

# Managing South Africa's Non-Governmental Organizations in an Interconnected World

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*Pre-1994, many donors sympathetic to the struggle against racial segregation, did not strictly control the administration and expenditure of funds. Shifts in donor policies and difficulties in the NGO sector for example, corruption, lack of financial management, inadequate leadership capacity and poor governance – are but some factors which led to the demise of many South African NGOs. Unseasoned managers floundered in an environment where good governance became the buzzword beyond 1994. This paper aims to devise a governance appraisal framework for the South African NGO sector in order to improve management practices and to sustain NGOs in the long run. It provides a theoretical underpinning pertaining to an NGOs legal status, its leadership, its executive management structure, the composition of the board and the principles of good governance.*

## Introduction

Due to the hostile environment in which non-profit organisations (NGOs) had to operate in South Africa, pre-1994, many donors sympathetic to the struggle against racial segregation known locally as *apartheid* (Apartheid refers to racial segregation in the South African context), did not strictly control the administration and expenditure of funds. Shifts in donor policies towards more stringent lending practices, in conjunction with difficulties within the non-profit sectors, for example, corruption, lack of financial management, inadequate leadership capacity and poor

governance – are but some factors which lead to the demise of many South African NGOs. Unseasoned NGO managers floundered in an environment where “good governance” practices became a buzzword beyond 1994.

Globally, the notion of NGOs ability to fulfil functions neglected by the private and public sectors is widely accepted. However, NGOs in different parts of the world have experienced a growth in the curiosity around their legal, fiscal, regulation and self-regulation status. For NGOs to survive in a changing and competitive environment, managers need to develop the necessary understanding and confidence to

make full use of various forms of management/governance information.

The aim of this paper is to devise a workable governance appraisal framework for the South African NGO sector against which management practices of NGOs can be tested. The developed framework will be derived from existing literature dealing specifically with: NGO legal status, NGO leadership, roles and responsibilities of the executive management, NGO Board and the extent to which principles of good governance are practices. The researcher believes that the aforementioned components form the core of managing an NGO in a sustainable fashion. The next section

will deliberate these issues where after a governance appraisal instrument will be forwarded. It is however important to first forward brief definitions of governance and management on which the study will be premised.

## NGO Management Practices: A Theoretical Overview

Management according to Oosthuizen (2008: 44) is defined as the process of co-ordinating work-related activities so that the people performing them complete these activities effectively and efficiently. In each management function the specialised manager needs to apply all the management tasks. Management can also be the term used to refer to the people with formal power within an organisation (Oosthuizen, 2008:44). Essentially when you manage, you combine human resources, material resources, and financial resources into a productive system in which organisational objectives can be attained (Odgers & Keelings, 2000: 4). Management in the aforementioned definitions, appear to be reliant on the skills a manager. Governance on the other hand according to Wyatt (2004) comes from the Latin word meaning "to steer, guide or direct". The term, the author contends, generally refers to the way in which power is assumed, conveyed and exercised within a society or an organisation. Governance is a widely-used term which ranges in definition from electoral arrangements to institutional structures (Narayan, Godden, Reid and Ortega, 2000). Budgeting, accounting, financial reporting and management control conversely, are the most essential tools for responsible governance, accountability, planning and management in NGOs (Ott, 2001). The search for answers to questions around the optimal management practices for the South African non-profit sector, juxtaposed against a global discussion, is what the next section forwards. Such deliberation will inform the governance appraisal framework which this paper will forward.

**Managing a South African NGO: 'Then' and 'Now'.** South Africa's history is rooted in an apartheid ideology where racial prejudice and discrimination prevailed. Before 1994, many South African institutions were constructed in an effort to counter the country's racially motivated discriminatory policies. The apartheid government assigned resources for various services along racial lines. Accordingly, in the health care sector, for example, where the government provided inadequate services, non-governmental organisations stepped in. The Black Peoples Convention is one such organisation which provided mobile clinics where trailers were equipped with medical instruments and volunteer medical doctors to help poor service-deprived black communities. The development and operation of NGOs in South Africa, including international NGOs, is thus closely linked to the country's political history (Mazibuko, 2000).

