

Chapter 28

Theatre for Development in Africa

Christopher Kamlongera

Various terms are (and can be) used for Theatre for Development (TFD), for example: popular theatre, propaganda theatre, case drama, developmental theatre forum, or sometimes, political theatre. Each of these terms indicates to some extent what this theatre tries to achieve. Theatre for Development is being developed as one way of helping the masses in the developing world to come to terms with their environment and the onus of improving their lot culturally, educationally, politically, economically and socially.

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It is a cliché to say indigenous performances in Africa contain within them some functional element. In most cases this takes the form of a didactic statement. While performers might engage in doing spectacular movements and dances, they also carry within the performances special messages or lessons to some members of their audience. Some work in Theatre for Development is a direct result of recognizing this characteristic in indigenous Africa performances.

Western, “conventional” theatre activities in Africa, initiated by the colonial education systems in a bid to develop the cultural life of the natives in Africa, is another source of theatre for development. While ‘straight drama’ was being taught and encouraged among the natives particularly through schools and colleges, its development was very much pegged to missionary intentions of eradicating pagan behaviour and any uncivil habits evident in their lives. So we find that even the plays that were being developed from folk tales placed heavy emphasis on the moral qualities of the stories.

Drama was not being pursued simply for its own sake, but also as a tool for inculcating behavioural patterns amongst Africans. In other words, drama was being used as a tool for teaching something other than drama itself. The didactic possibilities inherent in the dramatic art form were thus being exploited to the full. It is also from this background that work in Theatre for Development derives its origins. We can therefore say that the development of this theatre is due to three factors:

- » colonial attempts to improve Africans through drama,
- » a recognition on the part of colonialists that some positive aspects of behaviour could be extruded from indigenous performances, and
- » the Africans' own reaction to these colonial attempts at developing their culture.

In 1930 G. A. Stevens reported British attempts to boost 'the aesthetic education of the negro' (Stevens, 1930: 92-93). Developing theatre skills was part of this education. One method employed in order to create this theatre was 'to take a native legend or story with a moral, split up the action into as many as eight or nine different scenes, each dealing with one dramatic moment, and interspersed with considerable knock-about dancing and singing'. It is interesting to note how close this technique is to theatre for development work going on today.

In 1931, Mary Kelly wrote about some experimental work being carried out by missionaries at the Holy Cross Mission, Pondoland (South Africa) (Kelly, 1931: 109-113). Here, these people 'were concerned with the fact that the christianizing of the natives seemed to mean the removal of much of their lowest instincts rather than of any ideal, and they felt that something should be suggested to take their place'. In other words the process of 'Christianizing' was one of deculturizing the African which needed checking without losing the 'civilizing' mission. One way of doing this was to adopt and dramatize local folklore, giving it an obvious Christian story bias.

Earlier at a conference on African Drama held by the 'Village Drama section of the British Drama league' in September 1932, this sort of work was endorsed as one positive way towards developing African drama¹. At this conference "it was decided: (a) That a collection of themes should be made available for the use of native teachers (b) That a report of his conference should be sent to all educationalists in Africa, with a letter asking for their experience in the work, and for any conclusions that they had formed on it". The result of such a resolution was to push theatre work in Africa more directly under the wing of educationalists rather than mere missionaries. It also extended the areas of interest in terms of themes beyond the Bible story.

It should therefore be no wonder to see a report from Kenya in 1933 having nothing to do with 'religious drama', but community development. W. H.

1 "Notes", *Oversea Education*, Volume IV, No. 3, April 1933, pp. 160-161.

Taylor reporting his “observations on the dramatic talent of Africans” spoke of the work which was being carried out at the Jeans School of Kabete (in Kenya) whose task was the harnessing of “the natural dramatic talent of Africans and utilizing it for educational purposes and, finally, developing it in so far as it was amenable to conscious development for purely artistic ends” (Taylor, 1933: 17-20). Here was the first evidence of direct use of a theatre art for purposes other than aesthetic education. For although the religious drama mentioned earlier on seemed to do the same, its exponents talked more in aesthetic language than anything else. The moral tone of their work was always taken for granted. The work at Kabete had nothing to do with morality—in the Christian sense. Taylor continued to say that:

In our first task we were actuated by utilitarian motives, our aim being to use the stage for propaganda purposes. The Jeans teacher, it must be remembered, is more than a supervisor of village schools; he is a man with a new faith and a new ideal centred round ‘Better Homes’, ‘Cleaner Gardens and Plantations’. Various ways of instilling these tenets into the pagan population have been tried by Jeans teachers, but no one way has proved so successful in its practical outcome as the lecture combined with the propaganda play.

