

HOW TO START AN NGO IN GHANA

Starting and managing an NGO in Ghana, or anywhere, can test the most saintly of spirits. Alright, perhaps we're exaggerating a little. But what we're trying to say is that setting up an NGO in Ghana (or Africa) is NOT EASY.

We'll make setting up an NGO or non-profit in Ghana a little easier over the next five steps.

(Head over to G-lish.org because we'll give you glimpses into our own NGO struggles and achievements straight from the NGO diaries from time to time.)

This document covers five main steps essential to setting up an NGO in Ghana. The first two are generic steps for anywhere in the world. The final three steps are for Ghana, specifically. Feel free to share this document with anyone who may be starting their own NGO anywhere.

1. Develop Your Vision and Mission
2. Develop Goals and Objectives
3. Set up a Board of Directors
4. Draft a Constitution
5. Register the Organization in Ghana

1. Develop Your Vision and Mission

You need a compelling vision and genuine commitment to that vision for the long-term. If you do things right you will go MaD (making a difference) in a way that fully benefits your target communities.

Vision and Mission will explain your organization's existence and focus its activities. And, this will "sell" your NGO to the world.

Writing a vision and mission is like crafting an elevator pitch: make it short, clear and a little intriguing.

But let's look at the difference between vision and mission first.

Vision

Your NGO's vision is what the community would be if the problem is solved. A vision is the "ideal situation" that you hope to achieve.

At the most basic level, your vision could be "World Peace".

Your mission would be to "eradicate conflict by..." and listing ways to do this.

G-lish's vision is "Economic independence and environmental regeneration for impoverished communities in Ghana."

Establishing a meaningful vision requires consultation and time. You must identify a problem that requires a solution. Sometimes this is very complex and technical and sometimes it is simple.

The best way to determine the vision, and thus problem to be solved, is to spend time with your target group/s to learn their needs, aspirations and future goals. The ability to be flexible and to listen is important. It's important to get it right now, before you start down the wrong path.

You might want to bring technology to help a community travel faster between two villages, but the community might really want and need a health clinic. Just because you have something to offer, does not mean that it is helpful to the community. You must learn to adapt your offer to the needs.

You should research organizations similar to the one you are starting to ensure you are not duplicating the work of other groups. It is more beneficial to address a neglected need, than a need that is already catered for, unless the other groups are not doing a good job. In that case, you can attempt to do better.

Your ideal community after the problem is solved is, therefore, the basis of your NGO's vision.

Why don't you try thinking about the problem in the community that you could solve and how it would look when it's solved? Then try writing that vision in less than 30 words.

Mission

If your vision is “to help impoverished communities in Ghana become economically independent and environmentally sustainable,” then *addressing* this vision becomes the *mission* of your NGO.

In other words, the mission is the “how” of your NGO. How you will get it done—in a few short sentences.

The mission consists of specific goals.

For example, the G-lish Foundation’s mission statement is:

“To help impoverished communities develop sustainable sources of income and establish practices that will regenerate the local environment for current and future generations”.

We also express this in a “tag line”: Income generation, re-generation, next generation.

Income generation refers to the projects we are developing to create sources of income, re-generation refers to the environmental work we are doing to “re-generate” the environment in the communities where we are working on income generation, and next generation refers to the future and the legacy we aim to leave.

Notice the emphasis on generation, hence “G” lish, a simple term incorporating our key vision and also nicely branding our organization—a bonus and point we planned for months before. (It’s also kind of cool that our names are Godwin and Gayle in Ghana).

Your NGO’s mission statement will serve as a guide for the direction of your organization. It will also clearly explain your focus to donors and the general community. Basically, it’s the steering wheel of your organization. You wouldn’t drive a car without a steering wheel (I hope), and you probably best not drive an NGO without a vision and mission.

The statement should be concise and incorporate the core values and philosophy of your NGO.

What is your NGO’s vision and mission? Can you express them in less than 30 seconds and less than 30 words? If not, try rethinking and re-crafting them on paper.

2. Establish Goals and Objectives

Establishing the goals and objectives of the non-profit or NGO is the next thing to do after determining the vision and mission. This is the same for any organization, small or large, and is fundamental to organizational development.

Let's talk about the difference between goals and objectives. Goals are the big hitting changes you aim to make happen. Your goals might be stated in your vision statement.

You know: World peace, eradicating extreme poverty, providing a community drop-in house, establishing a fair trade shop, or setting up a soup kitchen.

Objectives are actions that lead you towards achieving your goals, one by one.

Projectsmart.co.uk says this: "Poorly defined goals and objectives, or goals without objectives, pushes a project into overruns, territory battles, personality clashes, missed milestones, and unhappy clients. Goals and objectives must be clear statements of purpose that drives the end result of the project."