Developmental non-governmental organisations are mostly a funded sector, depending on funds

from the community, businesses, government or from foreign governments, foundations and businesses (Mazibuko, 2000; Kihato, 2001; Fehnel, 1997). Despite their dependence on donations, NGOs appear to have a reputation for offering specific advantages over more bureaucratic government structures in the delivery of a range of social, economic and political objectives. It would appear that NGOs are better able to reach the poor, that they are flexible and responsive and that they can offer tailored and innovative service delivery interventions (Martin, s.c; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Bourne & Seager, 2000). The South African government's drive towards a closer working relationship with formally structured NGOs seems to be part of an effort to quell a rising tide of social discontent and protest about the stubborn levels of poverty and inequality linked to inefficient and corrupted state delivery arms (Gabriel, 2013:7). On the other hand, potential weaknesses of NGOs as espoused by Liebenberg (quoted in Bourne and Seager, 2000) range from:

- inadequate planning, organisation and management;
- inadequate staff training;
- inability to replicate projects and ensure sustainability;
- inability to collaborate with other role-players effectively;
- a lack of coordination in the efforts of NGOs.

These weaknesses, however, may not necessarily be true of all NGOs (Bourne & Seager, 2000). Further changes in the social development sphere as espoused by Gabriel (2013:7) is linked to overseas government donors who now shift funding away from particular NGOs to areas aligned to the home countries' political views and interests and where results can be counted.

Definitions in the earlier paragraphs of this paper, suggests that financial and human resources are crucial components when the management or governance of any organisation is discussed. This section will therefore focus on financial and human resources management practices of NGOs in South Africa, pre and post 1994.

*Financial resources:* When referring to financial management, prior to 1994, the nature of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, meant that many donors adopted a less-than-stringent attitude towards the way in which their beneficiaries accounted for and spent the monies they received (Habib and Taylor as quoted in Smith, 2001b). The absence of sound accountability structures proved problematic as was proven when the Danchurch Aid, a donor organisation, took legal action against an NGO and its leadership, led by Allan Boesak, for the misuse and misappropriation of funds (Camay and Gordon, 2000). The "struggle-accounting" practices (struggle in this context refers to the struggle against *apartheid*), contends Marais (as quoted in Smith, 2001a) were replaced by a much tighter stance on the part of donors towards financial accounting and programme reporting

requirements for NGOs. In this context, Smith (2001a: 27) reports that:

- Donors expect more specific and qualitative feedback and planning of projects;
- New reporting formats as a requirement for managing efficiently has been put into place;
- Donors demand tighter control over financial accounts;
- Lengthy tendering processes are attached to many internationally funded projects and
- Donors request the use of particular management tools.

The aforementioned author found in research undertaken that a number of local NGOs surveyed at the time, lacked the necessary capacity to comply with the requirements stated above. With a significant increase in the number of NGOs, funding and other collaborators have identified governance as a key issue in organisational effectiveness and efficiency (Centre for African Family Studies, 2001).

*Human resources:* Prior to 1994, NGOs were able to attract high calibre human capital wishing not to be associated with the apartheid state (Govender, s.c). NGO leaders were committed, altruistic and selfless at the time (Dollar, 1998). Numerous leaders of civil society organisations emanated from religious communities (Camay and Gordon, 2000). Others, particularly in the early 1980s, came in the form of university students and graduates politicised by the activities of the 1970s, and political prisoners, many of whom were released in the early 1980s. These individuals came together in many ways to organise political activities and the community (Habib, 2003).

The advent of democracy saw politically conscious individuals move from NGOs, CBOs and CSOs to assist with transformation in the new state (Govender, s.c). Strategic NGO leadership repositioned itself in national and provincial government, the parastatals and the corporate sector (Harding, 1994). Another group of CSO leadership moved into local government following the 1995/6 local government elections (Camay and Gordon, 2000). This brain drain left a huge gap in civil society leadership, particularly in organisations which had been part of the mass movement against apartheid (Camay and Gordon, 2000). NGO, CBO and CSO capacity weakened. A cynical line doing the rounds at the time suggested that the acronym NGO stood for 'next government official' (Harding, 1994).

