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**Influencing national policy making in education through best
practices: civic involvement in primary education (CIPE) project**

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“There is evidence that schools are more effective when parents and local citizens are actively involved. Teachers are more committed, students achieve higher test scores, and better use is made of school facilities in those communities where parents and citizens take an active interest in children’s educational well-being” (The World Bank 1992).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The existing literature spells out clearly the importance or need for communities to participate in the school management process. More often than not we hear statements such as “we must involve the whole community in the education of our children,” and “lack of community participation will lead to failures in improving education quality.” These are excellent, indeed noble ideas that have the support of most research study results, but how can they be realized?

Most countries in Africa have high illiteracy rates and Malawi, one of the small countries in the Southern African region, is no exception. Out of the estimated 10.5 million people in Malawi, 52% are female, of whom 68 % are illiterate. In 1994, the government of Malawi introduced free primary education that has led to an increase in primary school enrolment figures from 1.9 million to 3.2 million pupils. This, coupled with the poor agrarian economy with a GDP of US\$9.4 billion and GDP per capital of US\$900, seems to have lowered education quality standards which is manifested by high absenteeism, repetition and dropout rates especially amongst girls. There are several challenges that education faces that include, but not limited to, lack of infrastructure, lack of teachers, inadequate teaching and learning materials, poor parental attitudes towards education especially girls, and cultural practices and beliefs. The government of Malawi can hardly fund all the social services including education.

Notwithstanding, the Malawi government’s main policy objective for the education sector is to “develop an efficient, high quality system of education, of type and size appropriate both to the available resources and to the political, social and economic aspirations of the nation,” (Malawi Government Basic Statistics, 1997:1). However, this thrust is thwarted, as stipulated in the Policy Investment Framework (PIF) 2000 to 2015 document (2002:3) by: limited and unequal access to educational opportunity, declining educational quality, a school curriculum that does not effectively address individual and societal needs, poor planning and management capacity, and inadequate financing. In order to address these constraints, the government of Malawi has put in place a number of policies and strategies. One policy adopted concerns the involvement of communities in the management of the primary schools.

In this paper, community participation will be defined to mean both the means and the end whereby the communities are able to identify their own problems, assess possible solutions to the problems, decide on the course of action to take, implement the chosen solutions, and monitor and evaluate the implemented solutions. These have to be taken in

stages and are interlinked. Jumping past or being excluded from one stage might lead to other members of the community withdrawing. The community that has both bonding and social capital will achieve greater results than other groups.

2.0 The need for Community Participation

Many reasons have been cited by various authors regarding the importance of communities participating in the management of primary schools. In developed countries, it has been conclusively stated that community participation in the management of schools has a lot benefits that include: ownership of the schools by communities, ability of the communities to support the schools financially and materially, and the schools becoming environments where democracy is practiced.

The above reasons, and many more, made the government of Malawi and the civil society devise the National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management Policy.

3.0 The Government of Malawi Policy on Community Participation in Managing Primary Schools

The Ministry of Education has put in place a number of policies and strategies in order to ensure that communities are involved in the management of the primary schools. Ministry of Education Policy (2002:14) states that according to 1962 Education Act, the School Management Committees (SMC'S) and the Parents Teachers Associations (PTA's) are responsible for ensuring community participation in managing primary schools. The PIF (2000) document also emphasizes the importance of drawing in community participation to school management in order to improve educational quality. A National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School (NSCPPSM: 2003) was developed by the government together with the civil society in order to achieve maximum participation through the school governing bodies.

However, it is reported in the NSCPPSM (2003:4) that "School Management Committees and Parents Teachers Associations often do not exist, or if they do, are largely dormant. In addition, where there are school management committees, their role is still predominantly one of organizing the maintenance of school infrastructure. There is very little participation by communities and parents in other more contentious school management issues such as monitoring of teachers' performance."

The school management committees were unable to fulfill all their defined roles so that there was no real meaningful education development at the schools due to a number of challenges (NSCPPSM Document 2003:4). Communities did not participate fully in the education of their children and the government tried to do everything for the people (Grandvaux, Welmond and Wolf 2002:3).

4.0 The Role of the Non-Governmental Organizations in enhancing Community Participation in School Management through the School Governing Bodies

Any strategies to achieve quality basic education must have a policy related component in order to address policy issues and provide opportunity for continuous interaction between client/community and amongst various stakeholders.

