



Project sustainability through social marketing

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WHILST 'SUSTAINABILITY' HAS become accepted as a key concept in development initiatives, examples of its achievement are difficult to find. This paper considers some of the advice social marketing has to offer.

What is Social marketing?

Social marketing was "born" as a discipline in the 1970s, when Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman realised that the same marketing principles that were being used to sell products to consumers could be used to "sell" ideas, attitudes and behaviours. Its originators define social marketing as "the design, implementation and control of programs aimed at increasing the acceptability of a social idea or practice in one or more group of target adopters" (Kotler & Zaltman (1971) in (Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFS), 2000).

Social marketing differs from other areas of marketing only with respect to the objectives of the marketer and his or her organisation. Social marketing seeks to influence social behaviours to benefit, primarily, the target audience and the general society. This technique has been used extensively in international health programs, especially for promoting contraceptives and oral rehydration therapy (ORT), as well as currently in the United States to address a wide variety of issues, such as organ donation, drug abuse, high blood pressure, and family planning (Kotler and Andreason 1996).

What can social marketing achieve?*

In Honduras, deaths due to diarrhoea decreased almost 50% following a programme to educate mothers about the use of ORT

Over six months of hygiene promotion in Lucknow, India, the proportion of mothers washing their hands with soap after defecation went from under a quarter to over a half

44% of men in Bangladesh discussed family planning with their wives within 12 months of campaign launch.
Contraceptive prevalence increased by 10%

*Mehra 1997 in DfID (1998, p203)

Social marketing could be said to be more complex than commercial marketing as it often includes creating demand for products with a tangible base, such as the latrine structure, as well as for the associated concept of the safe

disposal of faeces. Commercial marketing, in contrast, tries to convince consumers that a certain brand of toothpaste is superior, for instance, rather than that it is important to brush teeth regularly.

Researching people's needs and aspirations is of primary importance

Rather than dictating the way that information is to be conveyed from the top-down, public health professionals are learning to listen to the needs and desires of the target audience themselves, and building the programme from there. This focus on the "consumer" involves in-depth research and constant re-evaluation of every aspect of the program. In fact, research and evaluation together form the very cornerstone of the social marketing process (Weinreich 1999).

Example of a possible Marketing Mix Strategy

The planning process takes this consumer focus into account by addressing the elements of the commercial 'marketing mix'. This refers to decisions about the conception of a Product, Price, distribution (Place), and Promotion. These are often called the "Four Ps" of marketing.

The marketing mix strategy for a sanitation promotion campaign might include the following elements:

The **product**, or a continuum of products could be tangible or intangible (a behaviour): a particular design of household latrine, the safe disposal of infant faeces, and keeping the latrine clean and in good repair. In order to have a viable product, people must first perceive that they have a genuine problem, and that the product offering is a good solution for that problem. The role of research here is to discover the consumers' perceptions of the problem and the product, and to determine how important they feel it is to take action against that problem, as opposed to other developmental needs.

The **price** of engaging in these behaviours includes the monetary/material costs of the household contribution towards the latrine construction, latrine cleaning materials and a potty. Time spent is part of the price, and includes attending project meetings, applying for the subsidy, doing the cleaning and maintenance, carrying the infant faeces to the toilet etc.

The **place** that the latrine may be applied for or the behaviour promoted could be at monthly community meet-

ings, and at the clinic to achieve accessibility of the offering and quality of the service delivery. Or bring a mobile project office to the pension queue points. By determining the activities and habits of the target audience, as well as their experience and satisfaction with any existing delivery system, researchers can pinpoint the most ideal means of distribution for the offering.

The **promotion** could be done through house-to-house visits by existing village health workers, and the performance of sketches and songs at community events. The focus is on creating and sustaining demand for the product. Research is crucial to determine the most effective and efficient vehicles to reach the target audience and increase demand.

