



INNOVATION, COLLABORATION, & PARTNERSHIP

BETWEEN NGOs

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars and academics are increasingly placing emphasis on strategic planning within organizations and greater collaboration and networking amongst NGOs.

Hans Holmen, in his paper 'NGOs, Networking and Problems of Representation' postulates that networking is currently recommended as particularly suitable for NGOs to improve performance and enhance impact. He mentions that since many NGOs are small and dispersed, networking is commonly seen as a cost effective means to share information and spread knowledge about grassroots needs, solutions and best practices. Collaboration allows NGOs to speak with one voice specifically with regard to policy change and advocacy.

However others have argued that such collaborations can obviously not be without its challenges. NGOs have been found not to share information voluntarily as they are often fierce competitors for funds and clients and the inevitable struggle for power and recognition.

A common thread amongst the various discourses is that NGOs are losing the practice of being human and becoming corporitized.

This paper attempts to examine the pros and cons of such partnerships and to encourage dialogue on creating collaborative strategies between NGOs.

DEFINITION OF NGOs

NGOs are a group of organizations distinct from government institutions and business entities. Their distinctive feature is that they are formed to complement, supplement and offer alternatives to government development efforts (Malunga/Holloway) NGOs are registered, formal with distinctive governing boards and management members and strong infrastructure in terms of human and other resources.

Globally, civil societies have mobilized themselves into forming non profit and non government organizations for specific reasons - :

- Citizens need to organize themselves independently from the control of the state as a way of escaping political oppression or improving their living conditions
- Governments foster the growth of these organizations by increasing their involvement in service delivery and development programmes.
- There is increased support for the formation of these organizations from religious groups and official aid donors.

In summary, NGOs are not self serving in aims and related values. Their aim is to act in the public arena at large, on concerns and issues related to the well being of people, specific groups of people or society as a whole. (Extract from The Commission & Non – Governmental Organization)

HISTORY OF NGOs

Non – profit organizations have their origins as early as the 16th century. The earliest among them being church organizations. However we do know that the Islamic Waqf was the first formalized system of charitable assistance. Monzer Khaf speaks about the Philanthropic Waqf. During the time of Nabi (saw) a man named Mukhairiq made a will bequeathing his seven orchids, to be given to Nabi (saw). After his death the orchids were made a charitable Waqf for the benefit of the poor and needy.

The UN Charter first used the term NGO in one of its clauses in 1947. This coincided with the shift among NGOs from being purely relief to relief and development.

Prior to the 1980s the entire voluntary sector remained generally unknown in most of Africa and specifically South Africa. During that period the focus was on the fight against oppression and people's movements were mobilized to create an uprising.

It was only after the 1990s that NGOs were recognized as being strategic for development in Africa for e.g. SANZAF was established in 1974 essentially to redress the inequalities of the apartheid system by attending to the economic needs of people. It was only after the 1990s and the Governments white paper on poverty alleviation through skills development that SANZAF made a shift towards skills and holistic development.

Today NGOs are the fastest growing category of organizations in Africa (Veit in Malunga). 12% of global flows of aid and technical cooperation are now delivered through NGOs (UNDP quoted in Capacity Org 2003:6)

However if we trace the history of NGOs, we see a certain pattern emerging. There are 3 distinct categories that define the NGO sector specifically in Africa.

- **THE COLONIAL ERA** - which can be traced back to the period of colonisation and the role of missionaries in conquest. According to Manji and O' Coill (2002) as cited in Julie (2009) services provided by the colonial state was mainly for a minority whilst missionary groups provided services to the majority rural population. In exchange they evangelized amongst the black population, promoting their own vision of civilisation. This was a subtle means of controlling their behaviour. The welfare programmes did not focus on the root causes of poverty but focused on the failings of the Africans themselves.
- **THE DEVELOPMENT ERA** – popular political movements unhappy with this form of injustice stirred an uprising. However how did these charity and missionary groups survive after independence? Manji and O'Coill believe that these groups found their answer in the changing discourse around 'development'. Since these groups were tainted by their association with a racist past, the new discourse around 'development' created a way out of their dilemma of illegitimacy. (Julie 2009). However the problem here was that the dominant discourse was a western based discourse that perceived non Western people as divergent from the cultural standards of the West.
- **THE NEO LIBERAL ERA** – Neo liberalism believes in the supremacy of the market and the safeguarding of the right of a minority to the unfettered accumulation of profits at the highest rate possible. This was referred to as 'growth' and the proponents of this ideology believe that when this freedom to accumulate is unrestricted others will reap the benefits through the 'trickle down effect'. The purpose of development is to therefore to guarantee 'growth' according to them and state expenditure should be used to create an environment for this growth to take place and public services can be best provided by private enterprise. (Julie 2009)

REDEFINITION OF NGOs

NGOs are not designed to facilitate genuine development. The aid system is driven primarily by the fear of an uprising from the poor. It has been meant to avert social upheavals and to maintain and nurture the world order. In this case NGOs, through the aid system may be used as a way of diverting attention from much deeper economic injustices which perpetuate poverty on a far greater scale. The question needs to be asked then "Are we as NGOs being used by the government/and other agencies to prevent an uprising from the poor for their

lack of service delivery? It is probable that the answer to this is yes. It is also probable that -:

- Singularly as individual organizations we may not be able institute structural change or make the power shifts that are required.
- Singularly we may not be able to make changes or address concerns because of limitations in capacity due to the different stages of development in our organizations.
- Singularly we may not be able to influence donors to fund initiatives that address such issues.

