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ORIGINAL PAPER

A Human Rights-Based Approach to the Social Good in Social Marketing

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Abstract Social marketing has been established with the purpose of effecting change or maintaining people's behaviour for the welfare of individuals and society (Kotler and Zaltman in J Market 35:3–12, 1971; MacFadyen et al. in The marketing book, Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford, 2003; French et al. in Social marketing and public health: Theory and practice, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2010), which is also what differentiates it from other types of marketing. However, social marketing scholars have struggled with guiding social marketers in conceptualising the social good and with defining who decides what is socially beneficial in different contexts. In this paper, we suggest that many dilemmas in identifying the social good in social marketing could be addressed by turning to human rights principles, and, in particular, by following a human rights-based approach. We examine a number of cross-cutting human rights principles—namely, *transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination*, and *participation and inclusion*—that are capable, in a practical way, of guiding the work of social marketers. Through an illustrative case study of the anti-obesity discourse, we present how these principles might help to address some of the challenges facing social marketing, both as a theory and practice, in meeting its definitional characteristic.

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Abbreviations

AASM	Australian Association of Social Marketing
BMSG	Berkeley Media Studies Group
CESC	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ESMA	European Social Marketing Association
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ISMA	International Social Marketing Association
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

In this paper, by building on the claim that social marketing activities have an intrinsic ethical dimension (Brenkert 2002), we aim to address some of the ethical challenges faced by social marketing by proposing a human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing. Despite efforts so far, no satisfactory understanding of the social good and no practical guide for identifying the social good in social marketing have been developed. As social marketing aims are never ethically neutral, calls have been made to advance what Brenkert (2008) describes as a theory of the social good that would be capable of guiding

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the practice of social marketing and of providing "criteria and standards for individual and social welfare" that social marketers should follow (*ibid.*, p. 213). In an attempt to inform the ongoing work, we reflect on recent efforts to conceptualise the social good by drawing on the human rights discourse. We propose an approach founded on a set of core human rights principles that can guide conceptualisation of the social good in social marketing. We acknowledge that social marketing is a complex process that can give rise to ethical, political and moral (among other) questions, and in this paper we focus on one aspect in particular: the potential relevance of the human rights discourse in assisting social marketing in efforts to determine the social good. In this study, we are not focusing on human rights as an exclusively legal regime (i.e. human rights law)—furthermore, the relationship between (social) marketing and the law has been examined extensively by others (see, for example, Rothschild 1999; Taylor and Singleton 1993)—but rather on the wider human rights discourse that encompasses multiple moral, ethical and legal considerations of rules and processes. Therefore, the main contribution of this paper to the social marketing body of knowledge is that it provides a critical analysis of the potential interrelatedness between social marketing and human rights in an attempt to develop a human rights-based approach that could guide social marketers in conceptualising the social good in social marketing.

The paper starts by providing an overview of the key debates in three foundational concepts: social marketing, the social good and human rights. Then, a human rights-based approach is introduced to explore the nexus between social marketing and human rights discourses through a common platform of the social good. In line with Brenkert's (2008) argument that the ethical dimension and the moral nature of social marketing is best addressed by engaging in in-depth discussions about social marketing activities, we provide an illustrative case study that allows us to explore the potential for a human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing. We focus on the anti-obesity discourse and its criticisms to examine the challenges social marketing faces and how these challenges can be addressed through an application of a human rights-based approach. Finally, concluding thoughts are offered, and we identify the key contributions, both theoretical and practical, of the human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing, and further highlight why and how social marketing can benefit from an approach to the social good based on human rights principles.

Social Marketing

Established in the early 1970s, social marketing is a relatively young discipline focused on the application of marketing principles to foster social change (e.g. Lefebvre 2011; Wymer 2011). A broader history of social marketing's origins and development has recently been offered elsewhere (see, for example, Dibb 2014), emphasising the need for the social marketing field to consider its future as a legitimate and independent discipline, beyond its initial status as a mere framework or structure (Kotler and Zaltman 1971). Thus, early on, the future of social marketing as a distinct discipline was perceived to be dependent on its ability to define its boundaries (Luck 1974), and, ever since, the debate about what constitutes social marketing as a concept has been evolving (see, for example, Luca et al. (2015) for recent work on a service-dominant approach to social marketing). In 2013, the International Social Marketing Association (ISMA), European Social Marketing Association (ESMA) and Australian Association of Social Marketing (AASM) adopted a consensus definition of social marketing, stating that "social marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good" (AASM, ESMA, ISMA, 2013: para. 1). This definition prescribes that social marketing practice is "guided by ethical principles" in an attempt to bring about "social change programmes that are effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable" (*ibid:* para. 2). Unsurprisingly, the fundamental feature of the majority of social marketing definitions is their emphasis on the social good, even though this emphasis appears in different forms in many of these definitions (see, for example, Dann 2010; French and Blair-Stevens 2006; Kotler and Lee 2008; Kotler and Zaltman 1971; Lefebvre 2011). However, the social good has been explicitly considered only in a handful of social marketing studies (e.g. Brenkert 2002, 2008; Gordon and Gurrieri 2014; Gurrieri et al. 2014; Spotswood et al. 2012). The notion of the social good as the underlying motivation is key in the theory and practice of social marketing because it is the core identifier that distinguishes social marketing from other marketing activities. Thus, even though commercial and social marketing might share the same marketing toolkit, social marketing aims to enhance the social good, rather than profits. We recognise that although commercial marketing remains an important element of the social context (Hastings and Saren 2003), the purpose of social marketing is to compensate for the deficiencies of commercial marketing with more socially responsible outcomes (Arnold and Fisher 1996)—i.e. working towards the social good. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a critical social marketing debate that has been explored elsewhere (Gordon 2011; Gordon et al. 2010).

Despite commonalities, raisons d'être for commercial and social marketing differ. Commercial marketing's approach to ethics provides rather a narrow view of social

problems as it is driven by consumer orientation (Witkowski 2007), making ethical and moral problems a consumer concern (Peattie and Peattie 2003), which does not necessarily lead to consumer welfare in a social marketing sense. For example, for individuals who are informed about the consequences of smoking, maintaining the habit may be an expression of civil liberty (Chapman 2008; Crotty and Malhotra 2015); yet, in social marketing smoking and its social costs need to be considered in a broader public heath context (Jha and Peto 2014). Thus, the dangers of over-relying on commercial marketing principles and practices in social marketing are particularly conspicuous in the area of public health, where social marketing faces ethical challenges that are far more complex than those of commercial marketing (Peattie and Peattie 2003). Consequently, as also argued by Holden and Cox (2013a), the view that social marketing does not need to examine its main reason for existence—that is, the social good—is untenable.

