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THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs) IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) because there is no discussion of poverty, equality, or development today that will be complete without considering the role of NGOs. NGOs are visible, respected, and entrenched in part of many societies. The successes of the NGOs in providing health care, education, economic opportunities, and human rights advocacy to millions of people, shows diversity in terms of their organizational form, structure, and culture. The decentralization of governments and scaling back of social spending advocated by international financial institutions and large aid-donor organizations throughout the last decades have created considerable space for NGOs and made them key figures in a wide range of social sectors. The findings of the study are that NGOs range from service-oriented, community-based initiatives operating around only one project to advocacy NGOs, intermediary NGOs to developmental NGOs. The key finding is the identification of ten successful NGOs, which play a significant role in developing communities in South Africa. The study found out the structures, significance, challenges, and benefits of NGOs in developing countries. The researcher has used the conceptual approach and relied heavily on secondary sources to get the relevant literature to achieve the overall goal of the study.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organization, Rural, Development, Role Players, and Governance

1. Introduction

Studies on NGOs are always significant as they offer insight, reporting, and evaluation of the progress and impact that NGOs are rendering to societies. In nation-states like South Africa, which is grappling with rural development and other socio-economic challenges, government alone may not succeed in eradicating poverty, unemployment, skills scarcity, and growing narratives on environmental and health awareness. That is where NGOs come in, as agents of change, operating from the grassroots level with citizens. Uphoff (2013) holds the sentiment that NGOs can make significant contributions to rural development, and that is not to say they are

superior to the state, but because they can effectively touch base and collaborate with communities, thus aiding the state. Shava (2021) posits, “NGOs have been playing a pivotal role, regarding services such as health care services, job creation, and supply of food to various communities. It is evident that governments cannot fully provide for their citizens”. This is because NGOs operate at the grassroots landscape, working for and with vulnerable and destitute communities, employing participatory approaches, where moral motives are articulated and consistent mission and priorities are clearly outlined to drive astute social development agendas with minimal overhead costs (Shava, 2021). Chitongo (2013, p. 125) provides this apt index for understanding the importance of NGOs: “NGOs have a reputation for facilitating development in rural areas”. NGOs play pivotal roles in societies, regarding environmental and health matters. Regarding health, which is one of the pressing issues in rural communities in developing nations, Zihindula and Gumede, (2019). see NGOs as having the ability and capacity to fill gaps in health-related issues in rural areas, and the charge that horizontal relationships are established between them and government. They also view NGOs as serving a critical role regarding the range of services that they can play by addressing the shortage of healthcare professionals in rural South Africa (Zihindula *et al.* 2019). This, therefore, illustrates the significance of a study on NGOs and their impact on rural development. It is the aim of this paper to examine the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in South Africa with specific reference to rural development. The study will contribute to the pool of knowledge on the myriad of services and roles that NGOs play and could play towards increasing the progress of rural development, thereby informing government policy that supports NGOs.

Stats SA (2014) reported the existence of 200,000 NGOs and in 2015 127,000 non-profit organizations (NPOs) were registered. It is also reported that there were over 140 000 registered NGOs (Stats SA, 2014). The increase in the number of NGOs represented an increase of over 200% over the past 10 years (Kagiso Trust, 2018). The economic recession, unemployment, and poor service delivery are the key contributory factors impacting negatively on the growth of the NGOs sector. A poor economic outlook, which has translated into a decline in government spending across critical sectors, has meant that NGOs have increasingly been filling an important gap where government services are limited or non-existent. A critique of the growing number of NGOs is that this is representative of the failure of the state and that this makes NGOs extension agents for basic services. This assessment has significant implications for the critical role that NGOs play in advancing social change and transformation (Radebe and Nkonyeni, 2020).

According to Radebe and Nkonyeni (2020), in South Africa, there are many non-government organizations (NGOs) assisting poor communities. These groups formed the Southern African NGO Network (SANGONeT) in 1987. Since then, the network has evolved and developed into a civil society organization that is historically linked to the social and political changes experienced in South Africa due to the democratic dispensation.

The sector consists of organizations of varying sizes and mandates that operate across multiple domains in both the formal and informal economy. Voluntary community-based organizations constitute 95% of the sector. In addition to that, an estimated 50,000 NGOs are unregistered. In the post-1994 transitional period, the sector followed a more conciliatory and collaborative approach, with many NGOs working with government to draft the new Constitution of South Africa. The funding landscape changed because resources were allocated through bilateral arrangements between the South African government and funders (Volmink and Van der Elst, 2017).