This is why we need to pursue the concept of partnership and collaboration, but before we can address this issue, many of us perhaps need to think of new strategies or innovative ideas from within our organisations. In order to achieve this we need to re evaluate/redefine our organizations by focusing on the following challenges -:

- Amateurism resulting from low skilled human resources.
- Limited organizational capacity leading to low operational efficiency and impact
- Restricted focus resulting from project mentality.
- Tunnel vision amongst organization leaders
- Material scarcity leading to difficulties in scaling up activities.
- Donor dependence that reduces autonomy.
- Fragmentation due to inadequate collaboration leading to little mutual influence or synergy and little common voice on large scale issue.

NGOs have been criticized for -:

- Refusing to be transparent and letting go of projects.
- Only a small portion of funds they receive from donors reach the field.
- Technically weak
- Not accountable to the communities they serve.
- Their work is often uncoordinated chaos.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES IN NGOs

- Establish an identity – in which category can we be identified.
 - Relief and welfare
 - Development
 - Advocacy
- Clearly articulate the desired future towards which the organization should move.
- The goals the organization is pursuing
- The strategies the NGO will use to realize the goal

NGOs need strategies in 3 main areas -:

1. Service Delivery and Sustainability

We need to ask what are we trying to sustain? Is it our organization, the benefits we provide or are we trying to create conditions for building sustainable communities. The most important criteria which are the bottom line for any NGO is its performance levels. As organizations we see social change as the ultimate goal of our activities and therefore our success is measured by our performance levels e.g. the number of beneficiaries individual or community, the kinds of services provided, development aspects, skills training and so on.

One of the methodologies of assessing our performance levels is via the Peer Review Mechanism. It may be wishful thinking to expect organizations to rate each others performance levels but in the interest of collaboration we have to be open to constructive criticism.

2. Internal Capacity Building

- Proper management and personnel infrastructure.
- Strong financial management
- Well defined aims and objectives
- Correct reporting mechanisms

3. Relationships with other stakeholders

What alliances or relationships to develop with others. Many NGOs have collaboration problems because they have not thought through whom to collaborate with, why and how.

Global companies and international NGOs could strengthen their collaboration to reduce poverty, according to a group of directors, strategists and professionals that met in London at the GlobeScan Salon in October 2008.

However it remained unclear how global companies and NGOs would collaborate further to help meet poverty reduction goals.

Green argues that 'Poverty is about relationships and politics'. The most effective approach to poverty reduction requires redistribution of power, opportunities and assets. Such redistribution depends on 2 elements: active citizens and effective states (Report from GlobeScan Salon, Addressing Extreme Poverty – October 2008)

Cooperation is important because if properly utilized

- Can greatly enhance efficiency and impact of NGOs
- There can be a greater expansion of information
- Is a way of linking people or organizations that share some common value and/or objective.
- Allows organizations to confront growing challenges without having to enlarge their formal structure.
- Allows for individual weakness to be overcome through support from member organizations

- Allows for organizations to work together on prioritized issues
- Allows for learning and growth
- Sharing of skills and resources

Challenges with regard to cooperation

- Not always active participation from all members. – Some members will spearhead projects whilst others remain passive.
- Members are not always willing to share information, material or human resources.
- Information must be relevant to all members.

Working together means establishing mutual trust, complementary strengths, reciprocal accountability, joint decision making and two way exchange of information.

CONCLUSION

The goal of any organization should ultimately be to improve the lives of the communities we serve and in order to achieve this organizations have to be efficient in structure and service delivery.

Quality, excellence in what we do is the benchmark of the NGO. This is not achieved merely by skills but by internal organisational processes and insisting on internal integrity. Inside itself the NGO must be alive and constantly re – inventing its creativity. The NGO can never stop thinking and challenging the previous thought. It can never stop reading and studying, reflection, silence and conversation is as much part of fostering change and movement as anything else it may deliver.

Kaplan as cited in Malunga states that an effective NGO is one that has -:

- A strong sense of direction and focus through an inspiring vision and mission
- Inspiring shared values, which are practically lived by the organizational members.
- Strong leadership that facilitates rather than hinder work
- Ability to self critique and self reflection, attributing any problem it may have to its own internal problems rather than external factors.
- Ability to concentrate on what it can do rather than mourn what it cannot do or influence
- Adequacy of skills and competencies and the ability to take time to develop staff beyond just academic qualifications but **emphasize** personal mastery
- Cordial relationships amongst employees
- Policies, systems and procedures that facilitate rather than hinder work
- Adequate resources to enable translation of mission statement into activities

All of the above can be summarized as having to do with organizational sustainability, legitimacy and relevance.

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