Exploring the Challenges Threatening the Survival of Ngos in Selected African Countries

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Abstract

Indubitably, the effectiveness and effectiveness of NGOs especially in African countries are increasingly being threatened by a barrage of factors, the huge one being diminishing state of funding. The aim of this article is, through a review of literature methodology to discuss and debate the underpinnings behind NGOs mal performance in selected African countries. Findings indicate that NGOs are weakened by funding challenges, pockets of corruption and embezzlement of funds especially by the top brass management, poor synergy and poor collaboration between them and the government, and inadequately skilled labourforce. The paper recommends to the government and other development partners to mobilize resources to help the NGO fraternity, the government to facilitate a strong collaboration and synergy between itself and the NGOs, as well as with other development partners, and the government to initiate a strong corruption monitoring system within the NGO fraternity. This is to foster transparency and accountability.

Keywords: *Synergy and collaboration, Development partners, corruption and embezzlement of funds, NGOs- government co-operation, Transparency and accountability*

1. Problem Statement

Although South Africa harbours innumerable NGOs in the African region, perhaps due to several community development challenges the country faces such as glaring poverty, preponderance of HIV/AIDS, etc., it's unfortunate that the effects and impacts of these NGOs and their interventions are not adequately conspicuous. It is therefore pertinent to explore the strengths of these NGOs resource wise, the policy environment in which they discharge their services, the competence levels of the human resource running them, their objectives, vision and their implementation plans in an endeavour to bring to the fore and document why the NGOs are not effective as partners of the government in development.

2. Methodology

The paper has utilized a review of literature methodology consulting various NGO related articles and books. It has also used the researchers' knowledge and experience in the NGOs environment.

3. Introduction and Background

It is notable to indicate that one of the latest global developments has been the emergence and widespread phenomenon of NGOs. Indubitably, NGOs stand for Non-Governmental Organizations and in South Africa they are also referred as Not for Profit Organizations, and the two concepts can be used interchangeably. However, their role in socio and economic development cannot be overemphasized in many countries, whether developed or developing. They are vehicles of development and undertake to fill in developmental gaps that the governments may not adequately fill, or in other words they complement government services. They are therefore partners in effectuating the developmental terrain of many countries (Kang'ethe, 2010).

The need to increase the activity of NGOs especially in developing countries has been made more urgent with glaring manifestations of poverty and its ramifications (Mulinge & Mufune, 2003). For example reliable statistics indicate

that 2.8 billion of the world's population lives on less than $2 a day while $1.2 billion live on less than a $1 a day. Furthermore, 6 infants in every 100 do not see their first birthday while 8 children do not live to see their fifth birthday. Gravely also, 9 boys out of every 100 and 14 girls out of every 100 do not attend primary education. These are critical factors that may point to developing countries' possible marginal score in the just about to be concluded 2015 Millennium Development Goals (Kang'ethe & Nyamutinga, 2014; Kang'ethe, 2012, 2014a). It is these researchers contention that although global development benchmarks are important in order to rank countries developmental scope and also as a tool of comparing development in a particular country, perhaps developing countries need their specific development benchmarks such as having African Millennium Development Goals or Asian Millennium Development Goals. This is because those who craft the global policy developmental benchmarks such as the Millennium Development Goals do not consider the developmental differences across different regions and countries. These authors consider that having the countries of the global North and those of the global South ascribe to the same global benchmarks could be tantamount to imperialism that shows the endemic weaknesses of the countries of the South.

Also predictions based on global challenges and trends indicate that in a few decades of the 21st century, close to 2 billion people will be added to the population with many of them in the developing countries. This is because of population explosion in many developing countries, poverty and low literacy levels coupled with inadequate implementation of family planning services (Cunjama, 2001). The above foreseeable challenges indicate more strain on the developing part of the world that is already facing structural challenges to deal with the phenomenon.

