Solving Complex Problems: Enduring Solutions through Social Entrepreneurship, Community Action, and Social Marketing

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Abstract
Three distinct literatures address social change: social entrepreneurship, community action research, and social marketing. While these activities have a shared goal to create social change, each orientation approaches their activities from a different perspective. The current work explores how macro-social marketing efforts can benefit from alternative orientations to enhance enduring social change. Social entrepreneurship highlights the importance of enduring resources and considering scalability. Community action highlights the importance of obtaining legitimacy and buy-in from multiple entities in the social change system. Social marketing highlights the importance of an end-user perspective and the application of behavioral theories to create systematic change. This work describes a case study in the Kenyan education context to highlight the value of this approach.

Keywords
macro-social marketing, social entrepreneurship, community action, social change, social development

Introduction
Macro-social marketing is a perspective that recognizes complex social problems require interventions directed at interconnected entities (i.e., institutional and individual) within a system to produce new institutional norms and social rules (Domegan 2008; Kennedy and Parsons 2012). These interventions apply traditional marketing concepts to change the antecedents that contribute to “wicked problems,” such as inequities in access to quality education. This approach to change is viewed at the systems-level, with an aim to influence multiple organizations and complex interactions among stakeholders to change deeply entrenched social problems.

We conceptualize a successful macro-social marketing campaign to solve socially-oriented “wicked problems” as a collective outcome of small institutional changes each partner makes within a system. This perspective contrasts with one in which the creation of new norms and actions initiated by one large public institution (e.g., government) “trickle down” through other institutional players to influence the individuals targeted for change (Kennedy and Parsons 2012). Our approach to macro-social marketing is a “middle ground” in which we focus on institutions more proximal to the direct beneficiaries (e.g., NGOs) who create change in their institutional norms and actions to address significant problems that face these beneficiaries.

This approach recognizes that an exclusive focus on changing the norms and actions of large, upstream public institutions, or a focus on downstream, bottom-up actions, representative of a traditional social marketing perspective, is less likely to be successful because neither approach includes stakeholder buy-in and resources to sustain implementation efforts to maintain a new social order. By social change, we mean developments that help society better realize upward movement towards enhanced quality of life. Ultimately, we argue solutions to societal problems are the result of individuals wanting and investing their resources (i.e., to “buy-in”) to make this change, which are then supported by institutions and their additional resources. In an extended example, we focus on two smaller institutions, within a larger social system, to improve access to education in a developing country.

The concept of buy-in has much of its intellectual foundation on work to foster community action, which emphasizes community or stakeholder buy-in and participation to legitimize social change and provide on-going support (Freire 1970; Lewin 1946). The concept of renewable financial resources is addressed in work on social entrepreneurship, an
approach which creates resources necessary to sustain the enterprise and support continued delivery of products and services to beneficiaries (Dees 2008). Community action and social entrepreneurship offer insights into how macro-social marketers can enhance their efforts to create and sustain systems-level change.

In the current work, we draw from these distinct approaches to social change to highlight a pragmatic approach to macro-social marketing. Second, we present an extended case to illustrate the value of buy-in, generation of an enduring resource stream, and application of social marketing principles to address a significant social problem: access to quality education for low-income Kenyan youth. We first present a brief overview of macro-social marketing, describe factors that affect an organization’s capacity to endure and institutionalize social change, and how community action and social entrepreneurship can enhance social change efforts.

**Conceptual Background**

**Macro-Social Marketing**

“Wicked problems” are deeply embedded in a social system, complexly determined over a long time period, sustained by a stable equilibrium among multiple stakeholders, resulting in problems resistant to an enduring solution (Kennedy and Parsons 2012). Macro-social marketing is a perspective intended to address and change the facets that cause these “wicked problems,” and is framed within a systems theory approach as dynamic interactions among the actors in a system. Kennedy (2016) describes macro-social marketing as efforts to change institutional norms through enacting policies and partnerships among multiple institutional and organizational parties. In an extended example, Kennedy (2016) applies macro-social marketing principles to address low wages in the textiles and clothing industry.

Kennedy and Parsons (2012) view government agencies as well positioned to initiate system-level social change efforts because these institutions are presumed to have sufficient, enduring influence (legitimacy) to address embedded problems that represent the collective interests of the community. Additionally, the government is presumed to have enduring resources to solve the “wicked problem” through the ability to tax and redistribute resources.

Numerous examples exist in which a government is unable to solve “wicked problems” through institutional change without concomitant efforts to build the capacity of these changes to endure. For example, the “Great Society” was a set of domestic programs in the United States launched by President Johnson to change institutional norms and social rules, and in that process, reduce poverty and racial injustice. Major spending programs to address education, medical care, urban problems, and transportation were introduced, but funding for these programs was reduced or eliminated and community interest in these initiatives waned. The United States’ current social and political system suggests the “Great Society” approach did not eliminate poverty or racial injustice (see, for example, the current economic disparity and racial conflicts in 2016), but was a misguided and failed social initiative. Two important facets were absent in the “Great Society” efforts: investment to grow organizational and individual buy-in for the programs and renewable resources beyond the unidirectional government funding for these programs (Bator 2008).

