

## NAVIGATING COVID-19 FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS



photo by Christin Bela

## NAVIGATING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC FOR CSOS: INNOVATIVELY FUNDRAISING ONLINE

As we try to navigate the coronavirus pandemic, every NGO, CBO or SHG is thinking how to emerge stronger thereafter. How do you continue fundraising if it is not business as usual around the world?

You may find this toolkit on crowdfunding useful during this time. Crowdfunding is simply the practice of fundraising for an organisation, project or cause through a large number of people online.

Crowdfunding might be a good way to find new forms of income for NGOs and CBOs. It can give you the chance to reach an extended audience, it reduces time, cost and the usual effort of fundraising.

It attracts not only donors but could also lead to more volunteers. In many cases you'll use a crowdfunding website that does a lot of work for you, has a new donor base for your organisation and uses different social media platforms to spread the word.

The advantage of crowdfunding is that you are able to reach potential funders collectively and present everything online, comprehensively instead of pursuing each donor individually. It sounds good, doesn't it? However, a crowdfunding campaign is not something that you can put up overnight.

Every successful campaign requires planning, images, a good video and a well-thought out follow-up plan. To know whether crowdfunding could be something for your organisation, it might be good to first think about possible advantages and risks.

Examples of crowdfunding platforms include [kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com), [Indiegogo.com](https://www.indiegogo.com), [causes.com](https://www.causes.com) and many more that you can find online. More about this toolkit [here](#).



## ADAPTING TO COVID-19 FOR CSOS' LONG TERM IMPACT AND VIABILITY

BY CHARLES KOJO VANDYCK

The past decade has seen considerable changes in civil society dynamics in Africa, with reductions in traditional forms of funding. In the middle-income countries shrinking space for civil society has been witnessed in many contexts and hence eliciting questions around the legitimacy and accountability of organizations dependent on aid investment.

These changes create multiple challenges for civil societies. For many organizations, movements and activists in Africa, the future is unclear.

This uncertainty has even been worsened as the world battles with the Coronavirus pandemic posing challenges on running programmes, coordinating staff, financial systems, planning, security, and communication. Yet CSOs are critical to humanitarian assistance in these times. However, as CSOs we are challenged today, probably more than ever, to remain able to deliver across communities. Therefore, organizations are being challenged to innovate to ensure that interventions are executed effectively and timely in the face of unprecedented disruption. At WACSI, we recognize the urgent need for civil society to review their structures, roles and responsibilities with communities, governments and international and domestic funders to ensure their long-term sustainability. This will help civil society entities especially community-based organizations, grassroots associations and less-resourced CSOs to carry out such crucial activities as supporting the poor, the disenfranchised and the marginalized, enabling collective action and holding decision-makers and the private sector to account.

The institute envisages that the potential operational challenges that CSOs will face due to the coronavirus include:

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The strain on the traditional ways of working and programme delivery; Disruption to resource streams, financial systems and planning; Health and availability of staff; Communication and workflow challenges between staff members who are now all working remotely; Challenges with implementing programmes in communities in an environment of physical distancing particularly organizations which work in health, education and social protection.



It is essential that during these times, CSOs take practical steps to operate and respond to their constituencies. These are some proposed measures that can be taken to navigate this unprecedented experience.

**Short-term (1-3 months, March-May, 2020)**

Officially informing donor partners about disruption and obtaining consent to reschedule activities or revise aspects of project delivery

It would be advisable for organizations to send formal notices to various donor partners supporting various projects to ask for activities to be rescheduled and also continue to implement activities that do not require face to face engagements. In some cases, organizations could propose new delivery modalities including virtual and digital platforms. Donor partners have to show leadership by being supportive of CSOs on extraordinary measures to manage the complex situation. Also, CSOs ought to facilitate the ability for staff members to continue working remotely on activities that do not require face to face engagements.