Although definitions of social marketing appear to be very appealing in their simplicity and all-encompassing nature, they nevertheless present certain challenges to social marketers. For example, while Dann (2010) acknowledges that the goals of social marketing are inherently subjective and political in nature and, hence, the aims of social marketing campaigns are defined by the people and organisations behind them, Donovan (2011) trusts in a common-sense understanding of the social good and, in case of any doubts, recommends relying on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a guiding tool. The UDHR was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1948 and, in its Preamble and 30 articles, it sets forth the human rights and fundamental freedoms to which all are entitled without discrimination. Stemming from this advisory declaration, the International Bill of Human Rights has evolved, including international treaties that directly create legal obligations for states, and it has provided a foundation for the human rights framework encompassing specific (legally enforceable) rights, as well as basic principles that are part of human rights standards and implementation (as we later discuss in more detail). Unsurprisingly, then, in the introduction to their *Principles and Practice of Social Marketing*, Donovan and Henley (2010: xv) invest the UDHR with the role of "the authoritative source for defining what constitutes a socially desirable goal", suggesting that, in times of uncertainty, social marketers should rely on the UDHR in their attempts to clarify what the social good is (2010: 209). Even though the reality might be more complex than the idea that the UDHR simply acts as "one arbiter of the social good" (Donovan 2011: 10), the proposition is a welcome advancement in the social marketing field as, first and foremost, it affirms the importance of the social good *in* and *for* social marketing. As also noted

by some other scholars, the UDHR is a good starting point for crafting professional codes of conduct to guide those involved in developing or commissioning social marketing interventions (Spotswood et al. 2012: 170). We attempt, therefore, to expand upon this notion by identifying opportunities for social marketing to reach out to human rights scholarship and practice for guidance in relation to the social good and, consequently, to advance the debate on the social good in the context of social marketing theory and practice.

It must be acknowledged from the outset that it might be impractical, and also beyond the scope of every social marketing practitioner's work, to engage in deep considerations of what constitutes socially desirable goals in each and every context; nevertheless, some of the concerns behind the socially responsible inducement of behaviour change must be addressed before engaging in programmes and actions that aim to achieve "the greater social good" (AASM, ESMA, ISMA 2013, para. 1). Without some further in-depth examination of what constitutes the social good, in what circumstances the social good would be determined as such, and as defined by whom, social marketing might not be able to progress as a discipline and overcome some of the major criticisms it faces. Such criticisms include assertions that social marketing is essentially manipulative, expensive and unethical (Andreasen 2002; Brenkert 2002), paternalistic (Donovan and Henley 2010), or a form of social control (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2014) that leads to negative consequences such as stigmatisation and social exclusion (Gurrieri et al. 2013), thereby infringing on the rights and freedoms of individuals (Holden and Cox 2013b), or else being used in developing countries in a way that resembles the language and practices of the colonial era (Grier and Bryant 2005).

Despite the rise of critical social marketing focusing the debate on its social consequences (Gordon 2011; Hastings and Saren 2003), there is still a conspicuous absence of social marketing's engagement with what Brenkert (2002) describes as one of the key ethical challenges in social marketing; that is, its ends. While the technical aspects of social marketing have been, and still are, widely debated in the literature (see, for example, Andreasen 2002; Peattie and Peattie 2003; Tapp and Spotswood 2013; Wood 2008), what constitutes a social problem and how the social good should be defined remains an underexplored and taken-for-granted area of social marketing (Brenkert 2008). If social marketers are to facilitate well-being and social welfare, rather than to act merely as "behaviour change technicians" (Lefebvre 2011), these key challenges necessitate an even greater need for enhancing engagement to explore the meaning and the nature of the social good in social marketing deliberations.

Social Good

Commitment to the social good, and what it may constitute in different contexts, is a familiar debate, but one that has not been solved, nor is it close to being solved (Brenkert 2002, 2008; Holden and Cox 2013b; Kymlicka 1988). Brenkert (2008), in his work on marketing ethics, cites Robin and Reidenbach, who argue that "the direct application of popular moral philosophies such as deontology or utilitarianism to ethical questions in marketing falls short of providing necessary guidance for marketers" (Robin and Reidenbach 1993: 97). The very issue raised by Brenkert, Robin and Reidenbach has been identified as problematic in the wider social marketing literature that explores ethics as a means of interpreting the social good in social marketing. The work of Gurrieri et al. (2014) demonstrates the dichotomy between the different ethical positions, whereby some of the utilitarian principles (e.g. the greatest good for the greatest number of people) serve to harm those who do not comply with the dominant norms promoted by social marketing, leading to further stigmatisation and exclusion. Spotswood et al. also question some of the ethical implications of social marketing techniques, such as coercion, and call for developing ethical social marketing principles that would help social marketers establish "a balance between our power to change people and the legitimate demands of ethical transparency" (2012: 167). Although their work raises several important ethical questions, Spotswood et al. do not provide much guidance on what the ethical principles for social marketing practice should be. While not denying the complexity of the task, Gordon and Gurrieri (2014) take the debate of ethical challenges a step further, and in their criticism of social marketing they argue that introducing reflexivity to social marketing may help to reduce the impact of unintended consequences such as stigmatisation and exclusion of individuals and groups. Thus, acknowledging the importance of ethics in social marketing, we attempt to address Gurrieri et al.'s call for a "more nuanced engagement with ethical perspectives and social justice principles" (2014: 535).

To that end, the matter of (shared) values and understanding of the social good is considered to be of utmost importance for developing cohesive communities and even entire nations, yet it has been largely dominated by the dichotomised ideological debate between liberalism, promoting principles such as equality, individual autonomy, liberty and free trade (and libertarianism/classical liberalism, which further advocates for a limited role of the government in realising these principles), and communitarianism, emphasising the importance of the community (for further discussion, see, for example, Avineri and De-Shalit 1992). Since the mid-nineteenth century, when a social philosophy of communitarianism started to take shape, the focus has been on societal formulation of the good; this can be contrasted with classical liberalism's stance, arguing it is up to each individual to formulate the good. The prevailing needs of the individual and the role of choice and freedom from state interference in an individual's life, as embedded in libertarianism (see, for example, Nozick 1974), compete with the priorities of the social realm, as advocated by communitarians (e.g. Ehrenhalt 1995; see also Hofstede 2001). While libertarians see the greatest good in the availability of choice being given to individuals without judging the value of any of the preferences, providing everyone with the opportunity to become the person they want to be (Kymlicka 1988), for communitarians individuals exist within a community and therefore communal values are the greatest social good that needs to be supported by the state. It is not necessarily the case that liberal scholars have not seen the value in, or have not recognised, the importance of the socially embedded self, and as the American liberal theorist John Rawls asserts: "only in a social union is the individual complete" (Rawls 1971: n4/525); however, the relationship between the individual and the community has been continuously complicated.

In a wide variety of areas, communitarians see the need for certain measures, including state regulation, to enhance social good. On the contrary, libertarians perceive regulation as intrinsically paternalistic and not in conformity with their minimalist view of the role of the state; that is simply to secure individual rights and freedoms. Again, it is not that libertarians reject all forms of paternalism, as some would accept state paternalism to protect and promote liberty (see Vallentyne 2007); however, as John Stuart Mill contends:

> the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any one of their number, is self-protection…the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant (1859: 21–22).

There are different forms of paternalism, including "soft" or "hard", "broad" or "narrow", "moral" or "welfare" and many others, which exist on a wide spectrum of what is largely defined as any intervention in private decision-making. However, in essence, the libertarian approach negates interference with individual choices, as it is incompatible with individual liberty, freedom and autonomy. Communitarians challenge the libertarian approach to non-interference on the grounds that personal preferences are more than merely a reflection of the individual self, but also of the larger culture, and, within that larger culture, people are already heavily influenced by various factors, including commercial marketing.

