Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT BY HUMAN RELIEF NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

VENESSA HORN

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Public Relations and Communication Management

Faculty of Informatics and Design

Supervisor: Dr E Ferreira

District Six, Cape Town
30 November 2023

DECLARATION

I, Venessa Horn, declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own unaided work and that the dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed: Venessa Horn   **Date: 30 November 2023**

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa. This study sought to understand how human relief non-profit organisations adapted their engagement with their stakeholders during the global COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

A qualitative research methodology was employed, based on a conceptual framework covering recent theory on stakeholder engagement; crisis communication planning, preparedness, and management; and the role of digital communication platforms – including social media – during times of disruption that call for rapid responses. The conceptual framework enabled the researcher to provide best practice guidelines to improve the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in crisis situations and for improved crisis preparedness. The primary research took the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with participants representing a purposive sample of four human relief non-profit organisations. This was preceded by a review of the sampled organisations' social media pages to gain insight into the background and context relevant to the primary research. The data was processed by means of qualitative content analysis, using categories derived from the conceptual framework and the different stages involved in the pandemic. This allowed the researcher to identify, examine, and interpret common themes in the participants' responses.

The findings show that despite challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the sampled non-profit organisations have actively engaged with their stakeholders, embracing technological advancements to assist them in their quest to fulfil their mandate and continue to assist those in need. They have adapted their engagement strategies to meet the needs of their stakeholders, whether by offering information and advice on how to keep safe during the pandemic or delivering crucial assistance during lockdown.

Measured against the best practice guidelines to improve stakeholder engagement during times of crisis, the findings show a deficiency in that little emphasis is placed on the internal stakeholders on the part of some of the sampled non-profit organisations. The researcher therefore recommends that internal stakeholders such as staff, volunteers, and members of the board be treated as a priority focus stakeholder group.

Further research is recommended to incorporate a larger sample of human relief non-profit organisations for a more widespread finding on the topic. Furthermore, additional research on the usage of the adapted stakeholder strategy by human relief non-profit organisations after the COVID-19 pandemic is recommended to understand the strategy's success following a global crisis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely wish to thank:

- God for His grace and mercy upon my life to complete this study. *Soli Deo Gloria.*
- All the participating organisations who agreed to participate in this study which would not have been possible without your valuable input. I stand in awe of your passion and commitment to serving humanity; may you continue to fight the good fight and make the world a better place.
- My supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Ferreira. Thank you for your academic guidance throughout my journey. It has been a privilege and honour to complete this dissertation under your leadership. I wish you all the best for your retirement.
- Nathan Kalam, Faculty Librarian. Thank you for your support and encouragement throughout my journey.
- Prof Elizabeth Van Aswegen for the editing of this document.
- My parents, for their love and support throughout my journey.
- My best friend and confidant for supporting me and motivating me to complete this study.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my one and only darling son, Zachary. Thank you for your love, and your cuddly arms around me while I was busy writing, but most importantly thank you for your prayers. Mamma loves you forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REFERENCES

LIST OF TABLES

APPENDICES

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation/Acronym	Definition
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPO	Non-profit organisation
PBO	Public benefit organisation
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SMMEs	Small medium and micro enterprises
WHO	World Health Organization

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
COVID-19	Refers to "Severe Acute Syndrome Coronavirus 2" SARS-COV-2 or COVID-19. Coronavirus is an infectious disease that spreads primarily through respiratory droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (World Health Organization, 2022a).
Crisis communication	Crisis communication refers to "the perceived violation of salient stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and/or the organization" (Coombs 2023:4).
Digital platforms and social media	A digital tool that allows users to communicate with one another through the creation, sharing, and exchanging of information in virtual communities and networks (Taprial & Kanwar, 2017:9).
Stakeholder	Refers to individuals or groups who influence or are influenced by an organisation's actions (Steyn & Puth, 2000:189).
Stakeholder engagement	Refers to the various communication processes and actions that an organisation performs to involve its stakeholders (Bourne, 2016:432).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

The COVID-19 pandemic which began in 2019 created a disruptive national and global environment. The World Health Organization (WHO) classified the global outbreak of this disease as an international public health crisis affecting all sectors of society (World Health Organization, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused overcrowding in hospitals, a massive strain on the education system, and a significant impact on vulnerable communities receiving humanitarian aid (World Health Organization, 2021a). Measures to contain the spread of the disease, such as social distancing and travel restrictions, put tremendous pressure on the global community to adapt rapidly to what was termed in the media as "the new normal".

Humanitarian non-profit organisations play an important role in assisting vulnerable communities, especially during times of disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for assistance worldwide. The WHO recognises the importance of such organisations and the critical role they play in times of crisis, particularly during health emergencies (World Health Organization, 2022d).

The pandemic had a tremendous impact on the economy and how non-profit organisations continued to carry out their mandate of providing social change to the communities in which they operate. It introduced a myriad of challenges and increased the demand for services to society by human relief non-profit organisations. These challenges include limited resources, dependency on donor funding, and consequently the need for a positive public perception (Suh et al., 2021:220). In these unusual circumstances, non-profit organisations, like corporates, were forced to adapt and find new ways to continue engaging with their stakeholders.

1.2 Statement of the research problem

Effective communication plays a pivotal role in non-profit organisations navigating unprecedented circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. By tackling these challenges head-on, organisations aim to ensure transparent, timely, and impactful communication. This is crucial for maintaining stakeholder engagement, fostering support, and ultimately, achieving the organisation's mission despite the disruptions posed by the pandemic. In addressing communication challenges, non-profits seek to enhance their resilience, adaptability, and overall effectiveness in serving their communities during times of crisis. Non-profit organisations compete for limited funding to survive and to fulfil their mandate in society. These

organisations were faced with the added dynamic of having to do so during a global pandemic that disrupted the environment and created crisis upon crisis. As a result, non-profit organisations had to adapt the way in which they communicate with their stakeholders to continue with their mandate to serve society.

As the focus of this dissertation, the researcher attempted to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa. By doing so, the researcher wished to gain insight into how these organisations had to adapt their respective stakeholder engagement processes to continue fulfilling their mandate. By answering this research question, the researcher wished to contribute to the non-profit sector's body of knowledge regarding stakeholder engagement during times of disruption and crisis.

1.3 Research question and sub-questions

To make the research manageable, the researcher selected four human relief non-profit organisations. The specific organisations selected and the reasons for their selection are in Section 1.6.

The question and sub-questions the researcher wished to answer through her research were:

Primary research question: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on stakeholder engagement of selected South African human relief organisations?

The following sub-questions were identified to answer the research question:
- **Sub-question 1:** How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders before the COVID-19 pandemic to fulfil their mandate?
- **Sub-question 2:** How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep fulfilling their mandate?
- **Sub-question 3:** To what extent did the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enable them to continue fulfilling their mandate?

1.4 Research aim and objectives

Based on the above-mentioned research question and sub-questions, the following aim and objectives were identified to structure and guide the research.

1.4.1 The aim

To investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement of selected human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa.

1.4.2 The researcher attempted to achieve the research aim through the following objectives:

- To provide an overview of the role, function and mandate of each of the four selected human relief non-profit organisations.
- To provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisations' engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisation's engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To determine to what extent the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enabled them to continue fulfilling their mandate.
- Based on the results of the above, to provide guidelines for effective stakeholder engagement in crisis situations and for improved disruption and crisis preparedness.

1.5 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework covering recent theory on stakeholder engagement; crisis communication planning, preparedness, and management; and the role of digital communication platforms – including social media – during times of disruption that necessitate quick responses. The rationale for the researcher adopting this theoretical framework is because of its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder dynamics, provide insight into proactive crisis communication strategies, and address the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital communication landscape during disruptions.

1.6 Research methodology and delineation

The primary research covers how human relief non-profit organisations engaged with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic since the initial circulation of news reports. Humanitarian non-profit organisations were chosen as there was a significant increase in humanitarian assistance globally during the pandemic. The number of non-profit organisations in the primary research was limited to four to make the research manageable. The researcher considered human relief non-profit organisations dedicated to providing humanitarian services in crisis and non-crisis situations and registered in South Africa with the Department of Social Development. A further qualifying criterion was that the non-profit organisation should have an active social media presence, utilising more than two social media platforms. The criterion was included, as the preliminary literature study completed by the author has revealed an

agreement among crisis communication scholars that social media has become an essential tool in crisis communication (see Section 2.4.2 in the next chapter).

1.6.1 Data collection and sample

As part of the secondary research, the researcher reviewed the non-profit organisation's use of social media. The researcher conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews with a group of consenting participants from the selected four human relief organisations to collect the relevant data. The process of gathering information from relevant sources to find answers to the research problem is referred to as data collection. In qualitative research, data collection methods include observations, interviews, and visual and textual analysis (Gill et al., 2008:291). The purpose of conducting interviews is to learn about participants' experiences, perspectives, and/or beliefs on the research topic (Gill et al., 2008:292). To collect specific insights from participants, interviews provided a 'deeper' understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement. Semi-structured interviews contain key questions that assist in defining the areas to be investigated (Gill et al., 2008:292). The reason for choosing this style of interview is because it allowed the researcher to deviate from the questions and pursue a response in greater depth by probing relevant responses from participants.

To target potential participants, the researcher used a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling refers to the deliberate selection of participants who are representative of the population (Hennink et al., 2020:92). The researcher contacted each non-profit organisation via email to identify the best person to interview on the topic and proceeded to contact the specific individual. Once a response was received from the potential participants, a suitable date and time were arranged for the interviews to take place. Interviews with participants were conducted during July 2022. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic which at the time of conducting the interviews necessitated social distancing and working from home, the researcher conducted online interviews via Microsoft Teams and used the platform to record the interviews. All appropriate measures were taken to ensure that the audio recordings remained private.

Participants were chosen based on their senior positions within the organisation and their active participation and leadership within the department that handles the organisation's communication function.

Non-profit organisations are distinguished by the diversity of humanitarian services they provide. It is argued that by examining several types of human relief non-profit organisations,

the researcher would be able to provide a comparative analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement. The four human relief non-profit organisations that comprise the purposive sample include FoodForward South Africa, The Al-Imdaad Foundation, CityHope Disaster Relief, and the Ashraful Aid International Humanitarian Organisation. One organisation is not registered with the Department of Social Development in South Africa but is a registered public benefit organisation in South Africa. For the sake of brevity, all organisations in this study will be referred to as non-profit organisations.

A summary of the selected organisations is provided in the table below.

Table 1.1: FoodForward SA (2022)

Date established	2009
Purpose	Addresses pervasive hunger in South Africa.
Location	National footprint in South Africa (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Limpopo, and North West provinces).
Social media accounts	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Table 1.2: Al-Imdaad Foundation (2021a, 2021b)

Date established	2003
Purpose	Delivers humanitarian services in crisis and non-crisis situations globally.
Location	Offices in South Africa, Indonesia, Australia, the United Kingdom, Jordan, Bangladesh, Chile, and Kenya.
Social media accounts	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Table 1.3: CityHope Disaster Relief (2022a, 2022b)

Date established	2014
Purpose	Delivers disaster aid to communities and nations that have been directly affected by disaster situations by engaging and leveraging volunteers, partner organisations, and local church groups.
Location	Based in Hillcrest in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
Social media accounts	Facebook, Instagram.

Table 1.4: Ashraful Aid International Humanitarian Organisation (n.d.[a], n.d.[b])

Date established	1984
Purpose	An African humanitarian aid and development organisation whose purpose is to eradicate hunger, poverty and malnutrition in Africa.
Location	Operates in seven developing countries in Africa (Angola, Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, South Africa, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone).
Social media accounts	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

1.6.2   Data analysis

The researcher used qualitative content analysis to analyse the data gathered from the interviews with the participants. Qualitative data analysis is the process of describing, categorising, and relating phenomena to the researcher's concepts (Graue, 2015:8). According to Graue (2015:11), qualitative data analysis is the technique by which a researcher recognises, examines, and interprets patterns and themes produced from textual data, as well as recognising how the patterns and themes assist to answer the research question.

Data was collected from participants and transcribed by the researcher. The collected data was categorised and classified based on the categories identified when the researcher created the interview schedule. A comprehensive explanation of how the interview schedule was created is provided in Sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.2.

1.7 Significance of the study

While many studies have been completed on stakeholder engagement in non-profit organisations, the author could not find published research specifically on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement in providing humanitarian aid in emergency situations in South Africa. As a developing country, and with a large number of citizens living in poverty, South Africa relies on non-profit organisations for assistance to vulnerable communities, especially so during times of crisis. This study is important as it attempted to provide guidelines to non-profit organisations to engage effectively with stakeholders during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The insights derived from the study can add value to non-profit organisations in their future strategy formulation, particularly with regard to crisis communication and stakeholder strategy. The results may be especially useful to humanitarian organisations operating in South Africa.

1.8 Ethical considerations

The names of the four non-profit organisations selected for this research are divulged in the dissertation. However, the names and job titles of the participants from each of these non-profit organisations are not mentioned. Participation by these participants was completely voluntary and the researcher obtained their written consent prior to the interviews. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants in order to obtain transparent and truthful responses. The researcher also obtained ethical clearance from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) (Appendix B) where she was studying at the time of completion of the research.

1.9 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 outlines the topic, the research problem, the research questions, and the aim and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review, covering the background and context of the research, and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and provides an overview of each of the four non-profit organisations: their location, size, mandate and function, operation, funding, and stakeholder engagement activities.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings from the analysis of the in-depth interviews, and the interpretation of the findings.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions from the research and makes recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the literature review conducted to develop a conceptual framework for the research. The objectives of the chapter are listed below:

- To provide the background to and context of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This takes the form of an overview of the pandemic's progression, beginning with when it was first identified in China at the end of 2019, to how it spread to the rest of the world, the devastation it caused globally, measures to try to contain the spread, and how this impacted the global community.

- To provide an overview of the role and functions of non-profit organisations in society in general, and in human relief organisations in particular. This section also includes a discussion of how non-profit organisations have been impacted by COVID-19 thus far, based on the perspectives of a number of scholars who have published literature on the subject.

- To develop a theoretical framework for the primary research that follows. This framework is applied in Chapter 3 to formulate questions for the primary research, which takes the form of qualitative interviews with representatives of the selected humanitarian non-profit organisations in South Africa.

This framework reflects the theoretical delineation of the research and includes theory on stakeholders, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication, including the role of digital media. The latter relates to crisis communication planning, the implementation of crisis communication, and post-crisis responses. Reference is also made to best practices in crisis communication.

The above-mentioned theories align with the aim of this research, which is to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement of selected human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa. The first two sections mentioned above allow the researcher to comprehend the context (COVID-19 pandemic) and the nature of the organisations (non-profit organisations) involved in this research.

The third section forms the basis and starting points for the next three objectives of the research, which are as follows:

- To provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisations' engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- To provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisation's engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To determine to what extent the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enabled them to continue fulfilling their mandate.

Once the interviews were completed and the interview data was processed, the theory presented in this chapter enabled the researcher to interpret the results and, in doing so, achieve the final objective of the research, which is:

- To provide guidelines for effective stakeholder engagement in crisis situations and for improved crisis preparedness.

2.2 The COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. The virus, which is diagnosed by a laboratory test, spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The disease was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, from where it rapidly spread to the rest of China and abroad. On 30 January 2020, the WHO declared the disease a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern". The disease was declared a "Global Pandemic" by the WHO on 11 March of the same year (World Health Organization, 2020).

Crisis communication became of utmost importance around the world as a public intervention to inform and advise the public on the necessary steps to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Jong, 2020:962). To contain the spread of the pandemic, preventive measures such as the following were introduced: wearing masks, keeping a physical distance, practising good hand hygiene, and isolating oneself when ill (World Health Organization, 2022b). Countries around the world also implemented strict lockdown measures to prevent the spread of the disease, which became the most widely adopted strategy globally (World Health Organization, 2022c).

Although not all countries were equally affected, the geographic spread of the pandemic resulted in millions of deaths worldwide, as well as a near-complete shutdown of all but essential services and near-overwhelming demands on healthcare systems (World Health Organization, 2021a).

According to Jong (2020:962) and Shi et al. (2020:874), the COVID-19 pandemic is a continuing crisis with widespread socio-economic consequences. The fact that the virus evolves and mutates has resulted in its longevity (World Health Organization, 2022e). At the

time of completion of this dissertation, the end of the COVID-19 pandemic was announced by the WHO on the 5th of May 2023 (World Health Organization, 2023).

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases reported the first COVID-19 case in South Africa on 5 March 2020. This was followed by a significant increase in COVID-19 cases (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). To prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national state of disaster on 15 March 2020 (South Africa, Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020) in accordance with the global response to the pandemic. During the national state of emergency, a risk-adjusted lockdown strategy based on "levels" were implemented. Lockdown levels imposed varying restrictions, with lockdown Level 5 imposing the most stringent restrictions, forcing the closure of public and private sector institutions while only essential services remained operational (South African Government, 2022).

Table 2.1 summarises the various levels of lockdown that took effect on 27 March 2020 (South African Government, 2022). The lockdown levels continued throughout 2021, with changes to the adjusted alert levels occurring throughout (South African Government, 2022). The national state of disaster was lifted on 4 April 2022, after South Africa had been in a state of disaster for 750 days (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2022). It should be noted, however, that the adjusted alert levels were not considered for this study because they had no different impact on the operations of the non-profit organisations than the alert levels that were in effect when a national state of disaster was declared.

Table 2.1: South Africa lockdown levels (South African Government, 2022).

Alert level	Indication of COVID-19 spread in relation to healthcare system	Restrictions
Level 5	A high COVID-19 spread is associated with a low level of healthcare readiness on the part of the healthcare system.	To contain the spread of COVID-19 and save lives, drastic measures were put in place, with only essential services permitted to operate. Everyone was confined to their place of residence unless strictly for the purpose of performing or obtaining an essential service.
Level 4	COVID-19 has a moderate to high spread with a low to moderate level of healthcare readiness on the part of the healthcare system.	Some activity was permitted to resume, subject to the strict precautions required to limit the spread of COVID-19. Everyone was confined to their place of residence, with a curfew in effect from 9pm until 4am.
Level 3	COVID-19 has a moderate spread with a moderate level of healthcare readiness on the part of the healthcare system.	To reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, some restrictions on work and social activities were relaxed. Everyone was confined to their place of residence from 10pm until 4am.
Level 2	COVID-19 has a moderate spread, with a high level of healthcare readiness on the part of the healthcare system.	Although restrictions were eased further, social distancing and restrictions on social activities remained in place to prevent COVID-19 from resurfacing and spreading rapidly Everyone was confined to their place of

		residence, with a curfew in effect from 10pm until 4am.
Level 1	COVID-19 has a low spread, with a high level of readiness on the part of the healthcare system.	Most normal activity resumed, with precautions and health guidelines to be followed. All sectors were allowed to operate, as were all modes of transportation, subject to strict hygiene requirements. Interprovincial travel was permitted, with only international travel restricted. The curfew was lifted, there were no restrictions on the hours of movement of people.

