



Nomakula Mrubata

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**THE FACTS** Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play the vital role of bringing socially uplifting services and facilities to communities when the government's unable – or unwilling – to do so. The terms “NGO” and “NPO” (non-profit organisation) have become largely interchangeable, but actually denote different things. The latter term indicates a core feature of NGOs – eg, any surplus funds they accumulate aren't shown as profit, but are ploughed back into the organisation.

**THE CHALLENGES** With poverty increasing and economic conditions deteriorating – both locally and globally – more and more people are turning to NGOs for assistance. Unfortunately, it's these exact conditions that are making it difficult for NGOs to survive, since they can no longer rely on donations or grants for survival.

**THE CHARACTERISTICS** Contrary to popular belief, NGOs aren't charitable foundations: instead, they're professionally run organisations which strive for financial independence. What's more, many of them are run by strong, highly competent businesswomen.

# Filling the Cracks

In 1994 there were an estimated 55 000 NGOs in SA. Today 56 552 are officially registered, although broader estimates put that figure as high as 100 000. Many of these organisations, born out of the HIV/Aids crisis and social ills such as poverty and violence against women, are headed or run by women. Four of them tell us how they've succeeded in the non-profit world

**I**n simple terms, NGOs exist to fill the gap between what communities need and what government can't or won't provide. As civic organisations, they fulfil a vital role in ensuring democratic accountability, although in SA questions still exist around the unmonitored establishment and accountability of NGOs themselves.

Structurally, NGOs can take various forms (CCs, companies, trusts, etc), but they all share two core elements: they aren't run by government (although they can receive funding from it) and they don't show a profit.

Funding is an ongoing focus and, in response to increasing economic pressures, there's a growing trend for NGOs which might previously have

operated in competition with each other to "engage themselves in networking with others to avoid duplication of their services", says Nomakula Mrubata, Rural Development Manager of Foodbank SA.

Along with this, NGOs are driven to "become more self-reliant and generate their own funds", as Yvonne Eskell-Klagsbrun, of Project Literacy, explains. Home Loan Guarantee Company's GM: New Markets, Ethel Matenge Sebesho, echoes this sentiment, adding that NGOs now recognise the need to operate according to strict business principles.

To this end, both women recommend approaching life in an NGO as one would to starting up a business or entering the corporate world: by planning, doing market research and hiring the best people for the job. ➤

**NOMAKULA MRUBATA,  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER:  
FOODBANK SA**

Mrubata seems to see hope everywhere – even in SA’s rural communities, where 60% of poverty in SA is manifest and where there’s little or no infrastructure to address starvation.

She’s part of the greater Foodbank SA team, which recently opened its doors in Cape Town with the purpose of “soliciting and distributing excess and donated food [from retailers and restaurants] to social service organisations whose focus is the poor and needy”. Based at the organisation’s offices, Mrubata focuses on “identifying and working with rural communities in implementing food relief programmes in these areas”.

She’s well equipped for the job, after 12 years as a social worker, during which time she ran a nutrition centre for malnourished babies, counselled couples, teenagers and families, and was nominated (and short-listed for) for several top awards. But while she’s qualified in clinical and therapeutic group work, it’s community development that means the most to her. “I strongly believe that if you can engage people in their own development, it’s much easier for them

to achieve their goals. It makes them see their own worth and feel a sense of ownership in the development of their communities, so they get a sense of accountability.”

Although there are ongoing challenges – including funding – and terrible realities to face, such as seeing helpless children sick and suffering, Mrubata tackles every day with the optimistic view that “as one person, I can’t change the world, but I can change the world of one person”.

• For further information on Foodbank SA, tel: 021 685 0484, email: info@foodbank.org.za or visit: www.foodbank.org.za.

**ETHEL MATENGE SEBESHO, GM:  
NEW MARKETS, HOME LOAN  
GUARANTEE COMPANY (HLGC)**

The silence and elegance of HLGC’s reception has that “big business” feel to it. Matenge Sebesho’s office, however, is warm and welcoming – a dichotomy she explains by pointing out that “an NGO is a business like any other: the only difference is that our profits are all ploughed back into the business, rather than taken out as dividends”.

Matenge Sebesho herself exemplifies the belief that compassion and good business go



Ethel Matenge Sebesho

hand in hand. Twenty years as a banker at Standard Chartered Bank Botswana plus an MBA from the prestigious Brunel University in London have given her the empathy needed to connect with HLGC’s core mission: providing guarantees to lower-income earners who can afford loan repayments, but not deposits. Her experience has also given her the business savvy to help the company function independently.

So what prompted her move from the world of pure finance? “HLGC touched me because it was fulfilling a basic human need,” she says. “I’ve been involved in the finance business, so I know how difficult it is for low-income borrowers to access housing loans.”

Matenge Sebesho is now focused on new market development, working with other organisations to empower home buyers (especially first-time ones) in the rest of the continent. Although she agrees that work can be its own reward, she encourages women to “enjoy the fruits of their labour, whether that’s a house, a car or a holiday”.

• For further information on HLGC, tel: 011 726 3150 or visit: www.hlgc.co.za.

