



Incubation Hub

CENTRE FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

GOVERNANCE, STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

ZIMBABWE
2024

Introduction

African civil society organisations face several challenges in the execution of their mandate to the extent that very few survive beyond the first decade from the date of opening. The challenges faced range from (i) weak to non-existent governance mechanisms, (ii) unreliable resource base, (iii) related to the preceding constant shifting away from the mission/core focus areas and inability to retain talent/skills. Unfortunately, these challenges are taking place in a context of ineffective states characterised by weak to non-existent commitments towards inclusive development. There is a need to re-invest in building civil society organisations spread across every aspect of political, economic, social and cultural life.

In Zimbabwe, many formal civil society organisations register themselves as trusts, private voluntary organisations or through a constitution agreed to by members. The majority of CSOs in Zimbabwe are registered by deed of trust. Over the years CSOs have complied with global best practices of making sure that the following are in place:

1. board of trustees,
2. organisational strategies, and
3. for some a significant presence online.

This material focuses on what should happen within CSOs to enhance relevance, agility, and long-term sustainability.

Objectives

- To nurture effective governance within civil society organisations
- To introduce new approaches that contribute towards long-term sustainability

Background - What is Civil Society?

A society, one might argue, is a sum of its parts. According to the United Nations, society can be divided into three parts: government, business, and civil society. It's the concept of a civil society that we shall be focusing on for this module.

What is civil society?

Civil society is comprised of agencies and institutions that are not part of the government. Civil society, regardless of the goals of a particular agency or institution, shares common characteristics. Let's explore these characteristics.

Civil Society: Characteristics

According to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), there are several characteristics that can be found in a civil society.

1. Reciprocity

Reciprocity occurs when people work together, exchanging ideas and resources, and collaborate on conflict resolution that's peaceful and nonviolent. For reciprocity to work, it needs all sides to work equally. If one side is reluctant to give as much as it takes in this relationship, then problems can arise. Reciprocity is not a one-way street.

2. Commonwealth

Commonwealth is an economic characteristic that reflects civil society's ability to produce, share, and exchange goods and resources. According to the ICNL, "as citizens participate in the open exchange of commonwealth resources, they can form and strengthen social connections and networks with others."

3. Participatory

Civil societies are participatory; that is, they're active and have the freedom to make decisions in their communities in general. Participation is getting involved and invested in the community through community organisations and agencies whose focus is on the common good for society and the controlling of resources for the benefit of all in that community. The participation brings community members closer together as they work towards a common purpose.

4. Justice

The characteristic of justice in a civil society means that people follow the rule of law and advocate not only for their rights but those of others. In a civil society, when laws are unjustly applied or members of that society are left out of the political process, it's the responsibility of members unaffected by this injustice to stand up for those who are.

5. Control of Resources for the Common Good

According to the ICNL, the common good in civil society "is advanced when citizens hold decision-making power, work to strengthen and improve local and regional economies and exercise sustainable and socially transparent stewardship of societal resources." These resources, which civil society has access to, including human resources, tangible non-human resources, such as material resources, resources that can be extracted or modified in the natural environment, as well as the resources that are provided by social institutions and agencies.

6. Association

The characteristic of association means that people in civil society can interact with one another, including groups, agencies, and institutions, freely and without restrictions, for the benefit of society. They can exchange ideas and resources and provide mutual support, which in turn strengthens the community's bonds with one another.

7. Sovereignty

According to the ICNL, sovereignty is present when "citizens have the right to be involved in all aspects of political governance and the authority to make decisions and perform actions affecting all levels of public life." Everyone has an equal say, not just those who lobby for their own interests.

What are Civil Society Organisations?

An organisation is a collection of resources arranged to accomplish an overall goal. The purpose of a civil society organisation is to meet one or more needs in a community. Each CSO describes its overall purpose in a mission statement. Typical types of CSOs services are advocacy, arts, civic, cultural, education, health, and human service.

