

Attacking the Cause the Problem and Not the Symptoms

“You cannot solve a problem using the reference points that created it.”

Albert Einstein

At its very core, advocacy is a negotiation between the governing and the governed as to who should have the right to manage social and economic behaviours and outcomes: the market, the state, or civil society. The ultimate goal of advocacy is not to change laws or government policies but rather **to change economic and social outcomes by influencing the behaviours of individuals and organisations.**

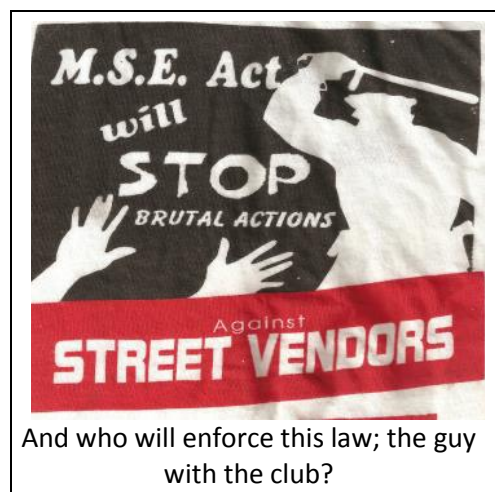
To sustain behavioural change, one must address the incentives and motivations that encouraged those behaviours in the first place. Too often, however, advocacy campaigns focus on the behaviours themselves and not the forces that encourage them. Such advocacy addresses only symptoms of the real problem – not the problem itself. Successful advocacy, on the other hand, first, identifies the incentives in a market, social, or political structure that encourages or rewards unacceptable behaviour and, then, changes the motivations so that people and organisations choose for themselves the preferred behaviours in their newly defined self-interests. Except in very rare circumstances, using the government as a blunt weapon to force change is ineffective for it tries to force the organizational structure to work against itself.

For example, members of the Kenyan National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT) faced harassment and extortion in epidemic proportions by local police. At great financial and political costs, they helped to successfully push through the National Assembly a Micro-Enterprise (M.S.E) Act, which included specific punishments for such behaviour. Yet, the harassment continued. Why?

Aside from the obvious flaw, that the law relied on the very people committing these crimes to enforce it, advocating for additional legal remedies to address behaviours that were already illegal proved ineffective because it failed to address the underlying economic and social forces that allowed KENASVIT’s members to become fair game to police brutality in the first place.

Instead of asking, “How can police harassment be stopped?”, KENASVIT should have asked, “Why aren’t municipal governments responding to street vendors’ complaints of chronic extortion within their own police departments?” and “Why is the rest of the retail community complacent in the face of public and often brutal shakedowns of fellow entrepreneurs?”

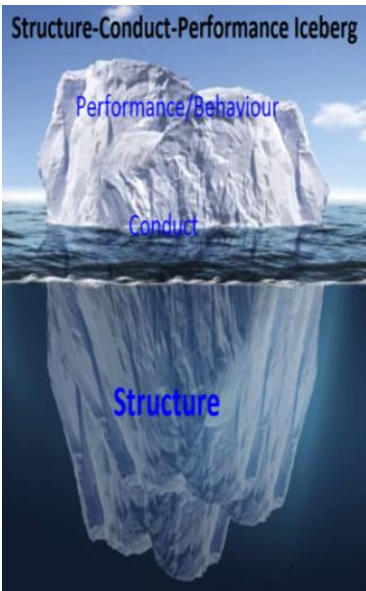
The police were able to act with impunity because local governments saw street vendors as parasitic drains on the public purse. As unregistered businesses they paid no local taxes; yet boldly demanded that local governments provide and maintain public marketplaces. Local businesses, as tax-paying members of the formal economy, saw street vendors as unfair competitors able to under-price registered businesses because their financial and literal lack of overhead. Together, municipal and business leaders convinced the public that street vendors’ poaching of local business dampened demand for formal employment, suppressed wages, and increased the tax burden of law-abiding tax-



And who will enforce this law; the guy with the club?

payers. Police harassment was perceived as an effective although admittedly crude means of addressing what local governments, businesses, and the general public all viewed as the “street vendor problem”. If, as a result of police harassment, street vendors left or went out of business, so much the better. The police **performed** in response to the **rules of conduct** driven by deeply rooted prejudices against street vendors among municipal authorities and business owners who controlled local political and market **structures**.

Before you can change an individual’s performance, you first must change the structure that dictates the rules of conduct. This is called the **Structure-Conduct-Performance Paradigm**.



The behaviours that we can see are most often only *manifestations* of the real problems – not the problems themselves. Like an iceberg, the real forces of social or economic problems lie below the surface and out of sight. Human behaviours are the result of *rules of conduct* dictated by a wide range of economic, social, and political structural norms. Behavioural drivers are often so subtle that we no longer see them or so endemic to our environments

that they are perceived as unalterable parts of a culture. This perception often leads to over-generalizations by donors and self-recriminations by local populations.

For example, while on a project to privatize the textile and apparel industries in Ethiopia, I was struck by the lack of original designs. Domestic products were overwhelmingly knock-offs of popular foreign designs in their markets. The explanation given was, “We Ethiopians just don’t design well.” Really? Having spent a decade in the textile industry, I was well acquainted with designer jeans. But this is the first I heard of a designer gene.

