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## Understanding Barriers, Benefits, and the Competition for Change

*“I truly believe that compassion provides the basis of human survival.”*

—His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama

Return to the room with your target audience, even if only in your mind’s eye. You’ve just shared what behaviors you would like them to consider adopting—ones such as participating in weekly job training workshops, allowing girls to attend school, visiting a health clinic for family planning counseling, or putting a mosquito net around their beds at night. The room is silent. People’s faces have varied expressions. Some look puzzled. Some are frowning. Only a few are smiling. You recognize what a gift it would be to you if they would share their thoughts. For those who look puzzled, what are their questions? For those who are frowning, what are their concerns? And for those who are smiling, what are they imagining?

Their answers fall into categories that marketers and behavioral scientists refer to as perceived *barriers*, *benefits*, and the *competition*. Barriers are reasons your target audience does not want, might not want, or doesn’t think they can adopt the behavior. These barriers may be real, or just perceived. Benefits are what they see in it for them to adopt the behavior, or what you might promise that would make it more likely that they would be motivated. Competitors are

related behaviors (or organizations promoting them) that your target audience is currently engaged in, or prefers to do, instead of the ones you have in mind.

Taking the time and expending the resources to understand these audience perspectives is a *compassionate marketing approach*. It allows you to see what your request looks like from the “other side of the counter.” Only then can you know what barriers you must remove or costs you must reduce. Only then can you know what benefits you need to highlight or features you need to add to the offer. Only then can you know who and what you are competing with, and what you must do to upstage or engage them.

Our opening case story introduces our poverty issue of focus for this chapter—agricultural productivity. In subsequent sections, we will further describe techniques for identifying audience barriers, benefits, and the competition.

### Agricultural Productivity: The Promising Case in Malawi

“A food crisis grips the planet. Prices of rice, wheat, and other essentials skyrocket, leading to food shortage riots in a dozen countries and jolting governments and policy makers to rethink their ideas about commodities markets, biofuels, and agricultural production in the developing world... Within this haystack of gloom shines the needle of Malawi, where a government-led fertilizer subsidies program has produced two bountiful maize harvests, filling stomachs and cupboards across this formerly destitute sliver of southern Africa.”<sup>1</sup>

—David Lepaska, Devex Correspondent  
May 15, 2008

One of the central characteristics of the poor is that they are significantly rural. Because agriculture is the predominant provider of employment for the rural poor, agricultural productivity is likely to have a significant impact on poverty. Malawi has one of the highest population densities in Africa, with 85% of the population farming on small plots.<sup>2</sup> Soil degradation is widespread. As the country's population grew over the years, impoverished farmers could not let their land lie fallow, nor could they afford to fertilize it. As a result, their depleted plots yielded less and less food, and farmers fell deeper into poverty. After a disastrous corn harvest in 2005, almost a third (5 million) of Malawi's 13 million people needed emergency food aid.<sup>3</sup> Most agreed that having farmers use fertilizer and improved high-yield seeds was essential for raising farm productivity, and there were pressures on the government of Malawi to offer subsidies. But there were major barriers to this happening.

Major donors, such as the World Bank and others that Malawi depended on for aid, had serious concerns about universal subsidies. Instead, they stressed the importance of targeting only those who could not afford fertilizers, and they encouraged using research-based criteria to select fertilizers based on soil and rainfall conditions. They felt that strategies were needed to support and leverage broader private investments and should provide for exit options in the future. And the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) wanted to focus on the private sector for delivering fertilizer and seed, and it viewed subsidies as undermining that effort.

Since the food supply situation was grave, the Malawi government in 2005 reinstated and deepened subsidies (anyway). Fertilizer was distributed through a coupon-based distribution program to more than 1.3 million farm households. In 2006,

approximately 1.5 million farmers received coupons for fertilizer, and 2 million received coupons for free maize seed. Over 50% of the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security was allocated to pay these costs. And then, to address donor concerns, the Government of Malawi and the World Bank sponsored a Fertilizer Workshop, bringing all stakeholders to the table to discuss best practices on fertilizer and address the mistrust between the government and private-sector fertilizer suppliers. As a result, the government agreed to involve the private sector in developing its 2006–2007 subsidy strategy. Ultimately, 28% of the subsidized fertilizer was sold through private-sector outlets. And to revitalize fertilizer distribution in Malawi, USAID began developing a network of medium- and small-sized business dealers in fertilizer<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 7.1).



