Community Mobilization in Combating Child labour in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

Community mobilization is undeniably important in the fight against child labour because the efforts require effecting attitudinal and behavioral change. There are several strategies for involving the community such as meetings, focus group discussions, role modeling and joint monitoring. When well implemented, community mobilization breeds community participation and enhances community ownership of initiatives. In order to be successful, community mobilization facilitators need to appreciate that communities differ and that they have their dynamic beliefs and practices, as well as problems and needs.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Child labour wears different facets: economic, health and social. Social and economic spheres are very critical because they touch knowledge, attitude and practices. There are several people who do not know the demarcation between child labour and child work. Many parents have grown up while being involved in child labour. Involvement of children in labour is regarded as part of informal education. Therefore, to win the battle against child labour there is need to address and effect change in the mindset of people. One of strategies for achieving this is Community Mobilization. This paper aims to discuss the importance of Community Mobilization in combating child labour in Malawi in accordance with work done by a local organization, CRECCOM, through projects like: Integrated Child Labour Elimination Programme (ICLEP) with funding from ECLT, Child Labour Elimination Actions for Real Change (CLEAR) with funding from ECLT, and Achieving Reduction Of Child Labor In Support Of Education (ARISE) with funding from JTI through Winrock International. The paper will start with defining Community Mobilization. It will also explain why community mobilization is important in child labour projects, and the Social Mobilization Campaign model which is used by CRECCOM in community mobilization work, and barriers to community mobilization before making conclusions and recommendations.

2. WHAT IS COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION?

Community mobilization has a number of definitions. USAID (USDoHHS, 2001) defines a community as “a group of people that has in common a network of shared interests and concerns, a common symbolic or physical base, an extension beyond the nuclear or extended family membership which is through birth and marriage and also sees itself as distinct in some way from the other similar groups”. To mobilize, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, is a process of organizing a group of people so that they work together and achieve a particular aim. UNAIDS (UNAIDS, 1997) defines it as “a group of people who have something in common and will act together in the common interest.” It is a process through which action is stimulated by a community itself, or by others, that is planned, carried out, and evaluated by a community’s individuals, groups, and organizations on a participatory and sustained basis.

A community becomes mobilized when a particular group of people becomes aware of a shared concern or common need, and decides together to take action in order to create
shared benefits. Therefore, in anti child labour projects there is need to ignite interest in people through awareness-raising and motivational activities, and charge them for action. Awareness-raising means alerting specific groups of people and the public in general about the existence of child labour and the harm it does, as they need to know about child labour, particularly its worst forms and why it is harmful both to children and society as a whole. Awareness-raising is the starting point and keystone if any child labour project is to inform those most closely concerned with the issue and the wider society of the existence and implications of child labour (Winrock International, 2008). Community mobilization is the pivot for a people-centred development process because it encourages better use of own resources, establishing own capacities and willingness to contribute. It makes passive recipients to become active partners in development (IFSP, 2003).

Community mobilization goes beyond a neighbourhood, village or local district level. It is a process of bringing together or empowering members of the community from various sectors to raise awareness on and demand for a particular development programmes. It facilitates change and development taking into account the felt needs of the community. It engages all relevant sectors of a population in a community-wide effort to address an issue. Some of the sectors are opinion leaders, policy makers, Government officials, special groups such as initiation counselors, religious leaders, influential people, and the community members.

A community becomes mobilized when a particular group of people becomes aware of a shared concern or common need, and decides together to take action in order to create shared benefits. This is what is needed in the fight against child labour. If people of different sectors do not appreciate child labour as a concern, and willingly decide to take action, it is difficult to win the fight.

3. WHY COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN CHILD LABOUR PROJECTS?

A mobilized community is a key success factor in combating child labour. Community mobilization:

3.1.1. infuses new energy into child labour elimination through community buy-in and support.

3.1.2. expands the base of participation for the child labour fight, which breeds a true community-based initiative in which local people say “we did it ourselves” thereby creating ownership.

3.1.3. helps a community overcome denial of child labour by influencing their attitudes and behaviour.
3.1.4. promotes local ownership and decision-making about child labour.
3.1.5. encourages collaboration between individuals and organization addressing child labour; and
3.1.6. creates public presence and pressure to change laws, policies and practices – progress that could not be made by just one individual organization working in the area of child labour.

