



# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SOCIAL CHANGE ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICA

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# INTRODUCTION

The global disruption caused by the novel coronavirus has had severe implications for life in general and the social sector is no exception. In Africa where persisting development challenges exist, social change organizations had to grapple with how best to respond to the increased demand for their vital services. Containment measures and other social distancing policies threatened service continuity of Nonprofits and other impact organizations at a time when the need to serve communities has never been greater. Their resources and reserves went under extreme pressure as the impacts of COVID-19 evolved and needs across communities multiplied and extended beyond healthcare to social and economic challenges.

The worldwide economic downturn placed huge financial strains on Nonprofits who largely depend on donors to deliver on their mission. Decline in donations shifted thinking from sustainability to survivability as organizations struggled to maintain operations and payrolls at a time of heightened need.

In a bid to better understand how social change organizations across Africa have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, ACT Foundation conducted a survey with focus on the following underlying objectives:

- Assess the extent and effect of COVID-19 on the services, operations and people of social sector organizations.
- Understand the challenges that threatened service continuity of social change organizations in Africa.
- Discover how organizations fared in spite of the negative outcomes resulting from COVID-19.
- Attempt to understand the financial security of organizations during the crisis.
- Identify areas of greatest need for Nonprofits and other impact organizations across Africa.

This report is based on evidence collected through an online survey between 20th October and 10th November 2020. Through this report we hope to improve support to social sector organizations, towards a resilient and sustainable future.

We believe that the survey findings provide critical insights for funders into the most impactful ways to allocate resources. The results of this survey will help inform discussions and decisions around recovery, support and shaping the future of the social impact sector in Africa.

