Service-delivery of non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe: Challenges and strategies

Alice Zinyemba¹, Ranga Zinyemba²
¹Department of Business Studies, University of Zimbabwe
²Catholic University in Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Zimbabwe face a number of organizational and management challenges that impact negatively on the delivery of their services. Those NGOs that seem to be doing well have adequate human capital with the necessary skills and competencies to perform. They have a flat structure that encourages team work and minimises delays in decision making. Successful NGOs allow for creativity and innovation, especially when the projects are being implemented at grass roots level. They have effective boards that ensure good governance through the use of proper administrative and management policies and procedures that govern their work. They are financially well resourced. The challenges that face many NGOs in Zimbabwe are the lack of financial resources, inexperienced manpower, political interference and involvement, lack of planning and prioritisation of programmes and poor coordination of activities in the field. NGOs in Zimbabwe could improve delivery of their services by coordinating and networking with other NGOs in the same field.

Key words: Non-governmental organisation, effective, management, challenges, service delivery

1. INTRODUCTION
There are various definitions of what an NGO is. What appears common to the definitions is the fact that NGOs are non profit, voluntary, citizen based organisations that operate independently of government. Some NGOs are primarily concerned with developmental projects while others concern themselves with promoting a cause or advocacy (Chawarika, 2011; Turkish weekly, 2013). The functions of NGOs vary immensely, ranging from service delivery to human rights and relief groups. The umbrella body for NGOs operating in Zimbabwe is the National Association of Non-governmental Organisations (NANGO). There are more than 1 000 NGOs operating under NANGO (www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html, 2013).

There are many organisational and management challenges that hinder effective delivery of service by NGOs. These NGOs also experience challenges that are external to them which also affect their service delivery.

1.1 Importance of the study
This study is important in that it sheds light on the areas of weaknesses for NGOs and how NGOs can improve their service delivery by addressing the internal organisational and management challenges identified in the study.

The study also benefits government and policy makers as it provides insights into how they can facilitate the effective service delivery of NGOs.

Funding partners will also benefit from the study because it highlights an area that needs to be addressed by them.

Beneficiaries of projects will benefit from the study when service delivery by NGOs is improved.
2. PROBLEM INVESTIGATED
Effective delivery of service by NGOs operating in Zimbabwe is influenced by a number of internal and external organisational and management factors. A research was carried out in April – May 2013 to investigate the challenges facing the management of NGOs in Zimbabwe and the strategies that could be used to mitigate those challenges.

3. PURPOSE /OBJECTIVES
The purpose of this article is to present the findings of the study carried out to identify the challenges of managing NGOs in Zimbabwe and the strategies that could be used to mitigate those challenges.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The study to investigate and identify the challenges faced by NGOs in Zimbabwe and the strategies that could be used to meet those challenges was carried out using the following method:

A questionnaire was designed and sent to 15 NGOs operating in both rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe. The NGOs were randomly selected. This was not a representative sample of all the NGOs operating in Zimbabwe. It was an indicative sample that provided an insight into the challenges facing the management of NGOs and the strategies that could be used to improve their effectiveness. Seven (7) NGOs out of the 15 that were selected responded to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was administered to directors, programme officers and field staff. The questionnaire solicited for qualitative responses to the following questions:

a. nature and core business of the NGO;
b. number of years that the NGO has been in operation;
c. the number of people employed;
d. what was going well with how the NGO was managed;
e. what was not going well with how the NGO was managed;
f. what hindered the effectiveness of the NGO in its service delivery;
g. what changes were needed to improve service delivery by NGO; and
h. recommendations to improve service delivery of NGOs in Zimbabwe in general.

Responses to the questions were analysed and grouped into the following categories;

- characteristics of NGO that responded to the questionnaire;
- factors promoting effective delivery of service by NGOs;
- factors negatively impacting on service delivery by NGOs; and
- recommendations and strategies for improving service delivery by NGOs.

5. FINDINGS
The findings from the study are presented below. The findings were then analysed in the light of experiences of other NGOs in the region.

5.1 Characteristics of NGOs that responded to the questionnaire
Characteristics of NGOs that responded to the questionnaire are summarised in table 1.

The table summarises the core business of each NGO that responded to the questionnaire, the area of operation, the number of people employed by the NGO and the number of years that the NGO has been in operation. The actual names of the NGOs are not revealed for confidentiality purposes. They are represented by numbers 1–7.

