

Surviving as an NPO during a pandemic - why collaboration is king

A year has passed since South Africa went into a hard lockdown to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. The implications have been severe and will be felt for quite some time, NPOs know this better than most; whilst on the front line to help people survive, they struggled with their own lockdown implications.

However, instead of wallowing in the past, South Africa must use the lessons learnt to



Hannah Busing via [Unsplash](#)

A year ago, President Cyril Ramaphosa summoned the nation for the first family meeting, in which he announced the hard lockdown. The measures were severe, prohibiting people from leaving their homes for anything other than seeking medical care, buying food and medicine, and collecting social grants. Besides grocery stores and pharmacies, all businesses shut their doors for three weeks, which was then extended by another three.

"When thinking back, it all seems surreal. However, the decision was necessary to flatten the curve and give the healthcare sector time to prepare for the various waves of infections we have had," says Precious Nala, Marketing Manager of youth development NPO Afrika Tikkun.

"The fact is that we can't anticipate what would have happened or how many people would have died without the hard lockdown. Making that call couldn't have been easy, given that our recession-stricken economy was already suffering at the time and with that, our society."

Building brand resilience

The need for assistance amongst vulnerable communities for food, shelter, and other essential necessities sky-rocketed and the economy contracted. As a result, many corporate donors and foreign governments lowered funding for their recipients or redirected it to Covid-related interventions. "Numerous organisations, including ours, had to stretch finances much further than ever before and think out of the box to maintain our impact," says Nala.

Besides hardship, 2020 was filled with valuable lessons, she adds. One was the need to deliberate the decision to keep the marketing budget as it was before the Covid shook our society. "Curtailing our marketing plan and budget was a no-go. We knew we had to continue building our brand no matter what, particularly during the pandemic," Nala explains. "What better opportunity than a crisis to showcase what we do and the difference we make?"

Collaboration is king

Then there is the lesson of collaboration, which not only applies to marketing but to the entire organisation. "If there is one thing we have learnt over the past 365 days, it is that working together with partners, external stakeholders such as our PR agency, communities, and other parties such as the government is absolutely vital when facing a multi-dimensional crisis like a global pandemic," explains Nala.

"Instead of each stakeholder building their own new systems from scratch, it is much more efficient to work as a collective, integration is key - pool resources and capabilities. This enables the setup and scaling of campaigns and interventions much faster than when working in silos."

Therefore, the focus of building the Afrika Tikkun brand during the pandemic has been on the organisation's proven collaboration track record, which dates back decades. "We have always preferred to join hands with like-minded organisations and individuals to make a difference. Without it, it would have been considerably more challenging to design, develop, and roll out our Cradle-to-Career development model and keep it going," Nala says.

Nala is convinced that selfless alliances between fellow NPOs, the private and public sector, and communities are what will push South Africa's civil society sector through this year and the years to come.

"Like Cyril Ramaphosa said in his State of the Nation Address: 'Rebuilding our country requires a common effort. Let us work together as government, as business, labour, political parties, and as all of society to clear away the rubble and lay a new foundation'," she says. "Like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to get a country back onto its feet after a pandemic – and build a civil society that can help the government and other stakeholders fight future crises."

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