Efforts to create and sustain a new, system-level equilibrium to reduce the magnitude and breadth of a “wicked problem” have received limited attention. The question remains: how can governments, organizations, or entities institutionalize and enhance enduring societal change? Next, we describe how two features which characterize alternative approaches to social change – obtaining buy-in (community action) and renewable resources (social entrepreneurship) – can enhance system-level social change, the desired outcome of a macro-social marketing enterprise.

**Generating Stakeholder Buy-In**

Hastings and Domegan (2013) and McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) provide insight into the value of community engagement to solve social problems. Buy-in signifies the commitment of interested parties (stakeholders) to a shared, desired outcome, often by their involvement in its formulation (Lachapelle 2008). Current discussions and applications of macro-social marketing have paid limited attention to the role of buy-in to create change and acceptance of institutional norms. In this section, we discuss how the concept of buy-in is a necessary condition to change the norms of relevant stakeholders in a system.

Buy-in must be present at multiple levels of an institution: for example, partnerships initiated by senior management in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding often fail to create enduring change unless efforts are extended to generate support from the remaining management and individuals within the organization. A community action orientation exemplifies an approach to obtain stakeholder buy-in and legitimacy of the change efforts, enhancing efforts to generate change in the social system (Lachapelle 2008). We next describe this approach and how it can establish the legitimacy of the social change effort.

**Community action.** This orientation involves co-creation of solutions through collaborative efforts among all key stakeholders (Lewin 1946). Many terms have been used to denote community action (see Israel et al. 1998), but they share the characteristics of involving multiple representatives from the community who integrate the social and cultural constructions of the people involved (Reason and Bradbury 2001) to create collaborative partnerships. Community action approaches rely on education and empowerment to encourage people to learn new skills, reflect on their social and economic conditions, and act in their collective interest, improving the ability of individual actors to understand and advance their capability to exert system-level influence (Israel et al. 1994).
Collectively, these principles provide a foundation for enduring social change because they recognize efforts of an individual change agent (e.g., community group, government, NGO) are insufficient, and that enduring change needs to include contextual knowledge to empower other members of the social change system. For example, a healthcare NGO which addresses food insecurity in an impoverished community must create trust and buy-in among community members prior to introducing new programs (e.g., sustainable agricultural practices by local farmers). This buy-in would emerge by meeting with local leaders (i.e., civic, religious, political, and community leaders) to co-create the value proposition associated with the efforts to reduce food insecurity. More specifically, collaborative efforts between the community and the NGO, and not simply investments by the NGO, increase the likelihood of enduring program success (Castro, Barrera, and Martinez 2004). Recipients of a social change effort (in this case, the farmers) are more likely to accept and comply with initiatives if they know other valued stakeholders are committed to the program of change, and if they are empowered to suggest changes to the proposed activities and learn how changes to the status quo lead to mutual benefit. Each effort increases the legitimacy of the social change initiative.

**Community action and legitimacy.** Kennedy (2016) emphasized the importance of institutional norms and social rules as a foundational outcome of macro-social marketing efforts. A related concept to institutional norms, developed in organizational management literature, is legitimacy. Suchman (1995, p. 574) describes legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.”

Institutional theory recognizes the need to consider various actors within the system to create normative change (Arndt 1981). This change can be accomplished through policy (change in formal institutions) or through a social norm approach (informal institutions) (Mittelstaedt et al. 2014). Legitimacy plays a central role in the transformation of normative and cognitive forces that construct, limit and strengthen organizational actors (Finch, Deephouse, and Varella 2015). Suchman (1995) argued legitimacy can take cognitive, moral, and pragmatic forms, and efforts to obtain and manipulate these facets of legitimacy influence the development and operation of institutions. Cognitive legitimacy pertains to actions that fit with understandings of what is appropriate and desirable at a broader, social level; moral legitimacy describes adherence to acceptable standards leading to outcomes consistent with values; and pragmatic legitimacy is obtained to the extent that an organization fulfills needs and interests of its stakeholders.

Perceived legitimacy affects the long-term survival of an organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Stakeholders consider legitimate efforts as valid, consistent with their values, and deserving of resources. If efforts are not perceived as legitimate, they are likely to be ignored or face active oppositional efforts. For example, a social change effort that is not culturally appropriate (and consequently perceived as illegitimate) will reduce the effectiveness of downstream efforts to change targeted actions or internalize new values. Upstream, institutional actors that do not see an effort as legitimate will likely withhold support and access to resources.

Community action approaches recognize the importance of perceived legitimacy among multiple entities in the system. These community actions are often formed and led by poor and marginalized groups who have limited access to more “official” channels, or for whom official channels do not function effectively (Batiwala 2002). Thus, obtaining and sustaining the desired social change involves movement legitimization in the eyes of other stakeholders within the system (Pilisuk, McAllister, and Rothman 1996). For example, a frequent catalyst for community action relates to “place-space” tensions, referring to the dynamic and often contradictory relations between “the producers of space and the makers of place” (Taylor 1999, p. 12). National governance and corporate activities often view space as abstract and dehumanized environments whose worth is tied primarily to economic value. In contrast, communities and individually-owned places are viewed as a particularized location rich with symbolic meaning and emotional attachment (Raco and Flint 2001). Misunderstandings and inequitable circumstances occur because of a mismatch between the ways in which spaces of national governance and corporate activity are prioritized over communities and individually-experienced places in the construction and delivery of policy, practice, and exchange (Raco and Flint 2001). A community action approach to change involves legitimizing the community perspective of place in the eyes of all stakeholders in the system by highlighting how concepts of value are not all tied to immediate financial worth; that is, the social value provided by places is as critical to the stability and health of an ecosystem (society) as the economic value provided by spaces.

