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GABLE SMC

Research & Verification

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.

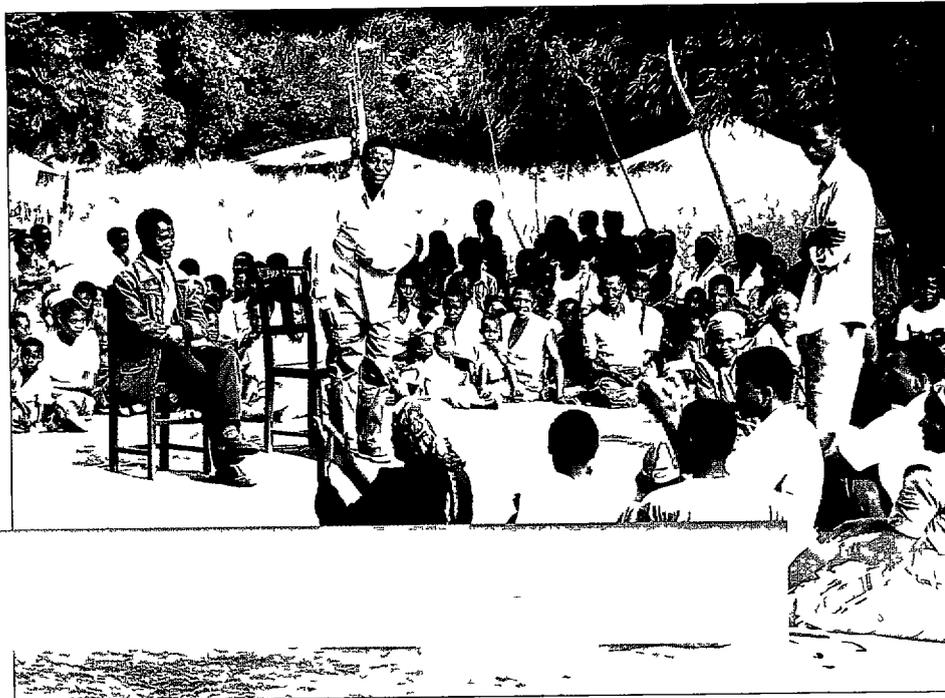
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Introduction

The main objective of the GABLE Social Mobilization Campaign was to increase peoples' awareness of the positive effects of girls' education on individuals, families, communities, and the nation. To achieve this goal, GABLE SMC utilized a grassroots outreach approach to research, sensitization, and community mobilization.



While survey research provided information about respondents, its utility in providing meaningful information about attitudes and behaviors in a village setting was somewhat limited. Likewise, collecting data from schools provided an accurate picture of enrollment trends and practices but it did very little to provide insight as to why those trends and practices existed.

Utilizing a combination of research methods was found to be the most effective strategy for identifying constraints to girls' education.





To identify cultural constraints to girls' education, it was necessary to employ a research method which allowed for trust and ease to develop between the interviewer and the community. This is particularly true when identifying constraints that are associated with more private, cultural, or traditional issues.



In addition to the more “established” research methods of a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey and school-based data collection, GABLE SMC used an extensive participatory action research component as its initial exploration into communities and districts.

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GABLE SMC moved from district to district throughout Malawi in order to reach all corners of the country. Initial contact with each district was made with the District Commissioner, District Education Officer, District Community Development Officer, and all Traditional Authorities. This meeting was used to familiarize all the necessary district authorities with the goals of GABLE SMC and to tap their experience and knowledge with regard to the socio-cultural, economic, and educational make-up of their district.

Site Selection



Site selection was based on the information provided by this team of district officials, along with GABLE SMC staff. It was important to achieve a good scattering of sites throughout the district and in particular to target sites which represented diverse cultural, religious, and economic conditions, along with unique problems of either dense or sparse populations. Also targeted were areas that were known to have particular difficulties in getting girls into primary school and keeping them there until they completed at least a primary education.



The Research Team

Initiated by a Malawian Professor at Chancellor College in Zomba, GABLE SMC employed students who were trained in participatory theater to work as research and performance troupe members. These students underwent further training in action research, storyline development, and in performing for research verification.



This team of researchers/performers, utilizing a methodology known as Theatre for Development (TFD), was made up of fifty students, twenty-five men and twenty-five women. These students represented nearly every district and language group in the country and were studying in a variety of subject areas at Chancellor College.

The troupe members became "owners" of the cause. They were proud to be part of a movement that was changing their country and they realized that they are among the very few who have had the opportunity to see and learn about all parts of Malawian culture, beliefs, and practices.





