



Photo: Barbara Evans

Social Marketing in Sanitation – More than Selling Toilets

Sanitation and hygiene is consistently, and justly, described as the orphan sector of development. Professionals working with sanitation lament the devastating effects that the lack of international attention and chronic under-funding in the sector has on the health, lives and development of the over 2.6 billion people who lack access to safe sanitation. Due to the supposed “unsightly” nature of the issue, many blame a subconscious but powerful taboo surrounding sanitation in the international community as a central cause of the slow and insufficient progress being made to address the global sanitation crisis.

As a former marketing professional turned sanitation and water professional, I see this as also a failure of the sector to use diverse approaches to achieve desired behavioural change. Social marketing is a valuable tool to achieve social change, but is unfortunately

often chastised and misconceived in the development sector. The word “marketing” faces its own taboo to many working in development, who pigeon-hole social marketing as only consisting of large promotional campaigns and mass media outlets.

But social marketing is much more than promotion and branding. Marketing is a methodology where “promotion” is just one of four central components, or the 4 P’s: Product, Price, Place and Promotion (see box 1). Social marketing applies and builds on commercial marketing principles and techniques, such as customer orientation, exchange theory, marketing research, segmentation, the use of the marketing mix and focused monitoring and evaluation. While commercial marketing ultimately seeks to generate profit and benefit a private interest, social marketing seeks to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, modify or abandon behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole.

Major differences between commercial enterprises and social campaigns make social marketing far more complex than commercial marketing. The intangibility of the product being “sold,” the non-monetary measurements of the gain or profit of behavioural change, as well as problems in segmentation all make improved understanding of how to utilise marketing techniques more important for social and development causes (see box 3).

In interventions in developing countries, social marketing has been widely used by organisations like the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), The World Bank, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to produce positive changes in family planning, public health and HIV/AIDS. In earlier decades, the HIV/AIDS crisis was, like sanitation is today, an issue that was stigmatised as “dirty” and seen as neglected by the international community. Today, effective social marketing campaigns have increased focus and funding for the fight

against HIV/AIDS and changed behaviours away from unprotected sex.

The same potential for social marketing exists and is especially needed in the sanitation and hygiene sector where it is not enough to simply supply latrines. As is commonly said in the sector, “a wanted latrine is a used latrine.” This means that users must see a clear need for proper sanitation and hygiene practices and facilities. Using terminology from the field of social marketing, more than supplying the physical product of latrines, the most crucial work in sanitation and hygiene is selling the “social product.” The social product can either represent an idea, a practice or a concrete object. The idea can then be either a belief (i.e. hand-washing will protect my children), an attitude (i.e. planned babies are better cared for than babies from accidental pregnancies) or a value (i.e. all humans have equal rights). The practice can be an act (i.e. building a latrine) and the repeated act turns into behaviour (i.e. using the latrine, washing hands).

Scholars have suggested that social campaigns commonly fail because the campaigners assume that their target audience has the same perception of the problem and solution as themselves. A basic principle in marketing is that people have to feel that they have a problem and that the product that is offered poses a viable solution to that problem. When it comes to sanitation and hygiene, communities and individuals inside those communities do not always perceive or understand the problem as professionals or scholars in the sector do. Nor do they necessarily feel a want or need for latrines or improved hygiene habits. The largest burden of work is selling to our targeted audiences that the use of latrines and their time investments in healthy hygiene is valuable to themselves and their communities.

How to Use Social Marketing in Sanitation

Key to any marketing campaign is knowledge of the type of product, the customer who is supposed to use the product, benefits it offers to the targeted audience, and the competition it faces. In sanitation, the primary product is the behaviour of safe excreta disposal (the latrine itself becomes the secondary product). The overall aim is to improve the lives of individuals, communities and society through decreased child mortality, increased access to education for girls, and development opportunities arising from improved health conditions. The competition is mostly the current or preferred behaviour of the target group, like squatting in the bush and using the flying toilet, as well as competition for

Box 1: The Marketing Mix: The 4 P's for Strategic Social Marketing

Product

The social product can either represent an idea, a practice or a concrete object. The idea can then be either a belief (handwashing will protect my children), an attitude (planned babies are better cared for than babies from accidental pregnancies) or a value (all humans have equal rights). The practice can be an act (immunization, building latrines) and the repeated act turns into behaviour (using the latrine, washing hands, using a condom). The tangible product could be a latrine, condom, soap, etc.

