelines set out in the constitution.
(xii) The committee should take responsibility for dealing with any allegations against the association.

(xiii) The committee members should actively address issues pertinent to the association.
(xiv) The committee should take responsibility for managing the association and monitoring any irregular activities.
(xv) The committee should meet once in a month, or more often if required.
(xvi) At least five committee members should be present in order to convene a committee meeting.
(xvii) The committee is elected by members during the AGM every year.
(xviii) If a member of the committee misses three consecutive meetings without tendering an explanation and apology to the committee, s/he may receive a verbal and then a written warning before being expelled from the committee.
(xix) If a member of the committee does not fulfil his or her mandate, s/he runs the risk of losing his/her position.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION
(i) There should be co-operation and respect amongst members in the work place and in the association generally.
(ii) Members should ensure that a good relationship exists between rank and file members of the association, and members of the association who sit on the committee.
(iii) Members should not discriminate against each other within the association.
(iv) Members should listen to each other and give one another an opportunity to talk without embarrassing others.
(v) In order to strengthen the association, members should work together to create a caring atmosphere.
(vi) Members should have patience and persist in finding solutions to problems in the association.
(vii) Members should endeavour to be personable to one another at all times.
(viii) Members should respect the privacy of each other and the association.
(ix) No member may dominate or discriminate against another member of the association.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES:
(i) Any member who is accused of misconduct has a right to be heard, and a right to put forward his/her case so as to defend him/herself.
(ii) Any member accused of misconduct has a right to seek support from a person who will speak on their behalf.
(iii) The rights of any member who is accused of misconduct should be protected at all times.
(iv) The arbitrator should remain neutral and not take the side of any party.
(v) No action may be taken by any member of the association against another member of the association before official mediation and arbitration as set out in the constitution has taken place.

STEPS FOR DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES:
(i) An initial verbal warning should be given to a member when who behaves or acts in a way that contravenes the constitution.
(ii) An initial warning letter should follow the verbal warning.
(iii) Thereafter, a second warning letter should be given to the member concerned.

(iv) Following a verbal warning and two written warnings, a member may be reprimanded at a meeting.
(v) A member may be further reprimanded by the committee.
(vi) A member may be suspended from the association for sometime following the procedure outlined above.
(vii) Following suspension, If a member continues to contravene the rules of the constitution, s/he can be expelled from being a member of the association.
(viii) In serious cases of inappropriate behaviour, a person may be taken to court, and face civil legal procedures.

APPENDIX 1b: CONSTITUTION (*SESOTHO VERSION*)

MELAOANA EA: HLAAHLELA–LE-LLA-KA LE LENG MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE

ATERESE EA MOKHATLO:
Malealea store
P.O Makhakhe's 922
MAFETENG 900

MESEBETSI EA MOKHATLO:
(i) Moloho
(ii) Moroko
(iii) Mokhabiso oa masela.
(iv) Mosebetsi oa matsoho oa lepolanka.
(v) Mosebetsi oa letlalo.
(vi) Temo ea meroho.

SEPHEO TSA MOKHATLO
(i) Ho khothaletsa le ho thusa ho sebelisa KHOEBO molemong oa ho etsa chelete le ntlafatso ea maphelo a litho.
(ii) Ho fokotsa khahello ea mesebetsi le ho e theha molemong ho nyolla moruo oa NAHA le ho fokotsa tsubuhlellano literopong.
(iii) Ho batlela litho/mokhatlo 'maraka molemong oa katlehiso ea mokhatlo.
(iv) Ho khothalletsa litho ntlafatso le tsoelo-pele ea metse.
(v) Ho khothalletsa litho tsebelisano- mmoho le boikopanyo mokhatlong le mekhatlong e meng.
(vi) Ho arolelana litsebo le malebela le mekhatlo e meng.
(vii) Ho nyolla mokotla oa mokhatlo ka ho alimana ka chelete ho litho tsa mokhatlo hore e tle e khutle ena le tsoala ka mora nako ea khoeli.

BOTHO MOKHATLONG:
(i) Setho ke motho e mong le e mong oa boithatelo bo botle ho latela botona le botsehali ho sa khethoe mohlobo kapa mofuta.
(ii) Setho e tlaba feela motho ea ntsitseng SEABO a bile a lumela tsamaiso ea melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(iii) Setho e tlaba motho ea utloisisang ntlafatso,ea phelang hantle kelellong. Motho ea joalo o tlamehahore a be lilemo li 18 hoea holimo.

(iv) Setho e tlaba motho ea nang le makhabane le litalenta tse hlokoang ke SEPHEO le MESEBETSI ea mokhatlo.
(v) Setho e kaba feela motho ea fumanehang ka hara TIKOLOHO ea tsebetso ea mokhatlo ea ka khonang ho phethahatsa litsebeletso tsa mokhatlo hose tsitiso ea letho ho latela melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(vi) Setho se lokela ho etsa kopo ea botho ka mongolo ho mokhatlo ketello-peleng ea komiti ho latela melaoana.
(vii) Botho bo phethahetseng ba setho bo tla phethahatsoa le ho phatlalatsoa ka molao ke komiti sebokeng se seholo se akaretsang sa selemo.
(viii) Botho o bo feletseng bo tla phatlalatsa ke komiti kopanong ea selemo.
(ix) Litho li lokela ho hlompha melaoana ea mokhatlo.

LITSOANELO LE LITOKELO TSA SETHO:

(i) Litho li lokela ho boloka nako.
(ii) Ha ho setho se lumelletsoeng ho tla mosebetsing se tahiloe kapo ho taheloa mosebetsing.
(iii) Litho li na le boikarabello bo phethaheng lisebelisoeng le thepeng ea mokhatlo, eo e lokeloang ho hlokomeloa.
(iv) Litho li lokela ho sebetsa ka boitelo ele ho atlehisa khol'o ea mokhatlo.
(v) Setho ka ngoe sa mokhatlo se lokela ho nka boikarabello ho bona hore mokhatlo fihlela sepheoe sa ona.
(vi) Litho li lebeletsoe ho hlompha lebitso la mokhatlo, li bontse le ho supahatsa boitsoaro bo ipapisitseng le melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(vii) Litho li lokela ho utloisisa li ketsahalo tsa mokhatlo.
(viii) Litho li lokela ho sebetsa 'moho le litho tsa komiti le litho tse ling lintlheng tsa tsamaiso
(ix) Litho tsohle li na le matla le litokelo tse le kanang ba bapi le ho etsa liqeto le ho rala tsamaiso.
(x) Litho li na le tokelo ea ho ipelaetsa ka setho se seng, le ho ikarabella liqosong tse khahlanong le sona.
(xi) Litho li na le tokelo ea phenyekolla libuka tsa mokhatlo ntle le tsitiso.
(xii) Litho li na le tokelo ea ho mema kopano ea tsohanyetso e le ho khetha litho tse ling tsa komiti haeba litho komiti li sa sebetse ho latela melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(xiii) Litho li ka lelekoa haeba li sa ikamahanye le melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(xiv) Ha setho se sa iponatse phuthehong tse tharo tse latellaneng tsa mokhatlo se sa ithipota, se ka fuoa khalemo ea molomo, e lateloa ke lengolo la khalemo pele se ka tebeloa mokhatlong.
(xv) Litho li na le tokelo ea ho alima chelete ea mokhatlo, 'me li lokela ho e patala e na le phaello ea peresente tse leshome (10%) ka khoeli.
(xvi) Ha setho se sa patale mokitlane oa sona ka phaello le ka nako e lumellanoeng, mokhatlo o na le matla a ho se leleka.
(xvii) Litho li ka khutlisetsoa chelete ea tsona ea both'o ha li sitoa ho tsoela pele mesebetsing ea mokhatlo. Empa, li ka e fumana ha feela li sena mokitlana le mokhatlo. Chalete ea mokitlana e ka ntsuoa cheleteng oe litlamehang ho e buseletsoa.
(xviii) Ho ho setho se lumeletsoeng ho sebelisa mokhatlo e le setsi sa ho phatlatsa litabatabelo tsa mekha ea lipolotiki.
(xix) Ha setho se hlokahetse, lintho tsohle tsa setho seo li ka fuoa mong ka, ea boletsoeng ke mofu