Excitingly and impressively, since the 1970s, the number of NGOs has been reported to increase both arithmetically and geometrically. For example in communist countries, the number has reached 75 000; while Asia, Africa, and Latin America record thousands of them (Fisher 2000 as cited by Haque 2002). Interestingly, developing countries appear to have the lion's share of the emergence of NGOs in the globe. With South Africa leading other African countries by having about 100 000 registered NPOs and 50 000 unregistered NPOs (Stuart, 2013), both Zimbabwe and Kenya have less than 10 000 NGOs (www.iaafrica.com 2014; www.softkenya.com, 2014). Perhaps a developmental relevant question that needs to be posed is whether the role and impact of these NGOs in poverty alleviation and other developmental aspects is commensurate with the geometric increase in the number of NGOs/NPOs (Mulinge & Mufune, 2003; Bariagaber, 2003; Alexander, 2003)

Most importantly, the work of NGOs in the developing world is believed to be reaching out to about 250 million people focusing on domains such as food security, community development, human rights, gender, environment, and agricultural development among other things (Kabir 2000; Weiss & Gordenker 1996: 17 as cited by Haque 2002). In South Africa, the innumerable number of the NGOs are usually service driven and undertake services such advocacy, gender empowerment, HIV and AIDS prevention and human rights (Stuart, 2013). Importantly, the role of NGOs especially in spearheading poverty alleviation programmes and projects in South Africa as in many other African countries needs to be expedited. This is because although global poverty is on the decline, African countries continue to move on a snail's pace as far as the rate of poverty reduction is concerned (Mulinge & Mufune, 2003; Bariagaber, 2003).

It is also good to note that although the diversity of NGOs/NPOs is important so that different developmental gaps can be tackled, perhaps these researchers are concerned with the quality of the NGOs/NPOs, their objectives, vision and mission, as well as their implementation capacities of what they stand for. Their contention is prompted by the observation that most NGOs are toothless, whether financially, human resource wise, or are totally devoid of visionary and realistic goals. Perhaps this is why the increase in the number of NGOs among African countries has not changed the developmental terrain of the respective countries, taking examples of South Africa that have more NGOs than other African countries (Poverties org 2013). Perhaps it is also worthwhile noting that the global economic environment like the recent global economic meltdown may have immensely affected the operations of the NGOs especially in African countries (Hecker, 2009). For example South African NGOs were financially hit by the economic meltdown as donations from the donors lowered significantly (Hecker, 2009).

Moreover, the global economic meltdown in South Africa reduced Corporate Social Investments (CSI) budgets resulting in most NGOs depending on the government for funding (Agere, 2014).

Such a change, however, has not augured well with the NGOs since their attention's goal posts stand to change to the direction and interests of the government. Perhaps the direction of the NGOs to please the government can proverbially be explained by the English proverb that says that "he who pays the piper calls the tune". This may also imply the NGOs limited autonomy and ability to promote citizenry by representing the government instead of the people (Stuart, 2013). It is based on these issues that threaten the survival of the NGOs that these authors saw it fit and appropriate to document a paper of this nature with the goal of coming up with recommendations that can prompt promotion, strengthening and bolstering both the survival and sustainability of the NGOs.

4. Challenges Threatening the Survival of NGOs

4.1 Funding challenge critical

The availability of funding is critical to service delivery of the NGOs while the unavailability of funds plays a debilitating role in the effective running of these institutions (Agere, 2014). Since most or all the NGOs operate on a non-profit basis and depending on donations, it therefore makes their survival unpredictable especially if market fluctuations occur and recessions descend upon global economies (Agere, 2014). Perhaps this may explain the low levels of success among the NGOs in African countries, South Africa notwithstanding. Inarguable, many NGOs are not living to their expectations of filling in the gaps that the government cannot meet. While funding is known to challenge these NGOs, there are questions that many minds cannot escape asking such as whether some of these NGOs in South Africa as in many other African countries such as Kenya are driven by the goals and vision they portend to follow, or are vehicles of directors to milk them at the expense of meeting their goals and expectations (Agere, 2014).

Indubitably, the NGO fraternity has seriously been affected by the recent global economic recession. This is because most donors stopped to donate when their financial houses went into a state of economic malaise (Davis, 2013). Gravely, the economic meltdown has not spared some South African NGOs that almost went on their economic knees due to the dearth of funding. The effects have been very grave especially among the NGOs specializing in the domain of HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention. With South Africa having more people suffering from HIV/AIDS, the unfortunate cut on funding due to the financial crisis saw organizations like Treatment Action Group (TAC) closing down six of its provincial offices .Regrettably, this also resulted in some clinics offering ARV treatment to stop enrolling patients on the ARV treatment programme due to severe ARV shortages at the clinics (Hecker, 2009).

