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SmartLessons

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Who's Teaching Whom? How End Users Reshaped a Consumer Education Campaign in Kenya

The Joint IFC and World Bank program Lighting Africa works to develop commercial off-grid lighting markets in Sub-Saharan Africa, as part of the World Bank Group's broader efforts to improve access to energy. In Kenya, where 75 percent of the population relies on kerosene for lighting, the program staff realized early on that making good products available would not be enough. A widespread shift to solar lighting would require convincing people to change the way they access and use energy. Lighting Africa embarked on its award-winning Songa Mbele na Solar (in Swahili, "get ahead with solar") consumer education campaign in rural Kenya in 2010. This SmartLesson draws together the lessons of that campaign, which underline the importance of listening, engaging, and being flexible—and focusing on the solution, not the problem.

Background

Nearly 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa—60 to 65 percent of the population—are not on the electricity grid. Most rely on expensive, polluting, and dangerous lighting fuels such as kerosene lamps and candles, or use costly battery-powered torches.

Lighting Africa works with the off-grid lighting industry to develop commercial and sustainable markets for cleaner and affordable lighting solutions. Modern portable solar lanterns with lasting components, mobile charging features, and in some cases pay-as-you-go credit schemes are increasingly becoming a viable lighting and energy alternative.

Although the market for quality off-grid lighting products in Africa has been doubling every year, only 2 percent of the African population has access to modern, cleaner lighting. Much remains to be done.

The *Songa Mbele na Solar* consumer education campaign in Kenya was designed

to complement and reinforce Lighting Africa's work on quality assurance, market intelligence, access to finance, and support for business development and policy. The goal from the outset was to change behaviors. The campaign set out to convince consumers that solar lighting was beneficial to them, and to enable them to identify good-quality lamps.

Why would low-income families and small business owners decide to switch from a readily available, well-known lighting source to a newer technology with a relatively high upfront cost? The answer to this challenging question formed the backbone of the consumer education campaign. We learned that we must show the effect of improved lighting on consumers' quality of life, emphasizing benefits such as more time to study, better family time, and longer business hours for microenterprises.

By the end of 2012, the *Songa Mbele na Solar* campaign had reached 22 million Kenyans, informing them about the benefits of solar portable lamps over kerosene lamps and

helping potential consumers make informed choices. More than 1.5 million Kenyans now have access to this modern form of lighting¹.

Lighting Africa and its partners have brought cleaner, safer lighting to nearly 7 million people across Sub-Saharan Africa and have a target of reaching 250 million people by 2030.

Lesson 1: A consumer education campaign must understand the end users' needs. Market intelligence, program development expertise, and stakeholder feedback are no substitute for engaging with end users and understanding their preferences and aspirations.

The Lighting Africa team, building on extensive market research in five countries, engaged a reputable social marketing firm to develop the campaign's messages, slogans, and images. After developing the concept, we shared the proposed approach with a wide range of organizations with an interest in off-grid lighting, including nongovernmental organizations, women's groups, and lighting distributors. After these interactions, we short-listed key messages and developed images that we deemed accurate and relevant.

We received a reality check when we went into the field to test these messages at a series of community forums involving 800 people. This campaign's main audience—people at the base of the economic pyramid in rural areas—rejected the messages outright. Not only were we not going to convince anyone to part with disposable income to buy a solar lamp, but we were on the verge of alienating our client base.

Since that formative experience, Lighting Africa has been collecting consumer feedback and incorporating it into all of its campaigns. As a result, our messages are relevant to low-income rural families and microenterprises without access to electricity.

Lesson 2: A consumer education campaign targeting behavioral change should convey aspirational and motivational messages that focus on a better life, rather than on present difficulties. In other words, it should focus on the solution, not the problem.

Our audience of rural consumers rejected our initial images and messages outright. Women felt that a core image (Figure 1) portrayed a bad mother, because the woman was judged to be exposing her baby to a cooking pot. Also, the slogan "Angazia yajayo" ("light up your life") was perceived as too formal. Moreover, respondents felt that the setting portrayed was one of extreme poverty, reminding them of their circumstances rather than inspiring change.

The campaign's initial proposals had fallen into the trap of

¹ More than 300,000 units of Lighting Africa-supported products were sold from when the program started through December 2012. The 2009 National Census of Kenya says that there is an average of five people per household.

Figure 1: Original Lighting Africa Promotional Image



capturing the problem—poor lighting and how it affects quality of life—rather than the solution—better light for a better life. Our core message of better lighting was lost; instead, our target audience found the campaign patronizing.

Lighting Africa redesigned its images with this lesson in mind. The resulting images (Figure 2) show the effect of improved lighting on consumers' quality of life, emphasizing more time to study, better family time, and longer business hours for microenterprises. The revised, on-message campaign has been well received.

Lesson 3: Resist the temptation to develop messages strictly from the perspective of a program or of IFC. Begin with the needs of the audience.

Not all information important to IFC is relevant to the target audience. For example, kerosene lamps produce carbon emissions that contribute to depleting the ozone layer. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is one of Lighting Africa's objectives and supports IFC's goal of mitigating climate change.

But this argument is largely irrelevant for rural consumers who are struggling to access affordable energy, clean or otherwise. Such individuals are concerned primarily with how lighting affects their families, their businesses, their children's health or ability to study, and their disposable income.

Figure 2: New Lighting Africa Promotional Image



Lesson 4: A consumer education campaign should be flexible, reworking and reorganizing itself to respond to new technologies and opportunities.

Lighting Africa set off communicating its message through forums, road shows, and local radio to reach rural communities. But sticking strictly to these methods would have limited the scope and reach of the campaign, so we adopted an innovative approach.

Lighting Africa took advantage of the strong and growing mobile phone subscriber base in areas that are not connected to the electricity grid. We incorporated a text-message feedback mechanism into the *Songa Mbele na Solar* campaign that allowed people to

request and receive a list of quality lighting products. To date, more than 30,000 people have used the text message feature.

In addition, we expanded our outreach to consumers by working with large companies. This started when Unilever Tea, a major tea producer in Kenya, invited the Lighting Africa team to run forums and road shows for staff on its plantation. This forced us to change our campaign schedule and routes, but it also inspired us to reach out to other businesses. After the Unilever project, we partnered with seven other enterprises. To date, *Songa Mbele na Solar* has reached more than 12,000 staff at the eight companies.

Lesson 5: An effective consumer education campaign provides all the elements that reinforce behavioral change.

We designed the campaign to work simultaneously “below the line” (road shows and forums) and “above the line” (radio, TV, and print media campaigns). Road shows and forums were effective in getting the campaign down to end users at the village level. But local radio messages prepared the ground by spreading the message widely about which lamps were available in a given area and how they worked. This media campaign was complemented by a partnership with the popular Kenyan soap opera *Makutano Junction*, which televised six episodes explaining the benefits of solar lighting.

Likewise, text messaging is far more effective when supported by print, radio, and on-the-ground mention at forums and road shows.

Conclusion

Listening is what defined the consumer education campaign and shaped its messages. It is a mistake to assume that you know what an audience needs or wants. Spending time with rural audiences, surveying their preferences, understanding their priorities, and hearing their concerns about a new product are necessary elements in an effective, targeted consumer education campaign. No deskwork can substitute for this. And because rural lighting sources and perceptions of solar products will differ from country to country, Lighting Africa won’t be able to simply replicate what we have learned in Kenya.

We will have to start listening all over again.



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