

A REVIEW: SOCIAL MARKETING STRATEGIES OF NGO

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Abstract Governments, especially in developing and emerging economies, are limited in their capacity to promote social development, due to lack of resources to handle such a formidable task. The tax base is too narrow to generate adequate funds for a list of several competing needs. Governments do not have sufficient number of trained staff with a focused approach who can implement social marketing programs effectively at the grass roots level. This is where NGOs are playing an increasingly important role. Based on experience in other parts of the world, NGOs in these countries can also apply marketing practices successfully for socio-economic development. While much research has been done in the West in the area of social marketing, the subject is relatively unexplored in India

Keyword: NGOs, Marketing , Government.

Introduction

In recent years, non-governmental organizations – the voluntary sector - have come to play an increasingly important role in socio-economic development and in bringing about desirable changes in social behavior, both in developed as well as in developing economies such as India. The difference lies in the focus of activities. While NGOs in western countries have reached a certain level of maturity and are more preoccupied with larger issues such as awareness of cancer, promotion of a nutritious diet and non-smoking, to name a few, the voluntary sector in India and some Asian economies is still grappling with the more basic issues of poverty reduction, awareness and prevention of AIDS, family planning and availability of clean water. This growing sector and its effectiveness as a supplement to governmental efforts is an important area for study.

Governments, especially in developing economies, are severely limited in their capacity to promote social development, due to lack of resources, both financial and managerial, to comprehensively handle such a formidable task. On the one hand, the tax base is too narrow to generate adequate funds for an endless list of competing needs, further aggravated by the demands of pressure groups. Governments also lack trained managers with a focused approach, who can implement social marketing programs effectively at the grass roots level. This is where NGOs can fill the gap, since they have the potential to attract funds from donors and offer the services of trained professionals. While NGOs have a vacuum to fill and have the potential to bring added value to governmental efforts, it is to be examined whether they are able to live up to this potential, and if not, what is hindering an effective performance of their role.

Another drawback with governments in developing countries is their “multi-layer” or hierarchical approach, characterized by bureaucracy and delay in decision making, which reduces their effectiveness in implementing programs. Unlike the NGOs, which have the capacity to work closely with their beneficiaries, governments are far removed from their beneficiaries. While NGOs have enormous potential, how far they have used these inherent advantages to good effect is another issue requiring study.

Literature review

NGOs in India register themselves under any one of several legislations – those governing trusts, societies, cooperatives and non-profit organizations. The role of this sector was first recognized in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) with increasing importance in subsequent Plans. NGOs play an important role especially in water issues, micro-finance and poverty alleviation. Usefulness of marketing principles like distribution methods, relationship building have been emphasized by various authors. The components of social marketing as analyzed by experts form the basis for evolving the questionnaire and benchmark traits under this study

According to Misra, Rajeeb (2008)¹⁶, there are three differing views regarding the relationship between the government and NGOs. The first view is that NGOs function independently and supplement the government’s development efforts. In this role, they help to fill the gaps left by the government. The second view sees NGOs as partnering and complementing the government. The third view is that NGOs play an adversarial role, by persuading the government to make changes in public policy and to maintain greater accountability to the public. The government in turn plays the role of watchdog and tries to regulate the services of NGOs. Thus, in the words of Clark (1991), “an NGO can oppose the State, complement it, or reform it, but cannot ignore it”. Both NGOs and governments adopt their own strategies to influence the

nature of the relationship. Julie Fisher (2003) mentions three different NGO strategies for NGO-government relationship

- Political isolation, which means developing a sense of independence and standing apart from the government;
- Political advocacy, which means communicating with the government on matters of policy, negotiating on objectives and expressing differing views on major issues and
- Co-operation with the government.

Clark, John (1993)⁴ looks at the relationship from the point of view of NGO efficacy and impact on social development. He suggests that the contribution of NGOs to social development is affected by the nature of NGO-government relations. The developmental impact of NGOs has been found to vary in different countries and Clark is of the view that a major influencing factor is the government's policies and practices. More specifically, government policies and practices include aspects such as quality of governance, the legal environment (such as registration of NGOs and reporting procedures), taxation policies and nature of collaboration. The author implies that governments can create either a conducive or an adverse environment for NGOs to function through their policies and practices and thereby affect NGO efficacy.

Misra, Rajeeb (2008)¹⁶ cites three reasons for NGOs to associate with each other and to join together to form networks – to avoid isolation, to influence the macro level and to protect their own identity and credibility. Networks of grassroots organizations (GROs) and grassroots support organizations (GSROs) also offer benefits such as greater impact of programs and more sustainability of individual organizations. Misra classifies NGO networks into the following types.

- Regional or horizontal networks of Grassroots Organizations – These are networks that link local community organizations in three ways – i) formal umbrella networks of individual GROs, such as cooperatives and local development organizations. ii) informal economic networks linked together by barter arrangements and iii) amorphous grassroots social movements which are involved with environmental issues.
- Formal or informal networks of Grassroots Support Organizations (GSROs), which focus on one or more development sectors and are either regional or national in scope. Formal GSRO networks represent GSROs as a group while dealing with governments and donors. Informal networks on the other hand are more involved in supporting grassroots organizations as a group

Rajasekhar, D (2000) says that the support of local organizations can also increase the developmental impact of NGOs and that NGOs cannot function in isolation. His views are based on a study conducted in two NGOs in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, to examine the effectiveness of NGOs and local organizations in alleviating poverty. It was assumed that the local organizations such as the gram panchayats had the potential to tackle the root causes of poverty. However, the findings of the study revealed that the gram panchayats did not take into consideration the concerns of the poor and focused only on development of infrastructure in the villages. As for the NGOs, while they were found to be making efforts on poverty, they faced several limitations of technical and political capacity and lack of a “pro-poor” attitude on the part of the local organizations.

Agha, S. et al (2005)¹³ examined contraceptive social marketing in four middle income countries – Morocco, Dominican Republic, Peru and Turkey – implemented through the manufacturer's model. The purpose was to determine whether social marketing efforts would continue to have positive results even when donor support was fully or partially withdrawn in these countries. The findings revealed that effective social marketing practices could help to maintain increased sales of contraceptives in all countries, even after donor support was discontinued. The authors generalize these findings by suggesting that the sustainability of the social marketing organization does not depend on the size or continuity of funds from donors. Further, social marketing organizations can also bring about sustainable behavioral change through effective strategies. However, they believe that sustainable change can be achieved, provided certain conditions exist – the absence of competition (e.g. from the government), partnership with the private sector and the willingness of the private sector to continue funding social marketing activities after donor support has been withdrawn. Sustainability in the foregoing case could be due to the medium of a tangible product, whereas in behavior change without involvement of a tangible product, market sustainability may be more difficult to achieve.

Conclusion

The master plan was then broken down section wise as in the outline, wherein each key idea and its source were linked to a specific aspect in the form of a sub-matrix for each aspect. The various aspects of the study included the following – rationale, scope and definition, NGO background -India and the world, NGOs and

the government, NGO types, role of NGOs, social marketing in socio-economic development, accountability Social Marketing Strategies & Traits of Successful NGOs – A Strategic Perspective aspects and internal systems in NGOs and how they affect sustainability, need and scope for building image of reliability applying marketing practices, funding and donor perspectives, performance measurement, success and failure factors, sustainability aspects, hypotheses, methodology, findings and recommendations.

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