What this says is that things will get messy without goals and objectives. Like driving the car from, say, New York to Los Angeles, with no road map, driving wherever the road winds. Nice if you're driving a car with loads of time and money for fuel, but not if you're driving an NGO with limited time and resources. So, let's get to it.

Goals are the "What": What you're aiming for.

If playing football it would be: "Score 3 goals."

Objectives are the "How" you'll get there: "Kick the ball between the goal posts."

There's no point attempting to reach your goal if you don't actually do anything to get there. If you don't kick that ball you ain't going to score one goal.

It's smart to start your objectives with action verbs. They are "actions" after all.

Instead of: “the ball kicked between the posts” Write: “kick the ball between the posts.” The second sentence is stronger.

Instead of: “The delivery of 20 mosquito nets to Mampong” write “deliver 20 mosquito nets to Mampong.”

This is really a language issue and the aim is to keep it simple and strong. Start with action.

On the subject of “smart”, if you’re familiar with organizational development you would know that objectives should be

SMART:

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Timebound

Let’s say your goal is to *establish a fair trade shop selling products from Africa, starting with coffee*, then one of your main objectives would look like this:

Identify 20 cooperatives producing fair trade coffee in East Africa by September 2010

“Identify” is a nice, strong action verb to begin with.

But is this a SMART objective?

Let’s see.

Specific? Yes. In other words, the opposite of vague. We identify the number of cooperatives, the location and the date. We will know if we do not meet this objective.

Measurable? Yes. “20” and “September 2010” are very measurable objectives and we will know absolutely whether we meet these or not. There is no scope for ambiguity.

Achievable? This is more subjective, but if it's April now, this is certainly achievable. (This work is not for the lazy.) 20 might be pushing it, though. We might have to revise this objective.

Realistic? A goal might be achievable, but you need to ask if you have the resources—technical, financial, human—to realistically do it? If your objective is to identify 20 cooperatives and you have no access to the internet, a telephone or a fax, then it's probably not realistic. If you do, however, then it is a realistic objective. When you're writing an objective, be honest with yourself about your limitations and abilities. If you need help, seek it.

Timebound? Yes. This means you put a date on it. Our objective is beautifully time bound and we will certainly know if, when September rolls around, we have not met it.

So, you have goals and your SMART objectives. Your goals will be few and your objectives will be many—and SMART!

Try applying the SMART formula to your own organizations objectives and see if there are ways you can refine them to be SMART.

Doing good takes more than good intentions; it takes a lot of bad-ass planning too.

We could also put it like this:

“Goals are the things your NGO will do in the medium to long term to achieve its mission, while the objectives are the immediate and ongoing actions you will take to achieve your goals.”

So, let's look at this again.

Goals: The “What” you plan to achieve

Objectives: The “How” you plan to achieve it. Be SMART.

These first two steps are useful for starting an NGO or non-profit anywhere, not just Ghana or Africa. If you know someone operating an NGO somewhere else in the world, please send this document on to them.

The next steps will relate specifically to Ghana.

3. Set up a Board of Directors

Now that you have outlined your vision and mission, and hopefully set some realistic goals with SMART objectives, the next step in starting an NGO in Ghana is to set up a Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors serves as the governing body of your NGO. You can instate a maximum of five individuals. Ideally, they will share your vision and mission. These individuals should be experienced and have skills to supplement your own so that the NGO can achieve its vision and mission.

The size and structure of the Board of Directors and its composition may change depending on the needs and priorities of your NGO as time passes.

Your Board of Directors is expected to perform the following functions:

- Hire and supervise the Executive Director of your NGO
- Develop and approve budgets
- Develop policy
- Champion the cause of your NGO
- Represent your NGO to the larger community
- Mobilize funds for your NGO

They can perform any other function that you deem fit for them.

4. Draft a constitution

After setting up your board of directors, to establish an NGO in Ghana you must create a constitution. The constitution is a set of self-imposed governing principles by the NGO and therefore, must be consistent with the specific needs of your NGO.

The constitution stipulates specifically how your NGO will be run. It determines the structure, roles and responsibilities of those involved, and organization of your NGO. It also guides your organization's operations and activities. It should be clearly written, deliberately structured and be up-to-date to meet the needs of your NGO.

The constitution will guide the behavior of all staff and members of your NGO, including the behavior and actions of the Board of Directors and the Executive Board. Each member of your organization must have a copy of the constitution of your NGO for reference purposes.

Constitutions vary according to the specific needs of NGOs, however the following list is a guide of commonly included elements

- Official name of your NGO
- The vision/mission and goals/objectives
- Registered office
- The programme areas
- Members and qualifications and length of memberships
- Board size, responsibilities, structure
- Structure of board meetings
- Committee Structure
- Executive positions and functions and procedure for dismissal
- How your NGO is funded
- How funds are applied
- Amendment procedure for the amendment of the constitution

You can appoint a constitutional committee to draft the constitution and submit it to the board of directors and executive board for approval. Once approval is given, the constitution becomes the over-arching standard by which your NGO operates and regulates its activities, behavior and actions of all its members, including the board of directors and the executive board.