A number of non-governmental organizations are implementing various projects to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning in the primary education sector. The Creative Center for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) is one non-governmental organization which envisions a future Malawi with highly self-motivated citizens responsive to ever-changing socio-economic and political pressures for the betterment of their own welfare. CRECCOM believes that this vision can be realized by “addressing the acute constraint of lack of effective community involvement and participation (ownership) which most Malawian communities face in addressing their own and the country’s development needs. This Non-Governmental Organization evolved out of USAID funded Malawi Government Basic Education projects in 1999. CRECCOM has a USAID PVO status and is a registered Member of Council of Non-governmental Organizations in Malawi (CONGOMA), NGO Board and also a member of Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE).

CRECCOM has implemented very successfully a number of projects in the education sector, eg, Social Mobilization Campaign for Educational Quality National funded by USAID; the Integrated Child Labour Elimination Project (ICLEP) funded by Elimination of Child Labour Trust, Geneva; Civic Involvement in Primary Education (CIPE) funded by Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA); and pilot projects in other areas of national concern eg,. Social Mobilization Campaign for Aids Awareness (SMC-AA) funded by USAID; and Social Mobilization Campaign – Community Outreach Project funded by the World Bank. The organization, in partnership with American Institute for Research, is implementing the BEST CHOICE project in Zambia. AIR won a contract to implement the Malawi Education Support Activity (MESA) which is also being implemented in Malawi by CRECCOM and other partners such as Save the Children (USA) and Malawi Institute of Education.

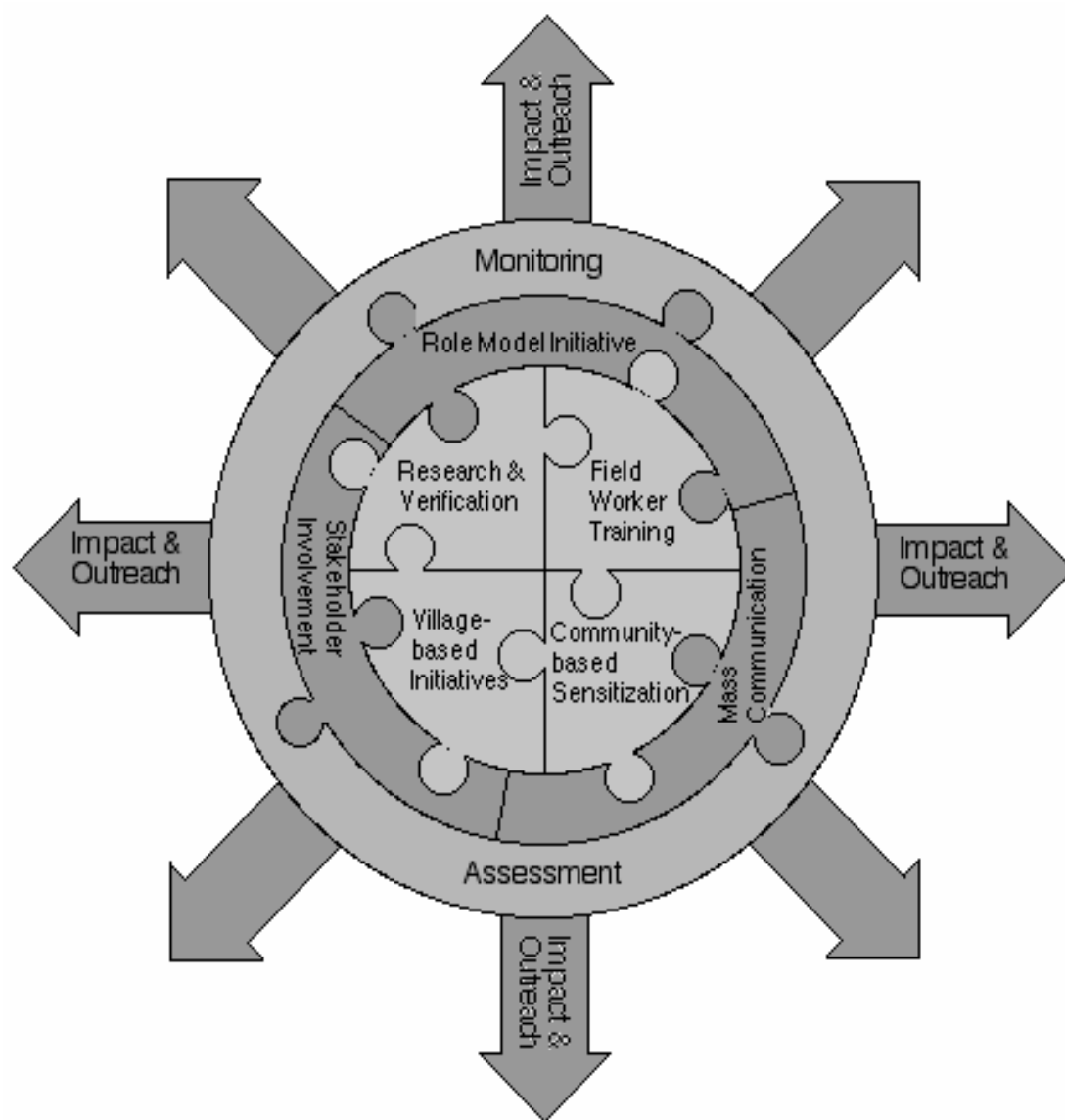
MESA is a blend of best practices and lessons learned from three successful USAID-funded projects namely:- QUEST by Save the Children (USA); SMC-EQ by CRECCOM and IEQ by AIR in collaboration with MIE. These best practices include: A Social Mobilization Campaign Conceptual Methodology; a Cluster Mentorship System and school based teacher training in-service training; continuous assessment, TALULAR; and a concerted approach in tackling issues such as HIV/AIDS

