Chapter X

The Internet as a Fundraising Tool for Marginal Communities in South Africa

Fazila Farouk
SANGONeT, South Africa

David Barnard
SANGONeT, South Africa

Abstract

This chapter discusses the challenges facing social justice organisations working in the South African non-profit sector in their attempts to harness new technologies to promote their causes as well as their sustainability. The chapter uses online fundraising as a medium to elaborate on the difficulties that social justice organisations face engaging with an online audience that is racially skewed and not close to its issues. It goes into length discussing the limitations of a sector that is further hamstrung by a lack of appreciation for the online platform and which is not being driven into adopting ICT solutions due to the sluggish transformation of the ICT policy landscape.
Introduction

(The) new world order...can be better understood in terms of the paradox of a situation in which we are increasingly witnessing dazzling technological and economic breakthroughs without corresponding social, political, and normative innovations. These epistemological lags are inducing economic growth without employment, political mobilisation without political efficacy, and cultural diversity without tolerance and civility. (Tehranian and Tehranian, 1997)

A restricted portion of the global village, fuelled by innovation and technology, is leapfrogging into the new millennium building a life of comfort and convenience for themselves. The rest of the world stands by the wayside watching wantonly as their dreams fade away with each jump that the chosen few take away from them. At the same time, social justice actors wring their hands in frustration at the resultant exponentially expanding gap between rich and poor and the escalating challenge it poses for them.

The context of current development is complex and challenging. With the new global economy built on technological innovation, countries that prosper are those that both produce and consume high-technology products, while the non-consumers slip out of the sustainability loop. Moreover, the producers of new technology products and solutions are largely accepted to be Western countries where innovation is given a helping hand by an abundance of resources.

In this part of the world, even sectors that are not conventionally associated with high-tech solutions, such as the non-profit sector, have integrated technology into the routine of their business. One innovative idea that has emerged in the last decade or so is the use of new technologies to consolidate the resource base of civil society organisations (CSOs). In this regard, the use of the Internet as a fundraising tool is one of the most popular technological innovations to be introduced to CSOs in recent times.

In the West, Internet fundraising has grown enormously, becoming an integral part of the sustainability of the non-profit sector. Its growth is based on the ease with which it facilitates the act of donating in a society where the Internet has become the first port of call for information and services. Indeed, the response to the December 2004 South Asian Tsunami disaster has demonstrated the might of the Internet as a fundraising tool. For example, in January 2005, PND News, an online newsletter of the Foundation Centre, argued that in the United States, 85% of the $35 million raised by UNICEF within 10 days of the disaster came by way of online credit card transactions. It is interesting to note that disaster relief is amongst the most popular causes in the online fundraising world (Farouk
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