The real problem was not in Ethiopians’ genetic makeup but rather a lack of intellectual property rights (IPRs) protection that made design innovation extremely risky. A designer who produced an unpopular design failed alone. But a popular design was quickly copied by competitors, minimizing the return to the original innovator. But in Ethiopia where the role of property rights in market efficiency was clearly undervalued, self-blame was the most common explanation. For their part, donors financed numerous projects to imbue Ethiopians with the design skills needed to become competitive. But each attempt inevitably failed as once the project ended and there was no longer a donor to subsidize design risks, innovation stopped. These results also had the unfortunate side-effect of reinforcing the notion of defective DNA.

Changing a Leopard’s Spots?

In many Sub-Saharan countries, agricultural commodity markets are managed by government-run boards or exchanges. Often holdovers from colonial rule, which created them supposedly to assure the quality of coffee, tea, and tobacco export. These commodity boards are, in fact, monosomies; the single buyers to which all small producers are required to sell the 90 percent or more of their crops that are exported. Only a few large estates have the right to export directly.

A local association of small coffee growers, whose members complained that the coffee board was exceedingly slow in paying, tried to lobby the government for better terms and prompter payments.

This was a fool’s errand for the Coffee Board was functioning exactly as it was designed. Petitioning the Ministry of Agriculture to force a monopsonist to act contrary to what the laws of economics say that it should was neither realistic nor sustainable.

The only way to achieve the association’s objective was to change the market structure by breaking up the monopsony and turning over the quality grading process to an independent organisation – not by asking a monopsonist to play nice.

Using the Structure-Conduct-Performance approach, *Three-Legged Stool* advocacy looks below the surface misbehaviours and identifies to their root causes by focusing on the structures that motivate and reward those behaviours. In order to *sustainably* change undesirable behaviours you must change the economic, social, and political structures that made them acceptable.

Despite significantly lower default rates, women business owners in Palestine had more difficulty in obtaining loans and paid higher interest rates than their male counterparts. An organisation promoting greater economic opportunities for women first tried to change bankers' discriminatory lending practices forcibly through legislated loan "set-asides" for women-owned businesses. This approach, unsurprisingly, met stubborn resistance from the far more influential banking lobby and proved unsuccessful.

On closer consideration, however, the women's group realised that with lower default rates, women business owners actually should have been the banks' *preferred* clients. The real problem was not solely gender discrimination. Loan officers were overestimating the risks of loans to women-owned businesses because women were less likely to have clear title to assets that could serve as collateral to secure loans. The CSO changed its advocacy strategy to address the structural problem – collateral requirements. Working with instead of against the banks and focusing on the harm *to the banks* of over-dependence on loans secured only with collateral women's group:

1. Demonstrated to the bankers' association how its members were losing new business because of the lack of contract lending products and loan evaluations based on a business's plan and performance rather than its assets (**education**);
2. Provided training programs for loan officers to better evaluate the risks of unsecured women entrepreneurs and other training programs for women business owners to write business plans and loan applications that met the requirements for unsecured loans (**direct action**); and
3. Together with the banking association, advocated for reducing collateral requirements for registering a business (**public policy**).

Instead of lobbying for government-mandated exceptions to banking industry lending practices, the women's advocacy group set out to change the dependence on collateralized loans (**structure**) which penalized loan officers who gave loans to businesses without real property.

Similarly, instead of painting street vendors as popularly unsympathetic victims, KENASVIT should have addressed the prejudice against them directly by documenting the positive economic benefits that street vendors bring to the communities in which they work. With minimum data collecting from its members' customers, KENASVIT could have determined:

- How many street vendors' customers also visit local restaurants for lunch or go to formal retailers to purchase complementary products after a morning of bargain hunting;
- The total retail traffic that street vendors bring to a local economy that it would not have otherwise.

KENASVIT could have altered the market relationships by reaching out to local chambers of commerce with offers to refer its customers to chamber members for additional product and service purchases. It could have partnered with tour providers by offering customer discounts from members' kiosks to get tourists to stop in villages they would otherwise bypass (and increase the value of the association's membership in the process).

It should have offered to work with the finance ministry to increase street vendor registrations in return for its help in curbing police violence. In the end, the M.S. E. Act increased registration requirements on micro-enterprises with without reliable guarantees of relief from harassment.

It is even possible that KENASVIT could have co-opted the corruption by contracting directly with off-duty police to patrol the markets on its members' behalves. By creating guaranteed and legitimate

sources of income that police officers would prefer over more risky, illegal activities. As long as the cost of the contract was less than the anticipated losses due to harassment and bribery, KENASVIT's members would be better off.

By presenting street vendors as a solution instead of a problem and accepting direct responsibility for their members' security, KENASVIT could change the motivations of local businesses, who, in turn, could apply their far more considerable financial and political influence on municipal officials to curb police harassment. In the end, no national legislation was really required as its ineffectiveness indicates. Addressing the deeper structural drivers that defined the relationships between street vendors and the public, the business community, and local government would have been a far more effective and far less costly solution to police harassment.

By identifying, understanding, and responding to the root causes of harmful behaviours, a **Structure-Conduct-Performance** analysis leads to more effective and efficient means to sustainably affect the behavioural changes that should be the goal of any advocacy effort.

About Change Management Solutions: Since 2006, Change Management Solutions has been dedicated to helping civil society organizations around the world to identify, understand, and harness the forces of change transforming their stakeholders' markets and environments. For more information contact Richard O'Sullivan at +1 410-793-5685 or rosullivan@harnesschange.net or visit our website: www.harnesschange.net.