

REPORT

The Impact of COVID-19 on African Civil Society Organizations

Ongoing Uncertainty and a Glimmer of Optimism

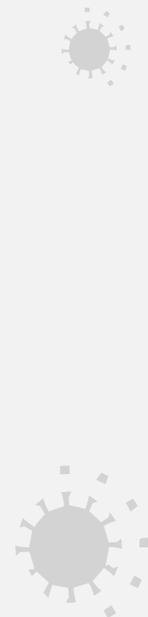
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time. Since it first emerged towards the end of 2019, and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic on 11 March 2020, the virus has spread to every continent.

While COVID-19 has already resulted in the deaths of more than 200,000 Africans, fewer COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered per capita in Africa than in other regions, leaving most Africans vulnerable to further infections and health risks.

Although African governments have largely acted decisively to contain the pandemic, repeated and sustained containment measures such as social distancing, lockdowns, curfews, travel restrictions and school closures have resulted in unintended socio-economic consequences beyond the direct health and human devastation caused by the disease itself. Millions of Africans are worse off than before the pandemic, with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups the most severely affected.

To alleviate these adverse outcomes, governments across Africa implemented temporary social protection measures early in the pandemic. These actions, which included food aid, cash transfers and free utilities, have long run their course, even though the end of COVID-19 is nowhere in sight.

Driven to choose between livelihoods and health, many governments have relaxed their COVID-19 control measures to allow greater movement and face-to-face interactions. However, despite the semblance of a return to "normal",

the devastating impact of COVID-19 on lives and livelihoods continues.

This is a moment when the voice and actions of civil society are indispensable to guarantee that public policy choices and actions do the least harm, respect human rights, and are driven by evidence. Moreover, CSOs are essential in ensuring that public measures to contain the pandemic are legal, non-discriminatory, time-bound and proportionate.

But the unprecedented scale and disruption of COVID-19 is severely testing the sector's capacity to effectively play its role while confronting its own existential crisis. Massive losses of funding, coupled with persistent restrictions on civic space that pre-date the pandemic, have limited the ability of African Civil Society Organizations CSOs to do their work, sometimes forcing organizations to close down altogether. Indeed, COVID-19 has exacerbated historical challenges, such as pervasive under-resourcing, that have long undermined the sector, and provides a sobering reminder of the perils facing African CSOs. The future, therefore, remains uncertain, with far-reaching implications for African CSOs' sustainability and the well-being of communities that they serve.

This report draws attention to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs while highlighting the essential work they continue to perform. It calls on governments, funders and other stakeholders to recognize, partner with and support African CSOs, whose actions, along with public and private sector solutions, are critical to driving a comprehensive response to COVID-19 and to ensuring a post-pandemic future with a resilient and sustainable civil society sector.

About the Report

This is the second report on the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs, compiled by EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs. The previous report, released in June 2020, was the first to focus exclusively on this issue. It filled a critical data gap by offering a snapshot of the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs in the early days of the pandemic, as well as the many ways these organizations were responding to the crisis while safeguarding their organizations.

When conducting the first survey in April 2020, there was optimism that the pandemic would be over before the end of the year. But six months into 2021, when the second survey launched, Africa had already experienced a second wave, and several countries were starting to experience, or were anticipating, a third wave. Therefore, it was essential and timely to assess how CSOs had fared through the prolonged disruption and continuing uncertainty.

EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs conducted the second survey from 1 June to 5 July 2021. It was the most comprehensive intervention to date aimed at analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs anywhere in the world. Given the historical challenges facing African CSOs, and the severity of the impact of COVID-19 on the sector, the survey aimed to accomplish the following:

- *Capture the ongoing impact of the pandemic on African CSOs, how CSOs are responding, and emerging trends and lessons that may help to predict and prepare for the future.*
- *Acquire information at the sectoral and regional levels to conduct pertinent cross-sector analyses and present a more granular picture of how African CSOs are coping.*
- *Compare the findings from the 2020 survey with the current situation and generate data and knowledge to inform and widen the discussion on building resilience in the African CSO sector.*

Building on the survey responses and feedback received from various local and international stakeholders in response to the first report, this report includes two new components:

- *Cross-country and cross-sectoral comparisons to surface critical gaps and priorities amongst CSOs in different parts of the continent.*
- *Insights from a complementary "mini-survey" of funders of African CSOs on how COVID-19 has impacted them, and the implications for their future engagement with African CSOs.*

EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs used an online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from CSOs and funders. The tool offered the most efficient and effective way of reaching CSOs at scale. Its immediate analytical capability was also an important feature given the urgency of providing actionable insights in a rapidly-evolving situation. The CSO survey generated responses from 1,039 CSOs in 46 African countries.

While the number of responses and countries exceeded that of the 2020 survey, it was lower than anticipated. Survey fatigue amongst African CSOs may have played a role in this regard.

EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs collaborated with the Centre for African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI) at Wits Business School in Johannesburg to deepen the level of analysis generated by SurveyMonkey. Two research associates, Wycliffe Nduga Ouma and Senyo Cudjoe, conducted the technical and empirical analysis of the data.

The data collected using SurveyMonkey resulted in a statistically acceptable threshold to conduct a comprehensive and robust analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs. The descriptive statistics employed include frequencies and percentages, which were further augmented with the cross-tabulation method to determine the distributional characteristics of the responses received across different African regions.

The funder survey, implemented from 28 June to 23 July 2021, generated responses from 26 funders and two African philanthropy support organizations. Unlike the CSO survey, which was advertised publicly, the Funder Survey targeted select individual funders only.

The following interventions preceded the implementation of the two surveys:

- *CSO consultations – EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs conducted interviews and online communication in April and May 2021 with more than 150 African CSOs to raise awareness about the upcoming surveys and generate feedback regarding specific issues to be included in the survey questionnaires.*
- *Funder roundtables – EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs organized two online events on 22 and 28 April 2021, respectively, to allow funders to learn more about the two surveys and highlight issues to be included in the survey questionnaires. More than 30 funders supporting African CSOs, based in Africa and elsewhere, participated in the two events.*

Vuyiswa Sidzumo, Acting Regional Director of the Ford Foundation, Southern Africa Regional Office, and Muthoni Wanyeki, Regional Director of the Open Society Foundations, Africa Regional Office, hosted the respective roundtables.

EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs used the feedback generated from the CSO consultations and funder roundtables to refine the questionnaires for both surveys and consulted various CSO and funding experts in support of finalizing the questionnaires.

The CSO survey was open to all African CSOs. EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs used a wide range of online communication and social media strategies to inform CSOs across the continent about the survey and encourage them to participate. At the same time, many CSOs, funders and other stakeholders also actively supported the outreach and awareness-raising efforts by sharing information about the survey with their members, partners and others via their communication channels and platforms.

The funder survey was shared with 57 funders, and 26 responded. Two of the five philanthropy support organizations that were approached, also responded with feedback.



1,039

CSOs from 46 African countries responded to the survey

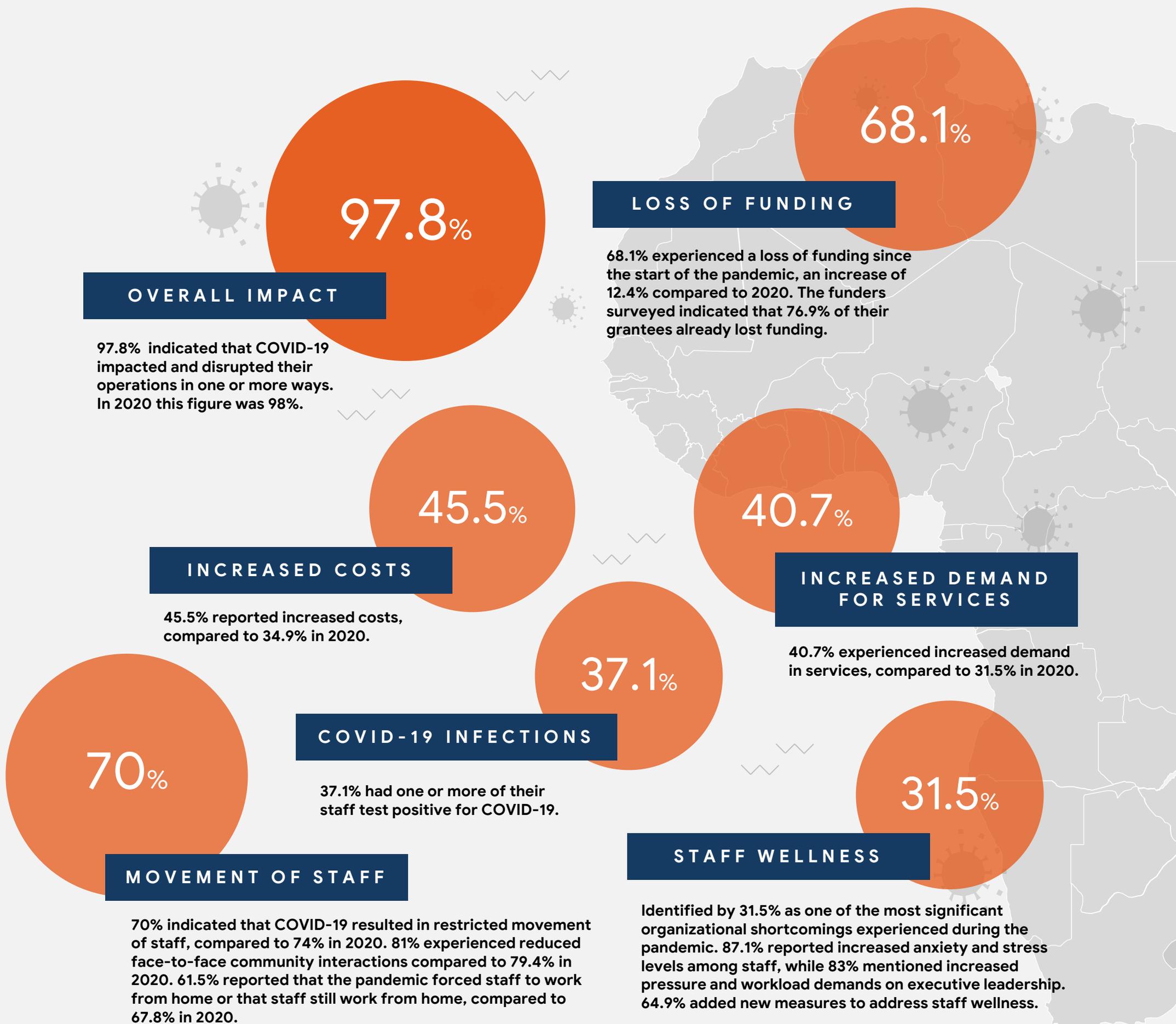
This report is based exclusively on feedback generated through the two surveys. It reflects on African CSOs' experiences since the start of the pandemic, the impact on their funding and operations, changes in their relationships with funders, their involvement in response to the pandemic, and what needs to be done to strengthen the sector going forward. Where relevant, the findings of the 2020 survey are cited to highlight the evolving impact of the pandemic on African CSOs.

Although the 2020 and 2021 surveys are unique as they covered African CSOs in general, EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs acknowledge that various entities have conducted other surveys and research over the past year on the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs in a specific part of Africa or involved in specific thematic issues. As a result, a list of all related publications is included as an annexure to highlight the growing body of knowledge on the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs and associated trends and developments in the sector.

This report's insights are timely as CSOs and their funders continue to grapple with an uncertain future. The report contributes to EPIC-Africa's goal of increasing knowledge about the African civil society sector, and its broader vision of a vibrant civil society and philanthropic ecosystem on the continent.

Summary of the Key Findings

Based on the feedback generated through the CSO and funder surveys, the main findings regarding the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs are the following:



80.9%

PREPAREDNESS

80.9% indicated that they were not prepared to cope with the disruption to their operations caused by COVID-19. 82.8% indicated that COVID-19 had exacerbated many historical organizational and operational challenges facing CSOs.

8.4%

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Only 8.4% received funding support from a government emergency relief fund during the pandemic. 42.3% of the funders surveyed felt that governments failed to recognize and utilize local CSOs' skills, experience and networks as part of the response to COVID-19.

75.3%

SUSTAINABILITY

75.3% felt that COVID-19 would have a devastating impact on the sustainability of many CSOs, compared to 78% in 2020.