The COVID-19 vaccination programme was launched in the fight against the global pandemic to reduce mortality and severity while relieving pressure on the healthcare system and easing restrictions. The vaccine is designed to provide COVID-19 immunity and protection (SACoronavirus, 2022). The first COVID-19 vaccine was approved for use in the European Union on 21 December 2020, and it was managed using a tier system to ensure effective programme rollout, beginning with the country's healthcare workers (World Health Organization, 2021b). According to the World Health Organization (2021b) the vaccination programme has the potential to provide a long-term solution to the COVID-19 pandemic. South Africa's phased national COVID-19 vaccination campaign began on 17 February 2021 (SACoronavirus, 2022) and was still ongoing at the time primary research was undertaken for this study.

2.3 The non-profit sector

The Department of Social Development in South Africa defines a non-profit organisation as a "trust, company or other association of persons established for a public purpose and of which its income and property are not distributable to its members or office bearers except as reasonable compensation for services rendered" (South Africa, Department of Social Development, 2022). Although registration with the Department of Social Development is optional, it improves the organisation's credibility by bringing it into a public system, ensuring accountability and transparency, which will serve the organisation well and increase public trust in the non-profit sector (South Africa, Department of Social Development, 2022).

The size and scope of non-profit organisations vary from small grassroots to multimillion-rand organisations (Hall, 2016:3). Non-profit organisations help those affected by societal and economic inequalities. They serve society by creating social value and identifying societal gaps that the business and government sectors do not address (Choto et al., 2020:589). Non-profit organisations make significant contributions to a country's socio-economic development by addressing societal issues (Lu et al., 2020:29) and serve as an important resource in emergency aid during humanitarian crises (Barhate et al., 2021:161; Haupt & Azevedo, 2021:163). Global demand for humanitarian aid has increased significantly over the last

decade as a result of ongoing conflicts, the climate crisis, and disease (Besiou & Van Wassenhove, 2020:135; Shi et al., 2020:874; Griffiths, 2022:2; Milante & Lilja, 2022).

Human relief non-profit organisations help those in need regardless of religion, nationality, or other characteristics. They assist in times of crisis, such as natural disasters, by providing shelter, food, and medical aid, with the goal of transforming and addressing the root causes of poverty and despair through education and capacity building (Davies, 2019:267).

According to Suh et al. (2021:220), non-profit organisations encounter challenges owing to limited resources, such as tight budgets and limited staff, which limit their ability to invest in communication strategies and stakeholder engagement efforts. Furthermore, non-profit organisations rely on donor funding therefore maintaining a positive public image is critical to attracting donors. Maintaining a positive public image is, therefore, a constant challenge for non-profit organisations.

2.3.1 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organisations

The COVID-19 pandemic caused global disruption across all sectors. According to Corak (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has increased demand for non-profit human relief organisations while also revealing and exacerbating societal inequalities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, non-profit organisations were already operating in challenging environments to carry out their mandate, navigating issues such as climate change, urbanisation, and political issues (Besiou & Van Wassenhove, 2020:137; Lu et al., 2020:40). The unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic presented several additional challenges to non-profit organisations as they navigated the pandemic's stages (McMullin & Raggo, 2020:1182). Lockdown regulations, exacerbated by volatile economic markets and the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, are just a few of the conditions that non-profit organisations had to deal with (Zerbst, 2022:230).

Sustainable non-profit organisations must be able to adapt to changing environments by revisiting their missions and mobilising resources to meet new challenges (Maboya & McKay, 2019; Shi et al., 2020:878). To ensure that operations could continue during the pandemic, non-profit organisations had to quickly adapt to shifting priorities, respond to unexpected loss of revenue streams, and adopt new technologies to ensure operations could continue while staff worked remotely (Besiou & Van Wassenhove, 2020:135). To maintain organisational sustainability, non-profits should explore diverse funding opportunities through public–private partnerships (Asogwa et al., 2022). According to DeMars and Dijkzeul (2019:76), while some non-profits have significant financial resources to leverage, the majority of non-profits rely on

the persuasiveness of their mandate and the credibility of their expertise. Adversity-resistant organisations are distinguished by organisational resilience, collaboration, and change leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic created both challenges and opportunities for human relief non-profit organisations' service delivery and operations; these changes will result in long-term benefits in terms of access to services and public–private collaborations.

Organisations must facilitate a balance between leadership and management activities in order to weather the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath (McMullin & Raggo, 2020:1184). Non-profit leadership and management are important for navigating crises successfully. Leadership and management activities are both critical to an organisation's success, but they serve different functions (Muhammed & Zaim, 2020:2478). Management is concerned with providing structure and a framework for the activities of the organisation, whereas leadership is concerned with inspiring and empowering the members of the organisation. When acting as a manager, the board is responsible for establishing decision-making structures and overseeing the executive director's work; when acting as a leader, the board develops a strategic vision for the organisation and guides the executive director's work (Garcia-Rodriguez et al., 2021:239).

McMullin and Raggo (2020:1184) further note that crises have called this traditional role into question, prompting non-profits to reconsider governance structures when short-term decisions must take precedence over long-term planning. Board members will be able to guide the organisation through turbulent times by rethinking governance structures. Similarly, Chikwanda (2020:685) observes that organisations with flexible strategic plans stand out and get ahead when navigating a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Pang (2021:104) notes that leadership and effective crisis communication have helped in the containment of the COVID-19 virus. Strategic flexibility becomes a core management concept to pursue during uncertain times.

Non-profit organisations must adapt their leadership strategies and governance structures to respond to emerging and rapidly changing environmental tensions during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. When an organisation is confronted with a crisis that alters its environment and necessitates a swift response to changing conditions, leadership must mobilise resources to reconsider service delivery models and organisational structures (Chikwanda, 2020:685; McMullin & Raggo 2020:1185; Shi et al., 2020:874). The proposed theoretical contingency-based model by McMullin and Raggo (2020:1186) describes how board roles differ depending on the type of governance pattern for various stages of the COVID-19 crisis. The board alternates between managerial (such as overseeing the CEO's work) and leadership roles (such as strategy development); the governance pattern followed

by the organisation determines when each role is performed. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been organisational adaptations where some boards have redesigned organisational offerings such as digitising activities, implemented structural changes, and intensified communication with communities and service providers (Willems et al., 2022:276).

According to Kim and Mason (2020:1191) the COVID-19 pandemic has increased resource pressures from external stakeholders; as a result, it is critical that organisations consider their external environment and its characteristics in order to effectively adapt their structures, decision-making processes, and strategies to an ever-changing environment (McMullin & Raggo, 2020:1185).

According to McMullin and Raggo (2020:1187), further research is needed to understand the politics of decision-making in non-profit boards and how critical decisions are taken in crisis and non-crisis situations. Further research into the board's quest to find the appropriate balance between leadership and management activities, as well as how this affects the executive director's work in ensuring the organisation's survival during a crisis, is also suggested.

Paluszak et al. (2021:670) agree that non-profit organisations need a post-COVID-19 response stimulus to improve capacity and efficiency. Additionally, efforts should be made to build organisational resilience, which refers to a system's internal adaptation to externally unexpected changes or disruptions. Resilient organisations can effectively adapt to challenges without regressing for an extended period (Paluszak et al., 2021:670). In this regard, Chikwanda (2020:685) states that when organisations use "resilience as a process rather than an outcome after recovery", they can continuously respond to challenges and provide uninterrupted services to society.

The pandemic has reminded the non-profit sector of the importance of preparedness and contingency governance models when navigating the various stages of a crisis (McMullin & Raggo, 2020:1187). Asogwa et al. (2022) recommend that non-profit organisations incorporate emergency response procedures into their policy and normal operations in order to respond quickly to global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4 Stakeholder theory

Edward Freeman developed the stakeholder theory in the 1980s (Freeman, 2010). This theory emphasises the importance of identifying, understanding, and managing the diverse needs and interests of an organisation's stakeholders, as well as building and maintaining

relationships with them in accordance with the organisation's goals (Phillips et al., 2019:1). Stakeholder theory prescribes that "a business should create value for all stakeholders". Stakeholders are individuals or groups who have an interest in the organisation's operations and on whom the organisation relies to carry out its mission (Phillips et al., 2019:2). During a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations, particularly non-profits, must devise strategies for maintaining contact with their stakeholders while also positively contributing to society.

Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of establishing mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders. The theoretical context of stakeholder theory suggests that organisations invest in developing and managing relationships with their stakeholders and that stakeholder classification is a management strategy that requires stakeholders to be classified based on their relevance (Freudenreich et al., 2020:5). Gonzalez-Perez et al. (2021:1195) emphasise the importance of stakeholder identification and classification in the stakeholder management process as organisational dynamics might lead stakeholders to lose relevance. The next step after identifying stakeholders is to determine their relative importance within the organisation.

Organisations that adopt a stakeholder-oriented management approach can better address their needs, particularly during a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Panneer et al., 2021:203). As a result, organisations will operate more efficiently and generate more value, which will help them to remain viable in the long run (Phillips et al., 2019:203).

Stakeholder relationships, according to the theory, are critical to an organisation's survival and success. Because competition for resources appears to be increasing among non-profit organisations, the quality of these relationships is important. Relationships must be established across all societal sectors and should serve as the foundation for developing collaborations and leveraging existing community networks (Zerbst, 2022:231). Organisations that invest actively and meaningfully in building relationships during regular times are best positioned to respond during difficult times, since working together helps to get through a crisis (Zerbst, 2022:231; Fuller & Rice, 2022).

Because the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is multifaceted, affecting all aspects of life and the global population, no organisation or stakeholder can effectively control COVID-19 and mitigate its impact (Panneer et al., 2021:203). In order to respond to and manage the COVID-19 situation more effectively, organisations should adopt a multi-stakeholder management approach to strategies that can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of crisis and humanitarian operations. According to Panneer et al. (2021:203), an inclusive multi-

stakeholder strategy engages vested-interest groups and develops effective structures for collaboration. They regard the multi-stakeholder strategy as one of the most effective strategies for fighting the COVID-19 crisis (Panneer et al., 2021:203). Non-profit organisations have recognised collaboration as a crucial theme in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaboration and partnerships have proved to be advantageous to non-profit organisations' survival (Bryant et al., 2020:4; Zerbst, 2022:230).

2.4.1 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a broader, more inclusive, and ongoing process between an organisation and its stakeholders. According to Bourne (2016:432), stakeholder engagement refers to the various communication methods, processes, and actions that organisations must adopt in order to gain their stakeholders' commitment to the organisation and its goals. Stocker et al. (2020:2072) in turn, state that stakeholder engagement refers to an organisation's ability to form collaborative relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders. It refers to a set of initiatives or practices that organisations develop in order to positively engage their stakeholders in their organisational activities. Stakeholder engagement is important to this research because effective stakeholder engagement helps organisations translate stakeholder needs into organisational goals and serves as the foundation for effective strategy formulation.

Organisations are forced to make hasty decisions with limited knowledge during times of uncertainty which changes their traditional approach to stakeholder prioritisation. Recognising the role of closeness in stakeholder management during crises enables more informed governance of organisations confronting stakeholder relations system disruptions (Gonzalez-Perez et al. 2021:1196). Fuller and Rice (2022) observe that non-profit organisations' ability to persevere and innovate in service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic was predicted by their engagement with external stakeholders.

According to Pillay and Scheepers (2020), critical considerations in leading multi-stakeholder partnership response in the context of COVID-19 include identifying and prioritising stakeholders' demands during crises, as well as distinguishing between producing shared value and corporate social responsibility. The success or failure of an organisation is linked to the effectiveness of various communications directed at specific stakeholders. Pillay and Scheepers (2020) highlight the example of Nestlé, which demonstrated a multi-stakeholder collaboration by highlighting existing community involvement programmes by one of the non-profit organisations involved in this study prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing trust relationships and partnerships were leveraged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Arokiasamy et

al. (2019:142) note that an organisation's ability to manage the crisis effectively restores stakeholder trust.

2.4.2 The role of technology in stakeholder engagement and crisis situations

Technological breakthroughs have become a frequent and regular occurrence throughout society. The World Economic Forum (2019:8) claims that technological progress is fundamentally altering civilisation. Similarly, Hai et al. (2021:26) note that digital transformation affects every aspect of an organisation because new technologies constantly evolve, and organisations must be aware of this in order to drive change and increase the value offered to society.

Hung-Baesecke (2018:73) state that "technological developments are redefining how crisis management experts view, engage, and transmit information" during a crisis. During a crisis, technological advancements are changing how crisis management professionals perceive, interact with, and transmit information (Hung-Baesecke, 2018:73; Haupt & Azevedo, 2021:167). By communicating relevant and critical information in real-time, technology enables more efficient operations. It enables organisations to communicate with their stakeholders and serves as a collective information hub during a crisis.

Clear decision-making is critical during a crisis. Fostering relationships with stakeholders boosts brand loyalty and aids the organisation in times of uncertainty or disaster, which is especially important as the digital era progresses (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:344). As news and information travel faster, organisations must track issues and potential crises more frequently and respond more efficiently. Social media platforms can help organisations communicate with their stakeholders in a variety of situations, including crisis communication. Organisations can then respond quickly to ensure that their messages are consistent across multiple channels because they have a better understanding of what various stakeholder groups think of them.

The internet and the rapid growth of social media have altered communication practices on many levels (Ahmad, 2019:319). The use of social media in crisis communication has had a significant impact. Fuller and Rice (2022) note that social media is an important tool for external engagement by non-profit organisations as it serves as an effective tool to communicate with its stakeholders and create a network of collaborations during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, technology has become an integral part of how business is conducted. To keep businesses running during the disruptive period, technology became the

driving force of innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the ability of organisations to think 'out of the box' and accelerated the adoption of integrating technology into the workspace faster (Zerbst, 2020:216). Technology became the driving force of innovation during the disruptive period in order to keep businesses running. According to Zerbst (2020:215), building an online presence has become a vital platform for communication tools throughout the pandemic.

When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, digital transformation had a significant impact on the global economy. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted all sectors to prioritise digital transformation in order to better serve their stakeholders (Almeida et al., 2020:101; Hai et al., 2021:28). The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for organisations to incorporate digitalisation into their stakeholder engagement strategy (Almeida et al., 2020:101; Hai et al., 2021:29; Süsser et al., 2021). Developing an online presence has become a critical platform for those looking to stay in business as well as a communication tool throughout the pandemic (Zerbst, 2020:215). According to Macnamara (2021:257), if the corporate communication function is proficient in communication technologies, it can play a significant role in crisis management. Scholars agree that communication is an important part of crisis management (Coombs, 2023:9; Dwiedienawati et al., 2021; Haupt & Azevedo, 2021:166). According to Süsser et al. (2021), new techniques for engaging with stakeholders have been developed, one of which is the transition to online involvement, which will most certainly continue after the COVID-19 crisis but will not replace face-to-face interaction.

2.5 Crisis communication

According to Coombs (2023:4), crisis communication is "the perceived violation of salient stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and/or the organization". This definition of a crisis implies that it is an unusual occurrence that cannot be predicted but can be anticipated, and it can have some serious consequences for the organisation and its reputation. However, crises can also generate opportunities (Fuller & La Sala, 2021). In order for organisations to be prepared for a crisis, they should know what a crisis is and have systems in place that can alert them when "business as usual" must be stopped (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:325). Crises can be self-generated (an event that occurs within an organisation), malicious targets on the organisation (an event that occurs outside the organisation but is directed at it), or inadvertently induced by external variables (environmental and natural forces) (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:328).

Crisis management "seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protecting the organization, stakeholders, and industry from harm while facilitating a positive

response to the situation" (Coombs, 2023:8). Doorley and Garcia (2020:327) define crisis management as the management of decisions during a crisis. Effective crisis management emphasises the importance of stakeholder expectations because of the need to generate and disseminate crisis knowledge, as well as manage stakeholder reactions; communication is integrated throughout the entire crisis management process (Coombs, 2023:8). It is this communication that is the focus of this dissertation. The theory in the rest of this section focuses on crisis communication rather than crisis management.

The goal of crisis communication is "to reduce the damage a crisis inflicts on an organization and its stakeholders" (Coombs, 2023:165). Coombs (2023:4) defines crisis communication as "the perceived violation of salient stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and or the organization." Effective crisis communication provides organisations with a competitive advantage and can boost their reputation (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:323). Reddy et al. (2009:260) state that effective crisis communication necessitates prompt and timely coordination in accordance with organisational objectives. Inadequate crisis communication harms an organisation's reputation and may jeopardise its survival (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:323).

One of the most widely used theories of crisis communication is Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (cited in Goodman, 2018:43). This theory proposes that crisis managers should match strategic crisis responses to the level of crisis responsibility and reputational risk posed by a crisis. Although the SCCT provides a framework for understanding how crisis communication can be used to protect an organisation's reputation during a crisis, authors such as Macnamara (2021:250), Rosete (2021:156), and Manoli and Anagnostou (2023:297), have found that this theory does not fully align with a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

What made the COVID-19 pandemic unique, was its longevity, magnitude, and reach. Macnamara (2021:238) states that the pandemic presented organisations with communication challenges as they dealt with ongoing major disruption and adjustment of operations caused by emergency response strategies such as workplace lockdowns and various services. Macnamara (2021:250), who researched crisis communication during the pandemic in the context of a large university in Australia, found that none of the crisis types identified in the SCCT were relevant to the case study. The crisis was neither intentional nor accidental on the university's part and the university was not directly a victim of a single event such as a natural disaster, rumour, product tampering, or hijacking. Similarly, it was found that the crisis responsibilities listed in SCCT were not directly relevant in the context of the case study.

The researcher considered the findings mentioned above and decided to use Doorley and Garcia's (2020) theory as the primary crisis communication model for this research, supplemented with the perspectives of other authors. The researcher selected this theory because of its focus on crisis communication responses rather than crisis responses. This aligns with the topic of this research, which focuses on stakeholder engagement during a crisis. Doorley and Garcia's (2020) model incorporates crisis communication into all three stages of a crisis, namely, planning, implementation, and resuming normal operations following a crisis. Furthermore, it approaches victim communication differently than Coombs' SCCT (Coombs, 2014:4) which states that when an organisation is perceived to be a victim of a crisis, there is no reputational risk because the situation is unavoidable, and the organisation has no control over it. The SCCT also suggests that in victim crises, the denial strategy is used to shift blame away from the organisation. Although there are researchers (e.g., Farazmand & Danaeefard, 2021:1152 and Tian & Yang, 2022) who found that denial and diminishing had been used as crisis responses during the pandemic, especially in the political realm, these tactics are not regarded as suitable COVID-19 crisis communication responses in the context of human relief non-profit organisations.

Delivering relevant and reliable information to stakeholders is critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where information saves lives. Because the pandemic was unexpected and long-lasting, organisations faced challenges in developing a crisis communication plan that addressed the needs of all stakeholders. There is no one-size-fits-all communication strategy for organisations during a prolonged crisis (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021:30). Effective communication during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is an interactive process in which information is exchanged among individuals, groups, and institutions (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021:30). Effective crisis communication necessitates prompt and timely coordination in accordance with organisational goals, and it provides organisations with a competitive advantage while also assisting in the improvement of organisational communication (Reddy et al., 2009:260; Doorley & Garcia, 2020:323). Similarly, Haupt and Azevedo (2021:163) state that the overall goal of crisis communication is to minimise reputational damage from crises while maintaining organisational missions and meeting the needs of their communities.