*University of Zimbabwe Business Review, Volume 1, No. 1, 2013*
Table 1: Characteristics of NGOs in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Core business</th>
<th>Area of operation</th>
<th>No. Of employees</th>
<th>No. Of years in operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on children through education, psychosocial support, nutrition</td>
<td>Urban and Rural</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Capacity building of rural communities, especially women through life skills programmes that allow for economic independence and poverty alleviation</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Youth capacity building for sustainable community development.</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS, through a holistic approach and providing early warning to other emerging epidemics that exacerbate the effects of HIV.</td>
<td>Urban and rural</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Popularizing and contextualizing Social Teachings through enculturation, documentation and influencing public policy</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Capacity Building for OVCs</td>
<td>Urban and rural</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Conflict management and transformation</td>
<td>Urban and rural</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.1 Core business areas
The 7 NGOs which responded to the questionnaire operate in the following core business areas:
1. Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on children through education, psychosocial support and nutrition.
2. Mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS through a holistic approach and providing early warning to other emerging epidemics that exacerbate the effects of HIV.
3. Capacity building of rural communities, especially women, through life skills programmes that allow for economic independence and poverty alleviation;
4. Youth capacity building for sustainable community development;
5. Capacity Building for orphaned and vulnerable children (OVCs);
6. Popularising and contextualising the Social Teachings of the Church through enculturation, documentation and influencing public policy;

The table shows that two of the NGOs operate in the field of HIV/AIDS. They both have been operating for the last eleven years in urban and rural areas. Four of the NGOs had operations in both rural and urban areas. Two of them had operations in rural areas only and only one had operations in urban areas. All NGOs that responded to the study, except one, have been established and have been operating for the last 10 years. Only one had been in existence for 5 years.

5.2. Factors promoting effective service - delivery
Factors promoting effective service - delivery by NGOs were deduced from responses to the question on what respondents liked most about how their NGO was managed. The respondents stated that they liked NGOs which had the following characteristics:
1. were efficiently run;
2. had experienced and skilled manpower;
3. had a unity of purpose and worked as a team;
4. employees were appreciated;
5. management encouraged creativity and innovation at all levels;
6. the organization was a learning one, and practised participatory methodologies in programming and management;
7. the NGO had a management structure and a board responsible for policy, board members with experienced individuals who had knowledge of community mobilization and use of participatory methodologies in programming;
8. there was wide consultation before a decision was made and everyone was involved;
9. board members rotated as directors on a 4-year term and this allowed for injection of fresh ideas and new energies into the organization;
10. the organization had both financial and programmatic management systems and policies in place;
11. management had an open door policy and everyone was free to approach management on any issue;
12. the NGO had a flat structure that was not bureaucratic and had quick decision-making;

5.3 Factors negatively impacting on service delivery of NGOs
Responses to the question about what respondents liked least about how their NGO was managed provided insight into what factors hindered their service delivery. The findings revealed that the NGOs:
1. gave priority to bigger funded projects than to smaller ones which engaged in core business;
2. lacked effective planning at lower levels;
3. lacked consistency in the application of policies;
4. had limited resources to support full implementation of projects as per demand;
5. lacked documentation of experiences and lessons learnt;
6. lacked enough resources for training of staff; and
7. experienced interference from founding members.

6 DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS
6.1 Challenges
The above reasons which respondents regarded as contributing to ineffective delivery of service by their specific NGOs can be said to contribute to the ineffective delivery of service by NGOs in general. In analysing the responses to why some NGOs were not meeting their objectives, the study identified the following challenges:

6.1.1 Lack of sufficient time to plan and to fundraise
The NGOs did not leave enough time to do operational planning as it is key to implementing programmes on the ground. NGOs have programmes which are funded by different donors and each donor requests a report on the progress being made on the projects that they fund. Funding agencies insist on reports being submitted before any funding is provided for future projects. This means that all projects must be implemented and funds utilized before deadlines for implementation expire. NGOs fall into the trap of being pre-occupied with report writing and implementation of projects at the expense of planning and fundraising.

6.1.2 Late disbursement of funds
Implementation of projects depends on the availability of funds. NGOs experience delays in the disbursement of funds to start implementing the projects on the ground. Project implementation in rural areas is also seasonal. During the rainy season, people in the farming communities do not avail themselves to projects until much later, when they wait for harvesting time. This means that the projects are hurriedly implemented in order to meet the deadlines.
6.1.3 Funding constraints
Effective service delivery is hampered by financial constraints. Late disbursement of funds to implement projects as noted above often results in projects being implemented hurriedly. Prescriptive donor funding is another major challenge. Funding partners usually provide support towards projects without financial support for administrative and personnel requirements that are needed for effective project implementation.
Funding partners sometimes have generic and predetermined policy guidelines which may not match the priorities of recipient organisations and their beneficiaries. This means that those projects which may not be regarded as priority by funding partners may not receive funding even if they are beneficiary to the community.