56.1%

REDUCED OPERATIONS

The situation has improved, as 56.1% reduced or cancelled their operations, compared to 69.3% in 2020.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19

83.4%

83.4% introduced new program activities in response to the pandemic. 27.6% increased their programming to deal with the impact of COVID-19, while 34.3% changed the focus of their programs by shifting to COVID-19 from other areas.

42.1%

OPTIMISM

Only 39% expect to experience further reduced or cancelled operations over the next 12 months, while 42.1% expect demand for their services to increase over the next 12 months. 41.4% felt that CSOs would emerge stronger and more agile after the pandemic, slightly dropping from 45.1% in 2020.

92.3%

RECOGNITION

92.3% of the funders surveyed agreed that local CSOs play a critical role in national responses to COVID-19. 80.8% felt these contributions would result in greater public appreciation for the sector's work.

Data Overview

Overall

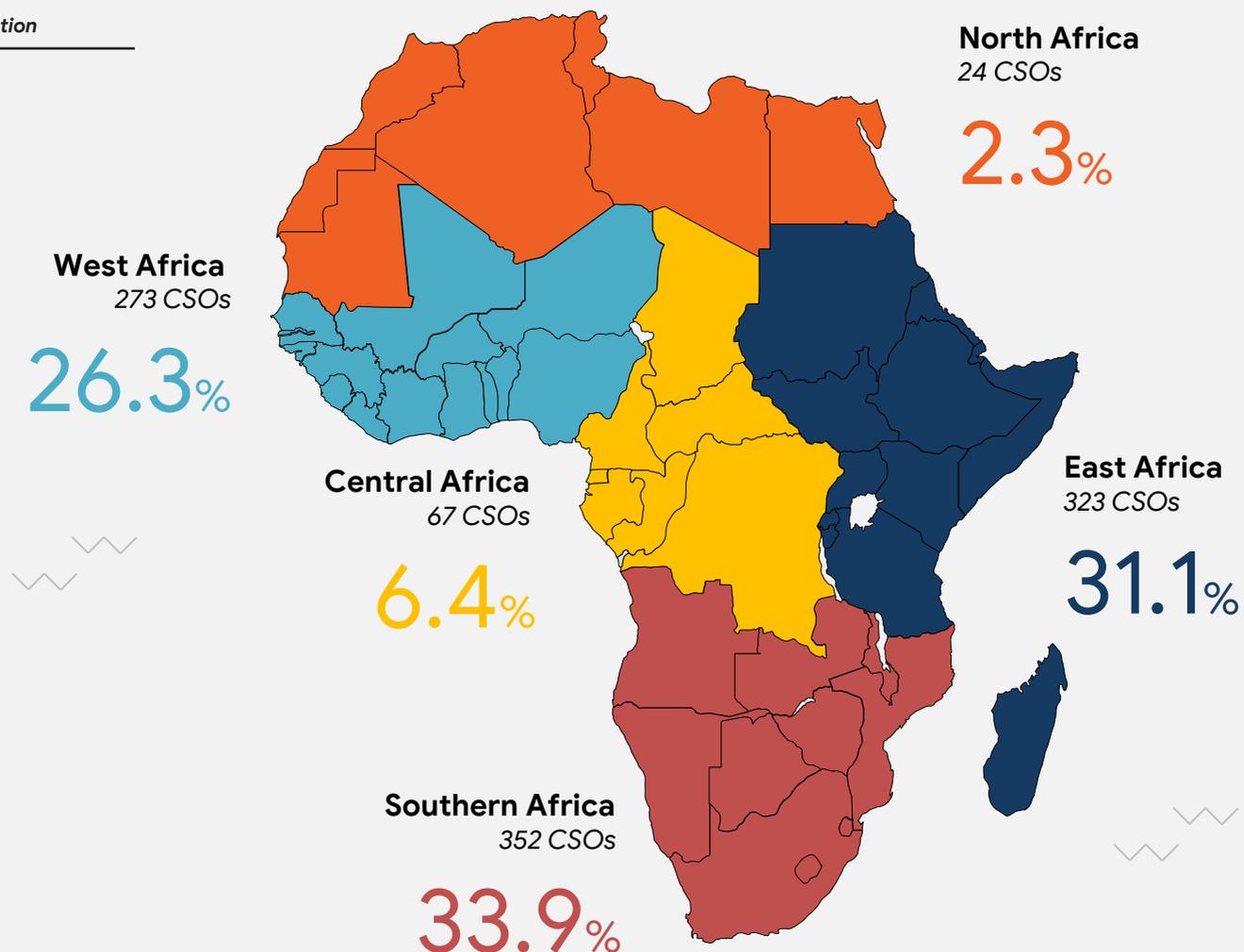
A total of 1,039 CSOs from 46 countries participated in the CSO survey. Compared to 2020, there is an increase of 24 CSOs and two countries. The top three regions represented in the survey are Southern Africa (32%), East Africa (31.1%), and West Africa (26.3%). Central Africa makes up 6.4% and North Africa only 2.7% of the total number of respondents. The top three countries represented are South Africa (191 CSOs), Nigeria (114 CSOs) and Kenya (113 CSOs).

This is the same pattern as the 2020 survey and may indicate countries with the most sizeable civil society sectors. It may also partly reflect the countries where EPIC-Africa and @AfricanNGOs have the most extensive networks and were thus able to mobilize more CSO responses. North Africa is notably under-represented.

Portuguese and French-speaking countries, despite concerted outreach efforts, including offering the survey in both English and French, are also significantly under-represented. Although the questionnaire was not offered in Portuguese, 23 CSOs from Mozambique participated in the survey. Among French-speaking countries, Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) had the most respondents (28 each), followed by Côte d'Ivoire (21).

The total number of respondents from East Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa is significantly greater than Central Africa and North Africa. As a result, regional comparisons highlighted in this report primarily focus on these three regions. Similarly, country comparisons focus mainly on South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya, the three countries with the most respondents.

Sub-regional representation

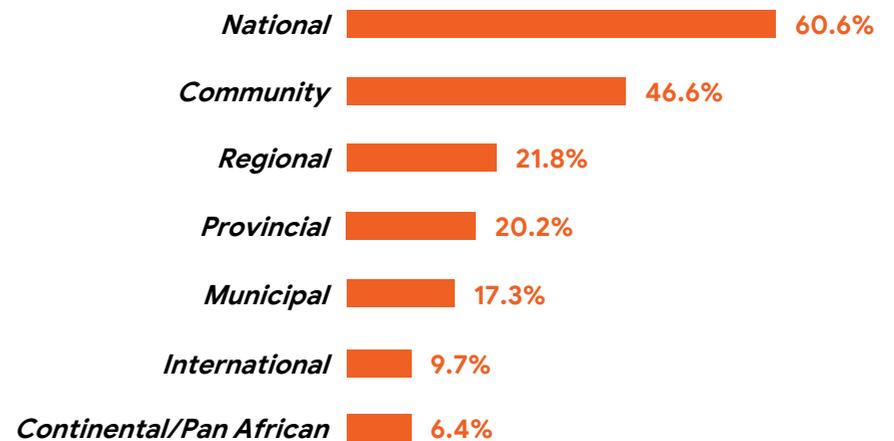


Level of Operations

Similar to the respondents of the 2020 survey, the majority of the 2021 respondents operate at a national (60.6%) or community level (46.6%), with many working at more than one level.

Among the three regions with the most respondents, West Africa has the highest percentage of respondents working at the national level, followed by East Africa and Southern Africa. Conversely, Southern Africa has the highest percentage of respondents working at the community level, followed by East Africa and West Africa.

Geographical focus of African CSOs



Thematic Focus

Respondents are active in more than twenty thematic areas, with many working across multiple issues.

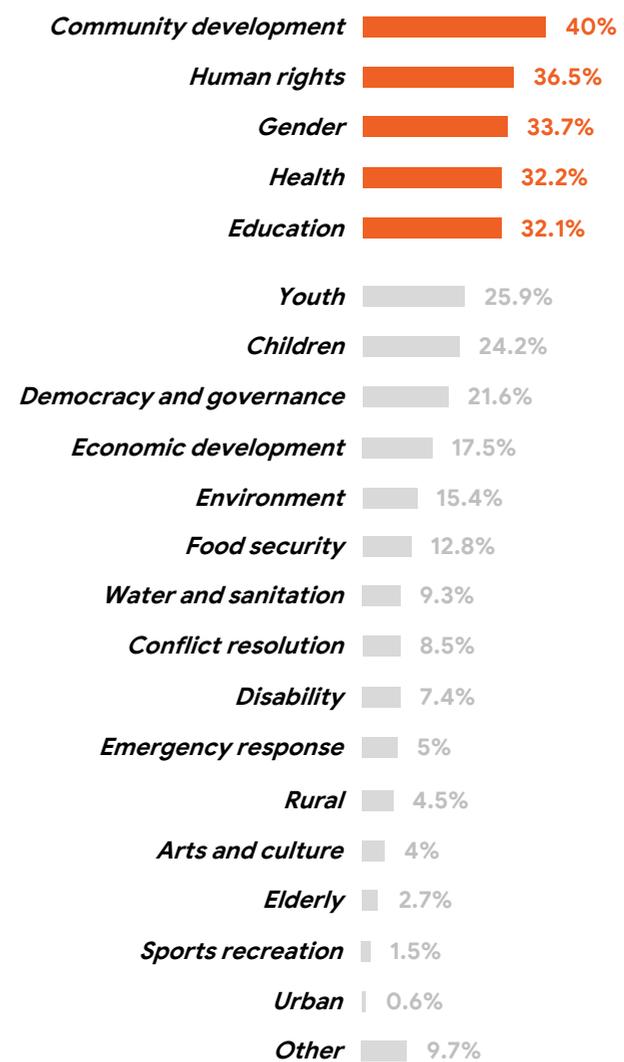
The **top five thematic areas** in order of magnitude are:

The five main thematic areas are also used in the rest of the report to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs involved in these areas.

While the top five thematic areas are the same across regions, their order of importance varies. Community development is the main area of focus for most respondents in West Africa (44.3%) and Southern Africa (41.2%), while human rights is the leading thematic area in East Africa (38.4%).

There are some notable differences on a country level. Community development is the main thematic area in South Africa and Kenya, while education is the leading area in Nigeria. While 37.2% and 38.6% of respondents in Kenya and Nigeria, respectively, focus on gender, in South Africa, only 19.4% of respondents are involved in this area. Instead, children and youth are among the five top areas in South Africa. Youth is also among the top five thematic areas in Kenya, but not in Nigeria. The second most important thematic area overall and regionally, namely human rights, is not among the top five areas in Nigeria or South Africa.

Thematic focus



Nature of Work

An overwhelming majority of respondents described the nature of their work as either advocacy (69.3%), or capacity-building and training (68.5%). Most respondents are engaged simultaneously in more than one type of activity. Many respondents are also involved in organizing or mobilization (30.4%) and service delivery (26.4%).

Almost 80% of East African and West African respondents are involved in advocacy, compared to 55.1% in Southern Africa. At the same time, 34.9% of Southern African respondents are involved in service delivery, compared to 26% and 17.6% in East Africa and West Africa, respectively.

Advocacy, and capacity-building and training are also the main activities of most respondents from Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, although the South African percentages are slightly lower. South African respondents are heavily involved in service delivery (40.8%), compared to only 14.2% and 26.3% of respondents in Kenya and Nigeria, respectively.

Kenya has a significantly higher percentage of respondents involved in organizing and mobilizing (40.7%), compared to Nigeria (29%) and South Africa (24.6%).

While advocacy, and capacity-building and training are the main activities across all budget categories, more respondents in the lower budget categories are involved in these two activities than those at the higher end. For example, 70.3% and 77% of respondents in the below US\$100,000, and US\$100,000 to \$200,000 categories, respectively, are involved in advocacy, compared to 54.2% in the US\$10 million and more category.