Non-Governmental Organizations are the effective non-political link between the government and the common people. They play an important role in the efficient and cost-effective provisioning of services, in mobilizing communities and groups and thereby providing effective channels of communication between the government and the people, and in the implementation of programs requiring innovative approaches (Shettigar and Mayya, 2015).

The structures and systems that the NGOs find themselves in are very complex and diversified (Africa, 2013). However, NGOs endeavors to retain and avoid the pressure from communities. Harris (2014) opines that there are rural development outcomes that could be social, economic, environmental, and political. It is of utmost importance therefore to consider

different sectors and institutions involved in the process. They play a vital role in transforming society.

The initiatives of rural development are outlined below as follows: Firstly, the terms social status and cultural reform are vital in social transformation vocabulary. Social transformation describes variations in or modifications of any aspects of interactions or social organization (Lewis, 2013). When individuals alter the socially ascribed social status of their parents into a socially achieved status it can, therefore, be regarded as societal transformation (Richey and Ponte, 2014). In rural areas, culture plays a critical role in matters of transformation because at some point it tends to hinder the development of both the people and the area (Rapatsa, 2016). Secondly, economic transformation as one of the outcomes of rural development can be regarded as a long-term change in the dominant economic activity (Uphoff, 2013). Lastly, people in rural areas should be empowered to be able to change their economic status. It is a cycle; if the social status of individuals is transformed, it leads to the realization of a sustainable economic transformation (Roderick, Blaauw and Scheck, 2016). In the context of this study, rural development NGOs help in ensuring that there are rural development initiatives and fruitful outcomes. Different sectors provide economic activities to achieve societal transformation in rural countries (David and Michael, 1997). The objective of the study is to investigate the role of NGOs in the development of rural communities. This study seeks to identify the challenges of NGOs and benefits of NGOs.

This study adopted a qualitative approach and analysis of secondary data, which involves acquiring information from scholarly articles, journals, books and published dissertations (Vilakazi and Adetiba, 2020). The paper bears the following structure: literature review; data analysis and discussion, which is presented in thematic mode. Finally, it ends with the conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature review

2.1. The global and South African NGOs perspective

According to Davies (2014, p. 23), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) “have a history dating back to at least the late eighteenth century.” Richmond and Carey (2005, p. 21) state, “there were about 1,083 NGOs that were in existence during the year 1914 as per estimation”. NGOs may not have a universally accepted definition as they are defined looking at their nature. Globalization enhanced the importance of NGOs, as many problems were difficult to be solved for a country on its own. According to Hasmath (2016), global treaties and international organizations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) were centered on capitalism. In other words, the development of vulnerable and destitute communities was never part of their socio-economic make-up. Arshad, Bakar and Razali (2015) observe that most of the NGOs in the United States have mission statements that are nothing but a bunch of pretty words and if these are not viewed frequently and acted upon, their performance will negatively be affected. Congruent to the argument above, Charnovitz (2010) accentuates that organizational actions are not always aligned with the promises made in mission statements. Therefore, the way they are governed affects their performance. Davies (2014) argues that most NGOs, if not all, were created with a dedicated focus on the extractive sector, which is the government or including NGOs that have been established to target one commodity or even one company. For example, collaborating with one partner is difficult enough, but most development interventions involve at least three partners: the NGO, government, and funder. Indeed, often there are multiple funding partners and/or NGOs, adding to the challenge. Another example of a successful collaboration involving a provincial education department, a local NGO and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN) is the Education Centers Supporting Rural Development intervention. The aim of the project was to establish a network of education centers to provide the province’s schools with hubs for teacher development, resource-provision and communication. Over the project period, the project was incrementally integrated into the department’s policies, budgets and operational systems (Volmink and Van der Elst, 2017).

The NGOs range from service-oriented, community-based initiatives operating around only one project to advocacy NGOs, intermediary NGOs to developmental NGOs (Cameron and

Haanstra, 2008). From an international experience, there are well-known examples of NGOs that focus their activities on the mining or energy sectors such as Mining Watch in Canada (Dorothea and Hans, 2012). There are also Mineral Policy Institute in Australia and Mines, Minerals and People from India (Dorothea and Hans, 2012). In addition, Oxfam America, and Oxfam Community Aid Abroad in Australia are NGOs that have a broader focus (Charnovitz, 2010; Choudry and Kapoor, 2013).

