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Civil Society submission towards the Social Sector Summit 2018

Compiled by Community Chest and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation

15 March 2018

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Background

In February 2018, a group of civil society leaders have come together in Cape Town to discuss pressing issues affecting the sector. The gathering, held on World NGO Day, was organised by Community Chest and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in preparation for the Social Sector Summit which was announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa during State of the Nation Address 2018.

“In recognising the critical role that non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) play in tackling poverty, inequality and related social problems, we will convene a social sector summit during the course of this year.” (SONA 2018, Cyril Ramaphosa)

Staying true to World NGO Day’s theme: ‘Celebrate, commemorate and collaborate’ the event brought about 40 Not-for-Profit Organisations (NGO) out of their silos, to establish a cohesive voice on the critical issues facing society in the post-Zuma era. The aim of the roundtable was to reflect on the demise, limitations and restrictions experienced by civil society organisation. At the same time, the organisations present also had honest conversations about the shortcomings of civil society in terms of accountability, transparency and competing for resources.

This first draft of the document summarises the contributions made. It will be sent for further input and consultations to all participants. In addition, Community Chest and the IJR will drive an online campaign to gather further input which will be shared with the Presidency and the Institutions responsible for organising the event.

The document is a reflection of different and at times contradicting views. It provides a good basis to understand the vital issues that the Social Sector Summit will have to address.

The conversation

This section captures views, insights, ideas and recommendations raised during the roundtable discussion.

NPO Governance

- Should there be more regulation about who can register an NPO? How do we create more accountability for NPOs?
- Dangers of over institutionalising the sector which could create a scenario – you either in or you are out with government.
- Professionalise the way NPOs are managed.
- Are NGOs seen as a threat to government?
- Bureaucracy – The state interface is difficult to navigate
- Too many NGO registrations

NPO introspection

- NPOs to not forget the purpose of their existence – it is not to make the NPO sector sustainable but to work towards changing the society and constantly reflecting if the work done is still relevant and useful
- Ethical leadership – this is vital within the NPO sector as well as in all spheres of government.

- There is a lot of competition among NPOs
- NPO comfort zone
- Reflection about we do the type of work we do?
- How do communities view the NGO world?
- Are NGO spaces reactive?
- There are low levels of accountability
- Big division between established organisations and grassroots. Income gaps with civil society
- Often an alienation from NGOs on the issues on the ground
- CSOC NGO (big fish gobble small fish)
- SANGOCO 1997 vs SANGOCO now
- Power politics, players + positioning

Networking/sharing

- Umbrella organisations should assist in bringing organisations working in the same field together to maximise efficiency and effectiveness
- Establish umbrella organisations in order to reduce overhead cost
- There should be a better way of sharing different implementation models
- NPOs to step out of their comfort zone
- Collaboration, coordination, communication
- Organising mechanism to mobilise think tanks, research organisations and civil society across the provinces
- Inter-NGO partnerships
- Changing the paradigm through coordination and cooperation
- There is challenge for Johannesburg and Cape Town NGOs to work together due to the geographical divide

Sustainability & Funding

- Funding and sustainability of civil society organisations are a vital area of concern. What are different funding models? What role does the private sector play in this?
- Relationship and roles of different type of donors.
- Without donors we die – what are different sustainability models for NPOs
- SA seen as a first world country – foreign funding is diminishing
- Sharing of resources
- What about reserves and funding the NPOs receive?
- Lack of sufficient resources available
- NGOs have to compete for funding and resources. This hinders the possibility of collaborations between them, as the resources are already scarce.
- Difficult funding processes that have led to the closure of a number of NGOs
- Sustainability – how can every NGO become sustainable and how can we develop stronger sustainability strategies?
- Funders and Donors are disconnected from the ground, and their will is relatively low.
- The high number of NGOs dilutes the overall resource base
- Decline in aid, few sustainable NGOs

Role of civil society

- Advocacy vs. a service provider for government
- Role of different type of NGOs (CBO, labour, NPO, social movements, think tanks)
- Issue-based vs systemic change

Themes and issues NPOs to focus on

- NGOs and the role of media
- Youth voices / youth issues - What is the message we want to youth to know/take forward? Young people are present and drawing social media and getting the message out there.
- Promoting active citizenry; Active vs insurgent citizenry
- Volunteering – getting involved in social sector work – how do we incentivise it? Suggestion - income tax break for young people working in the NPO sector.
- Elegance of the ordinary – not speaking on behalf of but let people speak for themselves.
- Young children at the centre of development – setting the agenda for the future; Need to develop practical skills in young people (8-14)

The relationship with government

- Don't divide us: listen to our views.
- Don't point fingers but speak with a unifying language.
- Revitalise the conversation
- Real engagement from government is required over and above the tick box exercises
- NGOs and government tension in various areas – service provider, advocate, insider-outsider; Are NGOs seen as a threat to government? Labelled as foreign agents.
- Civil society department in government
- Seek a generative relationship

The Social Sector Summit

- Let the NPO sector set the agenda for the meeting
- There needs to be many more conversation prior to the summit to ensure the summit maximises its effects
- Summit should be a space to network and talk to each other
- A space to improve relationship between government and civil society sector
- Interrogate the question how the diversity of the sector can be brought together in one summit
- How do NPOs fit into the priorities of government?
- Casting forward and involving the youth
- This discussion needs to be taken back to the community
- Develop a story
 - Events
 - Build mass support
 - Inclusive civil society agenda
- Secretariat -> IJR/Community Chest

Recommendations towards a Social Sector Summit 2018

This section summarises the section above and provides strategic insights and recommendations for the Social Sector Summit.