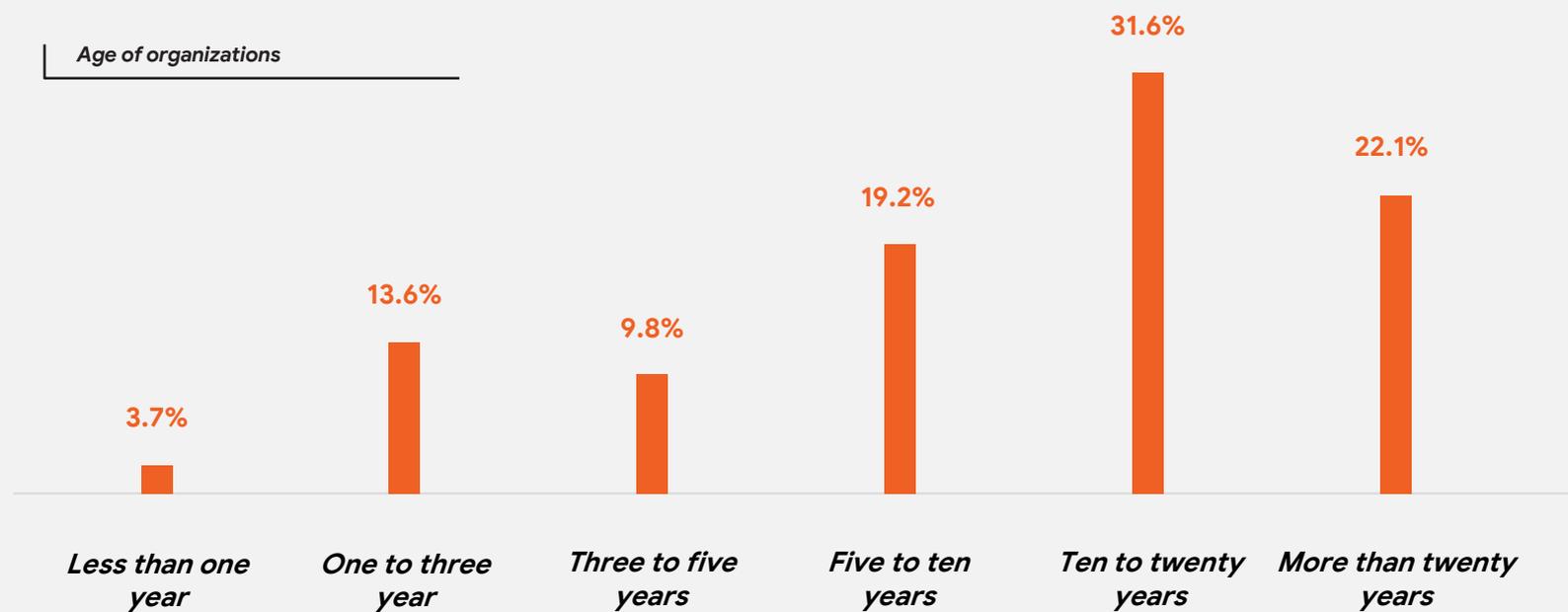
On the other hand, the highest percentage of respondents engaged in grantmaking is among the small cohort with a budget of US\$10 million or more (25%). This category also has the highest percentage of all respondents engaged in monitoring and evaluation (20.8%), but the lowest among those involved in service delivery.

Nature of work



Age of Organizations

Most respondents are well-established in terms of years of operating. 53.7% have existed for more than ten years.



With 33.1% of respondents having existed for less than five years, East Africa has the largest percentage of young CSOs. At the same time, with 57.9% of respondents having existed for more than ten years, Southern Africa has the largest percentage of mature CSOs.

A combined 51.3% of South African respondents fall in the five to ten, and ten to 20 years, categories, followed by Kenya and Nigeria with 48.7% and 48.3%, respectively. 28.3% of South African respondents have been operating for more than 20 years.

Older organizations (ten years and more) have larger budgets than those younger than ten years. All respondents, except one, that have existed for less than one year have budgets below US\$300,000.

Although many respondents that have existed for ten to twenty years (28.9%) have a budget of US\$100,000 or less, 47.1% in this age range also fall in the US\$5 million to 10 million category. Respondents that have existed for more than 20 years are over-represented at the higher end of the budget categories, from US\$1 million to 10 million, or more.

Respondents that have existed for ten years or more represent 60.7% of those that are involved in human rights, 56.3% in community development, 54.6% in health, 52.6% in gender and 51.1% in education. On the other hand, among younger organizations, those between one to five years, the highest percentage of respondents is involved in gender issues (26.3%).

53.7%

of CSOs have
existed for more
than ten years

Annual Budget Expenditures

Annual budget expenditures, 2018-2021 / year and level of budget



Almost 50% of respondents have an annual budget of below US\$100,000. This trend has remained relatively unchanged during the four years from 2018 to 2021, with only slight negative or positive variations from year to year. Between 2018 and 2021, the average annual budget for 82.2% of respondents was US\$1 million or less. 60.9% of respondents had an average annual budget of US\$200,000 or less, with those spending below US\$100,000 a year representing 46.7% of the total.

The number of respondents with a budget above US\$1 million, though growing slightly in some years, remained modest. Those spending between US\$2 million and 5 million annually grew from 30 CSOs in 2018, to 41 in 2021. At the same time, those spending US\$10 million or more represent an even smaller number, moving from 16 CSOs in 2018, to 24 in 2021.

There are some variations in regional and national budgets. In 2021, while 61.1% of West African respondents have a budget of US\$200,000 or less, the same is true for 59% and 53.1% of East African and Southern Africa respondents, respectively.

Among the top three countries, South Africa had the fewest respondents with a budget below US\$100,000 throughout the four years under review. At the same time, all three countries experienced a decrease in the percentage of respondents with a budget in this category, with Nigeria experiencing the most significant decrease, from 59.3% in 2018 to 48.2% in 2021. At the same time, the percentage of respondents in the US\$100,000 to \$200,000 category increased in all three countries. Nigeria experienced the most significant increase, moving from 10.6% in 2018 to 20.2% in 2021. There are only a few respondents in the US\$5 million to 10 million and more categories, and most of them are in Kenya and South Africa.

82.2%

of CSOs had a budget of
US\$1 million or less between
2018 and 2021

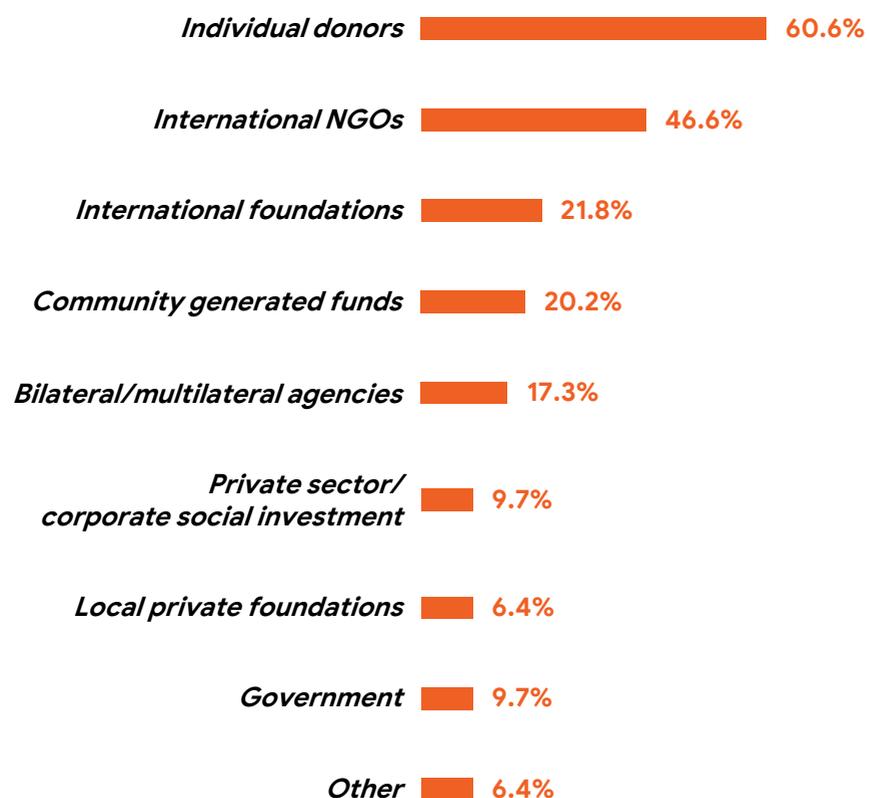
Funding Sources

Individual donors, followed by international NGOs and international foundations, are the biggest funders of African CSOs.

The same three types of funders are also CSOs' primary funding sources in East Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa. However, while individual donors are the most significant funding source in East Africa and Southern Africa, international NGOs hold this position in West Africa.

Individual donors are also CSOs' most significant funding source in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. In Kenya and Nigeria, international NGOs and international foundations are the other two primary sources of funding, compared to the private sector and local private foundations in South Africa.

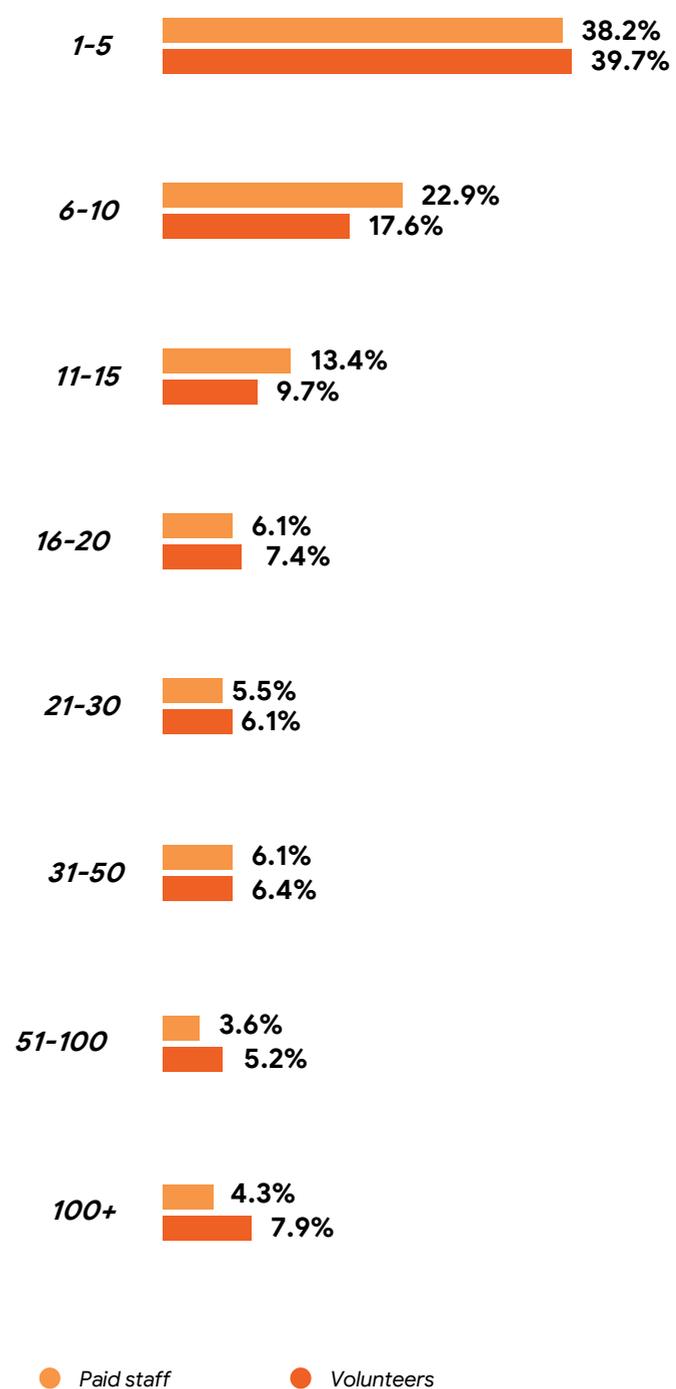
Overall sources of funding



Staff Size

Similar to the 2020 survey, most respondents are small in terms of staff size. 61.1% have a paid staff of 1-10 people, while those with a staff of 1-5 people represented almost 40% of all respondents. These organizations depend heavily on volunteers. Those with the smallest number of paid staff have the most volunteers. Bigger organizations with a staff of 51 to 100 people, or more, represent only 8% of all respondents.

Staff and volunteers



59.4%

of CSOs with a budget below US\$100,000 have a paid staff of 1-5 people

Funder Survey

A total of 26 funders participated in the funder survey, with 17 (65.4%) based in Africa.

Collectively, these funders are active in all African countries. However, their grantees operate mainly in Kenya and South Africa (16 funders each), Malawi (15 funders) and Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda (14 funders each).

Twelve funders are international private foundations, followed by four multilateral agencies, two African private foundations and two community philanthropy organizations. The other six funders defined themselves as a women's fund, international non-profit political foundation, intermediary agency, global grassroots grantmaker, international development organization and European government agency.