**FIGURE 7.1** In Mchinji, Malawi, fertilizer is now accessible due to USAID's program—small bags and better prices—sold locally.

Source: Staff/International Center for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development

In 2007, the government moved to increase public support for the program, giving people a more direct hand in determining who would receive subsidy coupons. In Chembe, for example, villagers gathered one morning in 2007 to decide who most needed fertilizer coupons in the next planting season. They had enough for only 19 of the 53 families in the village. In the end, with the leadership of the village chief, they came to an agreement, giving priority to families who were rearing children orphaned by AIDS and those caring for elders.<sup>5</sup>

In 2006 and 2007, farmers produced record-breaking corn harvests.<sup>6</sup> Child malnutrition dropped an impressive 80%, and the country exported 280,000 tons of maize, selling more corn to the World Food Program of the United Nations than any other country in southern Africa.<sup>7</sup> The harvest also helped the poor by lowering food prices and increasing wages for farm workers. And as David Lepeska reported further, these good times are likely to continue. “Despite the global economic downturn, the International Monetary Fund is forecasting nearly 8% growth for Malawi in 2008, as compared to 3.7% globally.”<sup>8</sup>

Better than shipping food to various countries needing aid, the same money could be used to help the poor grow their own food. Malawi is an example of a country that took this route and doubled its food production in three years.

## Barriers

We begin deepening our understanding of our target audiences’ perspectives by exploring the nature of barriers, ways to identify them, and how they will be useful to you. Remaining sections in the chapter expand on similar topics for perceived benefits and the competition.

## *Types of Barriers*

Barriers may be related to a variety of factors, including *internal* ones such as personal knowledge, beliefs, skills, and abilities related to the behavior. There are also likely to be *external* factors, including restraints created by existing infrastructures, technology, economics, and natural or cultural influences. They may be real (“Fertilizers and high-yield seeds will cost me more”) or perceived (“I think the chemicals in the fertilizers might be dangerous”). In either case, they are always from the target market’s perspective and often are something you need to address.

Table 7.1 presents examples of typical barrier categories, using the focus on agricultural productivity for illustration. Keep in mind that not every member of the target audience will have all, or even most, of these barriers. Additionally, not all barriers are “equal”; some are (way) more significant to your target audience than others.

**TABLE 7.1 Examples of Potential Barriers for Small Farmers in Africa to Use Chemical Fertilizers and High-Yield Seeds**

Type of Barrier	Example
Doubt or don’t value the potential benefits	They won’t help my crops that much.
Lack of understanding or knowing what this is about	How are these fertilizers and seeds different from the ones I am using now?
Self-efficacy—a concern with being able to perform the behavior or not having the know-how	Fertilizers are tricky and have to be done just right, or you could burn your crop.
Too much time, effort, energy	Switching to different seeds means I’ll have to make all kinds of changes, like how I store and sow them.
Physical discomfort	Those fertilizers smell.
Concern with potential “side effects” or unintended consequences	The fertilizers are chemical-based. This could harm my livestock.
Reduced pleasure or pride	I feel better knowing that I improved my crops without aid from the government or donors.

Type of Barrier	Example
Costs too much	I have no extra money for new seeds or fertilizers.
Lack access, or not available to me	There is no place in our village to get them.
Not a norm, or others aren't doing it	This isn't how we farm in our village.
Concern with what others are doing or will think	What if I get a coupon but my neighbor doesn't? It wouldn't seem fair.

### *Identifying and Prioritizing Barriers*

Identifying audience barriers should begin with exploring existing research, performing a literature review, and/or examining internal records and data. Your search may also warrant new qualitative and quantitative research efforts, especially when existing information does not apply to the specific behaviors you have in mind or markets you are targeting.

