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Blog: 'Beyond the outbreak and imagining the aftermath: Emerging issues from the global south.'

'Beyond the outbreak and imagining the aftermath: Emerging issues from the global south.' Key discussions from practitioner and stakeholder colloquium organised as part of SBM public engagement.

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Introduction

In response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Non-profit organisations and communities, the School of Business and Management (SBM), as part of public engagement, organised a colloquium with practitioners and stakeholders to gain insight into some of the emerging issues and lessons learned so far. Importantly, the colloquium follows a key mission for the School of Business and Management: *To create knowledge by engaging with private, public, and voluntary organisations.* Furthermore, the significance of fostering supportive and engaging dialogue between academia and practitioners is beneficial to understand and explore key applications in management practice and education. The themes discussed included the coping mechanisms of UK based non-profits and social enterprises, the impact of COVID 19 on small NGOs and diaspora organisations, the role and voice of diaspora, International perspective - Poverty, Security and conflict resolution in COVID affected countries, the role of the civil society in awareness building and prevention to Covid-19, lessons from Mexico (Social change), and lastly, international grantmakers perspective. Importantly, as part of the School's mission to engage with the voluntary sectors to create knowledge and develop inclusive education, leading practitioners in the sector, stakeholders representatives from the global south, international grantmakers, and diasporan group organisations were invited to share and exchange knowledge. In addition, as part of contributing to the discourse of non-profit management education, key discussions points were presented at the 2021 DSA (Development Studies Association) Conference, Unsettling Development, hosted by the University of East Anglia.

The colloquium, held in 2020, was part of the School of Business and Management (SBM) practitioner engagement in the context of our involvement with the non-profit sector via our Degree Apprenticeship in Business and Management (Social Change) programme and our more general emphasis on inclusive education, recognising and including contributions and narratives from local community organisations and communities in the Global South in our teaching more generally. In addition, the aim was to extend the conversation beyond the outbreak and imagining the aftermath. This blog article brings together contributions and discussions from the event.

The non-profit sector stems from a rich history of social responsibility, which has been the foundation of social policy for centuries and has led to partnerships with government and private sectors in service delivery. Therefore, NPOs (non-profit

organisations) are familiar with the pressures of adhering to rigorous evaluation methods based on performance measures. The sector is currently going through unprecedented change because of the impact of the global pandemic. The impact of Covid 19 on non-profit organisations has contributed to the exacerbation of the challenges for small and medium-size non-profit organisations and community-based organisations (CBOs). The impact on the economy, reduced funding, travel restrictions, lockdown measures, political instability in developing countries has affected the performance, strategy, and capacity to carry out their roles.

With the disruption caused by the pandemic, we are interested in understanding the impact of the global pandemic on community-based organisations and NGOs and how new players such as neighbourhood associations and groups have reconfigured their purpose as responses to the effects and impact of the pandemic on communities. We ask the question, 'how do non-profit organisations involved in social change respond to changes and challenges in light of the global pandemic? Finally, we extend this discussion to the broader debate on understanding how organisations and communities adapt and reconfigure disruptive catastrophes.

Caution must be taken not to homogenise the diverse organisations that come under the term non-profit organisations. Non-profit organisations are diverse, and we acknowledge that the term non-profit organisation is a broad one and is made up of different types of organisations. Non-profit organisations include labour unions, professional associations, managerial associations, business organisations, consumer organisations, ethno-cultural organisations, religious organisations, social clubs, and neighbourhood groups. For this article, we are particularly interested in non-profits that are in the field of social change.

The next section highlights some of the key discussion points from the SBM practitioner engagement event significant for non-profit management educational practice.

Key areas of discussion from the colloquium

Four key areas of discussion are highlighted in this section: the rise of community self-help groups, shrinking civic space, deepening power tension and competition, and community of practice.

The rise of community self-help groups due to the impact of the pandemic

- The global pandemic had a significant impact on organisations and communities. For example, the travel restriction and lockdown measures adopted by many countries impacted the mobility of people, most especially movement across and within countries. Vulnerable communities were heavily impacted, especially those in conflict affected zones and remote areas. This meant that some communities could not be reached by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) due to the travel restrictions and lockdown measures. The International humanitarian and Northern-based NGOs that usually provided some support, were themselves facing critical threats from the pandemic due to funding constraints, increase in demand for their services and costs of running the business, with staff furloughed, restriction to travel and complex government regulation that has not been experienced before. Further, many community-based and non-profit organisations that depended on international funding were affected and struggled financially and capacity wise.
- As many African countries went under lockdown, many communities struggled due to a lack of social protection, limited government support and the limited NGOs support due to the travel restrictions. Those in remote areas and conflict-affected regions struggled to get the help and support needed, leading to many community and neighbourhood associations springing up and redefining their purposes to support their communities and neighbourhoods. In some communities, food and

medical supplies were distributed by community or neighbourhood members. Some of the funding was understood to come from diaspora remittances. Self-help groups such as community associations and neighbourhood groups came together to support their communities; groups whose roles were more social groups reconfigured their purpose to provide help and support to their communities.

- Diaspora groups and organisations are said to have played a major role during the pandemic. However, the pandemic impacted many in the diaspora; some lost their jobs and, therefore, their ability to send money home. However, the remittances sent home helped individuals, and some of the local groups and associations distribute palliatives to individuals and people in need.