CIPE is also a blend of best practices and lessons learned from the projects that were funded by OSISA in Namibia and the Social Mobilization Conceptual Model that CRECCOM utilizes.

5.0 THE BEST PRACTICES UTILIZED BY CRECCOM

CRECCOM utilizes a unique conceptual framework called the Social Mobilization Campaign Conceptual Framework. The model comprises four key components namely: ***Research and Verification, Field Worker Training, Community Based Sensitization*** and ***Community/Village Based Initiatives***, along with other support components which

include: *Stakeholder Involvement*, *Role Model Initiative*, *Mass Communication Interventions*, and an ongoing process of *Monitoring and Evaluation*.



SMC Conceptual Model

It was the implementation of this model that fostered the type of atmosphere that prompted the USAID/Malawi GABLE SMC Report to state, “*The GABLE SMC is well planned, well executed program that goes beyond the creation of slogans and messages. It is one of the strongest social mobilization programs this evaluator has observed.*”

The model has an inbuilt mechanism that enables the concerned stakeholders get a deeper understanding of the different cultural patterns and ways of perceiving and conceptualizing practical life situations that in the end are analyzed and examined in order to see how they interlink with the issue being studied – in this case education. This approach that CRECCOM utilizes also creates a cadre of sustainable trained personnel (field workers) capable of implementing a methodology that facilitates social change

among communities. The trained field personnel, by utilizing various low cost participatory approaches such as focus group discussions, sensitization meetings, workshops and role modeling, are able to provide an environment that encourages communities to move beyond the rhetoric and flowery phrases about what should be done, to how they can work together to change for the better. This becomes a way of life, a culture of wanting progress and commitment which ensures sustainability.

What should be borne in mind is that the model does have a creative mobilization initiative within it which runs with no direct cost or a very low cost budget ensuring the continuity of the project mission after externally funded phase of the project runs out. This is why CRECCOM prioritizes the empowerment and involvement of grassroots institutions, Government Extension Workers and other Community Based Organizations.