#### *Existing Research or Data*

This, of course, is the least costly and time-consuming option for gaining insights, if available. Search engines such as Google may quickly lead to journal articles, news stories, press releases, conference papers, or even a relevant YouTube video. For example, a simple search for “barriers for farmers to use fertilizers in Africa” yielded 628,000 potentially relevant articles in a third of a second. Queries to Listservs can also be quite productive. The Social Marketing Listserv, for example, managed by the Social Marketing Institute, has more than 1,700 members from more than 39 countries and is an active forum for queries on existing research studies.<sup>9</sup> Finally, an organization’s own internal records and databases may provide informative, even anecdotal, comments that give you insights into target audience concerns and/or objections to proposed targeted behaviors.

### *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research generally refers to studies where sample sizes are typically small and are not reliably projected to the greater population. Since the focus for barriers research is often on just identifying and understanding them, this can be an efficient and effective technique. Focus groups, personal interviews, observation research, and ethnographic studies are common tools used for these purposes. Typical questions explored with target audiences might include asking “What are some of the reasons you haven’t done this in the past?”; “What might get in the way of your doing this in the future?”; and “What other concerns do you have when thinking about doing this?”<sup>10</sup>

### *Quantitative Research*

In some situations, it is important not only to identify barriers, but also to size and prioritize them, providing focus for strategic planning. In these cases, you may need to conduct quantitative studies, ones with larger sample sizes, rigorous sampling procedures, and controlled and organized environments. Common tools include telephone surveys, online surveys, and self-administered questionnaires.<sup>11</sup> Often a list of potential barriers will have been identified using existing or qualitative research, and then a quantitative survey can list (or present) each barrier, allowing the respondent to rate each on a scale in terms of its significance.

### *Using Insights on Barriers*

This list of barriers will be your inspiration for what strategies you will incorporate in your marketing plan. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the marketer’s toolbox has four traditional tools that you can use to create, communicate, and deliver value to your target audience—in return for the desired behavior. Conceptually, the process is a simple one. You consider each of the barriers, one at a time, and



explore which one or more of the marketing tools (product, price, place, promotion) can potentially remove or lessen that barrier.

For example, one of the barriers for the farmers to using fertilizers and high-yield seeds presented in Table 7.1 was a concern with access. Bringing the fertilizers and seeds to the farmer or at least the nearby village (a “place” strategy) seemed essential. The farmers also saw the cost as a significant barrier, which implied that subsidies (a “price” strategy) would also “make or break the deal.”

## Benefits

Benefits, in contrast to barriers, are reasons your target audience wants, or might want, to adopt the behavior. They answer the question “What’s in it for me?”, often referred to as the WIFM factor. This marketing principle stresses the fact that consumers are always sizing the potential benefits when considering whether to “buy.” And, as mentioned earlier when describing the Exchange Theory, they won’t buy unless they see value equal to or greater than the costs they will pay.

### *Types of Benefits*

Typical benefits that marketers appeal to are as follows:

- Health
- Safety
- Physical comfort and pleasure
- Entertainment
- Economic status
- Employment
- Relationships
- Self-esteem and recognition
- Growth and development
- Self-actualization
- Environmental protection
- Contribution to others and the community

Some are more relevant than others to poverty-related behaviors (such as economics and employment versus entertainment and self-actualization). What is relevant is that the target audience (the buyer) may have a very different benefit in mind that appeals to them than we (the sellers) do. Bill Smith at the Academy for Educational Development often cites the example of benefits sought for physical activity, illustrating the fact that benefits may not always be so obvious. “The whole world uses health as a benefit. (And yet) health, as we think of it in public health, isn’t as important to consumers—even high-end consumers—as they claim that it is. What people care about is looking good (tight abdominals and buns). Health is often a synonym for sexy, young, and hot. That’s why gym advertising increases before bathing suit time. There is not more disease when the weather heats up, just more personal exposure.”<sup>12</sup>

For the example of subsidies for fertilizers described in the case story at the beginning of the chapter, major benefits included increased crops, revenue, and, potentially, decreased labor.

