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PSI: Social Marketing For Healthy Lives

PSI is the largest social marketing organization in the world with programs targeting malaria, child survival, HIV and reproductive health in more than 65 countries. Dedicated to working with the public and private sectors and harnessing the power of the commercial markets, PSI remains committed to improving the health of low-income and vulnerable people in the developing world. In concert with our partners, PSI provides life-saving products, clinical services and behavior change communications that empower the world's most vulnerable populations to lead healthier lives.

PSI embraces social marketing because we have seen how this approach provides a unique perspective of the target audience, and then offers products, services and behavior choices that maximize the cost-benefit, improve access and accessibility, and are promoted and communicated in relevant and effective ways. Around the world, PSI's programs have been highly successful in terms of efficiency, sales, and reduction of disease and mortality. From January to April 2009, sales of our products averted an estimated 45,164 primary cases of HIV infection, 4,025 child deaths due to diarrhea, 70,065 deaths due to malaria, 1,014,925 unwanted pregnancies and 5,146 maternal deaths.

:: Affordable Products and Services

PSI's social marketing projects are managed by resident directors and local staffs who receive expert training. The country platforms procure products, establish distribution systems, and sell the products through wholesale and retail networks, primarily to low-income persons. The products—including condoms, contraceptives and insecticide-treated mosquito nets—are branded, attractively packaged, widely marketed, effectively promoted to the selected target groups, and sold at low prices affordable to the poor.

The social marketing principles applied by PSI to health products are also applied successfully to health services. Increasingly, PSI socially markets health services, such as voluntary HIV counseling and testing, reproductive health services and safe water. By tapping into the commercial infrastructure, PSI can reach people in rural areas to provide vital services, interpersonal communication about healthy behaviors and the proper use of products.

:: Effective Communication

A key ingredient of successful social marketing is effective communications to encourage the adoption of appropriate health practices, including proper use of the products and services. This is done by brand-specific advertising as well as by generic educational campaigns, using a combination of strategies and channels, including mass media and interpersonal communications, to reach the target audience(s). PSI has developed and refined innovative techniques to harness successfully the power of the mass media to reach the poor, at-risk target groups, and illiterate and remote populations. PSI uses such diverse communications methods as mobile video units, television soap operas, point-of-sale advertising, itinerant poets, billboards and movie spots. PSI also targets at-risk populations and motivates good health practices through interpersonal communications. PSI has won several national and international awards for these activities.

:: Building an Infrastructure for the Future

PSI works to build a strong commercial infrastructure in each of our host countries by using existing wholesalers and retailers, as well as training individuals and businesses to enable them to be part of the social marketing network. PSI's promotional activities often stimulate sales of similar products by commercial vendors, and when PSI expands a local market, such as mosquito nets, new or enhanced commercial activities (such as local net manufacturing) are fostered.

Social marketing programs in more advanced developing countries can become, in part or in whole, financially sustainable. PSI is dedicated to serving lower-income persons. Even where a social marketing program cannot be made fully financially sustainable, PSI is able to recover a meaningful percentage of operating costs through sales revenues, maximizing sustainability through efficient management of program resources and sale of multiple products. This cost recovery is then used to provide more health impact.