Doorley and Garcia's theory is used as a prescriptive model with practical guidelines and checklists for crisis communication and communication initiatives before, during, and after the crisis. This includes a best practices list for crisis communication.

2.5.1 Types of crises

A crisis can be "acute or chronic" (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:327). An acute crisis occurs unexpectedly and has potentially serious consequences. Stakeholders expect organisations to act quickly and communicate in a timely manner during this type of crisis. In the absence of timely communication, stakeholders question whether the organisation cares, putting their trust and support at risk. A chronic crisis develops over time and consists of a series of events or poses an ongoing risk. Much of the work in these crises is aimed at preventing negative events by intervening early in processes or with key audiences. Such crises essentially serve as a forewarning of something potentially harmful that is yet to occur (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:328).

Macnamara's classification of crisis types below provides a more appropriate categorisation of the COVID-19 pandemic (Macnamara, 2021:240).

- Physical crises are caused by external factors beyond the organisation's control, such as natural disasters, which include technological and biological crises.
- Human-climate crises are caused by conflicting external stakeholders.
- Management failures do not fall into the categories listed above.

According to Doorley and Garcia (2020:238), a crisis can arise from one of three sources:

- Self-generated – an event or issue that originates within the organisation or is based on the behaviour or misbehaviour of the organisation's employees or a breakdown in its business processes.
- Where the organisation is the target – an event or issue directed at the organisation that arises from outside the organisation.
- A crisis may be unrelated to the organisation, but there is a change in the organisation's environment, and its stakeholders expect a response.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic began as an acute crisis that struck without warning, the researcher classified it as a chronic crisis for the purpose of this study because it is an ongoing risk that necessitates adaptation to its communication while keeping stakeholders in mind. In terms of Macnamara's (2021:240) classification above, the pandemic was a physical crisis caused by external factors beyond the organisation's control. As far as Doorley and Garcia's (2020:238) classification of crisis sources is concerned, COVID-19 was a source of crisis unrelated to the organisation, but where there was a change in the organisation's environment. Inadequate crisis communication harms an organisation's reputation and may jeopardise its survival (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:323). According to Doorley and Garcia (2020:18), how organisations plan for and respond to crisis communication influence reputation capital. Reputation capital refers to an organisation's intangible assets (Okpamen & Ogbeide, 2020:753). Reputation capital can be influenced by reviews, brand identity, and other factors.

An organisation with a good reputation can recover from a crisis faster and more easily than one with a bad reputation. In a social media environment, the quality of information and the time it takes for an organisation to respond to a crisis have become increasingly important (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:336). This will contribute to organisations emerging with their reputation intact.

2.5.2 Requirements and best practice guidelines for crisis communication

Organisations must be prepared for crises by understanding what constitutes a crisis, and they must have an early warning system in place to determine when business-as-usual practices should be abandoned. The early warning system relies heavily on communication (Doorley & Garcia: 2020:326). Timely and consistent crisis communication demonstrates that the organisation cares (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:330).

Doorley and Garcia (2020:338) state that the "golden hour" is the most crucial time for an organisation during a crisis. This is when organisations have the most influence and their communication can be the most impactful. As a result, it is critical to be aware of how organisations communicate during this time, as it could mean the difference between weathering the storm or taking a hit that could potentially be fatal to the organisation.

Doorley and Garcia (2020:338) state that one advantage an organisation has during a crisis is the ability to control the narrative. If an organisation can get its message out quickly and efficiently, it can help mitigate any further damage to its reputation. During what is referred to as the "golden hour" of a crisis, it is essential that communication is clear and concise. Additionally, messages need to be distributed in an effective manner. Crisis communication decisions should never be made according to an organisation's usual timeline. The first 45 minutes, six hours, and three weeks after a crisis erupts are critical for an organisation to define the crisis and mitigate any reputational damage. If an organisation can master communication during the golden hour, it will have the best chance possible to weather the storm.

In addition to the requirements for effective crisis communication mentioned above, a list of guidelines for best practices in crisis communication is provided below. These guidelines are based on the work of Doorley and Garcia (2020:345), Hyland-Wood et al. (2021:30), and Veil et al. (2020:377). Best practice guidelines such as these can be used to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in crisis situations and for improved crisis preparedness.

- Collaborate with stakeholders: Organisations cannot deal with a crisis on their own; establishing and engaging a crisis communication network with stakeholders prior to a

crisis is critical to maintaining trust and collaboration and leveraging this when an organisation is faced with a crisis (Veil et al., 2020:380).

- Communicate openly: When communicating with stakeholders during times of uncertainty, organisations should provide clear, summarised, and confirmed communication within the legal parameters of the crisis rather than issuing false statements while waiting for all information to be gathered and reported on. Communicating with empathy and compassion when addressing the needs of stakeholders will cause less damage to the organisation's reputation and increase its credibility and trust among its stakeholders (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:346; Veil et al., 2020:380; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021).

- The organisation's top priority should be the safety and well-being of stakeholders: Clear, detailed information on how stakeholders can protect themselves from a crisis can help stakeholders cope with the stress of the crisis (Veil et al., 2020:381).

- Maintain credibility: In a long-term crisis, maintaining credibility is critical for effective, persuasive communication, and leveraging trusted partnerships formed before a crisis can help organisations navigate a crisis (Veil et al., 2020:379; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021).

- Communicate with speed: The speed of communication throughout the crisis is critical as it could result in harm to the organisation's reputation; to reduce uncertainty among stakeholders, organisations should provide timely, comprehensive, and relevant information (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:346; Veil et al., 2020:379).

- Maintain media access: Ensure that the media is included in the crisis planning, before, during, and after the crisis. Building relationships with the media will ensure that accurate information about the crisis is disseminated. Organisations should strive to be the media's first and best source of information to combat misinformation by providing the media with factual and up-to-date information (Veil et al., 2020:381; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021).

- Organisations should take a proactive approach to ensure that stakeholders are provided with factual, up-to-date information (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021).

- Communicate the process: Recognising that uncertainty is unavoidable in the aftermath of a sudden crisis, organisations should provide certainty to aid in the preparation of immediate and long-term plans to reduce anxiety among stakeholders by addressing underlying issues or communicating the process of what the organisation is doing about the crisis (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). Communicate the steps the organisation is taking to address the underlying issue of the crisis as early in the communication process as possible; if these steps have not been determined, organisations should outline the process that is being implemented. (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:345).

- Use a diverse stakeholder approach: The crisis plan should be multi-stakeholder in nature, with distinct guidelines for each stakeholder group. Organisations should keep in mind that different stakeholders require different messages and that different distribution channels should be used to reach the target stakeholder. Language barriers and cultural differences should be overcome for information to be accessible to all stakeholders (Veil et al.,2020:382; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021).

- Consider the public's concerns: During a crisis, an organisation's credibility and trustworthiness are critical; effective crisis communication necessitates acknowledging and responding to public concerns, whether legitimate or illegitimate. To mitigate risks during a crisis, it is critical to form public–private partnerships that include the public and acknowledge their concerns (Veil et al., 2020:380).

- Evaluate the crisis plan regularly: The crisis plan should be updated regularly and the guidelines for communicating during a crisis should be followed throughout the cycle, not just as part of the strategic response (Veil et al., 2020:382).

- Communicate the recovery plan: Communicate crisis recovery efforts for the benefit of the organisation but also to demonstrate to its stakeholders that the organisation can and will address challenges in the event of another crisis (Veil et al., 2020:382).

- Resume work responsibilities: Once the crisis team has been formed and the communication process has begun, those who are not directly involved in the crisis communication should be directed to resume their normal responsibilities (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:347).

- Communicate when the crisis is over: Once the crisis is over and the organisation has recovered, it should notify its stakeholders (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:347).

Using the guidelines for best practices in crisis communication can assist organisations in better managing and mitigating the impact of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, the researcher provided an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has impacted communities, and the role of the non-profit sector, particularly human relief non-profit organisations. The researcher noted how the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, its devastation globally, and how it affected communities, as well as the role of human relief non-profit organisations in responding to community needs during the pandemic. The importance of effective stakeholder engagement in translating stakeholder needs into organisational goals was also discussed. The researcher highlighted the importance of stakeholder management during crisis communication and provided an overview of the theory on crisis communication,

with an emphasis on best practice guidelines. From the above, the author derived a theoretical framework for the empirical research.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and research methods used to conduct this study. The theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 was used in Chapter 3 to prepare the data for the interview questions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research design created to conduct the primary part of the investigation into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement of selected human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa. Research design describes the approach chosen by the researcher to address the research problem. It provides the theoretical framework that the researcher would employ in the selected strategy and design. It explains the methods or actions that will be used by the researcher to conduct the research (Mligo, 2016:49). As such, it forms the strategy that a researcher employs to answer the research question (Chun Tie et al. 2019).

The research plan set out in this chapter is based on the theoretical perspective developed in the previous chapter, as well as the research context outlined in the same chapter. It lays the foundation to gather research data to answer the objectives and sub-questions of the study in the next chapter. These include the objectives: to provide an overview of the role, function, and mandate of each of the four selected human relief non-profit organisations; to provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisations' engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; to provide an overview of how the selected non-profit organisations engaged with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic; and to determine to what extent the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enabled them to continue fulfilling their mandate. The sub-questions are: How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders before the COVID-19 pandemic to fulfil their mandate? How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep fulfilling their mandate? To what extent did the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enable them to continue fulfilling their mandate?

3.2 Research design

A research design is a theoretical framework that is used to guide the research. It describes the steps of the researcher's chosen design and how they will be implemented during the research investigation (Mligo, 2016:49). The research design is the plan that guides the research, providing a solid foundation and establishing parameters. It describes the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing data. The study employs a qualitative research design, with in-depth interviews conducted with participants from selected human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa.

3.3 Research methodology

Research methodology refers to the philosophy or general principles that guide the research (Dawson, 2019:12) to systematically solve the research problem (Patel & Patel, 2019:48). It assists the researcher in determining what type of data is required for the study and which data collection methods are best suited to the research (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:52).

Scholars such as Dawson (2019:13), Hennink et al. (2020:10), and Mligo (2016:50) identify the following broad research approaches in the social sciences: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The choice of research approach depends on the purpose of the study (Mligo, 2016:50). Quantitative research is the collection of data in numerical form (Hennink et al., 2020:10; Mohajan, 2020:54) and is statistically analysed (Dawson, 2019:13). This data can come from a variety of sources, including surveys, polls, and experiments. The data can be analysed to draw conclusions about a certain group or set of variables. Once this data is collected, it can be analysed to look for patterns and trends. This type of research is often used to test hypotheses and answer questions about cause and effect (Mohajan, 2020:54). Qualitative research, on the other hand, seeks to understand human experience by investigating "attitudes, behaviour, and experiences through, methods such as interviews or focus groups" (Dawson, 2019:12). Graue (2015:8) states that qualitative data analysis is the process of describing, categorising, and relating phenomena to the researcher's concepts. Qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate in depth by employing specific research methods such as interviews, observation, content analysis, and visual methods (Hennink et al., 2020:10). Mixed-methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This approach is useful when researchers want to understand a phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Dawson, 2019:18).

The primary research methodology used for this study is qualitative research. Qualitative research methods are well suited to investigating complex social phenomena like the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on stakeholder engagement in human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa. This is because qualitative research methods such as interviews allow for in-depth exploration (Mligo, 2016:83).

Qualitative research can investigate how these organisations interacted with their stakeholders prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how these organisations responded to the pandemic's challenges. This type of research can also shed light on the pandemic's potential long-term effects on stakeholder engagement in human relief non-profit organisations and can assist organisations to develop targeted and effective engagement strategies in the future.

3.4 Delineation of the research

The study was limited to four human relief non-profit organisations operating in South Africa and registered with the South African Department of Social Development. The study was limited to non-profit organisations that provide humanitarian services in both crisis and non-crisis situations and have an active social media presence across more than two platforms.

The researcher selected humanitarian non-profit organisations because, during a pandemic such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on communities extends beyond healthcare.

Limiting the number of non-profit organisations to four allowed the researcher to thoroughly investigate and comprehend how each organisation engaged with its stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic since the initial dissemination of news reports about the pandemic. The sampling strategy is discussed in more detail in Section 3.6.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics are important in research because they guide researchers on how to conduct responsible and respectful research. Ethics helps to ensure that research is conducted in a fair and dignified manner for all parties involved, as well as that participants' rights and dignity are protected. Furthermore, ethics contribute to the accuracy and reliability of research findings. Researchers need to have integrity so that people can trust the research process. Ethical research benefits not only the researcher's reputation but also the various stakeholders involved in the research process. These stakeholders include participants, academic institutions, policymakers, the research community, the public, and funding bodies (Louw, 2014:272).

Participation in this study was voluntary. The researcher obtained written consent from CPUT as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study and from all participants before arranging a date and time to conduct the interview. The purpose of the study was explained to participants in writing when permission for participation in the study was requested as well as at the beginning of the interview in order to be transparent and truthful regarding the research being conducted. The dissertation does reveal the names of the four non-profit organisations chosen for this study. However, the names and job titles of the participants from each of these non-profit organisations are not disclosed.

To ensure confidentiality and safe storage of data, the researcher stored the video and audio recordings of the interviews on the researcher's laptop and cellphone, both of which are

password and biometric-access-protected. Additionally, the locally stored recordings were backed up to password-protected cloud storage.

3.6 Sampling strategy

The population is defined as the total number of individuals in a given group who share similar characteristics. The process of selecting a subset of individuals from a population is known as sampling (Wildemuth, 2016:71). Sampling is the process of selecting a smaller, more manageable group of people to participate in one's research (Dawson, 2019:39). The purpose of sampling is to allow researchers to study a smaller group of people in greater depth. Researchers can use a variety of different sampling methods, and the most appropriate method will depend on the specific research question being asked.

In this study, non-probability sampling was used. Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique that does not use randomisation to select individuals from the population for inclusion in the sample. This type of sampling is often used in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to select the most appropriate sample for the research question (Wildemuth, 2016:73). The deliberate selection of participants who are representative of the population to participate in the research is referred to as purposive sampling (Hennink et al., 2020:92). This sampling technique was used by the researcher to obtain a sample of participants who were relevant to the unit of research, namely human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa.

The researcher searched the internet and the South African Department of Social Development registry to identify human relief non-profit organisations that provide humanitarian services in crisis and non-crisis situations throughout South Africa and Southern Africa. Non-profit organisations were considered based on the range of humanitarian services they provide. Given the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the workplace, the researcher chose to include only four non-profit organisations to ensure that the research was manageable and appropriate to the scope and depth required by CPUT, where this dissertation was completed. By examining four types of human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa, the researcher was able to provide a comparative analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement. This revealed how the four organisations dealt with the pandemic and what lessons could be drawn from their experiences.

The researcher initially approached seven human relief non-profit organisations, four of which confirmed their participation. The researcher approached seven organisations because she anticipated that not all would respond. The researcher identified the appropriate individual at

the non-profit organisation to direct the email to in order to request participation in the research via the website of the specific organisation. When a specific individual was not specified on the website, the researcher contacted the head office of the relevant non-profit organisation to obtain the relevant email address. The researcher sent an email to the prospective participant, introducing herself and the purpose of her email, and asking for help in directing the email to the appropriate person within the organisation if the prospective participant was not the correct person.

Once the researcher received a response from the potential participants agreeing to participate in the research, the next step was to get the "template for written consent from participants" document completed as required by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of CPUT where this dissertation was completed (Appendix C). This document was then forwarded to the participants to complete. After receiving the completed documentation, the researcher contacted each participant to set up a suitable date and time for the interview and to determine whether the participant was familiar with and comfortable with Microsoft Teams. All interviews took place in July 2022. FoodForward South Africa (FoodForward SA), the Al-Imdaad Foundation, CityHope Disaster Relief, and Ashraful Aid are the four human relief non-profit organisations that make up the purposive sample. A summary of the selected non-profit human relief organisations is provided in the tables below.

3.6.1 Overview of the sampled non-profit human relief organisations

3.6.1.1 FoodForward SA is the largest food recovery organisation in South Africa (FoodForward SA, 2022a, b, c).

Table 3.1: Overview of FoodForward SA

Date established	2009
Purpose	Addresses pervasive hunger in South Africa by acting as an intermediary by cost-effectively securing quality edible surplus food and distributing it to registered non-profit organisations that address food insecurity in vulnerable communities across the country.
Location	Regional offices: Head office: Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa Provincial offices: Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Limpopo, and North West provinces).
Social media platforms	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn.
Stakeholders	Employees, individual donors, and external stakeholders are classified into food, financial, and donations or services in kind partners. In addition, the organisation has celebrity brand ambassadors who volunteer their time to assist the organisation.
Programmes	Food security is addressed through six programmes:

	1. Warehouse food banking: Surplus food is sourced, recovered, sorted, stored, and distributed to a national network of beneficiary organisations. More than 80% of the food distributed by them is nutritious.
	2. Mobile rural depot programme: Established to address rural food insecurity. Nutritional food is delivered to beneficiary organisations in 29 rural communities once a month.
	3. Second harvest: This programme connects the organisation directly with farmers across South Africa, allowing them to donate their post-harvest surpluses. This fresh produce significantly increases the nutritional value of the food distributed.
	4. Supply chain youth internship: A SETA accredited supply chain internship focusing on warehousing and logistics was established to address youth unemployment while gradually removing the huge barrier to entry for underprivileged youth. The six-month programme consists of 70% practical and 30% academic training. The organisation intends to employ all interns who have successfully completed the programme.
	5. School breakfast programme: FoodForward SA, in collaboration with various corporations, provides nutritious breakfast cereals and milk to approximately 75,000 children daily in creches, primary and secondary schools across the country. Nutritious meals are critical to ensuring that schoolchildren are healthy and less prone to disease, as well as having improved learning ability and physical activity.
	6. FoodShare (virtual food banking): FoodShare is FoodForward SA's digital platform that virtually connects their beneficiary organisations to the nearest food retail partner store for the collection of quality surplus food on a regular basis. As a result, FoodShare can provide access to high-quality food in even the most remote parts of the country.

3.6.1.2 The Al-Imdaad Foundation provides humanitarian assistance in both crisis and non-crisis situations around the world (Al-Imdaad Foundation, 2021a, b).