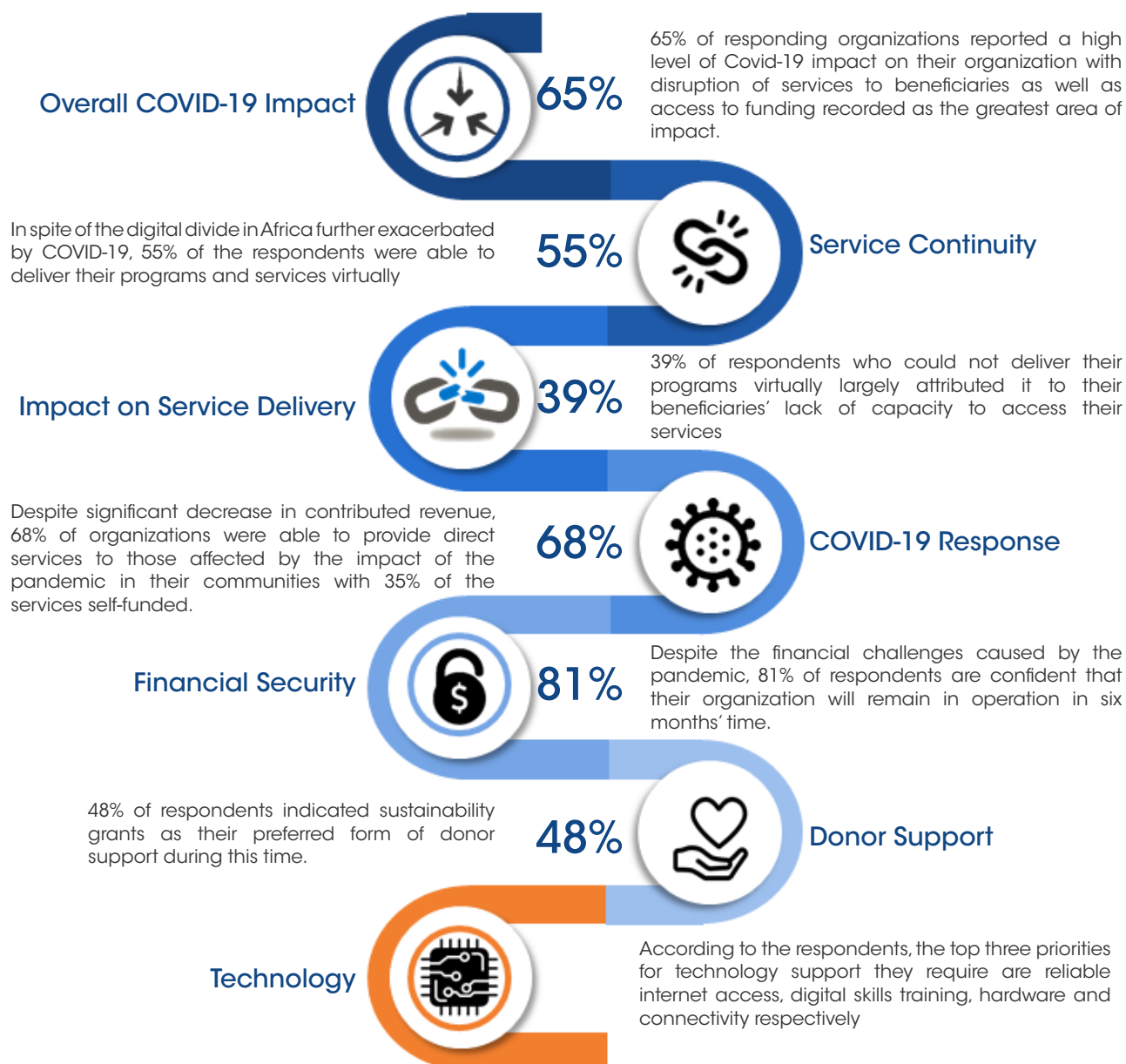




# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This report was generated based upon data collected via an online survey administered by ACT Foundation between 20th October and 10th November 2020.

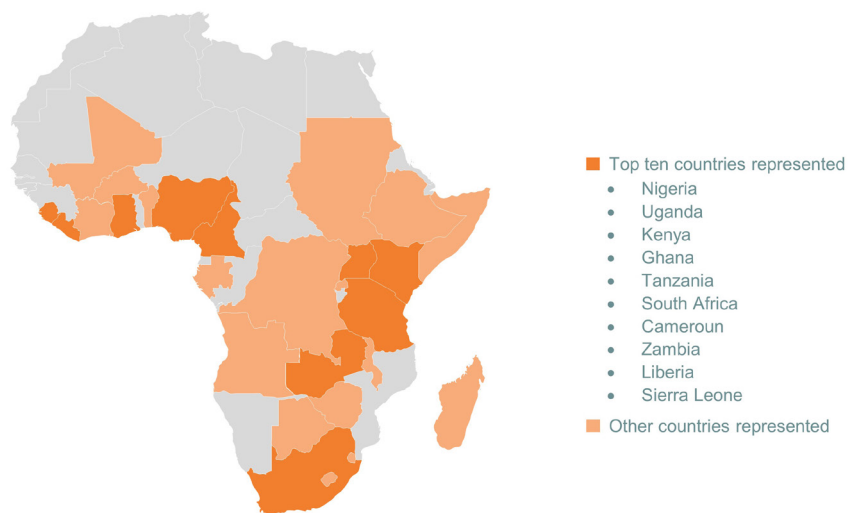
The following are among the most significant findings of this survey:



# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

All responses were submitted voluntarily and represent the experience and views of 434 organizations representing 27 African countries.

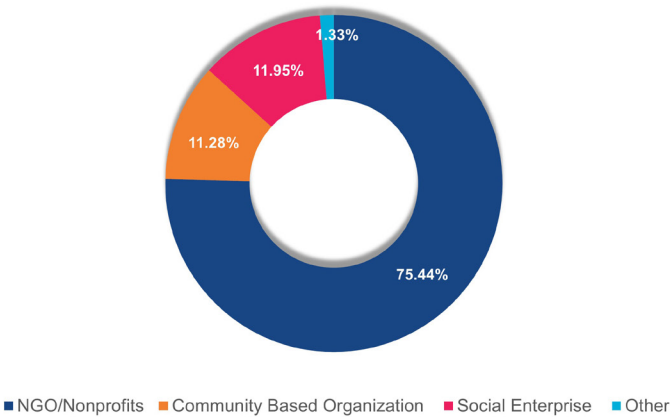
**Figure 1: Responding countries**



## Type of responding organizations

The majority of the respondents are from Nonprofits.

