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**Project in Development and the Environment**

## **Beyond Public Awareness: Introducing Social Marketing to Environmental Programs**

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The objective of the Project in Development and the Environment (PRIDE) is to help the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) design and implement programs that foster the agency's environmental and natural resources strategy for sustainable economic growth in the Near East and Eastern Europe.

PRIDE provides AID and participating countries with advisory assistance, training, and information services in four program areas: (1) strategic planning, (2) environmental policy analysis, (3) private sector initiatives, and (4) environmental information, education, communication, and institutional strengthening.

The project is being implemented by a consortium selected through open competition in 1991. Chemonics International is the prime contractor; subcontractors include RCG/Hagler, Bailly, Inc.; Science Applications International Corporation; Capital Systems Group, Inc.; Environomics, Inc.; Industrial Economics, Inc.; Lincoln University; and Resource Management International, Inc. In addition, AID has entered into a cooperative agreement with the World Environment Center to support implementation of PRIDE.

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## A. Introduction

The mass media and other communications channels have been used successfully to increase awareness of environmental issues in the United States. Officials in developing countries often talk about "public awareness," but investigation reveals that little is being done in this field that has any impact on environmental and natural resource management programs. However, a recent assessment of information and communications needs in the Near East by the Project in Development and the Environment (PRIDE) revealed a number of ad hoc environmental awareness activities under way, including the following:

- Small posters of a water faucet dripping coins were displayed, mainly on the walls of a water ministry.
- A nongovernmental organization was working on activities that had almost no links with other awareness activities in the country.
- Weekly television programs on environmental subjects primarily involved interviews with heads of government departments who described the good work of their units (often referred to as "talking heads" TV programs).
- No information on conservation, pollution prevention, or other environmental and natural resource subjects was being directed to private sector organizations.
- Organizations were producing publications and newsletters on various environmental subjects including research results, public relations, and tree planting campaigns.
- Public events sponsored by nongovernmental organizations on such subjects as tree planting had few if any links to mass media or school programs.

The PRIDE team conducting the needs assessment reached the following conclusions:

- Most public awareness activities have had little impact; therefore, the funds have seldom been expended effectively.
- No officials in the involved organizations are trained to design and manage appropriate education campaigns on the environment and natural resources.
- Opportunities to conduct successful campaigns are excellent, and governmental and nongovernmental groups are interested in developing campaigns.

This paper draws on the PRIDE experience in the Near East countries and makes recommendations on how to make awareness programs more effective. Without effective public awareness activities, environmental and natural resource management programs cannot succeed. Policy, technology, and infrastructure development is not enough. **People must be stimulated to take action if these programs are to achieve their goals.**

## B. Awareness Is Not Enough

The implications of the term "environmental awareness" vary depending on who is using it. Often the term implies that simply knowing about a subject—such as water conservation, pollution prevention, or recycling—is enough. That may be why so many programs fail. To involve the public in conserving the environment and managing natural resources clearly requires more than awareness. Without action, programs fail, but action must be sustained in order to become **long-term behavioral change**. Behavioral change can take place through individuals, families, groups, communities, or organizations (including industries and government agencies).

Social scientists have learned much about how humans (including groups, communities, and organizations) learn and are motivated to act. People generally sustain a behavior when they take action, observe a positive result, and then repeat the action and see the results many times over. The more people take action that has positive results, the better they learn the behavior and the more they are likely to repeat it. It becomes long-term behavioral change.

Long-term behavioral change almost never results from a single exposure to communication. That may explain why we see so little behavioral modification in the Near East from the current well-intentioned, one-time awareness efforts, whether by mass media or interpersonal means, such as seminars or field work.

## C. Paradigm of Behavioral Change

In the past 20 years, thousands of "diffusion of innovation" studies conducted worldwide have examined how to induce behavioral change. The findings have revealed how individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations progress from knowing nothing about an innovation to adopting long-term behavior change. The studies also clearly show that the innovation may be rejected at any stage. Following is an outline of the basic steps in the process of adopting behavior change.