In an attempt to reconcile what otherwise seems to be irreconcilable—that is to make people to act in their best interest and, at the same time, to preserve liberal principles such as self-determination—Thaler and Sunstein (2003, 2008) advocate liberal paternalism,[1] which forms also the theoretical foundation of nudging (see French 2011 and Spotswood et al. 2012 for a discussion of nudging in social marketing). Deriving from psychology and behavioural economics, the Thaler and Sunstein model of liberal paternalism is rationalised on the basis that people have self-control problems (2003: 176). Thaler and Sustain see some form of paternalism unavoidable as people are subject to various cognitive biases and their decisions are in any case influenced by external factors such as commercial marketing. What they therefore defend is paternalism that does not involve coercion or removal of personal choice but rather focuses on engineering of choice architecture: the design and presentation of choices to consumers (Thaler and Sunstein 2008: 3–7).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully engage in the debate on the nature and potential scope of liberal paternalism. That said, even though liberal paternalism proposes "an approach that preserves freedom of choice … [while] authorize[ing] both private and public institutions to steer people in directions that will promote their welfare" (Thaler and Sunstein 2003: 179), it is not without its own limitations. For example, liberal paternalism permits the state to take on the interventionist role (the very proposition that traditional libertarians object to), and, as Rizzo and Whitman observe, "main problem with [libertarian paternalism]…is that it defines freedom of choice…in terms of costs of exit, *without any attention to who imposes the costs and how*" [original emphasis] (2009: 698).

It is not our purpose to argue in favour of a particular concept of paternalism, liberal or otherwise, but rather to consider *when* paternalistic interference or policies overriding individual autonomy might be justified/appropriate or even required, along with *who* does the intervening and *how*. Discussion of these aspects contributes to both providing the rationale for and evaluation of the outcomes of a paternalistic action. In line with Thaler and Sunstein, "the goal should be to avoid random, arbitrary, or harmful effects and to produce a situation that is likely to promote people's welfare, suitably defined" (2003: 179), and our focus remains on how "people's welfare" or the social good could be derived in social marketing.

Despite the inherent difficulties, and drawing on the work of the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel on the

essence of the good and upon where its normative foundations should be placed, some further light might be cast on a more practical response to this very complex philosophical problem of what the social good is and who defines it. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel highlights the otherwise obvious: the need to move from the abstract to the concrete by translating ideas into practice (Hegel, [1821] 2005), thus challenging the merely abstract views of morality or ethics (Hegel, [1807] 1976; as also argued by Brenkert (2008), who emphasises the need for illustrative discussions of ethical issues). In Hegel's view, based upon the foundational conjecture of the conception of human beings as active within a social context, the notion of "good" requires a social, rather than merely an individual, formulation, especially as moral principles are historically, culturally and socially situated. To close the gap between Kantian ([1780] 2004) deontological ethics and Hegel's social theory, Jürgen Habermas' discourse ethics offers a solution by highlighting that in a modern pluralist social situation people's values are grounded in competing conceptions of the good, making purely ethical understandings of one another very difficult indeed. Thus, it is through the communicative form of "discursive processes of opinion- and will-formation" that decisions can be made:

> To the extent that the transmission of culture and processes of socialization become reflexive, there is a growing awareness of the logic of ethical and moral questions … practical orientations can in the final analysis be gained only from rational discourse, that is, from the reflexive forms of communicative action itself. (Habermas 1996: 98)

In light of this, it is the idea of discursive elaboration instigated by and surrounding human rights and the correlative principles supporting the translation of the legal rights and obligations into effective practices that create viable grounds on which to settle conflicts between values of different individuals and groups within one community. Human rights have a dual nature with both moral and legal bases (see also Habermas 1998: 189–93), and because they are created through a democratic elaboration entailing their comprehensive realisation, or as Michael Ignatieff sees them, "the language through which individuals have created a defense of their autonomy against the oppression of religion, state, family, and group" (2001: 83), human rights provide a scope to bring the competing social ideologies in a dialogue. In that sense, human rights become helpful as even though they do not provide an ultimate answer to what the social good is, the underlying principles of human rights that guide their protection and realisation can provide some direction to social marketers engaging with the complex considerations of the social good in social marketing theory and practice.

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[1] See also Camerer et al. on asymmetric paternalism, where they define a regulation as asymmetrically paternalistic if "it creates large benefits for those who make errors, while imposing little or no harm on those who are fully rational" (2003: 1213).

Human Rights

Modern human rights, as a legal concept, can be traced back to the late-eighteenth-century French and American declarations of rights, even though their philosophical foundations are much older and can be found in different cultures and religious beliefs beyond the influences and practice of constitutional democracy (see, for example, Robinson 1998). Internationalisation of human rights as actual and potential legal claims came with the adoption of the UDHR by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The UDHR was the first international instrument to universally proclaim and recognise the idea of human rights, and even though it is not legally binding on the signatory states it has offered a road map by which to guarantee the rights of all and everywhere, driven by an aspiration for human rights to become a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" (UDHR 1948: Preamble). Following from its initial success, which has led the majority of states to continue to express their commitment to respecting justice and equality for all, human rights have become codified in several international human rights treaties, covenants, customary international law provisions, various regional agreements, and numerous domestic human rights bills and constitutional provisions, thereby creating a legally binding system for the protection and promotion of human rights across nations. Today, human rights norms exist as both moral and legal claims (see, for example, Donnelly 2003, 2007; Habermas 1996), and thus some regional and national differences remain as to what constitutes human rights (their "essence") and how they should be realised in practice.

Within the discourse theory of human rights, the tensions between the individual and communitarian claims have been long-standing as well. Human rights, while striving to be universal (i.e. applicable to all), inalienable (no one can be deprived of them) and indivisible (all of the rights are interrelated and interdependent) (see, for example, UN OHCHR, n.d.), by their very nature safeguard the rights of the *individual*. The foremost goal of human rights has traditionally been to help protect individuals against unwarranted intrusions by the state and its agents (Turner 1993; De Schutter 2014; Rehman 2010). Thus, the aim is to ensure the individual good through protecting their human rights, and not necessarily via communal expression of the social good. One may rightly claim that ensuring good for the community would ultimately benefit individuals within that community, but this is not always the case, and in situations where there is a conflict between the rights and freedoms of the individual and that of the community, the former usually prevail.

In response to the difficulty in bridging cultural divides between the different notions and traditions of human rights, and as a way of addressing the continuous disjuncture in conceptualising and interpreting human rights as legal and moral concepts, a number of principles have been developed to assist all those involved in developing and interpreting these rights to facilitate their realisation. Human rights principles thus guide all programming that is required—or desired—to follow the normative framework set out in international human rights instruments.