6.0 HOW DOES CRECCOM INFLUENCE OR ADVOCATE POLICY MAKING?

- Through the research and verification process with a unique research methodology called Theatre for Development, which involves collection of data using informal interviews, observation and listening. Then plays are developed from the collected information and participatory drama performances carried out. Through out the process of performing the plays, the community members comment on the issues being depicted. As they are in the process of solving the problem featured in the plays, they discover that they are actually solving their own problems. At the end of the day, the community members come up with a plan of action on how they plan to overcome some of the problems. Government Officials also attend the performance to comment on and clarify some policy related issues. Informally the NGO does thus influence or advocate policy as stated by Kanji, et al (2002)
- Through the training of concerned government extension workers and their supervisors on community mobilization methodologies and facilitation skills. The training is over one week and the product is a set of plans of action by the skilled action oriented field workers on how they collaboratively intend to mobilize communities in their working areas. What is very unique with the SMC Conceptual Model is that it does provide an opportunity to develop a plan of action at each and every component.
- Through training of the special groups that are identified by the communities. These are the groups which the communities feel would make an impact on the issue, i.e. the initiation counselors, religious leaders etc.
- Through the sensitization of communities and training of key community target groups such as School Management Committees, Community Leaders and Teachers on their roles and responsibilities. They too develop well thought-out plans of actions which they implement to solve their own problems through the utilization of locally available resources.
- Role Model Initiatives which involve the utilization of those groups or individuals that are performing well to motivate and mobilize those that are lagging behind.
- Mass communication through print electronic media such as radio programs, newspaper articles, banners, T-Shirts, Newsletters, Calendars, information brochures etc. The NGO thus uses media to voice opinions and different issues that arise in the field as a way of advocating change.

- Involvement of various stakeholders and policy makers through regular briefing sessions and stakeholder meetings, inviting them to attend community based activities, quarterly and annual report etc. The NGO is thus able to influence or advocate policy by using the information that it collects from working in the field and from engaging relevant target groups. At such forums the NGO uses donors to leverage support for the policies being advocated
- On going monitoring and assessment being carried out at all levels i.e. by the grassroots themselves, the field extension workers and their supervisors, divisional and regional managers, Ministry Headquarters Officials, External Monitors and Project/CRECCOM Staff. This influences policy as the policy makers see the irrefutable evidence of the program success and are pressurized to develop a policy.

Note:

After the research, training and sensitization stages, a number of initiatives arise that may be termed the indicators of impact which show the social change process that is taking place in communities

7.0 EXAMPLES OF WORK DONE BY COMMUNITIES

The Projects are implemented collaboratively with Key ministries depending on the social issues that are being addressed, i.e. the Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services, field staff and key targets groups that include: - School Committee, Local Leaders, Teachers, Parents and Children. The techniques utilized by CRECCOM empowers these people to raise issues regarding the social issues being tackled e.g. Educational Quality, HIV/AIDS, Natural Resources Management, Child Labour etc, to accept responsibility for achieving quality, for instance, education quality, sustainable natural resources utilization, changed behavior regarding HIV/AIDS, reduced incidences of child labour and to take action using locally available resources. The following are some of the examples of what communities do after being mobilized using the social mobilization campaign conceptual framework.

- ***Cultural***
 - Rescheduling initiation ceremonies to allow the children to attend School
 - Changing initiation curriculum to enable more girls and boys to attend and complete their education
 - Renouncing Chithutu (a social practice which allows two pairs of married couples to befriend each other for mutual support in times of need but the need includes sleeping with each other's wife/husband when the other partner is away).
 - Getting tested for HIV/AIDS in order to know the status thereby prepare for the future.
- ***Social Economic***
 - Fending for poor/orphaned (vulnerable) children through donations, small grants, lobbying etc
 - Opening up Community Based Child Care Centers (CBCC) to take care of the young ones while the older children go to school
 - Opening up gardens to feed the young ones
 - Opening up school Bank Accounts where the school funds and small

- grants are kept.
- **Professional** - Orienting unqualified teachers to appropriate pedagogical practices through school based in-service trainings.
 - Communities assisting in the guidance and counseling of pupils and teaching of life skills like carpentry, building, tailoring etc.
 - Communities lobbying for teachers
 - Teachers implementing creative and innovative methods and practices that make pupils enjoy the school sessions thereby reduce dropouts and increase retention and completion rates.
 - **Physical** - Communities moulding bricks, constructing classrooms blocks, pit latrines, teacher's houses using small grants and locally available resources
 - **Policy-Related** - Community advocating policy change and the government modifying existing policies relative to new/relevant societal values e.g. school calendar, school uniform etc.

OVERALL IMPACT OF THESE BEST PRACTICES

Budgetary Implications: Many stakeholders embarked on revitalizing the school governing bodies and some notable examples of high level of involvement by communities were recorded by some NGOs. This could easily stop the continuous rise in the education budget in basic education as expressed by James and Kakatera, (2000:5).

“Government of Malawi’s main policy is to alleviate poverty with education as its center piece and thus prioritized spending in this sector. Between 1980 and 1990, educational spending in the national recurrent budget averaged 10%. By 1996/7 it had gone up to 26% and 1997/8 it also went up to 28%. During the multiparty era the budget for basic education alone went up from 49% in 1993/4 to 62% in 1997. Basic education is where the communities can have a significant influence in the reduction of budgetary allocations if they fully participated in the Management of schools. For example, 75% of Malawi’s primary schools have been built by community support.”