Governance of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

The governance function of a CSO is responsible for providing overall strategic direction, guidance, and controls. Often the term “governance” refers to board matters. CSOs are governed by a board of trustees. The size of the board of trustees can vary from three to more than 50. According to the laws of Zimbabwe, the board of trustees should meet four times a year. The effectiveness of governance depends to a great extent on the working relationship between the board and top management.

Trustees of CSOs are generally not paid, but they may receive any compensation that is allowed by the organisation's bylaws. The board is accountable for the policies of the organisation and is given powers by the organisation's Deed of Trust or Articles of Incorporation. The board's work is coordinated by the chair and the board may organise itself into various committees responsible for carrying out different operations. Typical board committees include (i) Audit, (ii) Finance, (iii) Programs, (iv) Human Resources and (v) Governance.

The board is comprised of individuals from the community and, ideally, is representative of the organisation's clients. Law and theory dictate that the board is in charge, and directly accountable for the overall direction and policies of the organisation. Powers are given to the board by the Articles of Incorporation (or other governing documents, for example, Articles of Association, Constitution, etc.). The board can configure the CSO in whatever structure it prefers to meet the organisation's mission and usually does so via specifications in bylaws. Members of CSO boards are generally motivated by a desire to serve the community and the personal satisfaction of volunteering. CSO board members may not receive monetary compensation for serving on the board.

Board Chair

A board chair's role is central to coordinating the work of the board, executive director, and committees. The chair's role may have appointive power for committees, depending on what is specified about this role in the bylaws. The power of the board chair is usually through persuasion and general leadership.

Board Committees

The Table below provides descriptions of functions that are often conducted by board committees. Note that the following list is not intended to suggest that all these committees exist within one organisation; it's ultimately up to the organisation to determine which committees should exist and what they should do for that organisation. Committees and their assignments are often specified in the Bylaws.

Board committees are put in place to divide up the work of overseeing the organisation. The advantages of such committees include

1. Improve the scope of participation from all board members
2. Utilize specific talents and skill sets to execute specific tasks
3. Allow for faster implementation of activities since work is divided

Read more ([Community Sector](#))