Table 3.2: Overview of Al-Imdaad Foundation

Date established	2003
Purpose	Delivers humanitarian services in crisis and non-crisis situations globally; works in 65 countries worldwide.
Location	Regional offices: Head office: Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa Provincial offices: Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Johannesburg, Gauteng. Kimberley, Northern Cape King William's Town, Eastern Cape International offices: Australia, Kenya, Jordan, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom.
Social media platforms	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.
Stakeholders	Employees, communities they serve, individual donors, financial and corporate partners, Board of Trustees, affiliated signatory organisations such as the Charity Commission, Fundraising Standards Board, the International Red Cross & Red Crescent Movements; affiliated institutions such as the National Disaster Management Centre, the South African Reserve Bank, the South African Department of International Relations & Cooperation, the South African

	Department of Social Development, the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and Proudly South African and various global affiliated organisations.
Programmes	1. Emergency relief: Professionally trained emergency relief personnel are readily available to respond to humanitarian disasters anywhere in the world by assessing, co-ordinating, and distributing immediate aid, as well as identifying ways to provide long-term and sustainable aid to those most affected.
	2. Disaster preparedness: As a member of the government's emergency operations committee, the organisation is readily available to assist victims of natural disasters and conflicts. Emergency plans are in place, and a stockpile of essential food items and blankets is readily available for distribution.
	3. Islamic programmes: These projects are dedicated to the upliftment of underprivileged Muslims; funds are directed towards education, orphan care, water wells, and the construction of masaajids.
	4. Orphans and child welfare: Various programmes are aimed at improving the quality of life of orphans, such as the construction of orphanages and the provision of sponsorship and bursaries to orphans to secure their education and necessities such as medical care, food, and clothing.
	5. Water and sanitation: Water and sanitation projects include water well drilling, borehole construction, toilet construction, and education and hygiene training to provide basic sanitation services.
	6. Housing and shelter: The reconstruction of homes and villages, as well as creches, schools, and orphanages, because of natural disasters, a lack of government services, or poverty.
	7. Health and medical: The establishment of medical centres, training of medical training personnel, and coordination of health workshops. The organisation also collaborates with the Islamic Medical Association to implement health initiatives around the world.
	8. Food aid and nutrition: Regular distribution of food hampers, agricultural and rural farming projects, soup kitchens, and campaigns such as the Slice4Life are examples of projects that help fight hunger and malnutrition around the world.
	9. Education and skills development: Working within communities to make education more widely available and affordable, projects include building crèches and schools, providing stationery, bursaries and scholarships, and teacher training programmes to alleviate the burden of inequality, poverty, and illiteracy.
	10. Widows care: Financial assistance, work, and empowerment projects are among the projects aimed at Palestinian widows in Gaza.
	11. Social welfare & careline: Various social welfare projects such as monthly food vouchers, assisting families with rent and electricity payments, and monthly allowances to supplement family income to assist and uplift underprivileged individuals and families are available.
	12. Winter warmth: The winter warmth campaign aims to provide South African communities with high-quality blankets, gloves, and hats.

3.6.1.3 CityHope Disaster Relief responds to disasters by providing relief aid and disaster recovery (CityHope Disaster Relief, 2022a, b).

Table 3.3: Overview of CityHope Disaster Relief

Date established	2014
Purpose	Deliver disaster aid to communities and nations that have been directly affected by disaster situations by engaging and leveraging volunteers, partner organisations, and local church groups.
Location	Regional offices: Head office: Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
Social media platforms	Facebook, Instagram
Stakeholders	Employees, operational and strategic partners such as City Logistics and City Hill Church, the South African Red Cross Society, CBN South Africa; local and international communities, corporate sponsors and trustees.
Programmes	Local and international disaster relief programmes were implemented. The 2020/2021 financial year primarily responded to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These programmes are as follows: Local businesses in KZN and the hospitality industry were identified to provide their short-time staff with food and hygiene parcels; Gauteng, Western Cape and Eastern Cape fire response in various communities affected by the fires; assistance to KZN communities affected by the KZN floods; hygiene parcels distributed to the elderly across KZN; assistance to those affected by xenophobic attacks; and food parcel distribution as part of the pastors relief programme. There were no international responses. The report for the 2021/2022 financial year was not yet available at the time the research was conducted.

3.6.1.4 Ashraful Aid International Humanitarian Organisation is an international humanitarian organisation based in South Africa (Ashraful Aid, n.d.[a,b]).

Table 3.4: An overview of Ashraful Aid

Date established	1997
Purpose	International humanitarian organisation based in South Africa that collaborates with global partners to help communities affected by disaster, famine, and war.
Location	Regional offices: Head office: Marlboro Gardens, Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa. Provincial offices: Cape Town, Western Cape & Durban (KwaZulu-Natal) International offices: Kashmir, Sri-Lanka (Asia), Syria, Yemen, & Palestine (the Middle East) & South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Burundi, Kenya, & Uganda (Africa).
Social media platforms	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.
Stakeholders	Employees, Board of Directors, communities they serve, individual donors, Key partner organisations: Consumer Goods Council of South Africa, CemAir (Pty) Ltd, Sanulac Nutritionals South Africa, Sanlam, and Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa.
Programmes	1. Food security: The provision of hot meals and food hampers. 2. Education: Support provided through bursaries, support to schools which includes school infrastructure.

	3. Healthcare: The distribution of hygiene packs, the establishment of a community clinic and a psychosocial centre in Syria, and the provision of medical supplies to those in need worldwide. 4. Sustainable development: Establishment of vocational training centres and sustainable food gardens. 5. Disaster relief: Providing hot meals, blankets, mattresses, and other necessities during a disaster. 6. Welfare support: Supporting the vulnerable through the (Zakaah) welfare programme. 7. Water/wells: The facilitation and provision of wells in remote communities. 8. Business relief: Assistance to Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMMEs) during times of crisis.

3.6.2 Overview of interview participants

While the names of the organisations are divulged, the names and job titles of the participants, however, remain anonymous. The participants will be referred to as indicated in the table below.

Table 3.5: Overview of interview participants

Organisation	Participant
FoodForward SA	Participant 1
Al-Imdaad Foundation	Participant 2
CityHope	Participant 3
Ashraful Aid	Participant 4

3.7 Data collection methods

The tools used to collect data, such as questionnaires or interviews, are referred to as research methods (Dawson, 2019:12). They are specific data collection and analysis techniques (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:52). According to Gill et al. (2008:291), methods for collecting qualitative research data include observations, interviews, and visual and textual analysis. The collection of data for this study was by video-recorded interviews that took place via Microsoft Teams.

3.7.1   Constructing the interview questions

The literature review was critical in developing the list of interview questions for the primary research. The researcher used the theoretical framework developed as part of Chapter 2's conclusion to create a list of open-ended questions to gather information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by human relief non-profit organisations to answer the following sub-questions:

- How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders before the COVID-19 pandemic to fulfil their mandate?

- How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep fulfilling their mandate?
- To what extent did the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enable them to continue fulfilling their mandate?

The researcher first identified the theories that informed her study, as developed in Chapter 2, that form the conceptual framework to help inform her work before using them to construct the interview questions. She also used her literature review on human relief non-profit organisations and the COVID-19 pandemic. The sections of the interview schedule were derived from the theoretical framework that focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, non-profit organisations, in particular human relief non-profit organisations, stakeholder theory, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication. The questions were designed to elicit information about participants' views on their role in the current pandemic, their thoughts on the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in crisis situations, and their perceptions of crisis communication. This framework was used to identify the key stakeholders of each organisation and to determine how the organisations engaged with them. The interviews were conducted with four human relief non-profit organisations; the aim was to gather data on how these organisations communicated with their stakeholders prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify best practices when communicating with stakeholders during a crisis such as the pandemic.

The researcher divided the interview schedule into sections to provide structure and make it easier to review the data and provide a more comprehensive picture of the experience of the participants. Questions were added at the beginning of the schedule to gather background information on participants and the non-profit organisations for which they work. The interview schedule was divided into three sections: pre-COVID, during-COVID, and post-COVID. Questions related to pre-COVID assisted the researcher to identify each of the non-profit organisations' stakeholders and how they interacted with them prior to the pandemic. This data was gathered to better understand how the pandemic has impacted organisations and their relationships with their stakeholders. The during-COVID section questions focused on how the pandemic has affected non-profit organisations, what changes they made to continue operating, how they dealt with crisis communication during this time, and how they communicated with their stakeholders during the disruptive period of the pandemic. Lastly, the what-lies-in-the-future questions focused on how the non-profit organisations intended to adapt their strategies after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The list of semi-structured interview questions that the researcher asked the participants can be found in Appendix A.

3.7.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used type of interview in qualitative research to understand the human experience better (Bearman, 2019:1; Dawson, 2019:23). The purpose of interviews is to learn about the experiences, perspectives, and/or beliefs of the research participants (Gill et al., 2008:292). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher wants to obtain specific information that can compare with the information from other interviews. Semi-structured interviews also allow for flexibility during the interview process (Dawson, 2019:23).

To achieve this goal, the researcher created an interview schedule with specific questions to ensure consistency. An interview schedule is a list of structured questions prepared by the researcher that serves as a guide for interviewers in collecting information about a specific topic (Dawson, 2019:57). The researcher chose this interview format because it allowed her to deviate from the questions and probe relevant responses in greater depth. Probes are follow-up questions that seek clarification by asking the participant to elaborate and explain in order to understand responses (Dawson, 2019:61).

Adaptive forms of qualitative data collection, such as video conferencing, can suffice to collect data in real-time, live, and face to face, but in remote settings (Torrentira, 2020:83). Similarly, Howlett (2022:387) notes that technology "served as an incredible useful tool for social interaction and research prior to the pandemic and has since become even more important as a way to engage with others". Torrentira (2020:84) goes on to state that remote and video conferencing technologies that can replace face-to-face interviews include Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams or Google Hangout Meet, Collab, GoToMeeting, WebEx, Cisco, Highfive Meeting, Eyeson, or a webinar. The advantages of online video conferencing interviews are that participants are more open and expressive, which in turn allows for the researcher to establish rapport more quickly. Also, these interviews are more cost effective and easier to organise. Video conferencing was the most popular method of data collection among qualitative researchers owing to its usefulness during the pandemic (Torrentira, 2020:84) and will remain so after COVID-19 (Howlett, 2022:399).

According to Tremblay et al. (2021:20), online interactions can be more convenient and provide participants with more flexibility and control, such as the ability to choose the time and location where they will be interviewed in their own space, which is not limited to office hours and office space. The researcher chose to conduct the interviews online rather than in person, owing to the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. This method was deemed to be the safest option at the time of the interviews. Furthermore, only one of the participants was based in

Cape Town, where the researcher is based. The other participants were either from other provinces or travelling abroad busy with humanitarian missions. The researcher chose this method of conducting her interviews as it is versatile and a convenient tool for qualitative data collection. As a result, conducting the interviews online was both more cost effective and time efficient. Online interviews could be conducted at the convenience of the participants - all busy people - and allowed for a more natural flow of conversation, as participants could take their time thinking about their responses.

The researcher conducted online interviews via Teams with a sample of four participants in order to construct meaning and interpret experiences and opinions related to stakeholder engagement within human relief non-profit organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The platform's microphone and camera settings were used to record the interview, and as a backup, the researcher did an audio recording of the interview on her cell phone. During the interview, the researcher took notes, paying close attention to nonverbal signs as well as the participants' verbal responses. The researcher was able to create a comfortable environment for participant disclosure through one-on-one interviews. The setting was informal, yet professional, with the participants in their own environment, making them feel relaxed and comfortable enough to share their experiences openly. The researcher was also able to establish rapport with each participant to create an atmosphere of trust as well as use active listening techniques and maintain confidentiality, ensuring that the participants felt safe and secure. This allowed for a more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and contributed to the creation of a richer data set. Because this is a self-funded project and only one participant was based in Cape Town, this method of data collection was a cost effective and convenient way for the researcher to conduct her qualitative research. All appropriate precautions were taken to ensure that the audio recordings remained private.

During the interviews, the researcher made a conscious effort to remain objective in an effort to ensure a credible and valid data collection process. The researcher transcribed the interviews after they were completed for the purpose of data analysis.

3.7.3 Data collection and reduction

To present the results in a systematic manner, the researcher followed the process outlined by Graue (2015:11). According to Graue (2015:11), there are four important steps in qualitative data collection; data reduction, coding and categorising data, and drawing conclusions. Data collection is the first step and involves gathering information from various sources. This data is then reduced to manageable amounts, allowing the researcher to identify the unit of analysis.

Coding and categorising data help to organise and prepare it for analysis. The researcher can then draw conclusions and report findings based on the coded data.

Data was gathered through one-on-one interviews with four consenting participants, as well as a review of the non-profit organisations' social media pages, to provide insight into how they used their social media platforms as an engagement tool prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. A review of the sampled organisations' websites was conducted to gather information and context for the primary research. One-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to ask direct questions and obtain detailed responses. Once the interviews were concluded, the researcher prepared the data by listening to the recorded interviews and transcribing the responses verbatim. After the data was prepared, it was ready to be analysed.

3.8 Data analysis

In order to understand and interpret the experiences of the participants, the researcher used a qualitative content analysis approach to review and analyse the data gathered. Although qualitative data is unstructured, it requires organisation in order to be useful to researchers. Qualitative content analysis is the process by which the researcher recognises, examines, and interprets patterns and themes produced by textual data, as well as how the patterns and themes aid in answering the research question (Graue, 2015:11). Qualitative content analysis enables researchers to gain a subjective but scientific understanding of social reality (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016:318).

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data in this study because it allows for an in-depth, nuanced analysis of textual data. This is important when investigating a complex phenomenon like the impact of a global pandemic on organisational behaviour. This method allows researchers to subjectively understand social reality in a scientific way by identifying patterns and themes in data and interpreting them in light of the broader context. As a result, it provided a rich understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by the selected human relief non-profit organisations. In South Africa, where the pandemic has been especially severe, qualitative content analysis can provide valuable insights into the challenges that non-profit organisations face when engaging with their stakeholders during a crisis such as the pandemic.

3.8.1 Developing categories

In qualitative data analysis, researchers use categories and coding schemes to organise and interpret their data. Categories help identify themes and patterns, while coding schemes help

code and analyse data. Data, previous studies, and theories can be used to generate categories and a coding scheme (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016:319). The pattern of response or meaning derived from data that informs the research question is referred to as a theme in the context of data analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020:847).

After the data was transcribed, the researcher listened to the recordings several times to become acquainted with the content in order to organise the data. The researcher used the categories identified when creating the interview schedule by identifying common themes in the data. This categorisation of the data into categories allowed for more meaning to be extracted from the transcripts and for comparisons to be made between different data sets. This system of coding enabled the researcher to examine and compare the data (Akinyode & Khan, 2018:167) more easily. The pattern of response or meaning derived from data that informs the research question is referred to as a theme in the context of data analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020:847).

The researcher classified the data into three categories: pre-COVID, during-COVID, and post-COVID to have all four participants' responses together under each category heading. The researcher was aware of additional categories that could emerge during the review and classification process. The researcher then compared all the responses to the stakeholder theory, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication theoretical framework described in Chapter 2. The researcher reviewed the data, identifying similarities and differences between the four non-profit organisations.

3.9 Concluding remarks

The research design employed to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by four human relief non-profit organisations was discussed in this chapter. In doing so, the first objective of the research was reached, namely: to provide an overview of the role, function, and mandate of each of the four selected human relief non-profit organisations. The researcher discussed the qualitative research methodology employed in this study and provided a detailed plan to ensure that the research process would be effective and manageable to equip her to answer the remaining objectives of the study in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The findings and interpretation of the findings are presented in this chapter to answer the research question highlighted in Chapter 1: "What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on stakeholder engagement of the selected South African human relief non-profit organisations?" The following research sub-questions were also addressed:

- How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders before the COVID-19 pandemic to fulfil their mandate?
- How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep fulfilling their mandate?
- To what extent have the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enabled them to continue fulfilling their mandate?

The above was addressed by reaching the next three objectives of the research namely:

- To provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisations engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To provide an overview of the selected non-profit organisation's engagement with their stakeholders to fulfil their mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To determine to what extent the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enabled them to continue fulfilling their mandate.

The data for this analysis was gathered through semi-structured one-on-one interviews conducted with representatives from each of the human relief non-profit organisations. The researcher analysed the data in accordance with the theories presented in Chapter 2 of this study. The results are divided into the three categories used when the interview schedule was created: pre-COVID, during-COVID, and what lies in the future, i.e., how the non-profit organisations intended to adapt their strategies after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, are addressed further in this chapter.

4.2 The population

The literature review section of this study in Section 2.3 states that non-profit organisations vary in size and make significant contributions to a country's socio-economic development and serve as important resources in emergency aid during humanitarian crises. Sections A and B of the interview questions were designed to gather background information about the participants as well as an overview of the non-profit organisations they represent.

The experience of each of the participants within the organisation in terms of the number of years they have been with the organisation is detailed in Table 4.1 overleaf. Although the names of the non-profit organisations in this study have been divulged, the names of the participants have not. The participants interviewed have either been with the organisation as few as 11 months or have been with the organisation prior to its official inception; 75% (three of the four organisations) of the participants interviewed are at executive level, and 25% function at both executive and board level within their organisations.

Table 4.2 is organised into categories to provide an overview of the organisation's mandate as it relates to its stakeholders as well as background information on the non-profit organisations that participated in this study. The summary shows the surveyed non-profit organisations provide varied humanitarian services in South Africa and around the world, both in crisis and non-crisis situations with only 25% (one non-profit organisation) operating in South Africa only. The years of existence of the non-profit organisations vary from nine to 28 years. The number of employees of the non-profit organisations varies from 4–100 full-time employees, and its volunteer database varies from 50–250 at any given moment. Only 25% (one of the non-profit organisations) have a dedicated communication department that handles both local and international communication matters of the organisation. Three-quarters (75%) of the non-profit organisations either have an external agency assisting on a project basis or have resolved to bring the communications function in-house, alternating between in-house and external agency assistance, not having a dedicated department. Twenty-five percent also involve their volunteer field workers to assist with the communication function of the organisation.

Population surveyed

Table 4.1: Participant overview

Participant	Years with organisation
Participant 1: FoodForward SA	11 months
Participant 2: Al-Imdaad Foundation	21 years (since before its inception)
Participant 3: CityHope Disaster Relief	3½ years
Participant 4: Ashraful Aid Foundation	21 years

Table 4.2: Organisational overview

Participant organisation	Year organisation was established	Main purpose of organisation	Area of operation	Registration with Department of Social Development as an NPO	No. of staff (employees & volunteers)	Size of communications department
Participant 1: FoodForward SA	2009	To reduce hunger in South Africa by safely securing quality food from the supply chain and distributing it to community organisations that serve the poor. The implementation of the low-cost solution to hunger and social transformation is dependent on corporate and individual partners.	Operates in all nine of South Africa's Provinces.	Yes	100 employees, approximately 50 volunteers	"The Communications department is known as the Fund Development Department, which consists of the national fundraiser, fund development manager, fundraising officer & the marketing & communications officer. During lockdown Level 3 a PR agency came on board to assist with the social media communication.