6.1.4 Political instability and interference
The operating environment, especially in some of the rural areas, in the last few years after 2008, does not allow for smooth implementation of activities because of political instability. Those organisations that teach communities to ask real questions are viewed as bad and having an agenda for regime change. Staff personal security is of concern because of political instability. Politicians also interfere with the work of NGOs and have an influence on which NGOs can operate in their area and on what kind of projects. Permission for an NGO to operate in an area has to be sought from both the government, traditional and local leadership of an area.

6.1.5 Bureaucracy within government departments
Implementation of projects often requires approval of government. Delays are often experienced when an NGO needs certain approvals, for example, in obtaining work permits for technical experts or in getting Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) signed.

6.1.6 Lack of skilled personnel
NGOs experience difficulties in attracting and retaining well qualified and experienced staff. Staff is usually employed on contracts which are tied to a project. At the end of the project a contract might or might not be renewed. A lot depends on the availability of continued funding for a particular project. NGOs are also constrained in financial resources for the capacity building of staff. Funding partners tend to support project implementation more than staff training. Most NGOs therefore tend to be thin on the ground. The limited staff is therefore over-stretched as they have to cover large areas and spending long working hours in the field. This often results in staff burn out and poor service delivery by the NGOs.

6.2 Strategies
Factors that promote effective management of NGOs in their efforts to meet their objectives can be deduced from responses provided by the participants in the study to the question on what they liked most about how their NGO was managed. The factors can be grouped into several categories, namely human capital, teamwork, board and governance, and organizational structure. The following are the strategies that were identified:

6.2.1 Human capital
An effective NGO has adequate, experienced and skilled manpower. There are enough personnel to do the work for which the NGO was created. The staff has skills to fundraise and to implement the projects. They develop strategic plans which are guided by the organisation's vision and mission.
6.2.2 Team work
Team work is one of the factors that contribute to the effective management of NGOs. There is a unity of purpose among staff and the programmes are well integrated and coordinated. Everybody understands the purpose and objectives of the NGO. Roles are clearly defined and understood by all. Management is accessible to all through the practice of open door policy.

6.2.3 Creativity and innovation
An effective NGO allows creativity and innovation at all levels. Creativity is called for at all levels especially when funds are limited and when donors place limitations and prescriptions on how the funds should be utilised. The situation calls for creativity and doing things differently while at the same time, meeting donor and beneficiaries’ expectations.

6.2.4 Organisational structure and governance
Effective NGOs have a management structure that is flat. A flat structure is less bureaucratic and allows for quick decision-making. The board of directors is responsible and makes policies that promote good governance. Board members are experienced and they freely share their expertise with the organisation. Appointment of new members to the board periodically, allows for fresh ideas and new energies being injected into the organisation. Management systems and policies are in place to guide the operations of the NGO. Good governance ensures relevance of programmes and this promotes integrity and confidence in the eyes of both the donors and beneficiaries. There is consistency in application and implementation of policies. Corporate governance is a matter of concern for NGOs (Moore and Stewart, 1998).

6.2.5 Resources and sustainability
An effective NGO is well resourced and financially sound. This requires the existence of competencies in writing bankable project proposals that can attract funding. Resources also include the availability of vehicles and equipment such as computers.

7. CHALLENGES IN RELATION TO REGIONAL EXPERIENCES
This section analyses the findings of the research on challenges facing the management of NGOs in light of the experiences of other countries in the region.

This study categorises the issues that hinder effective management of NGOs and their service delivery, as experienced by the NGOs that participated in the research into 4 areas namely:

- capacity issues;
- resources issues;
- management issues;
- external issues and governance issues

7.1 Capacity issues
Attracting and retaining good quality staff is a challenge for most NGOs. NGO funding is usually tied to projects. Personnel are employed to implement projects which have a life span. This means that personnel are employed on short-term contracts with no guarantee for continued employment. Funding partners usually do not support administrative and personnel costs. This is why most NGOs have a small staff establishment. The staff become overstretched by working long hours to complete their tasks and to meet deadlines.
Capacity is also to do with skills and competencies required to implement projects. Most staff appear to have basic computer skills. They lack skills for information management and documentation. NGOs do not seem to have enough finances to train staff. Limited resources are allocated to staff training.