To illustrate types of benefits further, we now turn our attention to India and a different agricultural productivity issue—that of serious concerns with water supplies for irrigating crops. One strategy being used is to construct what are called check dams—small barriers built across the direction of water flow on shallow rivers and streams to harvest water (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3). These small dams retain excess water flow during monsoon rains in a small catchment area behind the dam wall structure. The water is later tapped for irrigation and livestock, during the dry season. Benefits to the rural poor and small farmers are numerous: *increased employment through increased working days, increased income through increased daily wages, security against hunger, and decreased need to migrate to another village.*<sup>13</sup> (Later in the chapter, we will compare how these benefits stack up against alternative strategies, one many consider the competition for check dams.)



**FIGURE 7.2** Check dam: a work in progress.

Source: Vishal Himalaya Foundation



**FIGURE 7.3** Check dam: work is completed.

Source: Vishal Himalaya Foundation

## *Identifying and Prioritizing Benefits*

Techniques to identify benefits are similar to those used to discover barriers: reviewing existing research and data, pursuing qualitative efforts, and conducting quantitative surveys. Several questions help reveal true audience benefits: What are some of the reasons you might consider doing this? What could someone say to you, give you, or show you that might make you more likely to do this?

One technique that can help prioritize benefits is a doer/non-doer analysis. This approach can be used in both quantitative and qualitative surveys. It involves comparing perceived benefits (and additional variables) of those who perform the desired behavior with those who do not. Through this comparison, you gain insights into what factors may be important to both ensure and promote. Typical questions for such a survey include “What do you see as the advantages of doing this?” and “What would make it easier for you?” Table 7.2 presents a hypothetical example of the results from a survey, using the check dam example.

**TABLE 7.2 Hypothetical Doer/Non-Doer Analysis of Check Dam Project Acceptance**

	<b>Responses from Village Leaders Accepting Check Dam Projects</b>	<b>Responses from Village Leaders Not Sure About Check Dam Projects</b>
	<b>“What do you see as the main advantages of your check dam?”</b>	<b>“What do you think would be the main advantages of having a check dam?”</b>
Decreased need for migration to another village	80%	30%
More food for my villagers	70%	30%
Workers get higher wages per day	40%	25%
More people are employed more days throughout the year	30%	20%

## *Using Insights on Benefits*

Knowing an audience's perceived benefits, especially their prioritization, gives you strategic direction when you're developing the marketing plan, especially for the communications component. Based on the responses in the hypothetical example in Table 7.2, those promoting check dams will want to emphasize the dams' potential to decrease the need for migration to other villages. They also will want to share that villages where dams have been installed have experienced greater food supplies for villagers. After all, these are what "current customers" are saying they have experienced and value most from the offer.

Finally, by also exploring what benefits, if added, would increase interest in the offer, you will have inspiration for additional elements of the marketing mix, including product enhancements (check dams with larger catchment areas), price (more volunteers helping to install the dams), and place (materials for the dam delivered to the village).

## **The Competition**

Some people are surprised that social marketers spend time identifying, understanding, and developing strategies that will position the desired behaviors more favorably than the competition. "What competition?" they ask. Others recognize that without this exercise, we will have a tough time persuading young people to finish school, sex workers to use condoms with their customers, policy makers to fund check dams, parents to read to their children each day, a homeless veteran to attend job skills training, mothers to breastfeed exclusively for the first six months, villagers to purchase and install new latrines, women to postpone having another child, and food workers to wash their hands carefully after going to the bathroom. Without this exercise and informed competitive positioning, a target audience is likely

to continue doing “what they’ve always done” or start doing something that “everyone else is doing,” but not what you have in mind.

### ***Types of Competitors***

Three major types of competitors exist in social marketing:

- Behaviors the target audience would prefer to do or start doing instead of the one being promoted
- Behaviors they (and others) have been doing “forever” that they would have to give up
- Organizations and influential individuals who are sending messages that promote an alternative behavior or oppose the desired one

The job is toughest when all three competitive situations are present—one in which the target audience sees more benefits or fewer costs for the competing behavior, the alternative behavior is one they and others have been doing “forever,” and organizations and others they listen to advocate for this alternative.

