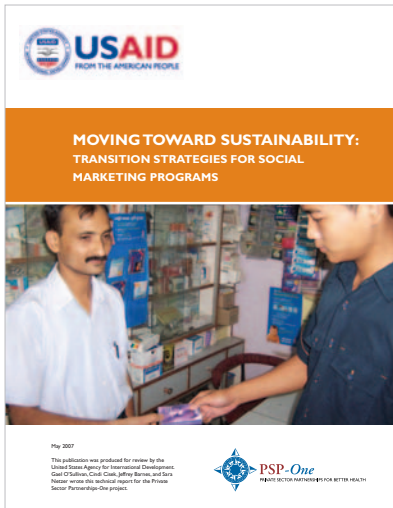


A Practical Approach to Conceptual Thinking and Sustainable Program Design in the Social Marketing Field



As donor resources shift and priorities change, sustainability has become an important issue for social marketing programs. Recognizing a need for conceptual tools to assist both donors and program implementers to identify priorities for funding and strategies for long-term viability, the Abt Associates led Private Sector Partnerships-One (PSP-One) project developed a framework to define indicators, assessment tools,

and strategies. While the models and strategies described in *Moving Toward Sustainability: Transition Strategies and Tools for Social Marketing Programs* can be applied to a variety of technical disciplines, the newly-published paper focuses on the application of social marketing principles to the sustainability of health programs, in particular reproductive health and family planning programs.

The focal point of the paper is a new tool called the Sustainability Continuum for Social Marketing. This resource is intended to guide decisions about the four primary components of sustainability:

- Technical sustainability – including the 4 Ps of marketing: product, price, promotion, and place (distribution),
- Financial sustainability,
- Institutional sustainability, and
- Market sustainability.

The continuum includes indicators for measuring progress related to individual components of a social marketing program. Three phases of sustainability are defined – beginning, intermediate, and advanced – and the four sustainability components are defined within each phase. This structure highlights how social marketing programs and social marketing organizations (SMOs) change over time. The continuum also illustrates that an SMO might achieve sustainability in one area, such as technical sustainability, within a shorter timeframe than in another compo-

nent, such as institutional sustainability. (Progress along the continuum is fluid and may include temporary setbacks as well as increases in sustainability.)

Even if all social marketing programs will not ultimately attain full sustainability, each of them may assess and document their progress toward sustainability in a variety of areas, including technical, financial, institutional, and overall market sustainability. The objective of sustainability is frequently balanced against the objectives of equity and increasing a project's health impact among low-income groups. An underlying assumption of this paper, however, is that the comparative advantage of product social marketing is not in serving the poorest people, but rather in leveraging commercial models to provide health in a cost-efficient and potentially sustainable fashion to low-income groups in developing countries.

Building on the issues and indicators defined in the continuum, various strategies are described to assist social marketing programs in their decision making within each of the four sustainability components. Insights are shared in the form of trade-offs and lessons learned, and areas for further research are suggested. Specific strategies related to technical sustainability include building the capacity of SMOs to conduct international tenders and source products independently, using cross-subsidy pricing strategies, developing partnerships to sustain communication efforts, and moving to commercial distribution models. Examples of financial sustainability strategies are provided, including reducing operational costs and introducing product-based commercial accounting procedures. For the institutional sustainability dimension, options suggested include establishing an organization with an independent legal status, strong governance, and accountability measures. Finally, strengthening the ability of an SMO to continuously adapt to changing economic, regulatory, and social conditions is discussed as one of the most useful strategies related to market sustainability. Five detailed case studies are included in the annexes to illustrate how programs have applied technical, institutional, financial, and market sustainability strategies to maximize long-term viability and impact.

This paper offers a conceptual framework in the form of the Sustainability Continuum for Social Marketing to analyze four dimensions of sustainability. As SMOs grow and change, variables and indicators can be used to identify strategies for and assess progress towards sustainable components of a social

marketing program. The concepts in the paper, along with the practical examples from a variety of SMOs worldwide, provide some general conclusions to guide future programming.

One of the challenges related to sustainability in social marketing is that programs define sustainability in their own terms. This paper establishes some initial indicators that will help program managers, donors, and decision-makers begin to standardize the ways in which they discuss sustainability parameters. It also identifies areas where additional documentation and, in some cases, research is needed to continue to advance the discussion of sustainability indicators.

For More Information

Moving Toward Sustainability: Transition Strategies and Tools for Social Marketing Programs.

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Abt Associates applies rigorous research and consulting techniques and technical assistance expertise to a wide range of issues in social, economic and health policy, international development, business research, and clinical trials and registries. Clients include U.S. federal, state, and local governments; universities and foundations; international organizations; nonprofit associations and institutions; and business and industry. Founded in 1965, Abt Associates has worked in more than 100 countries and currently has over 35 project offices in 30 countries around the world.



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