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PARTNERING DURING THE PANDEMIC: Lessons for Building Better, Together



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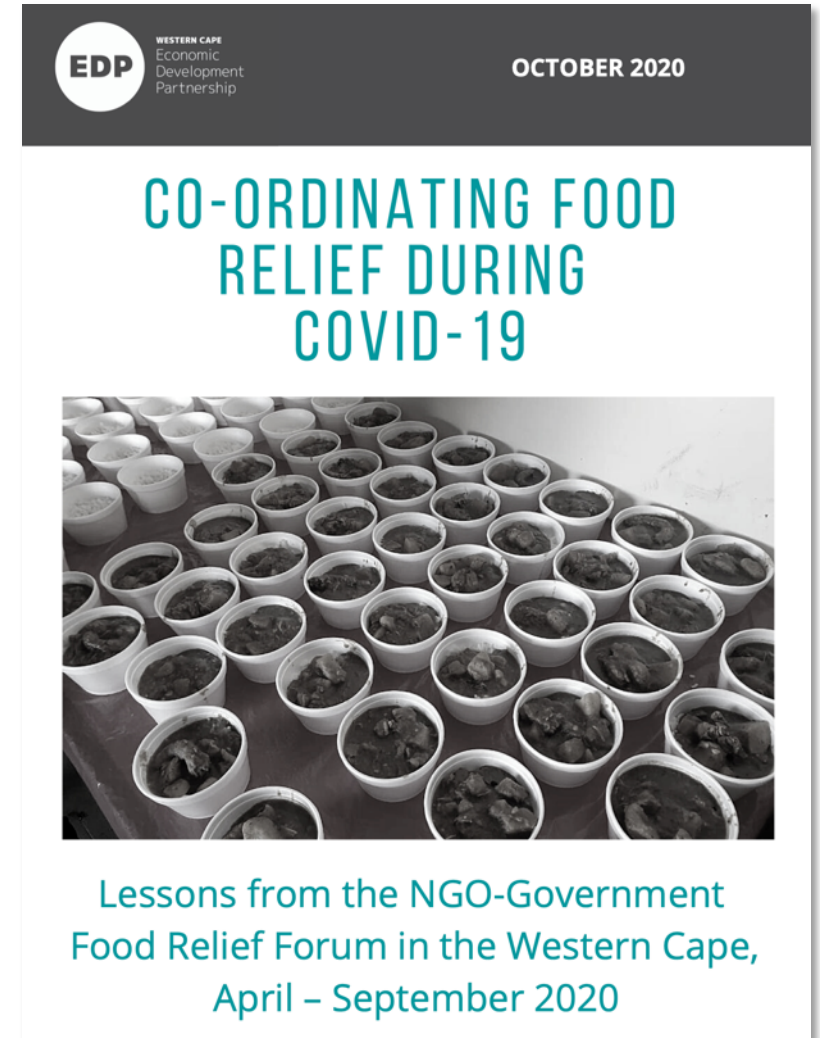
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Responding to the Covid food crisis (1): Connect, Communicate, Collaborate

Approach of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum

- Organise a 'whole-of-society' approach towards meeting food needs in vulnerable communities during the Covid-19 crisis
- Accurate two-way information and intelligence gathering and sharing about who is doing what and where
- Collective problem solving and unblocking
- Partnering between NGOs, between civil society and government and within government
- Build relationships of trust that can endure beyond the crisis



Report available on the EDP website [here](#)

Food Forum Results

During the first four months of the crisis,
CSOs in the WC collectively provided over
5,2m 'person days' of food relief

1. Connected organisations and sectors that otherwise may have worked in isolation
2. Served as a platform for CSOs and government to access intelligence that they did not have on their own
3. Created processes to collect and collate data on civil society food relief
4. Identified issues that were blocking effective distribution of food relief, and joint problem-solving processes
5. Established new relationships between the public sector and civil society with respect to food relief as well as more general responses to Covid-19
6. Collated and highlighted food relief innovations – logistics, new technologies, value for money, digital vouchers, measuring nutritional value
7. Demonstrated the value of civil society (responsiveness, flexibility, doing things differently) during a crisis
8. Raised broader societal awareness on the issue of food insecurity and poor nutrition

What made the Food Forum work?

As Forum convenor, the EDP played a collaborative intermediary role

- 1. Regular engagement** - Forum meetings were held weekly at the height of the crisis, and then every two weeks, and always at the same time. Meetings were business-like and ran to time
- 2. Co-create** - Each meeting was preceded with a shared agenda, to which participants were encouraged to contribute
- 3. Action-orientated** - The focus was on 'doing' rather than 'debating'
- 4. Adaptive approach** - During a crisis, things change quickly. Members were encouraged to 'step into action', rather than wait for the 'perfect plan' or 'perfect data', and at the same time to regularly reflect, evaluate, learn, and adapt and adjust
- 5. Speedy communications** - A full report for each meeting, including agreed action points, was distributed on the same day as the meeting
- 6. Accountability** - Where participants delivered on their actions or provided solutions to issues raised, this was communicated to the rest of the Forum immediately
- 7. Decentralised** - Participants were provided with direct contact details for those who could assist them individually. The Forum did not try and coordinate all activities of all members but rather encouraged members to work directly with each other.