The human resource skills capacity problem within NGOs, reports Cooper (as quoted in Camay and Gordon, 2000), pertains specifically to negotiation and fundraising skills. The skills deficit in these areas can be attributed to the legacy of apartheid where, even today, a large portion of the black population continues to face difficulties upgrading various types of skills essential in NGO management (Cooper as quoted in Camay and Gordon, 2000).

Dollar (1998), in research conducted around NGO organisational culture, reports that South African NGO leaders were required to set organisational direction, lead strategic planning, foster staff development, engage with cultural diversity and affirmative action, introduce participative management structures and deal with other administrative functions. While NGO leaders sought to reclaim the political space lost after 1994, it proved difficult to provide direction to the sector particularly around sustainability, building new capacity and leadership (Kraak, 2001). A huge challenge for the NGO sector therefore is to rebuild leadership and its skills capacity to ensure its continued existence (Camay and Gordon, 2000; Kihato & Rapoo, 1999).

When developing new NGO leaders, leadership styles would prove crucial. McLaughlin as quoted in Dollar (1998) argues that an NGO leadership style should be situational. This proposed NGO leadership style, contends the author, should be guided by the organisation, the staff and the environment. Harding and Meintjies as quoted in Dollar (1998) supports charismatic leadership the ultimate form of NGO leadership. They perceive charismatic leaders as individuals able to initiate change and set organisational direction. Bass (1990) contends that a charismatic leader exhibits confidence, dominance, a sense of purpose, and the ability to articulate goals. The author further suggests that a charismatic leader is an exceptional person and highly esteemed. Raelin (2003) concurs with Harding and Meintjies where he says that by definition, charismatics sway people and shape the future by their sheer presence and personality.

Whilst financial management and human resources management is crucial in the management of an NGO which the aforementioned discussion aptly proves, let us now pay particular attention to an NGO's legal status, its leadership, the executive management structure, the composition of the board, the role of the CEO vis-à-vis the chairperson of the board, organisational policies, procedures employed by NGOs to evaluate its projects and activities, and good cooperative governance. This discussion forms the core of sustainably managing an NGO as Hendrickse (2009) found in a study entitled: *Governance and financial sustainability of NGOs in South Africa*.

**Legal status:** The long-term sustainability of the non-profit sector is linked to the legislative framework of a country in which the NGO operates. In South Africa, the Non-Profit Organisations Act (Act 71 of 1997), lays out in great detail a framework for the creation and operation of civil society organisations. Essentially, the Act provides a registration

facility for the existing South African legal forms for NPOs, Section 21 Companies, Trusts and Voluntary and other non-profit Associations, providing that certain minimum establishment requirements and annual reporting requirements are complied with. This Act is currently under review where the government aims to streamline NPO registration procedures and improve its ability to manage the large number of registered NPOs, about 98000, while overhauling the coordination between funding agencies that have been set up to support the work of the NPO sector (Gabriel, 2013: 7). Local commentators are however sceptic about this new development as the true motives of government is questioned (Gabriel, 2013: 7).

**NGO leadership:** Corporate governance is essentially about leadership. In the absence of transparent and accountable leadership, the organisation will decline. To ensure accountable leadership, the chief executive officer should take responsibility for organisational processes and activities. A charismatic leader is regarded as an asset to an NGO. Leadership centred on a particular individual proves problematic. Potential leadership capacity within the organisation should be identified and groomed (Hendrickse, 2009: 201).

**Executive management structure:** An executive management team, the operational arm of organisation, who clearly understands its roles and functions should manage an organisation. Where a non-cohesive management structure exists the administration and coordination of resources will not be utilised in an effective and efficient manner towards the attainment of the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives. Staff within the organisation will lose their commitment and will not function at optimum level. Formal, effective organisational structures based on programmes and functions in documented management policies and systems should be in place. The policies and systems should be translated into effective management practices. Management practices should also not be too bureaucratic where the organisation's activities are hampered (Hendrickse, 2009: 201).