Community action approaches also rely on community education and empowerment to aid community members to recognize the validity of their desired social change and capacity-building and to legitimize their initiative in the eyes of others (Ozanne and Anderson 2010). Active citizens-turned-legislators do so because they understand the importance of legitimized discourse and become democratic agents to challenge the activities of institutions which shape their everyday lives (Hirst 1994).

**Section summary.** Buy-in from each stakeholder in the social change system is important to create enduring change. Community action efforts are one approach that involve many stakeholders, both upstream and downstream, in the development and implementation of social change initiatives. Legitimacy of the social change enhances buy-in and the inclusion of this concept within a system-level perspective increases sustained social change. Next, we describe the role of resource generation in system endurance.
Resource Generation

In ecology, sustainability is related to the capability of closed systems to maintain processes of productivity to replenish resources. This concept has been translated into the strategic marketing literature in the context of for-profit businesses; for example, a resource based view (Barney 1991; Wernerfelt 1984), resource advantage theory (Hunt and Lambe 2000), and discussions about market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski 1990) highlight how for-profit organizations must create a competitive advantage to be profitable and enhance the likelihood of organizational survival and growth.

Organizations or agents engaged in systems-level social change must also generate sufficient resources to ensure organizational sustainability. The nonprofit and social marketing literatures do not reflect the same focus on resource generation despite the negative effect of constrained resources on an organization’s survival (Weerawaradena, McDonald, and Mort 2010). Nonprofits, often agents of macro-level social change, operate in a resource constrained context and compete for government, foundation, and individual funds (Froelich 1999). Even governments, who possess the ability to generate resources through taxation, increasingly operate in lean environments, and are sensitive to the difficult decisions to allocate constrained resources (Akingbola 2004). A social entrepreneurship orientation exemplifies an approach where resource generation is fundamental and enhances system sustainability.

Social entrepreneurship. These efforts involve the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change or address social need (Mair and Marti 2006). Social entrepreneurship emerged from commercial entrepreneurship, widely understood as creating value by moving resources from less productive to more productive areas (Dees 1998). The primary distinction between social and commercial entrepreneurs is the former’s aim to achieve an enduring solution to root problems affecting society as opposed to achieving an enduring advantage for their organization (Santos 2012). Often, commercial and social entrepreneurship are discussed as points on a continuum rather than dichotomous categories; for example, Dees’ (2008) perspective on social entrepreneurship highlights how both orientations must consider the same micro (financial, human, intellectual, and social/political capital) and macro level (policy and politics, media, economic and social condition) environmental factors to identify and execute entrepreneurial opportunities.

Social entrepreneurship was popularized as an approach to social change by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank, in which very small loans were given to entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for standard bank loans, helping a substantial part of the population break out of poverty (Martin and Osberg 2007). A macro-social marketing perspective shares elements of social entrepreneurship by recognizing the embeddedness of social problems, but does not rely on self-sustaining solutions to address complex social problems. Some scholars argue the primary distinction between social entrepreneurship and other orientations to social change is that it generates resources (Boschee 2006; Mair and Marti 2006).

Value capture. Although the business models employed by social entrepreneurs range widely, this perspective views income generation as essential for a social venture because it ensures financial self-sufficiency, standing at odds with dependence on charitable relief or grant funding (Boschee 2006). The marketplace, which determines whether private enterprises create value, does not work as well for value creation in a social context; those who receive services are often unable to pay, and it is difficult to quantify the value of social improvements such as providing companionship to the elderly. Social entrepreneurial perspectives align market dynamics with social outcomes, challenging the stance that financial sustainability concerns of the commercial market sector and pursuit of organizational mission and maintenance of quality programs are incompatible (Dees 1998). In other words, social entrepreneurs use market mechanisms to attract or generate resources that directly or indirectly allow them to reinforce their social missions.

Santos (2012) describes social entrepreneurship as concerned primarily with value creation through innovating, producing, and delivering products to the market, but necessarily also engaged in value appropriation or value capture. Value creation occurs when an individual’s utility increases after accounting for the resources used in that activity (Mizik and Jacobson 2003). Value appropriation happens when the focal actor is able to capture a portion of the value created by the activity, for example, through extracting profits (Mizik and Jacobson 2003). In other words, an organization sustains itself by creating financial gain through selling products or services for more than they spend to operate or produce what is sold.

Commercial entrepreneurs seek to maximize value appropriation, while social entrepreneurs emphasize value creation and pursue value appropriation to capture sufficient value to sustain operations and re-invest in growth (Santos 2012). For example, TOMS shoes focuses on value creation through providing shoes to individuals in developing countries, generating value for society through improving quality of life, health, and ability to participate in educational activities. However, TOMS appropriates sufficient value from its activities, the sale of shoes to traditional customers in developed markets, to continue its efforts of value creation and shoe provision in developing economies.

