

Development of a Communication Strategy to Facilitate Implementation of VET Programme in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Air pollution is becoming a threat to human life as it creates various health related problems in addition to fabulous damage causes to the environment. Many research studies have shown that vehicle emission is found to be the major determinant of air pollution in many countries. In fact different countries have adopted different strategies which encompass a wide range of programmes, policies, and interventions that are designed to reduce vehicle emission thereby helping to reduce air pollution. In line with this, it is proposed to implement Vehicular Emission Tests (VET) programme as an integrated approach to reduce vehicle emission including range of measures as well as system management approaches including vehicle technology and non-road strategies in Sri Lanka from year 2007. It is hypothesized that by implementation of VET programme successfully, it would create beneficial effects on air quality and thereby better health.

Generally research found that many different types of communication strategies are available to change perception and attitudes of general public towards reducing vehicle emission. Among them, Communication Behavioural Impact approach (COMBI) is a most effective and innovative tool which has been using by many countries right now. The COMBI approach comprises both Social Marketing and Social Mobilization aspects. Therefore, it has been decided to adopt social marketing campaign as a drive to facilitate implementation of VET programme and social mobilization to create social accountability of people in Sri Lanka.

The main objective of the social marketing campaign is to create awareness on the events related to air pollution due to vehicle emission and mobilize people in the country on measures that could be used to reduce level of vehicle emission as a means to reduce air pollution in general in the country and in particular in urban areas.

In order to measure the prevailing awareness level such as benchmark information on knowledge, attitude and perception on the vehicle emission of the people, a sample survey is conducted drawing a total of 950 respondents from three districts in Western Province i.e Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara. The study sample was consisted of 350 respondents from general public, 350 from vehicle owners and drivers and 250 from students.

Based on the bench mark information of the survey, the social marketing strategy proposed under VET programme is multifaceted and it focuses to conduct awareness programme for general public, awareness and advocacy programmes for vehicles owners and drivers and advocacy programmes for policy makers, implementers and selected stakeholders such as workers in pumping stations.

The campaign design includes such aspects as the development of a communication strategy, communication tools, messaging and interventions. These measures will help to reduce the impacts of climate change, deteriorating air quality and related health problems.

The some of the findings of the study, such as vehicle emission as a main air pollutant, any fuel and any vehicle would contribute for air pollution, and also as a preventable measures, timely servicing of vehicles, control of used vehicle imports, imposing strict regulations on maintenance of old vehicle running in main roads and arranging concessionary credit facilities to replacing and converting to low emitting devisers/engine etc would be used as facts to developing measures to mobilize people under the VET

programme to be facilitated through proposed communication strategy.

Different communication modes will be used as integrated communication programme which comprises of interpersonal communication, group communication and mass communication. As communication tools, a several media related events and materials will be developed with special emphasis on health effects, social accountability, personal benefit due to proper maintenance of vehicles by owners and also in line with country's existing policy regime. In order to create a conducive-environment for implementing the VET programme effectively the communication strategy will be launched three months ahead of implementation of the VET programme. In order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication strategy proposed, a strong emphasis will be placed on utilizing variety of survey methods. This includes observational data collection, follow-up data intercept interview, focus group discussion and dedicated internet survey. The information generated through above instruments will assist in better understanding and measuring the behavior change that expected to achieve through the communication strategy.

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