Early Years

Bulletin of the Centre for Early Childhood Development

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The end of the year is a strange time for non-profit organisations. We have the coalescing of looking back and reviewing the year and our organisation performance, and also looking forward to what our organisation will be doing in the year ahead.

Every organisation should review its performance at year's end against the goals and objectives that was set the previous year. This way we can assess how we have done, what we need to do more of, and what we need to change. It is also an opportunity for us to look at how we are doing financially, meaning - have we raise sufficient funds during the year so that we can provide the programmes that we do. When we look back we need to look back honestly and openly and we must do this as an organisation. There is no benefit in being unaware of our organisation shortcomings. Rather we need to acknowledge these shortcomings in our organisation review.

In addition to the organisation programme review, at the Centre for Early Childhood Development, we also have individual reviews. This is the time when the leadership of the organisation sits down with individual staff members and looks back on individual performance over the year. This is an opportunity to hear from colleagues about how the year went, what worked well, what was achieved, what did not work well, and what we need to do in the forthcoming year to improve our impact.

At this time of the year we also need to know what we are doing in the year ahead. This is known as forward planning and provides a guide to the organisation and staff on programmes and activities in the ensuing year. Here, individuals and the organisation have to be realistic about what can be achieved in the year ahead. Once we know what we want to do, we then decide where we want to do this and at what cost.

From a financial point of view, it is important that organisations at this time, realistically cost programmes planned and forecast likely income that will be received. The result of this exercise is that the organisation will either have a projected surplus or projected deficit in the ensuing year.

This process is critically important for organisations. The aim should be that when we return to work in January 2024, we know what we want to achieve, we know how we are going to do it and we can start the year positively and immediately.

We hope that every ECD organisation has had a good year, done good work and is satisfied with their performance. We wish every organisation all the best in 2024, which is going to be a tough year with the general election coming up.

Enjoy this edition of EARLY YEARS which is the last for 2023. We will be back in February 2024, ready and eager to go.

ERIC ATMORE
Director

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OPEN LETTER: PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA, THE FUTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA IS IN YOUR HANDS

~ Eric Atmore

Dear President Cyril Ramaphosa,

About one year ago, you wrote a piece on early childhood development (ECD) in your weekly newsletter, with the title "ECD holds the key to our future". You highlighted the pivotal role that ECD centres and programmes play across South Africa.

As the ECD sector, we welcomed your comments and we saw these as very positive and were encouraged. Notwithstanding your fine words, the real test of your view lay in implementation and action, which was and still is critically needed.

Former presidents Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma made similar comments about ECD when they were in office – however, with little actual benefit to vulnerable young children and their families.

Your presidential newsletter followed your opening of an ECD centre in Bizana, Eastern Cape, where, in your words, you were "…deeply touched by the dedication of the centre's staff to supporting the community and its children". You went on to say that the commitment of the ECD centre's staff "is so important because early childhood development centres play a pivotal role in our nation's development".

In your written piece, you said that government had taken up the task to improve ECD in South Africa and make resources available for ECD centres to run suitable activities for young children. We strongly welcomed this and applauded you.

However, you now need to be informed of the real situation on the ground as it affects the ECD sector: the 42,420 ECD centres, with about 198,000 ECD principals, teachers and other staff; and the 1.66 million young children that attend these centres.

In the larger scheme of things, about 30% of young children in South Africa, aged birth to five, attend an ECD centre.

The quality of ECD centres across South Africa is generally poor – this is directly linked to the socioeconomic capacity of the communities in which these centres are based.

The best-quality ECD centre infrastructure is found in South Africa's affluent communities.

ECD centres in poorer communities face a contrasting reality. These are the centres, staff and children that live in poverty with little-to-no support from government, untrained teachers, limited age-appropriate education equipment, a basic meal of little nutritional value once a day – if at all – and appalling salaries as low as R300 per month. This is outrageous, given the valuable work that they do.

These are also the 60% of ECD centres that are not registered, meaning they are not compliant with the Children's Act or with the complex and burdensome municipal by-laws and regulations that pertain to ECD centres.