4. SMC METHODOLOGY USED BY CRECCOM

CRECCOM has used and continues to use a very unique, innovative best practice social mobilization campaign (SMC) conceptual model to effect community sensitisation, motivation, mobilization and empowerment towards overcoming child labour. This model is a powerful, effective and flexible community empowerment strategy that has been operational for more than 13 years and has proven applicable on a variety of social issues in terms of changing peoples' knowledge, attitudes and practices towards achieving desired goals and providing the required services as well. The conceptual model is called the Social Mobilization Campaign Conceptual framework that stands out in the entire SADC region. The Model is being adapted in Zambia, Namibia and even Sudan. The model comprises four key components namely: - Research and Verification, Field Worker Training, Community Based Sensitization and Community/Village Based Initiatives, and other support components with include: - Stakeholder Involvement, Role Model Initiatives, Mass Communication Interventions, and an ongoing process of Monitoring and Evaluation. The model can be implemented wholesome or it can be modified so long as it will achieve same results.

Figure 1: SMC Conceptual Model
4.1. Research & Verification

4.1.1. Staff briefing on the project:

It is important to start with staff orientation so that everyone in the implementing institution appreciates what the project is all about and NAP priorities, and policies and laws relating to child labour elimination. This must be done in the first month of project implementation. It is imperative that project people walk their talk.

4.1.2. Introduction and Briefing Meetings

Introductory meetings are aimed at soliciting key stakeholders’ support and are a buy-in process. As such government departments responsible for combating child labour, Members of Parliament, District Councils and traditional structures should be met. Briefings are done with concerned District Heads of Department and Extension Staff because Government plays an active role for sustainability and policy modifications. After being briefed on the project Traditional Authorities (TAs) and Group Village Heads (GVHs) in turn brief their subjects. This sets an impetus of project implementation at the grassroots level.

4.1.3. Theatre for Development (TFD)

Theatre for Development (TFD) assists in examining social (including cultural and traditional), economic, and institutional barriers that shape attitudes and practices embedding child labour in society. When it comes to breaking through issues that are sensitive and hidden, TFD is an ideal and effective tool for information gathering, verification and empowerment on CL issues. The depth of the information collected through TFD is derived from the nature of the information gathering process where TFD researchers are deployed to stay at the village and school sites where TFD activities are conducted. They stay in the same village houses as those of the locals and are involved in the routine household chores of the people and participate in the ceremonial activities in the area such as traditional dances, funeral et cetera. The collected information is later recorded in the night by the action researchers, analyzed and later on processed into drama plays which are performed in a participatory manner on an agreed date with community members.

Throughout the process of performing the plays, community members comment on the issues being depicted in the plays through a process called “opening up”.

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Since the issues and episodes being depicted in the plays are derived from the research findings, the audience discovers that as they are contributing to provide solutions to problems being depicted in the plays, they are actually solving their own problems. Finally, they come up with subjected plans of actions to solve their own problems.

The audience surfaces issues and dialogue among stakeholders ensues. This is evidenced with the fact that various people freely pop into the arena to express their views; fears, aspirations, to condemn, protest against child labour and give solutions. In-depth discussion on child labour and its effects on children and their education contributes to a major transformation of the people’s attitudes leading to formulation of plans of action made by all targeted communities.

The TFD builds on the plans made during sensitization meetings by reviewing the activities and further mobilizing the people for more action.

4.2. Change Agents (Fild Worker) Training Workshop

This component involves capacity building of Government administrators and extension staff from line Government ministries such as: Labour, Education and Gender on community mobilization skills and strategies. The aim of the training is to create a cadre of highly sensitized, motivated and mobilized extension staff and district supervisors equipped with knowledge and skills for empowering key community target groups (community leaders, child labour committees, chiefs, Area Development Committee, Village Development Committee, special cultural groups, ward councillors and Members of Parliament, SMC/PTA, tenants, Farm owners, et cetera) towards eliminating child labour. It helps to produce a caliber of highly
motivated grassroots workers in the fight against child labour, mobilize and equip them for action. The training ends up with an Action Plan comprised of participatory and innovative approaches for various communities.