In this work technique was ‘crudely’ propagandist. There was no attempt to be subtle about the message. Continuing to describe his work Taylor said:

The moral or points to be emphasized were always placed in a favourable position by the use of characters personifying animals from native lore. If the object of the play was to teach the value of grainstores, it was the clever Hare who profited by its use and Hyena who regretted clinging to the old methods; if we were trying to show the value of good management of a village school, the poor type of teacher was generally represented by the Monkey or Hyena and the better type by the Hare or the Bee. The acting was burlesque in the extreme and often overdone, but the point or points to be stressed were much discussed afterwards and taken to heart.

This work was highly recommended by specialists outside the teaching profession too. Taylor reported that even medical officers and sanitary inspectors in the area commented favourably on the work that his school was doing (ibid.: 18). One point that can easily be ignored in all this work is the emphasis that was being placed upon coaching the native teacher how to handle the drama work among his compatriots. At another conference on native drama held by the British Drama League again in 1933, it was popularly felt amongst those who attended (teachers, missionaries and administrators) that having introduced drama among the natives the next step was:

To ask African teachers to make a selection of the native themes, so that a large amount of African folk-tales should be ready for dramatic use: from which, and simultaneously with which, [...] the African teachers should be

encouraged to make plays with their pupils and the adults of the villages, and that the highly educated African should, wherever possible, see these plays and note the methods and growth².

In another context, and much later, in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) H. H. Ferreira talked about "The Use of Social Case Drama in Training African Social Workers" by the colonial government (Ferreira, 1953: 35-40). Here he spelt out how in Northern Rhodesia they were using the so called 'social case drama' to combat "the problem (...) of conveying technical knowledge and subtleties of "case work" technique to a student body whose education and grasp of English, the language of instruction, was limited; the problem of students failing to grasp abstract ideas".

This work, like that of Taylor, was supplementing lectures and field work. He said that the basis of the work was role play. The technique here was simply to leave the role playing in the hands of the student who played case worker- after he had devised the whole situation together with the various characters he was to be involved with. The playing of the roles was gone into without any rehearsal. The students were just left to play their parts as best as they could. Following this would be a session of criticism from the students on how well the whole case had been handled by the case worker. For Ferreira, this allowed two things: maximum consideration of 'cultural' issues in social work as well as maximum participation from students in the process of learning.

So far we can see how the earlier part of the last century shows a clear emphasis upon propaganda theatre rather than theatre for art's sake that dominated the later half of the century. All educational endeavours during the earlier part of the century were motivated by utilitarian aims. The emphasis in missionary schools was on moral teaching. As time went on and as the idea of developing drama caught on, moves towards using drama for educational purposes became more pronounced. The concept of the Jeans school played a leading role in this development. The areas tackled through this drama ranged from hygiene to modern methods of agriculture. These are areas that still occupy the minds of present day practitioners. There is a re-emergence of this drama on the continent. Why is this so? Let us look at this new phenomenon closely to answer this question.

Rationale

It has been a common view among African (nationalist) intellectuals and politicians that performing arts have always been fulfilling a utilitarian role in the community and that to encourage this serves to forestall nearly lost African heritage:

There are many reasons why our forefathers chose to use songs, dance drums and masks to educate their young, to comment on the socio-politi-

² *Oversea Education*, Volume V, No. 2, January 1934, pp. 125-128. It would be interesting to see what the British Drama League Archives has, particularly in relation to African responses to this call.

cal conditions in their societies and to preserve their historical legends. One of the reasons is that our forefathers realized that one of the most effective methods of education is through audio-visual aids of what was familiar. In other words our forefathers subscribed to the modern education axiom that if he sees and hears he remembers. They also realized that by presenting ideas through a variety of media such as songs, dance, mime, poetic recitals, ordinary narrative and masquerades, one is able to capture the imagination of the people. It was the function of our traditional theatre, not merely to entertain, but also to instruct³.

Talking about the sudden resurgence of this theatre in the third world today, Ross Kidd explains the interest in it as

an outgrowth of uses of rural theatre in the fundamental education campaigns of the '40s and '50s and the search for ways of supplementing the mass media which have been shown to be incapable of affecting change on their own without some intermediary process⁴.

This view is partly supported by David Kerr, who says that popular theatre is being encouraged as a tool for adult education

because of deficiencies in existing educational institutions and communications media which stem from elitism of colonial education and its irrelevance to the goals of national development (Kerr, 1981: 145-155).

Both Ross Kidd and David Kerr relate theatre for development to non-formal education. They also share one philosophical basis in their discussion of this education: a philosophy deriving from the ideas of Paulo Freire. Of his work in Botswana (called *Laedza Batana*) Kidd says it was "a non-formal education project [...] which attempted to follow a Freirean model" (Kidd and Byram, 1981). He goes on to say that "one of the key features of this programme was the use of popular theatre as the medium for encouraging participation, raising issues, fostering discussion and promoting collective action". From Nigeria, in West Africa, Michael Etherton, talking about his work with students of drama at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, among local farmers in a project called *Wason Manoma*, said their intentions in this were to communicate "to rural communities specific development objectives"⁵. The basis of this work was

the realization that the real media for disseminating scientific information helpful to rural African communities are the so-called folk media: masquerades, drumming and dancing, story-telling and the songs of the wandering

3 Mudenda, Hon. E.H.K., Speech at the Official Opening of the *Theatre for Development* Workshop held at Chalimbana In-Service Training Institute on 19 August 1979 (in *Theatre for Development* by Chifunyise, Kerr and Dall), published by I.T.I. (Z) (1978), pp. 4-7.