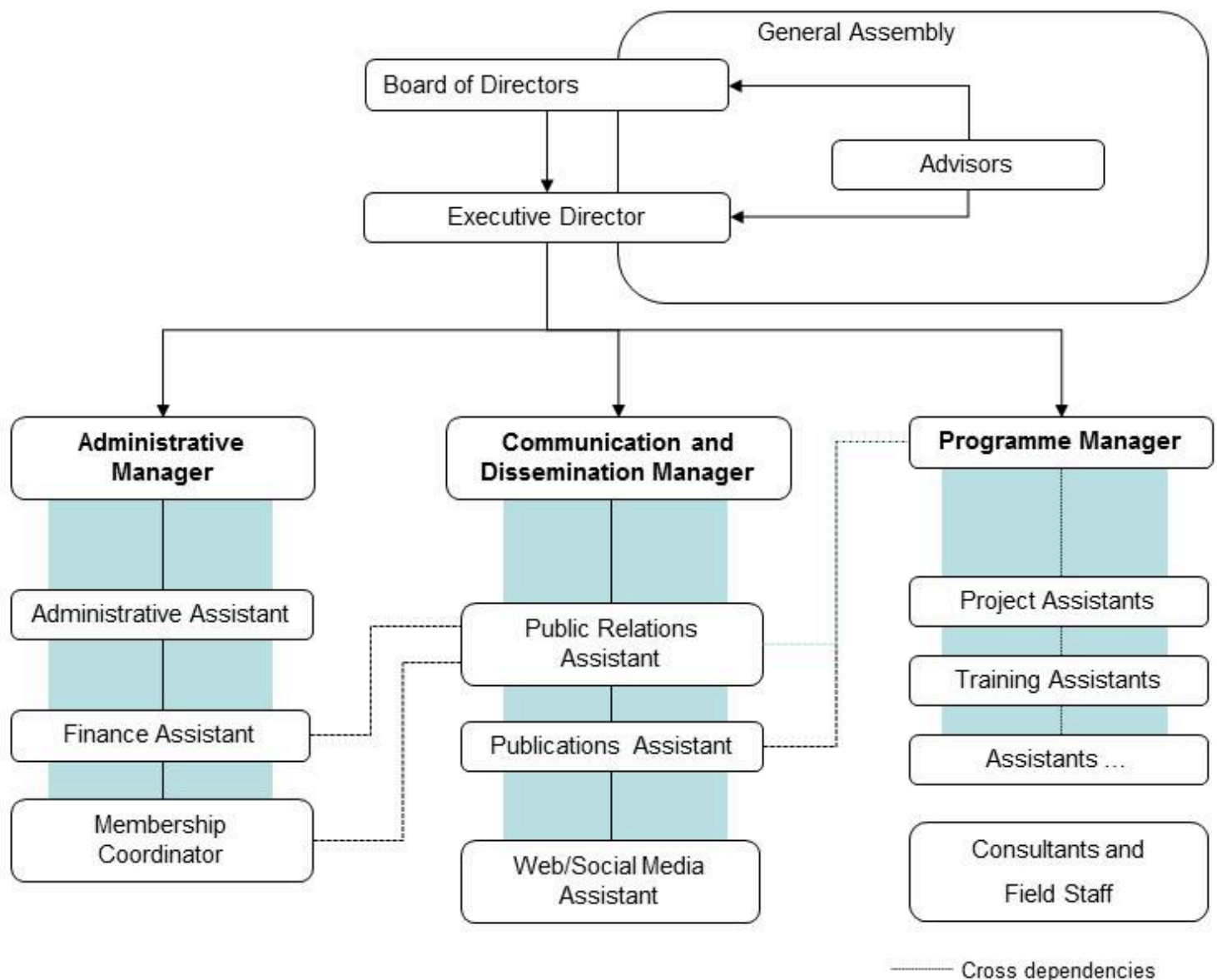
Potential Standing Committees	Their Typical Roles
Board Development	Ensure effective board processes, structures and roles, including retreat planning, committee development, and board evaluation; sometimes includes role of nominating committee, such as keeping list of potential board members, orientation and training.
Evaluation	Ensures sound evaluation of products/services/programs, including, e.g., outcomes, goals, data, analysis and resulting adjustments.
Executive	Oversee operations of the board; often acts on behalf of the board during on-demand activities that occur between meetings, and these acts are later presented for full board review; comprised of board chair, other officers and/or committee chairs (or sometimes just the officers, although this might be too small); often performs evaluation of chief executive.
Promotion and Sales	Promotes organisation's services to the community, including generating fees for those services

Finance	Oversees development of the budget; ensures accurate tracking/monitoring/accountability for funds; ensures adequate financial controls; often led by the board treasurer; reviews major grants and associated terms
Fundraising	Oversees development and implementation of the Fundraising Plan; identifies and solicits funds from external sources of support, working with the Development Officer if available; sometimes called Development Committee
Marketing	Oversees development and implementation of the Marketing Plan, including identifying potential markets, their needs, how to meet those needs with products/services/programs, and how to promote/sell the programs
Personnel	Guides development, review and authorization of personnel policies and procedures; sometimes leads evaluation of the chief Executive; sometimes assists chief executive with leadership and management matters
Product/ Program Team	Guides development of service delivery mechanisms; may include evaluation of the services; link between the board and the staff on program's activities
Public Relations	Represents the organisation to the community. enhances the organisation's image, including communications with the press

Administration of Civil Society Organisations

The administration is made up of the staff that oversee all programs. The administration team usually includes an executive director, or president, and office personnel. The executive director is responsible for liaising with the board and for carrying out their instructions, as well as for overseeing the people who run the programs of the CSO. This type of centralized structure has been rated by many others as the most successful for CSOs .

However, there are some variations, especially in membership-based organisations such as residents' associations, trade unions and faith-based formations such as churches. Membership-based organisations are usually established through a constitution which creates scope for a general assembly and a secretariat responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation.