4.3. Community Based Sensitization

This component involves implementation of plans drawn during field worker training. The rationale is to ensure thorough sensitization, motivation and mobilization of key influential groups in the community towards fighting child labour and equip them with skills to mobilize the other community members. It is aimed at raising awareness and empowering people for action. Activities include sensitization meetings, focus group discussions, formation of child labour committees, identification of mentors and peer groups; and community based training of key target groups who include; school management committees, village heads, initiation counsellors, pupil peer leaders and mentors. Every workshop or meeting should end with an Action Plan whether written or verbal in nature.

This is the stage where field extension workers translate their plans of action into action. Communities and community key target groups are thoroughly sensitized, motivated and mobilized towards engaging in dialogue relating to child work versus child labour, identifying causes of child labour. Community leaders and key target
groups are taught skills of creative engagement of community members into action, and lobbying which are vital to self-sustenance of initiatives by community members. The product of community based sensitizations and mobilization activities are plans of actions produced by community members outlining and detailing the actions that they intend to take towards combating child labour. Various groups: women, men, boys, girls, mother groups, traditional leaders, farm owners, tenants and other community groups are sensitized and mobilized to take a proactive role in ensuring reduction of child labour. The following take place under the community-based sensitizations:

4.3.1.1. Community sensitization meetings
Extension staff conducts the community-based sensitizations.

4.3.1.2. Training child labour committees (CLC)
The committees are formed during sensitization meetings. They comprise community members surrounding. CLCs are empowered to ensure that children are withdrawn from labour and rehabilitated so that their situation does not worsen. They also ensure that children of legal working age, who are working, work under a conducive environment that does not infringe on their rights. CLCs conduct labour inspection and labour laws enforcement activities.

4.3.1.3. Community based workshops
All community leaders, teachers, School Management Committees, and PTAs are thoroughly sensitized and trained on issues of child labour, traditional practices perpetrating child labour, children’s rights, especially rights to education, and relevant policies and legislations. They are mobilized to identify causes of child labour, come up with practical solutions and draw plans of action for solving them, which they implement using locally available resources.

4.3.1.4. Training of mother groups
Mother groups women target girls, with special focus on families affected by child labour. The groups comprise of vigilant and exemplary female community members, who are trained and equipped with mentoring, and gender analysis related to child labour e.g. household division of labour,
household dynamics in female and male-headed households, and within their catchment areas. Each mother group develops actions plans to guide them implement, monitor and evaluate activities.

4.3.1.5. Training of a Special Cultural Group; - Initiation Counsellors

Initiation leaders and counsellors are a special target group that if not targeted, activities of other target groups and efforts to fight child labour would realize minimal achievements. These include initiation counsellors and Gule Wamkulu. Gule Wamkulu performances and initiation ceremonies are greatly valued and shape gender and labour disparities embedded in their attitudes and practices. Gule Wamkulu is changed to advocate for elimination of child labour though promotion of messages in their songs address child labour, gender and HIV/AIDS. Some cultures value initiation rites so much that at ages 9-11 girls and boys undergo initiation rites such as Msondo or, Chiputu and Jando respectively. Males undergo Jando and Gule Wamkulu where among other things issues of life such as marital life, funeral rites are discussed and one is considered a grown-up in society only when they have undergone this rite. Initiation ceremonies are so much greatly valued.

There are a number of child abuse acts during initiation ceremonies and some include: sexual preparation of under-aged girls and boys e.g. sexual oriented songs, dances and teachings regardless of age; commanding the graduate initiate to indulge in first sexual act as cleansing soon after graduation; and initiation counsellors intoxicate themselves during circumcision which causes them to be careless and unhygienic resulting in wounding and infecting the initiates. The Gule Wamkulu has had the audacity to beat up fellow children and even defiling young girls. The psychological disorientation made on the children contribute to child labour in one way or the other, as children drop out of school and end up with other options.

Being custodians of greatly valued cultural customs, initiation counsellors need to be trained on how their institutions should contribute to the elimination of child labour. The purpose is to ensure that they learn and appreciate the causes, perpetrators, effects and impact of child labour and ways to eliminate the practices and mitigate impact of what might
contribute to them; and to discuss ways initiation rites influence or perpetrate child labour and, roles and responsibilities of initiation counsellors in achieving child rights.

It must be noted that training of special groups requires special trainers who have undergone such the rites before. Action plans developed at the end.