The analysis that follows has been guided by experience from other fields, especially in the realms of justice and development. An example of mainstreaming human rights and assessing compliance with human rights values and standards by public bodies includes the Human Rights Insight Project (2008) conducted by the UK Department of Constitutional Affairs to provide an evidence base for human rights policy development and, in particular, "to establish whether human rights can be used as a tool to improve the public's experiences of public services" (Ministry of Justice 2008: ii). A human rights-based approach to the work of public authorities is expected, as such bodies have legal obligations to do so; however, as multiple studies highlight, it is often the lack of understanding of "how" these standards should be implemented in practice, and in particular by frontline staff, that hinders successful compliance with (domestic and international) legal obligations. Thus, the proposed recommendations following the Human Rights Insight Project rightly included the need for the UK's Ministry of Justice to develop (for the public authorities and government departments) a tailor-made human rights-based approach to customer care, based on human rights values, and which would be viewed as central to service delivery (*ibid*.).

Beyond the delivery of public services, the private sector has also been encouraged to adhere to human rights values and standards, even though these are the states that remain the primary duty bearers in relation to human rights, including an obligation to protect against violations by third parties, such as business enterprises (see, for example, UN OHCHR 2011). The UN Global Compact is the main UN initiative for engaging with the private sector and business, and acts as a platform on which to develop, implement and disclose responsible corporate policies and practices (www.globalcompact.org). As reaffirmed in *The Global Compact Strategy 2014–2016*, the UN Global Compact aims to "increase the impact of business contributions to UN goals and issues" (2014: 3) and, by the same token, to facilitate the UN post-2015 Millennium Development Goals (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/). This voluntary initiative for companies calls upon them to "respect all international recognized human rights standards" (UN Global Compact 2015: 13), and assists them in developing human rights policies to ensure that these rights are respected through all business functions. Human rights

standards and principles are thus viewed as essential in devising mechanisms and processes capable of supporting and implementing human rights, whether in the public sector (based on their legal obligations) or private sector (being bound by mainly ethical commitments). For the remainder of this paper, we focus on government action only as a more clear-cut case of legal obligations towards human rights. That said, and despite the universally applicable human rights principles, a human rights-based approach requires additional adjustments and adaptations to fit the particular purpose or area.

As it is not workable to simply transplant the various human rights principles or norms to the social marketing context directly, for the purpose of this research we have selected and adapted three groups of core human rights principles that, as indicated in the following analysis, are most relevant and useful in the context of social marketing, namely *transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination* and *participation and inclusion* (adapted from the UN *Statement of Common Understanding*; UNDG, 2003). This group of principles is often referred to as "process principles" (UNDG 2011), and they sit alongside the "content principles" (*ibid.*) of *universality and inalienability*, *indivisibility* and *interdependence and interrelatedness*. Our focus on the process principles, over the content principles, was informed by experience from other fields. Despite certain challenges in accurately measuring the success of a human rights-based approach, as indicators of success are still being developed (UNFPA 2010), there have been positive efforts to measure the level of achievement of the particular process principles; for example, the level of "meaningful participation" in a programme. Thus, as experience elsewhere indicates (e.g. Ministry of Justice 2008), the process principles can be more consistently applied in a human rights-based approach, making them more practical. This can be contrasted with the content principles; these are more difficult to monitor and evaluate, and thus are much harder to assess, meaning that they cannot easily indicate how a programme has contributed to this domain (*ibid.*), notwithstanding the significance of the "content principles" for the conceptualisation of a programme based on a human rights-based approach.

It must be noted from the outset that the process-oriented principles have interwoven relationships with one another, rather than being distinct and separate, and should thus be approached as such in their interpretation and application. In the context of a human rights-based application, all processes need to be transparent and those involved in the decision-making and implementation must be accountable. Further, these processes must be ensured to be non-discriminatory, as all people have an equal right to protection and respect on the grounds of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth. Depending on the context and the issue at hand, some communities and groups might be more vulnerable to discrimination in certain situations, which requires looking beyond the immediate origins of problems into the structural causes and their manifestations (see, for example, Boesen and Martin 2007). Such groups may include, for example, children or people living in developing countries (Witkowski 2007). To ensure wide participation and inclusion, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised communities and groups, people must be offered access to information and be part of decisions that affect them.

In practical terms, making such an analysis involves applying these principles to particular cases; for example, breastfeeding social marketing campaigns analysed by Gurrieri et al. (2013) did not meet the standards set by the process principles as they promoted a particular ideology without acknowledging alternative motherhood discourses (thus lacking *transparency and accountability*), discriminated against mothers who make alternative choices about infant feeding (i.e. failing to ensure *equality and non-discrimination*), and did not provide mechanisms for participation and engagement in the promoted behaviour for mothers who, for personal or health reasons, do not want to or are unable to breastfeed (resulting in falling short of promoting *participation and inclusion*).

The argument we put forward is that these principles identify the key human rights considerations to be taken into account when developing and applying social marketing strategies and interventions to ensure that social marketing meets its defining criterion, which entails that "the social marketer's goals relate to the wellbeing of the community" (Donovan and Henley 2010: 1). In many respects, the exercise in drawing a line between individual rights and community interests might be easier to achieve in the context of social marketing interventions, which tend to be limited to one community or nation, than is often the case with human rights standards that strives to be globally applicable and, at the same time, locally relevant. However, even then, most of the dilemmas are germane in the modern pluralist and multicultural settings of a nation-state. The opposing ideological pulls from the libertarian and communitarian positions are thus equally relevant for both discourses, as they involve considerations of the socially formulated good and its impact on the individual. In practice, what could be perceived by communitarians as of wider social benefit and thus justifying the curtailing of individual choices, from the libertarian standpoint would be viewed as a means of oppression; for example, in the area of public health the introduction of measures pertaining to mandatory vaccination involves a complex examination of moral and ethical dilemmas, which requires an assessment of competing considerations of individual autonomy and community interests and consequential legal

regulation of the issue at hand (see Holden and Cox 2013b; El Amin et al. 2012). Bridging this divide—which is, after all, value driven—is not easy, nor has it been easy for human rights scholarship or practice, and equally should not be expected to be easy for social marketing.

A Human Rights-Based Approach to the Social Good in Social Marketing

There are many examples of states' involvement in regulating issues that have wide-ranging health implications, including immunisation (Holden and Cox 2013b), tobacco (Hoek et al. 2010) and alcohol consumption (Rothschild et al. 2006). One area that has attracted increasing worldwide attention in recent years is the impact of obesity on public health (WHO 2015). Social marketing campaigns have been identified as one of the key macromarketing measures to control obesity (Witkowski 2007). Government-funded social marketing campaigns that aim to tackle the obesity epidemic have been launched in the USA (Huhman et al. 2008; Thackeray et al. 2002), the UK (Croker et al. 2012) and other European countries (Henley et al. 2011) and Australia (Atlantis et al. 2008; Sanigorski et al. 2008).

Using the example of government policies in relation to public health and corresponding social marketing interventions addressing the problem of obesity, we illustrate how the relationship between states' obligations (as far as the right to health is concerned) and the application of a human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing might play out in practice. Our focus is on the three groups of cross-cutting process-oriented principles—*transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination* and *participation and inclusion*—as the most relevant in guiding social marketing interventions, with the first group predominantly informing the determination of social problems and issues requiring government-led interventions, the second instructing the approaches taken in social marketing interventions and the last advising the selection of methods and tools used in devising social marketing interventions and their assessment.