Table 7.3 illustrates the nature and range of competitors. A variety of behaviors are included, representing the range of potential solutions to major poverty-related issues. A quick scan of the column on the right gives you a sense of how tough the competition can be.

**TABLE 7.3 The Competition for Desired Behaviors**

<b>Desired Behavior</b>	<b>Competition: Behaviors, Organizations, or Important Influential Others</b>
Finish high school.	I play video games at night instead of doing homework.
Use a condom, even with your boyfriend.	My boyfriend’s other girlfriends don’t ask him to use condoms.
Fund check dams.	Large-scale dams and canal systems are more up to date.
Read to your child every day.	We watch television together as a family every night.

<b>Desired Behavior</b>	<b>Competition: Behaviors, Organizations, or Important Influential Others</b>
Attend job skills training.	I'd rather sleep in.
Breastfeed babies exclusively for six months.	This village has a taboo that prohibits sex while breastfeeding.
Purchase and place functioning latrines.	Pit latrines are already in place; they're free and work well.
Postpone having another child.	Having another child soon is important for helping on the farm.
Wash your hands before returning to work.	Wiping my hands on my apron has worked fine for 30 years.
Use high-yield seeds.	I've already bought seeds for this year's crop.

### ***Identifying and Prioritizing Competitors***

Qualitative research is often sufficient to at least identify the competition and related perceived benefits and costs. You can pose a few questions to your target audience:

- What do you do instead of (the desired behavior) or prefer to do?
- What do you like about doing this/the idea of doing this?
- What concerns do you have about doing this?
- Who else encourages you to do this (alternative behavior)?

Keep in mind that this process may reveal several competitors, not just one. Also keep in mind that you are not looking for barriers to adopting the behavior, although overlap or similarities may occur between the competitive and barriers “lists.” The competition is distinct in that it represents alternative behaviors or those who advocate for them.

### ***Using Insights on the Competition***

The name of the marketing game is to change the ratio of benefits to costs, relative to the competition. For example, persuading farmers

to use new high-yield seeds versus their traditional ones could include four tactical options:

- *Increasing benefits for the desired behavior* (such as having a neighboring farmer share the increase in corn this past year from using the new seed)
- *Decreasing the costs of the desired behavior* (such as bringing the new seeds to the village versus having to travel to pick them up)
- *Decreasing the benefits of the competing behaviors* (such as having the tribal leaders in the village explain why the old seed is no longer in the farmer's best interest)
- *Increasing the costs of the competing behavior* (such as having the traditional seed now available only in locations that will require the farmer to travel)

Table 7.4 shows a framework for organizing and analyzing the desired behavior (the middle column) relative to the competing one (the last column). How is this useful? How would you use this if you were in a position of advocating to potential funders to allocate resources to the check dams versus the larger-scale dams, canal systems, and other modern technologies? Your argument might be strengthened by referring to this list and stressing each of the benefits of the check dam and the corresponding costs of the alternative large-scale dams. Research and fact-finding efforts would be important to verifying sources and establishing credibility.

**TABLE 7.4 Potential Benefits and Barriers Related to Irrigation Options in Rural India**

	<b>Desired Behavior: Check Dams</b>	<b>Competing Behavior: Large-Scale Dams, Canal Systems, and Other Modern Technologies</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	Lower costs Less environmentally disruptive Less socially disruptive Less maintenance	More potential funding is available More leadership support The “modern” way



	<b>Desired Behavior: Check Dams</b>	<b>Competing Behavior: Large- Scale Dams, Canal Systems, and Other Modern Technologies</b>
<b>Barriers/Costs</b>	More locations are required Less funding is available	More maintenance is required Construction delays Increased rates of malaria Displacement of local populations Short life of many reservoirs

In the next chapter, we will focus on how these insights shape your marketing strategy—its product, price, place, and promotional elements.