Social marketing adds some P's of it's own:

Partnerships could be cultivated with the local political and religious leaders, clinic staff, traditional healers, school-teachers, and manufacturers of latrine materials, disinfectants or potties, women's groups, or schools, depending on the target audience. A situational analysis in the community should include the identification of other organisations or individuals that have similar objectives and agree ways to work together for the duration of the project and to sustain the initiative afterwards. Involvement of the regional government departments of Health and Education will help sustain the efforts of their staff in the project community, and even broaden the base of the initiative. To develop private enterprise from within the community to deliver and promote water services is a neglected option in South Africa.

One of the constraints identified by a UNICEF project in Burkino Faso¹ included, the time it took to identify and formalise new forms of collaboration between the key stakeholders/partners, and the departure and change of personnel at different levels.

The **policy** aspects of the campaign might focus on retaining the government subsidy for the latrine, 'free' water, or for the owners granted new plots in the community to be required by their leaders to build a latrine. Social marketing programs can do well in motivating individual behaviour change, but that is difficult to sustain unless the environment they're in supports that change for the long run. Often, policy change is needed, and media advocacy programs can be an effective complement to a social marketing programme.

Each element of the marketing mix should be taken into consideration as the program is developed, for they are the core of the marketing effort. Research is used to elucidate and shape the final product, price, place, promotion and related decisions.

Ethics of social marketing

The ethical component of social marketing should help distinguish it from other forms of marketing. To offer

'excessive incentives' might also be ethically suspect and counterproductive to sustainable behaviour change. Is it ethical to 'sell' communal reticulation alone when a community has good seasonal rainwater?

Although in the end the results of the programme or project is what it is judged by, the means to that end are just as important. Beware that any project has the potential to do harm as well as good. Possible negative effects of the project should be explored with the target population during the initial formative research.

Key elements of social marketing that could help sustain a project:

Credibility of the Implementers in the project community

Demonstrate genuine interest and respect for the community. Careful research of the issues of interest, a creative presentation you can be proud of, and to have all the key players at project meetings is key. A hard honest look at the budget, particularly in relation to keeping professional fees 'reasonable' will earn credibility.

An intimate personal knowledge of the target audience is necessary in order to make a meaningful impact. Members of the community should analyse their situation and identify the problems to be addressed "or there will be complaints from the people that you don't know what you're doing" (Osinubi in Earle, p138) 2000).

Great importance is attached to the selection of promoters, multipliers, and advisors (with regard to personality, ability to empathise, social esteem, age and sex, and so on) as well as to their training.

Clear strategies

"Vague strategies inhibit. Precise strategies liberate" (Berry in Earle 2000, p28)

From clear strategies flow clear objectives, and a principle message.

The starting point of social marketing, therefore, is getting to know the target audience thoroughly through market research: its social and demographic makeup (economic status, education, age structure, and so on), its psychosocial features (attitudes, motivations, values, behavioural patterns), and its needs.

Segment your audience

Good marketers know that there is no such thing as selling to the general public. Men and women, adults and teenagers respond differently to particular approaches. To be most effective, you need to segment your target audiences into groups that are as similar to each other as possible and to create messages specifically for each segment. Typical attributes for segmentation include sex, age, geographical location and race/ethnicity.

Any one of the organisations involved in water and sanitation service provision will have to market their services in ways suited to a non-profit organisation may

have several audiences it needs to address: its “customers,” its donors, the media, policymakers and the board of directors. Each of these groups requires its own marketing strategy as they all have their own ‘agendas’ of what they are trying to achieve.

Position your product

In social marketing, products are often hard to promote because of their high “price.” Products like behaviours and attitudes require long-term commitments and do not sell as easily as a bar of soap or a car.

The product positioning determines how the people in the target audience think about the product as compared to the competition. Just as various cigarette brands bill themselves as the freshest, the most fun, the most athletic, the least expensive, the classiest, or the most feminine, a particular sort of latrine or a different water source for drinking, needs to be positioned in relation to the researched alternatives and existing practices. An understanding of the perceived benefits and limitations of existing water sources or faecal disposal practices is essential for product design and positioning.

For example, women may feel that a toilet will allow them privacy and increased personal safety, compared with using the communal defecation areas. They may also think that it will be dangerous for children to use and require expensive disinfectants to clean. In this case, a program could either promote or reinforce the positive aspects of a household latrine, and/ or discuss ways to get around the barriers.