Participant 2: Al-Imdaad Foundation	2003	Providing humanitarian assistance in crisis and non-crisis situations to those who are destitute, irrespective of race, religion, creed and geographical boundaries.	Head office based in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, with branches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Kimberley. International offices based in the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Congo, and Turkey. Operates in 65 countries worldwide.	Yes	Approximately 100 employees, number of volunteers are not formally recorded.	Locally and internationally four people deal with the media and communication.
Participant 3: City Hope Disaster Relief	2014	Distribute immediate relief aid following disasters both locally and internationally. 20% of projects are humanitarian and not necessarily disaster relief.	Based in Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal but serves the world. The last three years' (2020, 2021, 2022) efforts have been focused only on KwaZulu-Natal.	No	Four employees, number of volunteers not recorded.	Has an off-site marketing agency that manages the social media, branding & website hosting. Also assists with both internal and external communication such as the drafting and distribution of press releases. Some elements of PR such as relationship building are handled internally.

Participant 4: Ashraful Aid	1995	Provides support and humanitarian relief to the most vulnerable when they need it most. Programmes are aimed at providing access to essential services and empowerment of communities to improve their lives.	Head office based in Marlboro Gardens in Sandton, Johannesburg. Has branches in Lenasia, Durban, Azaadville, Cape Town, and Zambia. Works in 25 countries globally.	Yes	50 employees, approximately 250 volunteers.	This department was previously outsourced, then it was brought in-house and managed by a team of staff members. Field workers, who are primarily volunteers, are also trained to handle communication in the field, and they are accompanied by one full-time employee (depending on the nature of the project, volunteers are sent). This function was later outsourced again, before being brought back in-house in June 2022, while some aspects, such as press release writing and distribution are still outsourced to a PR consultant for specific projects. During the COVID-19 pandemic this function was outsourced.

4.3 Findings

The findings below are structured in terms of the categories used to process the results of the interviews. Because the context of this study is based on the engagement of humanitarian non-profit organisations with their stakeholders prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, three broad categories have been identified in terms of timelines, namely before COVID, during COVID, and what was anticipated post-COVID. The rest of the categories were derived from the theory, covered in Chapter 2, including best practice guidelines for crisis communication. The researcher divided the data into each of the categories based on each participant's response to the specific question in order to compare all replies under each category heading. The researcher was aware of the possibility of new categories emerging during the review and categorisation procedure. Under each category, the researcher compared all the participant's responses to the appropriate theories presented in Chapter 2, with a special focus on best practice guidelines. The answers provided in Sections A and B of the interview questions were not included in the categorisation process because they comprised background information on the participants and organisations and were presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 (pages 40-42).

4.3.1 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Section C of the interview schedule focused on the researcher asking the participants to describe their key stakeholders, the importance of engagement in relation to stakeholder engagement, and how they engaged with their stakeholders prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to answer the research sub-question: how the selected non-profit organisations engaged with their stakeholders prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the literature review in Section 2.4, stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of identifying and managing the diverse needs of an organisation's stakeholders and building and maintaining relationships with them in accordance with the organisation's goals (Phillips et al., 2019:1). During a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical for organisations to adopt a stakeholder-oriented management approach so that organisations can better address their needs and generate more value which will help organisations to remain viable in the long run (Phillips et al., 2019:2); this is critical to an organisation's success. The interview questions sought to understand how the human relief non-profit organisations engaged with their stakeholders before the pandemic and what level of importance they attach to stakeholder engagement to fulfil their organisational mandate.

4.3.1.1 Key stakeholders

Each of the four participants identified their major stakeholders. Stakeholders were classified into food, financial, corporate, and services in-kind stakeholders, operational partners, affiliated institutions, media partners, beneficiary organisations and the communities they serve, both local and international, and internal stakeholders such as their staff and board of trustees.

To provide context for the community they serve, Participant 1 stated, "Before COVID there were 14 million people who are food insecure or at risk."

Participant 3 stated:

> "We have key relationships with certain of our providers, for example, if we have anything that needs to be collected in any shape or form our partner is available within 24 hours to assist us with the collection, which is just phenomenal, which really helps us with our operations."

The data shows that the organisations know who their key stakeholders are, they are not only recipients of services offered by the organisation but also play an integral role in assisting the organisation to fulfil its mandate. The researcher does, however, note that great emphasis is placed on external stakeholders such as the donor communities who benefit from the organisation's services and funders, but little emphasises is placed on the organisation's board, employees and volunteers.

4.3.1.2 The importance of engagement with stakeholders

The literature states that the ability of non-profit organisations to persevere and innovate in service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic was predicted by their engagement with external stakeholders (Fuller & Rice, 2022:1750). The success or failure of an organisation is linked to the effectiveness of various communications directed at specific stakeholders. The researcher asked the participants what engagement with their stakeholders and the value thereof mean to the organisation. Participants reported that building relationships with their stakeholders is critical to the organisation's survival and fulfilment of its mandate.

Keeping open lines of communication with stakeholders and making sure they see the involvement of the respective non-profit organisations on social media, through reporting on how their funds are spent, communicating via newsletters and face-to-face meetings, and providing thank-you gifts were all important aspects noted by participants of stakeholder engagement.

The research revealed that building relationships with stakeholders prior to a crisis is critical to the organisation's survival, supporting the theory that organisations that invest in building meaningful relationships during regular times are better positioned to survive a crisis

Participant 1 stated: "Engaging with our stakeholders is the only way to reach our mandate."

Participant 2 remarked:

> "We have a somewhat personal relationship with our stakeholders and it took us years to develop these relationships because there had to be an element of trust. It's only helped us to enhance, optimise and make our work even a bit better in every facet possible. This is the benefit of this relationship."

Participant 4 also noted: "We did have those prior relationships."

4.3.1.3 Engagement with stakeholders prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants acknowledged that they dealt with each stakeholder differently. The findings indicate that each human relief non-profit organisation recognises the importance of using various communication channels to garner stakeholder support for the organisation and its goals. The findings support the stakeholder theory that emphasises the importance of each stakeholder and actively engaging with stakeholders based on their relative importance inside the organisation.

Participant 2 said:

> "I mean yes, different strokes for different blokes. Certain relationships are more formal while others are more personal. So, whether you are donating R10 or R10 million, every donor is given equal importance, and we have a very high level of donor interaction. We would have one-on-one interaction with our donors, we would meet them on a personal level."

While some place equal emphasis on their stakeholders, others emphasise the benefits of adapting to each stakeholder's requirements and expectations.

> "We usually meet in person with one financial institution that supports us. They usually have face-to-face sessions with a group of about 15 partner non-profit organisations. Workshops are run to increase our knowledge base by teaching us how to do fundraising, build our boards, and identify what the real needs are where they can assist." (Participant 3)

> "We tend to adjust to each stakeholder, especially in terms of the communities. For example, in the hierarchy of communities, and the community leaders, there are cultural sensitivities. We take all those things into context. People like consistency." (Participant 4)

4.3.1.4 Concluding insights on stakeholder engagements prior to COVID-19

It was important to establish who the stakeholders of each non-profit organisation are to understand their importance and the role they play within the organisation in order to engage them accordingly to build sustainable relationships to fulfil the organisation's mandate. The data revealed that the participants have a clear understanding of who their key stakeholders are and how they impact the organisation. Participants classified their stakeholders into various groups, demonstrating their understanding of the stakeholder classification process and their importance to the organisation. It also demonstrates that non-profit organisations recognise the importance of a stakeholder-oriented management style in creating relationships for the benefit of the organisation's mandate to society. Participants also understand how to engage differently with each stakeholder group and the importance of adjusting to each stakeholder group by mentioning key phrases like "adjusting to each stakeholder", "understanding the dynamic of each relationship", and "maintaining open lines of communication".

The stakeholder theory and stakeholder engagement section discussed in Section 2.4 of Chapter 2 of the literature review emphasises the importance of identifying and establishing mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders, as well as the importance of these relationships to the survival of an organisation. This is in line with how the participants described and classified their stakeholders. All the participants were able to identify their key stakeholders and describe their engagement strategy for each group. All the participants agreed that their stakeholders are of utmost importance to the survival of the organisation and to fulfilling its mandate to society. Participants also stated that building and maintaining these relationships prior to a crisis are essential in sustaining the organisation during a crisis. It was, however, noted by the researcher that while the participants understand the importance and relevance of their stakeholders to the organisation's success, participating organisations fall short of understanding and acknowledging the importance of their internal stakeholders in contributing to the success of the organisation. While this is noted by the researcher, the participating organisations do have a strong employee and volunteer workforce committed to the organisation's goals. The researcher concludes that while they are not a priority focus stakeholder group, because they believe in the organisation's mission and values, they are committed to its success, and thus it appears that the organisations take for granted that while their internal stakeholder buy-in is strong, they forget that they need to focus on them.

4.3.2 During the COVID-19 pandemic

As noted in Sections 2.2 and 2.3.1 of the literature review the COVID-19 pandemic caused global disruption and has transformed life as the global community knew it. The rapid spread of the virus became an international health crisis and mitigating measures had to be put in place in order to contain the virus. A national state of disaster was declared which resulted in a near complete shutdown of all but essential services. The pandemic placed an increasing demand on non-profit human relief organisations. Besiou and Van Wassenhove (2020:135) note that to ensure operations could continue during the pandemic, non-profit organisations had to adapt their organisational strategy to carry out their mandate amid this global disaster.

To answer the research sub-question: How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep fulfilling their mandate? (Section D of the interview questions), the researcher focused on how the selected non-profit organisations adapted their strategy to maintain stakeholder engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.3.2.1 Did the list of stakeholders change during the COVID-19 pandemic and was it different from before the pandemic?

All the participants noted a substantial increase in their stakeholders, especially the communities they serve and their donors. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a sense of urgency to their work. Participants reported a significant increase in demand for the human relief non-profit organisation sector to fill bigger gaps that government was unable to fill owing to the need by all citizens regardless of class. The findings support the research discussed in Section 2.3.1 of Chapter 2 that an increased strain was placed on non-profit organisations, particularly human relief organisations, to not only weather the COVID-19 crisis but also a significant rise in recipients of their services.

According to Participant 3:

> "Everything has grown substantially due to COVID. I know most organisations took a hit during COVID, but because we are disaster relief based you think we benefited because our mandate was to respond to the COVID crisis, so all of the resources were channelled towards those that were making a difference in the COVID-19 period. So, our number of donors increased because they could see what we were doing and that we were making an impact, the number of non-profit partners definitely increased as well because, with our small team, we don't have the capacity to work in every community around the province or the country. We have to have partners to assist us in doing that. I think it was the COVID response; we had 231 non-profit organisations assist us with distributing the aid to the communities. So, all those non-profits were contacting us, asking us do we have relief aid,

can they help us. They would come and collect the aid from our distribution centres and get that into their communities. So that definitely grew during that period. Definitely financial. In kind, yes, that definitely increased as well. In the past, we were receiving 1 000 units, and now we are receiving 36 pallet trucks. Just loading and offloading 36 pallets and we have to make a plan with it."

Participant 4 noted:

"What we realised – the scale of communities that we had to provide support with – it really stretched us, you know like we never expected this. It was scary because, you know, communities that generally might not require assistance now required it. So, what we are finding as an NGO we have to fill in much greater gaps now and it's demanding more from us as an NGO."

4.3.2.2 Has the relationship changed with your stakeholders since the COVID-19 pandemic and to what do you attribute it?

Seventy-five percent of the participants indicated that there was a significant change in their relationship with their stakeholders, while 25% noted there was little change. This significant change was mostly attributed to the increase in demand for humanitarian assistance by communities, partnering with other organisations to deliver these services, and the increase in donor funding to deliver essential services to the community.

Participant 1 noted that their beneficiary organisations grew during the pandemic: "The number of people at risk or food insecure has now grown [to] 30 million, due to job losses, and a lot more people can't afford food because inflation has skyrocketed."

Participant 2 stated:

"Our relationship with the relevant stakeholders has improved drastically. Our relationship with like-minded organisations has also improved in a very constructive way. I think everyone came together. We kind of broke down the world that separates us, and you know, we decided now is the time for every one of us to put our shoulders together to the wheel and to make that wheel roll. So, everyone improved their relationships, the quality of partnerships, the sharing of resources, improved the sharing of information. One of the big pros out there is that stakeholders and like-minded organisations partner; every one of us came together, we put our differences aside and we put stumbling blocks aside, and we decided to work together for the betterment of the broader community and society here in South Africa."

Participant 3 stated that not much had changed and ascribed the only difference to electronic donation reporting. Thank-you presents were still sent to donors, but instead of in-person delivery, they were transported via courier, only to discover that there were no personnel at

the offices owing to employees working from home, therefore thank-you gifts were not received.

4.3.2.3 Did you change the way you engaged with your stakeholders to fulfil your mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic?

There was a collective change in engagement by all the participants interviewed. All the participants indicated there was an immediate switch to more online interaction, but because the organisations were classified as essential services during the pandemic, there was some personal interaction with donor communities. The data revealed that international relations and partnerships stagnated during the pandemic, preventing humanitarian organisations from offering international assistance due to global lockdown restrictions.

Participant 2 stated that the online interaction improved their relationships with the majority of their stakeholders; however, owing to the nature of international projects and South Africa's strict lockdown, there was little interaction with international humanitarian services, causing these relations to stagnate.

According to Participant 3, there was considerably more online interaction, although for this participant it was normal as most of their corporate partners are based in another province.

Although all participants indicated going digital, Participant 4 stressed that the speed at which organisations communicate with their stakeholders online is of paramount importance.

Participant 4:

> "What's important is also the speed at which we communicate. You know, for example, during a disaster, being able to communicate from the ground makes a major difference in the speed with which you were able to communicate with stakeholders. It is important in our donor communities; the responsiveness is important."

4.3.2.4 Change of resources as a result of the pandemic

Participants were asked whether their human, financial, physical, intellectual, and other stakeholder management resources changed as a result of the pandemic. All four participants indicated a definite increase in human, physical and intellectual resources, with only one participant indicating a loss of financial resources.

Participant 1 indicated an increase in warehouses and human resources. Participant 3 stated that while their resources expanded significantly, their financial targets set to raise R10 million during 2020 broke ground in just one year during the peak of the pandemic; they were also able to move into bigger premises during the pandemic.

While 75% of the participants saw an increase in their resources as a positive, Participant 2 explained that the pandemic placed an additional burden on their resources. At the humanitarian level, the pandemic caused many people to lose their livelihoods, adding an additional burden on humanitarian non-profit organisations as more people became dependent on them for assistance.

4.3.2.5 Alignment of organisation's strategy with stakeholder expectations during COVID-19

When asked how the organisation's strategy aligned with stakeholder expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants indicated that the pandemic escalated their organisational strategy for the better and some indicated that their targets were exceeded. Donor involvement in humanitarian operations had increased, and operations needed to be scaled up.

Participant 1 stated:

> "We had a 5-year plan which ends in 2024 that was developed pre-COVID; within a year of the pandemic, we witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of beneficiaries requesting assistance. COVID scaled up our plan rapidly; because of the funding that came in, we are far ahead of our targets."

Participant 2 agreed, noting that the pandemic instilled in donors a desire to work alongside humanitarian non-profit organisations to witness personally how help is provided and dispersed to communities.

> "We found a lot more donor interaction, and in fact, certain donors, because they began to donate a bit more, they wanted to see more value for their bucks. We found that many of them had also interacted with us by giving us suggestions, giving us their opinions, you know, and how to streamline our processes and how to take our resources [go] a bit further. So yes, during the pandemic, there was a greater amount of interaction, a greater amount of communication with relevant donors and stakeholders."

> "We create the strategy and then we communicate it with our stakeholders. This is what we see is a requirement and this is what's needed and generally that aligns to what they want or [is] very close to what they intend. In terms of COVID, we already started communication with our stakeholders two weeks prior to the hard lockdown, getting our resources sorted. As a disaster relief agency, you are always disaster ready." (Participant 4)

4.3.2.6 Is this a transitory divergence?

When asked if this was a transitory divergence or whether the organisations would revert to their pre-COVID stakeholder engagement strategy, all the participants indicated they would continue with their adapted stakeholder strategy post the COVID pandemic. This is attributed to the evolvement of their engagement with their respective stakeholders and the power of social media during the pandemic. Technology played a critical role in the adapted stakeholder strategy of human relief non-profit organisations, which agrees with the literature mentioned in Section 2.4.2 of Chapter 2. This is further discussed in the findings when the researcher reports on the digital platforms used to communicate with stakeholders.

Participant 2 stated:

> "Communication to our stakeholders is very, very, important. We look at different avenues and ways how to provide feedback in real time to our donors. Hence, we use a lot of social media. In the olden days, a person would give you funding and they would just expect a letter of acknowledgment and that's evolved. Where people relied on a newsletter, give us a newsletter, and tell us how our funding was utilised. That evolved into an email, an email newsletter. And then you would find that donors then began to rely on social media. They would want information in real time. No more giving us feedback after two weeks and three weeks and four weeks; we want to see first-hand what you are doing. Give us a live stream to oversee your distributions. And in fact, with the pandemic, we found that now donors were even tired of that. They wanted to stand side by side with you on the ground and see first-hand how you are utilising their donations, and how you are distributing their donations; they want to see you on the ground in person. So, you can see over the years how feedback has evolved, from a letter of acknowledgement to a newsletter, into an email newsletter, then to the use of social media, and now they want to be with you in person on the ground to oversee the humanitarian operations and to see first-hand how you are utilising their donations and to see how far you are utilising their resources."

Participant 4 noted that they were now in a much better position to communicate with their stakeholders.

4.3.2.7 Role of stakeholder changes depending on the type of crisis

The researcher asked participants how the role of their stakeholders had changed, depending on the type of crisis. Seventy-five percent of participants indicated that their roles would change, while 25% indicated little change except for their logistics partners.

Participant 2 stated that some humanitarian situations in the world are dangerous and complex, so stakeholders and donors would not be able to join on such missions.

Participant 4 noted that there would be a definite difference, depending on the nature of the disaster.

4.3.2.8 Collaborations formed to carry out mandate?

When asked if the participating organisations formed any new collaborations with other non-profit organisations or corporates during the pandemic to continue carrying out their mandate, the data clearly shows that collaborations were a key driver for human relief non-profit organisations during the pandemic. This finding supports the literature in Section 2.3.1 which refers to adapting to the challenges of the pandemic and that collaboration is one of the key distinguishing factors of adversity-resistant organisations. The researcher therefore concludes that one of the reasons why the selected organisations weathered the COVID crisis is because of their adaptability to collaborate and their commitment to their vision.

According to Participant 1, the model of their organisation is a non-profit organisation that supports other non-profit organisations but solely with food support.

Participant 2 noted that because of the pandemic the organisation was bolstered and their relationships strengthened. "We believe there is power through partnerships. We try our level best to enhance and strengthen our partnerships or collaboration with fellow NGOs, but also with relevant departments of government and relevant stakeholders."

In addition, Participants 3 and 4 noted new collaborations formed during the pandemic, working with smaller community-based non-profit organisations, and assisting them to form new partnerships with bigger entities such as government agencies in order to benefit the community (bigger NGOs helping smaller NGOs).