Impact enhanced by 'whole of government' approach and collaborative attitudes and behaviours of officials

- The impact of the Forum was enhanced through its access via the EDP to the Western Cape Government's bi-weekly (later weekly) Humanitarian Cluster Committee (HCC), a 'whole-of-government' approach to the crisis incorporating seven provincial government departments, SASSA, the City of Cape Town and five District Municipalities
- This meant that government officials participating in the Forum were able to represent and act on an integrated government mandate, emphasising the importance of **creating partnerships within and between public sector institutions** which in turn enhances partnering and collaboration between government and civil society
- Government officials participated in the Forum in an open, engaging and non-defensive manner. These attitudes and behaviours assisted the process of trust-building

Responding to the Covid food crisis (2): Supporting community kitchens and the local food economy

The Community Kitchen Initiative:

- EDP partnered with DG Murray Trust and Cape Town Together
- Raised and dispersed over R2 000 000 through private donations
- Supported 110 community kitchens
- Sent weekly R1000 vouchers to kitchen organisers by cell phone
- Purpose - to buy nutritional food
- Provided support for six months
- EDP verified and liaised with all kitchens
- EDP built relationships with donors

Lessons

- Working with community kitchens takes time and resources
- Need a single contact person, with a back up
- Need clear, regular, reliable communication
- Can't make assumptions about access to phones, WA, data, transport etc
- Work with community organisations on the ground

Responding to the Covid food crisis (2): Supporting community kitchens and the local food economy

The Community Economic Recovery Project:

- Funded by WCG Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism (R2 mill) and DG Murray Trust (R1 mill)
- Implemented by the EDP and DGMT
- Injecting cash into local economies in COVID-19 hotspot areas over six months
- R1000 vouchers to 225 community kitchens every two weeks
- To be spent at spazas and local food suppliers
- Areas: Atlantis; Khayelitsha; Elsies River; Mitchell's Plain; Masiphumelele; Tulbach; Bella Vista; Ceres; Saron; Worcester; Zwelethemba; Grabouw; Villiersdorp; Mossel Bay; George
- Can buy food, electricity and data

Lessons

- We built on lessons learnt from Community Kitchens Initiative
- Relationships are key. Technology is not foolproof. Lots of time required to resolve technical issues.
- Important to provide choice and dignity
- Some beneficiaries ignore sms messages as a result of phishing
- Implementing team has had to work collaboratively to find solutions
- Working with informality we have had to adjust our ways of communicating and measuring impact

Doing things differently?

The 'value' of a crisis - stakeholders are motivated to do things differently to ensure that food relief reaches poor and vulnerable areas, e.g.:

- Emphasis on taking action rather than time-consuming processes
- Relationships of trust and solidarity are valued
- Attitudes and behaviours are more open and collaborative, with less emphasis on mandates and boundaries
- Officials interpret public sector regulations in a way that gets things done
- Provincial and local government welcomes the role of CSOs and private citizens

The return to a post-crisis 'business as usual' approach to governance is potentially swift. Yet, while we may be past the pandemic peak, we need to address the devastating socio-economic impact of the pandemic. How do we build together, better?

For example, Food Forum members are figuring out ways to shift beyond food relief to sustainable and equitable food and nutrition systems

Propositions for doing governance differently (1)

1. Shift the traditional public sector 'community engagement' approach from tick-box 'participation' - mainly commenting on government policies and plans - to 'partnering', which involves co-planning and co-implementation
2. Government should focus as much on how it can **support and enable community-led recovery ideas and actions** as on delivering its own projects and programmes
3. Dealing with informality. The onerous public sector regulatory environment makes it difficult for government to channel public resources to organisations that are not 'formalised' and 'registered'. Yet the majority of community-led initiatives – food kitchens, community gardens, micro-farmers, ECD centres, traders and spazas in the local food system, waste pickers, etc, are informal and unregistered, and therefore, 'unseen' and 'unvalued'

Propositions for doing governance differently (2)

4. We measure what we value. Relationship-building matters and needs to be valued and measured accordingly within public sector monitoring and evaluation systems
5. Intermediary organisations can play a vital role in organising sustained collaboration between government and civil society (and other sectors)
6. During Covid, because of physical distancing, the digital divide has grown even greater. CSOs need to be specifically empowered to participate in engagements through access to data and connectivity



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