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GABLE

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GABLE SMC
A Government of Malawi Project
Funded by USAID
Contracted to
Creative Associates International, Inc

GABLE is a Government of Malawi program supported by funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). GABLE is an acronym for Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education and is designed to support Government of Malawi efforts to address constraints to girls' educational attainment.

A major component of Malawi's GABLE program is the Social Mobilization Campaign (SMC). The major objective of the SMC is to develop, test, and implement a national campaign to change attitudes about the importance of girls' primary education. The SMC is funded by USAID and contracted to Creative Associates International, Inc.

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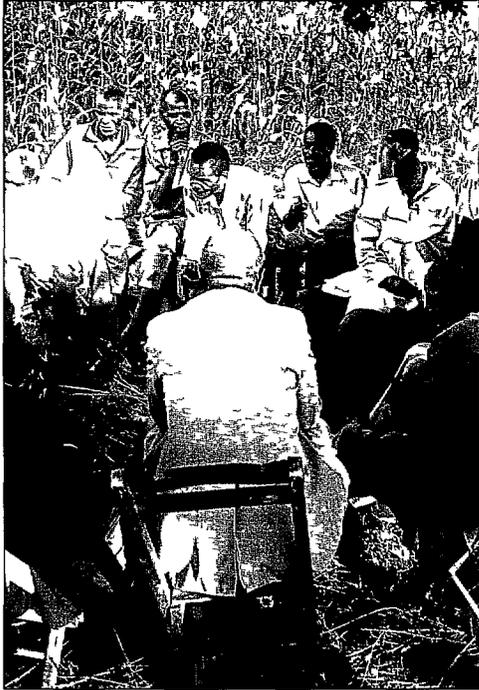
Introduction

The community-based sensitization phase of the GABLE Social Mobilization Campaign provided an opportunity for members of a community to identify and verify local constraints to girls' education, discuss solutions to those constraints, and develop plans of action to translate solutions into practice. These activities empowered communities, opened lines of communication, and established ownership of community-generated solutions through the creation and implementation of action plans.



Once field workers from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women, Youth, and Community Services were trained, it was their responsibility to plan and implement the community-based sensitization activities. In turn, these activities assisted the community members to assume further responsibilities concerning initiatives to alleviate constraints to girls' education. GABLE SMC staff served primarily in a monitoring and advisory role during this phase of the project.





Community-based workshops were chosen to sensitize key target groups in each community. The workshops were low-cost and high-return, could be conducted throughout all districts, and were found to be an acceptable forum in which the community members could feel comfortable.

The main objectives of the workshops were to enable the participants to know their roles and responsibilities in the education of the children in their community, and to promote interest in girls' education. The workshops introduced the GABLE SMC project, trained participants in focus group discussion organization and facilitation, and provided them with an opportunity to work together to identify constraints that hindered girls' education and discuss possible approaches to alleviating those constraints. Each workshop concluded with the participants developing plans of action which outlined the sensitization activities they would facilitate in their community.



Each community-based workshop lasted one to three days and hosted 20 to 40 participants. The workshops were held in a location which was accessible by foot to all participants. GABLE SMC provided the participants with a lunch allowance, as well as materials such as exercise books and pens. In particular, these last items served as incentives for the participants by encouraging their involvement in the participatory process that the workshops strove to foster.



Over the life of the project's existence, 2,526 such workshops were conducted reaching over 60,526 participants.

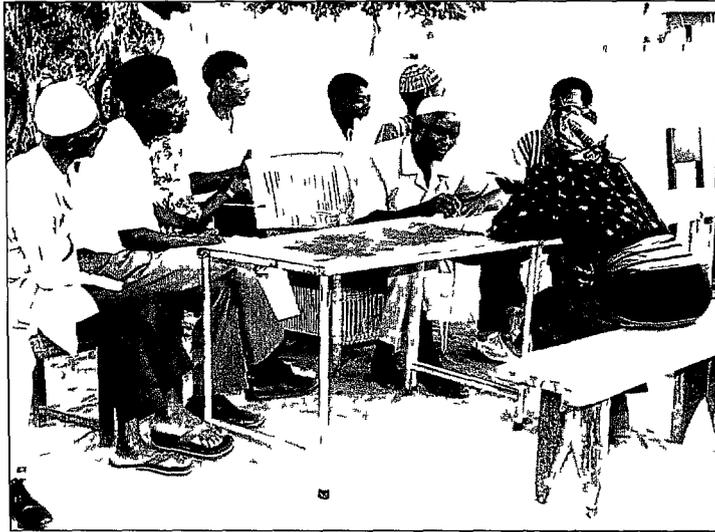




During the pilot phase of GABLE SMC, it was determined that three categories of individuals were “key” to the community-based sensitization process. These groups were local leaders, primary school committee members, and teachers. It was found that these groups, when properly trained and sensitized, exerted the most influence over education decision making at the community level and were most capable of translating the knowledge they received at the workshop into community-generated action.