For example, the donations are used to help people and communities survive today, prepare for tomorrow and change their future for the better. Another example for Donors to contribute financially to Oxfam America is to support Oxfam's ultimate vision, which is a just world without poverty. This means that by leaving Oxfam a gift in your Will, you are supporting a global movement of people working hard to tackle poverty through practical, innovative solutions that help people improve their lives. Whether it is supporting families displaced by the climate crisis, ending gender discrimination or fighting for justice for the First Peoples of Australia, leaving a gift to Oxfam is a contribution that keeps on giving generations to come.

It is stated that these NGOs over the past two decades have played a vital role in shaping public expectations (AbouAssi, 2012; Africa, 2013). Again, they have influenced both corporate and government actions. Public advocacy NGOs campaigns have been established, facilitated lawsuits, support local communities and previously marginalized groups by providing them with training, funds and networks. AbouAssi (2012) further states that they had worked constructively with energy and mining companies on the ground in a variety of national and community-based projects. Voluntary principles on human rights and security were some of the established instruments put in place (Harris, 2014).

In Africa, there is Network Operator Groups (NOGs), an organization that provides technical support and organizes training and events at the local level. Currently, seven African countries are actively involved and known as the NOGs, which are Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Angola, Sudan, and Somalia (Internet Society African Regional Bureau, 2017). Through the Internet Society African Regional Bureau, the countries have gained a lot in terms of provision of building technical communities in Africa (ISARB, 2017). In all these mentioned African countries, NOGs were created in different years, and their objective differs from country to country. The main aim of these organizations is to bring about societal transformation in these African countries through the provision of services through networking amongst different countries around the continent and outside (ISARB, 2017).

2.2. South African NGOs perspective

NGOs play a vital role in South Africa through addressing challenges such as HIV/AIDS, hunger, malnutrition, homelessness, education, civil rights and for the public goods (United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 2010). However, a study was undertaken by the Department of Social Development looking at the mission statement of some of the South African NGOs, which wanted to achieve a lot of things such as releasing ten caregivers to be trained, provide shelters for at least 40 poor households, proper education for the poor communities. Some of the objectives were not met, as their operational activities were not aligned with their mission statements (DSD, 2015).

Drawing from the South African experience, the UNAIDS (2010) states that since NGOs are regarded as the major providers of care services for a target group of people, more especially the poor communities. The government regards the NGOs as their main partners in delivering services to the people. Public policies over the past decade have been adopted and impended; thus, has resulted in an increased number of paid and unpaid care workers. In DSD (2015), it is outlined that this trend has been fast-tracked by the need to respond to the enormous HIV and AIDS crisis in the country.

The high unemployment rate has increased the burden on poor families and communities with women carrying the greatest responsibility in domestic life (Rooderick *et al.* 2016). Therefore, the reason for these NGOs to exist is to address challenges faced by poor communities. In addition to the above statement, it states that there are three reasons for this choice of focus. Primarily, they state that the voluntary sector has an established tradition of service delivery.

Secondly, the NGOs are said to provide the largest infrastructure of care services (Uphoff, 2013). Such services are delivered through various NGOs that operate differently in nature. They have different institutional relations with the government, local donors and civil society. The last reason for the choice of focus is that the path of the new legislation in the post-apartheid era, including an aspiring Children's Act, calls for a need of a broader range of services to be provided (Davies, 2014).

In South Africa, some NGOs have made headlines and made people undermine the credibility of NGOs. For example, the issue surrounding the deaths of mentally ill patients in a Gauteng Province hospital. The Life Esidimeni matter raised many questions as to whether the organizational intentions were that of transforming the society (health-wise) or it was only to satisfy the needs of certain individuals (Chaskalson and Baduza, 2022).

The Life Esidimeni inquest stands as a crucial accountability process for a national tragedy that ought never to have happened and should never happen again. It was established to determine the legal cause of death for each of the mental healthcare users and whether there were criminal acts or omissions which led to the deaths, after the decision of the Gauteng Department of Health to transfer mental healthcare users to ill-equipped NGOs in 2016 (Chaskalson and Baduza, 2022).

3. Role players in rural development in developing countries

There are various role players in rural development, which entails a multiplicity of actions. There are different rural development role players involved in transforming society by rendering different services to different people (Green, 2008). The role players can be the community, NGOs, public and private sectors, and they play a vital role in the development of the poor communities (Richey and Ponte, 2014). The stakeholders also provide services, which can be regarded as actions; hence, their outputs are social, economic, environmental, and political development. The community, NGOs, donors, public sector, and the private sector are the rural development stakeholders that bring about societal transformation in poor communities and developing countries (Green, 2008).

