

# Book Review

*Social Marketing to Protect the Environment: What Works*  
Doug McKenzie-Mohr, Nancy R. Lee, P. Wesley Schulz and Philip Kotler  
Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc, 2012



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Never doubt that a group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has (p. 32).

This poignant quote underpins the sustainable journey of McKenzie-Mohr et al. *Social Marketing to Protect the Environment* is a thought-provoking and inspiring book, which is an apt and well articulated 'bible' for social actors who are actively involved in or engaged with sustainability and environmental protection. In the first of its kind, McKenzie-Mohr et al. have endeavoured to fill two 'missings' in the market. First, there have been relatively few academics concerned with 'influencing behaviours to protect the environment' (p. xii). Secondly, the literature concerning environmental protection is academically oriented, and fails to find a 'variety of solid case examples using social marketing to influence environmental protection behaviours – especially ones that involved audience research, utilized more than communications and advertising, and included rigorous evaluations confirming success' (p. xii). Environmental issues such as global warming, recycling, water consumption, energy use and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are rampantly becoming such complex policy issues that they are now being perceived as 'wicked' problems to governments across the globe (Roberts, 2000; Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). Now more than ever, political leaders need to think outside of the box and see the world through the consumer's eyes.

McKenzie-Mohr et al. interconnect for the first time a social marketing model with a community-based social marketing (CBSM) model to produce solutions and experiences, which affect more than just awareness and attitudinal change, but envelop behavioural changes that 'benefit society (public health, safety, the environment, and communities) as well as the target audience' (p. 4). McKenzie-Mohr et al. postulate that behaviour change is central to the pursuit of sustainability. *Social Marketing to Protect the Environment*

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details how to use community-based social marketing to motivate environmental protection behaviours as diverse as water and energy efficiency, alternative transportation and watershed protection. The authors, in assimilation, provide an outstanding platform for the current generation and the next generation of sustainability advocates and activists, through the integration of academic-oriented concepts and models with action-oriented case studies from around the world. The global cases illustrate how community-based social marketing can be harnessed to foster more sustainable communities.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

*Social Marketing to Protect the Environment* comprises four sections. The first section encapsulates the introduction which underscores fostering sustainable behaviour. McKenzie-Mohr et al. argue that the cornerstone of sustainability is behaviour change. The authors critique past initiatives regarding sustainable behavioural change as being overly reliant on 'large-scale information campaigns that utilise education and/or advertising to encourage the adoption of sustainable actions' (p. 3). It is widely accepted that social marketing is much more than social propaganda (O'Shaughnessy, 1996) and CBSM, according to the authors, provides an attractive alternative to information-intensive campaigns for the design of programmes to foster sustainable behaviour. This section advocates a five-step model to CBSM which underpins the subsequent sections of the text, 'laying bare the essential steps of the process, simply and clearly, so that others can understand and apply them' (p. xi). Sections 2 and 3 examine the residential and commercial sectors respectively, where McKenzie-Mohr et al. provide 24 case studies from around the world, illustrating successful environmental campaigns with regard to influencing more sustainable lifestyles. Every chapter in Sections 2 and 3 begins by presenting an environmental challenge and exploring the nature of the problem and relevant environmental trends. The chapters proceed to explore potential behaviour solutions that could be used to address the relevant environmental problem, whilst incorporating two to three cases which highlight examples of 'what works' in addressing the particular environmental challenge under consideration. Section 4 is the most promising facet to the book where the authors deviate from the mid- and down-stream levels of action-oriented cases, where the focus is on individual behaviour change such as bringing a reusable mug to work, carpooling and not throwing cigarette butts or chewing gum on the street, to recommendations for upstream 'federal, state/provincial agencies and those working at the municipal level' (p. 221), encapsulating for the first time a total market approach to environmental issues in a social marketing book.

#### INFLUENCING BEHAVIOURS IN THE RESIDENTIAL SECTOR

McKenzie-Mohr et al. detail thirteen cases relating to sustainable issues such as reducing waste, protecting water quality, reducing emissions, reducing water use, reducing energy use, and protecting fish and wildlife habitats in the residential sector. The authors, acutely aware of the deficiencies of CBSM, choose case studies which target a variety of behaviours simultaneously, as opposed to strategies that tackle one behaviour at a time, which is a common criticism of the CBSM model. More specifically, McKenzie-Mohr et al. detail

in a case how EcoTeams in the United States, Netherlands and United Kingdom designed water efficiency programmes targeting households, but the programme could also extend to church groups, civic organisations and workplaces. The desired behaviours targeted included turning off faucets when not in use, washing full loads of dishes, installing water-efficient showerheads, fixing leaks and reducing lawn watering.