These centres will never be eligible for the government's meagre subsidy of R17 per qualifying child per day for 264 days a year. To qualify for the ECD subsidy, the parents' joint income must be less than R7,600 per month, or less than R3,800 for a single parent.

In your newsletter, you made the erroneous comment that the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill proposed that it be compulsory for all children to receive two years of ECD provision before the start of Grade 1. There is no such thing in the Bill.

What you were referring to is making Grade R a compulsory year for all children, and this was welcomed and supported across our country. As an aside, the ECD sector, through various activists, first made this recommendation more than 20 years ago, but it was not acted upon.

So, what is the reality for the ECD sector and our youngest children?

The recent Thrive by Five report informs us that only 35% of children entering Grade 1 are ready for school. This means that two-thirds of five-year-olds are not thriving, with 6% seriously not thriving.

Extrapolating from the recent ECD Census, we see that about 70% of young children do not have access to a formal early learning programme before they enter Grade 1. This means that these children enter formal schooling with little preparation to acquire the early literacy, early numeracy and life skills that form such an important part of the Foundation Phase of formal schooling and children's early development.

Part of this reality is that only 33% of ECD centres receive the ECD subsidy; 60% of ECD centres are not registered; just about half of the ECD teaching staff are qualified, and 23% of ECD centres have no books for children.

You should be shocked.

There is a major flaw in the information that you are given by your ministers and staff about ECD.

Three years ago, in October 2020, you made R1.3-billion available to the ECD sector as part of an ECD Employment Stimulus Relief Fund to help ECD centres recover from the loss of income during Covid-19. We now know that less than 19% of this amount reached the ECD sector.

Of the R1.3-billion, R712-million was held back by National Treasury because the National Department of Social Development could not get a coherent plan together.

The final amount received from National Treasury for the ECD sector was R588-million, of which R496-million was allocated to support ECD teacher salaries for 116,578 teachers. By 31 March 2022, only R245-million had found its way to ECD teachers and other staff.

This was due to the cumbersome and bureaucratic application system put in place by the incompetent National Department of Social Development (responsible for the process at that time).

Government has been extremely cagey in not making these figures publicly available. This is understandable, given that it shows a complete and appalling lack of concern for young children.

Responsibility for ECD in South Africa transitioned to the Department of Basic Education on 1 April 2022, and we hope that this department will be more competent and caring.

President Ramaphosa, you should instruct the Department of Basic Education to retrieve the missing R1-billion from National Treasury and distribute it as intended.

Your second focus should be to substantially increase the shockingly low ECD subsidy of R17 per qualifying child per day for 264 days of the year that is payable to registered ECD centres.

As a comparison to the above, our government spends R363 per day, for 365 days of the year, on keeping each prisoner in jails across the country.

For each rand spent on a vulnerable child at an ECD centre, government spends R21 on a prisoner. This is a disgrace.

Read more in Daily Maverick: Limited state subsidisation remains a key challenge to delivering quality learning programmes

ECD is a pivotal area in South Africa, as you say. Parents contribute about R10.2-billion each year to the economy by way of ECD fees. About 198,000 ECD-related jobs, overwhelmingly for women, have been created by communities at no cost to government – not one cent.

President Ramaphosa, we are informing you that there is a vibrant, skilled and talented nonprofit sector working in ECD.

This sector has many decades of experience and highly competent individuals who can make ECD opportunities a reality for every young child.

You have to lead from the front and you have to get the Department of Basic Education to work closely with the nonprofit ECD sector.

Our country has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and we have an excellent National Integrated ECD Policy, which Cabinet approved in December 2015.

The sad reality is that this policy is not being implemented, simply because there is no political will or budget allocation to do so. And we do not have sufficient numbers – with some exceptions – of skilled, competent and committed public officials to implement the policy.

To meet our commitment to the documents South Africa has signed, and to the current ECD policy, you must instruct National Treasury to substantially increase funding for ECD.

Currently, less than 3% of Basic Education expenditure is targeted at ECD. This has to change radically in the interest of and for the well-being of our youngest children.

Mr President, the ECD nonprofit sector is ready to follow your Thuma Mina request.

We must remember the profound comment by the late visionary Oliver Tambo: "A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth and children does not deserve its future."