The NGOs play a notable role in the provision of services such as environmental awareness campaigns, health-related services, food parcels to the locals and other services. The government provides the rural poor with free education, job creation and sponsors many communities-based organizations (CBOs) (Dorothea and Hans, 2012). However, the private and public sectors provide similar services. The outcomes of the role of the NGOs are measured by looking at the historical societal transformation in terms of society's current situation.

According to Tsheola (2017), there are various stakeholders involved in rural development, and that includes private and public sectors, institutions, and organizations. The stakeholders play a vital role in the development of the communities. Rural development NGOs are believed to be the role players between the society and government (Kearns, 2011). Rural development NGOs again can be regarded as the intermediary between the rural people and the public sector (Green, 2008). They provide multiple services to the communities that the government is unable to reach. There is no clarity regarding whose responsibility is it in terms of the ratification of the provision of services to the communities globally and nationally.

Private companies provide rural development NGOs with daily operational guidelines (Kearns, 2011). The private sector plays a significant role in the rural development NGOs that are in existence in the developing countries, particularly in rural areas (Rochester, 2014). NGOs are perceived to be the drivers of rural development and panacea to fight poverty. NGOs in rural areas provide different services, for example, charitable, voluntary to advocacy and developmental services (Uphoff, 2013). A lot of attention is given to the role players and the processes involved in rural development (Siddaraju and Ramesh, 2014; Uphoff, 2013; Richey and Ponte, 2014). The roles may be categorized in terms of social, economic, political, and environmental approach. If the rural development NGOs are well managed, they yield good results in terms of community development. For instance, some NGOs provide people with skills and knowledge that has enabled the development of people's social status (Charnovitz, 2010). The social aspects and achievements in developing countries were achieved when many people

were skilled, knowledgeable and when their social status was improved. If the NGOs were to be aligned with what was stated in their vision and mission statements, the initiatives would result in societal transformation. Some rural development NGOs seek to provide people with developmental services (David and Michael, 1997). The services include the provision of skills development, teaching and learning and identifying young and upcoming entrepreneurs. Davies (2014) further states that through such initiatives, if the programs were managed appropriately, they could lead to a transformed society.

Rodrik (2008) refers to governance as the process whereby authority is vested in the management team to manage societal resources and ascertain that operations are guided by relevant policies. The society will also be transformed by the intervention of the rural development NGOs. The improved economic status resulting from the intervention of the NGOs has enabled the rural communities to be financially independent by starting their businesses (Dorothea and Hans, 2012). Socio-economic development can be achieved through different initiatives provided by rural development NGOs.

NGOs are also responsible for environmental and health awareness, which plays a significant role in transforming the society (Banks *et al.* 2015). There is a concern in terms of how these NGOs are managed, and it is not clear who is their custodian (Arshad *et al.* 2015). There is no clarity in terms of where the multi-international and national NGOs responsible for environmental awareness acquire permission to implement their services in rural areas (Arshad *et al.* 2015). The NGOs' approach is unilateral because the beneficiaries are not informed about their intentions. According to Cameron and Haanstra (2008) and Arshad *et al.* (2015), rural development has a positive impact on most developing countries. However, a competency gap needs to be closed to ensure a positive impact on the communities. The role of the stakeholders yields positive outcomes, which are significant in the transformation of the society at large (Dorothea and Hans, 2012). Rural development NGOs are regarded as a panacea for societal transformation. Therefore, they should be recognized and acknowledged as drivers for rural development and societal transformation (Arshad *et al.* 2015).

Developing countries are faced with mounting issues such as poverty, inequality, and political instability (Rapatsa, 2016). However, many role players are willing to participate to enhance the lives of rural communities through various options. The participants in rural development can bring societal transformation or exacerbate the current situation depending on the NGOs 'implementation strategy' (Elbers and Arts, 2011). It could be either international NGOs, commercial businesses (private sector) or the public sector (Banks *et al.* 2015). The next sections give an exposition of the role players in rural development and societal transformation.

3.1. Public sector

An activity that is involved in the running of a state to add value for the citizens is service delivery (Banks *et al.* 2015). Due to the preferences and values of the society, the objectives of the state change because society is made up of fickle human beings. Therefore, public administration is regarded as a vehicle expressing the values and preferences of the communities, citizens, and society (Banks *et al.* 2015).

Banks *et al.* (2015) indicate that the roles of the state are based on the notions of the socio-economic welfare of the state. Furthermore, laissez-faire and socialism also form part of the ideologies of the state (Charnovitz, 2010). The laissez-faire ideology is principled on the fact that creating an enabling environment in which the citizens have free competition among themselves is the primary goal of the state (Uphoff, 2013). One of the aspects of societal transformation is the rule of law. The government should protect its citizens through the enforcement of contracts by the Courts of Law and individual protection together with their properties (Harding, 2013).