LICHELETE TSA MOKHATLO:

(i) Chelete ea ngoliso
(ii) Chelete ea seabo sa botho
(iii) Chelete ea kahlolo ea litho
(iv) Pokeletso ea chelete ka mekhoa e fapaneng
(v) Tsoala ea chelete e kalimisanoang
(vi) Phaello ho tsoa thekisong ea lihlolilоeng le lits'ebeletso tsa mokhatlo.
(vii) Tsoala ea pokeletso bankeng
(viii) Lithuso ho tsoa ho bahoebi le mekhatlo e meholo.
(ix) Chelete eohle ea mokhatlo e sebelisoa ho latela litabatabelo le melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(x) Chelete ea both'o ke M _____ 'me ea ngoliso ke M_____

<u>LIKOPANO TSA MOKHATLO</u>

KOPANO E KHOLO EA SELEMO:

(i) Mafelo a selemo le selemo, ho tlaba le phutheho ea khorola koqo ea litho tsohle tsa mokhatlo.
(ii) Phuthe ena e tla hlahloba moruo oa mokhatlo e be e phenyokolle libuka tsa lichelete tsa selemo seo.
(iii) Komiti e tla fana ka tlaleho ea ts'ebetso ea selemo.
(iv) Litho litla khetha komiti phuthehong engoe le engoe ea selemo.
(v) Litho litla hlahloba ts'ebetso ea mokhatlo ea selemo seo.
(vi) Litho litla etsa meralo ea selemo se hlahlamang.
(vii) Phatlalatso ea tulo ea kopano ea selemo e tla etsoa bonyane libeke tse peli pele ho tsatsi la kopano.
(viii) Liqeto litla etsoa ka mokhoa o pepeneneng ka bongata ba litho. Empa, liqeto litla etsoa ha feela litho li feta lenane la likoto tsa ona ha beli.
(ix) Litlhapiso tsa mosebetsi o khabane ka boitelo li ka fanoa phuthehong ena.

KOPANO EA LITHO E AKARETSANG:

(i) Kopano tse akaretsang litlaba makhetlo a fetang boraro ka selemo.
(ii) Lintlha tse tla ts'ohloa kopanong tsena li tla ama litaba tsohle tsa mokhatlo.
(iii) Merolo ea ntlafatso ea mokhatlo e ka ts'ohluoa kopanong ena.

KOPANO TSA TS'OHANYETSO:

(i) Kopano ea ts'ohanyetso e ka ba teng ka nako tsohle ho rarolla mathata a mokhatlo.
(ii) Kopanong ena ho ka ts'ohluoa lingoangoareho tsa mokhatlo feela.
(iii) Ha ho hlokahala qeto phuthehong ena, litho tse 'ne ho tse leshome li tlameha hore li be li le teng.

THE COMMITTEE

Komiti e ahiloe ke litho tsa mokhatlo, e khethoa selemo le selemo ke litho kopanong ea selemo. Litho tsa komiti lokeloa ho khethoa ka makhabane le boikitlahetso tsebetsong.

Komiti e ahiloe ka litho tse supileng, eleng:

- Molula setulo
- Motlatsa-molula setulo
- Mongoli
- Motlatsa-mongoali
- Ramatlotlo
- Moeletsi
- Baeletsi (2)

MESEBETSI EA MOLULA SETULO

(i) Ho etella pele kopano tsa mokhatlo.
(ii) Ho tekena lebitsong la mokhatlo.
(iii) Ho tsamaisa mokhatlo ho latela melaoana ea ona.
(iv) Ho nka boikarabello ka mokhatlo.

MESEBETSI EA MONGOLI

(i) Ho ngola mangolo le litokomane tsa mokhatlo ka tokollo ea komiti.
(ii) Ho nka lintlha tsa bohlokoa likopanong tsa mokhatlo.
(iii) Ho ngola li phatlalatso tsa likopano.

MESEBETSI EA RAMATLOTLO

(i) Ho hlokomela ts'ebeliso ea chelete ea mokhatlo.
(ii) Ho hlopha tlaleho ea lichelete ea mokhatlo kopanong e kholo ea selemo.
(iii) Ho jara boikarabellong polokong ea chelete ea mokhatlo.
(iv) Ho tekena tse amang chelete lebitsong la mokhatlo.
(v) Ho boloka buka ea litho ea boingoliso.
(vi) Ho jara boikarabello ba ho hlokomela le ho batla litsoala tsa chelete e ka limiloeng ke litho tsa mokhatlo.

KAKARETSO EA MESEBETSI EA KOMITI

(i) Mosebetsi oa komiti ke bona hore li tabatabelo tsa mokhatlo li ea fihleloa.
(ii) Komiti e lokela ho jara boikarabello ba ho bona hore litho li hlompha mekhoa ea tsamaiso.
(iii) Komiti e lokela ho thusa tsamaisong le lits'ebeletsong tsa mokhatlo.
(iv) Komiti e lokela ho tsoarisana matsoho le litho tsa mokhatlo esitana le litho tsa komiti tsa mekhatloana e meng ho fihlela katleho ea mokhatlo.
(v) Komiti e lokela ho etsa bonnete ba hore thepa le lisebelisoa tsohle tsa mokhatlo li bolokehile esita le ho sebelisoa hantle.
(vi) Komiti e lokela ho boloka lenane la lisebelisoa tsohle tsa mokhatlo le mekoloto eohle ea mokhatlo.
(vii) Komiti e lokela ho thusa ramatlotlo ho bona hore batho bohle ba lumeletsoeng, ele litho kapa ese litho, ba fumana monyetla oa ho hlahloba ts'ebeliso ea lichelete ea mokhatlo ka nako tsohle.
(viii) Komiti e lokela ho khothaletsa litho ho patala chelete ea seabo.

(ix) Komiti e lokela ho mamela le ela hlok'o likeletso ho tsoa ho mongoli e moholo oa mokhatlo oa "Lesotho Co-operative Society".
(x) Komiti e lokela ho a mohela litho tse ncha ho ipapisitse le meralo le melaoana ea tsamaiso. Litho tsohle tse ngolisitsoeng bo hareng ba selemo li phatlalatsoa ka kopano sa selemo.
(xi) Komiti e ka bitsa likopano e le ho etsa liqeto ho ipapisitsoe le meralo le melao ea tsamaiso ea mokhatlo.
(xii) Komiti e jara boikarabello mabapi le liqoso khahlanong le mokhatlo.
(xiii) Litho tsa komiti li lokela ho nka karolo tharollong ea lintho tse amanang le mokhatlo.
(xiv) Komiti e lokela ho nka boikarabello tsamaisong ea mokhatlo le tlhokomelong ea lintho tse sa tsamaeng hantle.
(xv) Komiti e lokela ho kopana ha ngoe ka khoeli kapa ho feta ha hohlokahala.
(xvi) Kopano ea komiti e ka tsoela pele ha feela litho li feta bohlano.
(xvii) Komiti e khethoa ke litho tsa mokhatlo kopanong ea khorola koqo ea selemo.
(xviii) Ha setho sa komiti se sa finyelle likopang tse tharo ka tatellano ntle le ho tsibisa, se khalengoa ka molomo le ka lengolo pele se lelekoa komiting.
(xix) Ha setho sa komiti se sa phethahatse mesebetsi eo se e fuoeng ea mokhatlo, se ka lahleheloa ke setulo komiting.