President Ramaphosa, the future of early childhood development in South Africa is in your hands.

Sincerely,
Eric Atmore.

Article first published and available at:
https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-11-06-president-ramaphosa-the-future-of-early-childhood-development

HOW TO RAISE FUNDS IN A TIME OF AUSTERITY AND GOVERNMENT CUT BACKS

~ Frank Julie

Non-profit organisations live and operate in extremely difficult times! The fundraising scene for non-profits is getting worse, exacerbated by Covid-19 and perpetual unbridled corruption. Just like government budgets were diverted towards the World Cup in 2010, so they are now again diverted away from social programmes. Unlike other sectors who received billions of rand of bail outs to survive, the financial needs and sustainability of NPOs have been totally ignored by government. We are not even an after-thought!

Instead of pursuing the politically corrupt who steal and feast on the dead bodies of the poor in broad daylight, the non-profit sector is made a sacrificial lamb. Again and again our interventions to support the poor are sacrificed on the alter of financial austerity. Social development budgets are cut to the bone.

Non-profits employ about 1.5 million people, more than the mining industry. Our role in maintaining social cohesion, protecting and providing a lifeline to the poor is unquestionable. Despite this reality, it is estimated that 25% of the NPO sector have been obliterated during Covid-19 leaving millions of people destitute.

To make matters worse, over the years, donors (and government) are moving more and more toward very big non-profits who can demonstrate big impact so that they can justify their appeals for raising funds from their sources (especially corporates and international donors). The effect is that more and more medium to smaller non-profits are pushed to the periphery and being marginalised. According to research by RESEP at Stellenbosch University, 90% of funding goes to 10% of non-profits in South Africa! Yes, read that again slowly!

Faced with a stagnant economy with mass unemployment, rising cost of living, worsened by load-shedding (and water shedding), the base of individual income that many non-profits depend on, has been decimated. Social media are littered with desperate appeal after appeal for funds from local community projects trying to face the challenges of a society in perpetual crisis.

Over the last few years, more and more international donors have exited South Africa claiming we are now a middle income country and must look after itself. What they conveniently forget is for the majority of its population, South Africa is a “third” world country, with the highest ratio of income inequality in the world. Already many international donors like Atlantic Philanthropies from the US, Ford Foundation, Cordaid, Hivos and many others have exited South Africa.

In order to survive this onslaught, non-profits will be forced to reposition themselves as a matter of urgency. If a climate of urgency does not permeate the corridors of each and every non-profit then there is a big problem! It is extremely desperate and difficult times... The sector is facing an existential crisis of epic proportions.

All this is happening on top of an existing deepening funding, and at a deeper level, a leadership crisis, with its roots post 1994. Even non-profits who were well funded with highly professional staff are now feeling the pinch with some having closed down. The shift towards right-wing administrations in Europe and America coupled with the deepening global economic crisis are exacerbating an already precarious situation.

Here are some tips for non-profits to consider seriously, in order to face the challenges ahead:

- Training, training, and more training of ALL staff, board and volunteers in understanding the importance of fundraising/ resource mobilisation for the organisation. Not just training for a few selected members, or depending on a fundraiser with a silver bullet as a panacea for your funding crisis.
- If your non-profit does not have a comprehensive fundraising strategy in place right now it would be better for the board to close it down! This is an absolute necessity! You need to have a strategy to guide you in this crisis situation. Without this strategy it will amount to an army going into battle without a plan! Absolute suicide! And in this strategy you need to focus on maintaining your current donors, increase their current funding, reconnect with previous donors and research potential donors A strategic communication strategy to maximise visibility amongst unknown donors is a necessity!
- A dedicated team (around the director or fundraiser) to fundraise continuously and not only when they have some extra/free time. And this team must be well trained with continuous evaluation. Bounce off ideas with people from the outside, in your sector, to check that you are on the right track. And be open to learn, learn, learn and more learning!
- Develop a diverse donor base. The days of single donor support is long gone. Various donors must be targeted, such as government (where funding is concentrated, especially in an election year), corporates, individuals, current and previous beneficiaries, friends of your organisation, municipalities and IDP's, international donors (those that are still left), national donors, staff giving, volunteer labour, cost containment (containing overheads), donations in kind, etc.
- Build relationships, relationships, relationships! Be in your donor’s face. Stop depending ONLY on emails, SMS, WhatsApp, social media, etc. Make personal contact, let them see you, meet with you! Invite them to your events, visit their offices if possible! But be in their face!

