

A Message to NGOs in the “Third World”: Stop Burning Tyres, Turn on the Charm AND Common Sense (Part Two of Sorts)

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If your non-profit organisation or non-governmental organisation (NGO) is in a vulnerable state financially, there are more effective and sustainable ways of securing funding than publicly shaming or embarrassing any entity—whether it be the government, a corporate citizen or anyone really—that you feel SHOULD want to help you. Taking a proactive, well thought out, strategic and holistic approach to securing funding will prove more fruitful and serve your organization far better in the long term, trust me!



For starters, before you ever make the decision to make a case for why an external entity should fund you, make sure that you are 100 percent supported by all of those involved in the organization. When I say ALL, I mean ALL—what percentage of their salaries has your staff committed to ensuring the sustainability of your NGO? You? Your directors? And any partners you have in business? I’m sure that sounds crazy to you because you all already work so hard for the organization, but the reality is no matter how much work you do on a daily basis to keep the cogs turning at your organization, as a potential external donor or funder, I want to know that you have put your money where your mouth is! And, you should lead with the fact that you have when approaching potential financial supporters. After everyone is fully subscribed—and everyone is a financial supporter—it is time to evaluate how much support you need in order to be viable over time. How much money do you need to sustain your operational/project costs over the next year? The next two years? The next five years? And, what’s the plan for self-sufficiency after that? Once you have answered those questions, it’s time to turn on the charm that I mentioned. Remember, **fundraising is about relationship-building—developing, nurturing and maintaining long-term**

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relationships with funders and potential funders. So, when you're launching a campaign to secure financial support, start by leveraging the hard-fought, authentic relationships you and your organization already have. Like every NGO worth its salt, you have extensive ties to the community/communities you serve and though the community members you serve may not have the financial means to assist, I'd bet money that each of them has access to someone or another organization that does have the means of offering some financial support. Don't wait until "water is more than flour," keep the people you serve informed about your NGOs financial situation and ask for their input, contacts and resources that can help build the organization's financial capacity. Reach out and introduce yourself and your NGO to those contacts and resource organizations suggested by your immediate network and let them know that you have. If we return to our dating reference, this is like being set up on a date by a close friend—the communities that you serve(or your matchmaker) love and respect you and are only going to match you with potential funders or resources to attract funders (your dates-to-be) that they think are worthy of your time. These could be individual donors, government representatives and corporate citizens with whom you can build a long term relationship if you initiate the relationship in the **right way**. After you have begun to cultivate relationships with different potential funders and funding opportunities start opening up to your organization, make sure you apply the same thoroughness to the process that I suggest you apply to developing and fostering the relationships with these funders. This will go a long way in making sure that funders take your NGO and its needs seriously as well as commit to helping you sustain it over time. And, be sure to entertain more than one funding opportunity at a time. While going through the lengthy application process for access to government monies and that of bigger funding institutions and grant makers, there are other funding options you can pursue:

1. **Request meetings with potential corporate social responsibility funders and partners whose goals align with your NGO's goals.** Make a case for project or programme support over a number of years and demonstrate how said project/programme will enrich the communities you serve.
2. **Look at ways to leverage technology to grow your financial capacity**—develop an online, local giving campaign for the people that you serve to offer their support and consider launching an international crowd funding campaign

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on a slightly larger scale to target your developing nation's diaspora. With each one, tailor the way you tell your story so that it is relatable to the people you hope to engage—for expats, how will your work make their homeland a better and more enriched place that is poised for global recognition? For locals, how will your work benefit their daily lives or that of their families, friends, neighbours? Speak to these key points in your pitches.

- 3. Research and apply to international funding opportunities designed to support projects/ NGOs with your area of focus.** They are out there and often, under subscribed and utilised. Some “third world” NGOs have such hyper local tunnel vision (because they serve small, niche communities) that they don't realize that more times than not, there are international funding opportunities available to them as well. Finding those may take a little extra effort, but putting in the work at the outset to find these opportunities could pay off in huge dividends down the road.
- 4. Partnering with like-minded international NGOs is also a way to pool resources and garner longer term support—both from a financial and programme-capacity building standpoint.** Apply the same rules to building relationships with all of your potential supporters, from online givers to potential partner NGOs, by taking a genuine interest in them and what they do because genuine interest begets genuine interest and concern. Not sure how to find like-minded organisations? Google is your friend!

You're a worthy cause that can attain sustainable funding. You just have to invest time and energy into doing the research and building the right relationships! Burn tyres no more, turn on the charm [and common sense], go forth and get funded!

Photocredit: Tyre burning in the road [Photo Credit: dawn.com]

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