Section summary. The capacity for an entity to endure depends on adequate access to resources. Social entrepreneurship is one approach to social change that addresses the issue of resource generation, or value appropriation. A social entrepreneurial orientation identifies how underutilized resources can be leveraged to create value for society, but captures part of that value to sustain the operation of the organization. The inclusion of this perspective can enhance efforts to create enduring social change.
Section Integration

Macro-social marketing emphasizes the importance of interventions to address system-wide mitigating and sustaining factors, and acknowledges the necessity of long term plans to achieve such change (Kennedy and Parsons 2012). How to achieve and sustain change across a broad time horizon has received less attention, and insights from community action and social entrepreneurship provide operational suggestions: creating fundamental, normative change is facilitated when others in the system are involved, at all levels of organizational structures, because it enhances the likelihood that such changes are perceived as valid or legitimate, and internalized. Resources such as time and money are also needed to enact and sustain these changes for an extended duration.

Further, institutionalization is not a static state, and as acknowledged by Kennedy and Parsons (2012), the mitigating and sustaining factors of “wicked problems” change continually. Buy-in at one point in time, and a one-off influx of resources, will not result in lasting, system-level change. Buy-in must be maintained over time, and is best conceptualized as a process rather than a state. Similarly, the ability to generate resources ensures efforts to enact change will endure over a broad time horizon, reducing dependence on external funding agents.

In the next section, we provide an extended example of how our approach to incorporate community buy-in, social entrepreneurship, and social marketing efforts can create enduring social change. We present a simple system, with few organizational entities and individual participants to highlight how these processes, collectively, can result in a system-wide change to improve access to education. The specific approach is scalable, and can be applied to a more complex net of institutions and individual actors.

Combining Approaches to Create a Social Change System: An Extended Case Study

Social change can become self-sustaining once all actors in a system have accepted and internalized the new set of norms and a new equilibrium is established. However, mitigation of complex and societal “wicked problems” addressed by macro-social marketers is likely to occur over the span of decades, first requiring sufficient engagement of all institutional actors, followed by building from “small wins” (Weick 1984) and scaling-up these solutions more broadly over time. Our example illustrates a view of macro-social marketing that generates “small wins” which are then scalable to address societal problems. In the following case study, we describe how various stakeholders create a system of social change. We then highlight how principles from social entrepreneurship (resource generation), community-based efforts (buy-in), and (micro) social marketing foster changes and generate social benefit. This approach broadly represents a macro-marketing approach to social change.

Background

Education is often seen as foundational for economic development, and is a focus of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2015). One “wicked problem” is the lack of educational opportunities at the primary and secondary school level for impoverished youth in developing countries. In one Eastern African country – Kenya – one million youth remain out of school, among the highest number per country in the world (Clark 2015). The education system has improved since reform efforts in 2003, in which the government instituted free primary school education for all, followed by free secondary education implemented in 2008. However, the already-strained public school system struggled to absorb new students, decreasing the quality of education provided (Orodho et al. 2013). As in many developing nations, quality, elite institutions exist that cater to the privileged sectors of society, but middle class and lower income families do not have access to these educational resources. Further, practices of early marriage, gender norms, and lack of schools in rural areas of the country have hindered enrollment rates (Orodho 2014). For impoverished families, the fees for required books and school uniforms are often too costly to allow children in low-income families to enroll in school. Those who are able to attend government-sponsored schools often do so in a context of large class sizes (e.g. 100+) with limited resources (e.g. unskilled teachers and poor infrastructure) (Clark 2015). Thus, access to quality education for members of the lower class is a critical problem that has constrained Kenya’s development as a nation, and is a “wicked problem” that has not been addressed successfully by the government alone.

We focus on two institutions that created a partnership to address the problem of access to quality education in coastal Kenya (a rural, poor area most affected by this problem): a large, land grant university in the United States and a small non-profit based in the coastal region in Kenya. Both institutions are embedded in a larger social, political, economic, and regulatory environment, but we constrain our extended example to focus on these two institutions.

The large, land-grant school, whose mission is “Ut Prosim” (translation from Latin: “that I may serve”), recently completed a university-wide strategic planning process to articulate its direction and to revise its institutional norms. Community buy-in was established by asking all stakeholders in this institution (i.e., faculty, students, administrators, governing board, alumni, and external constituents such as industry and community representatives) to participate in the formulation of this plan. One principle that emerged from this process reflected global interdependence and international engagement as a pillar of the new institutional norms. Within this context, the university supported efforts to collaborate with an international NGO to enhance access to educational opportunities for the university’s students and Kenyan students, and to develop renewable financial, intellectual, and labor resources for both institutions. We will describe these university-based programs in a more detailed discussion of social entrepreneurship and community buy-in. We next describe the NGO partner.
ATKYE (Associazione Ticino Kenya Youth Education) is a small, nonprofit organization located near the coast of Kenya, whose focal mission is to provide access to quality education for underprivileged local community youth (primarily girls) through the Bambakofi Academy, a boarding school established and maintained to educate primary school children. The community in which ATKYE operates is one of the poorest in Kenya, and the opportunities provided at the Bambakofi Academy serve as a bridge to secondary, and ultimately higher education. ATKYE initially solicited donations from individuals and foundation grants to support their efforts, but recognized that dependence on aid (versus income generating activities) created too much reliance on external sources. The NGO decided to modify its institutional norms to shift from a dependence on unpredictable aid to a more entrepreneurial focus to generate resources to enhance educational opportunities for the poor children in the local and regional community.