Lack of capacity to raise funds is another major issue that affects effective delivery of service by NGOs. There is also a tendency to focus exclusively on raising existing projects to the detriment of raising funds for new projects. This is coupled with the issue that project proposal writing is in itself a skill that is acquired and one needs to develop those skills.

7.2 Resources Issues
Research has shown that NGOs in general, and in Zimbabwe in particular, depend on some source of foreign funding (Chawarika, 2011). However, funding partners usually provide support for projects without support for administrative and personnel requirements. This means that funding is not usually flexible. As a result, some areas and projects which may be in demand but are not supported by donors, may suffer from lack of funding. Donors have their own priority areas that they support. There is also a challenge in terms of sustainability if and when the funding ceases.

There are situations where donor funding is available for certain objectives which may not be the same for which the NGO was created. At times NGOs end up implementing those projects which receive funding even at the expense of their mission objectives. Funding partners usually provide support towards the projects without support for administrative and personnel requirements. Such concerns as staff salaries and staff training usually suffer from lack of funding.

Late disbursement of funds is a major concern for NGOs that participated in the study. It takes time for funds to be released by funding agencies and this affects projects' start up, making it necessary that projects be quickly implemented before the expiry of the project life-time. As a result, activities are hurriedly done in order to meet the project deadline.

7.3 External Issues
One of the major external issues affecting the management and effectiveness of NGOs is political interference and involvement. Zimbabwean laws that have impacted negatively on NGOs include the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) among others. They place limitations on freedom of association, assembly and information (Raftopolous, 2000). These limitations have resulted in the curtailment of NGO activities in Zimbabwe.

Political polarisation and instability in Zimbabwe make the operations and management of projects difficult. Organisations that operate at the grassroots level, especially in the area of human rights are sometimes viewed as supporting the opposition and are therefore not tolerated by the government. NGOs' staff personal security is sometimes at risk. Political interference and instability render the management and implementation of NGO projects difficult, especially for those NGOs in the area of human rights which are viewed with distrust and seen as advancing the interests of foreign governments. They are viewed by the Zimbabwe Government as unsympathetic to Zimbabwe. It has been noted that some NGOs in Zimbabwe deliberately do not involve themselves in lobbying and advocacy activities for fear of being misunderstood as drivers of anti-government agendas (Chawarika, 2011).

Some NGOs appear to have strong political ties to the point of seeming to be extensions of political parties, especially when staff members subsequently run for councillorship or party positions in the areas where they have been operating. This situation compromises the perceived objectivity of such NGOs in implementing development projects or in carrying out relief programmes such as food aid.
7.4 Government bureaucracy
Government bureaucracy often results in delayed implementation of projects. This happens when decisions by government departments or local authorities take too long or when approval to operate in a certain area takes long to be granted. The implementation period may be shortened and quality of implementation is compromised as a result of such delays.

7.5 Internal management issues
Management of some NGOs seem to put a lot of emphasis on implementation of projects and writing of donor reports, such that little time is left for strategic and operational planning. This often results in priorities not being clear and donor agencies taking advantage of that situation with the result that funds get redirected to other priorities which suit the donors.

The lack of intensive documentation of experiences and lessons learnt often leads to valuable experiences not being documented and lost.

Failure by NGO staff to observe protocol at the grassroots community level often leads to none acceptance of some projects at implementation stage even if they are funded.

Governance is another issue affecting effective management of NGOs. NGOs are often started by an individual or group of individuals or a family and operate as trusts. When the NGO has grown and is supposed to be run by a board, experience has shown that the founding members often have problems in letting go and there is mixed accountability. As a result, separation of family funds and project funds becomes unclear.

Poor networking with other NGOs operating in the same field or in the same areas of operation often results in duplication of efforts and double dipping by the recipients. Double dipping occurs when beneficiaries receive aid such as food or money from different NGOs for the same cause. This emanates from a situation where there is poor coordination of the work of NGOs and the need to compare registers of beneficiaries. The same people end up receiving aid while others do not. It becomes difficult to measure the impact and effectiveness of the services offered by NGOs working in the same geographical area and in the same core business and working with the same beneficiaries.