4.3.2.9 Concluding insights on stakeholder engagements during COVID-19

The data reveals that the stakeholders of all the participating organisations changed during the pandemic. The pandemic brought about a significant increase in the number of people in the community that they serve who required humanitarian help. There was also an increase in their donor community and new collaborations formed with partner organisations and financial donors. All these current and new relationships formed were in fulfilment of the organisation's mandate. From this data, the findings are consistent with what is stated in Section 2.3 of the literature review, which states that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand on humanitarian non-profit organisations. All participants also reported a considerable increase

in their resources, which indicates significant growth for human relief non-profit organisations during the pandemic.

All the participants stated that their engagement strategies changed during the COVID-19 pandemic compared with before the pandemic. Although all participants changed the way they engaged with their stakeholders during the pandemic, most of the organisations reported that the change occurred organically and they would continue with their adapted strategy after the pandemic. Section 2.4.2 of the literature review emphasises how technological improvements have reshaped crisis engagement and information transmission. Social media evolved into a powerful tool for stakeholder participation and collaboration during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic and became the driving force during the disruptive period of the pandemic to keep businesses running. Creating an online presence became an important communication tool for organisations to engage with their stakeholders.

This is in line with how participants justified changing their engagement strategy during the pandemic to online interaction with their stakeholders.

The participants highlighted the importance of collaborations especially during times of crisis to not only fulfil the organisation's mandate but to also capacitate smaller organisations operating in the same environment to better serve society. This aligns closely with the stakeholder theory and stakeholder engagement discussed in the literature review.

The findings reveal that human relief non-profit organisations are invested wholeheartedly in their specific causes and committed to their vision to serve society whether in crisis or non-crisis situations.

4.3.3 Perceived effects of changes on fulfilling mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic

In Section E of the interview questions, the researcher focused on answering the sub-research question: To what extent did the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enable them to continue fulfilling their mandate? The researcher questioned participants on how the new form of stakeholder engagement helped them fulfil their mandate during the pandemic.

4.3.3.1 Did the new form of engagement fulfil the organisation's mandate or benefit the organisation to strengthen the mandate?

Participants found that the new form of engagement strengthened their relationships with their stakeholders and brought them closer together. As a result of the adapted stakeholder strategy, organisations were able to better target their resources because by collaborating, they were able to stretch their resources further to fulfil their mandate. Furthermore, Participant 4 explained that social media assisted with strengthening their engagement with their stakeholders.

4.3.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the adapted stakeholder engagement process

The data shows that the advantages of the adapted stakeholder engagement strategy brought about greater partnerships and awareness of the organisations and their work.

Participant 1 noted: "The increased use of social media created an increase in our social media presence and online engagement with our stakeholders and also increased our brand awareness."

There are also, however, disadvantages of the adapted stakeholder strategy. While the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, some participants noted that with all the collaborations, there are too many individuals involved in the decision-making process. Participant 2 explained, "We have now become completely reliant on one another and secondly there are too many chiefs."

Furthermore, Participant 4 made an insightful comment stating that during the peak of lockdown some stakeholder groups, particularly their beneficiaries, did not have access to technological resources, and those not technologically advanced could not communicate their needs to the organisation. In this case, the adapted stakeholder engagement strategy was at a disadvantage, specifically to their beneficiary stakeholder group.

4.3.3.3 Impact on the reputation of the organisation

All of the participants stated that owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, their reputation and reputation capital improved. The data revealed that the pandemic provided an opportunity, particularly for human relief non-profit organisations, to prove their value and contribution to society; additionally, stakeholders and the general public were able to witness and recognise the critical role humanitarian non-profit organisations play in society. The findings support

Doorley and Garcia's theory (2020:323) that an organisation's response to crisis communication has a direct effect on the organisation's reputation. As a result, the data show that the participating organisations effectively managed their crisis communication strategy, resulting in an improvement in their reputation.

According to Participant 1, one of South Africa's largest non-profit food distribution organisations, not many people knew about the organisation, but as a result of the pandemic, awareness of the organisation increased in a positive way.

Participant 2 and 4 concurred that their stakeholders only realised during the pandemic how large their organisations were and what positive impact they were making on the community and the country as a whole.

Participant 3 stated: "It was an opportunity to perform; previously the disasters were small and manageable and unnoticeable, they weren't in headlines across the world. COVID provided an opportunity for us to show what we are capable of".

4.3.3.4 Lessons learned in stakeholder engagement

When asked what the lessons learned in terms of stakeholder engagement were, the results show that consistent communication and collaboration improve stakeholder relationships and should not only be done in times of crisis. This is consistent with the stakeholder theory discussed in Section 2.4 of Chapter 2 and with the contention of Doorley and Garcia in Section 2.5, which states that cultivating relationships with stakeholders increases brand loyalty and aids the organisation in times of crisis.

Participant 1 stated: "More donations meant more frequent feedback which is important to sustain relationships with donors."

Participant 2 noted:

> "Consistency is key. Consistent communication, and consistent collaboration. We cannot just wait for pandemics and disasters to happen. We need to maintain these relationships. It is very important for us to continue these kinds of relationships in a way where we share information, share resources, and advise one another. We've seen the positives of having good, strong collaboration and partnerships with organisations and stakeholders, and this has to be maintained. We have to maintain this because there is strength in partnerships and there is power in knowledge. So, by sharing knowledge, by sharing advice, by sharing expertise, we will only help one another. And if we help one another, then we are basically helping our country. We are improving the status of our citizens. We are only enhancing the country as a whole. So, we are moving forward."

In addition, the pandemic has instilled a sense of universal humanity in all stakeholders. Participant 3 stated: "It helped to ground all of us. As a country, we were going through something together. You feel like you can relate to your stakeholders on a more personal level."

4.3.3.5 Concluding insights on perceived effects of changes on fulfilling mandate during COVID-19

According to the findings, the adapted strategy for communicating with stakeholders via online platforms increased the participating organisations' relationships with their external stakeholders. It allowed organisations to better target their resources through collaborations during the pandemic, and despite the lockdown restrictions, it allowed organisations to engage with their stakeholders by taking them on humanitarian missions and showcasing the work they do by inviting stakeholders along on the journey through online interaction. The findings support the literature in Section 2.4.2 of Chapter 2, as well as the best practice guidelines for effective crisis communication in Section 2.5.2 of Chapter 2.

The majority of participants agreed that overall the adapted form of engagement increased the organisations' online presence, thus contributing to greater brand awareness of the participating organisations. One participant did however note that the adaptive form of engagement through its collaborations is disadvantageous as there are too many decision-makers. Another participant stated that collaborative partnerships caused organisations to become overly reliant on one another in order to fulfil their organisational mandate. The adaptive strategy was also disadvantageous to some beneficiary stakeholder groups that were unable to access online platforms to communicate their specific needs to the respective organisation.

There was an overall consensus from the organisations that the reputations of the organisations were enhanced through the adaptive strategy. It gave organisations the opportunity to demonstrate what they are capable of in terms of delivering humanitarian services to society. The key factors in stakeholder engagement as noted by the participants are consistent communication with stakeholders, and collaborations to improve relationships and service delivery as mentioned in the literature in Section 2.4.1 of Chapter 2.

4.3.4 Communicating during a crisis

The theoretical framework on crisis communication discussed in Section 2.5 in Chapter 2 indicates the importance of understanding what constitutes a crisis within an organisation and the importance of stakeholder engagement during a crisis. Doorley and Garcia's (2020)

prescriptive model on crisis communication with practical guidelines and checklists for crisis communication was used to investigate how the organisations approached the pandemic from a crisis communication perspective. According to the summary of requirements and best practice guidelines for effective crisis communication presented in Section 2.5.2 of Chapter 2, the researcher deduced the following from participants' responses.

4.3.4.1 Defined crisis communication plan

According to the theory, effective crisis management emphasises stakeholder expectations because of the necessity to develop and share crisis knowledge, as well as manage stakeholder reactions. Communication is interwoven throughout the entire crisis management process. (Doorley & Garcia, 2020:327). The researcher needed to establish whether the participating organisations had a well-defined crisis management plan that guides the organisation during times of crisis. The literature in Section 2.5 of Chapter 2 indicates that crisis management "seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protecting the organisation, stakeholders, and industry from harm while facilitating a positive response to the situation" (Coombs, 2023:8).

When asked if their organisation had a well-defined crisis management plan, only one participant reported that their organisation had a defined crisis management plan in place. Participant 2 indicated that they have engaged various experts in the field for years on end to have a plan in place for every scenario possible which includes succession planning, resources management, and how to sustain the organisation and the work of the organisation locally and internationally.

Although all organisations operate in both crisis and non-crisis situations, most participants (three out of four) do not have a crisis management strategy in place for their organisation, but only for the work they do. Participant 1 indicated that discussions on developing a crisis management plan took place with their PR agency towards the end of the pandemic. Participant 4 explained that they do not have a clear plan or clearly defined management plan, but for disaster response, they have a transparent and clear procedural document that is communicated to everyone on their team.

4.3.4.2 When business/operations, as usual, should be suspended in the event of a crisis

When asked whether their organisation has a clear understanding of when business/operations, as usual, should be suspended in the event of a crisis, and if that plan includes a clear description of what constitutes an emergency or disaster in their organisation,

only one of the four participants indicated that their organisation has a crisis management plan for their organisation.

According to the theory, in order for an organisation to be prepared for a crisis, it must understand what a crisis is and have procedures in place that alert them when "business as usual" should be suspended. The data revealed that only one organisation understands what constitutes an emergency within their organisation.

> "We have various policies for every single thing, you name it, we've got a policy for it. We have policies in place to help define the organisation and to make sure that the organisation runs very smoothly whether it's in a crisis or not. For an organisation as large as ours we have these contingency plans in place, whether it's with regard to funding, resources, or serving the poor." (Participant 2)

Humanitarian non-profit organisations are resilient because they are built for disaster, so a crisis situation is what they thrive on, it's part of their DNA. They are very well resourced and structured to assist communities in times of disaster; however, they do not know what a crisis within their own organisation looks like. Participant 3 stated, "We don't even know what that looks like."

Participant 4, however, explained only when there is a possibility or high probability of staff and volunteers being injured, operations are ceased. "When there is life endangerment of our teams we stop our operations; other than that we are built for disaster," Participant 4 stated.

4.3.4.3 Involvement in the crisis management plan

According to Doorley and Garcia's theory on crisis preparedness discussed in Section 2.5 of Chapter 2, for effective crisis communication having a designated crisis management team for crisis preparedness and response is important for organisations to ensure that they are prepared for a crisis. The findings revealed that half of the participating organisations have various departments as part of their crisis response teams, although the other half do not involve specific departments due to the structure of their organisation. The team responsible for the organisation's crisis preparedness is at trustee and executive management level, which is in line with the theory.

According to the findings, half of the participating organisations consult with various departments to facilitate their crisis response, such as operations for operational and logistical issues, finance for financial guidance, or the management team for organisational guidance in terms of fulfilling their mandate. Fifty percent of the participants stated that a representative from each department is involved in their crisis communication plan. However, 25% indicated

that their crisis management plan is managed by their trustees while the other 25% stated, "It would be me or nobody." This participant is on the executive management level within the organisation.

4.3.4.4 Start communicating about the pandemic

The guidelines for effective crisis communication provided in Section 2.5.2 of Chapter 2 state that the 'golden hour' is the most crucial time for organisations to communicate during a crisis. Prompt and timely communication during a crisis can give organisations a competitive edge to weather the storm.

The data shows that the majority of participants began engaging with their stakeholders about the pandemic shortly before South Africa was declared to be in a national state of lockdown. Participant 1 stated that they immediately made an appeal on their social media channels during the hard lockdown; their target was exceeded within six months of the pandemic.

Participant 3 explained their communication with stakeholders started in March 2020 with the assistance of a PR agency.

Although the majority of participants started communicating with their stakeholders shortly before the hard lockdown, Participant 2 noted that they actively observed what was happening on the international scene because they are members of the United Nations. Participant 2 further stated that they began to position themselves strategically to lend assistance in South Africa and wherever they have offices in the world and began positioning themselves in December 2019/January 2020.

The findings confirmed that participants followed the theoretical framework and guidelines for best practices in crisis communication and leveraged the opportunities presented by the pandemic to appeal to their stakeholders for assistance at the early stage of the crisis in order to continue to fulfil their mandate during the pandemic.

4.3.4.5 Dealing with the increased demand for humanitarian relief during the pandemic

Collaboration was one of the key threads that emerged from the literature in Chapter 2. The guidelines for best practice in crisis communication provided in Section 2.5.2 state that organisations cannot deal with a crisis on their own; leveraging from collaborations formed before a crisis is important for organisations to continue fulfilling their mandate during a crisis.

While collaborations formed before a crisis are important for effective crisis communication, the data also reveals that participating organisations formed new collaborations during the pandemic to continue fulfilling their mandate. Participants explained that they partnered with other smaller non-profit organisations to capacitate them and formed new corporate partnerships to meet the increased demand for humanitarian assistance during the pandemic. According to the findings, owing to the exponential demand for assistance during the pandemic, 75% of the participants stated that they dealt with the demand by appealing to multinational corporations and by collaborating with various stakeholders with whom they already had a relationship as well as with the new relationships formed during the pandemic. Twenty-five percent of the participants explained that it was through their collaborations prior to the pandemic that they were able to deal with the demand, as each partner brought different strengths to the table and through the collaborations helped made a collaborative impact.

4.3.4.6 Flexibility of governance structures

The literature in Section 2.3.1 of Chapter 2 states that the leadership and management of non-profit organisations play an important role in organisations navigating crises successfully. The adaptability of leadership and governance structures aids organisations in successfully navigating a crisis.

The data indicates that the boards of the non-profit organisations were flexible in their governance and were continuously adapting as the pandemic progressed. There was an increased interaction between the boards and management teams of the organisations. Participant 2 explained that they needed to adapt across the spectrum in order to survive. Convening daily and very quickly when required, and consistent communication between the board, management, and operations team, resulted in the organisation being able to get through the pandemic.

Participant 3 explained that during the peak of the pandemic, authority by the board was granted to do what needed to be done in order to fulfil their mandate. As a result of the growth of the organisation, new governance structures were introduced.

4.3.4.7 Use and selection of digital platforms for stakeholder communication

Section 2.4.2 of the study highlights the critical role of technology in stakeholder engagement and crisis situations. During the pandemic, technology became an integral part of how business is conducted. According to the best practice recommendations for crisis communication, a multi-stakeholder strategy with specific guidelines for each stakeholder group is important for

improved crisis preparedness. Using different distribution channels with different messages to reach each stakeholder group is important to access the organisation's stakeholders.

The data indicated that all the participants used digital platforms to communicate with their stakeholders during the pandemic. Participants primarily used Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp, and email as digital platforms for stakeholder communication.

When asked how the platforms were selected, Participant 2 stated, "As we went along we figured out which platforms to use for which stakeholders."

Participant 3 explained that the organisation needed to understand the different digital platforms and their target market in order to distribute their communication.

The data indicate that the use of social media provided non-profit organisations the opportunity to provide live feeds of their work, allowing stakeholders the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the mandate of the organisation and how it is carried out. The participating organisations used the opportunity during hard lockdown while most people were glued to their phones to see what was going on around the world to live stream their distributions. This also allowed the organisations the opportunity to appeal to donors.

All the organisations stated that social media allowed them to engage with their stakeholders on a daily basis. This method of communication proved to be an effective tool for humanitarian non-profit organisations to communicate with its stakeholders during the hard lockdown.

Participant 2 explained that during lockdown, "People only had one way out to the world, that was through social media. Everyone was stuck at home, so the only way out was through their devices and these were the platforms."

Furthermore, Participant 4 indicated that the transition occurred naturally throughout the pandemic and was not part of their strategy. Participant 4 went on to add that during this time, traditional methods of interacting with their donors, such as reports and brochures, came to an end.

The participants' responses were based on statistics such as increased online involvement, followers, and social media trends. Participant 1 explained that in addition to the online statistics, their social media appeals far exceeded what they wanted to accomplish.

Although for some participants the multi-stakeholder approach was not part of their strategy. the data indicated that the participants understand that one cannot use one channel and one message to communicate with one's stakeholders; each group requires a different message through a different channel. In addition, the data reveal that social media became an effective tool for organisations to communicate with their stakeholders.

4.3.4.8 Adaptation of crisis communication plan during the pandemic

Because only one organisation out of the four has a well-defined crisis communication plan, the data show that only 25% of the participants indicated that they adapted their crisis communication plan. Although the remainder of the participating organisations did not have a defined crisis management plan, they understand the importance of adaptation during times of crisis.

Participant 2 stated: "Yes we did adapt it. We realised that we needed to work under extraordinary conditions and situations, it was not the norm." Fifty percent went on to say that during times of disaster, adaptations of plans happen naturally. However, 25% of the participants noted that there was no adaptation of their plans during COVID, and discussion about creating a crisis management plan took place a year after the pandemic was declared.

4.3.4.9 Lessons learned in crisis communication

Participants shared valuable information on lessons learned at the pandemic's peak, with the major themes being consistent communication, collaboration, and having formed trusting relationships. Participant 2 stated: "Consistency is very, very, important as stakeholders do not want to hear from you now and then in ten days." Participant 2 went on to say that the pandemic provided stakeholders with the opportunity to analyse the work of humanitarian non-profit organisations; providing information to them in real-time and consistently is crucial during times of crisis.

Participant 3 provided a different facet to the feedback by explaining that the pandemic provided humanitarian non-profit organisations the opportunity to learn from the experience of others in similar situations.

Furthermore, Participant 4 remarked that helping others is inherent in each individual, since the pandemic saw people from all walks of life trying to help in any way they could. Continuing to harness the generosity of people after the pandemic and channel it towards a higher cause will help humanitarian non-profit organisations fulfil their mandate to contribute to society

4.3.4.10 Concluding insights on communicating during a crisis

Because the nature of humanitarian non-profit organisations is to assist in times of crisis and disaster, they are geared for crises and are ready to mobilise teams to be deployed worldwide to assist. According to the findings, while organisations have practically implemented some of the best practice guidelines for crisis communication mentioned in Section 2.5.2 of Chapter 2, there is a lack of theoretical knowledge in crisis preparedness in respect of organisations' understanding when their organisation is facing a crisis and the importance of having a crisis management plan for the organisation rather than a crisis management plan for assisting humanity in times of disaster.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that humanitarian non-profit organisations are agile and adaptable to their changing environment in order to continue to serve humanity irrespective of whether the crisis directly affects them or not.

Interestingly, the researcher observed a lack of focus on crisis communication in one specific stakeholder group, their employees, and volunteers. The data suggest that because of non-profit humanitarian organisations' inherent nature to be disaster ready and respond to crises to alleviate suffering and assist humanity, they seldom think of themselves.

The data support the theory of Doorley and Garcia (2020) and best practice guidelines for crisis communication, that communicating with your stakeholders during the 'golden hour' is critical for an organisation's survival.

The literature in Section 2.4 states that collaborations formed before a crisis assist organisations during difficult times. Furthermore, the literature indicates that collaborations during the pandemic carried organisations through the storm. The findings support this, as all participants acknowledged that collaborations formed prior to or during the pandemic strengthened their mandate to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need.