The primary thematic areas that they support are gender (14 funders), human rights (12 funders), democracy and governance, and economic development (six funders each), and children, environment and youth (five funders each).

For 2021, five funders have a grantmaking budget of US\$1 million to 3 million, four at US\$3 million to 5 million, and four at US\$20 million or more.

The regional picture resembles the overall situation. More than half of respondents from all regions have a paid staff of 1-10 people.

Kenya has the highest percentage of respondents with a paid staff of 1-10 people (69%), which is higher than the overall and East African percentages. On the other end of the spectrum, South Africa leads in the 51-100 category with 12% of respondents, followed by Kenya with 11.5%. Only 3.5% of Nigerian respondents fall in this category.

59.4% of respondents with a budget below US\$100,000 have a paid staff of 1-5 people. Respondents in the US\$10 million and more category have the highest percentage of paid staff in the 100 people and more range (41.2%).

Respondents involved in community development have the highest percentage of respondents with a paid staff size of 1-5 people (41.6%). Those engaged in gender issues are the best represented among respondents with a paid staff of 6-10 people (27.1%). Health has the highest percentage of respondents with a paid staff of more than 20 people (23.8%).

53.8%

of funders surveyed focus on gender

Impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs

Overall Impact

The overall impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs continues to be overwhelmingly negative and widespread. Only 2.2% of respondents reported minimal or no impact. **Compared to the situation in 2020, the number of CSOs that reported a loss of funding increased by 12.4%, from 55.7% to 68.1%, while those reporting an increase in costs increased by 10.6% from 34.9% to 45.5%.**

Despite increasingly adverse outcomes, demand for services increased from 31.5% to 40.7%, while the number of respondents that reported a reduction or cancellation of their operations fell by 13.2%, from 69.3% in 2020 to 56.1% in 2021. This may indicate a resumption of previous activities due to relaxation of the earlier restrictions in movement, or a sign of CSOs adopting new ways of working.

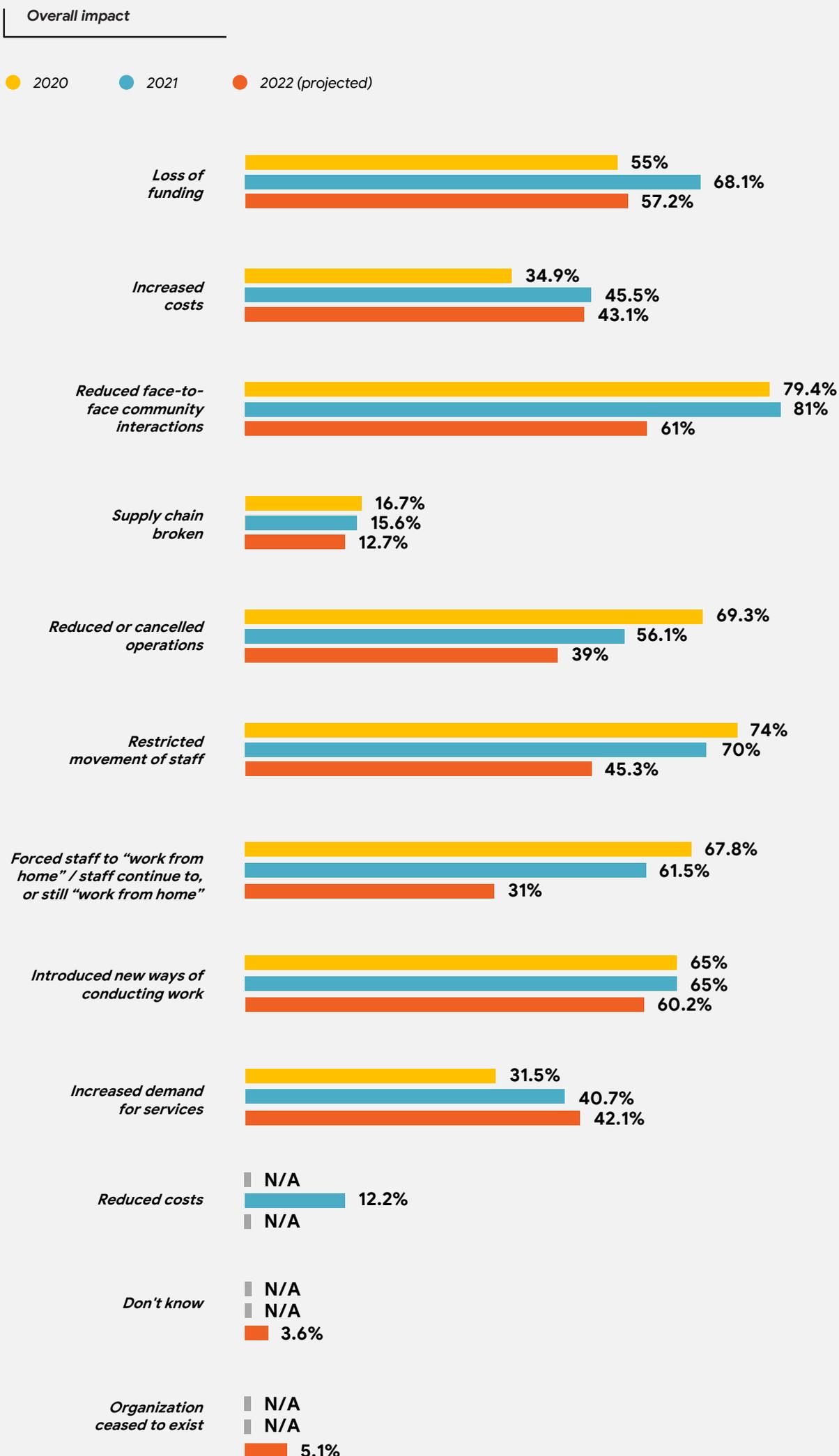
Looking ahead, most respondents expect that the overall situation will improve in the coming 12 months (July 2021 to June 2022). Loss of funding remains a serious concern for 57.2% of respondents, but they also project that the reduction or cancellation of activities would decrease by a further 17.1%, from 56.1% to 39%. This more positive outlook may be borne out of optimism about the expected roll-out of vaccinations, albeit very slowly, and the further lifting of restrictions on the movement and interaction of people, and the removal of earlier draconian measures that disrupted the activities of entire sectors of society, including civil society.

However, unless there is a drastic improvement in the conditions impacting CSOs, 5.1% expect to cease operations.

5.1% 

of CSOs expect to
cease operations
if the situation
doesn't improve

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The impact of COVID-19 was severe across all regions, with some slight variances. The percentage of respondents in Southern Africa (64.6%) that reported a loss of funding is slightly lower than in East Africa (71%) and West Africa (69.5%). On the other hand, East Africa had the highest percentage of respondents (59.4%) that reduced or cancelled their operations compared to Southern Africa (56.3%) and West Africa (53.6%).

72.7% of Nigerian respondents reported a loss in funding, compared to 66.3% and 60.2% in South Africa and Kenya, respectively. South African respondents experienced the highest increase in the demand for services (53.7%), followed by Nigeria (43.4%) and Kenya (37.8%). The relatively high demand for services in South Africa is likely the result of the country experiencing the highest rate of COVID-19 infections on the continent, and the subsequent need for emergency services.

Most respondents across all budget categories simultaneously experienced increased costs and demand for their services, while losing funding, and reducing or cancelling their operations. The loss of funding was most widespread among respondents with a budget below US\$100,000 (73.7%), which is higher than the overall average. While still significant, the loss of funding among respondents in the US\$1 million and more categories was lower. Only 40% of respondents in the US\$5 million to 10 million category lost funding, the lowest percentage of all budget categories.

The impact across the five main thematic areas was similar to the overall trends, with only slight deviations in the scale of the impact.

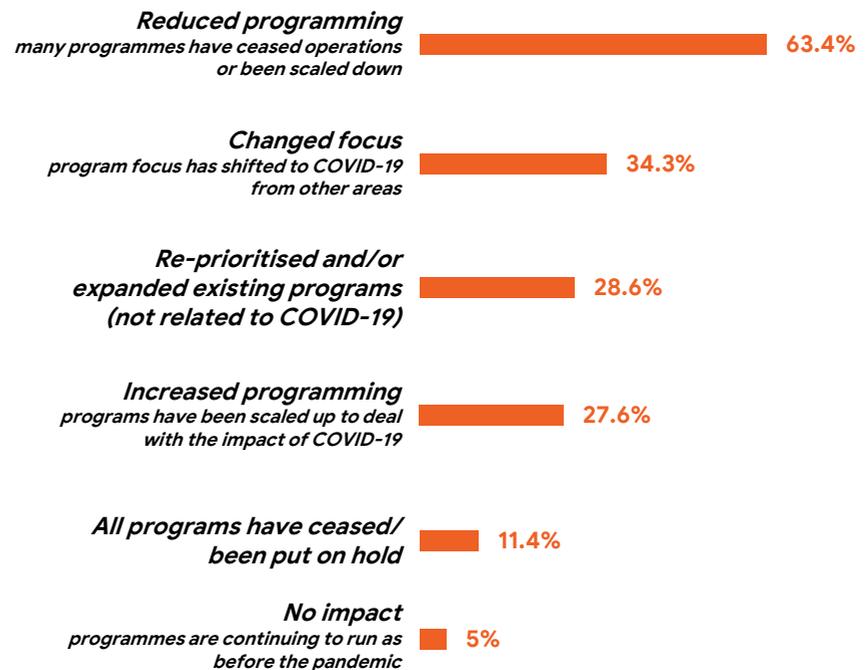
Impact on Programs and Beneficiaries

The impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs is illustrated further when analyzing it in terms of the impact on their programs and beneficiaries.

For 63.4% of respondents, it resulted in reduced programming, as many programs ceased operations or were scaled down. 11.4% cancelled all their programs. At the same time, 34.3% shifted their program focus, and 27.6% scaled up their programs to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

Some respondents experienced a level of normality as 28.6% re-prioritized or expanded their existing programs (not related to COVID-19), while 5% experienced no impact and continued to run their programs as before the pandemic.

Impact on programs and beneficiaries



The changes experienced by respondents, not surprisingly, had a cascading effect on the populations and issues that they serve. When asked how their beneficiaries have been affected by the impact of COVID-19 on their organizations, in general, and programs specifically, respondents described a worsening situation due to their inability to provide services at a time of

growing need. Examples include beneficiaries being denied vital services such as educational programs for children and adolescents, life-saving medication for HIV+ people, shelter for victims of domestic violence, rape and other atrocities, and the muting of citizens' voices in matters of social and economic justice.



The direct beneficiaries of our work are people with disabilities, including people with mental health conditions. My organization was unable to reach out to them due to budget cuts from our donors. Besides, the COVID-19 restrictions put in place by our government impacted negatively on most of them and deepened their marginalization and discrimination.”



We reach up to 1 million people across our different project types, including 15 teacher training schools and eight polytechnics. COVID-19 restrictions closed schools for the best part of nine months. Farmers had to find alternative markets. People living with HIV & TB experienced serious challenges continuing their treatment.”



We serve the general public. COVID-19 has impacted our ability to influence policy and governance. This has resulted in less scrutiny of government policies which continue to affect millions.”

The impact on respondents' programs by region was consistent with the overall situation. However, West African respondents were impacted more adversely as 64% experienced reduced programming, while 16.7% reported that all their programs ceased or were put on hold. At the same time, relatively fewer respondents from Southern Africa (57.6%) experienced reduced programming, and only 7% indicated that programs ceased or were put on hold.

South African respondents experienced the least impact in terms of reduced programming (52%), and the highest increase (33.1%) in programming to deal with the impact of COVID-19. Only 3% of Kenyan respondents experienced no impact on their programs, while 42.9% changed the focus of their programs to focus on COVID-19, the highest of the three countries. Nigeria had the most respondents (36.4%) that reprioritized or expanded their existing programs (not related to COVID-19), or had their programs ceased or been put on hold (8%).

No thematic area was left untouched by the sweeping impact of COVID-19 on program activities. **For a majority of respondents, COVID-19 resulted in the reduction of activities across all thematic areas and a shift to dealing with COVID-19.**

East African respondents were the worst affected in the areas of community development (68.4%), gender (64.2%), health (72%) and education (72.8%), while 71.9% of respondents from West Africa that focus on human rights experienced a reduction in activities. Southern African respondents were affected slightly less across all five thematic areas compared to the other two regions.