LIKAMANO TSA LITHO TSA MOKHATLO

(i) Ho lokela ho be le ts'ebelisano 'moho le tlhompho pakeng tsa litho libakeng tsa ts'ebetso esita le kahara mokhatlo ka kakaretso.
(ii) Litho li lokela ho etsa bonnete ba hore likamano tse mofuthu li teng pakeng tsa bona ka ho fapana ha mesebetsi ea bona esitana li litho tsa komiti.
(iii) Litho ha li ea lokela ho khenthollana ka hara mokhatlo.
(iv) Litho li tlameha ho mamelana le ho fanana monyetla ha ho buisanoa ntle le ho nyenyefatsana.
(v) Ho holisa mokhatlo, litho li lokela ho sebetsa 'moho ho etsa mokhatlo sebaka se phuthuluhileng.
(vi) Litho li lokela ho ba le mamello, li phehelle ho rarola mathata a mokhatlo.
(vii) Litho li lokela ho leka ka thata pelo-nolo ho babang ka linako tsohle.
(viii) Litho li lokela ho hlompha makunutu a litho tse ling le a mokhatlo
(ix) Ho ho setho le seseng se ka hatellang kapa hona ho khentholla setho se seng samokhatlo.

MEKHOA EA KHALEMO

(i) Setho se qosoang ka boitsoaro bo bobe, se na le tokelo ea ho mameloa, le ho ikarabella khahlanong le liqoso.
(ii) Setho se qosoang ka boitsoaro bo bobe, se na letokelo ea batla 'muelli kapa moemeli.
(iii) Litokelo tsa setho se qositsoeng ka boitsoaro bo bobe, li lokeloa ho hlomphuoa ka linako tsohle.
(iv) Moahloli ha a lokela ho nka lehlakore lefe kapa lefe.
(v) Ha ho setho se ka nkang bohato khahlano le setho se seng sa mokhatlo pele khang e felisoa 'me kahlolo e liuoa ho la tela melaoana ea mokhatlo.

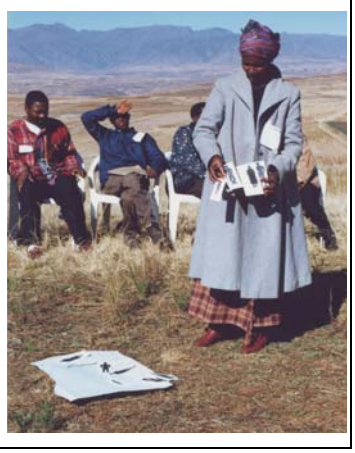
METHATI EA MEKHOA EA KHALEMO.

(i) Setho se lokeloa ho hlokomelisoa ha se itsoara ke tsela e khahlanong le melaloana ea mokhatlo.
(ii) Setho se lokeloa ke lengolo la khalemo ha se ntse se tsoela pele ka boitsoaro bo khohlanang le melaoana ea mokhatlo.
(iii) Ho feta moo, setho se lokeloa ke lengolo le leng.
(iv) Ka mora thlokomeliso le mangolo a khalemo setho se ka khalengoa kopanong ea mokhatlo.
(v) Setho se ka boela sa khalengoa ke komiti.
(vi) Setho se ka behelloa ka thoko ho komiti nakoana ho ipapisitsoe le lintlha tse boletsoeng holimo.
(vii) Ha setho se ntse se tsoela pele liketso tse khohlanang le melaoana ea mokhatlo, se ka lelekoa mokhatlong.
(viii) Maemong a hlobahetsang a boitsoaro, setho se ka qosoa lekhotleng le leholo la molao.

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF KEY PRA TOOLS USED IN THE STUDY

> The term Participatory Rural Appraisal has been used to describe a growing family of approaches and methods used to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act.
>
> (Chambers, cited in Robinson-Pant, 1996:531)

The table below outlines some of the major PRA tools used by REFLECT circles during the course of this study. However, it is important to note that the selection represented here, is just that – a selection. There is a great variety of methods and ways of using and adapting the tools. Examples of how these tools were used in practice are scattered throughout Chapters Four, Five and Six.

TOOL	DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL	CONTEXT IN WHICH THE TOOL WAS USED AND VISUAL REPRESENTATON OF THE TOOL
Map	A map provides a visual picture of a situation and stimulates discussion about a wide range of issues. During discussion, features of a community or organisation are added to the map. It can be used to visualize the potential; the opportunities; resources; problems and needs within a context depending on what kind of map is constructed.	Mapping was used to visually represent the contexts in which the circles worked. The photo below shows a map constructed by circle members of their village. While making the map, much debate was generated about problems and potentials within their community. 
Story telling	Story telling provides another way for communities to articulate their issues and concerns. As they recount stories about their lives, issues can be idenitified for further discussion. Pictures and objects can be used to help participants create their stories.	Story telling was used as a way of identifying problems in the communities. Participants worked with cutout figures and created stories around these. 

TOOL	DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL	CONTEXT IN WHICH THE TOOL WAS USED AND VISUAL REPRESENTATON OF THE TOOL
Problem audit , sorting and categorising	A problem audit is a way of taking stock of a range of problems within an organisation or community. Once problems are identified, these are copied onto cards and further sorted and categorized. Moving the cards around and arranging them in different ways helps to stimulate discussion and get participants to analyse about problems in more depth as they identify relationships and establish links between problems.	Problem auditing was done after problems were extracted from a situation. Here participants cluster problems that they had identified with in the carpentry section of the Co-op. 
Matrices	Matrices are useful for helping to structure and compare information about an issue. This is useful when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a situation or resource. Insight gained can be used to inform planning.	Participants here construct a matrix comparing different animals and the kinds diseases affecting them. This helped them to plan treatment programmes. 
Pairwise / ranking matrix	Like the matrix, the pairwise matrix is used to compare issues or resources, but in this case issues / needs/ resources are ranked to find out which is the most important.	The ranking matrix is used here to compare products in the Handicraft Centre in order to assess which product sells best and should be prioritised. 

TOOL	DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL	CONTEXT IN WHICH THE TOOL WAS USED AND VISUAL REPRESENTATON OF THE TOOL
Calendar	A calendar tool can be used to show how people use their time across a year. It can also show events and activities that happen across a time period – these might be agricultural, seasonal, educational, religious or financial activities. The calendar allows participants to visualize patterns and plan for future actions based on insights gained.	The calendar (as shown here) is a gender calendar and was used to help participants understand gender plays a role in constructing their workloads over the period of a day. Notice that the calendar might reflect as a little as a day and as much as a year or more. 
Tree diagram	A tree tool can be used in different ways. It can show the causes (roots) and effects / outcomes (branches) of a problem, or it can be used to discuss income (roots) and expenditure (branches). Usually the trunk symbolizes the problem or topic under discussion. In addition, possible solutions and actions can be visualized as fruit.	The tree was used to analyse the causes and effects of erosion, of illiteracy, of teenage pregnancy and many other problems. Here it is used to look at the effects and causes of crime . 
Venn diagram	Venn diagrams are used to explore relationships between institutions, organisations and even individuals. This tool provides a kind of social or organizational map that helps participants to think about the influence and power that groups have and the relative importance of different groups or people.	The venn diagram was used here to help participants think about gender relationships within the Co-op and the community. 

TOOL	DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL	CONTEXT IN WHICH THE TOOL WAS USED AND VISUAL REPRESENTATON OF THE TOOL
River	The image of a river as constantly flowing and changing can be used to help participants to visualize and reflect on their own life experiences or other ongoing processes. Such reflection provides insight into behaviours and actions that cause changes, either positive or negative, empowering or disempowering.	Participants construct a river tool as they reflect on the progress of their circles 
Time line	The time line tool enables participants to record the history of a group of people or a project. It can also be used to monitor and evaluate events and activites that take place in a project.	The timeline tool was used to monitor and evaluate events and activities within the Co-op and the circles. 
Transect walk	A transect walk entails walking through an area, discussing what is seen and known about that area, and then representing that as a cross section format. This tool can provide another way of seeing the community and open different dimensions of discussion about an issue.	Participants used the transect walk to help them think about what trees to plant in an area. As they walked, they noted different characteristics about the area including different soil types, status of erosion of the area, types of vegetation, animals, and humans in the area, etc. 

