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Current international development efforts to reduce poverty through designing technologies for the poor are unsustainable. These technologies – broadly referred to as appropriate technology (AT) – have rarely diffused throughout societies or been adopted by their intended users. In order to sustainably improve international development, more resources must be dedicated to effective AT diffusion and new product introduction (NPI).

There is a significant gap in the research of diffusion and NPI strategies in sub-Saharan Africa focusing on AT. This led to the following key research question: what strategies are being used for effective NPI in low-income markets in eastern Africa, and how can these strategies be applied to AT?

A multiple case study research methodology was used to research five products from Kenya's private sector that have reached over 1 million low-income customers: Coca-Cola's 300mL bottle, Safaricom's airtime vouchers, Nokia's mobile handsets, Bamburi Cement's 50 kg bag of all-purpose cement and Kenya Seed Company's 2 kg bag of maize seed. Case studies focused on four aspects of NPI that tangibly influence diffusion: distribution, pricing, branding and advertising.

Analysis revealed 11 cross-case themes within and across NPI strategy categories. These themes are summarised in three overall strategies:

1. Distribution methods based on daily versus seasonal product consumption, price and utilisation of a network of independent authorised retailers
2. Use of point-of-sale marketing materials
3. Emphasis of brand on quality

These summary strategies in conjunction with more specific cross-case themes formed a framework of effective NPI strategies for products in low-income markets. They were then assessed relative to existing NPI strategies for AT innovations in Kenya, so to extend the framework to strategy recommendations for AT.

By focusing on more effective NPI strategies, appropriate technologies are more likely to be adopted by their intended markets. Increased diffusion and market adoption of AT contributes to sustainable international development and poverty reduction as customers use and benefit from the technologies.

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