- **Awareness.** The target audience must become aware of the innovation and its importance. Research has shown that mass media play an important role in increasing awareness in most cultures. However, becoming aware of an innovation seldom changes behavior, although obviously it is an important first step as no action will be taken if an individual is not aware of the innovation.
- **Understanding.** The next step is to learn more about the innovation. If the target audience is not interested in learning more, the innovation will not be adopted. Therefore, it is important to spell out the benefits and rewards simply and clearly. At this stage, interpersonal communications at schools, field days, and other gathering places are important, along with promotion by the mass media. Also during this stage, the target group will probably seek information as its interest grows in learning more about the innovation.
- **Trial.** If the campaign succeeds, the target group will decide to try the innovation and learn more about it. However, the trial itself does not necessarily lead to action. The

innovation may be too expensive or the resources needed to take action may be lacking. The equipment, supply, or service, such as a water saving faucet, may be unavailable. The economic payoff may be insufficient. Religious and cultural factors or bureaucratic distrust or procedures may hamper action. In other words, the target audience could accept a behavior but learn during the trial that non-communications factors prevent actual adoption or action. At this stage, interpersonal communications among school teachers, extension workers, water user groups, religious leaders, and other opinion leaders become very important in the process.

- **Action.** Is the person or group motivated to take action and can the non-communications constraints be overcome? This decision-making process is complex. Individuals often rely on family members or close friends for advice and counsel at this stage. Groups and organizations have parallel means for advice and counsel (special consultants, internal committees, etc.).
- **Sustained Behavioral Change.** Research has shown that action is often initiated but then discontinued. The action must be sustained over time. The communication effort at this stage is often handled through a mix of mass media and interpersonal means. Psychological rewards are often as important as economic and physical rewards. Remember, a successful long-term behavioral change requires action and positive results repeated over time. It is costly to provoke the initial action. It is much more cost-effective to continue the communications efforts to ensure sustained behavioral change than to start all over with a new adoption process.

Does this process appear too complicated? Readers should reflect on their own experiences in making significant decisions, such as the purchase of a house or a car. Did you act after one exposure to mass media or one mention in a meeting? How many sources of information did you use? Who did you rely on most when it came time for the final action? In the case of a product you regularly use, do you always buy the same brand? If not, why not?

#### **D. Social Marketing Campaigns**

In the 1960s a small group of professors at the Northwestern University School of Business (Chicago, Illinois) began to examine the effectiveness of social change programs. Their efforts led to considerable research and practice in the development of a professional discipline generally called "social marketing." While social marketing has spread widely in the United States and to a lesser extent in Europe, it has had little impact in the developing world. The U.S. Agency for International Development has been the only donor agency to do any social marketing—introducing research and development projects called HealthCom, AidsCom, Communications Technology Transfer in Agriculture, and some country-specific social marketing projects in the family planning field. These projects have contributed much to development efforts. Any failures can be traced to the fact that the social marketing efforts have not been integrated into the basic development program. The owners (policy makers) and managers of the development programs often pay lip service to social marketing activity, but in practice demand that their staff conduct public relations campaigns on their programs. In addition to the work PRIDE is doing, the upcoming USAID GreenCom project will focus on introducing social marketing methodology to environmental programs worldwide.

Social marketing is an adaptation of private sector marketing approaches that are highly sophisticated. Private companies have the financial incentives to use these techniques. Government agencies, however, generally have few incentives to develop services responsive to their client groups. Nongovernmental organizations seldom have the resources or professional staff to carry out these programs. Often they reject private sector methodology as suspect.

Social marketing is a crucial concept, one that USAID needs to promote and to help introduce in environment and natural resource management programs and projects. Therefore, a first step might be to conduct a social marketing campaign on social marketing for USAID itself, as well as for other donors.