"Theatre for Development," "participatory drama," and "popular theater," are all terms that have been used to define a methodology for identifying areas of critical need or concern and motivating others to work toward resolution of those concerns or satisfaction of those needs. While these terms may imply a methodology that begins and ends with a stage performance, in actuality it is more complex and goes beyond the immediate performance. It is a process of gathering information, analyzing the collected information, developing an appropriate drama script, and performing the drama to elicit dialogue and to verify the existence of the issues being portrayed.





The action research process began when the TFD troupe entered a selected village. They arrived equipped to stay 5 to 10 nights and settled into housing provided by the local chief. Just the sight of a GABLE SMC vehicle laden with people and supplies was enough to raise curiosity and excitement in the villages they visited.

The researchers gathered information in a variety of different ways.

Semi-structured interviews usually took place during home visits and were conducted without the use of questionnaires and without note-taking. This methodology increased the level of comfort during interviews and made the interviewing process flow more freely.



The researchers came into constant contact with the villagers. Some of this contact was planned, but much was spontaneous. While drawing water, washing clothes, cooking meals, pounding maize, or simply sitting outside, the researchers were in contact with the villagers. Whenever possible, the researchers engaged the villagers in conversations. These conversations allowed the researchers to discuss issues with people in the village who were not often reached during the semi-structured interviews. Young children did not have to be shy because their parents were around, women could speak more freely when there were no men present, and husbands could voice their thoughts without their mothers-in-law looking on.



An intentional method of observation was also employed by the research team. They observed behavior, practices, customs, and personal characteristics and interaction. Their observations were used not only to identify issues of concern, but also to verify information that they had gathered through other sources.



Observations included various activities such as dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. The researchers noted the types of music and the types of dance steps used, and the lyrics of the songs. The lyrics of the songs were often very insightful. The researchers also noted the reasons why some practices and beliefs were in place within the community.

The data collection techniques purposefully were kept flexible. Each researcher asked different questions, in different ways, and under different circumstances and, in return, had very different conversations with each person they interviewed. It was this flexibility and this focus on sharing ideas and information with villagers and discussing as many aspects of culture as possible that allowed the researchers to gather exceptionally rich data.



Research Analysis

The research team members used each other's experiences to create an aggregate, comprehensive picture of the numerous interviews



Each evening, the researchers gathered in private and discussed the day's findings. The sharing of information during the nightly meetings allowed all team members to develop a more complete picture of the attitudes present in the community.

There was a natural check-and-balance system which assured that no one researcher or villager unduly influenced the attitudes gleaned from the data to be representative of the entire village. If areas of dispute or incomplete data were identified during these sessions, individual researchers were chosen to "follow up" on the issues and to present their findings at the next meeting.





At the end of the data collection period, the researchers came together again. Their next task was to create a comprehensive “village profile” of their findings. This profile was a written account of their research findings—accessibility of the village, cultural and traditional practices, school enrollment and selection, distances to schools and other service facilities, attitudes of parents and children, practices of various community members, etc.



The key issues that had surfaced after each day in the village and as a result of completing a village profile were used as a springboard for storyline creation for the dramas that were to be presented at the end of the researchers’ stay in the village.



The Performance



The researchers' last day in the village was performance day

These performances were attended by audiences of up to 2,000 people—men, women, children, local leaders, parents, initiation counselors—all facets of the community were well represented

Nearly 380 dramas were performed in over 190 villages throughout Malawi from 1994 through 1997



Dramas were intended to reflect the conditions, attitudes, and behaviors in the lives of villagers as they related to issues concerning girls' primary education. The desired effect was for people within the village to recognize their own situations, as well as that of their neighbors, throughout the various scenes of the plays.

Due to the participatory nature of the drama performances, the troupe members entered into dialogue with the audience. This allowed the researchers the opportunity to listen and to observe the reaction of the audience and to verify their perceptions formulated as a result of their research.



The participation that took place as part of the drama performances was critical in helping the community members accept ownership of their conditions, attitudes, and behaviors. It also helped to spark discussions that continued long after the final scene of the performance.

Drama performances drew the attention of influential people throughout the country—Cabinet Ministers, media reporters, and even the State President of Malawi were in attendance at various performances. International recognition of the influence and impact of GABLE SMC's TFD performances was highlighted by the attendance at various drama performances of the US Ambassador to Malawi, members of the US Congress, and USAID representatives from Washington, DC.

GABLE SMC's TFD research initiative was recognized by The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) with the Agathe Uwilingiyimana Prize in Malawi. The Agathe Award is given annually to individuals or organizations from African countries whose programs have effected significant improvement either in girls' access to education or in their enrollment, retention, achievement, or performance in school.

The research and verification component of GABLE SMC became the driving force behind a much larger set of methodologies and interventions. It provided not only the necessary



The unique nature of Theatre for Development helped to ensure that GABLE SMC activities were off to a well received start.