Furthermore, 67.7% of respondents involved in human rights reduced their program activities, the highest percentage across the five main thematic areas, and shifted away from regular programming to focus on the impact of COVID-19 (38.3%). Respondents involved in gender had the highest percentage (32.9%) that increased their programming to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

69.7% of respondents with a budget below US\$100,000 reported reduced programming, compared to 39.6% in the US\$1 million to 2 million category, which was the least affected. More than 30% of respondents in all the budget categories below US\$1 million shifted the focus of their programs to COVID-19 from other areas. At the same time, more than 40% of respondents with a budget of US\$500,000 and more, increased their programming to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

Impact on Operations

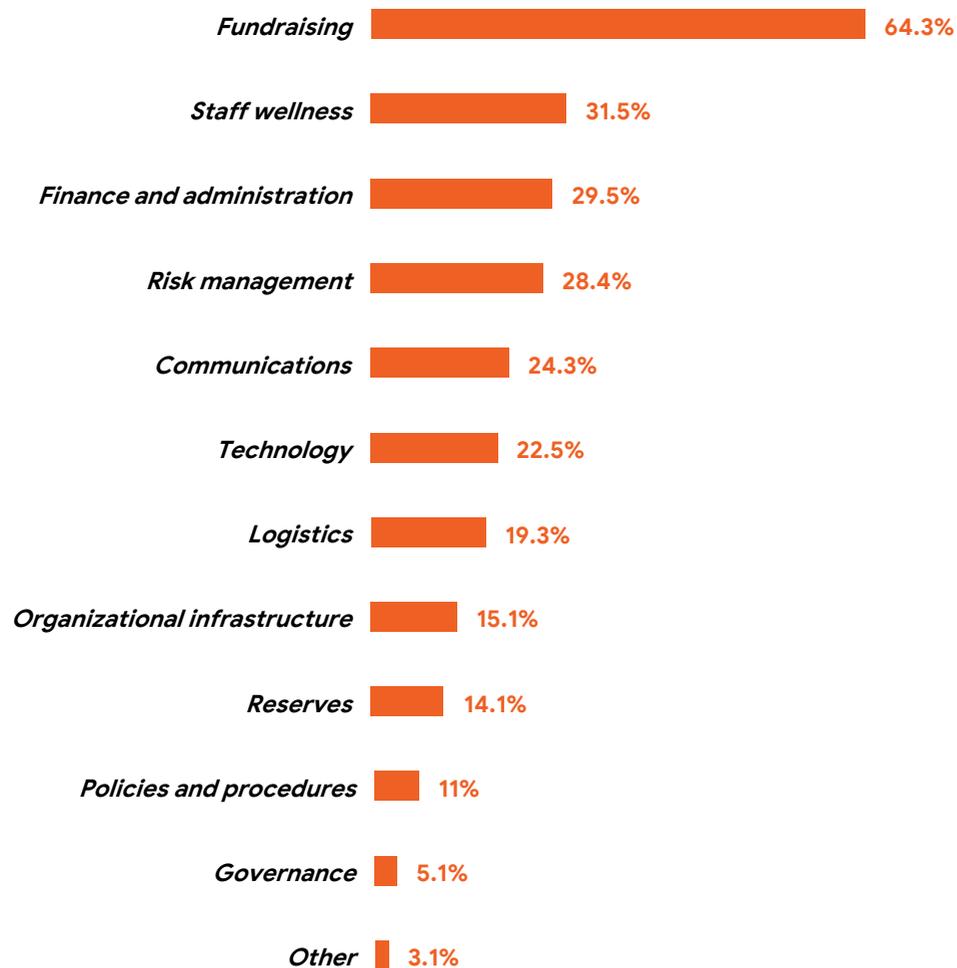
While COVID-19 has created many new challenges, it has magnified and exacerbated many pre-existing conditions that characterize African CSOs. Historical under-resourcing, marked by unpredictable, short-term, restricted funding, has deprived CSOs the ability to invest in building robust organizational infrastructure, thus leaving the sector extremely vulnerable to external shocks.

The situation is further compounded by government failure to consider CSOs, especially those delivering vital services, as "essential workers" during the implementation of COVID-19 responses. As a Zimbabwean CSO described it, "...this has therefore rendered such CSOs redundant, hence creating a negative impact on the capacity to maintain operational relevance."

82.8% of respondents felt that COVID-19 has exacerbated many historical organizational and operational challenges facing CSOs, while 80.9% felt that African CSOs were not prepared to cope with the disruption to their operations caused by COVID-19.

Respondents highlighted fundraising, staff wellness, finance and administration, and risk management as the most critical organizational shortcomings that they experienced since the start of the pandemic. Communications and technology are also areas of significant concern.

Operational areas in which CSOs experienced the biggest shortcomings during the pandemic



The most often cited organizational shortcoming across regions are consistent with the overall picture, with fundraising being the leading challenge for respondents in all regions except North Africa.

Fundraising is also the most significant organizational shortcoming for most respondents from Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. For Kenyan respondents, this is followed by risk management and staff wellness. For Nigerian respondents, finance and administration, and technology are their main shortcomings, and for South African respondents, it is staff wellness, and finance and administration.

Fundraising is the biggest shortcoming for respondents with a budget below US\$100,000 as well as for respondents in all other categories up to US\$5 million. Risk management is the main shortcoming for 50% of respondents with a budget between US\$5 million and 10 million. In comparison, staff wellness and risk management (both 40%) are the main shortcomings for respondents in the US\$10 million and more category. For respondents in the below US\$100,000 category, finance and administration, and communications precede staff wellness. Risk management and communications are similarly more significant shortcomings for those in the US\$200,000 to \$300,000 category than staff wellness.

Fundraising is also the main shortcoming for respondents across the main thematic areas. Staff wellness and risk management are the other two shortcomings mentioned by most respondents, except those working in community development, who rated finance and administration higher than risk management.

73.1%

of CSOs with a budget below US\$100,000 indicated that fundraising is the biggest shortcoming

Impact on Funding

The loss of funding by African CSOs continues to be one of the most significant consequences of the pandemic. The financial health of African CSOs was problematic before the pandemic, and this situation has further deteriorated.

In response to the 2020 survey, 55.7% of respondents reported a loss of funding, and 66.5% projected a further loss in funding in the following three to six months. 68.1% of respondents in the 2021 survey reported a loss of funding since the start of the pandemic, and 57.5% expect further losses over the next 12 months.

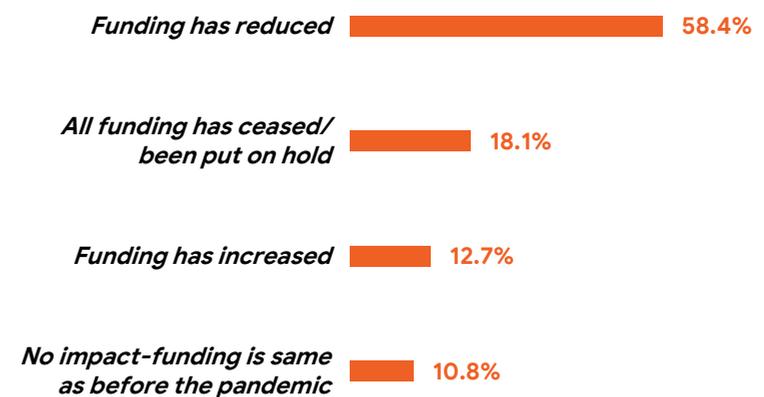
The overall financial situation and future outlook for most African CSOs are, therefore, bleak. In terms of their sustainability, 75.3% of CSOs and 57.5% of funders surveyed felt that COVID-19 would have a devastating impact on the sustainability of many CSOs.

A more nuanced picture emerged when respondents explained the specific impact of the pandemic on their funding. A combined 76.5% of respondents experienced a reduction in funding (58.4%) or cessation and putting all funding on hold (18.1%). The feedback from funders surveyed confirmed the severity of this situation as 76.9% of their grantees already lost funding. At the same time, 10.8% of respondents experienced no impact, while 12.7% indicated that their funding increased.

68.1%

of CSOs reported a loss of funding since the start of the pandemic

Impact on funding



Respondents with a budget for 2021 of below US\$100,000, and US\$100,000 to \$200,000, were hit the hardest. A combined 86.7% and 73.5% of all respondents in these categories, respectively, experienced reduced funding, or all their funding had ceased or been put on hold.

It is important to note that more than 50% of respondents across all budget categories experienced reduced funding. However, as most survey respondents fall in the budget categories mentioned above, their funding was the most severely impacted. Of all the respondents that experienced reduced funding, 42.5% had a budget of below US\$100,000. Respondents in this budget category also represent 68.8% of those that experienced all their funding ceased or been put on hold. Interestingly, this group also had the highest percentage of respondents that experienced no impact on their funding (28.3%).

In terms of respondents that experienced increased funding, 75.7% indicated that the new funding was earmarked for COVID-19 interventions. Most of these respondents have a budget of US\$100,000 to \$200,000 (25%).

This overall negative impact on the funding of African CSOs was consistent across all regions and countries. 65.2% of East African respondents experienced reduced funding, followed by Southern Africa (59.9%) and West Africa (53.9%). West Africa had the highest percentage of respondents that experienced no impact (12.5%), and the highest percentage of those reporting that all funding had ceased or been put on hold (23.3%). 17.8% of Southern African respondents experienced increased funding, the highest of the three regions.

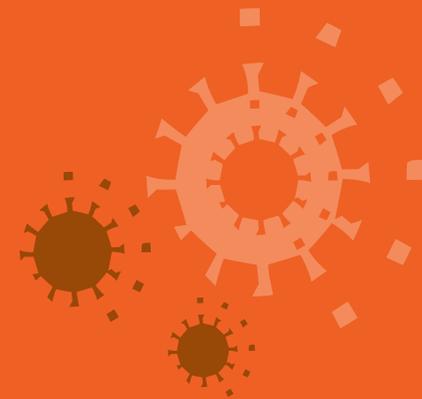
A combined 84.4% of Nigerian respondents experienced reduced funding, and all their funding had ceased or been put on hold, compared to Kenyan (76.1%) and South African (73.6%) respondents.

The pandemic severely impacted funding for the five main thematic areas, with an average reduction of between 56.7% and 61.6%. At the same time, respondents involved in gender and human rights were the least impacted (10.7% each), those involved in human rights experienced the highest increase in funding (15.9%), and those involved in community development were the worst impacted in terms of all funding having ceased or been put on hold (21.4%).

Furthermore, the pandemic impacted respondents involved in these thematic areas differently across the three regions. Those involved in human rights in East Africa were the worst affected in terms of reduced funding (65.4%), compared to education in Southern Africa (66.3%) and gender in West Africa (61.8%). Southern African respondents involved in gender and human rights experienced increased funding of 20.5% and 26%, respectively. In comparison, gender (14.9%) and human rights (15%) were the areas that experienced the most significant increase in funding among respondents from East Africa and West Africa, respectively.

CSOs involved in gender and human rights were the least impacted

10.7%



Impact on Funders

The pandemic also directly impacted the grantmaking to CSOs of the funders surveyed. 52% increased their grantmaking, with many programs scaled up to deal with the impact of COVID-19, 68% changed their grantmaking, with existing programs adapted to deal with the impact of COVID-19, and 24% shifted their grantmaking to COVID-19 from other areas. Only 4% reduced their grantmaking as programs ceased operations or were scaled down. The funders surveyed experienced only a slight decrease in their average grantmaking budget for 2021, compared to 2020. At the same time, these were still higher than the average budgets for 2018 and 2019.

80% of the funders surveyed that experienced an increase in their budgets from 2020 to 2021, indicated that it was due to their response to COVID-19.

Looking ahead, although 36% of the funders surveyed expect that their budgets for African CSOs will increase in the next two to three years, 12% indicated that it would decrease, 36% stated that it would remain the same, and 16% indicated that they don't know what will happen in the future.

Staff Wellness

Staff wellness is a new frontier that CSOs are learning to navigate, even when dealing with existential threats amid rapid change and uncertainty.

31.5% of respondents identified staff wellness as one of the most significant shortcomings experienced during the pandemic. Southern and East African CSOs represent a combined 70.9% of all these respondents.