Transparency and Accountability

The very issue of states engaging in paternalistic interventions is perceived as essentially incompatible with (traditional) libertarianism, as deciding how and to what extent one can benefit oneself is a matter of personal choice. This is of particular relevance to public health. The dilemma in the area of (preventive) public health rests on whether to achieve the public health goals, while sacrificing liberal values, or rather, to preserve liberal values, but at the expense of public health gains that can be achieved through

paternalistic action. Sunstein and Thaler argue in favour of private and public institutions attempting to influence people's behaviour if, at the same time, they preserve individual choice: "a policy … counts as 'paternalistic' if it attempts to influence the choices of affected parties in a way that will make choosers better off" (2003: 1162). In order to avoid some of the pitfalls identified by libertarians as intrinsic in a paternalistic action (e.g. abuse of power or elitism on the part of government or other authorities), ensuring transparency and accountability in the employed processes might be a solution to legitimising such interventions, as it provides mechanisms for determining who makes the decision and on what grounds, which, in turn, creates a scope for the decision to be challenged and, if necessary, rectified. Further, a valid justification for paternalistic action can be found in states' (legal) obligations in relation to human rights, as we outline below.

The legal basis for the global community to take interest in and call for collective action in addressing the problem of obesity, often through the organs and structures of the UN, stems from the need to attain the right to health, as comprehensively defined in Article 12(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966,[2] which constitutes one of the nine core international human rights instruments.[3] The provision itself refers to "the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health", followed by a non-exhaustive list of examples of state parties' obligations in that regard (Article 12(2)), which is considered to cover a range of socio-economic factors that are critical for creating necessary conditions for the progressive realisation of this right, including access to essential foods that are safe and nutritionally adequate. In 2000, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESC)—a body that monitors compliance with the ICESCR—adopted a General Comment on the Right to Health, stating that health is a "fundamental human right indispensable for the exercise of other human rights" (CESC 2000: para. 1). The right to

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[2] See also Art 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Art 5 (e) (iv) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); Art 11.1 (f) and Art 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); Art 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and parallel provisions in a number of regional human rights instruments.

[3] These include International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), 1965; Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989; International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW), 1990; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2006; International

health contains both freedoms (e.g. to control one's health and body) and entitlements (e.g. for the necessary protection systems to be in place), and is not to be understood as a right to be healthy but rather "a right to the enjoyment of a variety of facilities, goods, services and conditions necessary for the realization of the highest attainable standard of health" (CESC 2000: para. 9).

Therefore, it is unsurprising that what people eat—i.e. food diets—and how these affect people's general health have been subject to steadily increasing governmental scrutiny, including legal and policy regulation, and social marketing interventions (Carins and Rundle-Thiele 2014). Following the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2003), at the end of 2011 a report was sent to the UN Human Rights Council, which set out five priority actions that are needed to tackle the growing worldwide problems of obesity and unhealthy diets, ranging from taxing unhealthy products to monitoring food production and regulating advertising of unhealthy foods (De Shutter 2011). Oliver De Schutter, the then UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, warned that the increase in obesity and in the prevalence of unhealthy diets are today a greater threat to health than tobacco, urging that "[j]ust as the world came together to regulate the risks of tobacco, a bold framework convention on adequate diets must now be agreed" (Srfood.org 2014: para. 1). What emerges, therefore, is not only that states have invested interest in creating and promoting conditions that positively affect the health of the population, but also that states' responses in this regard are necessitated by their national and international obligations to progressively realise the right to health.

Therefore, the right to health, as defined in international human rights instruments, provides a universally accepted and legitimate foundation for states' actions in addressing the obesity problem. The role of social marketing is thus to support states' obligations in relation to human rights commitments by engaging in practices that strive to be rights based and facilitative of social justice. Adopting a human rights-based approach also offers practical benefits to social marketing by shifting the social good debate beyond the dichotomous arguments of philosophical libertarianism and communitarianism (Brenkert 2008; Ehrenhalt 1995; Kymlicka 1988; Nozick 1974). Thus, rather than pursuing the complex dilemma juxtaposing the needs of an individual against a societal formulation of the social good, a human rights-based approach provides a means to depoliticise social marketing goals by grounding them in a dialogue that transcends any political context in

an attempt to create a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" (UDHR 1948: Preamble).

This is not to say that the decision-making as to which rights to label "human", and how they are to be realised, is not a political act in itself, but, rather, that decisions about which issues to focus on within social marketing should be guided by the tenets that are considered to be universally supported (Spotswood et al. 2012). Such an approach offers a practical solution to the ethical challenge facing social marketing; that is, "[h]ow do we ensure that this exciting new technology is used for 'good' ends?" when "social marketing technologies [can] be applied by partisans promoting their own particular visions of social welfare, which can differ significantly from those held by the general society" (Andreasen 1994: 113). Reframing social marketing as a tool that supports states' obligations in relation to human rights commitments offers social marketing *transparency* and *accountability* that is not a product of any particular ideology, organisation or the people standing behind social marketing interventions (Dann 2010), but contributes to fulfilling states' legal obligations and commitments, and ensures proper responsiveness to the interests and needs of the people.

There are numerous examples of social marketing campaigns conducted in response to states' obligations with respect to public health. For example, Agita São Paulo in Brazil was developed at the request of the Secretary for Health in São Paulo in response to data indicating high levels of physical inactivity among the population (Matsudo et al. 2006). Similarly, Change4Life was launched in the UK in 2009 as a government response to public health data identifying childhood obesity as a major health issue (Croker et al. 2012). In the USA, coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the introduction of the VERB campaign aimed to increase the physical activity levels of tweens (Huhman et al. 2008). In the application of a human rights-based approach, the focus must therefore remain on *accountability*, which entails identifying those who are responsible for human rights realisation and whose capacities to meet these requirements might need to be strengthened. However, the very "process" through which the realisation of these rights takes place is also recognised to be as important as outcomes, and thus necessitates it being ethically acceptable to lead to the achievement and sustainability of desirable outcomes (UNICEF 2003: 7–8).

The identification of social problems lies with the relevant state agencies and public bodies that, when identifying these problems, must ensure that they adhere to human rights commitments and utilise processes that are *transparent* and open to scrutiny. Public authorities must act compatibly with human rights, which stems from states' international, and often domestic, legal obligations in that

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Footnote 3 continued
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICCPED), 2006.

respect. As far as international human rights are concerned, state parties' obligations lie in three areas: to respect (which entails refraining from harmful practices), to protect (including against non-state actors' actions, where these are harmful for realisation of the recognised rights) and to fulfil (necessitating taking positive action, including adopting appropriate legislation, regulation or other relevant policy measures) (see, for example, UN OHCHR, n.d.). In this context, a wide range of duties are placed on states to take targeted and concrete steps that encompass national public health strategies and plans of action, including developing and commissioning social marketing interventions, to ensure that rights, including to health, are realised. A human rights-based approach thus implies *accountability* of those who are involved in developing and implementing programmes, as well as *transparency* of the processes employed in these programmes to facilitate the monitoring thereof to ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights.