ATKYE representatives contacted faculty at the large, land-grant university in the US to determine whether a partnership would serve the mission of each institution. The stakeholders in this social change system were two formal institutions – the university and ATKYE (Kenyan NGO), the local Kenyan community where the Bambakofi Academy operates, the students at the university and in the academy.

The project that evolved from this collaboration entailed the development of two interrelated joint ventures: an international service learning (ISL) study abroad program and the development of a summer camp designed for Kenyan youth. These programs were started in 2012 and generate money for ATKYE to invest in their focal mission to provide access to education for low-income youth. In the subsequent sections, we describe how this project employed principles of social entrepreneurship, community buy-in, and social marketing to create system-level change. This example is illustrative of a growing movement: ISL programs have increased substantially in higher education as a pedagogical platform and an approach to civic engagement (Clayton, Bringle, and Hatcher 2012). Concurrently, NGOs have increasingly adopted an entrepreneurial orientation, developing ventures to generate funds for their core activities (Dees 1998). The current example bridges these growing trends, linking them as a way to address a deeply-rooted social problem. A key value of the approach is the NGO’s joint development of a summer camp and an ISL program that generated revenue to accelerate ATKYE’s efforts to serve their mission: provide access to education for low-income Kenyan youth. The ISL program and summer camp reflect the core tenets from three distinct social change literatures to increase the organizations’ capacity to fulfill its mission, to enhance the venture’s success, and to serve as a scalable template for other education-oriented NGOs.

Social Entrepreneurship Contribution

ATKYE applied an entrepreneurial orientation, expressing interest in using their school’s classrooms and dormitories, and to employ the school’s local workers (cafeteria, guards, teachers and teaching assistants, domestic aides) when classes were not in session. Market research efforts, including in-depth interviews with local community civic and business leaders, discovered Kenyans were unfamiliar with the concept of a “summer camp” (educational, athletic, or recreational activities for children during non-school time provided in a temporary-living setting), but were interested in such an offering. The market for these camps consisted of distinct segments: poor children from the local coastal region, and middle to upper-middle class Kenyans who would pay to attend this camp. Revenue from the latter group subsidized the attendance of the poor local students, and more importantly, supported the nonprofit’s core activities to operate and later expand the infrastructure and scholarships provided to students who attend the Bambakofi Academy. This model created a source of income for the nonprofit organization and a shift from relying solely on aid to a more enduring combination of aid and income-generating activities, allowing ATKYE to scale up their efforts to provide access to quality education. With the money infused by the summer camps, ATKYE was able to hire qualified teachers and administrators, expand and enhance their facilities and infrastructure, and accept more students at the school (covering the costs of the additional books, school fees, and uniforms). Using a social entrepreneurship lens, ATKYE appropriated value (in the form of the camp fees) to reinvest in their core activities and used the value-creating activity of a summer camp to hire additional, qualified teachers, pay for additional students’ uniforms and textbooks, and invest in the school infrastructure.

The university supported an “intrapreneurial” effort to create an international service learning (ISL) program that reflected its emerging institutional norms and to provide an enduring source of financial and intellectual resources, and staff for the camp. This university venture was also developed to accommodate the rapidly growing student demand for study abroad and service learning experiences in developing countries (Olivola and Shafir 2013; Wearing and McGehee 2013). In the new ISL program, undergraduate students spent several months to complete coursework related to enduring social change and to design camp curricula and activities (described subsequently) as part of a field practicum (see www.linkinglives.org). Students travelled to Kenya to implement the program.

The ISL program provided many resources for ATKYE and their operations. ISL participants paid a fee to participate in the ISL experience and to the nonprofit organization in exchange for housing and dining services. Students also served as a source of “free,” skilled human resources to implement the summer camp as part of the service learning experience, and to provide intellectual resources (i.e., a transfer of knowledge acquired through the university) to the campers and staff of the NGO. They also provided access to their collective social networks, generating publicity for the nonprofit organization, attention to its efforts, funding, and attracting future potential ISL program participants. For example, one university student group who worked with primary school children at the summer...
Camp formed a US-based NGO (www.taalumaproject.org) to raise scholarships for these children to attend secondary school.

Social Entrepreneurship as a Pillar of Enduring Social Change

A social entrepreneurial perspective enabled ATKYE and the university to identify available, unused resources and apply them to meet demand for a summer camp, creating value for all parties. The use of a fee-for-service business model generated revenue for ATYKE and reduced their need to rely on a less reliable source of revenue (i.e., donors or grants). That is, the summer camp provided a way for ATYKE to generate money to subsidize their core mission: to provide education to low-income youth, a step toward addressing the “wicked problem” of lack of educational opportunities for low-income youth in Kenya.

The international service learning (ISL) platform was also an entrepreneurial response to an opportunity at the university. In addition to meeting student demand, the ISL platform is an enduring source of resources. At the end of each program, participants often engage in resource generation for the NGO, remain project advocates, and, in one case, formed a separate NGO to provide continued support for social development efforts. The use of a fee-for-service model in this context reduced the nonprofits’ reliance on volunteers, whose availability and extent of commitment is unpredictable.

These two enterprises (the camps, the ISL program) provide complementary resources and value for the respective participants, and generated financial resources for ATYKE’s operations through activities aligned with their social mission. The university partners generated value for the university students through the ISL program. These partners created additional social benefit by generating resources to address the focal social issue at hand.

