Social Mobilization Campaigns: An Affirmative Strategy for Involving Communities

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Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII) developed and tested an innovative social mobilization process for increasing the awareness and ownership of ideas and practices related to education and other social issues. This campaign strategy employs grassroots level methodologies and person-to-person communication at the community level. The process creates an atmosphere for dialog concerning issues within and among the communities and then mobilizes communities to accept responsibility and take action to address those issues. Key stakeholders and policy makers and shapers are kept informed of the community activities and work to influence policy to impact change. CAII began this process in Malawi to increase girls' access to and participation in formal basic education programs. The success of this strategy led to a similar campaign being used to improve community participation in educational quality and yet another to raise community awareness of strategies to combat the proliferation of HIV/AIDS.

In addition to implementing three successful campaigns utilizing the same methodology, CAII facilitated the start-up and certification of a Malawian NGO, the *Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation* (CRECCOM). As defined in its mission statement, "CRECCOM is an organisation for sensitization, motivation and mobilisation of all Malawian communities for determination and implementation of a community's own development needs, embracing relevant and sustainable attitudinal and behavioral changes." CRECCOM is committed to "effecting change through community involvement" and does so by utilizing the social mobilization conceptual model proven so effective for girls' access and participation, educational quality, and HIV/AIDS awareness. CRECCOM's activities have expanded to include not only health and education sectors, but natural resource management, as well.

The Conceptual Model

The social mobilization conceptual model consists of four key successive reinforcing developmental stages--research and verification, field worker training, community-based sensitization, and village-based initiatives. These are supported by stakeholder involvement, role model initiatives, and mass communication interventions with on-going monitoring and assessment at every stage, all of which lead to the desired outreach and impact of the campaign. This social mobilization process is iterative with each

action contributing to further actions which collectively and synergistically contribute to ever increasing improvements and changes to the issue at hand. While illustrated as distinct component parts, the various initiatives among components are often overlapping in occurrence.
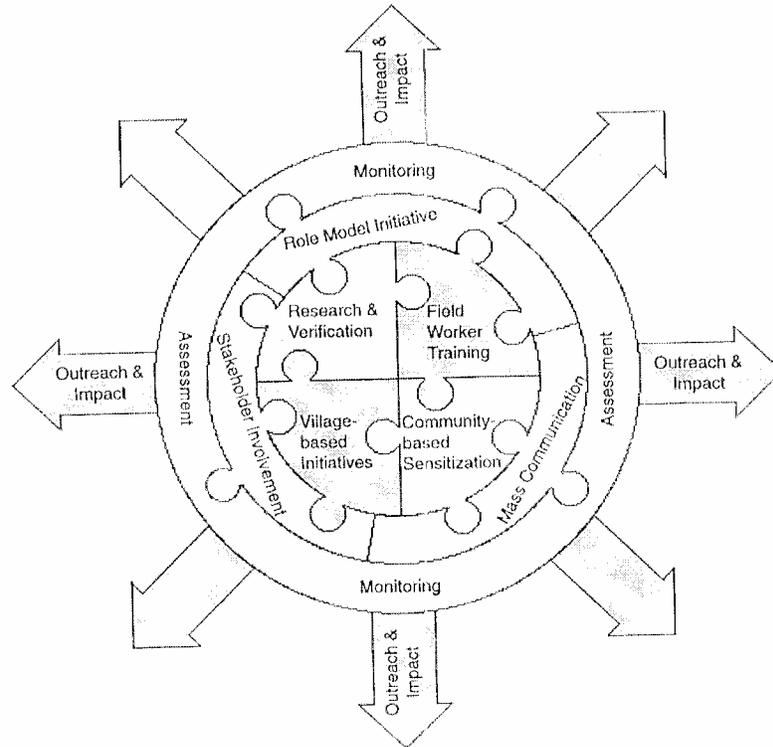
The implementation of the social mobilization conceptual model is done so with adherence to five guiding principles: participation, collaboration, partnership, equity, quality.

- *Participation:* Both as a means and an end, participation ensures that the beneficiaries of any intervention are, as a means, consulted and contributing to a particular development activity, and as an end, reach the point where they (communities and individuals) define and control their own development.

- *Collaboration:* Through multi-sectoral collaboration among Ministries, donors, and local organizations at the national, district, and community levels, leaders must be involved consistently through all phases of the campaign.

- *Partnership:* Whether its partnerships with Ministries, communities, or other NGOs it is important that there is shared recognition for implementation and success, transparency, and joint decision-making.

- *Equity:* "The quality of being just or impartial," equity is at the core of every social mobilization campaign. Success will rest on equity being applied to all dichotomous areas of society--gender, race, class, literacy, and even health status.

- *Quality:* Often used interchangeably with "exceptional," quality must be achieved in all components of a successful campaign.

Some Lessons Learned

Implementing this type of social mobilization campaign led to new lessons being learned nearly every day. Some were obvious lessons while others were surprising, enlightening, and extremely essential to the success of the activities. The following are shared as the most "universal" and in the hope of stimulating dialog about how development issues should be tackled:

- Be flexible and adjust when needed.

- The research component, as action oriented and participatory, cannot be eliminated or ownership is not accepted.

- Mobility and communication are essential to any major field-based project.

- People are receptive to dialog and involvement. They are not receptive to "being told."

- Be non-judgmental when discovering and discussing issues.

- Give praise freely and show an interest and pride in even the smallest of impacts.

- Train field workers from different sectors, and within sectors, together as equals.

- Where possible, work within existing structures.

- Continuous monitoring is essential, at all times, at all levels, by all concerned.

- Transparency and accountability must be established from the very beginning and among all partners.

The most valuable lesson of all has been that the conceptual model works. It has been effective for more than one issue within the education sector and has proven effective when transferred to issues in both health and natural resource management. It is an effective strategy for involving communities and creating powerful partnerships for change.