4.3.1.6. **Community based workshops for farm owners**

They employ people in their tobacco farms. There is need for farmers to be sensitized to ensure that no child labour takes place in their farms. They need to learn and plan on child labour issues.

4.3.1.7. **Community based workshops for tenants**

Tenancy system is predominant whereby workers are allocated gardens to farm on behalf of the farm owners. To ensure that they complete their farming activities and do other productive labour for their survival, many parent/tenants get their children involved in child labour. They need to be sensitized on child labour and how it can be eliminated within their households.

4.4. **Community based Initiative**

Community-based plans of actions translate into a variety of community-based initiatives. These are basically interventions and activities that community members and target groups (parents, children, out of school and in school youths, women, youth clubs and groups, individuals and influential people, community leaders, child
labour committees, tenants, farm owners, SMCs and PTAs etc) undertake to eliminate child labour. Each of the targeted communities carries out activities that include frequent meetings, sensitization and mitigation activities against child labour, exchange visits, and open days.

4.5. Role Modelling

Role model initiative is a way of encouraging individuals or groups of people that are excelling in fighting child labour to continue while on the other hand motivating those that are lagging behind to learn and follow suit. The individuals or group of individuals are identified by the community or change agents. They are utilized during meetings and open days, exchange visits and through print and electronic media.

4.6. Stakeholder involvement

This aims at ensuring that district level and national level policy makers, Area Development Committees and other stakeholders are informed of the project findings at the community level including those that relate to policies on child labour. Furthermore, the initiative builds mechanisms of ensuring the provision of feedback to community members on issues relating to policy. Stakeholders like District Executive Committee members should be regularly invited to attend and participate in community-based activities.

4.7. Mass Communication

Mass communication interventions facilitate awareness-raising at various levels. It ensures that messages are sent across that aim at changing negative attitudes, beliefs and practices that perpetrate child labour to even those areas that are outside the project impact area. The interventions include print and electronic media.

4.8. Participatory Monitoring

Monitoring of implementation of plans is done at all levels by mentors, community leaders, field workers, district administrators and project officers.

5. BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Community mobilization has its barriers. They include:

5.1. Time and energy expected from community members after being motivated may be higher.
5.2. Rigid pre-set expectations which do not recognize community’s natural rhythms of every day life. Facilitators should be cautious with their expectations.

5.3. Implementers working on the notion of “one size fits all”. It is said that generals are always fighting the previous war, which means that they use the same strategies as before, even if the new battleground is very different. Facilitators should not work on previous projects by trying to apply to a new community all techniques that were judged successful somewhere else.

5.4. Pre-determined lifespan of initiatives through pre-planned project designs which impose without wide participation of community members e.g. specific schedules for case studies and reporting, which can be disrupted by factors like funerals, rains and celebrations.

5.5. Incompetent participation or representation as those involved on behalf of the community do not represent the majority or the minority groups.

5.6. Behavioral and attitudinal change is a process, which sometimes takes long to achieve. Therefore, projects need to be realistically long in order to realize impact.

5.7. People’s morale declines with time because life is dynamic. It is, therefore, important to repeat community mobilization activities after a space of time in order to address emerging issues or projects should build on one another. This is the reason why, although a powerful tool, Theatre for Development can be applied to a community more once in order to surface and challenge the new developments.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community mobilization is very important in child labour projects. As child labour is also a social issue, there is need to effect change in people’s minds. Community mobilization leads to community participation, which breeds an active involvement of people in planning, implementing and monitoring of child labour initiatives for their well being. It allows people to: identify their needs and promote their interests; promote good leadership and democratic decision making; identify specific groups for undertaking specific problems; identify all the available resources in the community; plan the best use of the available resources; and enable the community to better govern itself.

To elicit community participation there is need to assess and know community’s problems and needs; build up rapport with the community; be aware of beliefs and practices prevalent in the community; educate/ mobilize/ organize community members; always listen to community members carefully; avoid improper introduction of new interventions that are contradictory to existing practices and beliefs; assess community
dynamics and adjust in that situation; involve the community right from the beginning in addition to implementation and monitoring of projects; and give respect/importance to negative experience of the community, if any, and try to minimize the negative feeling not only by sharing but also by doing.
7.0 References