Socialism as one of the ideologies, as opposed to laissez-faire, discourages private ownership and free enterprise (Green, 2008). It seeks to make provision services that are accessible to anyone such as free health services, social grants, pensions, free education and redistribution of income (Jalali, 2013). It puts more emphasis on the fact that the government is

the one that controls the markets; therefore, the provision of social welfare and redistribution of income should be accessed by all citizens.

The state plays a notable role as a donor by assisting NGOs in rural areas or developing countries (Harris, 2014). The assistance is in the form of money and other resources that enable assisting the NGOs to achieve their objectives and the beneficiaries. Social welfare emphasizes that the government's role is to ensure minimum standards for a good life for all its citizens (Roderick, Blaauw and Scheck, 2016). Moreover, the provision of free education, health care, shelter, pensions and protection against loss of employment will lead to the enhancement of the lives of poor conditions of poor communities.

Good governance requires that the role of government should be to facilitate and mediate. The endeavors of the government are directed to basic services in health, education, and social development (Dorothea and Hans, 2012). According to Lipschutz (2005), the responsibilities of the government are to ensure the safety and security of all its citizens and promote their general welfare. The government should function in a manner that is responsible, participative, transparent, and accountable as it is a guiding principle towards good governance (Rooderick *et al.* 2016).

Concisely, the state is regarded as the regulator, facilitator, and enabler of rural development. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that policies are made to promote safety and security (Rochester, 2014). It is, therefore, the responsibility of the administrative institutions to construct the strategy and ensure implementation to achieve societal transformation.

3.2. Private sector

The private sector is defined as part of the economy that is controlled, managed, and run by private individuals (Dorothea and Hans 2012). Unlike the public sector or the NGOs, the private sector's motive is to make a profit at all cost. Jalali (2013) states the private sector is sometimes called the citizen sector and it is said to employ more workers than the public sector. According to Jalali (2013), the private sector is a very diverse sector that makes up a big part of many economies and based on many different individuals, partnerships, and groups. The following entities form part of the private sector:

- Sole proprietorships,
- Partnerships,
- Small- and mid-sized businesses,
- Large corporations and multinationals,
- Professional and trade associations, and
- Trade unions (Jalali, 2013).

4. The aspects of societal transformation in developing countries' rural areas

According to Green (2008), society's perspective on societal transformation may differ according to the social, economic, political, and demographic status - society's status quo. Societal transformation may mean different things from one society to the other. Development and transformation in other areas may mean moving from a traditional way of doing things to a modern way. While in other areas, it may refer to having local institutions and NGOs that provide basic services.

Education, health, political, and economic freedom, peace, and stability form part of the aspects of societal transformation in rural areas. Societal transformation describes variations in any aspects of social process, social patterns, social interactions, and social organization (Harris, 2014). To be precise, it means a new fashion or mode of modifying the old approach in the operation of society. Secondly, it may mean observable differences in any social phenomena over a period (Uphoff, 2013).

5. The governance of NGOs in developing countries

Many scholars believe that rural development NGOs are a panacea for poverty alleviation and social illnesses (Wiesinger, 2009; Banks *et al.* 2015; Rooderick *et al.* 2016). As a result, the government and other development role players are at risk of losing role players of the rural development NGOs. This has resulted in a catastrophe in the development cycles because the role of the NGOs is not considered (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013; Banks *et al.* 2015).

A report generated by Rooderick *et al.* (2016) described the biggest challenge that South Africa is currently facing regarding the mushrooming of many NGOs that cease operating within a shorter space of time. It is believed that this is due to mismanagement of funds and a lack of good leadership and management skills (Banks *et al.* 2015). The rural development NGOs have scaled down their operations; for example, they have reduced the number of services they provided to the poor communities due to insufficient funding (AbouAssi, 2012).

According to AbouAssi (2012), drawing from the experiences in Brazil, China, and India, a vast rise in inequality and the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the small proportion of the world's richest countries has been witnessed. In developing countries, the approach portrays the people as helpless and passive victims in need of assistance. According to Tsheola (2017, p. 20), "To accord African characteristics to party-state and society triad interactionism, it is necessary to link governance to the notion of African Renaissance as an ideology and philosophy."

6. Discussion and results

The study reveals four important findings, which are the significance, the challenges, the benefits of NGOs, and the role of ten identified NGOs in South Africa.

6.1. The significance of the NGOs

The study identifies the importance of NGOs which is to provide direct services and activities that range from research to policy analysis and philanthropic work, including community support services like capacity building, technical assistance, and funding. As articulated in the South African Constitution's Bill of Rights, the existence of NGOs personifies the rights to freedom of expression.

