

Open letter: South Africa's forgotten sector

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4 May 2020

Those that we support and those who support us are on the verge of collapse due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



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We have heeded the call by President Ramaphosa and his government to step up and support the interventions that have been implemented across the country during this unprecedented period. We have put aside our brands and barriers to form coalitions, magnifying our collective support, and like so many other sectors, Covid-19 has united civil society.

The needs that NPOs were addressing prior to Covid-19 have not disappeared – they continue to require attention. NPOs have simply added Covid-19 support to their strategic focus, placing additional strain on an already oversubscribed sector.

As civil society, our purpose is to serve, to augment and to enhance the lives of our society. If we cease to exist, we will no longer be able to partner with government to serve the millions of South Africans who so desperately need our support. For civil society to continue, we call on government to create mechanisms to stabilise the sector and create a sustainable environment for our teams to endure.

Financial support and war rooms have been made available to numerous sectors ranging from the travel sector, to the textile sector and events industry. This is over and above the support granted to individuals, SMEs and corporates. However, the NPO sector, upon which millions of disenfranchised and underprivileged South Africans depend on for assistance daily, has been overlooked, with no measures or strategies implemented to alleviate the enormous burden being felt by organisations countrywide.

Before the NGO sector collapses entirely, we call for presidentially led empowerment to enable our continued augmentation of government's immediate needs and future goals, and to protect our workforce. With a minimum of 228,580 NGOs registered with the Department of Social Development, each with an average of four employees - a million jobs are in jeopardy, equating to six times the projected losses to the mining sector. Over and above these potential job losses at NPOs is the significant "loss of passion" in a sector which always goes above and beyond, which is irreplaceable.

We call on government to consider support in both the form of funds and passive support in terms of interventions. We also call for an urgent war room to be established with the Department of Social Development, Department of Finance, and Department of Health and Treasury, in collaboration with NPO leaders. This has been requested since prior to the detection of the first case of Covid-19 in South Africa in early March.

Areas for urgent consideration:

Passive support

- Reduced taxes for employees working in the NGO sector to encourage retention in the sector and to minimise losses to other, more lucrative sectors.
- Identify opportunities for reduced rates/discounts for NPO employees, such as public transport (Gautrain, buses and e-tolling).

Inject further funds into the sector

- Increase the 18A percentage that donors can claim to encourage an enhanced level of donor support and to prevent donor fatigue.
- Include and encourage civil society in business transactions as a condition of compliance, as already actioned in some sectors, e.g. ICT sector.
- Utilise appropriate NPOs with relevant expertise or resources as preferred service suppliers.

Financial injection

- Launch the national lottery funding which has been approved but is yet to be formally launched.
- Partner with organisations such as the Oppenheimer Foundation via a national platform to assist the NGO sector.
- Evaluate other relevant funding models.

Such interventions are imperative to galvanise the NGO sector, removing redundant costs and rationalising efforts through co-operation and integration, to optimise impact. Without prioritisation of these issues, we fear that the NPO sector, working so tirelessly to help meet the needs of so many, may be lost.

Signed:

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