Digital platforms such as social media platforms played a key role in assisting organisations to adapt and communicate with their stakeholders. Consistent communication was crucial in establishing trust in the stakeholder engagement process.

The selected non-profit humanitarian organisations managed to weather the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, despite some not having a well-defined crisis communication plan. However, two of the participating organisations indicated that they were in the process of developing a

strategic crisis communication plan as a result of the lessons learned in crisis communication during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic brought a sense of understanding of the importance of crisis communication by human relief non-profit organisations.

4.3.5 Post COVID-19 pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic was still ongoing at the time the interviews were conducted, the findings below reflect what participants anticipated they would do when the pandemic was over. When asked what new opportunities the COVID-19 pandemic offered human relief non-profit organisations, four significant opportunities emerged. New relationships and collaborations for human relief non-profit organisations across all sectors were attributed due to the increase in donations, and partnerships formed to continue with their mandate. The pandemic provided the opportunity for organisations to stretch their resources and realise that they are capable of achieving more than what they were doing. Communication across all levels, from the grassroots to the very top of the hierarchy, is very important. The pandemic also strengthened the organisations' brand positioning and enhanced its reputation.

Participant 1 explained that the pandemic presented them with an opportunity to form new relationships and partnerships; this is attributed to the increase in corporate sponsorship at the start of the pandemic.

Participant 2 outlined the importance of partnerships and collaboration and the best use of resources without duplication. Participant 2 further commented: "It has taught us the importance of communication, across all relevant stakeholders across the spectrum from the grassroots level to the very top of the hierarchy, there has to be very strong communication."

According to Participant 3, the pandemic presented the organisation with new stakeholders and an increased number of new relationships across various sectors; this statement was attributed to the increase in financial and in-kind donations.

Participant 4 explained the organisation's brand position had strengthened and that the organisation's overall service delivery had improved, adding "We never realised that we could actually do so much. The pandemic has helped us to deliver on a large scale."

4.3.5.1 Concluding insights post COVID-19
The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for the four human relief non-profit organisations to form new relationships and partnerships. Organisations recognised the value

of communication across all stakeholder groups and made them strengthen existing relationships with their stakeholders, thus increasing their financial and resource support. Although the pandemic wreaked havoc globally, it made humanitarian non-profit organisations realise their value and how best they can stretch their resources in order to fulfil their mandate to society.

4.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter compared the findings of the literature review with the findings of the primary research in order to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by four human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa. The findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on how human relief non-profit organisations communicated with their stakeholders and how the organisations embraced technology to assist the organisations to continue to fulfil their mandate to society during the unprecedented crisis.

The data revealed that all the participants indicated that they would continue with the adaptations they adopted during the pandemic to ensure they continue to engage with their stakeholders.

The theory is implemented to a certain degree in the daily practical practice of the four participating organisations, although theoretically, the organisations do not have a well-defined crisis management plan.

In addition, this chapter discussed the application of the guidelines for effective crisis communication by human relief non-profit organisations and what lessons were learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that although most of the participating organisations did not have a well-defined crisis management plan, because of their inherent adaptable nature, they were able to weather the COVID-19 crisis.

This chapter also highlighted the opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic presented to human relief non-profit organisations. The findings revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has cemented the role of human relief non-profit organisations in society. The findings indicate that the pandemic made organisations realise the importance of having a strategic crisis communication plan. Two human relief non-profit organisations are engaging their PR agencies to assist them in developing a crisis communication plan and improving measures put in place during the pandemic to better serve society, while one organisation is re-looking at its governance structures as a result of the pandemic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research by highlighting the key findings of the study and addresses whether the research question through the sub-questions has been answered; it also offers recommendations for further research. The main objective of the study was to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa.

Based on the results, this chapter provides guidelines for effective stakeholder engagement in crisis situations and for improved disruption and crisis preparedness. Furthermore, this chapter addresses the study's limitations and identifies areas for future research that can assist humanitarian non-profit organisations to engage with their stakeholders during times of crisis.

In Chapter 4 the researcher answered the following sub-questions identified to answer the research question.

- Sub-question 1: How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders before the COVID-19 pandemic? The answers are discussed in the previous chapter in Section 4.3.1 under the heading prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Sub-question 2: How did the selected non-profit organisations engage with their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic? The answers are discussed in Section 4.3.2 of the previous chapter under the heading during the pandemic.
- Sub-question 3: To what extent did the adapted stakeholder engagement processes of the respective non-profit organisations enable them to continue fulfilling their mandate? The answers are discussed in Sections 4.3.4, 4.3.5 and 4.4.

In this chapter, a summary of those answers is used to provide the answer to the main research question. The main research question the researcher wished to answer in this study: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on stakeholder engagement of selected South African human relief non-profit organisations. What follows is a set of conclusions and recommendations addressing the main research question.

5.2 Summary of findings

The study revealed several findings from the online qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted to answer the primary research question: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on stakeholder engagement of selected South African human relief organisations? The findings from the study are summarised below.

5.2.1 Findings revealing successes

- The participating human relief non-profit organisations are good examples of adversity-resistant non-profit organisations. This is evident in the fact that they are agile and adaptable to their changing environment in order to continue serving humanity whether in crisis or non-crisis situations and whether the crisis directly affects them or not. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the need for humanitarian assistance, which revealed how the participating non-profit organisations had to quickly adapt to changing environments.

- The participating human relief non-profit organisations do follow a multistakeholder strategy. This is evident in the fact that organisations have a clear understanding of who the organisation's stakeholders are, the impact they have on the organisation, and their importance to the organisation's survival in fulfilling its mandate. Participating human relief non-profit organisations recognise the value of a multi-stakeholder approach. This is reflected in its stakeholder engagement strategies. During the pandemic, engagement techniques were adapted, and participants expect to continue using the adapted strategy after the pandemic. Participating organisations' revised stakeholder engagement strategies enabled them to better target their resources through cooperation during the pandemic. The adaptive stakeholder engagement strategy used by the participating organisations improved their reputations.

- Actively engaging and building relationships with stakeholders prior to a crisis is critical to the organisation's survival during a crisis. This is evident in the participating human relief non-profit organisations trusted, personal relationships with their stakeholders through the years to ensure the organisation's fulfilment of its mandate to society and ensuring its survival during and after a crisis.

- Collaborations and partnerships have proven to be beneficial to the survival of human relief non-profit organisations. This is evident in the new collaborations and partnerships formed during the pandemic by human relief non-profit organisations to continue carrying out their mandate to serve society.

- Consistent and timely communication during a crisis improves the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in crisis situations. This is demonstrated by the participating human relief non-profit organisations's active engagement with its stakeholders and collaborative efforts, which resulted in increased resources.

- Online communication became the driving force for participating non-profit organisations during the pandemic. In the opinion of the researcher, the non-profit organisations employed agile techniques to communicate with their stakeholders, including daily engagement and consistent communication on social media. During the hard lockdown, they used live broadcasts to engage stakeholders, sharing their

operations in real time. This allowed the non-profit organisations to keep stakeholders informed about ongoing activities and urgent needs.

- A well-defined crisis communication plan mitigates damage and improves an organisation's reputation. Because of their flexible nature, the selected non-profit organisations weathered the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, despite some lacking a well-defined crisis communication plan.

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased awareness of the significance of crisis communication among human relief non-profit organisations. This is evident in two participating human relief non-profit organisations that indicated further engagement with its public relations agencies to assist in developing a crisis communication plan and improve procedures put in place during the pandemic to better serve society. In addition, another organisation is re-looking at its governance structures in order to be better prepared during the next crisis the organisation may face.

- Although the pandemic wreaked havoc globally, it made human relief non-profit organisations realise their value and how best they can extend their resources in order to serve their societal mandate. This is evident in the collaborative efforts and impact on the communities that the organisations had during the pandemic in fulfilling its mandate to society.

5.2.2 Findings revealing shortcomings

- Participating human relief non-profit organisations fall short of understanding and acknowledging the importance of their internal stakeholders during a crisis. This is evident in the findings where none of the organisations highlighted their internal stakeholders as part of the key stakeholders when engagement strategies were discussed. The internal stakeholders only formed part of the key stakeholders in fulfilment of the organisations mandate to society rather than a key stakeholder in the organisations' crisis communication plan.

- For two of the non-profit organisations the adapted form of engagement through its collaborations is disadvantageous as there are too many decision-makers and causes organisations to become overly reliant on one another in order to fulfil their organisational mandate.

- The adaptive strategy was also disadvantageous to some beneficiary stakeholder groups that were unable to access online platforms to communicate their specific needs to the respective organisation during the hard lockdown period of the pandemic.

- A lack of theoretical knowledge in crisis preparedness in respect of organisations' understanding when their organisation is facing a crisis and the importance of having a crisis management plan for the organisation rather than a crisis management plan for assisting humanity in times of disaster.

5.3 Guidelines for best practice in crisis communication

Based on the research conducted the researcher provides the following guidelines for effective stakeholder engagement in crisis situations and for improved disruption and crisis preparedness. The guidelines below are based on the findings in Chapter 4.

1. A well-documented crisis communication plan for the organisation is an emergency plan put together by the organisation to use in times of crisis. When a crisis occurs, there is an immediate need to communicate. In the hours and days following a crisis, organisations must be able to respond quickly, appropriately, and confidently. A well-defined crisis communication plan will help organisations better prepare for the interruption. The crisis communication plan should be reviewed and revised on an annual basis. This is evident in the fact that two of the participating human relief non-profit organisation did not have a well-defined crisis communication plan but indicated further engagement with its public relations agency for assistance in developing a plan for navigating future crises.

2. Leadership and management play an important role in organisations navigating crises successfully. Organisations should establish a crisis communication team from its leadership, this will help manage the flow of information and messages during a situation that threatens the reputation, operations, or survival of an organisation or its stakeholders. This is evident in that one of the participating organisations will re-look at its governance structures as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and the leadership support the rest of the organisations had during the COVID-19 crisis.

3. Following an examination of the research and literature, the researcher recommends that human relief non-profit organisations place a stronger emphasis on internal stakeholders to ensure continued buy-in and dedication to their specific goals in order to fulfil their societal mandate. Organisations should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to better address the needs of the organisation's stakeholders. This recommendation is consistent with the recommendations for organisations to improve employee communication amid a global disaster such as the COVID-19 pandemic, published by the Institute for Public Relations and Peppercomm on how communication leaders have responded to the pandemic and other organisational challenges (Institute for Public Relations & Peppercomm, 2020).

4. Clear and consistent communication with stakeholders enhances stakeholder relationships; cultivating stakeholder relationships before a crisis is critical as increases brand loyalty and aids the organisation in times of crisis. This is evident in the fact that participating organisations noted consistent communication with its stakeholders as a

key factor in stakeholder engagement to assist the organisation fulfil its mandate especially during times of crisis.

5. During a crisis, organisations should embrace technological advancements to establish a strong online presence and not rely primarily on one medium or platform to connect with their stakeholders. This is clear in the research, which shows how technology has become a fundamental component of how business is performed, as well as how it has transformed crisis engagement and information transfer during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media has become a significant instrument for stakeholder interaction and collaboration for participating human relief non-profit organisations.

6. Collaborations especially during times of crisis can assist organisations to weather the storm during a crisis. In times of crisis, organisations must bring together professionals with unique, cross-functional perspectives to handle fast-changing, complex challenges with long-term consequences and meet the growing needs during a crisis. The findings of the research clearly indicate the importance of collaborations especially during times of crisis.

7. Organisations should be adaptive and agile during times of crisis, from governing structures to operational levels. One of the primary differentiating characteristics of adversity-resistant organisations is their adaptability. This is evident in the literature and findings of the research, which shows that the participating human relief non-profit organisations were able to weather a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic due to their adaptability.

5.4 Limitations of the research

The findings of the research are based on the subjective responses and opinions of four participants from human relief non-profit organisations. Because the sample included only four human relief non-profit organisations operating in South Africa in crisis and non-crisis situations, it cannot be considered a true representation of all human relief non-profit organisations.

The interviews with the participating organisations were conducted online owing to the precautionary measures of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the convenience of the participants as well as the researcher. Load shedding, scheduled power outages due to a shortage of electricity supply in South Africa, impacted the connectivity of participants. Although the researcher conducted the interviews where she experienced no load shedding as she was based in a critical infrastructure area that did not receive load shedding, participants, however, experienced various connectivity issues, some due to load shedding.

The intermittent connectivity issues experienced made it difficult for the researcher to conduct a fluent interview and she needed to reschedule one interview as a result of connectivity.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

It is recommended that future research incorporate a broader sample of human relief non-profit organisations to add validity to the findings of this research.

Further research into the use of the adapted stakeholder strategy by human relief non-profit organisations post the COVID-19 pandemic is also recommended as the end of the public health emergency around the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in May 2023. This research may provide a more comprehensive analysis of the post-COVID category and may provide additional guidelines on adapted stakeholder engagement processes of organisations in fulfilling their mandate to society.

5.6 Concluding remarks

The expected outcome of this research was to equip human relief non-profit organisations with evidence-based knowledge on how to best engage with their stakeholders during a crisis. It attempted to provide organisations with guidelines for best practices in stakeholder engagement during a crisis to fulfil their responsibility to society. Despite challenges, the selected non-profit organisations in South Africa have risen to the occasion and are in the opinion of the researcher working relentlessly to assist those in need. They have adapted their engagement strategies to meet the needs of their stakeholders, whether by offering information and advice on how to keep safe during the pandemic or delivering crucial assistance during lockdown. Furthermore, the findings urge human relief non-profit organisations to embrace new technology and incorporate it into their strategic communication when engaging with their stakeholders.

The experiences of human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa can provide valuable lessons for other organisations around the world facing similar challenges. By understanding the different ways in which non-profit organisations have responded to the pandemic, organisations can learn from one another and build a more effective response to a crisis such as the COVID-19 global pandemic.

REFERENCES

Ahmad, Z.A. 2019. Embracing social media: The change and disruption to public relations practices in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 35(1):319-337. https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2019-3501-21

Akinyode, F.B. & Khan, T.H. 2018. Step by step approach for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Built Environment & Sustainability,* 5(3):163-174. https://doi.org/10.11113/ijbes.v5.n3.267

Al-Imdaad Foundation. 2021a. About us. https://www.alimdaad.com/#/aboutus [20 April 2022].

Al-Imdaad Foundation. 2021b. Our work. https://www.alimdaad.com/#/ourwork [30 April 2022].

Almeida, F., Santos, J.D. & Monteiro, J.A. 2020. The challenges and opportunities in the digitalization of companies in a post-COVID-19 world. *IEEE Engineering Management*, 48(3):97-103.

Arokiasamy, L., Kwaider, S. & Balaraman, R.A. 2019. Best practices for crisis communication: A qualitative study. *Global Business & Management Research*, 11(2):141-150.

Ashraful Aid. n.d.[a] About us. https://www.ashrafulaid.org/about-us [12 May 2022].

Ashraful Aid. n.d.[b] All posts. https://www.ashrafulaid.org/category/all-posts [12 May 2022].

Asogwa, I.E., Varua, M.E., Datt, R. & Humphreys, P. 2022. The impact of COVID-19 on the operations and management of NGOs: Resilience and recommendations. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* (ahead of print). https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-12-2021-3090

Barhate, B., Hirudayaraj, M., Gunasekara, N., Ibrahim, G., Alizadeh, A. & Abadi, M. 2021. Crisis within a crisis: Migrant workers' predicament during COVID-19 lockdown and the role of non-profit organizations in India. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 15(1):151-164. https://doi.org/10.1177/0973703021997624

Bearman, M. 2019. Focus on methodology: Eliciting rich data: A practical approach to writing semi-structured interview schedules. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal,* 20(3):1-11. https://doi.org/10.11157/fohpe.v20i3.387

Besiou, M. & Van Wassenhove, L.N. 2020. Humanitarian operations: A world of opportunity for relevant and impactful research. *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*, 22(1):135-145. https://doi.org/10.1287/msom.2019.079

Bourne, L. 2016. Targeted communication: The key to effective stakeholder engagement. *29th World Congress of the International Project Management Association (IPMA), South Melbourne, Australia, 28 – 30 September 2015. Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 226:431-438.

Bryant, J., Holloway, K., Lough, O. & Willitts-King, B. 2020. Bridging humanitarian digital divides during COVID-19. *HPG briefing note.* London: ODI. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Bridging_humanitarian_digital_divides_during_Covid-19.pdf

Chikwanda, H.K. 2020. Challenges and strategies in NPO's operations during COVID-19 pandemic. In *Proceedings of the 2nd African International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management, Harare, Zimbabwe, 7–10 December.* Southfield, MI: IEOM Society International: 680-687.

Choto, P., Iwu, C.G. & Tengeh, R.K. 2020. Non-profit organisations and socio-economic development in South Africa: A literature analysis. *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews*, 8(2):589-600. https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2020.8267

Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M. & Francis, K. 2019. Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 2019:7. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927

CityHope Disaster Relief. 2021. Trustees report: March 20 – February 21. CHDR Trustee Report 2021_AFS.pdf

CityHope Disaster Relief. 2022a. About us. https://cityhopedisasterrelief.org/about-us/ [28 April 2022].

CityHope Disaster Relief. 2022b. Where we have worked. https://cityhopedisasterrelief.org/blog/ [28 April 2022].

Coombs, W.T. 2014. State of crisis communication: Evidence and the bleeding edge. *Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations*, 1(1):1-12.

Coombs, W.T. 2023. *Ongoing crisis communication*: *Planning, managing, and responding.* 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Corak, M. 2020. COVID-19 is not the great leveller, it's the great revealer. *Economics for Public Policy.* https://milescorak.com/2020/04/13/covid-19-is-not-the-great-leveller-its-the-great-revealer

Dawson, C. 2019. *Introduction to research methods*. 5th ed. London: Robinson.

DeMars, W.E. & Dijkzeul, D. 2019. Constituting NGOs. In Davies, T. (ed.). *Routledge handbook of NGOs and international relations*. Oxford: Routledge: 75-89.

Doorley, J. & Garcia, H.F. 2020. *Reputation management: The key to successful public relations and corporate communication.* 4th ed. New York, NY: Routledge.

Dwiedienawati, D., Tjahjana, D., Faisal, M., Gandasari, D. & Abdinagoro, S.B. 2021. Determinants of perceived effectiveness in crisis management and company reputation during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cogent Business & Management,* 8(1):1912523. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2021.1912523

Farazmand, A. & Danaeefard, H. 2021. Crisismanship under the most severe sanctions: Lessons learned from the Iranian Government's responses to the COVID-19. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(13):1149-1164. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2021.1931315

FoodForward SA. 2022a. Home. https://foodforwardsa.org/ [30 April 2022].

FoodForward SA. 2022b. Our partners. https://foodforwardsa.org/our-partners/ [30 April 2022].

FoodForward SA. 2022c. Our work. https://foodforwardsa.org/our-work [30 April 2022].