4 Kidd, R. "Liberation for Domestication" in *Educational Broadcasting International*, p. 3.

5 Etherton, Michael, "Drama for Farmers", *The Times*, London, December 1, 1977.

praises-singers... which make the community development message so immediate and pertinent emphasizing the basic goals of participation and self-reliance.

On a slightly different premise, later on, Etherton and Ngugi wa Thiong'o embarked on developing a theatre which was more directly political in its texture although within the mode of this Theatre for Development. Talking about "Street Theatre in Northern Nigeria", Abah and Etherton lament the dearth of "radical street theatre in contemporary African towns" (Abah and Etherton, 1982: 121). And in trying to meet this need at Ahmadu Bello University, they tried to produce plays relevant to the needs of a neighbouring squalid suburb (ibid.: 5). The idea here was to first awaken the minds of the residents of this place to the need for knowing their rights and demanding fair attention from the government. Etherton says that for this theatre to succeed,

the plays must take the part of the local people. They should reflect life from the viewpoint of the villagers themselves; and they should not avoid articulating criticism of government policy which is inadequate. Thus, although they may initially set out to be less than political in their aims, these plays may end up as the most politically active of all African theatre (Etherton, 1980: 57-85).

Believing that "crisis is the condition of social action in the Third World today", Etherton justifies this theatre by saying it is

a legitimate political objective to discover strategies and organisation skills for functioning politically and creatively within the context of the crisis (Abah and Etherton, 1982: 20).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o talks of the need for bridging the gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. His work in Limuru demonstrates this (ibid.: 16). Working in a voluntary 'adult literacy' project with Ngugi wa Mirri, Ngugi wa Thiong'o saw the need for educating his people beyond the alphabet, to include 'culture'. This way, his people could be made ready for a true 'homecoming' which they still have to achieve when neo-colonialism is out of the way. He argued that colonialism still existed in Kenya in spite of independence. Its life depended on cultural control. Language, being central to culture, any vernacular in Kenya, fell victim to colonial or neo-colonial exploitation. It got suppressed in a variety of ways by the exploiter. He argued that independence in Africa had failed to recognize this fact and consequently it had not achieved its true meaning. Until 'flag' independence was accompanied by cultural independence there would be no 'homecoming' for Africans. African writers could play a part in bringing this about. They could do so by addressing themselves to the majority in a language and style the majority of their people can understand.

This is how his theatre work in Gikuyu came into being. While he shares the ultimate goal of his work with other practitioners of Theatre for

Development, he differs from them in his emphasis on artistry. He insists that whatever he does with his people should be well done, polished and professional. Other practitioners tend to de-emphasize this aspect. The message is all they really care about. However, the goal of both Etherton and Ngugi wa Thiong'o here still remains non-formal education.

The nature of Theatre for Development

In almost all cases where this theatre is in existence, it is led by a team of experts who work with various types of extension workers or 'village level workers' assisting them "to get their health, nutrition, and agricultural messages across to rural villagers using entertainment and fun"⁶. We might add adult literacy campaigns to this list, too. Throughout the continent, we find projects of one type or another engaged in Theatre for Development.

Areas that come under this headline vary from straight drama to songs which are employed in any way as media for communicating ideas related to rural development. The government of Sierra Leone/Care project used 'dramatizations, music and visual aids to bring new information and ideas to the villagers to help them keep healthy and improve their agricultural practices'. *Laedza Batanani* Popular Theatre in Botswana, like Chikwakwa Travelling Theatre of Zambia and the Extension Services Department in Malawi, included puppetry and dance in their work. So we can say that broadly speaking Theatre for Development involves a wide range of resources. Here we are going to isolate a few elements of this theatre in order to illustrate how it is created.

Songs

Usually these are campaign songs, composed and sung by teams of extension workers either alone or together with the people among whom they work. In some cases the songs are recorded on tapes and distributed all over the country for playing through the radio or portable tape recorders during working sessions. Where the latter is the case, the help of properly trained musicians is sought. This was the case in Sierra Leone's project LEARN whose theme song was sung by Big Fayia and the Military Jazz Band. The songs are sung in vernacular languages and usually their tunes are well known adaptations of popular music styles. The guiding principles in composing such songs are:

- » simple catchy tune,
- » simple words and lots of repetition,
- » clear message⁷.