Community Engagement Contribution

Mutual respect is a central tenet of community action efforts, and a way to encourage buy-in from different partners (Ozanne and Anderson 2010). Representatives of the university and ATYKE (community organization) collaborated to identify projects of mutual benefit. This approach to co-creation of value resulted in the development of a camp-experience. For example, university representatives contributed knowledge about how to form an enterprise and market the camps (define the target audience, communicate the value of the camps to the target). ATYKE representatives generated local community buy-in for the venture, and tailored the camps’ value proposition using a culturally-appropriate message and modality (i.e., word-of-mouth).

ATKYE used its position in the community to engage local workers to arrange camp logistics and to staff the program. For example, a (domestic) camp director was hired to oversee camp operations, and updated furniture and recreational materials were purchased from local suppliers, building community capacity through an infusion of capital.

Community buy-in from the university, the NGO, and their respective constituents (i.e., university students and primary school children in Kenya) enhanced the entrepreneurial venture by legitimizing its programs: the American university’s buy-in enhanced middle-class Kenyans’ perception of the camps, and ATYKE’s welcoming of local poor children to attend the summer camp (for free) enhanced the local community’s perception of the venture. ATYKE created buy-in among the university students through their efforts to teach these students about local culture and to facilitate their interactions with the local community. ATYKE’s commitment to the students’ overall well-being also enabled them to be open to personal growth, a predictor of long-term personal change via service learning programs (Simons and Cleary 2006).

Program developers at the university generated institutional and community buy-in among administrative, faculty, students and their parents. Efforts to co-create this program with the various university stakeholders provided sufficient resources to establish the program and to grow its presence on campus. All key stakeholders viewed the ISL program and camps as appropriate and desirable efforts, adhering to acceptable cultural and normative standards, seeking valuable outcomes, and fulfilling pragmatic needs and interests.

Buy-In as a Pillar of Enduring Social Change

Efforts to encourage community buy-in through the university and the NGO generated support among all system participants, and created conditions where each institution and its members derived value from the joint venture. ATYKE’s efforts to generate buy-in from within the organization and in the local community provided support for the joint venture with the university. The university students were provided with multiple settings (both within the organization and the local community) to learn about cultural expectations for social and educational interactions. The successful adjustment of the university students to the Kenyan context was critical to sustain the camps and the service learning program.

ATKYE’s buy-in to the joint venture also provided valuable market intelligence to design the camp to meet the needs of the community, using culturally appropriate communications and social interactions. Although the university could have engaged in market research to answer these questions, an outsider-only approach is less efficient and effective than gathering market intelligence from an insider perspective, and would have also been less successful in generating interest in and trust by the community.

The program developers’ efforts to generate buy-in at the university administration level were also critical to the program sustainability. The legitimacy and value of the international service learning fostered internal support for program operation and created tangible evidence to reflect the emerging institutional norms. Past university student participants shared their experiences with administrators, faculty, and potential future student stakeholders to further legitimize the program value, and enhance the longer-term viability of the program’s operation.
Finally, the young middle-class Kenyan participants can be considered a future stakeholder in ATKYE’s efforts. Campers from multiple backgrounds interacted and formed relationships during the camp. Research suggests that interaction among members of different groups in a camp context reduces stigmatization and increases empathy with the outgroup (Sherif and Sherif 1953). Participation in the camp with youth from a lower-class background increases the middle class campers’ awareness of and sensitivity to inequities in access to education, laying a foundation for future voting and advocacy behavior.

Social Marketing Contribution

Micro social marketing emphasizes behavior change that results in societal benefit. Alone, as other authors have pointed out, this approach is not sufficient to produce enduring social change, but can enhance efforts when coupled with other social change approaches (Kennedy, 2016). This focus guided the structure of the ATKYE camps, shaped elements of the ISL program, and was used to generate positive change in the participants.

Camps. The ATKYE camps were positioned as an educational and recreational summer camp experience. The educational focus of the camp — and a source of prosocial benefit — was a curriculum that focused on making good decisions. The week-long curriculum was developed by university students, working with marketing and psychology professors, and was assigned as part of the ISL fieldwork. The curriculum was organized around themes based on results from focus groups with members of the target market and in-depth conversations with the NGO and community leaders. The ideas communicated through the curriculum were disseminated through a combination of discussion, lecture, and games. A component of each unit entailed student development of a skit to reflect lessons learned during the day: characters faced a situation involving the unit subject and used (or failed to use) pertinent behavioral strategies. Drama was applied because it is a culturally-familiar communication channel.

ISL program. A social marketing approach was also applied to influence the actions of the ISL university students and encourage commitment to future prosocial efforts. Research on ISL indicates participation in such programs fosters participants’ personal development, such as increased self-efficacy and appreciation of relationships (Astin and Sax 1998; Eyler, Giles, and Braxton 1997), an expanded sense of social awareness and citizenship skills (Bringle and Hatcher 1996), and enhanced commitment to future prosocial efforts.

ISL students were assigned guided critical reflection essays and participated in structured group discussions about the experience at several points throughout the program. Participants were asked to write about their expectations of the service learning experience, and then iteratively reflect upon past writings in light of their current experience. Group discussions focused on the concept of social justice and one’s personal role in shaping a social system. Discussions raised the question of personal fulfillment, reexamination of personal priorities, activities that provide meaning, and beliefs about the way the world should be.

