

Amplifying the impact of local Community Based Organisations (CBOs)

My interest in CBOs



We all generally know what an NGO is – an organisation that does not pursue profit and is neither part of Business nor Government, nor an agency of government. Most of us envisage them as those large, global, future-shaping NGOs reaching across borders, confronting Government and Business and making the front pages to advance their just causes.

Many global NGOs do fit this very big picture. The *Global Journal* began publishing non-profit rankings in 2012, focusing on the Top 100 NGOs. After expanding this to the Top 500 NGOs in 2015, the journal evolved into an all-new media platform, *NGO Advisor*, which has intensified the fascinating exploration of the global non-profit sector.

I found it interesting to read that the largest NGO of all is not from Europe or North America. In February 2019, *NGO Advisor* announced the world's number one NGO of the year: the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which is a global leader in developing cost-effective, evidence-based programmes in conflict-prone and post-disaster settings. BRAC retained the top spot for the fourth year in a row in part due to its leadership of the Rohingya refugee crisis, innovative new partnerships and the continued scale of its reach.

This got me thinking about South Africa and the NPOs we work with in communities as part of the community research efforts of G3 Business Solutions. For us, gaining and keeping the trust and confidence of communities is critical, given the rising levels of social unrest in most of the communities where our clients have an interest. People marginalised and overlooked – by the state and private sector alike – often feel they are only sought out when Business or Government wants something from them.

But NPOs embedded in communities, the so-called community-based organisations (CBOs), have credibility in these communities and this is an important strength that we leverage in working with them while carrying out our work.

So I would like to zoom in on the little-discussed CBOs, who differ from NPOs in that they may or may not be formally registered and are driven by people with a direct interest in the community where they work.

CBOs are started by people with a genuine connection to a particular community, a real passion for the cause and an inferred understanding of the root causes of the problem at hand.

Often, the people behind a CBO have experienced the same or similar trauma as the community concerned, giving them a real stake in addressing it.

The challenges faced by CBOs

CBOs seldom start with funding. Different from NGOs, they are unlikely to have funders. They start with a problem that they try to address. The fact that they are not in it for the money may add to their credibility in the community where they work – but it also makes it difficult to gain momentum or economies of scale and, as we are seeing in the South African context, volunteering at community level can be a challenge.

Community members may have confidence in a CBO's motives and methods, and share its desire to overcome a social ill, yet they might not be willing to volunteer to work with it unless they are given some form of compensation to do so.



While this may seem mercenary to ‘outsiders’ (especially to well-heeled outsiders), it is worth remembering that CBOs typically work in communities living in grinding poverty, where meeting basic needs is a relentless daily struggle. The fact that an initiative is for one’s ‘own good’ does not necessarily make volunteerism more appealing to someone living in the grip of poverty and unemployment.

I don’t want to debate the merits of community volunteer stipends or not, as that’s a discussion for another day. The point I rather want to make is that most CBOs, particularly those just starting out, are severely cash-strapped and not only battle to find willing, sufficiently skilled volunteers but find it intimidating to deal with potential funders. They usually have limited networks, limited financial and business skills, and a limited ability to make themselves more appealing to such funders.

And yet community access and credibility are things that money cannot buy.



Partnerships could well be one of the most effective ways for CBOs to get what they need, financial stability and business skills, and for funders to get what they need, which is access to the communities in which they want their CSR initiatives to make an impact.

Exploiting synergies through employee volunteering

From my personal and professional vantage point, I have experience in how Business and the NGO sector are not mutually exclusive. Let me explain. I have my own CBO, Purposeful Women, which I registered as an NPO in 2016 to assist girls and young women who, like me, had been sexually or physically abused. This NPO is, understandably, extremely close to my heart. At the same time, I am an employee of G3 Business Solutions, whose core expertise is stakeholder relationship management, which includes quantifying the socio-economic impact of its clients.

The two roles are mutually reinforcing. Wearing my G3 hat, I gain hands-on knowledge of engaging various types of stakeholders and direct experience in planning, strategising, monitoring and evaluating initiatives. I then use these skills to manage my NPO, which in turn adds to Purposeful Women’s capacity to assist young women in distress and to partner with hygiene brands such as Always in their sanitary pad drive at schools.

I also like to think that my NPO experience is of mutual benefit to my employer and its clients, especially when it comes to using the community liaison and relationship-building skills I have gained in working with young women from communities around Tshwane.

These synergies highlight the shared value that can be created when Business enables employees, its human capital resource pool, to apply competencies to social causes in communities where these employees can make a difference.

Partnerships between Business and NPOs

Scaling up the impact, I want to reflect on an example of an innovative Business-NPO partnership that we at G3 Business Solutions recently came across. It is an initiative where Santam partners with Landworks, the NPO enabling the concept of FireWise communities.

A FireWise community is a community at high risk of regular veld fires and who assumes responsibility for a systematic programme of prevention, preparedness and disaster response through a self-appointed FireWise steering committee and volunteers.

In Kranshoek in the Western Cape, one such FireWise community has been running since 2007, with astounding results in preventing and responding to veld fires.

Santam was not content with merely funding Landworks, however, and did not stop there. It also saw an opportunity to roll out an innovative short-term insurance product to the community of Kranshoek, safeguarding the assets of the community on a collective basis.

For the nominal amount of R50 to R60 per month per building, Santam – through Landworks – offers building and contents cover to households and businesses in Kranshoek – a community where very few had such cover before. The FireWise Community Insurance is administered by Landworks-accredited community agents, who receive 20% of premiums collected and qualify for incentive bonuses. Santam provides training and digital support, and also pays the community agents directly.

That, in my opinion, is taking Business and NPO collaboration to the next level – through co-creating with NPO partners unconventional solutions that benefit the community, strengthen the NPO, and drive business value.

With their community credibility and connections, CBOs can work with companies to innovate solutions that add value to their community initiatives and their core business. CBOs can also offer companies access to volunteering opportunities for their employees, which in turn benefits the CBOs and helps them develop the business skills they so badly need.

Then let's not forget the communities who benefit from the combined contribution of the CBOs and their business partners. It all adds up to shared value for all parties involved – it sounds like a cliché, I know, but everybody really does win.

