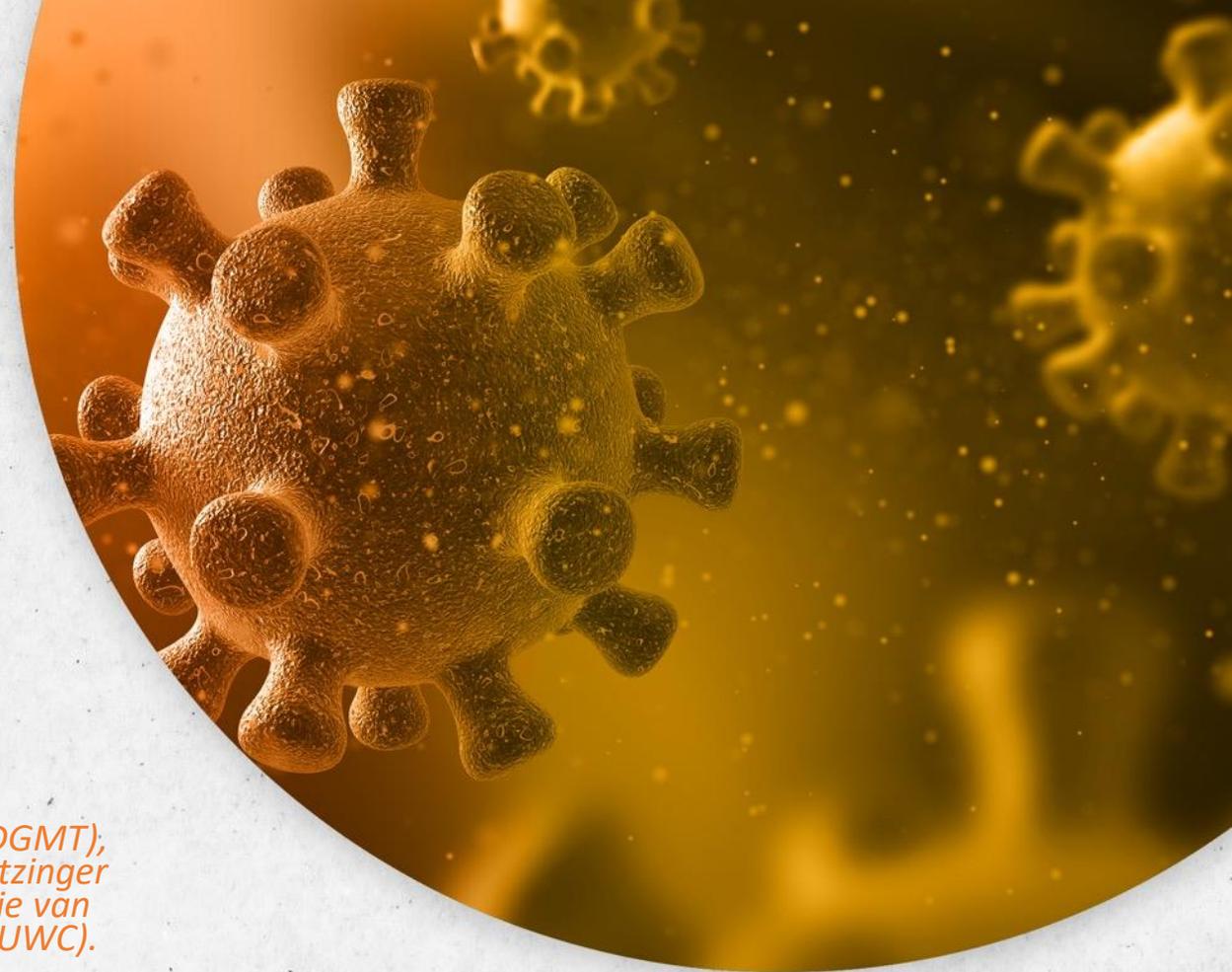


Chapter 8: *The experience and response of civil society to the Covid-19 Pandemic*

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LET'S GROW SOUTH AFRICA TOGETHER

What we'll cover today

- Framing this Chapter and its place in South Africa's Covid-19 story
- Unpacking the mobilisation strategies of various groups
- Exploring specific interventions & innovations by civil society
- How we move forward: the relationship between civil society and the State



Our nation is one body, and civil society is its neuro-electric system that can sense and signal changes in every cell. Without it, government becomes less and less responsive to need, and communities more and more alienated.