6 Project LEARN, *Instructor's Guide*, Government of Sierra Leone/Care Publication, March 1982, Freetown.

7 Youngman, Frank (1976), *Report on Bosele Tshwarayanang*. Bosele Tshwarayanang Publications, No. 6, University College of Botswana, Institute of Adult Education, 1979, initially published by Kgatleng District Extension Team U.B.S., Botswana Extension College, 1977: 3.

Dances employed in this theatre are those that already possess within themselves abundant mimetic potential, for what actually takes place here is what should properly be termed dance-drama. An example of such dances is Malipenga or *Mganda* found in Tanzania and Zambia⁸. Although it is danced to the accompaniment of songs, the dominant part of the music comes from drums, whistles and gourds that are specially designed to play like some form of trumpet. To the beat of such instruments, dancers mime several scenes in which they can depict whatever message they choose to show. In theatre for development, these messages fall within the total intentions of the project. We have watched school children in Malawi use this dance to give audiences a lesson on childcare.

Puppetry

This usually forms part of mobile information campaigns. Between 1962 and 1990 the Malawi Ministry of Agriculture employed puppetry in its campaigns. The Extension Services section of the Ministry serviced not just Agriculture, but Forestry and Game sections also. They prepared and performed puppet shows up and down the country. The idea in such campaigns usually was to teach modern methods of agriculture as well as forest and game conservation to farmers and villagers in general. In spite of its popularity amongst practitioners, puppetry lost its grip on its adult audiences. It was found to be too childish in some cases, whereas in some places it was found to be culturally not admissible⁹.

The puppetry show took on a simple story line that the audience was supposed to follow without problems. Usually it built on stock characters that could easily be identified. The puppetry employed popular recorded music to go with the show. Very often the show was interspersed with such music and commentary other than the puppets' own dialogue¹⁰. The problems these shows tried to tackle were usually a common phenomenon amongst the audiences, so that no questions about the clarity of the message arose. The setting too was always a direct take-off of everyday life. The drama in these was almost always sustained by quarrels between characters who stood for opposing points of view in the story. The stories were mostly built around imagery from local folklore sources.

Drama

This is the most extensively used of the art forms of the lot said to come under Theatre for Development. The work in drama varies from plays performed for vil-

⁸ Ibid.: p. 17. Also see T.O. Ranger's *Dance and Society in East Africa*.

⁹ Personal communication with the Chief Extension Officer, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi, 1981.

¹⁰ Youngman, op. cit., p. 15.

lagers by outside groups to those created and performed by the villagers themselves. As the Sierra Leone experience shows:

These dramas feature the adventures of a typical village farm family. In each story a situation is presented that a villager might encounter. Some of the dramas show that the problem might be solved, while others are left unresolved to encourage the listeners or audience to work out their own solutions. Each drama is in the vernacular languages of the people in which the project is presently being implemented¹¹.

This work is presented as radio drama as well as stage presentation. The aspect of how 'the problem presented might be solved' in work, like that of *Laedza Batanai* Popular Theatre in Botswana, sometimes becomes the king pin of all work in Theatre for Development. This is particularly so where it is felt, by the organizers, that there is "low community participation and indifference to government development efforts in the area" (Kidd and Byram, 1981: 1). In such a situation, rather than solve problems, the drama is supposed to be thought provoking.

All this work is improvised. Teams of extension workers and sometimes students collect problems prevalent in particular areas of campaigns. Using these as themes they develop improvised dramas that are rehearsed very briefly and quickly before presentation. This technique has its own flaws, especially where aesthetics are concerned. There is not enough time and thought given to the format of the presentation and styles of acting. The idea in most projects is to minimize theatricality as much as possible, so that everybody attending the project can participate without feeling inferior to another person. The over-all aim is, as we have said already, "to increase participation of community members in development projects by involving them in the planning and running of the theatre programme" (ibid.: 11). But to limit this theatre to such intentions also suggests that it has no future. More important are perhaps the implications such a fast growing and widely used theatre has for theatre *per se*.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work, which seems to be the only one of its type, to care about proper theatrics, started from a script written by one author who presented it to the masses to re-write and direct *en masse*¹². Talking about how *I will marry when I want* (1981) was a product of his work in Limuru, he says, he was commissioned by the adult literacy organizers to script a play as a supplement to the straight teaching that was going on at the centre. What they had in mind, was a script for 'modern' theatre, but in the vernacular. Artistic intentions were to be primary. When he presented the script to the centre and was made to produce it, the students (adult literacy classes) at the centre were more than willing to participate. Rehearsals were open to the whole group of students there—even if they were not participating in the play. Directing was helped by a good

11 Project LEARN, op. cit.

12 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, talk on "Modern Writing in Africa" at the College of Adult Education, All Saints, Manchester, June 1982.

444 | deal of comments from the entire public watching the rehearsals. A direct result of this was that several criticisms and alterations were made to the script. This was in terms of language as well as plot and theme. What ultimately came out (as claimed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o) was the people's own play.