## Summary

This chapter emphasized how a deeper understanding of your target audiences' barriers, benefits, and the competition (relative to a desired behavior) will inspire your strategic thinking and planning.

*Barriers* are reasons your target audience does not want, might not want, or doesn't think they can adopt the behavior. They may be real or perceived, and may be based on internal and/or external factors. To identify them, begin by exploring existing research, reviewing publications and journal articles, and/or examining internal records and data. You also may need to conduct qualitative research more directly related to your unique target audience and quantitative research when it is important to prioritize the barriers to provide focus for strategic planning.

*Benefits*, in contrast to barriers, are reasons your target audience wants, or might want, to adopt the behavior. They address the WIFM factor—"What's in it for me?" Typical benefits include those related to health, safety, physical comfort/pleasure, entertainment, economics, employment, relationships, self-esteem, growth and development, self-actualization, environmental protection, and contribution

to others and the community. Techniques to identify benefits are similar to those used to discover barriers.

*Competition* in social marketing includes the following:

- Behaviors your target audience would prefer to do instead of the one you have in mind
- Behaviors they (and others) have been doing “forever”
- Organizations and influential individuals who are sending messages that promote an alternative behavior or oppose the desired one

Four options for “beating the competition” include:

- Increasing the benefits of the desired behavior
- Decreasing the costs of the desired behavior
- Decreasing the benefits of the competing behaviors
- Increasing the costs of the competing behavior

We close the chapter with a final example from Cambodia, one that further illustrates these three distinctions and demonstrates their application to strategy.

### Farm Field Schools in Cambodia: A Success Story from the United Nations<sup>14</sup>

#### **Background**

In Cambodia, poverty and food insecurity are interlinked. The majority of Cambodians work as subsistence farmers who depend on their own capacity to meet food requirements. About half are women. According to the World Bank, in 2004, 91% of the country’s poor lived in rural areas, with agriculture the primary occupation for 72% of heads of household. Crop yields in Cambodia are among the lowest levels among East, Southeast, and South Asia regions, and rice dominates production in all regions.<sup>15</sup> Accelerating poverty reduction in Cambodia is largely about helping to raise this agricultural productivity and these incomes.

### **Barriers to Agricultural Productivity**

Both internal and external factors have challenged farmers. Many lack skills, education, and confidence in their ability to deal with change. Infrastructure challenges such as poor irrigation facilities and soil fertility also exist. There are natural environmental challenges as well, including seasonal flooding and problems with pest control. The farmers' (natural) tendency and inclination have been to maintain their strong beliefs in traditional techniques.

### **Benefits of Agricultural Productivity**

The desire to increase crop and livestock productivity is strong. It is seen as a way to increase food supplies, income, and time to then devote to land diversification.

### **Competition**

Long-held traditional beliefs and practices compete with new technologies, including burning straw instead of the better practice of incorporating it into the soil, and planting crop varieties with long versus short maturity periods.

### **Strategies**

In 2004, a Farmer Field School program was launched. It uses a community-based approach that begins with identifying the needs of poor farmers in a specific region and then developing a targeted learning curriculum. Farmers learn by doing, through detailed observations in the field, analyzing their observations, and presenting their results and conclusions to 25 to 30 fellow farmer "classmates." Subject matter revolves around agronomy, livestock, small-scale inland aquaculture, and irrigation. For example, Cheong Chuon, a chicken and frog farmer, learned that he could feed his chickens well and for less money by giving them earthworms and could feed his tadpoles termites from a termite mound. He was also helped to apply for a microloan that he used to buy more chickens and build a chicken house. He was able to repay the loan with his increased productivity.

## Outcomes

5,063 farmers from six provinces benefited from the field schools. This standard model of the school, with its emphasis on learner-centered and experiential learning, initially used with rice systems, is now being adopted to improve a range of food crops.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>9</sup> Information on the Social Marketing Listserv can be obtained at <http://www.social-marketing.org/>.
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- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Kotler, Lee, op. cit. pp. 162–163.
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