Know your competition

One product’s competition may be that of another product, such as chips versus fruit, or it may be non-performance of the behaviour being promoted. Inaction is nearly always easier than adopting a new behaviour. For example, the construction, use and maintenance of the latrine must be made more attractive than adopting or continuing the alternatives.

Familiarity with the work done by other organisations in the sector may affect how the message is portrayed. Involvement in sectoral forums where there is discussion of methods and methodologies can form core practice norms of behaviour and practice amongst sectoral role-players.

Test, test, test

All of the products, promotional materials, and services developed for the programme should be tested with your target audience to gauge their potential effectiveness. Social marketing recognises that the customers or target audience are the experts on what works best for them. A bi-product of years of apartheid could make a cultural error a cause for deep mistrust of or even opposition to the whole project. Take the time to do it right.

Utilise a variety of approaches

Social marketing programs use a combination of mass media, community, small group and individual activities.

When a simple, clear message is repeated in many places and formats throughout the community, it is more likely to be seen and remembered. Do not rely on the few individuals in one meeting or workshop to ‘cascade’ the message to the rest of the community effectively. The variety of approaches used will depend on the programme’s budget and what will be most effective with the target audience.

Social marketing advocates that the variety of approaches should have a common “look” and/or slogan, so that people will realise all the messages are from the one organisation. Consistency and continuity are key to a successful campaign.

A restriction in the way social marketing could utilise the economies of an ‘area approach’ for water & sanitation promotion is the tendency to fund individual villages or communities within an area, selected on the basis of donor criteria, rather than market to all communities in a wider area.

To move from contemplation to action, messages should promote the benefits of performing the behaviour and minimise the perceived costs. The behaviour should be portrayed as something that many other people do and agree with; skill-building messages and demonstrations of the behaviour by others similar to themselves will help them move to action. This is another reason why new projects could be more successful if they are neighbours to communities who have also been involved in water and sanitation promotion.

Once they have tried the new behaviour, the last and often most difficult stage is to maintain it. Motivational and reinforcing messages are necessary to prevent relapse. Yet this is what is frequently missing from project programmes. It is essential to have community partners who can do this.

Earned media

Harness the positive feeling for the project to earn some free media coverage for advocacy and/or promotional purposes.

Compliment, don’t replicate

Research what has been done to address the health issue in the past. Avoid duplicating the established roles of existing community personnel such as the established health workers. Female volunteers with visual reminder sheets in Burkino Faso were used as channels of communication. “In an urban setting it is difficult to maintain volunteer motivation, particularly after the project funders withdraw, thus the role of the *Responsibles Saniya* was reviewed and their integration with local health centre considered. Their numbers will be reduced and a remuneration will be provided by the health center operating within the Bamako Initiative” Unicef BurkinoFaso

See what you can do better next time

The cornerstone of social marketing is evaluation, that is, determining what you accomplished so you can use that information to improve your program. Evaluation occurs

throughout the social marketing process. By spending time to monitor and evaluate the answers to these questions will allow opportunity for crucial adjustments to the message and product while there is the opportunity to do so.

At whatever level the evaluation is performed, the information gained should be shared and used to improve the sustainability of projects in the future.

“What we know, or can remember, is largely what we have experienced and shared with other people” (Edwards & Middleton 1986, p423)

Conclusion

The principles of social marketing highlight a number of general shortcomings of water and sanitation project implementation in South Africa:

- Insufficient market research of community characteristics, needs and aspirations to inform the ingredients of the social marketing mix;
- The social marketing mix of: product, price, place (distribution), promotion, partnerships and policy illustrate the interdependence of these aspects of project implementation. The failure of one, or of project momentum, will reduce the success of all;
- No clear, integrated strategies for sustainability. What is expected to happen after the funded project phase ends? For example, the single community focus of projects fails to establish effective support of, say, the regional government departments of Health and Education to enable the clinic staff and teachers to continue the promotion.

- The need for constant re-evaluation of every aspect of the programme, to learn from mistakes, and to share those lessons.

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