The success of such work goes beyond mere numbers of people who saw the performance. Ngugi says that after the production he noticed how people came together to share ideas; families that were disintegrating became reconciled and wanted to confer amongst themselves before decisions on projects were made¹³. For the writer, the whole experience revealed a new dimension to the relationship between the writer and his readers or audience.

Returning from detention, Ngugi wa Thiong'o could not resist the temptation of producing another play. This time it was a musical, *Mother, Cry for Me* (1982). The play was banned in rehearsal. Why was Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work thwarted by the Kenyan authorities? They regarded it as political agitation.

In Malawi, Theatre for Development work has been firmly established now as a key tool in the mobilization of communities towards their development. Let us turn to two examples of this work to demonstrate how this works. The two examples are drawn from the work of (a) the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Malawi Government's Liwonde Agricultural Development Division on primary health care and (b) USAID and the Government of Malawi on Girl's Attainment in Basic literacy and Education (GABLE).

Theatre for Development and community mobilization in practice

Work in community mobilization rests on the premise that the most important element in rural development and poverty reduction is community participation. Community participation here means the involvement of the community in making their own decisions and taking their own actions aimed at improving their lot. Theatre for Development has been enlisted by many development projects in this kind of work. It has been employed as a research tool for getting to know a community before actually settling in with a project. At other times it has been used as a way of creating awareness about development issues and engaging the community in a dialogue. Some times Theatre for Development has been employed as a way of mobilizing communities to rally behind some development activities and carry out related activities. It has also been used in evaluation of projects that has been done in a participatory manner. Let us look at some concrete examples of such work.

Mobilizing rural communities for primary health care in Malawi

In the late 1980s, the Malawi Government, with GTZ assistance, initiated a Primary Health Care (PHC) system in the south-eastern part of the country under one of its agricultural development divisions (Liwonde Agricultural Development

¹³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o., op. cit., talk at Manchester.

Division). This PHC approach was based on the belief that western styled health facilities by themselves may not necessarily result in improved health conditions for the people of the area. The people had to be motivated to help themselves in health matters. This was done through dissemination of health information and education in a culturally accepted manner at the community level.

Ordinarily, provision of health education and information in Malawi is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Other non-governmental organisations in the field of health work hand in hand with the Ministry in the provision of these services. Major tools for the health education and information dissemination are publications (booklets, magazines, leaflets, posters and flip-charts) and radio programmes written and presented either in English (the official government language) or Chichewa (the national language). Most of these publications carry information on how to prevent diseases like AIDS, malaria, measles, tuberculosis, leprosy, cholera, diarrhoea and many other common communicable diseases.

To fully utilise these outlets one has to be literate or rich enough to own a radio. Unfortunately, Malawi at the time of this intervention had very high illiteracy rates, and very few people in the country had access to the radio (National Statistical Office, 1991). This implied that health radio broadcasts meant for rural communities were not being accessed by the intended audiences. Being aware of these impediments, the Primary Health Care team of Liwonde Agricultural Development Division worked out an alternative method for reaching and mobilizing the community.

The guiding principles for introducing primary health care in this area were:

- » starting with people's concerns and priorities;
- » recognising people's motivation and participation as the basis of all work;
- » avoiding imposition of ideas from the top and strengthening grass-roots involvement;
- » involvement of people from other ministries.

Recognising that most primary health care activities suffer from lack of involvement of communities in the early stages of planning, the PHC team chose to work with the Chancellor College Theatre for Development team (University of Malawi) as a tool for engaging the communities as early as possible through theatre activities. Theatre for Development (TFD) was used to probe, stimulate and tease out ideas from the community (Kalipeni and Kamlongera, 1996).

The organisational structure of the PHC team comprised three groups, namely; the community; Liwonde ADD Primary Health Care team; the Theatre for Development team.

These teams interacted as equals and could work independent of each other. The community was made up of people from villages that were neighbours and coming under one traditional authority. They also shared cultural values and language(s). The community's task was to provide reports on

446 | health issues and to seek advice from the PHC team. At the same time, they were to provide feedback to the TFD team after conducting self evaluation. The PHC team was made up of a medical doctor and some public health workers. These people were supported by colleagues from other ministries in the Liwonde Agricultural Development Division. The role of the PHC team was to provide technical manpower to train and motivate local PHC workers as well as give PHC support services. The team also liaised with the TFD team on how best to motivate the communities. The TFD's primary task was to motivate the community to identify their own health and organisational problems through open and participatory plays.

The structure just described fitted into an already existing national development tradition of self-help projects. This tradition thrived on the ability of the one party regime (at the time) to bring together traditional leaders and party authorities to create Area Action Committees. These served as a tool for generating community resources, mobilising labour and materials for development projects and a channel of communication on official, political and developmental issues.