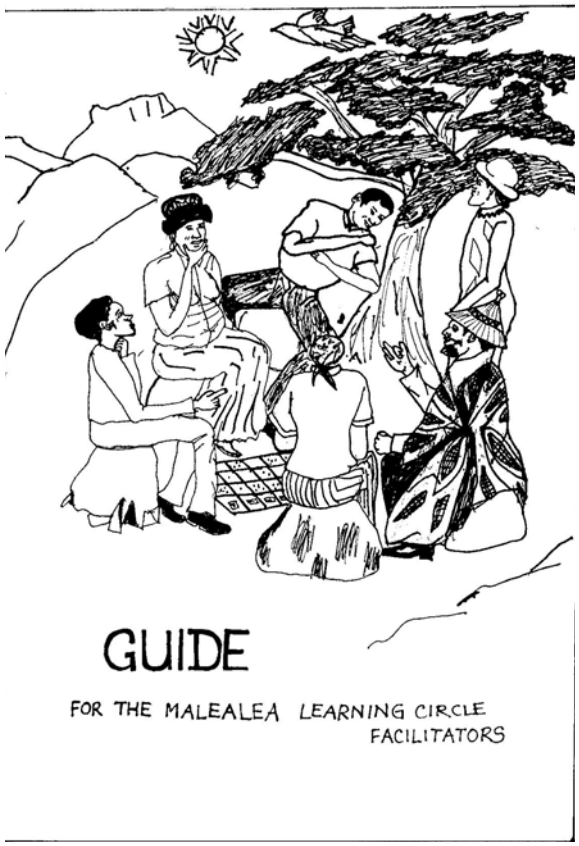
TOOL	DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL	CONTEXT IN WHICH THE TOOL WAS USED AND VISUAL REPRESENTATON OF THE TOOL
Role play and drama	Role play and drama offer excellent ways of analyzing issues as people take on roles of different characters. Things they might not be able to express themselves can be said as they play at being someone else. These tools stimulate thoughts and feelings, which can lead to heated discussion.	Many role play and dramas were preformed to convey different messages about HIV/AIDS. The photo here shows participants enacting a play about the risks of HIV in relations to migrant labour. 
Music, song and dance	Music, singing and dancing are ways of knowing, and expressing knowledge. Powerful messages can be conveyed through these media, which can also provide a stimulus for further discussion and analysis.	Song and dance are used here as part of a festival celebrating local achievements. The aim was to encourage community members to join development initiatives. 
Team building exercises	Team building exercises can help to build group dynamics and confidence in one another. This helps to ensure that all members of a group are in a position to contribute to the activities of the group.	Building trust and communication are important aspects of team builing. The photos here show participants playing a game that demonstrates how communication can break down when passed on from person to person. 

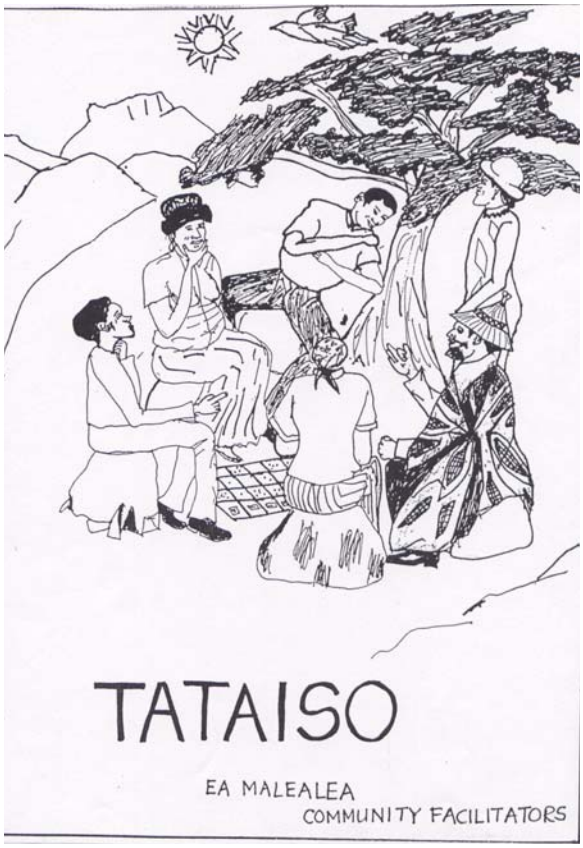
APPENDIX 3: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE USED TO OBSERVE LITERACY PRACTICES IN CIRCLES

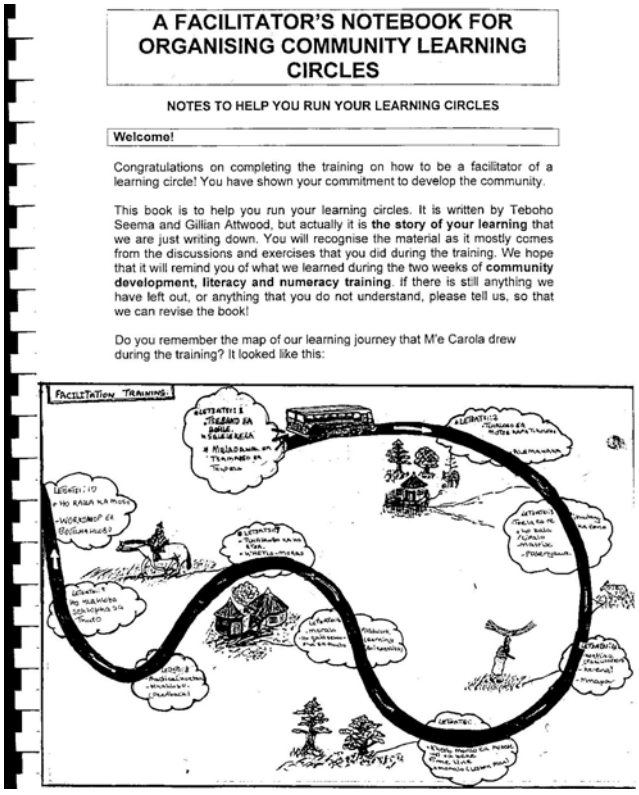
Activity	Notes
Writing	
What is the context? (e.g. the circle meeting, the garden, the shop …)	
Who is writing? (look at gender, age, education level, etc. Also count the number of people taking notes)	
What are they writing and how are they doing this?	
What is the purpose of the writing?	
How frequently are they writing? (Is this an exceptional or frequent activity)	
Is anyone 'co-writing' (writing for someone else)	
Reading	
What is the context? (e.g. the circle meeting, the garden, the shop …)	
Who is reading? (look at gender, age, education level, etc. Also count the number of people reading written texts)	
What are they reading and how are they doing this?	
What is the purpose of the reading?	

Activity	Notes
Reading (continued)	
How frequently are they reading? (Is this an exceptional or frequent activity?)	
Is anyone 'co- reading' (reading for someone else)	
Counting / Using numeracy skills	
What is the context? (e.g. the circle meeting, the garden, the shop …)	
Who is using literacy skills? (look at gender, age, education level, etc. Also count the number of people using numeracy skills)	
What are they counting / adding / subtracting, etc and how are they doing this?	
What is the purpose of this activity?	
How frequently is this activity taking place? (Is this an exceptional or frequent activity)	
Is any one helping or using numeracy skills with another person?	

APPENDIX 4: FACILITATORS' GUIDE – COVER PAGE AND OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS OF THE GUIDE







A FACILITATOR'S NOTEBOOK FOR ORGANISING COMMUNITY LEARNING CIRCLES

NOTES TO HELP YOU RUN YOUR LEARNING CIRCLES

Welcome!

Congratulations on completing the training on how to be a facilitator of a learning circle! You have shown your commitment to develop the community.

This book is to help you run your learning circles. It is written by Teboho Seema and Gillian Attwood, but actually it is **the story of your learning** that we are just writing down. You will recognise the material as it mostly comes from the discussions and exercises that you did during the training. We hope that it will remind you of what we learned during the two weeks of **community development, literacy and numeracy training**. If there is still anything we have left out, or anything that you do not understand, please tell us, so that we can revise the book!

Do you remember the map of our learning journey that M'e Carola drew during the training? It looked like this:

This map shows us all the things we learned and the activities we did during the time that M'e Carola and Ntate Rudzani were with us. This book will remind us of that learning.

The book is organised in the following way:

Introduction

We will start with the **Introduction**. The **introduction** tells us about the learning circles, the facilitators and the training. It will answer the following questions:

What are **learning circles**?