Equality and Non-discrimination

The role played by social marketing in supporting states' obligations in relation to human rights commitments is essential, and has also been extensively utilised to these ends. However, if one considers the various government-led campaigns and interventions, including general media representations of the obesity problem, in particular in the Western world (Gurrieri et al. 2013), one conclusion would be that the responses focus predominantly on fighting obesity, as opposed to ensuring healthy solutions that would lead to the improvement of general health and would aim at social justice. Such approaches carry consequences for ensuring that the messages conveyed in social marketing campaigns do not inadvertently or otherwise stigmatise or reinforce social stereotyping of certain groups or communities (Gurrieri et al. 2013). Furthermore, little consideration has been given to the impact of social marketing on health equity (Kerr 2011), yet numerous studies indicate that the impact has not always been positive (Langford and Panter-Brick 2013). Such risks are at odds with the human rights principle of *equality and non-discrimination*, which entails that all people have an equal right to protection, respect and freedom from discrimination and discriminatory practices.

Many health campaigns relating to obesity focus on weight loss as the key outcome, rather than promoting well-being and health as their ultimate objective. For example, the issue is identified by Gurrieri et al. (2013), who, using examples of weight management, physical activity and breastfeeding social marketing campaigns, show how dominant health messages can make women vulnerable to stigmatisation and social exclusion.

Following their argument, the micro-orientation of social marketing, with its focus on medicalised discourses and moralising practices, steers the social marketing discipline away from the social good (understood here as social and distributive justice) towards "simplistic binary oppositions" (ibid., 139). This is not a new criticism, as the politics of body size has been a subject of feminist critique for much longer, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s following Susie Orbach's 1978 seminal work, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (see also Wolf 1991; Banyard 2010; Redfern and Aune 2010). However, more than ever before, the so-called obesity crisis or obesity epidemic that once was a medical condition has entered into the realm of social discourse, where the focus has been predominantly on blaming and shaming those who fall into the category of the "obese"; as with all forms of social control, this phenomenon is not gender-neutral.

Moreover, as other research also points out (e.g. Holland et al. 2015; Lewis et al. 2011; Dickins et al. 2011; Thomas et al. 2007, 2010), there is often a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the relationship between health and obesity, which necessitates a paradigm shift in current mainstream approaches. Weight and health are closely interlinked; however, as medical research indicates, it is the extremes on the weight scale that cause significant health implications. This is often combined with another factor affecting those who are overweight—that is, situations where overfeeding is accompanied by undernourishment, which leads to many health problems (e.g. Koh et al. 2012; Seneff et al. 2011; Gillis and Gillis 2005). Therefore, as many rightly argue (see, for example, Gurrieri et al. 2013; Thomas et al. 2007, 2010), stigmatisation and discrimination against obese people often lead to further health problems, which creates a very complex situation where in an attempt to realise one right (to health), some other standards (e.g. the cross-cutting principle of *non-discrimination*) are trampled upon. Thus, when addressing the principle of *equality and non-discrimination*, social marketers should identify the meaning, scope and application of social marketing interventions on the target groups, as well as their broader societal impact. This requires identifying which groups might be most vulnerable in the particular context, and assessing the wider impact of the proposed interventions and, therefore, what measures must be taken to minimise actual or potential discrimination of these groups. In practical terms, safeguard mechanisms must be established to monitor compliance and to ensure that issues of discrimination, inequality and vulnerability are addressed throughout the programme development, implementation and evaluation stages. To assist in implementing the principle of *equality and non-discrimination*, ensuring effective *participation and inclusion* of the target groups and others affected is essential for the gathering of

data and information required to design reflective processes and to achieve desirable and sustainable outcomes.

Participation and Inclusion

The principle of *participation and inclusion* entails that people have the right to access information and participate in making, implementing and evaluating decisions that directly affect their lives and well-being. Individuals and target groups should have access not only to information, but also to opportunities that allow them to develop their capacity for participation and to influence the decision-making that affects their lives. Thus, depending on the context, the principle of *participation and inclusion* should apply to all stages of the development, implementation and evaluation of social marketing interventions. This approach requires an analysis that aims to maximise participation and inclusion of the target groups to increase their empowerment and represent their diversity, leading to increased ownership and sustainability of the proposed interventions. Effective *participation and inclusion* are thus essential in the process of collecting data to draw more evidence-based conclusions, and in assessing the broader impact of the strategy in question, which is also instrumental in ensuring that social marketing measures respond to and address the needs of the target group. These are important drivers, as even well-intentioned efforts might not contribute to solving the problem, or may inadvertently negatively impact upon the target group or other stakeholders, as various examples of social marketing interventions indicate (Gurrieri et al. 2013). Existing evaluations of social marketing interventions that aim to increase physical activity are dominated by quantitative measures of effectiveness—such as number of steps per day (De Cocker et al. 2011) or meeting recommended physical activity levels (Matsudo et al. 2006)—that solely focus on individuals who participate in the interventions. However, to satisfy the principle of *participation and inclusion*, qualitative research should be conducted as part of the evaluation process to enable exploration of the experiences of participants and those who are unable or unwilling to participate, in order to better understand the broader impact of the campaigns. Systematic reviews of social marketing interventions also indicate that although audience research is one of the social marketing benchmarks (Andreasen 2002), the actual interventions are often delivered with minimal or no input from their target audiences (Carins and Rundle-Thiele 2014; Kubacki et al. 2015). Adhering to the principle of *participation and inclusion* also supports Gurrieri et al.'s (2013) call for more equitable participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of social marketing interventions for those whose right to health is being facilitated through social

marketing, and those who might become (further) marginalised if unrepresented, which consequentially widens the inequality gap.

The area of health interventions in relation to obesity and the right to health demonstrates, in a rather explicit manner, the complexity of what might constitute the social good in social marketing. Although the issue is often perceived and presented in medicalised discourses as straightforward, it also exposes the opposing pulls of commercial and social marketing (Witkowski 2007). On the one hand, the broad availability of unhealthy foods is further aided by the often aggressive commercial marketing campaigns purporting to increase the profitability of the food industry (see, for example, BMSG 2011; Story and French 2004); on the other, social marketing campaigns aim to warn and educate the general public about the dangers of obesity and consumption of unhealthy foods. Non-participating, alienated and excluded individuals are, therefore, exposed to mixed and contradictory messages, but are expected to respond in the "right" way to these expert-driven stimuli. The emphasis of the various social marketing campaigns is predominantly on personal responsibility and encouraging individual responses (Rundle-Thiele et al. 2013), which often underrates the importance of the lived experience of individuals, the surrounding environment (including commercial marketing messages) and barriers to participation, such as structural inequality (Langford and Panter-Brick 2013) and the availability of reasonable choices. Other relevant ethical considerations relate to social marketing using hidden persuasion techniques, such as nudging (Spotswood et al. 2012), where an expert-driven choice architecture is used to manipulate individuals to make the "right" decisions.