**YVONNE ESKELL-KLAGSBRUN,  
PROJECT LITERACY**

Eskell-Klagsbrun understands all too well that learning knows no age limit; after all, the organisation to which she’s dedicated her life since 1997 is based on that very premise. As the oldest and largest NGO in SA in its particular field, Project Literacy has

PHOTOGRAPHERS: ADAM LETCH & BRANDON BARNARD. HAIR & MAKE-UP: MARC BOSS USING L'ORÉAL PROFESSIONNEL

**NGO ESSENTIALS**

**Do I need to register my NGO?**

No – but there are many advantages to becoming one of the 56 552 NPOs who’ve voluntarily registered with the NPO Directorate, such as ensuring potential funders see you as a “serious” organisation.

**How do I fund my NGO?**

Tackle the issue properly from the outset. “An NGO today needs to generate its own funds and cover its own overheads to succeed,” says Yvonne Eskell-Klagsbrun. This means that even though a government department may be willing to contribute to your funding, or you might be able to access a loan from a corporate or a bank, you should build your NGO in such a way that it will start generating income of its own. Consider charging a fee for membership, or for some of your services, or even marketing related products.

**Do I need any special skills or training?**

No – but you *do* need the most skilled people on board. “The goals of your organisation will determine which skills you need in order to achieve them,” says Nomakula Mrubata. Don’t try to fulfil every function within your NGO yourself. Once you’ve identified your skills needs, identify people who have them – and always hire the best employees you can afford.

• For further information about setting up and registering an NPO, visit: www.npo.gov.za or www.etu.org.za. For information on Section 21 and other companies, visit: www.cipro.co.za.

been teaching adults of all ages basic literacy and numeracy for over 35 years.

Eskell-Klagsbrun made the leap to the organisation when she was already well entrenched as Head of Marketing for the (then) Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal. “I felt it was time for a career change. I was ready for the challenge,” she says.

Now, a decade down the line, she’s responsible for both raising funds and for the organisation’s communications – the aspect of her work she enjoys most. The job clearly hasn’t lost its freshness or appeal for her: “Project Literacy seeks to improve the quality of life for all, especially under-served populations – there can be no better reason to go to work every day.”

The most rewarding aspect of her job, says Eskell-Klagsbrun, is “witnessing people become whole, and seeing the change in them as they grow and become confident, responsible active citizens”.

Yvonne Eskell-Klagsbrun



While tirelessly investing her energy in making a difference in the lives of others, she’s also very focused on her own family life. “First and foremost, I’m a wife and mother,” she says. “Although my children are adults now and have families of their own, they’re

still very important to me. I’m a home-maker and love being with my husband.”

• For further information about Project Literacy, tel: 012 323 3446, email: info@projectliteracy.org.za or visit: www.projectliteracy.org.za.

**DELPHINE SERUMAGA, OUTGOING DIRECTOR: PEOPLE OPPOSING WOMEN ABUSE (POWA)**

The sound of children playing and laughing bubbles through Serumaga’s office from the park across the road in Berea, Johannesburg. She smiles and comments that eight years ago, when she joined Powa as Strategic Advisor, the park was all but deserted.

Born in Ireland and raised in Uganda, Serumaga started her career in Canada. “I worked as a counsellor in a women’s shelter,” she says. “I was struck by how many women I counselled had left their homes in Africa because of the conditions in their countries.” Having developed a passion for enabling more women to stay in their motherlands by improving the conditions for them there, Serumaga leapt at the opportunity to move back to Africa and spearhead a total revamp of Powa. At the end of her initial two-year contract, she accepted the offer of a board placement.

“It’s been a long, but successful journey,” she says. “I’m proud of everything we’ve achieved as a team.”

Yet despite Powa’s many successes, Serumaga says there’s still a great deal to be done in asserting women’s rights. And her main challenges are “keeping motivated and optimistic”, as well as dealing with ever-present financial pressures.

These challenges aren’t unique to Powa – which might explain the global trend among NGOs of pooling resources and forming coalitions in order to tackle joint projects. There’s also a trend for larger, more mature NGOs to play “big sister” to smaller, younger ones, helping them with everything from mentoring to managing their finances.

All in all, “it’s been a good journey”, says Serumaga, whose new role with Powa is likely to revolve around fund-raising and will continue to incorporate other African countries.

\* Contact Powa at tel: 011 642 4345 or email: info@powa.co.za

Delphine Serumaga



**NGO SUCCESS TIPS**

**Ask whether there’s really a need for the service you’re offering.** Also, ensure you aren’t duplicating one which already exists.

**Get to know the community.** It’s essential to get their buy-in and input from the start, says Delphine Serumaga, of People Opposing Women Abuse.

**Write a sound business plan.** This is a vital part of obtaining funding.

**Build in self-generating finance.** Ethel Matenge Sebesho emphasises the need to generate revenue and cover your own operating costs.

**Consider registering a Section 21 company.** This means you’ll be taxed as a non-profit organisation (NPO) and that the NGO is a separate legal entity to you.

**Hire the best people.** Yvonne Eskell-Klagsbrun dismisses the perception that NGOs attract mediocre talent.

**Build a good track record.** Nomakula Mrubata says this, as well as a properly audited set of books, are essential when approaching donors. **D**