Gravely also, other organizations such as IDASA in Cape Town actually closed down their offices. (Davis, 2013). In other countries such as Botswana, the government threatened to withdraw all it's funding for HIV/AIDS programmes making the work for NGOs more laborious and burdensome given the withdrawal. This is because the government funding makes up to 80% of the funding for these programmes. In fact most NGOs such as Botswana Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (BONEPWA) in Botswana almost went to a closure, leaving the office to be run by only the director and the deputy director and all the workers getting retrenched. Furthermore, Swaziland known to be having the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS saw its NGOs suffering as donors reduced funding because of the global financial crisis. In countries such as Uganda and Tanzania, the survival of NGOs has been seriously threatened and those that have weathered the storm have been operating on s shoe lace budget (Hecker, 2009).

Unpublished evidence indicates that agencies such as FAMSA in East London forced their employees to work on shifts and seek other income generating options and modalities to sustain their livelihoods because of little funding they were receiving in 2012. Whereas worrying reports indicate that the South African government has promised to support the NGOs because of the sterling role they do in supporting government service delivery, but on the ground, this is not the case. Equally, other donor bodies such as Lottery are accused of failing to foster a good working relationship with the NGOs (Barnard, 2012).

4.2 Corruption and embezzlement of funds

Corruption and its ramifications manifesting itself in embezzlement of organizational funds, paying ghost workers, misuse of organizational infrastructure such as vehicles for one's personal gain etc. is a cankerworm that seriously continue to undermine the productivity of organizations, NGOs not withstanding (Agere, 2014: Coetzer, 2013). Perhaps the NGO fraternity in African countries are echoing and mimicking the state of corruption happening within the leadership circles of their countries. In many NGOs, reports have indicated that those entrusted with funds for the institutions misuse them for personal benefit and in some instances corruptly access funding (The Herald, 2014: Agere, 2014). It is heart-breaking that all these filthy actions would be at the expense of the targeted beneficiaries who are in most cases needy and vulnerable. Perhaps the fact that most directors of the NGOs could be connected to those in power is an indicator that they may not fear the wrath of the law. In the same vein, some NGOs are platforms for political expediency, perhaps instituted to make some individuals popular in readiness to vie for either a civic or parliamentary post. Such personalities may be closely related to high ranking government officials. The goal of such NGOs may not intrinsically be there to address social development concerns. Such NGOs may suffer the process of politicisation of NGOs. Also, such NGOs may also not be following legal government channels such as filing any annual returns (Erasmus, 2012).

4.3   Lack of co-operation from the government impedes the work of NGOs

The lack of co-operation from the government poses a serious detriment to the efficiency of NGOs in service delivery (Kang'ethe, 2010) In many countries especially where democratic dispensation has not taken roots, the governments have been viewing NGOs as sympathizers of the opposition politicians and therefore using bureaucracy and administrative forces to harass them (African Commission on People's and Human Rights, 2009). Such scenarios are common in countries such as Zimbabwe and Kenya. In Zimbabwe, for instance, NGOs not affiliated or supporting the ruling party have had challenges of operating freely without various forms of political or administrative harassment (Kang'ethe & Serima, 2014).

Lack of government goodwill for the NGOs resulting to poor collaboration between the government and the NGOs has impeded NGO fraternity's effectiveness and efficiency, sometimes making the NGOs fail to achieve their set goals and objectives. For example, agencies such as the Institute of Youth Development South Africa (IYDSA) operating in East London, though doing a sterling role of training primary health care facilities' nurses has not been able to enjoy adequate government support and recognition. Due to its survival amid poor collaboration with the government in various ways, it is being forced to shift some of its operational goal posts to do things that the government is supposed to do (Kang'ethe & Manomano, 2014).