Source: [The Global Development Research Centre](#)

Programs and Types of Work

Typically, CSOs work from, their overall mission, or purpose, to identify a few basic service goals which must be reached to accomplish their mission.

Resources are organised into programs to reach each goal. Most CSOs are founded to carry out certain specific types of work. These specific types of work have been divided into broad categories which include, intermediary work like policy-oriented research, training and advocacy, public defenders of human rights, and service delivery like running a homeless shelter or raising money to support the work of other CSOs.

It often helps to think of programs in terms of inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs are the various resources needed to run the program, e.g., money, facilities, constituencies/beneficiaries, program staff, etc. The process is how the program is carried out, e.g., new data is gathered through research and communicated, advocacy for policy change is carried out, clients are counselled, children are cared for, art is created, association members are supported, etc. The outputs are the units of service, e.g., research products produced, training services provided, number of clients counselled, children cared for, artistic pieces produced, or members in the association. Outcomes are the impacts on the clients' receiving services, e.g., increased mental health, safe and secure development, richer artistic appreciation and perspectives in life, increased effectiveness among members, etc.

Inputs	Processes	Outputs	Outcomes
Staff Building	Training Research Advocacy	Training Participants Research Reports Advocacy Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informed policy makers• Informed citizens• Informed stakeholders

The organisation should be structured into various program areas to carry out this work and achieve its goals. Each program area may then have its own department head or assistant director. Typical program areas may include fundraising, research, operations, development, human resources, volunteer coordinator, networking, publicity and planning. The program heads report to the chief executive and may have any number of staff members under them.

Unique Management Areas

Civil society organisations typically have several types of management areas that may not exist in for-profit companies. These may include fundraising and grant writing, volunteer programs and public policy. Some of these areas, such as fundraising, may be handled by the executive director, or an entire department, headed by an assistant director. Some CSOs may also have a program director, or assistant director, in charge of ensuring the organisation is meeting ethical requirements set out in its bylaws and is liaising with the local community.

Issues to Consider in Successfully Managing CSOs

At the heart of any successful CSO is an effective chief executive officer and board of directors. These leaders must work as a team with vision, skill, and sufficient resources to accomplish the organisation's mission. While leadership is shared, critical management skills must rest with the chief executive. However, the board must be sufficiently skilled in management to assess the work of this director and assist in strategic decision-making.

Values as the Bottom Line

Values are the driving force in a CSO. The bottom line is the realization of a social mission, not profits. This poses complex problems for the leadership team. How are programs agreed upon, progress monitored, and success measured? How are priorities set and consensus reached? How are staff rewarded and what control systems are applicable? Skilled consultants may be needed from time to time to assist the team in answering these qualitative, value-laden questions and focus on appropriate management systems.

CSO Personnel are Often Highly Diverse

Diversity is reflected, not only by different races and ethnic groups but ultimately by different values and perspectives. This strong diversity is a major benefit to the CSO because input from a wide variety of perspectives usually ensures complete consideration of situations and new ideas. However, CSO personnel must ensure they cultivate and remain open to the various values and perspectives.

Common Challenges Faced by CSOs

Problems are Especially Complex for the Small CSOs

The majority of CSOs have small staffs and small budgets, for instance, less than \$500,000, which compounds the leadership and management problems they face, especially given their charters and the magnitude of community needs with which they deal. Most organisations (regardless of size) experience similar issues, e.g., challenges in planning, organising, motivating and guiding. However, when these issues are focused in a small organisation, the nature of the organisation becomes very dynamic and complex.

Sufficient Resources to Pay Leadership May Be Lacking

With a lack of sufficient money, attracting and retaining paid management also can be problematic. Hard work with little career development opportunity encourages turnover of chief executives and staff. This can stall the organisation's work. Expertise that is brought in to advise the management may be lost once that leadership leaves.