The authors also examine an 'impressive work plan for audiences downstream (consumers), midstream (purveyors such as restaurants, food service companies, grocery stores and fish markets) and upstream (wholesalers and the fishing/aquaculture industry)' (p. 120) in a case relating to Seafood Watch in Monterey, California. The authors argue that had behavioural change been concentrated in one sector of society the outcome would not have been as successful. The authors ascertain that the integration of efforts by consumers, restaurants, fish markets and the fishing/aquaculture industry resulted in the concretisation of the programme's success in assisting conservation efforts through sustainable seafood choices. Each of the residential cases selected by the authors critically analyses the benefits, barriers and success factors to sustainable behaviour, acting as guiding mechanisms to residential environmental practitioners.

#### INFLUENCING BEHAVIOURS IN THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR

McKenzie-Mohr et al. again respectively tackle the sustainability issues of reducing waste, protecting water quality, reducing emissions, reducing water use and reducing energy use, but this time the cases are applied to the commercial sector. The authors, through the depiction of eleven compelling cases, outline the triple win strategy. The authors present a win-win-win situation, where there is a win for the change agent, the corporation and the environment. Reflectively, the authors are not constricted to successful cases; they pinpoint the shortcomings of some cases and review what was effective and what could be more effective, elucidating to practitioners how programmes after evaluation may require refinement and improvement for future applications.

#### THE 'SUSTAINABLE' FEATURES OF THE BOOK

In keeping with the theme of the book, the sustainable features of *Social Marketing to Protect the Environment* are numerous. First, McKenzie-Mohr et al. have superbly compiled an extensive action-oriented book for environmental practitioners and enthusiasts. Second, the authors have certainly achieved their objective of defying the 'missings' of environmental issues and credible evidence-based cases from previous literary books and articles in social marketing. Third, the authors have not only overcome the research caveats, but they have produced an excellent resource for upstream stakeholders at policy, regulatory and agency levels in society. The application of the five-step model of CBSM to each chapter makes the read captivating and informative. In addition to the value of the cases to sustainability programme developers, the final section dedicated to upstream stakeholder levels, which embraces the public, practitioners, social advocates and policy makers, simultaneously 'enables social marketing to finally live up to its fullest potential with regard to promoting more sustainable communities' (p. xi).

#### LIMITATIONS TO THE 'SUSTAINABILITY' OF THE BOOK

McKenzie-Mohr et al. provide a comprehensive examination of 24 environmental cases; however, the authors assume a reader's prior knowledge of social marketing and CBSM. It is advisable that all readers use this action-oriented book in conjunction with a theoretically immersed social marketing book in order for practitioners and academics alike to understand and grapple with the theoretical underpinnings of *Social Marketing to Protect the Environment*. In continuance with this limitation, graduates studying social marketing would also need to study a theoretical social marketing book to fully appreciate and value the cases examined by McKenzie-Mohr et al. Another limitation is the brief discussion in the final section relating to upstream stakeholders at policy and regulatory levels. McKenzie-Mohr et al. suggest that federal/state/provincial agencies have an important role to serve as a clearinghouse for effective programmes but this section lacks depth and specificity, and the authors do not necessarily reveal any new solutions or recommendations on how to incorporate the upstream macro-environmental level more effectively in environmental protection programmes. This aspect of the book could be more meaningfully developed.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this book offers invaluable advice to 'current and future practitioners charged with influencing behaviours to protect the environment' (p. xii). In addition to practitioners, the book is also an insightful and explorative read for policy makers, regulators and academics. The fruitful blending of social marketing with CBSM has paved the way for continued theoretical and conceptual advances in social marketing. McKenzie-Mohr et al., as dedicated social marketers, have integrated and intertwined academic-oriented knowledge with practical action-oriented cases, illustrating how complex 'wicked' problems can be deconstructed, achieving sustainable behavioural change for individuals, communities, societies, economies and nations worldwide.

#### REFERENCES

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