It is important for the constitutional committee to do close consultation with the board of directors, the executive board and the broad-base membership of your NGO to reduce the risk of disapproval of the drafted constitution.

It is wise to include a review of your constitution in your annual planning process so that you can adapt your activities to the needs of your NGO.

5. Register your NGO in Ghana

The important first four steps have been taken to profile the NGO.

1. Develop vision and mission
2. Set goals and objectives
3. Set up a Board of Directors
4. Set up a Constitution

Now, the big step:

5. **Register the NGO in Ghana.**

NGO registration laws differ from country to country. Since we're looking at Ghana, let's now take a look at the legal requirements and the registration steps for NGOs in Ghana.

It's a two step application process. The first step involves applying to the Registrar General's Department. The second step involves applying to the Department of Social Welfare.

1. Applying to the Registrar General's Department

Certificate to Commence Business and Certificate of Incorporation

The first step in the NGO registration process is to obtain a Certificate to Commence Business and Certificate of Incorporation.

Purchase the NGO registration form at the Registrar General's Department in Accra or at the regional post offices outside of Accra. The current cost of the form is nine Ghana Cedis, fifty Pesewas (9.50). Please note here that there are different

registration forms for registering different organization types. NGOs must pick the form marked “The Companies Code, 1963 (Act 179), Regulations of a Private Company Limited by guarantee.”

If unsure, ask the attendant and they will assist in selecting the right form. Sometimes officials will refuse to refund money if the wrong form is purchased so be sure to purchase the correct form.

Fill the form

Next, fill in the required information in the appropriate spaces on the form. Be sure to take enough time to do this correctly. Most importantly, it must be typed on a type-writer, not a computer. The trick is to make photocopies of the form and fill it out with ink, and then submit that photocopied, handwritten form with the original form to a typing professional to type the details in the required spaces with a typewriter on the original, using the copy as a reference. Typewriting services are available for a small fee at post offices. If you’re lucky enough to have a typewriter lying around, go for it (and set up a small side business for NGO registration applicants).

Some of the information that the registration form requires include:

- a. The name of NGO
- b. The objectives
- c. The first members of the Executive Council or Executive Board. The number must not be less than two persons and not more than twenty persons
- d. Particulars of Directors and Secretary, which include their names; nationalities; usual residential addresses; business occupation
- e. Name and address of Auditor. If you don’t have an Auditor, don’t worry because the Registrar will provide you with one upon approval of your application
- f. Address and P.O.Box of registered office; principal place of business

If in doubt or confused, contact the Registrar General’s Department or the National Board for Small Scale Industries at the regional levels for assistance.

After filling the form, submit it to the Registrar General’s Department together with the registration fees. The current amount is 250 Ghana Cedis. They will issue the certificate to commence business in about two weeks. It takes about

another week to get the certificate of incorporation. Keep in mind that everything takes time in Ghana and these timelines are just guides.

2. Applying to the Department of Social Welfare

NGO Status Application

After securing the certificate of incorporation from the Registrar General's Department to operate as a company, it's time to apply for NGO status from the Department of Social Welfare.

The Social Welfare Department is the regulator of NGOs in Ghana and is therefore mandated to issue certificates of recognition to organizations to operate as NGOs.

The requirements for registering an organization with the Social Welfare Department for NGO status have to be submitted to the national office of the Department in Accra and the approved fees paid in full.

- Certificates of Incorporation and to Commence Business from the Registrar General's Department
- Application letter on organization's official letter head addressed to
The Director
Department of Social Welfare
P.O.Box M. 230
Accra, Ghana
- Organization's constitution
- NGO profile form
- Social investigation report
Both the NGO profile form and social investigation report will be provided by the Social Welfare Agency near your organization's location
- A recommendation letter from the District, Municipal or Metropolitan Assembly in which your organization is located
- Any brochure or publication of your organization. This could be your organization's profile, which talks about your vision, mission, goals and objectives, your programme areas, your board of directors, your staff and any other useful information about your organization.

- Three copies of an endorsement letter from regional office of Departmental of Social Welfare. The Department of Social Welfare has offices in all the regions of Ghana.

It takes about one month to get the NGO status certificate.

Now, you're registered!

After completing the above steps and obtaining official NGO status, the challenge is to go MaD (Making a Difference) in Ghana—or wherever you are if you're reading this around the world.

If you are reading this around the world, email us at gayle@g-lish.org and tell us what you're doing. We'd love to profile your work on our site, G-lish.

Don't forget to tap into the wealth of local knowledge and experience in the communities in which your NGO will operate.

If you also have any additional useful information, do not hesitate to share with us because sharing is what makes the world go round.

This document was fully researched and written by Godwin Yidana and edited by Gayle Pescud.

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