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**Up-stream, Mid-stream and Down-Stream Social Marketing. Defining the terms**

**Jeff French November 2012**

The ‘dangerous stream’ analogy was originally adapted from a story told by Irving Zola cited in McKinlay, John B. "A case for refocusing upstream: The political economy of illness." In Conrad and Kern, 2nd edition, 1986, The Sociology of Health and Illness: Critical Perspectives. pp. 484-498.).

The analogy is that a person witnesses a fast flowing and dangerous stream with lots of people in it with many of the people drowning. Public servants are deployed to dive in and rescue people or hall them to the bank of the stream and revive them. The punch line of the analogy is that it would be better to focus up-stream to see what was causing all the people to end up in the water in the first place and do something about it such as build a fence.

This analogy is often used in appeals to use a more strategic approach to social programme development and delivery especially emphasising the need for preventive action and action focused on the determinants of social problems or the risk conditions that cause many social ills. However the exact nature of what constitutes up-stream, down- stream or in-stream activity is not well articulated. The following definition seeks to set out some clarity with regard to what action at each level might consist of.

**Up-stream:**

Policy formulation, and prioritization, budget allocation and influence on strategy. Focused on the causal agents and determinants of social problems. Interventions would include for example a policy to restrict the sale or promotion of dangerous products or to promote through fiscal incentives green travel.

**Mid-stream:**

Strategy implementation focused of helping people cope with and improve their ability to deal with poor social conditions and immediate threats to their and their family / community wellbeing. Examples of such interventions would include community resilience and social capital building support programmes, training in skills development, practical assistance in the form of subsidies, and incentives to help adoption of positive social actions such as conditional cash payments for tacking girls to school in developing world counties.

**Down-stream:**

Focused on deploying tactical interventions, projects and campaigns aimed at influencing specific behaviours related to social challenges such as smoking, over eating, poor energy use etc. Examples of interventions would include informational programmes, design solutions such as traffic calming and service provision such as smoking cessation clinics.

**In most instances action at all levels is needed in any comprehensive approach to delivery**

Social Marketing can assist with the development of effective and efficient programmes at each level through the setting of clear behavioral goals, competition analysis, the development of valued social exchanges, the development of segmented interventions, and the selection of the optimum intervention mix at each level to bring about uptake and compliance. Social Marketing’s systematic planning approach can also assist with the development of efficient and effective programmes that can be evaluated in terms of their impact on specific behaviours at up-stream level such as corporations behaviour related to promotions, at in-stream level such as citizen uptake of support services and at down-stream level such as changes in fruit and vegetable consumption.

**Some useful related references with relevance to Social** Marketing.

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Kenny A, Parsons A. (2012). Macro-social marketing and social engineering: a systems approach. Journal of Social Marketing Vol 2 No 1 pp 37- 51.

Wymer W (2011). Developing more effective social marketing strategies. Journal of Social Marketing. Vol 1 No1 pp 17.31.