# Chapter 1

## GreenCOM Weaves Four Strands

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Knowledge alone doesn't harm or help the environment.

Human attitudes don't harm or help the environment.

Human behaviors, on the other hand, have greatly harmed, yet hold a great deal of hope for helping, the environment. Those of us who work for environmental sustainability must address human behavior.

Behaviors, of course, must be supported by knowledge and attitudes. But research in the field of environmental education and in commercial marketing have shown that there is no cause-and-effect progression from knowledge to attitude to behavior as educators have long believed (Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera, 1987). In fact, the relationship among these three things is puzzling.

Research shows that people who take positive environmental actions often have no better understanding of the problem than those who don't act. In the United States, national opinion polls show consistently strong positive attitudes toward the environment, yet most of these Americans still won't do simple things to conserve energy and water. What does cause people to act? What can we as educators say or do to get people to behave in environmentally responsible ways?

The Environmental Education and Communication Project (GreenCOM) was started six years ago by USAID to apply a set of social marketing and communications techniques that have proven successful in the field of health to the field of environment. GreenCOM has had the opportunity to make use of some of these new strategies in 28 countries. This book shares both the theories behind the communications techniques and some of the practical results.

GreenCOM draws on four complementary disciplines and works closely with practitioners in these four fields: social marketing, environmental communications, environmental education, and public participation. Many GreenCOM projects, as described in the case studies in chapters 13–15, blend elements of these fields into workable methods on the ground. But the four fields do not simply offer a cafeteria of strategies; each has its own framework and logic. This chapter gives a brief background on these four fields that form the strands of GreenCOM's strategies.

### STRAND 1: SOCIAL MARKETING

In a relatively new field collectively referred to as *social marketing*, models derived from commercial marketing and behavioral psychology are used to encourage new (healthier, more environmentally friendly) behaviors in groups of people. Social marketing relies on behavior modification theory as its base and identifies key factors that determine the behaviors of target audiences. These "determinants" may operate at the individual, family, community, or system levels. This framework suggests communicators consider a range of ways of making the new behavior desirable and accessible to the target population by looking at barriers to, and benefits of, their adoption.

GreenCOM uses a form of "social marketing" that involves a simple five-step process that we feel will bring about environmental behavior change. It is divided into sections corresponding to the five basic steps of social marketing (Day & Smith, 1996).

The first step—Assessment—identifies why the people you want to influence behave the way they

do. People almost always have good reasons for doing what they do. They are not stupid nor are they often irrational. People need to be empowered to take action. Some small fraction of the audience may already carry out the behaviors we want a larger portion of the population to do. Knowing what people think and why they act the way they do can pinpoint a problem and identify the right way to solve it. What are the differences between doers and non-doers? When possible we want to build on what people are already doing correctly. We are looking for opportunities to develop appealing messages that make the desired behavior sound fun and easy. We are also learning what their sources of information are so we can select a medium for communicating these messages.

In the design and planning step, we take what we learned from the assessment step, compare it to our goals, and design our message. Based on what we learn about doers and non-doers we attempt to identify what might motivate people to stop or start a specific behavior—conserve water, dispose of waste correctly, or take steps to protect critical wildlife habitat. When designing a message we try to remember to find an incentive for people to do (or not do) the behavior. Every person in one form or another asks, "What's in it for me?" Our message must clearly answer that question. Applied research provides insights into the benefits and barriers that people perceive about the proposed behavior. We conceive a message and prepare a draft script, storyboard, or rough tape to convey the message in terms that people can readily relate to. But we do not go into production yet.

In the pre-test and revise stage we actually test our draft campaign items with a small subset of the target audience. In one project GreenCOM worked on in Egypt, we took a draft message out to 40 people to see if the message was effective. (The tested message was what the "experts" believed people should hear rather than one based on marketing research.) We found that 39 out of 40 people with whom we pre-tested the materials did not understand the message. Pre-testing can save enormous amounts of money and time.

After revising, and even re-pre-testing if necessary, it is time to implement.

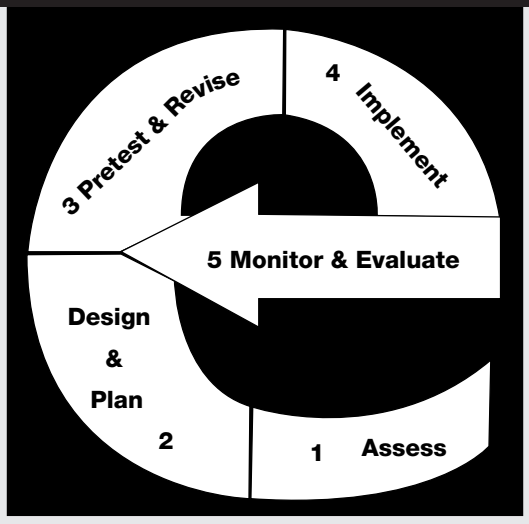
Here we look back at our research or where our audiences get information and we deliver our messages through those channels.