Just to confirm this, CRECCOM, during the Social Mobilization Campaign for Education Quality, tried to cost community contribution towards improving educational quality and came up with 92,200 Million Kwacha (approximately 1.152 million US Dollars) from the 16 districts they operated in just in one year. This figure could be very high if all communities cost their contribution towards improvement of education quality.

Policy Implications: The government of Malawi is developing policies while taking into consideration the best practices from the projects that are being implemented. For example, in the CIPE project, a holistic approach was utilized whereby it was not only the Ministry of Education that was involved in the improvement of education quality. The Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Community Services, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Forestry, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Local Government were all involved. This approach has been included in the Joint Sector review policy document. Apart from that, a policy has been developed to allow school management committees to have bank accounts so that they can give development funds direct to

schools. This is what CIPE project did. CIPE gave small grants to the schools which the schools utilized in constructing teachers' houses at low cost (for they contributed some other materials and labor). In the Joint sector policy review they have included small grants to cater for such items. Lastly, the Ministry of Education has put community involvement as a priority before undertaking any intervention in improving education quality.

SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT FACILITATE OR HINDER PROGRESS

Gilbert and Tounkana (2000:10) state that community participation in Coate d'Ivoire and Gambia is seriously hampered by poverty, illiteracy, lack of jobs for graduates and ignorance of the concept of free school. In Benin, as reported by Salami and Kpamegan (2000:5), the following factors impede community participation: Economic, Demographic, Socio-cultural, Religious or Institutional.

The other factor worthy of consideration that has been highlighted by other authors like Putnam (2000) and Fukuyama (1999) is **the social capital**. They explain that all forms of traditional culture –social groups like: tribes, clans, village associations, religious sects etc. are based on shared norms to achieve cooperative ends. However, care should be taken so that groups or organizations with high social capital should not work to exclude and subordinate others.

Lastly, it is important to consider the issues of **governance** and how it affects community participation. Community participation has been closely linked with governance. Hyden (1992:188) quotes World Bank as saying

“poor governance which means extensive personalization of power, the denial of fundamental human rights, wider spread corruption and prevalence of unelected and unaccountable government would lead to lack of participation.”

Landell Mills and Serageldin (1991:15-16) mention the following things that foster governance: accountability, freedom of association and participation, sound judicial system, bureaucratic accountability, freedom of information and expression, capacity building and the different roles of external agencies. Since community participation is about empowerment, it should be mentioned that empowerment will not assure better governance unless the responsible public agencies are competent. There is need for technical management and acquisition of skills.

8.0 LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

- a) There is need to define what is meant by community and community participation before embarking on any strategy to involve the people participating in education matters.
- b) A policy aimed at involving community in education matters need to be developed by the government **and** the civil society if meaningful community participation is to be achieved.
- c) Apart from economic and social-cultural factors, social capital and governance do affect community participation hence they seriously need to be looked at critically when making any strategies to enable communities to participate in education matters.

- d) There is need to involve non-governmental organizations who should sensitize, motivate and mobilize all stakeholders, including the School Governing Bodies, on their roles in Education. Such NGOs must be technically equipped for this job.
- e) Social Mobilization Campaigns must utilize very sound methodologies that should include research, training of existing government personnel, mass communication stakeholder involvement and monitoring and evaluation in order to impact or influence policy. Plans should be put in place to support the School Governing Bodies as they involve the communities in education matters.

Conclusion

From the paper, it can be seen that the civil society plays a very significant role in ensuring that school governing bodies encourage communities to participate in the education of their children. However there is need to define what is meant by community and community participation and the areas in which they can participate in order to be able to make realistic evaluations about the functioning of the school governing bodies. The mandates of the school governing bodies must be covered by the policies that are put in place. Organization power relationships and the institutional arrangements must be properly defined. Community participation requires continuous interaction between school governing bodies and other stakeholders. The school governing bodies should be more like facilitators than implementers. The government and non-governmental officials are vital in capacity building for the school governing bodies and the communities. Only best practices which have successfully impacted on local education can make any influence on national policy formulation. Challenges to community participation exist and have to be dealt with carefully.

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