Lack of Managerial Training is Problematic for Small CSOs

Many managers in CSOs have been promoted primarily out of non-management disciplines and do not have the managerial skills that are needed to run a CSO organisation. Training and consultation can do much to help these new leaders/managers gain the skills they seek and help them up a myriad of learning curves that rainbow out in front of them.

Chief Executives Wear Too Many Hats

A CSO chief executive must be a current expert in planning, marketing, information management, telecommunications, property management, personnel, finance, systems design, fundraising and program evaluation. This is not possible, regardless of size. A larger organisation may be able to hire some internal experts, but this is certainly not the case for a smaller organisation. Furthermore, the technology of management progresses today too rapidly for the non-specialist to keep abreast of new thinking and expertise, whatever the size. Outside expertise therefore is often a must for both the large and small organisation.

Too Small to Justify or Pay for Expensive Outside Advice

Most CSOs, even larger ones, often hesitate to spend money on administrative “overhead” such as consultants or other outside experts because this is seen as diverting valuable dollars from direct service. Of course, most CSOs have no choice. They don’t have enough money to even consider hiring consultants at for-profit rates. Low-cost, volunteer-based assistance often is an appropriate solution.

Networks are Lacking

Everyone outside the CSO sector observes, “Why don’t those chief executives get together more, share more ideas, and undertake cooperative ventures?” There are many reasons. First, running a successful organisation (delivering the quality service that fulfils the organisation’s mission) isn’t enough. Most CSO directors run a second business — raising money to support the first. Both are complex and very time-consuming activities, especially when the director wears all the management hats. Second, developing networks or researching joint ventures is time-consuming, expensive, and risky.

CSOs Usually Have Little Time and Money

Funders do not seem to think research and development activity justifies new expenditures; at least many are hesitant to fund what might not succeed. While CSOs may be more entrepreneurial than funders, they have little capital to risk. Collaborative planning will be enhanced by computerization and telecommunications, but these investments also are difficult to fund. In some ways, affordable consultants can substitute for expensive, up-front research and development costs, at least at the feasibility level. In many cases, they can carry an organisation through the needed planning to develop a new system of collaboration, merger, or automation.

CSOs Need Low-cost Management and Technical Assistance

CSOs are valuable community assets that must be effectively managed. The need to provide affordable, accessible management and technical assistance to CSOs is clear for all the reasons stated above: the complexity of the task, the lack of board and internal expertise, the lack of time and money, changing needs, the learning curve, and finally the importance of the results to the community. What is well done is based on what is well run.

Typical Nature of Planning in CSOs

Most CSOs, don't have a lot of time, money, or resources for sophisticated, comprehensive strategic planning. The focus is usually on the major issues facing the CSO and quickly addressing them. Typical major challenges for the facilitator are basic training of personnel about planning concepts and processes, helping the CSO to focus and sustain its limited resources on planning, ensuring strategies are strategic rather than operational/efficiency measures, and helping design small and focused planning meetings that produce realistic plans that become implemented.

Elements to Consider in Building Resilient Organisations

Built-in Agility

The term is now used more broadly, including in the non-profit world. Nowadays, successful CSOs use some or all the agile methodologies in their work. These methodologies focus on frequent inspection and adaptation of strategies and activities (usually every two weeks). They also include a leadership philosophy to encourage teamwork and clearly define short-term specific tasks. Agile CSOs focus on delivering results in self-managed teams. In those teams, the hierarchy is not as present as in traditional models of management. There is also a big focus on transparency and an emphasis on frequent, short conversations. Immediate feedback is preferred instead of long meetings.

Agile CSOs are all about responding to change rather than following a dusty yearly plan sitting somewhere on the office shelf.

If a CSO is to be successful today, it needs to face change and unexpected risks continuously successfully. The agile methodology can really help with learning and adapting fast. And organisations that can learn and adapt fast are the ones that are successful in today's environment.

It can be difficult to change the culture of a non-profit and get everyone on board with agile methodologies. This is especially the case if the CSO has been around for a while. The old and established habits and patterns are hard to break. It's important to remember that 'agile' is not about one single thing, about one single methodology.