**Medium-term (4-6 months, June-August, 2020)**

Implement projects in alignment with rescheduled timelines or continue to engage with partners virtually/ digitally or through telephony, if the COVID19 situation persists

WACSI is anticipating that the situation may be under control within three months based on projections from various governments and scientific bodies across the world. If this scenario plays out as projected, the institute advises that organizations should plan face to face engagements with their partners based on rescheduled timelines. However, if the Coronavirus situation persists, organizations ought to continue using virtual platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram to deliver support to their partners and maintain engagement. Also, find innovative ways of undertaking sensitization campaigns, training and follow-up support for their partners. For grassroots organizations, WhatsApp notes are an effective communication tool to keep a respectable level of engagement with community members.

**Long-term (6-10 months, September-December, 2020)**

If the pandemic persists into August 2020, CSOs need to review their operating models, partnerships and engagement mechanisms

CSOs will have to consider organizing more virtual engagements with their board members and may consider reinforcing their boards with additional experts to respond to this challenge. However, the biggest challenge CSOs will face is financial sustainability. Most CSOs in Africa are excessively dependent on external donor funding, countries which have been hardest hit by the pandemic. Most CSOs in Africa have inadequate capacity in mobilizing resources from their communities. This means this is the time to consider alternative financing models. WACSI in partnership with innovation for change developed an alternative funding models guidebook. There is no better time to utilize this resource than NOW! Organizations should consider utilizing this resource effectively. Download here.



## RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS: CSOS INTERVENTIONS IN BRAZIL

The civil society in Brazil is facing a difficult moment during this Covid-19 pandemic period as it discharges its mandate toward easing the grip of the disease on the community. Nevertheless, it has managed to give direct and indirect assistance to vulnerable communities across the country specifically addressing urgent issues including food security, health and information.

Despite the President's casual treatment of the pandemic, the Brazilian civil society has done this through alliance building, crowdfunding and networking among diverse organizations. This has enabled them to deliver assistance and make a difference in lives of people living in the streets or slums, those without regular water supply, as well as indigenous and Afro-Brazilian rural communities without access to adequate public policies.

Rural social movements, such as the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and Small Farmers Movement (MPA) have contributed huge amounts of food to urban communities in need, highlighting not only the importance of family agriculture and agro-ecological systems for food security but also the solidarity principle guiding social movements actions. A priority for these CSO's has been the distribution of food, cleaning materials, masks and other protection. This has helped slow the dissemination of the virus and avoided the early collapse of the public health system, which has suffered significant budget cuts in the last few years.

These efforts have however continued to be hampered by the actions of the far-right president, elected in very controversial elections at the end of 2018. This is even more serious if we consider that Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with deep-rooted class, race and gender disparities. Non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations in Brazil are well aware of the challenges they face and their multifaceted role. Thus, they are also running information campaigns to reach specific groups, providing mental health care, remote religious support and useful information for women who are suffering domestic violence while in confinement, among other types of actions.

CSOs are mobilizing support at the local and national levels so that the government responds to the pandemic with emergency policies capable of effectively saving lives. One successful example was the national campaign for the approval of a minimal income to large impoverished sectors of the population, mainly informal workers whose means of subsistence were made impossible in the pandemic context ([www.rendabasica.org.br](http://www.rendabasica.org.br)).

Other important proposals include taxing large fortunes and restoring successful food security programs which were terminated by the national government.

The proactive and nuanced approach to the pandemic held by civil society to face the pandemic and its impacts - with service delivery associated with advocacy and policy intervention - opens space and creates new opportunities for dialogue with large sectors of the Brazilian population. The relevance of civil society is more visible in this context, not only to the poorest people but also to other sectors of society which have been exposed to extremely negative discourses - including scathing statements from the President - on human rights, activism, non-governmental organizations and social movements. Indeed, civil society is very active in the public sphere, discussing the pandemic and making the necessary links with other structural issues, such as the relevance of the state and public health systems, the value of human rights, the importance of water access as a common good and the impact of institutional racism and gender inequalities.