(Harrison, 2020)

Mobilisation strategies: Community; FBOs

- **The Family unit – Micro level**

- Intense lockdown experienced at the family level.
- Multiple activities – working from home, teaching, care work.
- Adverse impact on women, children and vulnerable groups.

- **The community – two responses**

- A reactive response (community protests and mobilizations).
- A proactive response (self-reliance – building collaborative networks to bridge the gap between the govts and communities).

- **Faith Based Organizations**

- Loss of faith, livelihoods and adapting to new ways of worshiping (FB & YouTube)
- Solidarity – mitigating the physical and mental impact of the pandemic.
- Critiques of FBO's influence on govts responses and decision making without consultation from other CS formations (e.g. MAC).

Mobilization: Unions; Youth; Research Sectors

- **Trade unions and other worker organisations**
 - A sluggish response but unprecedented display of unity.
 - Pandemic exposed the exclusion of majority workers from legal protection, social benefit and union structures.
 - The sluggish response attributed to historical, organisational, economic, health and political issues.
- **Youth organisations and movements**
 - The revival of #feesMustFall and student activism.
- **Research – Civil Society and HSH's role in responding to the pandemic**
 - Missing voice of HSH and Civil Society in govts consultation and decision making.

What were some of the key interventions by civil society?

- Reducing the risk of transmission
 - *Sikhaba iCOVID-19 radio broadcasts*
 - *Getting PPE to community care workers*
- Getting food to the most vulnerable
 - *Digital Vouchers – the future of food relief?*
 - *Community Kitchens – investing into local relief efforts*
 - *Ensuring government continued to roll-out the school nutrition programme*
- Strategies to support continued learning and education
 - *The digital frontier (aided by zero-rating)*
 - *Mobilising connections with caregivers*
- The crisis in, and emerging power of, the ECD Sector
 - *The Real Reform and #SaveOurECDWorkforce Campaigns*
- An opportunity to reform our national relationship with alcohol

State/civil society engagement patterns during COVID-19

- Civil society has proven to be as critical a role player as in other pandemics
 - Filling gaps and performing work that government has no capacity to carry out
- However, is their recognition, regard and reward commensurate with their role in society?
- How have the lessons learnt from previous major pandemics been applied to inform state/civil society engagement in the current pandemic?

State/civil society engagement patterns during COVID-19

- Some engagement, partnership and new opportunities for collaboration
- Overall, patterns of engagement characterized by antagonism, consultation and service provisioning
- Missed opportunities to reimagine the role of civil society during times of crisis
 - In the establishment of entities such as the Solidarity Fund, government relied on the private sector rather than disaster relief entities or civil society experts
 - Limited consultation with civil society in the early days of the pandemic, and overreliance on biomedical experts, scientists, and the private sector
- Sometimes government processes impeded civil society efforts
 - E.g. through restrictions placed on food distribution mechanisms, making it difficult to provide emergency food relief

The future of state-civil society engagement

- Normalize routine engagement with civil society to improve collaboration and effective partnership
- Embed civil society involvement in national consultative bodies
- Develop protocols and strategies outlining the role of civil society in times of disaster
- Create processes and spaces for collective critical reflection on major lessons learnt during each pandemic, so that better and more effective processes are developed for future crises

“The chapter, which still requires further development, shows the undeniable goodwill and contribution of many thousands of South Africans acting in solidarity as a vibrant and creative civil society. Their efforts were not always solicited, nor appreciated or supported by Government though, which is the main recommendation of the chapter, that Government develop stronger routine engagement with civil society in order to ensure better collaboration and effective partnership.”