The ISL students uniformly articulated that the experience changed their perspective in both the group discussion context and reflection essays, and they voiced a desire to engage in prosocial activities in the future. This critical reflection guided ISL students in their attitude and behavioral change. The ISL efforts can be viewed as an intervention in which the outcome is an increased number of socially-minded actors in the population. This outcome contrasts with traditional education abroad programs which are more personal, or course subject focused. ISL experiences enhance understanding of socially-embedded problems, awareness of social justice, and enhance a commitment to future civic engagement and broader social change.

Social Marketing as a Pillar of Enduring Social Change. In this context, social marketing was applied to encourage the beneficiaries (i.e., the university and primary school students) to adopt prosocial behaviors. The university student participation in ISL increased the likelihood (through critical reflection) they would engage in such activity in the future by presenting the program (i.e., the product) and its promotion (i.e., the communication of the program benefits) as an opportunity for personal growth and a contribution to social welfare. The experiential nature of the program, its implementation in a developing country, the written prompts, and group discussion all enhanced the delivery and value of the experience for the university students and resulted in an increased desire, post-experience, to engage in social welfare projects, leading to enduring social change.

The summer camp curriculum (the product) was delivered using a communication channel prominent in the local culture (i.e., drama and oral histories). The content of the curriculum reflected specific, contextualized instantiations of target behaviors to change (e.g., peer influence, bullying, unprotected sex). The social marketing approach was designed to provide lessons for the students and teach the local staff a process that can be applied to future students to foster good decision making and reduce at-risk behaviors.

This micro social marketing approach increased the value of the camps experienced by multiple stakeholders. For the ISL stakeholders (university students and representatives), the social marketing efforts created engagement with the camps, and enduring involvement in future social welfare projects. For the campers, the social marketing efforts created a curriculum designed to address the at-risk behaviors of camp participants. The micro social marketing approach aided the development of a quality “product” to support the NGO’s mission, and created mission-consistent value for other ecosystem stakeholders.
Discussion

Integration

The current work describes an approach which NGOs can adopt to address “wicked problems,” by using the lack of educational opportunities for lower-income youth as an exemplar. The focal NGO grew their core activities through the joint development, with a university partner, of an ISL program and summer camp venture. The summer camp venture and ISL program provided a reliable source of revenue to invest in their infrastructure and to hire qualified teachers and administrators, ultimately providing additional educational opportunities to lower income youth.

In the current work, we present a three-faceted approach to systemic change that applies components of social entrepreneurship, social marketing, and social engagement. The inherent weakness in each approach is compensated for by a corresponding strength in other approaches. For example, social entrepreneurship focuses on innovation and creating new solutions to address the social problems. In that process, social entrepreneurs apply business and financial models that can generate resources and revenue to sustain the efforts. Less focus, however, is placed on the local context (community buy-in). If, for example, a social entrepreneurial venture is initiated from outside the local community (e.g., an international social enterprise which enters into a local market), then the consequences for failure are likely more substantial in the local context than for an internal entrepreneur. Community buy-in, and the co-creation of the enterprise with the social entrepreneur increases the likelihood of long-term success and reduces the potential harm to the local community.

If an effort to address a “wicked problem” focuses primarily on a community-based approach to engage and energize the local residents, then fewer resources are available to identify key determinants of the targeted behaviors and outcome, and the creation of an organizational structure to generate the resources necessary to support enduring social change. The small-scale and geographically rooted approach of community action also creates a barrier to scale up the grassroots innovations, which are based on attention to complex contextual detail and are not applicable to other localities. In the current example, a community-based approach alone – that is, community-based schools – would not have an adequate, enduring, resource base, resulting in an inability to attract trained teachers and purchase the educational materials necessary. In other words, a community-based only approach would be less scalable and less likely to solve “wicked problems.”

(Micro) social marketing provides a systematic process to identify key determinants of targeted behavior and to develop and implement a platform to deliver an intervention. This approach increases the likelihood of measureable change, but its intention to resource generation, community buy-in, or the application of behavioral change models not refined for the local culture or local context make its sole use for enduring change problematic. In the current example, social marketing was used to promote the ISL program, the development of the camp curriculum, and promote camp participation among the Kenyan children in the local and regional communities. A micro social marketing approach alone without the engagement of other systemic partners and efforts to grow ATKE resource base, would be less likely to create an enduring solution to the lack of quality education for Kenyan children.

Macromarketing Thought

We provide evidence for the potential success of a “middle ground” approach to macro-social marketing in which we focus on how institutions more proximal to the direct beneficiaries (e.g., NGOs) create change in their institutional norms to address the significant problems that face these beneficiaries. That is, rather than suggesting a top-down solution, or a solution at the individual level, we consider how institutions at the meso-level (such as NGOs and universities) can interact to create improvements at the macro level through a series of smaller-scale improvements: that is, big change is often driven by multiple small wins. The current work highlights this approach through the use of market-driven solutions (entrepreneurship, marketing) that recognize embeddedness in a social system (community action).