Recommendation 1: Prepare the Social Sector Summit well

The Social Sector Summit is an important opportunity to reignite a constructive working relationship between the civil society sector and the state. It is a serious task and this document attests that the expectations and opinions for the summit are very diverse.

We recommend that the summit is a well-prepared intervention. We expect that it has a proper secretariat and that the logistics are organised well in advance to ensure a smooth running of the summit. The Social Sector is very diverse and thought needs to be given how the diversity of the civil society sector can be accommodated. The outcome of the summit focuses on the work necessary to advance transformation and sustainable livelihoods for the majority of South African's still living in poverty. The content of the summit needs to therefore provide analysis, data and information that is cutting-edge, relevant and recent to advance the conversation. We advise that the agenda is set by government and the civil society representatives equally.

Recommendation 2: Civil Society the driver of social transformation

Civil society is the key driver for social transformation in South Africa. The Social Sector Summit is an opportunity to redefine the role of civil society and the role of government in relation to the sector. What does it mean for the civil society sector to drive a transformative agenda? Where do we need to have honest introspection about the effectiveness of interventions from both government and civil society? Are we actually advancing transformative changes towards eliminating poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 as stated in the National Development Plan (NDP)? What progress has South Africa made achieving the UNDP Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030? What is the relation between money spent by the state and money given to NGOs towards effective, sustainable transformation?

We propose to shift the conversation about change towards differentiating development and transformation. Development is the global paradigm for change. If we take the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the World Bank Development Indicators, the African Union's Agenda or South Africa's National Development plan, all speak to the paradigm of development. What the concept of development seems to imply is that there is a certain direction for change seemingly reinforcing strategies and programming that looks very similar across the world to achieve the desired results of growth and development.

Social transformation is less popular and a difficult term as it speaks to a change that is profound, complete and radical. It speaks to disrupting, interrupting and restarting. It challenges us to think upside down and inside out. It requires brutal honesty and clarity. South Africa is in desperate need of transformation to engineer against centuries of institutionalised oppression and dehumanisation. In the South African context, this requires deliberate acts to counter the historical injustices that are still current, the captured and corrupt state institutions and actively participate in the building of a transformed society. We recommend to use the Social Sector Summit as an opportunity to have bold conversations about social transformation, change and measures required to achieving tangible results.

Recommendation 3: Sustainability - New resourcing, funding and investment models for the civil society sector

Funding and resource mobilisation are often key topics when civil society organisations get together. The common narrative speaks to the struggle to secure funds and the large competition to secure resources. What is missing in the debate is the amount of money that is already distributed within the sector and the capital assets available within the sector. It would be interesting to apply a macro-lens of funding and capital available within the sector and imagine new models of investment and distribution. It is clear that, reviewing what both the private sector and government gives to the Non-Profit sector, that the most conservative figures appear to be in excess of R60 billion.

We recommend therefore that the summit looks at a way to better regulate the sector which in turn ensures a more efficient and accountable way of utilizing donor funds to provide services to children, youth and adults. We further recommend that the summit look at new funding models for the sector that allows for more integrated financing models for NGOs. This will contribute towards eliminating the hiding of funds in order to secure more.

Recommendation 4: The relationship between civil society and the state

The relationship between civil society and the state is by its nature full of tension. It is a sign of a healthy and prosperous society. Over the past decade, the relationship between civil society and the state has deteriorated in South Africa. NPOs were accused of being foreign agents wanting to overturn the state. Civil society was seen as an extension of the state and often treated as service providers without acknowledgement and regard.

We recommend that building of a constructive relationship between the state and civil society organisations is one of the key outcomes of the summit. The summit is an opportunity to identify red tape and bureaucratic processes that hinder fruitful and productive working relationships as well as define the desirable relationship between the sectors with practical suggestions for implementation. We also recommend that we come up with an engagement framework so that the summit is not a once off activity but the start of regular engagements for all sectors and key stakeholders to report back. This is not an attempt to create further institutions or structures but we would rather recommend to propose organisations as convening agencies who will then bi-annually report back to the summit.

Recommendation 5: Accountability & compliance

A vital role of civil society is to hold the state and private sector to account, to point out corruption, mismanagement and maladministration. There are many stories to be told where civil society has succeeded in bringing governments and the private sector to account. Accountability is also an important topic for the civil society sector and the social sector summit would be an opportunity for some introspection in this regard. How can the civil society sector become more accountable not to the state but to the broader public? The latest data shows that South Africa had 155 367 registered NGOs by March 2016.

By end of March 2016 there were also 86 768 non-compliant but registered NPOs. These are organisations that did not comply with the obligations of section 17, 18 and 19. In essence the compliancy rate is sitting at 44 % meaning 56% of the registered NPOs are non-compliant.

What does the sector have to say about the 86 768 non-compliant NGOs? Accountability goes beyond financial means and includes discussions on checks and balances towards beneficiaries and the

broader public. The recent Oxfam sex scandal is but one example illustrating the need. What role can and should the state play and what mechanisms need to be embedded within the sector?

We recommend that accountability, compliance and transparency are debated at the summit and that the concrete solutions are proposed. We recommend that a pledge for ethical leadership is drafted at the summit and signed by government departments and civil society organisations.

-END-

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Tekioo Design and Technology for kids
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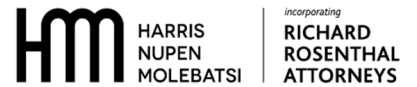


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