#### **E. Who Must Be Involved?**

As mentioned above, some USAID-sponsored social marketing programs have been less than successful because key people in a development program have not accepted them. A PRIDE advisory committee for developing a handbook on conducting an environmental awareness campaign identified the following groups that must be involved in a successful campaign:

- **Policy Makers.** Ministers, company presidents, founders of nongovernmental organizations, and environmental leaders must endorse the social marketing campaign, because in the end they make available the resources required for social marketing campaigns. They are also the ones who most often demand that a social marketing/educational campaign be converted to a public relations activity that does not facilitate development.
- **Program Managers.** These people, who tend to have technical expertise, often fail to see the social or human dimension of a program. They generally think they understand what the target audiences need. They also believe that awareness is enough: "All we need to do is tell them what to do!" An important element of social marketing is to acquire feedback from the target group; too often program managers ignore or reject that step. Successful private companies use this feedback to design new products and services. Public service program managers generally do not recognize the need for professional social marketing expertise and its potential contribution to the design and impact of their programs, often because they do not understand the social marketing process.
- **Campaign Planners.** These specialists can help development programs determine campaign priorities, oversee market research, and convert the research findings into campaign designs. They also must have expertise in managing campaigns and utilizing monitoring/evaluation results to refine them. At present, no cadre of such professionals exists in the Near East and unfortunately, no universities in the region teach courses in this field.
- **Campaign Producers.** Working as an integral part of the development program's senior management, campaign producers make the critical decisions related to target audiences, essential intermediary groups, messages and appeals, channels of communication, timing,

and targets or goals. The campaign planners direct the teams who actually produce the campaigns. Often this step can be contracted out to public or private groups. The production team could include writers, organizers of special events, speakers for school programs, and audiovisual experts or broadcasters.

The current approach—which is not working—is for development program managers to direct the producers to create a specific communications product or program. This activity is not based on planning or market research. The producers are given little or no information on the program goals/targets or the technology that must be woven into the messages. The development program manager and the communications production personnel have no campaign planning expertise.

- **Intermediary Groups.** The people involved with a water or environmental program can seldom directly reach many members of the target audience. Therefore, they must rely on intermediaries to communicate with the target audience. Intermediary groups can include mass media, chambers of commerce, school teachers, nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, field personnel, and local leaders. If these intermediaries are not convinced that a campaign is important, it has little chance of success. Therefore, the campaign must initially be directed to motivating the intermediaries to convince others.
- **Target Groups.** Too many campaigns never determine who is really the target audience. The term "public awareness" implies everybody, but no campaign can be directed to everybody. Therefore, it is important to **clearly identify the target audience and learn as much as possible about it through market research.** The private sector spends millions of dollars studying its target audiences. Did you ever wonder how they get you on their mailing lists for direct mail advertising?
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Experts.** A campaign seldom succeeds over time without proper monitoring and evaluation. In the private sector, highly specialized groups conduct market research and monitor and evaluate programs. The campaign planner is responsible for using this information to adjust messages, appeals, timing, and channels of communication to make the campaign more effective, and in some cases, to discontinue it and start over.

The groups listed above exist in most developing countries, except for the campaign planners and, in most countries, the monitoring and evaluation (including market research) experts. This expertise must be introduced.

## **F. A Social Marketing Campaign**

A campaign is a military concept. It involves a strategy and program to capture an entire hill, rather than the lobbing an occasional shell up the hill. In most countries, environmental programs are characterized by ad hoc activities that relay random messages to undefined audiences with no follow-up to learn the results. They are not developing strategies to change target group behavior regarding environmental concerns. Following are the steps needed to develop successful

social marketing campaigns:

- **Determine Priority Programs and Targets.** Most campaigns fail at this early stage. How are the subjects of campaigns being selected at present? The answer is discouraging at best. The problem lies with the institutions that operate water conservation, environmental, and natural resource management programs. They are not using strategic planning techniques, environmental impact assessments, comparative risk assessments, or other planning tools to establish priorities and focus their programs. Therefore, when a difficulty develops in a campaign, it often reflects a much more serious problem in management of the overall development program. The introduction of social marketing can help to strengthen the overall institutional capability and management of the development organization by revealing that a subject selected for a particular campaign is not relevant to the target audience.
- **Conduct Market Research on Target Audiences and Intermediary Groups.** Successful companies spend considerable resources on market research and development of intermediary channels of communication and distribution. The public sector spends almost nothing. Market studies on target audiences and intermediary groups must be introduced, for such research lies at the heart of the social marketing concept.
- **Secure Commitment of Owners and Program Managers.** Policy makers and senior managers in governmental and nongovernmental agencies must buy into the social marketing approach and support campaigns on important subjects. One of their responsibilities is to ensure that program managers are persuaded to support the campaign with the necessary human and financial resources.
- **Plan Campaign.** This is probably the most important step in the social marketing process. It requires expertise not currently available in most developing countries. The United States has the academic programs and unique expertise to help developing countries. USAID should take advantage of this situation.
- **Produce Programs.** Expertise in program production exists in most developing countries but is not properly utilized. Competent campaign planners must be found and trained in environmental and natural resource management. It is critical that they understand and appreciate these fields. They need not be experts, but they must be able to work with the technical experts.
- **Disseminate.** An important element of a campaign is to ensure that the messages, materials, and related services are disseminated to the appropriate intermediaries and target groups in a timely manner. Too often, carefully planned and produced campaigns fail at the dissemination phase.
- **Monitor Impact.** This is a critical step to ensure that campaign dissemination is occurring properly and to determine the reactions of the intermediaries and target groups. One must also ensure that communication channels are working properly; that messages and appeals are leading to the intended actions; and that the timing is optimum. Results