The approach described in the current work also illustrates how efforts to reduce a “wicked problem” can create benefits in other sectors of society. The primary focus of this work is to highlight a mechanism for NGOs to sustain their efforts to address the lack of quality education. The secondary benefits of this approach – the influence on ISL program participants and summer camp participants – are often studied separately, as approaches to individual and social change. The literature on the positive benefits of ISL programs (Clayton, Bringle, and Hatcher 2012) and educational summer camps (Winfree, Williams, and Powell 2002) indicates these participants are more likely to experience growth in identity, interpersonal and critical thinking skills, and are more likely to become engaged in social welfare projects (Mainieri and Anderson 2015). The current work contributes to macro-marketing thought by pointing out the positive macro-externalities that can occur through addressing a macro-social problem.

Finally, we conceptualize the social system as an ecosystem, where resources must be infused to sustain efforts. The traditional micro marketing view has examined exchange at an individual level, and the traditional macro view has viewed economies as an aggregate marketing system. We incorporate a perspective from the natural sciences, with multiple entities that contribute different types of resources or capital, and interact to create a balanced system. For example, a missing component in a system (lack of educational opportunities for low income youth) can be filled by an institution (NGO) that will convert resources from other entities (university and middle-class Kenyan students) in exchange for a “product” (summer camp, ISL program), with support and buy-in of other institutions (local community, university).
Alternative Approaches and Limitations

The proposed solution is one approach to macro-level change that involves scalable NGO efforts to meet the needs of the larger community. The approach used in this case study is not the only solution, but reflected an effective use of the skills and resources of the institutions involved to address limited access to quality education. Other institutions, with an alternative set of skills, resources, and missions could approach this “wicked problem” differently. Large-scale religious organizations can fund and manage schools and school districts as part of their mission fulfillment. In Ethiopia, for example, the Catholic Church and its associated organizations support a significant portion of the primary and secondary school children, providing an alternative to small NGOs whose mission, like ATKYE, to provide education (Grace and O’Keefe 2007). Finally, the Kenyan government can reposition its priorities and rank education as the foundation for economic development, prompting the allocation of additional resources and constituting a more “top-down” approach to systematic change.

Numerous factors may contribute to an unsuccessful effort to implement the proposed approach to address the lack of quality education. Like many entrepreneurial and nonprofit ventures, an inaccurate assessment of consumer demand (e.g., camper interest, university student participation, local student needs), lack of resources to implement the venture (e.g., financial, intellectual), ineffective allocation of scarce resources to meet institutional needs (e.g., substantial investment in capital expenditures, less investment in human capital), changing local context (e.g., new government regulations) and the inability to adapt to new challenges all may contribute to an unsuccessful effort to improve the quality of education in Kenya. The institutional norms of the university and NGO partners are also subject to local, organization-specific pressures and leadership changes, which would affect the success of a partnership between the two organizations. Finally, NGO failure may result from efforts to scale up prematurely and related expenditures (such as administrative costs) (Edwards and Hulme 1996).

Propositions and Future Research

Macro-social marketing attempts to address inter-related problems, using upstream social marketing and a systems approach to effect societal change (Domegan 2008; Kennedy and Parsons 2012). Based on the current work, we present propositions for future research relevant to macro-social marketers and other researchers interested in social change. We view the actions of “midstream” institutions as one appropriate approach to solve “wicked problems.” Future research can explore how the actions of these midstream institutions, such as NGOs, influence both local and distal members of the ecosystem; that is, are midstream institutions uniquely positioned to influence government actions and individual-level behaviors? Using a social network perspective, midstream institutions may serve as “brokers” in an ecosystem. Relatedly, is government intervention more effective when enacted through these midstream partners?

Second, our approach recognizes that institutions are embedded in a system of inter-related stakeholders and act with the explicit support of its constituents. That is, changes in institutional norms are the result of changes that evolve from the constituents served by these larger institutions. We see the power of macro-social marketing as creating change in many smaller institutions, within their embedded systems, that then cultivate the macro changes in the societal norms. We propose macro-level changes are not solely trickle-down effects of new institutional norms and social rules from large entities to solve these problems. Future research can test this proposition, again adopting a longitudinal social network analysis perspective: are institutions more tightly embedded in a context (as indicated by the number and strength of their ties) more efficient and effective in bringing about changes in “wicked problems?”

Third, we propose community action often provides the motivation to initiate social change. The involvement of the community increases the buy-in and commitment to sustain efforts to create a desired change because residents experience the aversive circumstances directly. Social marketing and social entrepreneurship are often excluded as a component of community action programs. Future research can compare the relative short and long term success of community action approaches that do and do not employ social marketing and social entrepreneurship principles.

Fourth, we propose that organizations with an entrepreneurial orientation (that is, generate a portion of their resources through market-based means) are more scalable and lead to macro-social change more rapidly than organizations that rely on grant funding and donations. Future research can explore the rate at which organizations are able to accelerate their efforts in the presence (or absence) of an entrepreneurial approach to revenue generation. Further, research can examine when efforts adversely affect the NGOs original mission and what types of organizations are more prone to mission drift.

Our analysis of social change is intended to highlight the value of each approach and to make salient that one approach is inadequate to create enduring social change. As in research, which benefits from the triangulation of multiple methods and strategies to examine a phenomenon, enduring social change would benefit from a multi-perspective collaboration in which the key stakeholders within each tradition work together to create the desired change. Integrating these approaches within a systems-level perspective will strengthen a macro-marketing approach, and provide guidance to create enduring social change.

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