NGOs are important because they are guided by the needs of the communities, they function in. Research is first conducted by NGOs on what the communities want or need before they can start providing services (Uphoff, 2013). This is important because resources and funds will not go to waste; funding is given according to what is needed. NGOs play a significant role in South Africa because they do not waste state resources as private companies and individuals around the country and even across the world (Rooderick *et al.* 2016) mostly fund them. These organizations help the government by making it their responsibility to make sure that poor people are taken care of, and people who are ill or sick are given access to quality healthcare.

NGOs play a significant role in closing gaps that were caused by the apartheid government. Most poor people in South Africa are black, because of the racial segregation introduced and implemented by the apartheid government (Rooderick *et al.* 2016). The majority of black South Africans were forced to settle in areas that were poor or rather far from the inner cities where economic activities were practiced. As a result, today most black people are poor in South Africa. NGOs now play a huge role in seeing that these poor people can survive by providing them with basic services such as health services.

These organizations are important because they allow for freedom of expression as stated in the Bill of Rights. Both founders and beneficiaries of NGOs get a chance to voice out their opinions in a way that no one's opinion is discriminated against (Macedo *et al.* 2016). The beneficiaries get to have a say in what services they need to be provided with. For instance, if a community needs food, they are given a platform to express it, and the NGO cannot force them to provide them with clothes because it is what they want to offer.

Founders, managers, and employees also have a fair share in expressing themselves when they are unable to cover everyone in the community (Lipschutz, 2005; Thacker, 2011; Rochester, 2014). They cannot get insulted or harassed if they fail to provide services to all members of the community. NGOs play a significant role in seeing that the Constitution's Bill of Rights is not broken to favor or disadvantage a certain group of people.

6.2. The challenges of the NGOs

6.2.1. Lack of funds

Rural development NGOs, in most cases, cannot operate on their own without receiving any funding from donors. They are helping poor people with services that the state fails to deliver, such as health care services, literacy programs, charitable services, awareness campaigns etc. Funding plays a vital role in the provision of services, as they have not met the needs of poor people in developing countries (Jalali, 2013). Kearns (2011) states that there is prevalent of mismanagement of funds in most rural development NGOs as people have different motives and they do not stick to the organizational vision and objectives.

6.2.2. Poor governance

The fraudulent activities that take place in the rural development NGOs can be attributed to a lack of governance within the organizations (Herzer and Nunnenkamp, 2013). Poor governance can lead to insufficient funds, poor communication and poor relationship between the council and board of NGOs (Kamstra *et al.* 2013).

The relevant and appropriate example of poor governance is demonstrated by the Gauteng Province Health Department rushed mentally ill patients Esidimeni to NGOs that lacked management skills and elements of good governance, and this is a classic example of poor governance. The former Gauteng Deputy Director-General for mental health services indicated that the processes were rushed in moving Life Esidimeni patients. After several procedural delays and adjournments, the inquest meant to determine if anyone was criminally liable for the deaths of 144 mental health patients in the 2016 disaster. The former deputy Director-General, Hannah Jacobus, admitted to the commission of inquiry to writing false licenses for NGOs, including ones where patients died. The Director-General was under pressure from the former head of Gauteng mental health services, Dr. Makgoba Manamela. Jacobus' role was to oversee clinics in the Ekurhuleni and Sedibeng districts and to create a framework for the downscaling of patients at Life Esidimeni. There was no indication of Life Esidimeni closing at the time; management was looking at downscaling to make the facility more suitable and profitable. After completion of the document, the management team of Esidimeni went to do surveys in the districts. The management team looked at what type of NGO was suitable. The downscaling was only on paper and there was no implementation. The Gauteng Provincial Department of Health signed licenses and awarded them to inexperienced, underfunded, poorly equipped NGOs permission to look after profoundly mentally ill patients (Masweneng, 2022).

6.2.3. Absence of strategic planning

Strategic management is critically important because it helps in terms of planning, monitoring, and evaluation in any organization, both public institutions, and private entities. According to Harding (2013), poor strategic planning breeds poor governance in an organization. Organizations should have a clear mission and vision statements as strategic tools that help in achieving the desired goals (Patel *et al.* 2015). Since a mission statement validates the existence of an organization, it can also help in terms of strategic planning.