Monitoring and evaluation are critical. Changing behavior doesn't happen overnight. As people are exposed to new behaviors they often seek additional information. Campaigns need to be reworked to speak to those needs. Which media are being helpful or effective? Do we need to change the media mix? Figure 1.1 shows step 5 pointing back to a point between steps 2 and 3. Progress is made in a spiral with constant revisions, new pretests, and further evaluations.

## STRAND 2: ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

Drawing on social marketing theories, described above, as well as experience in communication programs in other sectors (e.g., health, family planning, and AIDS), environmental communicators create strategies for reaching certain audiences, they develop messages and select the appropriate media to reach these audiences.

**Figure 1.1 The Steps of Social Marketing for Creating Behavior Change**



*The goal is to instill in learners the knowledge about the environment, positive attitudes toward the environment, competency in citizen action skills, and a sense of empowerment.*

Communications campaigns are varied, multifaceted, highly planned, and strategically assembled media symphonies designed to increase awareness, inform, or change behavior in target audiences. A model for designing communications campaigns uses these four steps:

1. First, set a clear goal. What exactly do we want people to do? Which behavior do we want to focus on and why? Environmental practices often involve a myriad of behaviors. Which of these should be the focus of our efforts?
2. Then select the audience that can have the most impact and focus on it.
3. Learn that audience's "media diet." What media does the target audience get its information from—radio, TV, newspaper, community bulletin boards, their doctor, boss, or children?
4. Only then can we focus on message. A message written for a community bulletin board is quite different—and could be more effective in changing behavior— than one written for TV.

These four steps: Goal, Audience, Medium, Message must stay in order.

## STRAND 3: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

GreenCOM also draws heavily on the tradition of environmental education. Since the 1970s, environmental education has been characterized as a process that prepares citizens to prevent and solve environmental problems. Delegates to the 1977 United Nations Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tbilisi, Georgia in the former USSR acknowledged the various aspects of environmental education when they agreed upon the following definition:

> *Environmental education is a process of developing a world population that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones (UNESCO, 1978).*

The delegates identified five objectives of environmental education programs:

**Awareness—**to acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.

**Knowledge—**to gain a variety of experiences in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems.

**Attitudes—**to acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.

**Skills—**to acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.

**Participation—**to encourage citizens to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems (UNESCO, 1978).

Environmental education is mission-oriented. A good environmental education program does not stop with the presentation of information, but helps learners wrestle with values and gain the skills to take relevant and responsible action.

Formal environmental education differs from social marketing and environmental communications in that it does not always directly target specific behaviors. It teaches students "how to think" not "what to think." Thus the goal of environmental educators is to help learners form the capacity to collect and analyze information, make good judgments, and participate fully in civic life. Because research shows that people who take action not only have some knowledge and awareness of the problem they are addressing, but also knowledge of *how* to effect change, environmental educators often stress civic and public participation skills. The goal is to instill in learners the knowledge about the environment, positive attitudes toward the environment, competency in citizen action skills, and a sense of empowerment.

Environmental education materials and programs reflect an evolution from science-based information to skill-based participation in problem solving. In some nations, environmental education objectives nicely complement education reform efforts to make subject areas more relevant to local situations and to prepare students to become responsible citizens.

Environmental education activities are easier to start in the nonformal education system, through youth group activities, religious communities, extension visits, agency outreach materials, and field visits to museums and zoos. Environmental educators develop and implement programs that engage learners in discovering information and developing skills to convert that information to meaningful practice.

In some nations, environmental education has a third important aspect: training professionals to consider the environment in their work. Through training, engineers, architects, business leaders, legislators, planners, and other decision-makers in society come to understand how environmental principles and concepts affect their work in housing, water treatment, transportation, urban development, automobile manufacturing, and other spheres (see Chapter 10).

## STRAND 4: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The growing democratization around the world clearly shows the growing desire of people to participate in decisions that affect them. In Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Asia, and Africa the news of the past two decades has been of increased control of people over their governments.

Participation by local residents and stakeholders changes policy. It also makes policy more likely to be effective. The need for public participation is a basic tenet of GreenCOM's strategies. And communication and education techniques can enhance the effectiveness of people or groups seeking to participate.

The complexity and specificity of environmental issues also makes participatory techniques important tools. Today it is less likely that outside experts will have the answer.

With a growing community wariness of consultants, governments, and authority in general, it is paramount that residents design their own communication strategy and messages. Their participation not only improves the program and adds credibility, but also strengthens their skills to do similar work in the future (see Chapter 3). Participatory materials development workshops and participatory research efforts are but a few of the new tools that ensure greater participation by stakeholders in environmental communication activities. The result can be improved quality in a considerably shorter time than would be needed by experts to familiarize themselves with issues, actors, and behaviors.

Participation in communication activities is not just a matter of including local stakeholders in the design of a project, but also partnering with them in the collection of formative research data (see Chapter 6), decision making, and program implementation. The degree to which participation increases local capacity to initiate and manage similar programs at a later time may be the true measure of success (see Chapter 13).

These new approaches are also changing the nature of the communication tools themselves. With greater authority for managing programs devolving to decentralized agencies and community groups, larger numbers of people are being trained to use new communication techniques effectively. Their techniques include: community resource centers, community radio, and community websites.

### *References*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