37.1% of respondents reported that one or more of their staff tested positive for COVID-19, while 7.6% indicated that this resulted in the death of one or more staff. The staff of respondents in Southern Africa and East Africa were the worst affected and represented a combined 80.6% of all infections and 71.2% of all fatalities.

In addition, 87.1% of all respondents reported increased levels of anxiety and stress among staff, while 83% mentioned increased pressure and workload demands on executive leadership.

In response to this situation, 64.9% of respondents reported adding new measures to address staff wellness, with 34.7% being from Southern Africa. The measures described were often limited to ensuring adherence to COVID-19 prevention protocols and sharing relevant information with staff. Those who went further in their response increased health insurance coverage for staff and provided access to mental health services.

Size and resources played a crucial role in respondents' ability to respond to the wellness of their staff. More than 80% of respondents with between 50 and 100, and more than 100 staff, added new measures, compared to only 56.4% with 1-5 staff.

For the 35.1% of respondents that have not instituted any measures to address staff wellness, the reason cited most often was a lack of funds. Almost 40% of respondents with a budget for 2021 of US\$200,000 or below, did not add new measures in this regard.



We work on the frontline, and it is exhausting.”

“We don't have funding for a more extensive wellness program, but we continue to recognize the staff for their effort and achievements.”

64.9%

The graphic features the number '64.9%' in a large, bold, orange font. To the right of the percentage sign is a small, stylized icon of a coronavirus particle. The background is a light gray gradient with several other faint coronavirus icons scattered across it.

of CSOs reported adding new measures to address staff wellness

Southern Africa (51%) had the highest percentage of respondents whose staff tested positive for COVID-19. Central Africa was the only region with more than 10% of respondents reporting that one or more of their staff passed away due to COVID-19. More than 80% of staff in all regions experienced increased anxiety and stress levels, and more than 76% increased pressure and workload demands on executive leadership.

Except for Central Africa (54.2%), more than 65% of respondents from the other four regions added new measures to deal with staff wellness.

Only 18.6% of Nigerian respondents highlighted staff wellness as an organizational shortcoming, compared to South African (35.8%) and Kenyan (33.3%) respondents. However, more

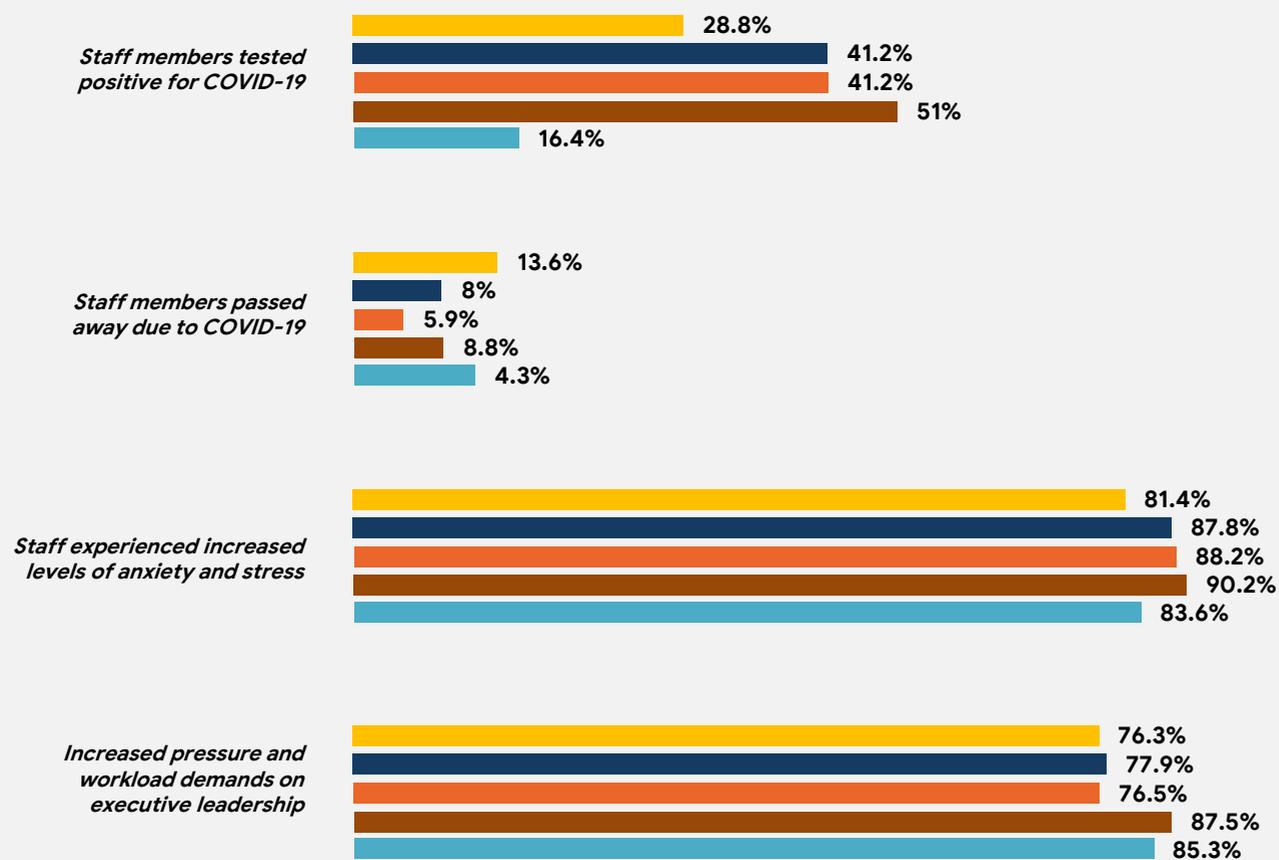
respondents in these three countries added new measures supporting staff wellness compared to the overall or regional averages.

Nigerian respondents were the least affected by COVID-19 infections. Only 14.6% reported that one or more of their staff tested positive for COVID-19, with no fatalities recorded.

More than 90% of respondents in South Africa and Kenya reported that their staff experienced increased anxiety and stress levels. Only 74.4% of respondents in Kenya reported increased pressure and workload demands on executive leadership, which was lower than the overall and East African averages.



Impact on staff wellness by sub-region



● Central ● Eastern ● Northern ● Southern ● Western



Civic Space

Governments' containment measures to stop the spread of the virus have restricted the freedom of citizens and CSOs across the continent, including the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Freedom of assembly, in particular, has been curtailed via curfews, lockdowns, the closing of schools and public venues, and the banning of gatherings of more than a certain number of people. As many African countries already experienced shrinking civic space before the pandemic, these measures have, in some cases, further adversely impacted civic space.

47.2% of respondents indicated that government measures resulted in the closing of civic space in their countries. 33.6% of these respondents were from Southern Africa, with 31.9% and 22.9% from East Africa and West Africa, respectively. Interestingly, 17.9% of all respondents indicated that they didn't know if civic space was impacted or not.

However, a clearer picture regarding the impact on civic space emerges on the regional and national levels. 61.9% and 59.7% of respondents in North Africa and Central Africa, respectively, indicated that government measures negatively impacted civic space, followed by East Africa (49.6%), Southern Africa (45.9%) and West Africa (41.4%).

58.2% of Kenyan respondents indicated that government measures had a negative impact, while the response from South African and Nigerian respondents was slightly lower than the respective regional averages.

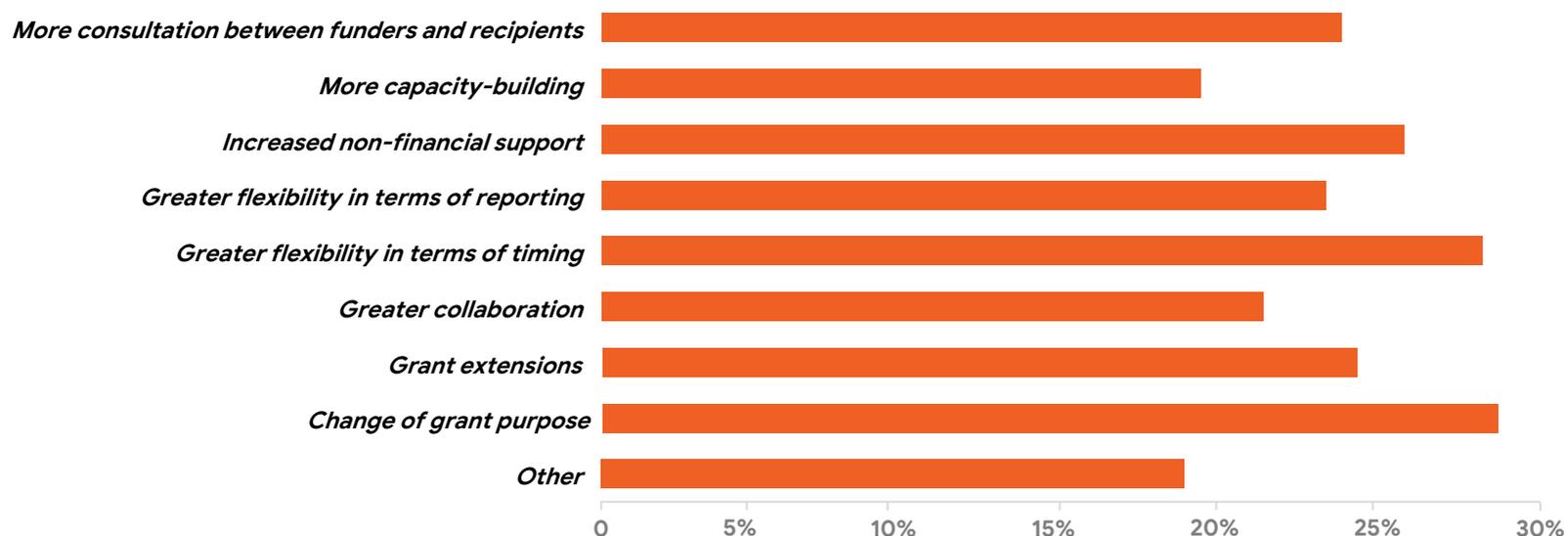
In other countries with a recent history of shrinking civic space, such as Uganda and Tanzania, 60.5% and 26.4% of respondents, respectively, indicated that government measures adversely impacted civic space.

Relationship Between CSOs and Funders

Beyond the impact of the pandemic on the funding situation of most African CSOs, it has also resulted in changes in the relationship between CSOs and funders, and funders' grantmaking practices in general.

As far as African CSOs are concerned, most respondents indicated that they experienced a range of changes or flexibility in their relationship with funders since the start of the pandemic. Change of grant purpose (28.5%) received the highest rating. Only 18.5% of respondents experienced no changes.

Changes experienced by CSOs



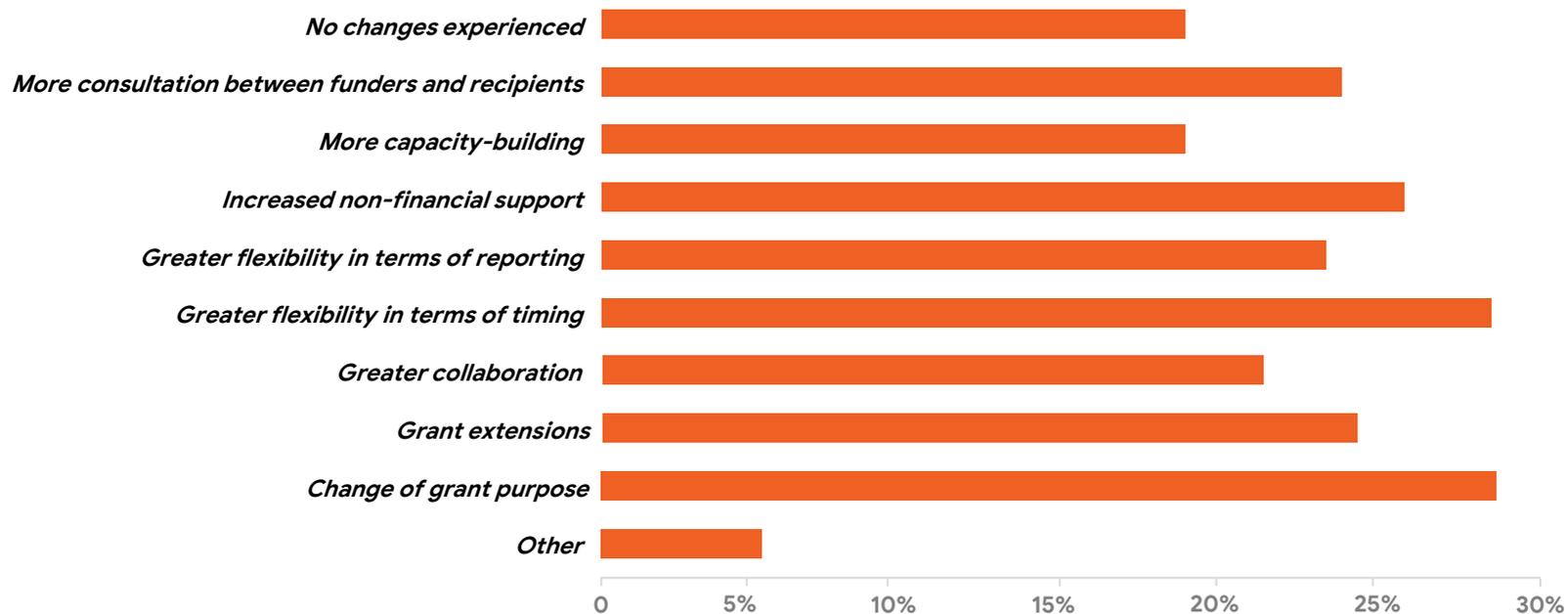
On a regional level, Southern African respondents highlighted a change of grant purpose (31.7%) and increased non-financial support (28.2%) as the areas that experienced the most changes and flexibility, compared to more consultation between funders and recipients (32.8%) and grant extensions (30.1%) in East Africa, and a change of grant purpose (28.4%) and greater flexibility in terms of timing (28.4%) in West Africa.