6.2.4. Poor networking and communication

Poor networking between developing countries makes it difficult for NGOs operating in rural areas to get global funding that could help in enhancing the provision of services and other resources

(Uphoff, 2013). NGOs in rural areas have limited communication channels, and some do not have access to the internet as well as telephones to execute daily activities. It is a challenge for the NGOs to get more information about other regional or international NGOs that could assist with funding (Rapatsa, 2016). Communication is essential, particularly in terms of getting first-hand information regarding local, regional, and global NGO-related issues. According to Rochester (2014), there is a gap between the board and council of NGOs because of lack of communication.

6.2.5. Limited capacity

Leadership is one of the most important components of NGOs that stakeholders should possess within any organization. Leadership capacity matters to get tasks executed and making sure that the needs of the poor people are met (Rapatsa, 2016). Limited capacities are found in fundraising, governance, technical areas of development, and leadership as well as management (Siddaraju and Ramesh, 2014). As a result of lack of funding capacity, most NGOs are unable to pay for capacity building workshops. It is stated that technology, particularly in areas of IT capacity was a major challenge in the rural development NGOs (Uphoff, 2013).

6.2.6. Development approaches

One of the major challenges that rural development NGOs are confronting is the blueprint approach to development. Many rural development NGOs are trying to copy everything that is done by international NGOs or other well-established NGOs (Wiesinger, 2009). Rural development NGOs that focus only on providing services and building infrastructure instead of making it possible for people in rural areas to empower themselves and aiding local institutions to manage their affairs should change their approach (Roederick *et al.* 2016). Illiteracy and unemployment in rural areas are persisting; however, the rural development NGOs seem not to find a solution.

6.2.7. Relationships with NGOs

According to Kamstra *et al.* (2013), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), referred to as giants NGOs, tend to occupy space without leaving room for existing rural development NGOs. The INGOs initiate short-term development projects to deskill beneficiaries (Macedo *et al.* 2016). The INGOs pay exorbitant salaries to the employees because of enough working capital, and the process dents the credibility of the donors (Macedo *et al.* 2016). The major challenge in this regard is that the INGOs dominate the rural development NGOs because they pay allowances and manipulate the recipients (Lewis, 2013).

6.2.8. Political interference

Politics is about making policies, which are implemented by administrators (Harris, 2014). Politics can either have a negative or positive impact on the daily operations and the overall performance of an organization. Given the circumstances, the administrators provide the politicians with advice during the policy formulation processes. However, these politicians intrude and interfere in the affairs of the organization's administrators (Harris, 2014). One of the most challenging factors for any organization is politics, and there is no way they can be ignored. Organizations have their politics, and if the politicians are only concerned about satisfying their interests, then the organization will encounter problems. People should have political freedom so that they can elect whomever they want and formulate policies that can be executed without political interference. According to Harris (2014), our everyday lives revolve around politics, and we cannot run away from them, as they are very influential.

6.3. The benefits of NGOs

The study further presents the benefits of NGOs, which are the key findings of the study, and they are discussed in detail below as follows: Rural development NGOs may come with inconsistencies in rural areas such as deskilling and the provision of complex projects. However, some benefits come with the rural development NGOs, and they are discussed as follows:

6.3.1. Local resource mobilization

Rural development NGOs have the potential to provide and raise funds from the government, individuals, and local businesses. Such crucial practice requires strong governance mechanisms. Funds can be generated locally through the available local resources (Lewis, 2013). Local resource mobilization is essential, and NGO personnel should have strong accountability mechanisms with clear strategic plans and credibility (Kearns, 2011).

6.3.2. Local networking

Appropriate development initiatives can be identified through local networking over the rural development NGOs that exist in an area (Mitlin, 2013). Cooperation and coordination between the rural development NGOs and the local government can be improved to achieve societal transformation (Davies, 2014). Local advocacy can be effectively pursued through local networking and coordinating approaches to development.

6.3.3. Cheaper to implement

According to Harris (2014), for a project to be complete, it must pass through four project phases: initiation, planning, implementation, and closure. This section focuses on the implementation phase. The fact is that project implementation of rural development is cost-effective because of access to local resources. Community-based organizations are easily monitored and achieve the desired organizational goals because of realistic goal setting (Harris, 2014).

6.3.4. Improvement of standards of life and enabling the environment

Societal transformation means the improvement of the standard of living socially, economically, politically, and environmentally (Macedo *et al.* 2016). Therefore, improvement in the standard of living of poor people is one of the benefits of rural development NGOs. Rural development NGOs play a vital role in the lives of the people through the provision of different services. The existence of NGOs has permitted an enabling environment that allows communities to be innovative and pursue their own developmental goals rather than wait for the government (Rapatsa, 2016). An environment that is enabling is one where people have access to the resources needed for transformation in all aspects (Richey and Ponte, 2014). Improved infrastructures in rural areas such as IT, roads, schools, community halls, libraries, water, and electricity can assist poor people in achieving developmental goals (Rooderick *et al.* 2016).