**Composition of the Board:** Organisations should be governed by an effective board, which can both lead and control the organisation. There should be an appropriate balance of power and authority on the board, such that no one entity or block of persons can dominate the board's decision-making. The board should seek to ensure an adequate mix of skills and experience and diversity in demographics to enable them to operate effectively. Particular knowledge and skills amongst board members is essential to ensure

efficient governance. Legal expertise as a requisite skill for one or more board members should be considered to ensure that the organisation is compliant within the legal framework of the country and sector in which it finds itself (Hendrickse, 2009: 202).

**Principles of good governance:** To uphold the Code of Corporate Practices and Conduct as forwarded in the King Report, it is imperative for organisations to have specific policies elucidating the duties of the governing board and the management committee of the organisation. Such policies will contribute to sound internal governance. In order for an NGO to remain relevant in relation to its role and purpose in today's global context, it should regularly evaluate its projects and activities, which in turn will impact on good corporate governance (Hendrickse, 2009: 203-205).

In concluding this discussion, the following tenets as captured above, and which informs the governance appraisal framework devised, are imperative in managing an NGO: The organisation has to reflect its legal status, a charismatic leader is imperative and the executive management structure should be clear. The composition of the governing board is important. Organisational policies should be spelled out clearly and it is crucial for activities and projects to be evaluated at regular intervals.

## The Governance Appraisal Framework

The purpose of this appraisal instrument is to provide a framework for assessing the governance of NGOs with particular focus on the evolution of NGO management practices since the advent of *Apartheid*.

The governance appraisal framework for NGOs consists of systematically developed appraisal criteria based on theoretical assumptions explored. Its purpose is to assess and to make explicit recommendations with a definite intention of influencing how NGOs are governed or managed.

The appraisal form consists of a governance section which includes assessment criteria against which scores are assigned. A practical cumulative scoring system has been devised.

In concluding the appraisal process, score categories have been developed which will indicate whether the NGO is managed in a sustainable fashion, or whether particular areas require improvement. The total score attained by an NGO should be measured against one of the following score categories.

### DIAGRAM 1: GOVERNANCE SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR

SCORE CATEGORY	FINAL SCORE	SUSTAINABILITY INDICATOR
<b>GREEN CATEGORY</b>	60% +	Sustainable
<b>ORANGE CATEGORY</b>	41% - 59%	Strengthen governance practices
<b>RED CATEGORY</b>	0% - 40%	Drastic action required with regard to governance practices

**APPRAISAL FORM 1: GOVERNANCE APPRAISAL INSTRUMENT FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF NGOs**

	APPRAISAL CRITERIA	MAXIMUM SCORE	SCORE ATTAINED
	<b>GOVERNANCE</b>	NGO legal status	10
NGO leadership (Chief Executive Officer/Director/Manager)		10	
Roles and responsibilities of the executive management		10	
NGO Board		10	
The extent to which principles of good governance are practiced		10	
Score: Total		50	
<b>PERCENTAGE SCORE:</b>			%

The user should note that the criteria and weighting of scores are relative. Weighting (how many points are allocated to each criterion) can be adjusted depending on the value placed on particular criteria, within acceptable parameters and particularly by facilitating agreement between stakeholders of a particular NGO being appraised. An acceptable

parameter in this context will be an adjustment of not more or less than two points in the possible score column pertaining to a particular criterion which may require an adjustment.

The next section will explain the theoretical relevance of the assessment criteria, and perspectives will be provided on the reasoning for the assessment scores pertaining to each criterion.

**APPRAISAL DIAGRAM 1.1**

<b>GOVERNANCE APPRAISAL</b>		
<b>NGO LEGAL STATUS</b>	Possible	Score Assigned
<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	Score	
<b>Existence of a legal entity</b>	/5	
<b>Registered as one of the following:</b>	/4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NGO registered as a non-profit organisation under the NPO Act of 1997</b></li> <li>• <b>Registered as PBO</b></li> <li>• <b>Non-profit trust registered under the Trust Property Control Act 1998</b></li> <li>• <b>Section 21 not-for-profit gain organisation as per the Companies Act of 1973</b></li> </ul>		
<b>Registered for value added tax (VAT)</b>	/1	
<b>Sub-Total</b>	/10	

**How to assign scores:**

- Insert a score in each column. Where the organisation does not meet the specified criteria, assign a zero (0). Where the organisation has partially met the assessment criteria, where appropriate and at the discretion of the assessor, assign a score of between five (5) and zero point five (0.5).
- Transfer sub-total of score attained under Appraisal diagram 1.1 to the appropriate block in Appraisal Form 1.