Respondents also highlighted the most significant changes or flexibility that they experienced with different types of funders.

Bilateral/multilateral agencies, government, individual donors, international foundations, international NGOs and local private foundations emphasized greater flexibility in terms of timing. In contrast, community-generated funds emphasized increased non-financial support, and the private sector focused on the change of grant purpose.

At the same time, all the funders surveyed introduced one or more changes or flexibility to their grantmaking since the start of the pandemic.

Changes introduced by funders



Furthermore, although 44% of the funders surveyed made no strategic shifts to the focus of their grantmaking since the start of the pandemic, some changed the thematic focus areas that they fund (20%), the population groups they support (12%), or the context in which you operate. Only 4% changed the types of CSOs they fund.

When asked if they responded adequately to the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs by changing how they engage with their grantees, 57.7% of the funders surveyed felt that they did, 19.2% disagreed, and 23.08% were undecided.

The mentioned changes and flexibility represent encouraging developments in the relationship between CSOs and funders, and a willingness by funders to be more supportive of CSOs in a challenging funding environment.

However, it is not clear if these changes and flexibility will continue in the future. 48% of the funders surveyed indicated that they don't know, while 20% don't think they will be long-term in nature. At the same time, 66.7% of CSOs felt that COVID-19 would force funders to rethink power dynamics and transform their engagement with CSOs.

66.7%

of CSOs felt that COVID-19 would force funders to rethink power dynamics and transform their engagement with CSOs

Involvement in the Response to COVID-19

Despite the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on their operations, African CSOs are actively involved in the response to the pandemic.

New Program Activities

83.4% of respondents reported adding new program activities in response to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, which correlates to the 84.8% response in 2020. In addition, 89% indicated that these activities are aligned with their mission compared to 87.4% in 2020.

Most new activities are centered around respondents' main activity areas, primarily advocacy, information dissemination, and capacity-building and training. A substantial number of CSOs are also involved in emergency response efforts, especially the distribution of food and hygiene products.

It is also important to note that in terms of how the pandemic has impacted respondents' programs and activities, 27.6% increased their programming, with programs being scaled up to deal with the impact of COVID-19, while 34.3% changed the focus of their programs by shifting to COVID-19 from other areas.

From a regional perspective, respondents from East Africa and West Africa are primarily involved in advocacy (54.3% and 58% respectively), and emergency response activities in Southern Africa (48.9%).

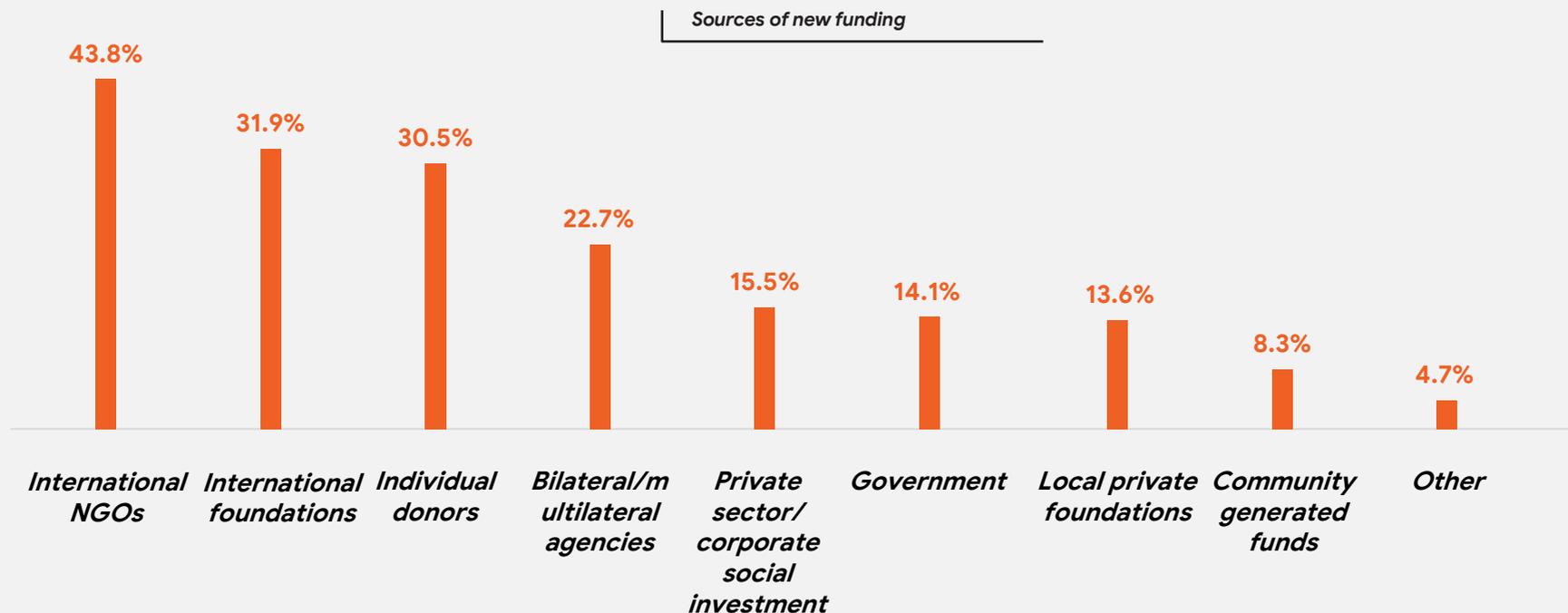
New program activities



83.4% of CSOs reported adding new program activities in response to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic

New Funding

46.2% of respondents have accessed new funding to support their COVID-19-related interventions compared to 28% in 2020.



Whereas individual donors were the primary source of new COVID-19 funding in 2020, international NGOs received the highest rating in 2021. This change relates to the significant decrease in the number of South African respondents (191 in 2021 compared to 321 in 2020) and the high percentage of individual donors in that country in 2020.

50.7% of Southern African respondents accessed new funding, with individual donors still the primary source of funding, while international NGOs were the main source in all the other regions. On a country level, individual donors were the primary source of funding in South Africa and Nigeria, with international NGOs the primary source in Kenya.

At the same time, 32% of respondents have diverted funding to COVID-19 interventions at the expense of regular programming. This switch enabled them to provide timely support in response to the immediate needs of their beneficiaries but disrupted the implementation and frequency of everyday activities.

On a regional level, respondents from Southern Africa and Central Africa diverted 35.2% and 37.9% of their funding, respectively, and the other three regions between 26% and 32%. South African respondents diverted 39.4% of their funding, followed by Kenyan (29.6%) and Nigerian (21.9%) respondents.

50.7%

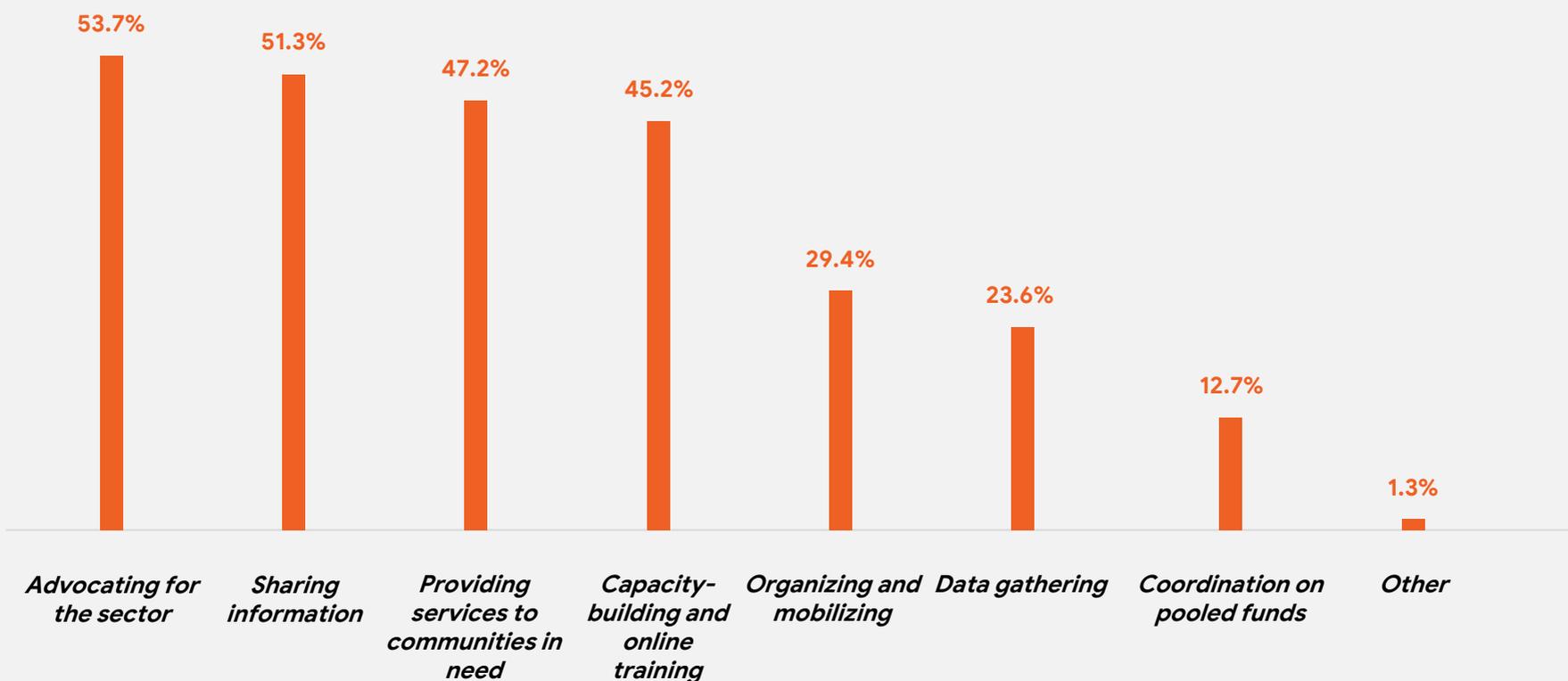
of Southern African respondents accessed new funding, with individual donors still the primary source of funding

Cooperation and Partnerships

79.7% of respondents reported working with other CSOs in responding to COVID-19. This figure shows a slight decrease compared to 2020 when close to 84% of respondents reported working with others. Perhaps, as the pandemic has

become “normal”, and as CSOs have learned to live with the new reality, the heightened sense of solidarity that was apparent at the beginning of the pandemic has begun to wane.

Areas in which CSOs formed partnerships



From a regional perspective, respondents from East Africa, North Africa and West Africa cooperate primarily on advocacy, in Southern Africa on sharing information, and in North Africa on capacity-building and online training.

79.7%

of CSOs reported working with other CSOs in responding to COVID-19

Lack of Government Support

Unfortunately, African governments have not recognized or supported the efforts of CSOs or offered support to lessen the impact of the pandemic on their operations and activities. 42.3% of the funders surveyed felt that governments failed to recognize and utilize local CSOs' skills, experience and networks in response to COVID-19. Furthermore, only 8.4% of respondents indicated that they received funding support from a government emergency relief fund during the pandemic.

