Chapter 7

Applying a Grass-Root Approach to Empowering Change Agents to Transform Pro-Conservation Attitudes and Behaviors in Over-Populated China

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ABSTRACT

Accompanied China’s stellar economic developments in past decades, over-population has worsened the negative impacts of rapid industrialization and urbanization upon China’s already fragile environment. Rare, a U.S.-based social marketing non-profit organization on global environmental conservation efforts, has expanded to China to train 120 local campaign managers at 2,400 remote areas. This book chapter aims to examine how Rare’s grass-root approach in its PRIDE campaigns has helped alleviate the effects of over-population on environmental causalities in China. This multi-campaign case study explores whether cultural norms can be used by local campaign managers as a change agent and a transformative practice tool. Results found that recurrent appearance of family values in the PRIDE campaigns that generate message relevance with the target audiences. This study supported that a family-oriented message is able to frame the campaign to generate message relevance and subsequent behavioral changes among Chinese stakeholders.

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INTRODUCTION

As a U.S.-based non-profit environmental conservation organization, Rare focuses on global environmental protection efforts through inspiring “changes, so people and nature thrive” (Rare, 2014d). The 43-year-old conservation organization has used a bottom-up approach to support global conservation effort (Boss, 2008). Adopting a grassroots approach, Rare has helped local communities in over 50 countries to develop environmental conservation campaigns (Rare, n. d.). Some observers have noted that Rare’s local activists are not the same as what people would expect for conservationists (Boss, 2008). As stated in Rare’s official website, Rare “appeals to hearts and minds through proven marketing techniques. Rare trains local leaders to lead change, leaving a legacy of increased capacity and a sense of ownership, responsibility and pride in conservation” (Rare, n. d.). Seventy-six percent of Rare’s alumni have continued to use Rare’s methodology in the conservation campaigns. The Global Journal has ranked Rare No. 56 in its Top 100 NGO list in 2012. Charity Navigator has also assigned Rare the highest ranking (Rare, n. d.).

Rare has been using social marketing tools, techniques, and theories to promote global bio-diversity programs that protect endangered species (such as cranes, tigers, and monkeys) and delicate ecosystems (such as wetlands) in different geographical locations. Over the past decades, Rare has successfully trained over 214 local campaign managers in its global PRIDE conservation campaigns to inspire local stakeholders to “take pride in their nature resources – that alter the way their communities relate to nature” (Rare, 2014a). Based on the local-derived conservation solutions, PRIDE campaigns intend to generate and establish community support to encourage sustainable behaviors (Rare, 2014d). It is estimated that these PRIDE campaigns have affected over 10 million people in over 57 countries around the world (Rare, 2014b). Rare has also sponsored various environmental conservation programs over 44 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean, and Pacific. In 2010 alone, Rare has launched 73 PRIDE campaigns around the world. In People’s Republic of China also, Rare has trained over 120 local campaign managers that cover 2,400 remote areas and influence over 6.8 million people. One of Rare’s recent efforts focuses on the conservation of wetlands in China, the home to 10% of the world’s wetlands (Rare, n. d.).

Rare’s curriculum emphasizes five key areas:

- Social marketing,
- Conservation science,
- Research methods,
- Project management,
- Leadership and
- Communication (Abhat, 2010).

All PRIDE campaigns are also developed on the basis of an evidence-based social scientific approach to understand stakeholders’ behavioral changes in conservation campaigns. Rare pedagogy is derived from the Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (i.e., KAP) theory (Wang, Yam, & Tang, 2013) and uses the SMART objective framework designed to provide a step-by-step curriculum to train local change agents to conduct conservation initiatives around the globe. Rare’s theory of change model posits that, in order to accomplish intended conservation results, a successful PRIDE campaign need to reduce human-created threats to bio-diversity and generate behavioral changes to promote alternatives or solutions to
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