Shrinking civic space

- The shrinking civic space in many parts of the continent, driven by political factors, is a significant development to explore. The increasing control and restriction of civil societies through policies regulation is significant. Civil societies in Cameroun, Nigeria, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are experiencing the use of strict regulation to curb their activities. This is especially so for organisations involved in advocacy. Some NGOs and CBOs in Nigeria have seen their bank accounts frozen, especially after the 'End SARs movement'. However, it is important to note that this has not deterred civil societies from finding other means to push for change. For example, social movements groups use technology and innovative means to push back (Kode, 2018). Although some governments are trying to restrict technology use and social media apps, it has not stopped activists and advocates from sending their messages across.

Deepening power tension and competition

- A point of discussion is the deepening power tension in terms of competition among non-profits on the continent. This is not merely in terms of funding but also how these organisations work with donors who have their agenda.
- Limited resources for non-profits add increased pressure amidst competitive NPOs to receive support. Therefore, significant demand for resources in non-profit organisations creates an urgency of replenishing resources, which takes precedence over service outcomes. This often leads to a greater risk of failure, thereby risking substantial support for communities in need (Salamon, 1994). Furthermore, there is awareness of the dismissal of eligibility for funding human social service type organisations among such pressures. The global pandemic exposed some of the inequalities that exist.
- Additionally, there is competition with private sector organisations that also engage in human social services, providing complexity for the NPOs to balance competitive advantage over internal resources. Therefore, this requires the organisations to stay abreast of what the competition offers and maintain their organisational objective. It is worth understanding how these organisations maintain their organisational objectives in a period where many NPOs are going through reconfiguration.

Community of Practice

- The Community of Practice (COP) Theory is centred on practices shared by a mutually defined community (Wenger, 1998). A significant aspect of COP theory is understanding how learning and sharing knowledge contribute to an organisation's practice. A crucial aspect of knowledge sharing is Knowledge Management and Information Management. The amalgamation of individual knowledge and collective organisational knowledge becomes an authority to influence decision making, organisational approaches to practice, documentation, reporting, and daily tasks. Subsequently, a vital component in the influence of individual knowledge use and application is how the daily interactions for individuals in an organisation are essential components of Knowledge Management, sharing, and learning. Importantly, understanding how local communities create alternative narratives, a shared sense of humanity across religion, cultures, and traditions—different forms of knowing, of evaluation has value for management education. As changes are taking place and issues emerging, there is a need to draw on the experiences of practitioners, researchers, communities, and educators. Furthermore, the expertise of community

building and community of practice can be beneficial for organisations of private, public, and the Non-profit sector.

Discussion points significant to us as non-profit management educators.

- The discussion about deglobalisation is significant. Deglobalisation is nearly always a time of stand-off among great powers. What is also important is that two other developments occurred during the last deep deglobalisation that reshaped non-profit organisations. The first was the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations within African and Asian countries. The second was the strategic use by African and Asian non-profits of the forums available to them at the international level. Therefore, it is significant to follow the trajectory if something analogous emerges during this period of deglobalisation.
- The use of technology can present high expectations both internal to the organisation and external that may be unnecessary and may impede progress in times of crisis. This may be especially so for grassroots and small non-profit organisations reliant on essential and basic procedures to feed, clothe or shelter their service users. The value of collaborations, knowledge sharing, individual value, organisational values, and technology to help incorporate and access useful knowledge for workers often is lost with the application of misappropriated technology (Finn, Maher, Forester, 2006). Technology can be an effective way to reach large or communities in remote areas. However, more needs to be written about inclusivity, those excluded, and whose voice we are not hearing.
- Exploring performance management and evaluation is also an important discussion point to explore. Speculation presents whether the external expectations and performance measures imposed on NPOs by funding bodies and external partners are conducive to NPO strategy, operational nature, and organisational culture. This is particularly so in the face of disruptive catastrophes such as COVID-19. As funders have also been affected by COVID-19, will there be more understanding for the NPO? Performance evaluations are often used to determine how to fit an NPO to compete for resources or exist as an organisation entirely. However, standards and measures of external funding sources may be restrictive to an NPO's organisational nature, leading to misinterpretation and inability to adopt effective measures and standards beneficial to NPOs (Miljkovic, 2006). Assessing an NPO without discernment for a unique context in which it operates can negatively affect the organisation and have a far-reaching negative impact on the community dependent on a particular NPO, as in the case of many humanitarian organisations. It is important to explore whether newly reconfigured community-based organisations will scale up, sustain their current role, and build alliances with internal donors and local partnerships.

Conclusion

We presented some discussion areas for issues non-profit organisations traditionally face, which disruptive catastrophes can also intensify. The perspective of human interaction and the impact on an organisation and communities are essential in a sector where the reliance on donors and how they respond to other actors and their environment is a dominant factor. Non-profit organisations, particularly those involved in social change, are already in underserved and underrepresented communities, forcing them to respond with limited resources to immediate crises, such as shelter, food, housing, and health services. On the other hand, community-based, grassroots, social care type organisations offer an experience of crisis intervention, recovery, and limited resources through their COP that may benefit current responses to COVID-19 in the public and private sector, seeking to integrate historically excluded communities.

Finally, we end with implications for non-profit management educational practice and the involvement of Schools like SBM in the emerging community of practice. The emerging community of practice allows for more inclusive education and epistemic trust necessary in knowledge exchange and collaboration with diverse organisations within the UK and the global south. This can aid knowledge exchange, inclusion of local knowledges and narratives that form part of knowledge and practice in SBM.

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