If we were to look into the subject matter from a human rights perspective, two further issues emerge: the first relates to prioritising one right over others (often to the extent of those other rights being infringed upon), and the second pertains to the states' three spheres of obligations to respect, protect and fulfil (as alluded to briefly above). Therefore, as much as personal responsibility should be encouraged among individuals in relation to social problems, it does not release states from their international, and often domestic, obligations, as states cannot deflect responsibilities onto individuals in response to these obligations. States' obligations in relation to human rights often require some form of regulation of the non-state actors' conduct, including in the commercial realm, if it is harmful to people at large and interferes with the realisation of recognised (human) rights. There needs to be a balance between how much should be expected of individuals in relation to the social problems they face, and the extent to which the state's intervention is required to regulate the wider environment so as to present the individuals with reasonable choices. This might include, as in this

context, limiting or even banning some of the harmful practices employed by the food industry if they are deemed to negatively affect the right to health. Therefore, realising the right to health requires an ongoing engagement of the individuals and groups affected by the measures in the process of development, implementation and evaluation of social marketing interventions.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Since the initial conceptualisation of social marketing in 1971, the majority of social marketing definitions have emphasised the importance of the social good as one of the discipline's fundamental features (Dann 2010; Donovan 2011; AASM, ESMA, ISMA 2013; Kotler and Zaltman 1971; Lefebvre 2011). Although the notion of the social good in social marketing has been explicitly considered in only a handful of social marketing studies, there has been growing interest in exploring the meaning of the social good in practice (Brenkert 2008; Gordon and Gurrieri 2014; Gurrieri et al. 2014; Spotswood et al. 2012). The premise behind this article was to address the identified gap in social marketing literature, namely the lack of effective and efficient theoretical engagement with the concept of the social good, which, nonetheless, is essential to realising the purpose of social marketing (Brenkert 2008). This article, therefore, builds on and extends prior literature by identifying the key human rights principles in the context of social marketing—i.e. *transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination* and *participation and inclusion*—and by examining the applicability of a human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing.

Along with the other two types of social interventions—that is, education and the law—that inform and instruct people to change behaviour or, indeed, to coercively regulate free market situations (Rothschild 1999), social marketing's role lies in influencing voluntary changes of behaviour by offering choices conducive to those changes and providing further reinforcement of the related decisions. Therefore, the choice of marketing tools, the target audience and the means by which these groups are targeted becomes critical for achieving socially responsible interventions. In practice, social marketing may rely on commercial partnerships and/or revenue-generating commercial activities to deliver long-term behaviour change (e.g. Mushi et al. 2003; Purdy 2011). Yet, as long as in case of conflict between social and commercial aims the former take precedence, the focus on the social good entails application of the human rights-based approach.

Focusing on the dominant anti-obesity discourse and social marketing interventions in relation to improving public health—even though these are not necessarily conclusive or archetypal of social marketing practice as such—

created a platform on which to bring to light the rationale for why social marketers might need to improve their navigation of ideals and practices by focusing on human rights principles to strengthen social justice and, consequently, to fulfil social marketing's foundational aim (see, for example, Lazer and Kelly 1973: 26). There is scope for social marketing to not only learn from the human rights discourse to further conceptualise the social good, but also establish a discrete and practice-informed approach to guide its normative development and implementation strategies.

As we sought to elucidate through an illustrative case study of the anti-obesity discourse and some of the issues emerging in relation to the right to health, even though social marketers are not bound by law to observe and protect human rights, there are many reasons why they should consider a human rights-based approach to the social good in their day-to-day practice. Aside from ethical arguments in favour of adopting such an approach, there is also a viable pragmatic rationalisation, including an increase in effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of social marketing strategies and interventions. Employing a human rights-based approach helps improve risk management and identify opportunities, and offers a particularly useful method for dealing with complex and challenging issues, thus, arguably, constituting best practice. A human rights-based approach offers social marketers a practical guide that facilitates recognition of society's expectations and helps to develop more sustainable ways of addressing social problems by taking into account the universal benchmarks and minimum standards as proclaimed through the core principles of human rights: *transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination* and *participation and inclusion*. This approach also supports states in delivering their obligations to protect, respect and fulfil human rights, which constitute both positive obligations (acting towards realising human rights) and negative obligations (refraining from harmful practices).

For social marketers, then, the considerations are not so much about *what* social problems there are and which of these should be addressed by social marketing interventions (as these are largely guided by states' obligations), but *how* to address these social problems as part of social marketing strategies. Thus, applying a human rights-based approach in social marketing may require social marketers to change *what* they do and *how* they address the identified social problems. However, this does not entail that social marketers be particularly familiar with (international or domestic) human rights laws or other aspects of states' (legal) obligations; rather, it encourages them to consider following the human rights-based approach to the social good as a step towards fulfilling the aim of social marketing, that is, to enhance the social good through social marketing. In practical terms, in the case of the human rights principle

of *participation and inclusion*, such an attempt would be to ensure that the vulnerable and marginalised groups in society are given an opportunity to voice their experiences and concerns in regard to the issues being addressed by social marketing, as well as throughout the formative and evaluative stages of social marketing programming. Further, while the availability of healthy food options might be the key ethical priority for commercial marketing (Witkowski 2007), the human rights principle of *equality and non-discrimination* shifts the focus in social marketing towards the issue of "access" to healthy food options, and the sufficient reach of the interventions as being constitutive of the social good (Langford and Panter-Brick 2013). Finally, availability, collection and dissemination of data and information relevant to social marketing interventions, and employing procedures and processes that are *transparent*, demonstrate and further reinforce the existence of *accountability* (De Schutter 2014: 554).

Approaching the social good in the context of social marketing through a human rights perspective offers a new way to theorise one of the focal constructs of social marketing—that is, the social good—which has so far not been sufficiently conceptualised in the social marketing theory (Brenkert 2008). The approach constitutes a starting point for realising the potential for social marketing to address some of its shortcomings, including its gaining "recognition as a legitimate toolset for tackling a huge range of societal problems" (Truss et al. 2010: 27), and, indeed, to facilitate its future as a distinct and coherent discipline that can defend its autonomous status. Beyond the theoretical contribution of this study to the literature on the social good in social marketing, practical implications of the human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing should be considered. Identifying the social good requires social marketers and all those involved in developing and applying social marketing tools to engage with the identified social issue (e.g. obesity) at a deeper, reflective level (Gordon and Gurrieri 2014), considering broader social implications of their actions and any potential negative consequences (Andreasen 2002; Brenkert 2002; Donovan and Henley 2010; Cherrier and Gurrieri 2014; Grier and Bryant 2005; Gurrieri et al. 2013; Holden and Cox 2013b). The approach to the social good in social marketing integrating the cross-cutting principles of human rights, i.e. *transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination* and *participation and inclusion*, provides a systematic way to assess the consequences of social marketing programmes at the stages of initial identification of the social issue, social marketing programme design, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation (see Fig. 1).

We acknowledge the complex reality regarding practical application of the proposed approach and the extent to which engaging with the meaning of the social good can and does take place. Nonetheless, we recommend this approach as it is capable of guiding social marketers in their work by offering signposts and steps to follow in the social marketing practice to a greater extent than some other approaches identified and proposed in the social marketing literature (e.g. the libertarian or communitarian approaches). Furthermore, human rights-based approaches have been developed and successfully applied in many other domains (e.g. justice or development); thus, this proposal offers a pragmatic and effective way of identifying what is otherwise a complex philosophical issue. The proposed human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing involves considerations of the above-discussed cross-cutting human rights principles at every stage of social marketing programming, and requires it to be an integral part of social marketing theory and practice.