# BEYOND THE LOCK DOWN, A FUTURE BECKONS. ARE YOU READY?

BY ERNSTJAN STROES

Article 3 of the UN's Universal declaration of human rights states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". Pandemics such as the Covid-19 outbreak heavily impact our right to 'life and physical security' and therefore to fight them, governments around the globe are obliged and even entitled to take radical steps to stop such and protect their citizens. Temporarily this may limit our other rights such as the right to liberty and security in the broader sense of the declaration, nonetheless whilst lifting these rights authorities should be aware that this can only be temporary and that the balance between the rights should be restored as soon as reasonably possible.

## Totalitarian trendsetters

There is a risk though that authorities will use the pandemic as an occasion to strengthen their grab onto power instead of as an emergency to address the disease. In Hungary for example, President Orbán was enabled by his parliament on the 30th of March to rule by decree endlessly, whilst further limiting the freedom of the press to publish about the Covid-19 crisis.

President İlham Aliyev of already quite totalitarian Azerbaijan sought to attack the opposition on the 19th of March motivating a crackdown on what he called the 5th column in the country. President Duterte of the Philippines, known for his hard approach on drugs addiction, went even a step further and bluntly suggested that everybody who defied the curfew should be shot. On 26th March 2020, the President of the Pacific Island state of Vanuatu announced that it is illegal for media to publish on the coronavirus without authorization by the National Disaster Management Office. The leader of Turkmenistan simply even prohibited speaking about the coronavirus to stop the pandemic.

## Epidemy of shrinking civic-space

Rulers with totalitarian ambitions will indeed use the health-crisis to further strengthen their powers. But in countries where civic rights are more guaranteed and leaders don't have such ambitions, the introduction of emergency rule in the face of the health crisis have a strong impact on civic-space. Many people in the world are at the moment strongly limited in their right for free movement even within their own country and neighborhood. To stop the pandemic meetings are forbidden and protesting becomes practically impossible. To manage the information that reaches citizens, governments take unorthodox steps to guarantee that citizens receive the right kind of information. Mass-surveillance programs are set up to isolate people that are sick and track their behavior and movements. In a drive to better organize the health-care response, rights of CSOs can be reduced.



photo by Christin Bela

In a reaction to the pandemic, a stronger central state may arise and local authorities may find themselves as well deprived of part of their roles. Furthermore, authorities may start looking for extra finances to fill the budgetary gaps caused by the pandemic. No matter how understandable these actions are we are at risk that they remain in place even after the pandemic.

### CSOs in a post-pandemic world

It is to be expected that worldwide the situation for CSOs after the pandemic will be less favorable. Social and environmental CSOs will find limited possibilities to get the facts about the work of the authorities and find themselves highly invigilated due to new regulations on gathering and distributing information. Service providing CSOs may have lost control over schools and health-clinics and other facilities. Local development CSOs may find themselves unable to sustain their activities due to a long period in which they were unable to raise funds and the organization of local gatherings was impossible. International funds may find new borders in transferring money to local CSOs and could be forced to stop their operations in the aftermath of the pandemic. Many of the installed emergency rules may remain in place for a long time and will be not rolled back quickly.

### Restore trust and well-being

In this context raising local funds and mobilizing popular support for CSOs is both challenging and urgent. Local resources restore the independence of CSOs in the aftermath of the pandemic and reduce their dependency on foreign funds. In this time CSOs have to convince governments that restoring the space for citizens to undertake action and to alleviate social needs is an important way of sustainably restoring the well-being of the population. Moreover, facts can only exist in a world where public space is open to debate about the meaning of these facts. CSOs have to prepare during lockdown for a challenging world in which skills for local fundraising and restoring the partnership with local communities and local authorities become the main challenge to be dealt with. In this time the online courses of the Change the Game Academy offer you the possibility to learn how to face these challenges without the need to leave your house.

Click [here](#) to register for our online courses.