These findings reflect some of the findings that have also been identified in other studies in the region (www.turkishweekly.net/article/159/organizational-problems-of-non-governmental-organisations.2013). Some of the findings from a regional workshop held in Kenya on challenges and opportunities for regional NGOs revealed the challenges summarized below:

1. There is a high dependency on donor funding and most NGOs suffer from a lack of sufficient funds to run projects.
2. Good governance was compromised by founders of NGOs who often regarded the NGO as their “baby” and had problems in letting go.
3. Lack of strategic planning and establishment of priorities often left NGOs at the mercy of donors who dictated how funds should be utilized.
4. There was a duplication of efforts and “double dipping” at the community level because of poor networking and coordination of activities among NGOs.
5. Lack of capacity to fundraise for projects.
6. Some NGOs experienced inadequate capacity in technical areas and leadership and management of organisations.
7. Interference from local politicians and civic leaders often makes the operations of NGOs at the local level difficult.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY
Respondents from the seven NGOs in the study made a number of suggestions to improve the effective management of their NGOs in particular and other NGOs in general. The following is a summary of recommendations that were commonly identified:
8.1 Collaboration and networking with other NGOS
In order to avoid duplication of efforts and “double dipping” by beneficiaries, it is important that NGOs working in the same field and operating in the same geographic areas collaborate and integrate their activities. Collaboration implies sharing of information and maintaining a coordinated register of beneficiaries especially when it comes to food aid distribution and other social services offered by NGOs.

Networking would be made much easier in situations where NGOs create platforms for sharing information.

8.2 Sustainability
The question of sustainability is of paramount importance especially to donors. The more sustainable projects are, the less dependent they will be on donor funding. By their very nature, it is difficult for NGOs to be self-sufficient. Since donors are not keen on spending money on administrative support but on actual programmes that benefit the identified beneficiaries, it is recommended that NGOs be able to generate income that could be used to finance administrative support. This means that NGOs should engage in income generating activities for that purpose.

8.3 Maintaining strategic focus
There is a tendency by some NGOs to bend backwards and implement projects which are funded even though they may not be of priority to the NGO’s mission. This has tarnished the image of NGOs with the NGO work being regarded as “commercialising” their services. The NGO work is seen by some as more of a money spinning venture than providing much needed social services. This situation is created when an NGO lacks adequate financial resources to run programmes that are guided by their mission. This negative image can easily be removed by planning and prioritising programmes and embarking on fundraising in good time.

8.4 Resource mobilization
Related to maintaining a strategic focus is the need to mobilise resources. Resource mobilisation needs to be done in good time and not left until the situation is dire. Resource mobilisation requires good proposal writing skills, networking and the ability to maintain good relations with donor agencies. Board members can also help with resource mobilisation since it should be within their interest that the organisation is well resourced.

8.5 Documentation
A piece of evidence that shows the impact and effectiveness of an NGO’s services is the documentation of its experiences and programmes. This requires good documentation and writing skills. Documentation can be in the form of reports, books, documentary films etc. The documentaries can be used in the field during sensitisation exercises, training, lobbying and other campaigns.

8.6 Capacity building for staff
Capacity building of staff and management in NGOs is necessary for the effective delivery of project activities and services. Management skills such as teamwork, strategic planning, report and proposal writing and training in how to fund raise are important. Project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are important especially for field staff. Constant on - the - job training for staff and management to enable them to respond to the ever changing environment is necessary.
8.7 Good governance
Good governance is key to the effective management of NGOs. Good governance implies the existence of policies and procedures which must be adhered to and implemented. The implementation of policies and procedures encourages proper management of resources and programmes. Policies such as Human resources policy and administration procedures, supply and purchasing policy, transport policy, etc. encourage transparency and professionalism. However there should be consistency in the application of those policies and procedures. It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that key policies and procedures are established and implemented by Management.

9. CONCLUSION
NGOs operating in Zimbabwe face a number of internal and external challenges that hinder their management. Effective management and delivery of project activities and service by NGOs in Zimbabwe require a stable political environment for them to flourish and realise their objectives. Collaboration and networking with other NGOs in the field operating in the same area is necessary. It is important for NGOs not to compromise their objectives by engaging in good strategic planning and prioritisation of programmes. Resource mobilisation should be an on-going activity to ensure that NGOs are well resourced and not compromised. Although it may be difficult for an NGO to be self-sufficient, sustainability of programmes could be ensured if NGOs also embark on income generating activities to meet administrative costs of implementing programmes. Documentation of experiences is an important way to show the effectiveness and impact of an NGO’s programmes.

10. REFERENCES
Rafipolous, B. 2000. NGOs, the State and Politics in Zimbabwe. Harare: SAPES.