- What should the learning circles do?
- What does a facilitator do?
- Why is it important to become a learning circle facilitator?
- Who should our participants be?
- How often should our learning circle meet and for how long?
- Where should we meet?
- What should we discuss in our learning circles?
- How should we start?

Part one

Part one will help us to think about the way that adults learn, which is different to the way that we were taught at school as children. Adults learn best if they **have** an opportunity to share their experience as they talk to each other, **and take responsibility for their learning**. This section will remind us of how we saw this during the training.

We will also talk about what it means to be a **facilitator**, rather than a teacher.

- What are your responsibilities as a facilitator?
- How do they differ from those of a teacher?
- What are you expected to do as a facilitator?

Part two

Part two will remind us of how to identify and prioritise the **issues** that are relevant to the **adults** we are working with. This is important because if **adults** can discuss issues that are close to their lives they will be more motivated to come to the learning circle regularly. The issues you identify with your participants when you start your learning circles are the issues that you will take up later in your learning circles. We will remind you of the issues that our group identified as important, and the way in which we did this.

Part three

Part three will introduce the different planning and problem solving **tools** that we used during the training.

- Do you remember using the **daily** and **yearly calendar** to look at how people use their time during the day and during the year?
- Do you remember using the **map** to look at development in our different villages?
- Do you remember how we used the **matrix** to plan different activities?
- And the **timeline** to trace how things have happened over time?
- And what about the **tree** diagram – do you remember how we used it to look at the causes and effects of certain problems?

This section will remind you of how we used these tools to think about the issues that we identified as important to us at the beginning of the training.

Sometimes it helps us to remember and learn more if we are able to read and write things down as we discuss issues. **Reading and writing** are more tools (like the ones mentioned above) that can help us solve our problems and think about our lives. We will look at how we can practise reading and writing while we discuss important issues with the people in our learning circles.

Part four

Part four will give you some practical advice on how to get your learning circles going. We will answer these questions:

- What do you need to think about before you start your learning circle?
- How will you find out who your participants are and what they need?
- What do you need to do to get started and to keep your learning circle going?
- We will remind you of how to plan a lesson and the kind of activities that you might do with your participants. We will give you some examples of lessons as well, so that it will not be so difficult to get going.
- We will also talk about learning units and give you some examples of learning units that you could use as you begin your learning circles.

Part five

Part five will help you find ways to manage your learning circles. We will look at:

- time management
- monitoring
- record keeping

Part six

Part six is the last section of this guide, and is about **reflection and evaluation.** It will remind us:

- what reflection and evaluation mean.
- why it is important to reflect and evaluate.
- how we should go about it.

We will look at how reflection and evaluation can help us to take development forward; how we can move from talk to action.

We will also give you an opportunity to evaluate your learning and this book.

- What have you learned?
- Was this book useful?
- Is there anything that you would still like to learn that is not in this book?

How is this book organised?

PART	CONTENT	PAGE
Introduction	All about learning circles	6 – 7
Part 1	How do adults learn? What is a facilitator?	8 – 16
Part 2	How do we find out what issues are important to our participants?	17 – 23
Part 3	Tools for solving problems and looking at our lives Literacy and numeracy	23 – 51
Part 4	Learning units Lesson plans	52 – 67
Part 5	Managing our learning circles • Time management • Monitoring • Record keeping	68 – 77
Part 6	Reflection and evaluation	77 – 83

APPENDIX 5: CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION



LESOTHO

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION

NO. 1580

IN THE MATTER OF APPLICATION N0:1580 MADE BY

1. TEBOHO	SEEMA
2. 'MATELLO	RAMOTS'OANE
3. 'MASEKOLO	RAKOJOANA
4. FUSI	QOANE
5. THABISO	RANCHOBE
6. EMMANUEL	LIJO
7. 'MAFIELLA	THEJANE
8. 'MAKENEUOE	'MUSI
9. 'MAPULANE	MPOROANE
10. MAHLAPE	MOHALE

I hereby certify that I have this day registered **LEHLAA-HLELA LE LLA KA LE LENG MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY LIMITED** as a cooperative society with limited liabilities under the above name and with its address at: **MALEA-LEA MATELILE, P.O MAKHAKHE'S 922, MAFETENG 900, LESOTHO** in accordance with the **COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES ACT N0 : 6 OF 2000.**

Written at **MASERU**
This **18th APRIL 2001**

COMMISSIONER OF COOPERATIVES

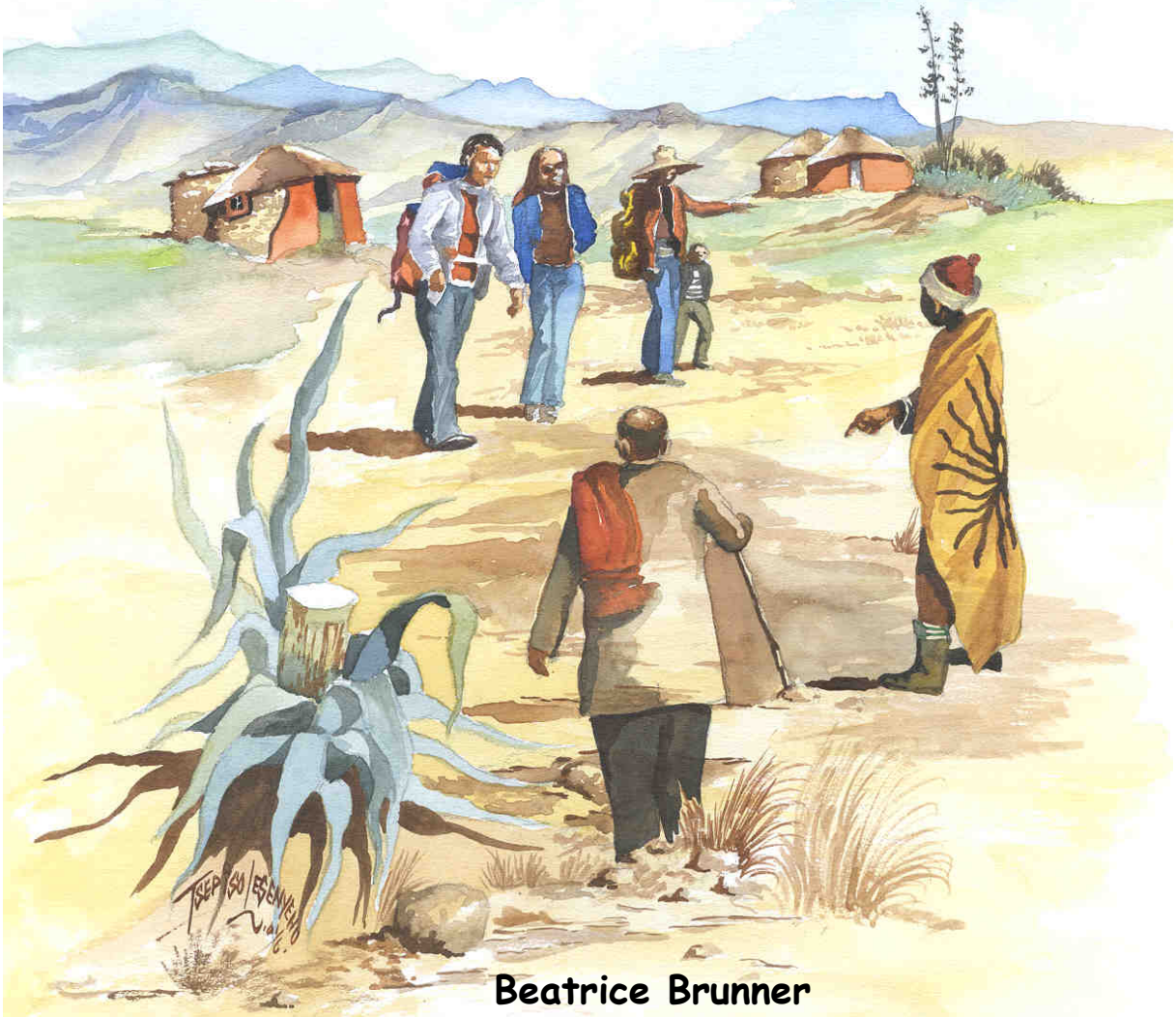
LEGAL SERVICES
P.O. BOX 89

APPENDIX 6: TALKING TO TOURISTS COURSE BOOK - COVER AND CONTENTS PAGES

TALKING TO TOURISTS

An English course for people in Lesotho

With specific vocabulary for pony-trekking guides



Beatrice Brunner

MAP (Part I)

