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Project Management for NGO's/CSO's

One of the important development agents that complement the effort of governments of developing countries in their developmental issues is Non-Governmental Organizations, hereafter referred to as NGOs. NGOs are part of the civil society sector, distinct from government and the private sector. NGOs are legal, not-for-profit organizations that are community-based, voluntary in character and pursue humanitarian, developmental, environmental or relief activities and deliver social services.

Non-governmental organizations have a history dating back to at least 1839. International NGOs played a key role during the anti-slavery movement and participated actively in the movement for women's suffrage and reached a peak at the time of the World Disarmament Conference. However, the phrase "non-governmental organization" only came into popular use with the establishment of the United Nations Organization in 1945 with provisions in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the United Nations Charter.

Most Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have dynamic (even visionary) leadership with the ability to imagine innovative solutions to community needs. Most also have a deep reach into and trust in their communities; they can both mobilize and engage constituents, understand their challenges and concerns as well as translate them into policy with nuance. These are areas where leadership skills can be nurtured, and cultures of inclusivity, accountability and evidence orientation strengthened.

To facilitate their work, NGOs/CSOs need to source/access financing from public sources or from donors. They also need to report to their members, contributors, and beneficiaries on how funds are used. Donor requirements, public reporting and accountability standards in these areas are increasing in their detail and complexity. Unfortunately, many NGOs/CSOs lack both administrative systems (infrastructure and project management capacity) to operationalize their ideas, and human resource expertise to implement their goals.

The funds that donors contribute to the NGO's mission require prudent management of, and accounting for such funds. It is also necessary for NGOs/CSOs to measure what they are doing and the impact on their respective target communities. Adequate project management methodology application will also assist to provide NGOs/CSOs with the tools they need to help them achieve their project deliverables for development the communities they serve.

The increasing role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the development of communities and the attention they attract globally have made them indispensable in the current political, social, and economic dispensation in Trinidad and Tobago and the world at large. However, the question of the impact of NGOs' projects or interventions on rural communities has been a major issue of concern.

Projects of NGOs benefited communities for an extended period (long-term impact) other only benefited the communities for a brief time (short-term impact). Two main factors that have accounted for the short-term impact of NGO projects in Trinidad and Tobago are implementation inefficiencies of projects and lack of effective participation of the local people in the activities of the NGOs. The latter is a consequence by the fact that majority of the people are not aware of the existence NGOs and their projects or initiatives. For rapid and sustainable development of communities, there must be a conscious effort by development agents to implement projects that will bring long-term impact on communities.

To promote the long-term impact of NGOs' projects, NGOs must practice Community-NGO-Donor networking during the initiation and implementation of projects and training of staff in proper project management methodologies. Also, private citizens can support NGO-centered development by contributing their resources to support local NGO projects.

NGO's work in different fields of life, but most associ-

ated with the groups seeking some social change and improvement on social grounds. They tend to play an increasingly prominent role in the development sector of this country and the region, widely praised for their strengths and capacity to pursue participatory people towards the fight for development and to fill gaps left by the failure of countries across the developing world in meeting the needs of their most vulnerable citizens. For NGOs to manage the different verticals of planning, preparation, and budgeting in development, much more demand must rest upon the shoulders of a qualified project management team/personnel.

Successful project managers and their teams in non-governmental organizations are true heroes, delivering benefits to external stakeholders whose lives may very well depend on them. Development projects in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, large and small, depend on effective project management to gain maximum value from every penny donated by individuals and donor organizations. Proper project management methodologies and adequate project management software can be a conduit in assisting NGO's in achieving their short term and long-term goals in the community they serve, especially in these challenging socio-economic times.

Derwin Antoine
Lecturer, CCLCS