Utilising this already wellknown organisational structure, the PHC team advised communities to elect their own village health committees. In some villages, communities already had committees. Most of these were dominated by men. Even where elections were just being held, the tendency was to elect men into key offices. However, through TFD, open and candid discussions were held –on who really played a critical role when it came to matters of primary health care. In most cases where men had been elected into key positions, they offered to step down as they admitted they would not be able to fulfil the task as they were likely to be away from the village most of the time. They also admitted that most of the concerns being addressed at the time related to young children who would still be in the direct care of mothers. So, they felt it would not be fair to dominate the village health committees when their role was marginal.

The starting point for the community mobilisation work was collection of health data for the communities and their area from various sources, like hospital records, national statistics, research reports and journal articles, by the PHC team. Information so gathered provided a synopsis of the situation of health care in the area. This information was shared with the TFD team before it set out for the villages. The information also provided some benchmark for future assessment of the impact of the mobilization work.

Entry into the villages was spearheaded by the Theatre for Development team. The team entered a village through the local authority structures in place. Once in the village, the TFD joined in the daily life of the community. They participated in their joys and sorrows as would be done by any member of that community. This is the way they gathered information for their dramas. The first activity undertaken by the theatre team was to find out

from the community what it thought about its primary health care status. Information gathered earlier by the PHC team provided a spring board for the TFD team's investigations. The team gathered as much as possible information about the culture of the community. They also got information on preferred and used communication networks. This information was put alongside that gathered by the PHC team.

The TFD team created plays and songs based on this combined information. The team then rehearsed and performed the plays at venues that were traditionally used by the community itself whenever they were holding ceremonies or festivals of one kind or another in the village.

Acting in the performance encouraged participation of audiences in the dialogue going on between actors. This was factored into the performance through a technique referred to as "opening up the play". This was a way of asking direct questions to the audience at critical points of the story line in the play and then incorporating responses as the actors returned to the plot. Through this theatre activity a bigger picture of the community's health status emerged. Dialogue about this picture involved everybody in the community. Because of the "play" nature of drama, anybody present at performances felt free to comment and contribute to the dialogue that was developing about primary health care in the community. This dialogue continued even after performances to become everyday conversation on everybody's lips. These dialogues led to communities seeking ways through which they could solve their primary health care problems. Much as the concept had been mooted at the Liwonde Agricultural Development Division, the communities took over the process of solving their problems. They owned the problem and started looking for ways of improving the situation. This included reorganising themselves and creating village health committees.

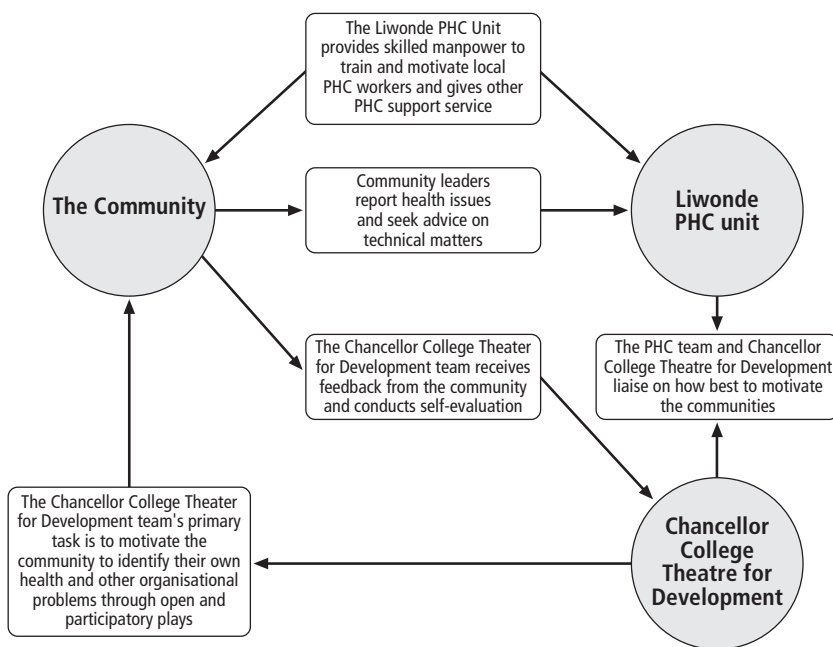
After one year of reorganising and setting up Village Health Committees in the selected villages, evidence of self-propelled activity could be seen. As a matter of fact, some of them won a WHO sponsored "Clean Village" award for two years running. Records on water and sanitation for the area showed an increase in numbers of hand-dug wells and latrines. On maternal care, some traditional birth attendants were selected by the villages to be trained to provide basic antenatal care including iron supplementation, malaria treatment and high risk screening. Some "community doctors" were selected and trained to diagnose common conditions and administer basic medication. The "community doctors" started to collaborate with the traditional attendants on certain issues such as immunisation of children. All these were working on a voluntary basis (Kalipeni and Kamlongera, 1996).