This lack of support has weakened the planning, coordination, and implementation of national responses and the ability of CSOs to sustain and expand their efforts.

42.3%

of the funders surveyed felt that governments failed to recognize and utilize local CSOs' skills, experience and networks

Recognition

92.3%



of funders agreed that local CSOs are playing a critical role in national responses to COVID-19. At the same time, 80.8% felt that these contributions would result in greater public appreciation for the sector's work.

Key Learnings

Thankfully, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and related loss of lives have been relatively contained across the continent –perhaps with the exception of South Africa. But the impact of the pandemic continues to reverberate through all sectors. While the easing of restrictions in movement and public gatherings has enabled some recovery in the CSO sector, with fewer CSOs reporting a reduction or cancellation of operations, the loss of funding has not abated. Instead, the percentage of CSOs that experienced funding losses increased by 12.4%, from 55.7% in 2020 to 68.1% in 2021.

At the same time, the cost of doing business increased by 10.6%, from 34.9% to 45.5%. Furthermore, the optimism that CSOs expressed in 2020, when 45.1% felt that the pandemic would give rise to a more robust and agile sector, has dropped to 41.4%.

Despite daunting challenges, CSOs across the continent are making adjustments and finding new ways to continue doing their work. They partner with other CSOs, conduct online fundraising, sell goods and services, and leverage technology for program delivery and monitoring, among other innovations. Indeed, African CSOs have continued to demonstrate remarkable adaptability, agility and relevance. Even as they grapple with their own survival, 83.4% of respondents reported adding new program activities in response to COVID-19.



We are collaborating and partnering with other organizations to sustain our programs. We are using more volunteers, working from home and using webinars more than physical meetings to reduce cost.”

It is still too early to reach final conclusions about the fallout and impact of the pandemic on African CSOs. But the experiences and learnings of the past 18 months can guide specific changes within the CSO sector, inform grantmaking approaches, and strengthen advocacy for a more supportive legal and regulatory environment for CSOs.

Following are highlights of these experiences and learnings:

Financial Sustainability – COVID-19 has brought to the fore the historical under-resourcing of African CSOs, which has hindered their ability to be more effective and scale and sustain impact. Between 2018 and 2021, the average annual budget for 82.2% of the CSOs surveyed was less than US\$1 million, with almost 50% of them having less than US\$100,000. In addition, the nature of funding is unpredictable, short-term, and restricted.

This situation deprives CSOs of investing in building robust organizational infrastructure, leaving them extremely vulnerable to external shocks. Without adequate long-term and flexible funding, few CSOs have the means to, for example, attract and retain enough experienced staff, build effective governance and operational systems, or measure, document and share their impact stories. These are some of the shortcomings that funders often cite as "risky" when funding African CSOs. Money matters, as there is a direct link between the size of budget expenditures and CSOs' ability to weather the impact of COVID-19 on their operations.

Organizational Capacity – while COVID-19 has created many new challenges for African CSOs, it also exposed pre-existing internal conditions other than under-funding. 82.8% of respondents felt that it had exacerbated historical organizational and operational challenges that have long hampered the sector. The most critical shortcomings that they highlighted include fundraising, staff wellness, finance and administration, risk management, communications, and technology. As a result, 80.9% felt that African CSOs were not prepared to cope with the disruption to their operations caused by COVID-19. CSOs need to prioritize strengthening these areas, while funders should earmark more dedicated support in this regard.

Reinforcing Relevance and Credibility – despite the challenges confronting African CSOs, they are at the frontline of alleviating the suffering caused by the ongoing ravages of COVID-19. In addition to expanding awareness and providing emergency relief, CSOs are responding and bringing

attention to new and old crises caused or aggravated by COVID-19. However, because their activities are short-term and small-scale, African CSOs are hard-pressed to demonstrate impact. Additionally, their activities often lack continuity, as they are funder-driven and constantly change focus in response to changing funder priorities, leaving behind few tangible long-term outcomes. Unable to sustain programs and build a track record of achievements, CSOs find themselves with a credibility deficit.

Recognition and Inclusion – the essential role that African CSOs are playing goes largely unrecognized and unsupported by governments, funders and other stakeholders. Yet, CSO interventions are often the only assistance available to underserved communities, filling a void in the absence of government services and amplifying citizen voices on critical matters. 42.3% of the funders surveyed felt that governments failed to recognize and utilize CSOs' skills, experience and networks in response to COVID-19.

This assertion is corroborated by the fact that only 8.4% of CSOs received funding support from a Government COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund. At the same time, while 92.3% of the funders surveyed indicated that CSOs were playing a critical role in national responses to COVID-19, and 80.8% felt these contributions would result in greater public appreciation for the sector's work, this recognition has not led to substantial increases in funding or other types of support.

Operating Environment – the legal and regulatory environment in which CSOs operate was already restrictive in many African countries before the pandemic. This situation is especially true for CSOs that seek to inform and empower citizens about their rights, advocate for more open governments that are responsive to the needs of citizens or promote collective action to advance the public good. The containment measures introduced by governments have further curtailed the ability of CSOs to carry out both their regular programs and new activities in response to COVID-19.

The situation is worst in North Africa and Central Africa, where 61.9% and 59.7% of respondents, respectively, indicated that the civic space had shrunk, compared to East Africa (49.6%), Southern Africa (45.9%) and West Africa (41.4%). Within regions, some countries reported higher levels of impact than the regional figures. Some CSOs also expressed fear that the emergency measures that are in place may become permanent, further restricting civil and political rights well beyond the pandemic.

Staff Wellness – this is a new frontier that CSOs are learning to navigate, and one of the organizational challenges that many were least prepared to deal with. In addition to protecting staff from contracting the disease, CSOs were confronted with the need to support those who became ill or lost colleagues or family members. The situation led to increased costs, as well as unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety among staff. The ability of CSOs to offer their staff relief was mainly dependent on their size and resources. More than 80% of respondents with a staff of 50 people and more, who also have higher budgets, added new measures to deal with staff wellness, compared to only 56.4% of CSOs with one to five staff members and an annual budget below US\$100,000.

Catalyzing Transformational Change – COVID-19 has forced many funders to become more flexible and understanding in their grantmaking practices. Many have relaxed reporting obligations, converted project-based funding to operational funding, and listened to their grantees as to where and how best to support them during this uncertain and challenging period. The implications are that there may be a shift of power in the relationship between funders and grantees leading to the growth in community philanthropy, trust-based philanthropy and participatory grantmaking.



We are in survival mode and taking a day at a time. Currently, we are experiencing the third wave of the pandemic in our country. We are trying to plan, but with limited resources and abilities. We are seeking online funding opportunities and running campaigns to harness support. We also are remaining active in the community albeit at a reduced scale.”



We have developed customized merchandise that we sell as an income-generating activity for the organization.”



We use mobile phones for monitoring our program activities.”



Way Forward

The way forward is clear. Few of the lessons emerging from the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the solutions, are new. In fact, African CSOs have long called for these changes. What is unique and different this time is that COVID-19 has shown that change is possible. In this, there is a glimmer of optimism, even in a sea of uncertainty and concern for people's health and well-being during the ongoing pandemic.

Firstly, many funders have demonstrated unprecedented flexibility, provided additional resources, and in some cases, ceded more decision-making power to their grantees. When asked to describe the lessons of COVID-19 and what funders ought to do to enable CSOs to recover and emerge stronger from the crisis, the following response from one such funder captures what is possible.

"This is not a new lesson, but the importance of flexible general support was reaffirmed over the course of our grantmaking in 2020. Multi-year flexible grants gave many of our partners the space to react to changing situations. Additionally, we learned that it's important for grant duration to be set up by partners and not to be limited to our grantmaking cycles. We are doubling down on providing multi-year support to our partners, including both existing and new partners. We are also recommending more and flexible time for reporting after the implementation of a grant, without waiting to invite a grantee for a renewal grant after the official closeout of their first grant. Finally, this past year has highlighted the importance of investing in infrastructure (to enable partners to adjust their work style and plans as needed). For example, a number of partners work from desktops and didn't have laptops to take home to continue their work. Partners benefit from having additional funds to build out their infrastructure, so they can remain resilient in changing environments."

Secondly, African CSOs have also demonstrated that change is possible. They have quickly embraced technology, for example. Furthermore, CSOs exercise agency by acknowledging and beginning to tackle internal challenges within their power to change. They recognize the need to heal the fragmentation that weakens their voice. When asked what advice they would offer to other CSOs, respondents most often mentioned the need to be better organized, collaborate more, and build more robust networks and platforms. The following quotes from two respondents highlight these sentiments:

"Working together is the best way to overcome any challenges. COVID-19 has been a major one, but other crises will come, like authoritarian regimes and sanctions. The best way to be impactful is to build robust networks of partners and share responsibilities."

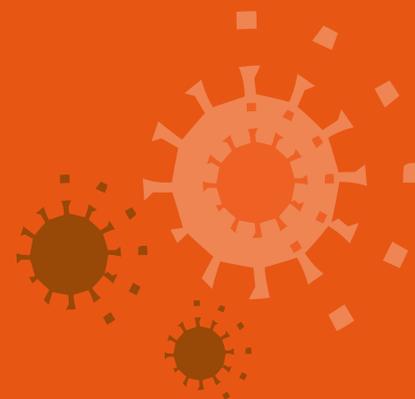
"Collaboration and capacity-building. We need to share not only resources, but also experiences. Instead of CSOs going down, struggling CSOs should amalgamate with stronger ones to continue the work they do."

Finally, what is also different this time is that African CSOs are no longer the lone voice calling for meaningful change in the global aid architecture and practices. A constellation of voices, local and international, is growing louder in the call for change. From private and corporate philanthropy to bilateral funders, COVID-19 seems to have ignited an inflection point. A consensus seems to be emerging around the imperative to fund African CSOs directly and shift power to African CSOs. The extent to which the hope that this moment represents will be realized depends on the willingness of those with power "to walk the talk."

When funders and CSOs were asked what should be done moving forward, and by whom, to enable African CSOs to recover and emerge from the COVID-19 crisis stronger and more resilient, they offered the following practical solutions:

What should funders do?

- Be flexible and give long-term institutional grants.
- Trust African CSOs and share power.
- Fund African CSOs directly.
- Support and work through networks.
- Support institution-building, including strengthening local philanthropy infrastructure.



What should governments do?

- Recognize and include CSOs in national emergency responses and long-term development efforts.
- Create an enabling environment.
- Fund CSOs, especially those filling service gaps left by government.

What should CSOs do?

- Organize, collaborate, consolidate, and build networks and platforms.
- Be proactive, exercise agency, learn to anticipate and plan.
- Build visibility and demonstrate accountability and transparency to increase credibility.
- Embrace and leverage technology.
- Diversify funding and explore new organizational and funding models.

Publications

This section covers a select list of publications that also focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs.

Africa

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We are committed to sharing the survey findings with CSOs, funders and all other stakeholders interested in learning more about the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on African CSOs and supporting the sector's work.



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About

EPIC-Africa

EPIC-Africa is a Senegal-based non-profit organization that seeks to strengthen philanthropic impact by filling critical data and capacity gaps in the African civil society sector. It envisages a vibrant civil society ecosystem with diverse, influential, sustainable African civil society groups at the center. EPIC-Africa contributes to this transformative vision by gathering, analyzing and sharing sector data, as well as providing services and tools that aim to set standards and ensure continuous improvement in performance and impact, champion new approaches, and advocate for better policies to support the sector.

Founded in 2017, EPIC-Africa is led by Rose Maruru, with the support of a small in-house team and consultants based in Dakar, Dar-es-Salaam, Johannesburg, Nairobi and New York. EPIC-Africa also works through a vast network of CSOs and peer organizations in Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda.

For more information, please visit
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About

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@AfricanNGOs is a Twitter account that covers news and information for and about NGOs in Africa. It is moderated by David Barnard, a development consultant with more than 25 years' executive and senior management experience in leading and supporting development organizations and programs across Africa. His expertise covers fundraising, strategic communication, stakeholder management, advocacy, governance, ICT4D and philanthropy. David currently acts as a consultant to various NGOs and foundations in Africa and serves on the Africa Policy Advisory Board of the ONE Campaign.

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