It was further determined that mobilization of communities happened more effectively when local leaders were trained first, followed by the school committee members, and then teachers. This order became the standard for all districts.

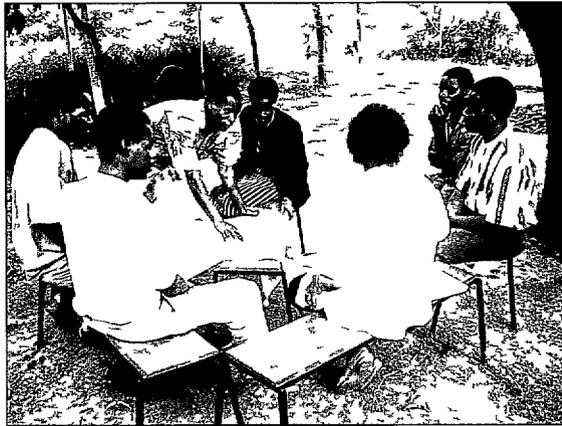




The **local leaders** were a diverse group of individuals who held positions of respect and authority in their villages. They included village heads, religious and political party figures, and influential community members. In most cases, a local leaders' workshop was conducted for all communities under the authority of a Group Village Head. Each community was represented by their Village Head and one or two other leaders who had been identified by the Village Head in consultation with the local field workers. Training multiple leaders from each community allowed local leaders to support and reinforce one another in their efforts to sensitize and mobilize their community.



In theory, every primary school in Malawi has an operating **school committee**. In practice, many school committees were inactive or in disarray due to lack of knowledge, guidance, or inappropriate appointment procedures. GABLE SMC, through trained Community Development Assistants and Primary Education Advisors, was able to sensitize the school committees to their duties and to the educational constraints that existed in their area.



Once active, the school committee played a very significant role in assuring that after enrolled, children stayed in school. It assisted the head teacher in making decisions about disciplinary action for both pupils and teachers, and it kept the parents informed of the activities taking place at the school. The school committee also served as the main committee to ensure improvements at the school were undertaken and supported by community efforts.





Teachers, perceived and treated as “outsiders” by many communities, had little knowledge of the constraints faced by girls and boys who attended their classes. Without this understanding, it was difficult for them to plan or implement classroom practices which would alleviate these constraints, or to work with the community to address them.



Identifying teachers as a key target group for sensitization helped them to recognize the difficulties faced by their pupils. These workshops provided a forum whereby the teachers themselves could explore strategies to reach out to the communities to assist in alleviating constraints to education in order to increase enrollment, retention, and achievement.

40% of teachers participated in community-based sensitization workshops, 17% of school committee members, and 21% of teachers participated as well.



In addition to the key target groups identified by GABLE SMC, the community members themselves often identified special groups within their community who were influential in the educational decisions of young girls. These groups were also targeted for sensitization training. These special interest groups included traditional authorities, initiation counselors, and religious instructors. Due to the traditional, cultural, and/or religious practices within a community, it was often found that these groups were extremely influential in a young girl's life.



SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS



The workshops held for special interest groups often differed from those held for key target groups in a number of ways. Due to the sensitivity of the special interest group workshops, GABLE SMC staff occasionally served as co-facilitators with the district field workers. The workshops often lasted longer than the key target group workshops, and they were often residential rather than community-based. The special interest groups were often composed of people who worked in a solitary, exclusionary environment. Therefore, it was often necessary for the special interest group workshops to focus considerable attention on opening lines of communication between participants and provide them with an opportunity to learn about one another.



Special interest groups were often representatives of cultural or religious norms and were more sensitive to outside interference than the key target groups, resulting in workshops that often focused on issues unique to them and their practices.



Just like the field worker training, no community-based sensitization workshop was complete without the development of plans of action. All three key target groups, as well as the special interest groups, ended their workshops with the establishment of a well thought-out plan of action which they could implement in cooperation with the community.

Plans of Action

Local leaders generally began their plans with a series of sensitization meetings for community members followed by focus group discussions. School committee members focused their plans of action on meetings with groups, such as teachers and local leaders, to discuss possible initiatives that could be implemented by the school committee themselves, focusing on school-based constraints.

The plans of action drawn by the teachers focused on meetings with parents, school committees, and pupils to discuss issues which affected community-school relations and the attendance and retention of girls at their school.



Plans of action drawn by the special interest groups were often as varied as the groups themselves. Initiation counselors made plans to implement age-relevant initiations, religious instructors established mechanisms to monitor children's attendance in formal schools, and traditional authorities established incentive schemes within their areas of authority.





It was the responsibility of all the groups sensitized to communicate and work together to coordinate and implement their plans of action. This collaboration helped to strengthen the efforts of every group and demonstrated a spirit of cooperation to all the community.