Freeman, R.E. 2010. *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Freudenreich, B., Lüdeke-Freund, F. & Schaltegger, S. 2020. A stakeholder theory perspective on business models: Value creation for sustainability. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166:3-8. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04112-z

Fuller, R.P. & La Sala, A. 2021. Crisis communication preparedness practices among U.S. charitable organizations: Results from a national survey. *SAGE Open*, 11(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211014516

Fuller, R.P. & Rice, R.E. 2022. Nonprofit organization communication, crisis planning, and strategic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, 27(3):e1750. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1750

Garcia-Rodriguez, I., Romero-Merino, M.E. & Santamaria-Mariscal, M. 2021. The role of boards in the financial vulnerability of nonprofit organizations. *Financial Accountability & Management*, *37*(3):237-261. https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12269

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E. & Chadwick, B. 2008. Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6):291-295. https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192

Gonzalez-Perez, M.A., Cordova, M., Hermans, M., Nava-Aguirre, K.M., Monje-Cueto, F., Mingo, S., Tobon, S., Rodriguez, C.A., Salvaj, E.H. & Floriani, D.E. 2021. Crisis conducting stakeholder salience: Shifts in the evolution of private universities' governance in Latin America. *Corporate Governance*, 21(6):1194-1214. https://doi.org/10.1108/CG-09-2020-0397

Goodman, M.B. 2018. Communicating strategic change. In Austin, L.L. & Jin, Y. (eds). *Social media and crisis communication*. New York, NY: Routledge: 41-56.

Graue, C. 2015. Qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Sales, Retailing & Marketing,* 4(9):5-14.

Griffiths, M. 2022. Global humanitarian overview 2022. New York, NY: OCHA. file:///Users/elizabeth/Downloads/GHO%20December%20Update%202022.pdf

Hai, T.N, Van, Q.N & Thi Tuyet, M.N. 2021. Digital transformation: Opportunities and challenges for leaders in the emerging countries in response to COVID-19 pandemic. *Emerging Science Journal*, 5(1):21-36. https://doi.org/10.28991/esj-2021-SPER-03

Hall, P.D. 2016. Historical perspectives on nonprofit organizations in the United States. In Renz, D.O. & Herman, R.D. (eds). *The Jossey-Bass handbook of nonprofit leadership and management.* 4th ed. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass: 3- 42.

Haupt, B. & Azevedo, L. 2021. Crisis communication planning and nonprofit organizations. *Disaster Prevention and Management,* 30(2):163-178. https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-06-2020-0197

Hennink, MM., Hutter, I. & Bailey, A. 2020. *Qualitative research methods.* 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Howlett, M. 2022. Looking at the 'field' though a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. *Qualitative Research*, 22(3):387-402. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120985691

Hung-Baesecke, C.J.F. & Bowen, S.A. 2018. Ethical engagement at a time of crisis in the social era. In Austin, L.L. & Jin, Y. (eds). *Social media and crisis communication.* New York, NY: Routledge: 68-80.

Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J. & Ecker, U.K.H. 2021. Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 8:30. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00701-w

Institute for Public Relations & Peppercom. 2020. Leadership perspectives: Leading and looking ahead through COVID-19. July 15. https://instituteforpr.org/leadership-perspectives-covid19/ [22 May 2023].

Jong, W. 2020. Evaluating crisis communication. A 30-item checklist for assessing performance during COVID-19 and other pandemics. *Journal of Health Communication,* 25(12):962-970. https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2021.1871791

Kiger, M.E. & Varpio, L. 2020. Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE guide no.131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8):846-854. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030

Kim, M., & Mason, D. P. 2020. Are you ready: Financial management, operating reserves, and the immediate impact of COVID-19 on nonprofits. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 49(6):1191–1209. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640209645

Louw, M. 2014. Ethics in research. In Du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C. & Bezuidenhout, R.M. (eds). *Research matters.* Cape Town: Juta: 262-273.

Lu, J., Shon, J. & Zhang, P. 2020. Understanding the dissolution of non-profit organizations: A financial management perspective. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 49(1):29-52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764019872006

Maboya, M. & McKay, T. 2019. The financial sustainability challenges facing the South African non-profit sector. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 15(1):a693. https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v15i1.693

Macnamara, J. 2021. New insights into crisis communication from an "inside" *emic* perspective during Covid-19. *Public Relations Inquiry,* 10(2):237-262. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X21999972

Manoli, A.E. & Anagnostou, M. 2023. Operational crisis communication management: A content analysis of FIFA's communication during Covid-19. *Sport Management Review,* 26(2):293-314. https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2022.2059992

McMullin, C. & Raggo, P. 2020. Leadership and governance in times of crisis: A balancing act for nonprofit boards. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 49(6)1182-1190. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764020964582

Milante, G. & Lilja, J. 2022. Chronic crisis financing? Fifty years of humanitarian aid and future prospects. SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, 2022/5. https://doi.org/10.55163/AGAR2561

Mligo, E.S. 2016. *Introduction to research methods and report writing: A practical guide for students and researchers in social sciences and the humanities*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications.

Mohajan, H.K. 2020. Quantitative research: A successful investigation in natural and social sciences. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 9(4):50-79. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/105149

Muhammed, S. & Zaim, H. 2020. Peer knowledge sharing and organizational performance: The role of leadership support and knowledge management success. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 24(10):2455-2489. https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-03-2020-0227

National Institute for Communicable Diseases. 2020. First case of COVID-19 coronavirus reported in SA. March 5. https://www.nicd.ac.za/first-case-of-covid-19-coronavirus-reported-in-sa/ [13 January 2022].

Okpamen, P.E. & Ogbeide, S.O. 2020. Board director reputation capital and financial performance of listed firms in Nigeria. *Insights into Regional Development*, 2(4):750-758.

Paluszak, G.T., Wisniewska-Paluszak, J.A, Schmidt, J. & Lira, J. 2021. The organisational resilience of rural-non-profits under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic global uncertainty. *Agriculture*, 11(7):670. https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture11070670

Pang, L.L. 2021. Leadership and crisis communication during COVID-19: The case of Brunei Darussalam. *Policy & Governance Review*, 5(22):97-112. https://doi.org/10.30589/pgr.v5i2.388

Panneer, S., Kantamaneni, K., Pushparaj, R.R.B., Shekhar, S., Bhat, L. & Rice, L. 2021. Multistakeholder participation in disaster management – the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Healthcare*, 9(2):203. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9020203

Patel, M. & Patel, N. 2019. Exploring research methodology: review article. *International Journal of Research and Review,* 6(3):48-55.

Phillips, R.A., Barney, J.B., Freeman, R.E. & Harrison, J.S. 2019. Stakeholder theory. In Harrison, J.S., Barney, J.B., Freeman, R.E. & Phillips, R.A. (eds). *The Cambridge handbook of stakeholder theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1-16.

Pillay, R. & Scheepers, C.B. 2020. Nestlé and Southern Africa: Contextual leadership of multi-stakeholder care response to COVID-19. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, 10(3). https://doi.org/10.1108/EEMCS-05-2020-0167

Reddy, M.C., Paul, S.A., Abraham, J., McNeese, M., DeFlitch, C. & Yen, J. 2009. Challenges to effective crisis management: Using information and communication technologies to coordinate emergency medical services and emergency department teams. *International Journal of Medical Informatics,* 78(4):259-269. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2008.08.003

Rehman, A.A. & Alharthi, K. 2016. An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(8):51-59.

Rosete, A.T. 2021. Ready or not: Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte and her crisis response strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journalism and Mass Communication*, *11*(4):125-160. https://doi.org/10.17265/2160-6579/2021.04.001

SACoranavirus. 2022. https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2021/02/18/vaccine-rollout-a-major-step-for-sas-fight-against-covid-19-dr-mkhize/ [20 January 2022].

Shi, Y., Jang, H.S., Keyes, L. & Dicke, L. 2020. Nonprofit service continuity and responses in the pandemic: Disruptions, ambiguity, innovation, and challenges. *Public Administration Review*, 80(5):874-879. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13254

South Africa. Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs. 2020. Disaster Management Act, No. 313 of 2002. Declaration of a National State of Disaster. *Government Gazette*, No. 43096, 15 March.
https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202003/43096gon313.pdf

South Africa. Department of Social Development. 2022. Nonprofit Organisations. About us. https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/npo/about-us [7 May 2022].

South African Government. 2022. About alert system. https://www.gov.za/covid-19/about/about-alert-system [15 January 2022].

Steyn, B. & Puth, G. 2000. *Corporate communication strategy*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Stocker, F., De Arruda, M.P., De Mascena, K.M.C. & Boaventura, J.M.G. 2020. Stakeholder engagement in sustainbility reporting: A classification model. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management,* 27(5):2071-2080. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1947

Suh, J., Hoang, T. & Hijal, J. 2021. Nonprofit external communications: General management, public relations, or fundraising tool? *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs,* 7(2):220-239. https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.7.2.220-239

Süsser, D., Ceglarz, A., Stavrakas, V. & Lilliestam, J. 2021. COVID-19 vs. stakeholder engagement: The impact of coronavirus containment measures on stakeholder involvement in European energy research projects. *Open Research Europe*, 1:57. https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.13683.1

Taprial, V. & Kanwar, P. 2017. *Understanding social media.* 2nd ed. London: Bookboon.

The Presidency, Republic of South Africa. 2022. Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the termination of the National State of Disaster in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/speeches/statement-president-cyril-ramaphosa-termination-national-state-disaster-response-covid-19-pandemic [18 October 2022].

Tian, Y.& Yang, J. 2022. Deny or bolster? A comparative study of crisis communication strategies between Trump and Cuomo in COVID-19. *Public Relations Review,* 48(2):102182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102182

Torrentira, M.C. 2020. Online data collection as adaptation in conducting quantitative and qualitative research during the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 7(11):78-87. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v7i11.3336

Tremblay, S., Castiglione, S., Audet, L., Desmarais, M., Horace, M. & Peláez, S. 2021. Conducting qualitative research to respond to COVID-19 challenges: Reflections for the present and beyond. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211009679

Veil, S.R., Anthony, K.E., Sellnow, T.L., Staricek, N., Young, L.E. & Cupp, P. 2020. Revisiting the best practices in risk and crisis communication: A multi-case analysis. In O'Hare, H.D. & O'Hare, M.J. (eds). *The handbook of applied communication research.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley: 377-396. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119399926.ch23

Wildemuth, B.M. 2016. Longitudinal studies. In Wildemuth, B.M. (ed.). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited: 71-80.

Willems, E.L., Van Puyvelde, S., Jegers, M. & Raeymaeckers, P. 2022. Responding to COVID-19: International nonprofits' stakeholder channels, resource pressures and governance responses. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 30(3):270-280. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12421

World Economic Forum. 2019. Health and healthcare in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Global Future Council on the Future of Health and Healthcare: 2016–2018. Geneva: WEF. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF__Shaping_the_Future_of_Health_Council_Report.pdf

World Health Organization. 2020. Origin of SARS-CoV-2. 26 March. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332197/WHO-2019-nCoV-FAQ-Virus_origin-2020.1-eng.pdf

World Health Organization. 2021a. The impact of COVID-19 on global health goals. 20 May. https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-global-health-goals [15 January 2022].

World Health Organization. 2021b. Vaccine efficacy, effectiveness and protection. 14 July. https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/vaccine-efficacy-effectiveness-and-protection [15 March 2022].

World Health Organization. 2022a. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1 [24 January 2022].

World Health Organization. 2022b. Tracking SARS-CoV-2 variants. https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants [15 January 2022].

World Health Organization. 2022c. Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 response. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline [15 January 2022].

World Health Organization. 2022d. WHO and Religions for Peace global conference https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2021/10/20/default-calendar/who-and-religions-for-peace-global-conference-on-strengthening-national-responses-to-health-emergencies on strengthening national responses to health emergencies, 20 October – 3 December. [12 January 2022].

World Health Organization. 2022e. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Virus Evolution https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/sars-cov-2-evolution [15 January 2022].

World Health Organization. 2023. WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing - 5 May 2023. https://www.who.int/news-room/speeches/item/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing [5 May 2023]

Zerbst, F. 2020. *Business in society handbook 2020*. 23rd ed. Cape Town: Trialogue.

Zerbst, F. 2022. *Business in society handbook 2021*. 24th ed. Cape Town: Trialogue.

Zhang, Y & Wildemuth, B.M. 2016. Qualitative analysis of content. In Wildemuth, B.M. (ed.). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited: 170-175.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview schedule

Good morning/afternoon/evening and thank you for your participation in my research for my degree: Master of Public Relations and Communication Management. The aim of my research is to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement in selected human relief non-profit organisations in South Africa.

Please keep in mind that all information will be kept strictly confidential and used only for the purposes specified in the consent form. The interview is divided into six sections; please confirm that it is okay for me to contact you if I have any follow-up questions.

Interview Questions

A. **Participant details**
   - Please state your name and job title for the purpose of the interview. Please note this information is confidential and will not appear in the dissertation and data sets.
   - Please give an overview of your role, education and how long you have been with the organisation.

B. **Organisational overview**
1. Please state the name of your organisation and briefly describe its main purpose.
2. What kind of non-profit is your organisation?
3. When was your organisation established?
4. Where are you located and in which provinces/countries do you operate?
5. Are you registered with the Department of Social Development in South Africa?
6. Describe your organisation's main activities/programmes.
7. How many employees does your organisation have? (full-time, part-time and volunteers)
8. Please describe the size of your communication department and everyone's role within it.
9. Please provide me with an overview of your mandate as it relates to your stakeholders.

C. **Stakeholders and stakeholder engagement pre-COVID-19**
10. Please describe your non-profit organisation's key stakeholders; these are the stakeholders who have the most influence over the operation and performance of your non-profit organisation.

11. Discuss the importance of engaging with your stakeholders (what does

engagement mean to you as an organisation).

12. How did your non-profit organisation engage with the mentioned stakeholders to fulfil your mandate prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?

13. Did you engage with different stakeholders differently? Please explain the difference.

D. **Changed/adapted strategy to maintain stakeholder engagement during the pandemic?**

14. Did your list of stakeholders change during COVID-19? Was it different from previously?

15. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, has your relationship with your stakeholders changed? To what do you attribute it?

16. Did you change the way you engaged with your stakeholders to fulfil your mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, please explain how.

17. Did your non-profit organisation's human, financial, physical, intellectual and other stakeholder management resources change as a result of the pandemic? If so, please explain the change.

18. How was the organisation's strategy aligned with stakeholder expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic?

19. Was this a transitory divergency, i.e., you will revert to your pre-COVID 19 stakeholder engagement strategy? Or will you change the way you communicate with your stakeholders after the pandemic?

20. How does the role of your stakeholders change depending on the type of crisis?

21. Have you formed any new collaborations with any other non-profit organisations or corporates during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue to carry out your mandate? Please elaborate.

E. **Perceived effects of changes on fulfilling their mandate during the COVID-19 pandemic**

22. Did the new form of engagement (specific to your organisation) fulfil your organisation's mandate or benefit the organisation in order to strengthen the mandate? Please elaborate.

23. What were the benefits/advantages of the adapted stakeholder engagement process?

24. What were the disadvantages of changing it?

25. Do you feel your organisation has maintained a good reputation during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please explain your answer.

26. Based on your answer in Question 27, how do you feel your organisation's

reputation capital has been affected in the long run.

27. What were the lessons learned in terms of stakeholder engagement?

F. Crisis communication (including digital media)

28. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, did your organisation have a well-defined crisis management plan? Please elaborate.

29. Does your organisation have a clear understanding of when business/operations as usual should be suspended in the case of a crisis? If that is the case, does the plan include a clear description of what constitutes an emergency or disaster in your organisation?

30. Who is involved in your organisation's crisis management plan?

31. Do you have a list of actions your organisation takes in a crisis? Please elaborate.

32. When and how did you start to communicate with your stakeholders about the pandemic?

33. At what stage during the COVID-19 pandemic did your organisation begin to take steps to prepare for the potential disruption caused by the pandemic?

34. How quickly did you realise that everything had to be done as soon as possible and do you believe that your organisation's responses to the crisis were sufficiently prompt?

35. How have you dealt with the increased demand for humanitarian relief during the COVID-19 pandemic?

36. Has your governance structure changed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis? If so, how?

37. How flexible was your governance structure during the COVID-19 pandemic and how did this impact on stakeholder communication?

38. Did you use digital platforms to communicate with your stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, which platforms?

39. How was each platform used and for which stakeholder?

40. Have you used any other platforms to communicate with your stakeholders? If so, how have you used them, and for which stakeholders were they used.

41. How did you select the digital platforms to distribute information to specific stakeholders?

42. Did you have different messages for different stakeholder groups? Please elaborate.

43. How frequently did your organisation communicate with your stakeholders during the pandemic? Please elaborate.

44. In hindsight, how effective were each of those platforms for stakeholder

communication during the pandemic?

45. Is your answer to the previous question based on your opinion or on actual measurements?

46. Have you adapted your original crisis communication plan during the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, how have you adapted it?

47. What lessons did you learn in crisis communication during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic?

48. What new opportunities has the COVID-19 pandemic presented to your organisation?

Appendix B: Ethics clearance

Office of the Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Room 2.09
80 Roeland Street
Cape Town
Tel: 021-469 1012
Email: ndedem@cput.ac.za
Secretary: Mziyanda Ndede

08 February 2022

Ms Venessa Horn
c/o Department of Media
CPUT

Reference no: 201003635/2022/1

Project title: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement by human
relief non-profit organisations in South Africa

Approval period: 08 February 2022 – 31 December 2023

This is to certify that the Faculty of Informatics and Design Research Ethics Committee of the
Cape Peninsula University of Technology conditionally approves the methodology and ethics of Ms
Venessa Horn (201003635) for Master of Public Relations & Communication Management.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the
Research Ethics Committee for approval.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Dr Blessing Makwambeni
Acting Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Appendix C: Template for written consent from participants

<<On company letterhead>>

I <<*insert name*>>, in my capacity as <<*insert position in company*) at <<*insert company name*>> give consent in principle to allow Venessa Horn, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data in this company/from me as part of their Master of Public Relations and Communications research. The student has explained to me the nature of their research and the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual person to participate in the research, and it is expected that the student will get individual consent from any participants. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time.

In addition, the company's/my name may or may not be used as indicated below (tick as appropriate):

	Thesis	**Conference paper**	**Journal article**	**Research poster**
Yes				
No				

_____

<<Insert name and signature>>

<<date>

Appendix D: Letter from the editor

ELIZABETH S VAN ASWEGEN

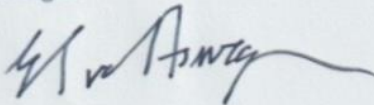BA (Bibl), BA Hons (English language & literature), MA (English), DLitt (English), FSAILIS

Language and technical editing | bibliographic citation

DECLARATION OF EDITING

11 Rosebank Place
Oranjezicht
Cape Town
8001

021 461 2650
082 883 5763
lizvanas@mweb.co.za

The Master's in Public Relations by candidate VENESSA HORN has been edited and the references checked for conformance with CPUT's Harvard bibliographic citation style guidelines. All in-text citations have been checked against the references, and all items in the references have been checked for citation in the text. The candidate has been advised to make the recommended changes.

Dr ES van Aswegen
4 June 2023