Lack of government respect for the NGOs has made their working environment unconducive. To this end, some senior government officials are on record showing contempt to the working of the NGOs through making sentiments that further sour the NGO-government relationship. For instance some sentiments made by Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education in April 2012, in an opinion article at the ANC website … *some NGOs are part of an ideological third force…* had an immense and grave spate of demotivation and discouragement among the NGO fraternity (IOLNEWS, 2012). This indicates that although the NGOs and the government are serving the same people and their goals are supposed to meet at a certain point, the environment that the government is creating is undermining and wreaking the NGO-government synergy to serve citizenry. This is a challenge that the government need to urgently address.

4.4   Inadequate competence levels within NGO fraternity

In any occupational setting, the level of skills and training heralds competence levels as well as possible effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (UNAIDS, 2001; Kang'ethe, 2014b).

It is disheartening to learn that most NGOs struggle to obtain skilled labour force such as social workers. This is perhaps because they do not afford a better remuneration as government or other private agencies. Therefore, the social workers who are ready to work in the NGO fraternity usually remain there as a stepping stone to increase their experience that will make them employable by the government or any other private agency (Agere, 2014). Therefore, the attrition rate of the social workers from the NGO fraternity is usually high and a big blow to the NGO domain. However, this notwithstanding, South Africa suffers shortage of the social workers generally. Even the Department of Labour alludes that the country has a severe shortage of social workers (Department of Labour, 2008) making the survival of NGOs difficult. The absence of a social worker or social workers in the organization is a big blow because it is also difficult to prove the need for funding from any establishment, whether donors or government. Amidst poor funding, NGOs can barely attract stable and long serving skilled labour force because employees end up leaving in search of better and greener pastures. To this end, government reports indicate that 66, 329 social workers were needed to implement the Children's Act, while 743 social workers were needed to implement the Older Persons Act and 1426 social workers for the Prevention and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act (Waters, 2013).

5.   Strategies to Strengthen and Enhance the Survival of NGOs in South Africa

5.1   Mobilize financial resources for NGOs

This paper has shown how the financial aspects are challenging the survival of NGOs. It is important for the Government of South Africa to mobilize funding for the survival of the NGOs or even partner with them so that they can also benefit from its funding. It is also important if the donor community can be made aware of the prospects and challenges that are experienced by NGOs in service delivery so as to ensure that funding is not erratic.

5.2 Increasing funding and education of skilled labour force

The government and the donors need to mobilize resources in the direction of the NGO fraternity to ensure that the labour force offering services to the NGOs is trained adequately. Perhaps training more social workers can increase the number that can look for jobs in the NGO fraternity. For example, with the shortage of social workers currently experienced, the government can consider availing more bursaries and encouraging most youths to register for the Bachelor of Social Work degree and other professions needed in the NGO sector. Moreover, ensuring that the degree is competitive and recognized and respected will go a long way in ensuring learner ship and increase in the number of social workers.

5.3 Enhancing co-operation between NGOs and the government is critical

It is a naked fact that NGOs have the ability to ensure efficiency and professionalism as well as embrace visions which are some of the lessons that the government can take from them. Otherwise, NGOs are likely to remain limited in impact if there is weaker synergy and poor collaboration between them and the government. It is pertinent, therefore that the government increases goodwill to foster a good working relationship with the NGO fraternity.

5.4 Establishing and reinforcing NGO and parliamentary corruption watch dogs

Corruption is a cankerworm that needs to be annihilated altogether within NGO fraternity. This is because of its capacity to wreak the effectiveness and efficiency of the NGOs in South Africa. Moreover, the trust and confidence of donors and other well-wishers is severely compromised by corruption. These researchers recommend that parliamentary watchdogs are instituted to raise the bell and whistle blow on corrupt and misusers of funds. Parliamentary platforms should also institute the right kind of punishment to corruption perpetrators in the NGO fraternity.

6. Conclusion

In South Africa, the work done by NGOs is not adequately conspicuous whether in child protection services, community development, counselling etc. Therefore, the role and task of NGO fraternity as a partner to the government in development is not adequately achieved. This is because of the environment of the NGO fraternity in South Africa. The environment of inadequate funding, failing to attract permanent social workers, corruption and inadequate government goodwill compounds the NGO challenges. It would be central that the government take interest in addressing these challenges if NGOs' effectiveness and efficiency is to be realized.

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