Unit	You will learn to talk about:	You will learn to:	You will learn these words:
1 Hello!	➢ yourself ➢ your friends ➢ your job ➢ your family	➢ say hello to people ➢ say who you are ➢ say your name and your address ➢ say how old you are ➢ say if you are a man or a woman ➢ say who your friend is ➢ say who belongs to your family ➢ ask questions ➢ ask questions if you don't understand your teacher ➢ ask how you write a word ➢ ask what a word means	➢ names of countries ➢ family ➢ classroom phrases
2 Daily Life	➢ clothes ➢ colours ➢ food and drink ➢ normal days ➢ your work	➢ say what you are wearing today ➢ say how you do things ➢ say what you eat everyday ➢ say how you cook food ➢ say what you do everyday ➢ say what you do when you are working	➢ clothes ➢ names of colours ➢ names of food ➢ words you use for cooking ➢ names of jobs
3 Body and Mind	➢ people's looks ➢ your body ➢ health and first aid ➢ your likes and dislikes ➢ your feelings	➢ say what people look like ➢ say what hurts you ➢ help people if they have an injury ➢ say what you like and what you don't like ➢ say how you are feeling today ➢ say what you can do and what you cannot do ➢	➢ words describing people (hair, build, face, ➢ the body ➢ aches and illnesses ➢ injuries and first aid ➢ feelings
4 House and Home	➢ your house ➢ the things you have in your house	➢ say what your house looks like ➢ say what things you have in your house ➢ say what the things in your house look like ➢ compare things	➢ furniture & items ➢ the house ➢ adjectives (size, shape)

5 Places and Maps	➢ the world ➢ countries ➢ languages ➢ maps ➢ Africa ➢ Lesotho	➢ read maps ➢ name countries ➢ say where people come from ➢ say what languages you speak ➢ say what languages other people speak ➢ say what nationality people are ➢ name rivers and mountains of Lesotho ➢ name physical features ➢ name the districts of Lesotho	➢ countries ➢ languages ➢ nationalities ➢ directions (north etc.) ➢ physical features
6 Malealea	➢ Malealea ➢ your own village ➢ the structure and politics of your village ➢ directions	➢ give information about your village ➢ say what places there are in your village ➢ answer tourist questions about your village ➢ say how your village works ➢ say what problems there are in your village ➢ ask the way and show people the way	➢ hierarchical structures ➢ features in villages
7 Weather	➢ the weather ➢ the four seasons ➢ the date ➢ equipment needed in different weather and seasons	➢ say what the weather is like today ➢ say how warm it is today ➢ say what the weather will be like tomorrow ➢ say what the seasons are like in Lesotho ➢ name the months ➢ say what we need for different weather and seasons ➢ say what date it is	➢ weather conditions ➢ months ➢ dates ➢ equipment
8 Business	➢ prices ➢ shops	➢ ask for prices and buy things in a shop ➢ sell things in a shop ➢ thank people ➢ Make simple requests and refuse simple requests ➢ make recommendations	➢ money ➢ everyday objects
9 Education	➢ your classroom ➢ the subjects ➢ the education system of Lesotho	➢ name the things in your classroom ➢ say what subjects children learn in school ➢ describe education	➢ subjects ➢ routines in school ➢ classroom items
10 Tourism	➢ Malealea Lodge ➢ the tourists ➢ tourist attractions in Lesotho ➢ advantages and disadvantages of tourism	➢ say what rooms and places there are in the lodge ➢ say why tourists come to Malealea ➢ say why you like something ➢ say if you agree or disagree	➢ accommodation ➢ geographical features ➢ outdoor activities

MAP (Part II)

Unit	You will learn to talk about:	You will learn to:	You will learn these words:
1 Starting the Day	➢ the pony trek ➢ the route ➢ horse riding	➢ speak in front of a group of tourists ➢ say where you are going today ➢ answer tourist questions ➢ explain how long the trek is ➢ explain how many breaks you will take ➢ say what equipment the tourists need for a day-ride ➢ explain how to ride a horse ➢ give the necessary information to tourists	➢ the routes ➢ difficulties ➢ equipment for day rides ➢ horse riding
2 Sightseeing	➢ the Bushman paintings ➢ Botsoela waterfall ➢ the gorge ➢ the Ribaneng overnight trek	➢ say how difficult a trek is ➢ say what people will see on the trek ➢ say what equipment the tourists need for an overnight trek ➢ say what the tourists can do in Ribaneng ➢ say what the tourists are not allowed to do in Ribaneng ➢ saw what the tourists must do in Ribaneng	➢ difficulties of the trek ➢ the path ➢ things you see on the trek ➢ equipment for overnight trek
3 Horse	➢ the body of your horse ➢ riding equipment	➢ name the parts of the body of your horse ➢ say what equipment you need for horse riding ➢ say how a horse moves	➢ the body of your horse ➢ bridle ➢ saddle

Unit	You will learn to talk about:	You will learn to:	You will learn these words:
4 Mountains and Rivers	➢ mountains ➢ rivers	➢ name parts of a mountain ➢ name the mountains around Malealea ➢ say how high mountains are ➢ name some rivers in Lesotho ➢ describe rivers	➢ countryside ➢ mountains ➢ rivers
5 Animals	➢ wildlife (wild animals) ➢ farm animals ➢ nature conservation	➢ say what animals there are in Lesotho ➢ group animals ➢ say for what you can use farm animals ➢ tell the history of the Basotho pony ➢ talk about national parks and nature reserves ➢ give your opinion about nature conservation ➢ discuss things	➢ wild animals ➢ farm animals ➢ characteristics
6 Plants	➢ plants ➢ the cultivation of plants ➢ medicinal uses of plants	➢ say what vegetables and cereals you plant in Malealea ➢ what tools you use to plant things ➢ name the plants in Malealea ➢ say for what you can use plants	➢ vegetation ➢ plants ➢ vegetables ➢ tools ➢ cereals ➢ medical plants
7 Basotho Traditions	➢ initiations school ➢ weddings ➢ the first-born child ➢ the Basotho blanket and hat	➢ say what you do in Initiation School ➢ say what people did in Initiation School in the past ➢ give your opinion about certain things ➢ say what a traditional Basotho wedding is like ➢ explain the traditions when a child is born ➢ tell the history of the Basotho blanket ➢ say when and where you wear a blanket ➢ say why you wear a blanket	➢ wedding ➢ child birth

APPENDIX 7: MONITORING MATRICES

DOLLS TEAM	**MONDAY AND FRIDAY**				**STOCK MATRIX**
Date:					
Product	**Number needed in shop**	**Number NOW in shop**	**Number we need to make**	**Time needed per product**	**Number of work hours this week**	**Overall target for production**
Sitting dolls	60					
Standing dolls	60					
Men dolls with hats	60					
Place-mats (sewn)	20					

DOLLS TEAM	**MONDAY AND FRIDAY**				**TARGET MATRIX**
Date:					
	Who? / Team members this week	**Overall target for this week**	**Target per person**	**Number of products made**	**Points for achieving target** (maximum 5)	**Point for exceeding target** (maximum 1)
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						

DOLLS TEAM	**MONDAY AND FRIDAY**				**SALES MATRIX**
Date:					
Product	**Number in stock at beginning of week**	**No in stock at end of week**	**Number sold**	**Price of product**	**Money received** (Number of stock sold x price of product)
Sitting dolls	**60**				
Standing dolls	**60**				
Men dolls with hats	**60**				
Place-mats (sewn)	**20**				