Future Research

The proposed approach to the social good in social marketing does not offer a quick fix to what is an essentially complex and multifaceted issue. Drawing on experience from other fields, developing indicators or benchmarks by which to measure and assess the level of application of the particular principles is a lengthy and complex process that requires ongoing work to ensure their effectiveness and to address any potential bias in their application or misuse (e.g. Rosga and Satterthwaie 2009; Green 2001; in relation to (human rights) indicators relating to the right to health see, for example, Hunt 2003). It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this paper to flesh out every aspect of the proposed approach to social marketing, as this requires further normative analyses and empirical research capable of informing both theory and practice in this area.

However, despite these limitations, this approach offers a solution to the ideological divide between libertarian and communitarian approaches in social marketing (Ehrenhalt 1995), and the wider debate in normative ethics and political philosophy on the nature of freedom and autonomy, and the relationship between the individual and the state. While recognising the shortfalls, the proposed human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing has scope to be instructive as—irrespective of the personal preferences of social marketers, or, more importantly, recognising the differences in theoretical approaches—following the human rights-based approach not only constitutes best practice (and thus offers concrete and practical benefits to social marketers), but also amounts to compliance with (legal and other) obligations, and thus supports states' (human rights) commitments that transcend any political divides. Thus, future research should evaluate

Fig. 1 Human rights-based
approach in social marketing
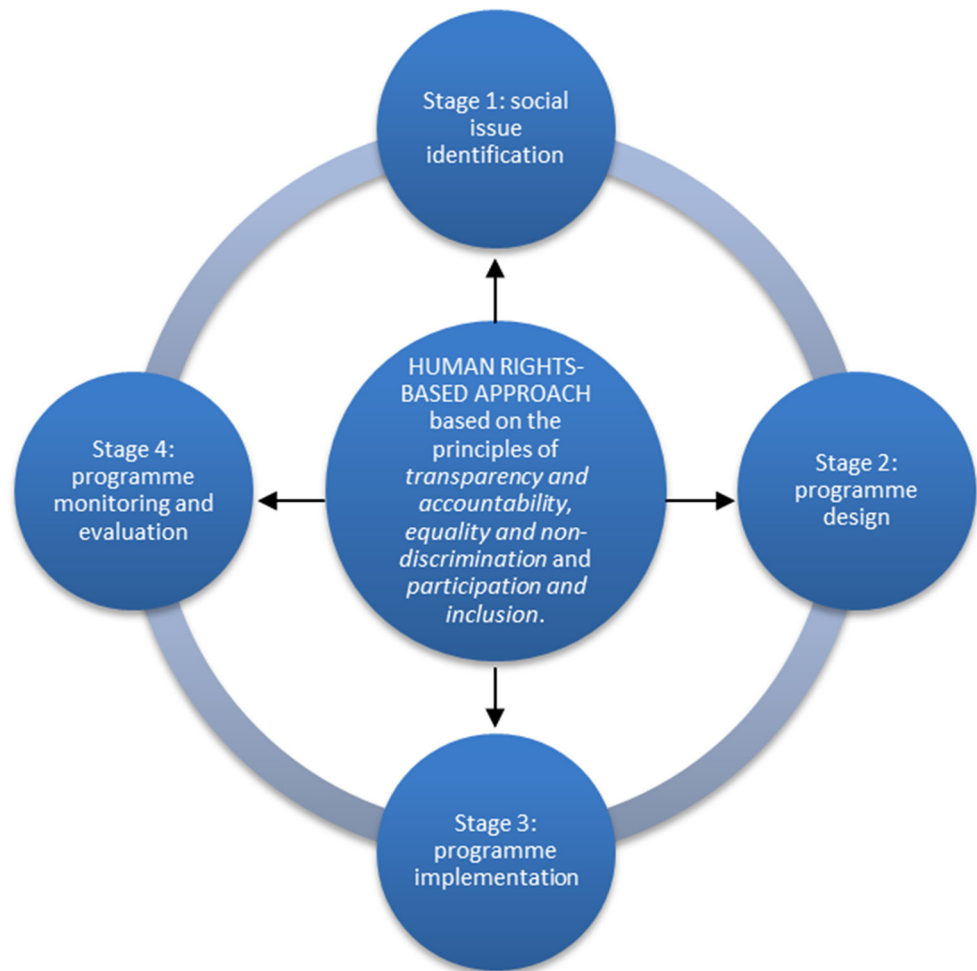
social marketing interventions to verify their impact, including unintended consequences, on the target audiences and wider society in light of the examined human rights principles. This would allow for the development of best practice to achieve desirable and sustainable outcomes and ensure that these can be achieved through a process that is reflective of human rights standards. Further work should focus on practical application of the human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing in different contexts, and throughout the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages of social marketing interventions. For example, research should explore the challenges of applying the human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing in situations where commercial partnerships and/or revenue-generating commercial activities may adversely impact the social good; thus, a compromise between social and commercial aims is required to achieve progress towards the social good. Finally, as political and structural forces, along with commercial marketing, shape the social environment and the social issues that social marketing attempts to change, more work needs to be done in future to explore

the potential of the human rights-based approach to social good in social marketing to inform solutions to wicked problems facing society (Kennedy et al. 2017).

Conclusions

This paper aimed to address some of the challenges facing social marketing and propose a human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing. This research is guided by a premise that ethical challenges of social marketing differ from those of commercial marketing (Brenkert 2002; Gordon 2012), despite the fact that some techniques used in commercial marketing can be and are used in social marketing. We presented the opportunity for the field of human rights to inform and assist the development of social marketing, and introduced a human rights-based approach to the social good in social marketing, based on a number of cross-cutting human rights principles: *transparency and accountability*, *equality and non-discrimination* and *participation and inclusion*. The main contribution of this research to social marketing lies

in three areas: *first*, it advances the debate on the social good in social marketing beyond the binary divide between the libertarian and communitarian ideological claims (Brenkert 2008) and offers a solution to legitimising state's paternalistic action in line with its human rights obligations; *consequently*, it proposes a practical approach to the social good in social marketing based on particular human rights principles; and *finally*, it positions social marketers within the larger context of states' obligations towards human rights and redefines the role of social marketing in addressing social issues.

Reaching out to human rights, in terms of both scholarship and practice, is well placed as the objectives of human rights and social marketing are closely correlated: they both aim to deliver socially desirable ends and to improve people's lives. However, as we argue in this paper, no particular (international or domestic) instrument of human rights as such provides the ultimate answer to what constitutes the social good but, rather, the fundamental principles that inform the respect, protection and fulfilment of these rights—in particular, *transparency and accountability, equality and non-discrimination and participation and inclusion*—can offer social marketers guidance in their endeavours. This important realisation allows for some of the divides regarding the notion of the social good in social marketing to be bridged and for the current debate about the purpose and future of social marketing as a scholarly field to move forward in both its theoretical and practical aspects.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Dr Natalia Szablewska declares that she has no conflict of interest. Dr Krzysztof Kubacki declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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