6.3.5. Reduce illiteracy levels

Teaching and learning are an on-going process that should take place in rural areas to reduce the high rate of illiteracy. Learning should not only take place by sending people to school (Mitlin, 2013) but giving and exposing them to skills impartation programs. Developmental and advocacy or educational NGOs are of utmost importance in reducing the level of illiteracy in rural areas as they provide various educational services (Murray and Overton, 2011). Awareness campaigns related to health, social, political, environmental, and economic in nature are essential for the transformation of society; they should therefore form part of a society's literacy.

6.4. The role of the ten successful NGOs in South Africa

This study gives an exposition of ten successful NGOs and the different services they render to various communities in South Africa. Radebe and Nkonyeni (2020) outlines the NGOs and the services they render as follows:

AIDS Foundation of South Africa was founded in 1988 and was the first registered anti-AIDS NGO in South Africa. The organization supports regional, local, and national efforts to reduce HIV, STIs, and TB infections. AFSA aims to address the structural and social drivers of HIV, raise awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and build resilience in communities. The South African Red Cross Society's objectives include spreading knowledge of first aid, home nursing, and hygiene and carrying out relief work for the sick and wounded.

CHOSA South Africa believes that every South African child should grow up in a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment. World Vision South Africa aims to create a future in which no children are without protection, health, education, and or employment (once they are of age). By identifying fragile and impoverished communities, they assess and create a program specific to that region, then implement that program to benefit the children and the community. Save the Children South Africa works to give children the opportunity to learn and thrive in the safest environment possible.

MIET Africa is an African education organization that strives to improve the lives of children and youth by providing them with a quality education. READ Educational Trust targets illiteracy in South Africa. READ is aware that illiteracy stunts individual progress and South Africa's overall growth.

The Viva Foundation of South Africa strives to be instrumental in transforming high-priority poverty areas, such as informal settlements, into stable, economically sustainable communities that provide civilians with education, employment, business, and recreation opportunities. Human Rights Institute of South Africa strives for a society in which human rights are protected and fulfilled for every person. The organization focuses on women and children, impoverished and rural communities, and other informal settlements by providing human rights education.

Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa is there to implement effective environment, tourism, education, and youth development programs throughout South Africa. WESSA also provides a variety of local initiatives for the environment.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper focuses on the role of NGOs in developing countries with specific reference to rural development. The role players identified regarding rural development are the public and private sectors as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The significance, benefits, and challenges of NGOs are discussed in detail. The paper also provides an overview of the aspects of societal transformation by NGOs in developing countries as well as a brief outline of the governance of NGOs. The study is concluded with a detailed discussion and results of the study.

The overall analysis of the study reveals that NGOs are playing an important role in promoting and implementing different developmental programs in rural areas. Moreover, NGOs can contribute to changes in economic conditions, social status, and personal development of everyone. Most crucially, NGOs are faced with financial constraints, hindering their possible positive impact on rural communities. In a nutshell, it is evident that NGOs outperform government departments and government agencies regarding basic service delivery.

NGOs are not getting proper grants and sufficient financial assistance from the government; this creates delays for them to render services to poor communities. It is recommended that the government should provide proper financial grants to NGOs to remedy this shortfall. Globally, it is a norm that NGO programs are not sustainable for change management because of insufficient information from the NGOs. It is therefore recommended that governments should undertake corrective measures to emphasize the importance of the NGOs to the rural poor. Since NGOs are responsible for the funds, which they are granted to the beneficiaries, the study recommends that government properly monitor the reporting and

evaluation of all the financial activities of the NGOs. It is recommended that NGO members should have well designed fundraising mechanisms because funding is always a challenge for many NGOs. Since the socio-economic conditions of society are unpredictable, it is recommended that NGOs identify new projects, and other development initiatives to attract donors and to sustain the provision of services.

The study recommends that NGOs not carry out development work in isolation, but through a participatory approach, where they collaborate with the members of the communities they are serving. NGOs are essentially grassroots institutions that work closely with local communities. Therefore, the study recommends that NGOs provide training to develop the skills of their members and to educate the public, especially the depressed sections of society, about their rights. It is also recommended that NGOs promote the habit of capacitating the poor communities with skills and development. Lastly, the ethical and moral responsibilities of NGOs should be clearly outlined and disposed to all communities for the sake of transparency and accountability.

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