TEAM EA LIPOPI	**MANTAHA LE LABOHLANO**				**MATRIX EA LITHAISOA**	
LETSATSI:						
LITLHAISOA	**Tse hlokoang shopong**	**Tse teng**	**Tseo re hloka ho li etsa**	**Nako ea ho etsa sehlaisoa ka seng**	**Re hloka nako e kae ho etsa litlhaisoa tse hlokoang**	**Tseo re ka li etsa bekeng ena**
Lipopi tse lutseng	60					
Lipopi tse emeng	60					
Bontate ba roetseng likatiba	60					

TEAM EA LIPOPI	**MANTAHA LE LABOHLANO**				**MATRIX EA THAKETE LE LINTLHA**	
LETSATSI:						
	Ke bomang ba sebetsang bekeng ena?	**Thakete ea motho ka mong**	**Labohlano: Litlhaisoa tse entsoeng**	**Lintlha tsa ha ho fihletsoe thakete** (tse 5 ka beke)	**Ntlha ea ha ho motho (kapa team) e fetile thakete (1 ka beke)**	**Kakaretso lithlaisoa ka beke**
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						

TEAM EA LIPOPI	**MANTAHA LE LABOHLANO**		**MATRIX EA LITHEKISO**
LETSATSI:			
Litlhaisoa	**Tse teng qalong ea beke**	**Tse teng mafelong a beke**	**Tse rekiloeng bekeng e fetileng**
Lipopi tse lutseng	60		
Lipopi tse emeng	60		
Bontate ba roetseng likatiba	60		

APPENDIX 8: LITERACY PRACTICES BOARD GAME

01 FEBRUARY 2001 **REFLECT WORKSHOP**

ESTABLISHING CURRENT LITERACY PRACTICES AMONGST FACILITATORS AND LEARNERS

BOARD GAME

INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME

The aim of this game is to find out a bit more about peoples' experiences of literacy and numeracy, how they use literacy and numeracy, and where they struggle because they don't have literacy or numeracy. This will help us to make sure that the work we do is really meeting people's needs.

- This is a board game, played with a dice.
- The aim of the game is to move from the start to the finish answering as many questions as you can along the way.
- It is called the **Honesty Game** because you have to be honest. You are not allowed to make up any of your answers.
- You can however ask other members of the group for help if you can't answer the question.
- There are five piles of cards. You should pick a card from the pile that matches the number you land on. E.g. if you land on **5**, you should pick a card from the pile marked **5.**
- Each card has a picture. You should think about the different things you might have to read or write in that situation. Try to think of ways that at first may not seem obvious.
- The person who has thrown the dice, should try to answer the question, but may ask others in the group for help from their experiences if they are unable to answer.
- Your group can discuss the answers after the person has answered.
- The answer should be written down on a piece of paper. Write the number of the card next to your answer.
- The cards have pictures to help the learners if they do not understand what to do, but when you play this with your learners you should help them to understand the cards. You should also make sure that you write down their answers.

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS (for facilitators after playing the game)

- Did you discover any new ways that people use reading and writing that you did not know about?
- Were there any situations where people managed to find other ways of doing things besides through reading and writing?
- Were there any instances when people could *not* do something because they could not read/understand the instructions? When?
- What did they do? (Did they ask someone else for help? Did they watch and learn? …)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PLAYING THIS GAME WITH YOUR PARTICIPANTS

1. **Make sure you introduce the game to your participants.** Explain what the aim of the game is, and make sure they understand why they are playing it. Make sure you explain the following points:

    - We want to be able to help learners as quickly as possible with the things they want to learn about reading and writing and counting.
    - In order to do this, we need to find out what people already know and what they still want to learn.
    - We also want to find out how people cope at the moment. What do they do if they can't read or write or count.
    - Once we know this we will be in a better position to give them the support they need.
    - This game will help us to think about all these things and talk to each other about what we know and what we need to know.

2. **Please make sure you write down the following information:**

    - Date
    - Village
    - Facilitator(s)
    - Who are the participants? (shepherds, housewives, farmers …)
    - Number of people in the learning circle
    - What happened when people played the game? Did they understand how the game worked, or did they struggle to understand what to do. (we need to know this because playing the game means that people are already using literacy – and it would be useful to know whether they can cope with this kind of literacy or not.)
    - Try to capture everything people say about the different ways in which they use literacy in the different situations on the cards (just as you did in the workshop)

3. **As people pick up cards ask them:**
    - In this situation, in what ways do you have to communicate (through speaking, reading, writing, etc…)
    - In this situation (on the card), *what* might you have to read or write, or count or measure or in what way might you have to use numbers? Give examples…

4. **Try to probe what people say:**.

- **Ask them to give examples**. For instance, if they say, "I read and write at school when I take my child to be registered" – ask them **what** they read and write.

- **Also try and find out what people can't do**. Are there any situations where you find you need to ask someone for help because you can't read or write or count? What situations are these?

In what situations do people struggle because they are not able to read and write? Maybe they can't write things down when they take their children to register at school. (Some people may be shy to say these things, so try and encourage them by telling them that this is not something that they should feel bad about.)

- **Ask them how they manage if they can't read and write**. If they get a letter from a relative in the mines and they can't read – what do they do? Do they ask others to help? Do they watch what others do and copy them? Try to let them tell you before you make suggestions to help them.

- **Ask them where they learned the literacy skills they do have**. Where did they learn to count or read the things they can count and read?

APPENDIX 9: REVISED PROBLEM MAPPING (a series of lessons from the Introductory Unit)

TOPIC – Constructing a map to identify issues in the community

Aims: To raise awareness of issues that might be affecting development in the village. (Some of these issues have already been identified by reflect circles in the Malealea area, and we build on these in this unit.)

By the end of this part of the unit people should have:

- Discussed and acknowledged the possible existence of a range of problematic issues that affect the community.
- Explored a vision of how the community could look if these problems were addressed.
- Discussed possible actions that could be taken to raise awareness of the problematic issues identified.

Objectives: To construct (or build on) a map of the village that will allow participants to locate a range of problematic issues that might be affecting their community

Preparation:

- a list of key words (see attached list)
- stick to draw a map on the ground , ash or coloured sand for showing the lines of the map, stones, beans, leaves, etc.
- markers, cards for drawing on
- flip chart paper for recording map
- exercise books and pencils

List of key words

(The problematic issues listed here have been identified during discussion in the learning circles in the Malealea valley. Your group may wish to leave out some of these issues, or they may have other issues that they wish to include.)

Drunkenness	Domestic violence and rape
HIV/AIDS	Jealousy
Drought	Hunger
Erosion	Lack of trees and wood
Unplanned pregnancy	School drop outs
Politics	Lack of infrastructure (roads, schools, shops…)
Unemployment	Poverty
Illiteracy	Lack of knowledge about agriculture
Poor planning	Illness
Youth idling	Water
Lack of development	Lack of skills
Fill in other issues identified by your group once you have drawn the map.	

How to construct the map: Ask the learners to sit in a semi-circle and clear an area of ground in the area. Ask them to construct a map of their village on the ground. This map will allow participants to think about various issues in relation to their village. They can start drawing the map by first drawing in main paths or any major reference points such as a river. Ask them to draw in houses, toilets, water taps, shops, schools, fields, animal kraals and any other details they can think of. They should make the map by using whatever resources are available - like sticks, stones, etc. to represent major features on the map[95].

Once the participants have constructed the map, look at the list of key words. Read these out to participants and ask them if any of them are relevant to their communities and if so, how they could be shown on the map. If participants are not able to read and write, they could draw symbols to represent the different issues on the map. Participants should mark in the identified issues in the place where they see these issues happening most on the map. Ask participants if there are any other issues not on the list that are important for their communities. Discuss what symbols could be used if participants can't read and draw these or write the words on the map.

Encourage as many learners as possible to participate in the session. Try to avoid just one or two of them dominating. When the map is complete ask if all the participants agree that it is accurate. If not ask why and make any adjustments necessary.

When the map is completed, ask a few of the participants to help you (the facilitator) copy the map onto flipchart. Explain that the map should be copied so that it can be used for future discussion. Check that all the important details of the map have been copied correctly. The facilitator should also copy the map into his/her exercise book.