- Learn to get personal! Get to know your donors better - as people. Find out who they are, what makes them tick, their interests, likes and dislikes, family background, etc. When you make this extra effort, donors will learn to respect you. It shows them that they are more important to you than their funding! Learn to make specific requests to specific people based on their specific interest. Stop making general requests to all and sundry. Get personal... NOW!

- Where possible, cut your overheads immediately! Go through your list of overheads and ask yourself what is absolutely necessary to spend money on.

  What are those things that are just luxuries and what can you dispense with. Contain your costs to run your operations. Go to banks, insurance companies and other services providers to renegotiate contracts. They must either scrap or lower their rates. And when you go to see them, go as a consortium, as a group of non-profits, preferably in the same sector or in the same community.

- Get more strategic volunteers and advisors, i.e. increase your social capital. Recruit more people in your line of work to add value to your operations. Recruit bookkeepers, managers, HR professionals, facilitators, legal experts, health professionals, accountants, auditors, journalists, marketers, etc. Cultivate them, they are also donors. Let them commit to spend some time with your organisation to add value to your work. And never stop thanking them, acknowledging them, always! Develop a list of strategic advisors or a "Friends of the Organisation".

- Join or start a network forum. Get like-minded non-profits together and share ideas, experiences and best practices. Stop working in isolation, afraid that others will find out who your donors are. And learn about the art of networking, building healthy relationships to maximise impact. Stop duplicating and competing... it does NOT work and cannot work these days! It is madness!

- Within your organisation, break down any real or perceived silos. Everybody must learn to understand the importance of team work, not competition! Every department must work in an integrated manner, as a whole. There is no place during these days for individual inflated EGOS!

  Those who cannot let go of their egos must be shown the door... In a crisis situation, inflated egos become a luxury you cannot afford.

- Go the extra mile: these days there can be no ‘business as usual’! If you have worked 8 hour per day, increase that to 10 hours per day or maybe and extra 3/4 per hours per week or per month (without burning yourself out of course), show commitment! Show your donors that you take your work and its impact seriously. And record those extra hours... that is social capital, that is raising funds from yourself! I know many of you are already working overtime without compensation, but whatever you do now, do it better and better!

- Stop the negative attitudes: every crisis contains potential opportunity! Learn to focus on your successes, your track record. Nothing sells better than what you have already done or achieved, not what you still PLAN to do. Donors don't buy good intentions, they buy results!

- Donations-in-kind: Stop only focusing on money, money, money! Focus on donations-in-kind, material support, intellectual capital...

- Get your board involved: you either have an active board or a board that is bored! Make sure you have the board members on board. They must open doors, help with advocacy, marketing the organisation. Too many board members are just paper members, totally inactive and uncommitted. This must stop! Get rid of the dead wood!

- Look for opportunities: Your fundraising office must resemble a campaign room!

  Your team should be busy everyday scanning newspapers, magazines, social network sites, websites, etc. to research opportunities. Visit other non-profits, make appointments, visit donors, government departments, send out emails, etc. to find out what and where is the next opportunity for your organisation. Sometime ago I saw an advert about a funding opportunity from an oil company in KZN in the Cape Times. I shared it with many clients. One of them received R100 000 eventually! Simple...

- And please, please, please! If you can avoid it, do not cut on your programmes... Cut some overheads yes, but avoid cutting your programmes where your beneficiaries are located. Explore how to go online. Use social media where possible. Beneficiaries are the reason for your existence, so avoid cutting at this level unless you have explored ALL possibilities and alternatives. Don't cut away the reason for your existence!

- And lastly: stop moaning about what you don't have and focus on what you already have. Maybe you are not worse off than others.

And learn to have fun despite the hardships we are all facing! We are in the business of changing and saving lives. Nothing can be nobler, more fulfilling and more rewarding. We cannot give others what we don't have!

And remember, knowledge is power but consciousness is light!

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