of monitoring must be immediately fed back to campaign planners so they can adjust the program while it is ongoing.

- **Revise Campaign.** The campaign planners must modify the campaign and ensure that any needed changes are introduced throughout the system. The monitoring information should also be fed back to the owners, program managers, and donor agencies that are involved.

## G. What Is Being Done?

PRIDE has been the only centrally funded environmental project involved in social marketing, but the GreenCom project will soon introduce social marketing. Following are the current PRIDE activities in this area:

- **Jordan Information and Communications Needs Assessment.** This needs assessment, conducted in January-February 1993, focused on the overall environmental communication and information systems, technical/professional training, and organizational development programs. The review was done in partnership with Jordanian institutions including the central environmental agency, line ministries (including education and information), NGOs, the private sector, the scientific community, and universities. The purpose was to help Jordanian organizations—governmental and nongovernmental—begin developing an action plan to strengthen their environmentally related information, communication, and training program activities. The assessment includes recommendations on how donor agencies can support these areas by working with governmental and private sector agencies and NGOs. PRIDE is supposed to conduct similar assessments in two other NE countries.
- **Environmental Awareness Handbook.** Dr. Robert Kern, who has served four times as a PRIDE environmental communications specialist, is providing leadership to develop a handbook to train a cadre of environmental campaign planners, which does not now exist in the Near East region. An advisory committee has been established for this effort with experts in social marketing, environmental communications, community participation, development communications teaching, NGO program planning, and management of environmental education campaigns. The handbook will be tested in Jordan as part of the implementation of the USAID Water Quality and Conservation Project. It will be refined and made available to other Near East countries and regions through such means as the GreenCom project.
- **The Earth Generation School Kits.** PRIDE has been working with The Earth Generation, a company that is developing kits for seventh grade science classes in the United States. Social marketing approaches are being used to design and test the kits. The first kits were introduced in Michigan schools where they were used by 95 percent of the seventh grade science teachers in the first year. Private companies are sponsoring the program and paying for production and distribution of the kits. In each state the Audubon Society provides the leadership and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Education, ensures that the contents are accurate (and provides certificates to

students who complete the projects). Through the kits, students do simple science-based projects in their classrooms, homes, and communities. They become involved with environmental concerns of high priority to their region. PRIDE is working with The Earth Generation to adapt its process for designing and producing the kits so that Near East countries can gain from the experience.

- **Training NGOs.** PRIDE is developing a program to enhance Near East nongovernmental organizations. The program is envisioned to involve planning exercises with nongovernmental organizations; training of educators and the mass media in campaign design and management; and training in program management. The program will also focus on the role of women in environmental and natural resource management programs.

## **H. Conclusions**

The overall goal is to stimulate participation and behavioral change in environmental and natural resource management programs. This goal cannot be achieved through awareness activities alone. Social marketing concepts must be introduced. This means building a cadre of professionals and organizations (governmental, nongovernmental, and private sector) in developing countries that can design and manage social marketing campaigns.

A starting point is to expand our thinking beyond public awareness and to promote the concepts of social marketing among governmental and nongovernmental clientele. USAID missions can introduce these concepts to projects so that resources are available to train people and demonstrate how to produce effective campaigns.

Social marketing approaches are vital to stimulating behavioral change, which is key to the success of environment and natural resource management projects.