**APPRAISAL DIAGRAM 1.2**

<b>GOVERNANCE APPRAISAL</b>		
<b>NGO LEADERSHIP</b>	Possible Score	Score assigned
<i>Assessment criteria</i>		
<i>The NGO displays ALL of the following leadership criteria</i>	/3	
<i>NGO manager/director displays transparent and accountable leadership in line with the organisation's constitution</i>	/1	
<i>NGO leadership (manager/director) is not centred on a particular individual where the manager is also the chairperson of the governing board. Clear separation of powers exists between the two entities</i>	/1	
<i>NGO has a charismatic leader (director/manager)</i>	/1	
<i>NGO manager/director delegates the management of the organisation to senior executive staff (where subordinates exist)</i>	/1	
<i>NGO manager/director served for 3 years or more as managing director or director</i>	/1	
<i>NGO manager/director effectively manages the operational arm of the organisation, and the chairperson of the governing board and/or governing board does not intervene in administrative issues of the organisation except in the formulation of operational policies</i>	/1	
<i>There is regular supervision of the director/manager/management by the chairperson of the governing board</i>	/1	
<b>Sub-total</b>	/10	

**How to assign scores:**

- Insert a score in each column. Where the organisation does not meet the specified criteria, assign a zero (0). Where the organisation partially meets the assessment criteria, where appropriate and at the discretion of the assessor, assign a score of between three (3) and zero point five (0.5).
- Transfer sub-total of score attained under Appraisal diagram 1.2 to the appropriate block in Appraisal Form 1.

APPRAISAL DIAGRAM 1.3

<b>GOVERNANCE APPRAISAL</b>		
<b>ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT</b>	Possible Score	Score Assigned
<i>Assessment criteria</i>		
<b>The NGO meets ALL the assessment criteria, as stated in this diagram, pertaining to the roles and responsibilities of the executive management structure. (First complete the sections below before assigning a score in this block.)</b>	/4	
<b>The executive management team clearly understands its roles and functions</b>	/1	
<b>The executive management team has clearly assigned responsibilities</b>	/1	
<b>A cohesive management structure exists</b>	/1	
<b>Executive management effectively and efficiently manages the NGO's resources</b>	/1	
<b>Executive management upholds the NGO's vision, mission and strategic objectives as displayed in its constitution</b>	/1	
<b>A sound strategic and business plan exists. Executive management assisted in its formulation and oversees its implementation</b>	/1	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>/10</b>	

How to assign scores:

- Insert a score in each column. Where the organisation does not meet the specified criteria, assign a zero (0). Where the organisation partially meets the assessment criteria, where appropriate and at the discretion of the assessor, assign a score of between four (4) and zero point five (0.5).
- Transfer sub-total of score attained under Appraisal Diagram 1.3 to the appropriate block in Appraisal Form 1.

**APPRAISAL DIAGRAM 1.4**

<b>GOVERNANCE APPRAISAL</b>		
<b>COMPOSITION AND SKILLS OF THE BOARD</b>	Possible Score	Score assigned
<i>Assessment criteria</i>		
<b>Existence of a governing board.</b>	/4	
<b>Diversity of the board. The board consists of representatives from the NGO sector, community, government and private sector.</b>	/2	
<b>The board consists of more than 50% of external membership.</b>	/2	
<b>The board reflects diversity in terms of technical skills, community engagement skills, management skills, fundraising skills, financial skills and legal skills, commensurate with the business of the NGO.</b>	/2	
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>/10</b>	

**How to assign scores:**

- Insert a score in each column. Where the organisation does not meet the specified criteria, assign a zero (0). Where the organisation partially meets the assessment criteria, where appropriate and at the discretion of the assessor, assign a score of between four (4) and zero point five (0.5).
- Transfer sub-total of score attained under Appraisal Diagram 1.4 to the appropriate block in Appraisal Form 1.