Neighbouring villages were requesting the PHC team to start similar activities in their own villages. The village-based service providers were attending to more than just their villages. Their services were in demand in other villages too. One could argue that this community had been successfully mobi-

448 | lized to set up a primary health care system. A lesson or two might be learnt from this experience.

Community mobilization work just described was well within government attempts to improve health services in the country. It was within policies of the Ministry of Health, otherwise approval for the approach would not have been granted. The macro-policy environment was also right for the exercise to be fulfilled. This was an environment that encouraged an integrated approach to rural development. Government ministries worked together and supported each other in their work.

The PHC team respected the communities they worked with. They did not temper with the socio-cultural set up of the community. Where there was a need to change ways of doing things, it was left to the community to come to such a conclusion. Even with TFD facilitation, the community's communication networks were not disturbed. What were strengthened were links between the community and the other two components, i.e. TFD and PHC teams. The PHC mobilization work can be describes as follows (Kalipeni and Kamlongera, 1996).



Experiences of the Primary Health Care initiative in Liwonde spurred the Theatre for Development team on to lending their skills to other initiatives. One such initiative was a social mobilisation campaign on girls education in Malawi. An examination of this campaign shows another dimension of what community mobilisation can be.

GABLE SMC

The GABLE Social Mobilization Campaign (GABLE SMC) was a Government of Malawi Project, funded by USAID and contracted to Creative Associates International Inc. (CAII, Rehani). The main objective of the project was to “increase peoples’ awareness of the positive effects of girls’ education on individuals, families, communities, and nations” and in so doing, change attitudes about the importance of girls’ primary education.

To achieve this objective, the project employed what it referred to as “a grassroots outreach approach to message dissemination and community mobilisation” (CAII, Rihani). The GABLE project involved (a) project personnel, (b) University of Malawi’s Chancellor College (TFD) students, (c) Ministry of Women’s and Children’s Affairs, Community Development and Social Welfare, and (d) Ministry of Education and Culture. Since the project aimed to work with communities directly, field officers from the two ministries involved were seen as the gateway to the communities. It was therefore necessary to make sure that everybody understood what the project was all about and how it was to work. This work won the FAWE award for coming up with an innovative way in encouraging girls’ education in Africa (CAII, Rihani).

The process being described here was first piloted in one district whose statistics on girl child enrolment in primary school were among the lowest in the country. Experiences of this pilot social mobilization campaign convinced the GABLE team that they could go full throttle throughout the country albeit piecemeal. After the pilot, the team understood what worked and what did not. Initial forays into distant districts from the pilot one showed how different cultures responded to sending the girl child to school, and so prepared the GABLE SMC team on how to deal with different situations. The process being described below was streamlined after some experiences of working up and down the country.

Stage one: situation analysis

The GABLE SMC covered the entire country of Malawi. It attempted to reach all corners of the country. In each district the GABLE team started by contacting district commissioners (who are in essence government heads in a district), a district education officer, a district community development officer and all traditional authorities. This contact was through a meeting during which the GABLE team collected information with which to develop a situation analysis of girls education. Apart from this, the meeting also served to familiarize the district authorities with the goals of the project.

Stage two: site selection

While getting a situation analysis of girls education (through socio-cultural, economic and the general educational make-up of the district) from government

450 | officials, the GABLE SMC staff also gathered data from other sources. The information helped the GABLE team to select sites for their intervention. The criteria for selecting a site were:

- » balanced scattering of site in a district;
- » targeting site with diverse cultural, religious and economic conditions;
- » populations with unique feature like sparsity or density;
- » areas with particular difficulties in getting and retaining girls in school up to end of primary education.

Stage three: participatory research

After selecting sites to work in, in a district, the GABLE team, comprising some GABLE field officers and TFD members, went out to start work in the field. The TFD team members formed the core of the research team. GABLE SMC says that

The team of researchers/performers was made up of fifty students; twenty-five men and twenty-five women (representing) nearly every district and language group in the country and were studying a variety of subject areas at the college (CAII, Rihani).

Prior notice would have been given to the traditional authority of a particular site of the forthcoming visit (lasting 5 to 10 days), through government extension/development workers in the area. So, before doing anything in the village, the team went to the traditional authority to announce their arrival. The chief welcomed them and organised accommodation for them wherever he could. Otherwise, the team arranged their own accommodation within the site. The idea was for the team to become part of the village community as much as possible. The purpose of the visit was to triangulate the situation analysis developed out of prior meetings with government officials and traditional authorities at the beginning.

Stage four: field worker training

Field workers from the two ministries involved were to become facilitators of activities in the villages selected for the campaign. GABLE felt it was necessary to train and prepare them for this task. So, special field worker training was organised. The objective was to create a cadre of knowledgeable, skilled, action-oriented facilitators.

The training included a look at the GABLE SMC field methodology and the role the field workers were going to play in the project implementation. To come up with a workable curriculum, GABLE SMC carried out a training needs assessment. The findings from this assessment suggested that field workers needed more exposure to participatory methods and communication skills ideal for development work.