Constructing the map should take a full session

Ideas for discussion

During discussion, encourage participants to think more deeply about the issues and the problems that have been identified during the construction of the map. This can be done by asking them questions that will help to unpack these issues. The questions below are probe questions that can help you to open up discussion and deepen the level of analysis. There are no right answers! And you don't have to ask all the questions – see how the discussion flows.

- What do you think are the most serious issues facing our community?

- Why do you think these issues are the most serious?

[95] If all your participants have already taken part in constructing a map in earlier sessions, and you still have a copy of that map, you can just build on it.

- Who is most affected by these issues? (Are there different groups affected differently?)

- Are there areas in the village which are worse affected than other areas? Which ones and why?

- Can you think of when these problems began to develop? How did this happen?

- What might life in the village be like if these problems did not exist?

If other issues arise during discussion, it is important that the facilitator identify these and allow participants to discuss these issues freely. Encourage participants to talk to each other rather than having a two-way discussion between participants and the facilitator. Remember – the facilitator is not the one with the answers.

Make a list of all issues that participants identify. You (the facilitator) should note this list in your notebook and keep this list for future use.

If the participants are able to write, ask each participant to write one of the issues onto a card. If participants are not able to write, they can draw pictures that represent the issues discussed onto card. Put the cards on the ground and see if there are similar issues or problems. Group them together. As participants group the issues together, ask them **why** they say certain issues belong together, what the similarities are. For example, are the same people affected by these issues? Do all the issues relate to one bigger problem? This will help them to think about the issues more deeply.

Remember to keep in mind these six words that will help you to formulate questions: **who, what, why, where, when, how**.

Ideas for action

The ideas below are examples of the type of actions that might come out of the discussion above. However, these are only suggestions – it is important that you do not tell the participants what they should do. It is up to the participants to themselves decide what to do – if anything.

- If discussion has focussed on rape, participants might speak to the local chief about holding a community pitso to raise awareness of the problem.
- If discussion focussed on an educational concern, the learning group might want to encourage parents and educators to come together to raise awareness of and discuss the issue concerned.

Discussion of the issues should take a full session

IDEAS FOR READING AND WRITING

Participants should make a copy of the map from the flipchart into their own books. This may take a long time and might need several attempts. Don't worry if they miss some of the detail. Some participants may need help in copying the main lines.

For beginners

Remind the participants of the discussion about problems that happened in the last meeting. Choose a word that was discussed and write it clearly next to the symbol that has been drawn on the map.

NB If you are working with beginners, choose a word that does **not** have two letters that stand for one sound, for example, th as in **th**aba, or tlh as in **tlh**aiso. For beginners, start with simple sounds of one letter only. A word like **peto** would be a good word because each letter is a sound on its own.

Ask participants to read the word together a few times. Now divide the word up into syllables:

Pe-to

Explain that each syllable is made up of two parts, a vowel and a consonant. There are five vowels:

a-e-i-o-u

and 21 consonants:

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r s t v w x y z

Do not sped too long on this and do not ask participants to copy these. Write them yourself on a large piece of flipchart paper which can be displayed on the wall. Explain that this may seem like a lot of letters but this is all participants need to read and write. Explain that you will slowly be learning more about each letter over the next few weeks in relation to real words (which will help them to remember the letters).

NOTE: It is very important not to spend too much time on the explanation above. The aim is only to give participants a sense of the task that lies ahead – not to make them remember or understand any of the letters.

Return to the word **peto**. Explain that each letter of the word can go with another letter. So from **peto** we can make the following:

pa pe pi po pu

ta te ti to tu

Let participants take turns in repeating the syllables. **Do not spend a long time on this**. Now write each syllable on a piece of paper / card and lay them on the ground. Ask participants to come up and try to arrange them to form real words. Once a few people have done this, ask participants to copy the words into their exercise books. Examples of words they could produce are:

Papa (maize meal) **pepa** (carry) **toti** (rubbish) **piti** (name of a person)

Ask them to try and make other words. Move around the circle and help participants with holding their pens and forming the letters.

NOTE: If participants are having difficulty holding their pens, ask them to write in the sand with a stick first. This will help them to learn how to hold and write with a pen.

For participants who already have some knowledge of reading and writing

Ask learners to copy the list of words from the map into their books. If they know how to write other words, ask them to make simple sentences using the word they have copied off the map. Encourage learners to work in pairs if they would like to. Learners can also write down questions about the issues they have identified.

IDEAS FOR NUMERACY

For beginners

If learners are beginners you can write the numbers 1 –10 on the blackboard in a mixed up order, and ask participants to read them. Learners can then copy them into their exercise books.

Beginners can then apply their counting skills by counting the number of roads, shops or schools in the village. They can also think about how far the distances are and how long it takes to get to get the various places. They should come up with numbers and discuss whether those numbers make sense. You can ask learners which places are further and which are nearer to help them understand bigger and smaller numbers, and what these mean in the context of their lives.

Ideas for learners who already know some numeracy

Write the numbers 1 –100 as set out below (or 50 depending on the level of skill of your learners), and ask participants to read and then copy the numbers into their

exercise books. Discuss the patterns that appear in the table. Ask participants to test each other pointing to numbers at random.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
11	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
21	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**
31	**32**	**33**	**34**	**35**	**36**	**37**	**38**	**39**	**40**
41	**42**	**43**	**44**	**45**	**46**	**47**	**48**	**49**	**50**
51	**52**	**53**	**54**	**55**	**56**	**57**	**58**	**59**	**60**
61	**62**	**63**	**64**	**65**	**66**	**67**	**68**	**69**	**70**
71	**72**	**73**	**74**	**75**	**76**	**77**	**78**	**79**	**80**
81	**82**	**83**	**84**	**85**	**86**	**87**	**88**	**89**	**90**
91	**92**	**93**	**94**	**95**	**96**	**97**	**98**	**99**	**100**

If alcohol has been identified as a problem, learners might wish to look at how much a person spends on alcohol in a day, a week and a month. Learners can estimate how much a bottle of beer costs, and how many bottles a person might drink in one night. They can then add up the prices of the number bottles of beer to find out how much a person spends in a day.

If learners know how to multiply, ask them to multiply the amount spent in one day by the number of days a person drinks in a week or a month. This will enable learners to calculate how much money is spent on alcohol.

IDEAS FOR SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION AND MATERIALS

- Posters / pamphlets on health related problems (such as AIDS, STD's, alcoholism, high blood pressure …)
- Poster / pamphlets on environmental issues (such as protecting water sources, establishing a tree nursery, methods of cultivating different plants …)
- Encourage participants to talk to resource people such as the Agricultural Extension Officer and the staff at the local clinic.

APPENDIX 10: LIST OF LEARNING UNITS DEVELOPED FOR MALEALEA LEARNING CIRCLES

Introductory units
- Introducing REFLECT to your community
- Collecting baseline information
- Identifying relevant issues through mapping (A revised version of this unit is attached as Appendix 9.)
- Planning circle meetings

Units related to environmental issues
- Deforestation
- Erosion and trees
- Land degradation
- Land holding size
- Managing water

Units related to social issues
- Life skills
- Building unity against jealousy
- Gender and power

Units related to health issues and HIV/AIDS
- Understanding illness and death in our community
- Understanding our vulnerability to HIV/AIDS
- Asking questions,understanding more about HIV/AIDS
- Discussing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and how to cope
- Using drama to share what we know about HIV/AIDS
- Learning about HIV/AIDS through George's story (Soul City materials used)
- Getting tested for HIV
- Learning how to live with HIV through Simanga's story (Soul City materials used)
- Treatment options
- Living a healthy life with HIV
- HIV, babies and children

Units related to business
- Understanding different kinds of businesses
- What makes a successful business?
- Understanding markets
- Thinking about a business and market to suit you
- Planning your business and analysing the potential of your planned business
- Getting started with your business
- Creating a successful business
- Money and your business
- Managing money; understanding income and expenditure
- Meeting production targets
- Applying for funding

Units related to management

- What is management and why do we need it?
- Monitoring and evaluating your progress
- Planning for the future