Price

Price is measured in both monetary and non-monetary terms. Time, effort, change in life style, etc., all affect true cost. The monetary price serves several functions to determine the product's accessibility, discourage or encourage demand, and attribute product value. In social marketing, non-monetary costs like time and perceived risk are more critical than product price.

Place

The social marketing placement/distribution objective must always be to make sure access to the product is as convenient as possible for the target group. This could include more and closer locations, extended hours, improving the appearance of the location, and making the performing of the desired behavior more appealing.

Promotion

Communication and promotion involves persuasion to influence attitudes and/or behavior. In order to persuade the target person or group, one must capture their attention from other competing sources. The traditional promotional tools in marketing includes advertising, personal selling, publicity and sales promotion.



Photo: Cecilia Martinsen, SWI

To influence behaviour in communities and individuals, one must understand why they behave the way they do, and specifically what would make them invest in and use a latrine. A study of triggers for investment in latrines in communities in Benin showed safety, comfort and prestige were most important to users.

Box 2: Triggers for Investing in Latrines

1. Avoid discomforts of the bush
2. Gain prestige from visitors
3. Avoid dangers at night
4. Avoid snakes
5. Reduce flies in compound
6. Avoid smelling/seeing faeces in bush
7. Protect my faeces from enemies
8. Have more privacy to defecate
9. Keep my house/property clean
10. Feel safer
11. Save time
12. Make my house more comfortable
13. Reduce my household's healthcare costs
14. Have more privacy for household affairs
15. Make my life more modern
16. Feel royal
17. Make it easier in old age/sickness
18. For health (spontaneous mention)
19. Be able to increase my tenants' rent

Source: London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene



Photo: USAID

funding with other more prioritised areas of investment.

Understanding the target audience, as well as the differences between your audiences, is key to effective promotion of desired behavioural change. Strategies must be tailored to suit the need, wants, resources and behaviour of the people being targeted, and

for this marketing research provides valuable information. To influence behaviour in communities and individuals, one must understand why they behave the way they do, and specifically what would make them invest in and use a latrine. A great example of such research was done by the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene

in Benin where they investigated the triggers for investing in latrines in local communities. Safety, dignity and prestige were among the top five, while the main health goals of the sanitation intervention appeared as only 13 and 15 (see box 2). This information is vital for the production of effective promotion activities and messages.

Box 3: How is Social Marketing Different from Commercial Marketing?

Commercial vs. Social Products

While the products for commercial marketing primarily are services and goods, social marketing often deals with selling behaviour change. In sanitation the primary product is the behaviour of safe excreta disposal and the latrine itself becomes the secondary product.

The Competition

In commercial marketing, the competition is usually other companies selling similar goods. In social marketing, the competition is often the current or preferred behavior of the target group, like squatting in the bush, using the flying toilet. Competitors can also include items that users may rather invest in, such as medicine, or even a cell phone.

Customer Orientation

Commercial marketing is based on a view that the product offered needs to appeal to the customer in all aspects (product, price, place and promotion) and so must the social marketing program. There is a need for both commercial and social marketing project to have a customer-centred mindset, meaning that all decisions must come after consideration of the target customer.

Who Gains?

The aim for commercial marketing is profit for the company. In social marketing it is the individual and/or the society (i.e. decrease in child mortality due to diarrhoea diseases) who profits.

A Valuable Tool

Social marketing is by no means a silver bullet solution to the sanitation crisis, and should not be portrayed as an easy-fix. Quite the contrary, marketing is a complex science and it is not easy to implement a successful marketing strategy in any company or organisation. In organisations working in development this work is especially difficult, complex and critical; yet the professionals that are asked to set up a social marketing programme often have little to no experience in marketing. When applied correctly by people who are both competent and conversant in marketing techniques and the issue they are working with, social marketing is a valuable tool that can help us in promoting safe sanitation and hygiene behaviour.

In recent years, some sanitation programmes have started to apply social marketing to their work to increase household latrine coverage and improve hygiene behaviour in Africa and Asia. But more is needed to make social marketing techniques more widely and effectively used in the water and sanitation sector.

By Cecilia Martinsen, SIWI
cecilia.martinsen@siwi.org