Stage five: community-based sensitisation

While at the beginning communities were brought into the GABLE project through the TFD and GABLE SMC staff, field workers from the two ministries taking part in the project took over working with communities as soon as they were trained. A key element in the community-based sensitization was the way field workers involved communities by identifying some key members (people who held positions of respect and authority) and training them on GABLE SMC goals and activities, and preparing them to take over the sensitization activities in the villages.

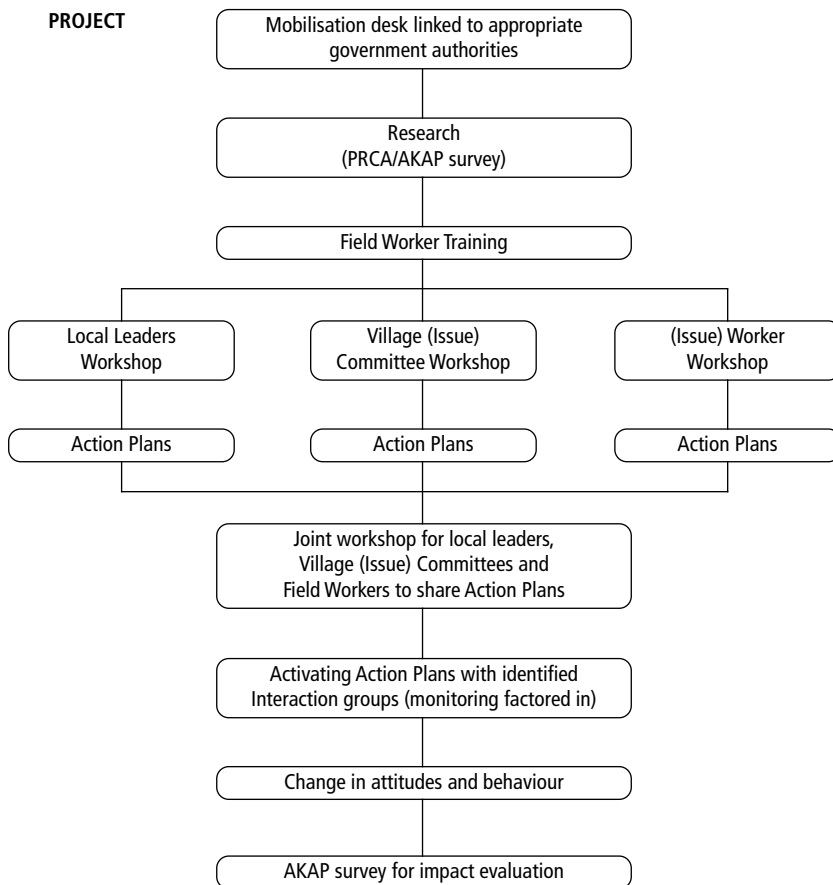
The training workshops culminated in the production of action plans that informed further activities to be carried out by the villagers themselves at village level. Monitoring was factored into the community-based sensitization through the field workers and the leaders of the community. Once an action plan had been agreed on, field workers from the area monitored progress. Leaders of the community did the same at the community level. This transfer of responsibilities to the villagers helped to establish ownership of the project among them and set the stage for more of their involvement in the GABLE SMC activities.

Stage six: village-based initiatives

Village-based initiatives grew out of action plans drawn during the community-based sensitization workshops. During the training of community leaders, it was agreed that all of them from a particular area meet to revisit their action plans and make sure that they were not overlapping, or unrealistic in terms of what they expected from the communities. A key product of these meetings was a schedule of meetings with the community during which the community would be informed about the GABLE SMC project and asked to discuss the issue of girls' education. While field workers and school teachers would be invited to attend these meetings, they were not there to participate. The meetings were being facilitated by the community leaders. The idea was to allow maximum freedom to the community to identify and discuss local constraints to girls' education and to brainstorm possible solutions to the constraints. It was during these meetings that concrete action was being suggested and workable schedules of activities agreed upon.

From the GABLE SMC work we suggest a slightly more elaborate model than the one developed out of the PHC work in the Liwonde ADD.

PROJECT



In this model, the PRCA stands for Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal, while AKAP survey stands for a survey of levels of awareness, knowledge, attitude and practices. The instrument for the survey is to be developed out of the PRCA findings (Anyaebugnam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 1998). The results of this survey are to add a quantitative aspect to the qualitative PRCA findings as well as provide a benchmark for the final impact evaluation. The PRCA is supposed to involve communities in identifying possible problems and solutions as well as local communication networks that should inform any communication strategy to be developed in mobilizing the community. This work is to be carried out by the TFD team and the community. The final AKAP survey is to be based on the instrument used during the first survey. The workshops for community members and field workers are stages 4 and 5 in the description above. The impact evaluation should combine PRCA and a final survey based on the benchmark set at the beginning.