APPRAISAL DIAGRAM 1.5

<b>GOVERNANCE APPRAISAL</b>		
<b>THE EXTENT TO WHICH PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE ARE PRACTICED</b>		
<i>Appraisal criteria</i>	Possible Score	Score Assigned
<i>ALL of the following characteristics of good governance are present within the organisation.</i>	/1	
- <i>Staff participation in policy formulation and implementation</i>		
- <i>Transparency of decisions by management</i>		
- <i>Responsiveness to clients</i>		
- <i>Consensus-oriented decision-making</i>		
- <i>Equity with regard to human resource appointments</i>		
- <i>Equity with regard to the procurement of external services and resources</i>		
- <i>Effectiveness and efficiency in responding to client needs</i>		
- <i>Accountability to stakeholders</i>		
- <i>Legal frameworks are enforced impartially</i>		
<i>Staff participation, where staff comments on the practicality around the implementation of policy frameworks</i>	/1	
<i>Transparency of decisions by management</i>	/1	
<i>The organisation's responsiveness to clients</i>	/1	
<i>Consensus-oriented decision-making</i>	/1	
<i>Equity with regard to human resource appointments</i>	/1	
<i>Equity with regard to the procurement of external services and resources</i>	/1	
<i>Effectiveness and efficiency in responding to client needs</i>	/1	

<b>Accountability to stakeholders</b>	/1
<b>Legal frameworks are enforced impartially</b>	/1
<b>Sub-total</b>	/10

#### How to assign a score:

- Insert a score in each column. Where the organisation does not meet the specified criteria, assign a zero (0). Where the organisation partially meets the assessment criteria, where appropriate and at the discretion of the assessor, assign a score of between one (1) and zero point five (0.5).
- Transfer sub-total of score attained under Appraisal Diagram 1.5 to the appropriate block in Appraisal Form 1.

#### FRAMEWORK APPLICATION GUIDELINES

The following section will forward a discussion on the structure and content of the appraisal framework, how documentation should be assimilated, who should appraise and how final scores should be calculated.

##### Structure and content of the appraisal framework

This appraisal framework consists of 5 assessment criteria. Each criterion is intended to capture a separate dimension of governance as informed by theoretical evidence. The scope and purpose of this appraisal instrument is to provide a framework for assessing the governance of NGOs as alluded earlier.

##### Documentation/Information

The assessor should attempt to identify all information pertaining to the organisation prior to the start of the appraisal exercise. Information can be collated through consulting, for example, the organisation's annual reports and other relevant documentation, or through site visits, interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

##### Who should appraise

It is recommended that the appraisal instrument be facilitated by an assessor experienced in the

area of NGOs in order to increase the reliability of the assessment outcomes. The assessor may be assisted by a moderator. Focus groups can be utilised to deliberate the outcomes of the appraisal exercise

##### Score scale/overall assessment

A cumulative scoring system has been devised. Each item within the assessment criteria has been awarded a possible score. The assigned score measures the extent to which a criterion has been fulfilled.

- If the assessor is confident that the criterion has been fully met, then the full possible score can be assigned.
- If the assessor is confident that the criterion has partially been fulfilled, a portion of the possible score, at the discretion of the assessor, may be assigned. However, if a possible score equals one, a score of zero (0), at the discretion of the assessor, may be assigned.
- If the assessor is sure that a criterion has not been fulfilled, due to a lack of corroborating evidence, a score of zero (0) may be assigned.
- Sub-totals attained in each appraisal diagram should be transferred to Appraisal Form 1, whereafter a final score and a percentage score should be calculated.

- The percentage score should be compared to the Governance Sustainability Indicator presented.

#### CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to devise a workable governance appraisal framework for the South African NGO sector against which the management practices of NGOs can be tested. The framework was derived from existing literature dealing specifically with: NGO legal status, NGO leadership, roles and responsibilities of the executive management, NGO board and the extent to which principles of good governance are practiced. This was done against the background of the historical evolution of NGOs in South Africa and in the context of global discussions on NGO management and governance practices. The study concludes that NGOs have a critical role to play in the delivery of various services in South Africa. In this context, NGOs require an environment within which they can flourish. The appraisal framework can contribute to the long-term sustainability of the South African NGO sector. It will enhance the management of South Africa's NGOs in an interconnected world.

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