Agility is a philosophy that you can adapt and distil into something understandable and applicable to your organisation. But just adopting a methodology for the sake of it won't make your organisation succeed. There is no 'one-size-fits-all agile' methodology, nor is anyone's methodology guaranteed to deliver certain results. The secret is in experimenting until you find the way that will propel your organisation forward.

A Tenacious Focus on the Mission

An organisation's mission is its reason for existing, its purpose, where it is "headed". A successful CSO always remains focused on the mission, despite the firefighting that almost all of them need to do on an almost daily basis. A healthy CSO clearly articulates its mission into a mission statement and then shares it. The mission statement is shared alongside the vision and values with employees at every level of the organisation and all other relevant stakeholders.



Management in successful CSOs constantly shares goals with employees and gets them on board. Employees and managers in such organisations understand what is required to reach these shared goals. They feel ownership over them, and they take daily steps to accomplish them. In addition to that, successful CSOs are those which create a mission-oriented culture. In mission-oriented organisational cultures, employees have a clear sense of purpose. They understand how their roles contribute to the bigger picture and to the immediate and long-term goals. The purpose is a key ingredient for a strong, sustainable, and scalable CSO. It makes the work more enjoyable for employees and is an inspirational driver for engaging communities and other stakeholders.

A strong sense of purpose can fuel results and become an engine for organisational success. The connection between purpose and performance is clear. There's mounting evidence that aligning an organisation with a higher purpose drives results. In a successful and healthy non-profit organisation, mission, values, and purpose are not just words on a plaque on a wall – they're alive every day.

Ability To Mobilize and Inspire Others

Successful CSOs are able to mobilize and inspire their staff, their volunteers, and their donors. They constantly create meaningful ways to engage these individuals and connect them to the organisation's mission and core values. They build and sustain strong communities.

While successful organisations are really good at managing their internal operations and internal stakeholders, CSOs that have the highest impact are the ones that are able to mobilize every sector of society — government, business, non-profits, and the public. Great organisations push past the boundaries of their organisation. They inspire others to take action – leading by example and providing opportunities for others to engage with their cause.

While things like excellent non-profit boards, good Customer Resource Management (CRM) systems, and a great fundraising team are all necessary for a non-profit organisation to succeed, a high-performing non-profit organisation is relentlessly pursuing creating large-scale social impact.

To achieve that, an organisation needs to work with others and through others, and not work in isolation. Working with other organisations and individuals means that those non-profits can create much more impact than they ever could on their own.

organisations that mobilize and inspire others are the ones that create social movements, influence policies, and create conversations. Through their work, they change the attitudes and behaviours of the public. In a way, they are externally rather than internally focused.

These organisations understand that, in addition to providing high-quality programs and services to their beneficiaries, they need to advocate for change (usually by working with the government and starting grassroots movements).



Become Digitally-Savvy

Technology is transforming how civil society organisations work and how professionals engage with donors and supporters across online platforms. While offline fundraising still accounts for a significant amount of charitable giving, online fundraising is growing every year. A successful non-profit is on top of all things digital. It is constantly honing digital skills and acquiring knowledge of new tools, applications, and platforms.

While in the past it might have been enough to have some sort of digital information management system and a website, successful non-profits of today have integrated technology into much of their organisation's work.

This general ability to use digital technologies and to adapt to the changing digital landscape is often referred to as digital literacy. Digital touches everything in modern organisations, not just the IT department.

A successful CSO is digitally savvy. It has the digital expertise at the senior management level and a willingness to embrace the digital in many, if not all, of the organisation's undertakings. The digital can improve a non-profit's operational efficiency, increase mission impact, and enhance sector competitiveness.

Being a digitally savvy non-profit organisation is the only way forward, the only way to stay relevant and scale up. The difference, for example, between the giving 14 habits of the new generation and those of the generations before them is distinctly rooted in how they connect to organisations and causes digitally.