Figure 2: Organization type



## Scope of Work

Responding organizations are working across multiple focus areas. Women's empowerment recorded the most involvement in the respondents' scope of work (262). This is followed by Entrepreneurship (238) and Community development (236).

Figure 3: Respondent's scope of work

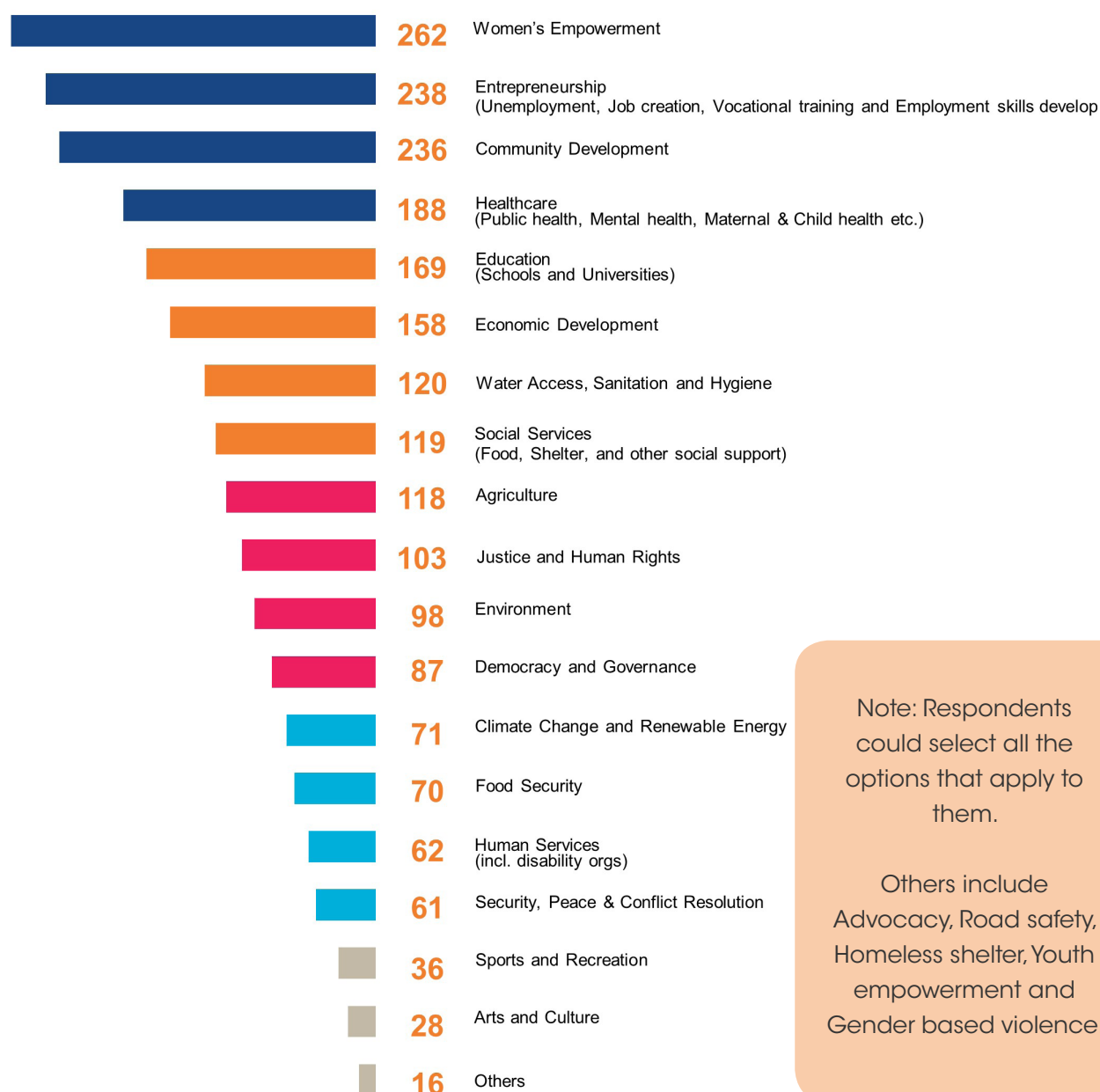


Figure 4: Population served by respondents

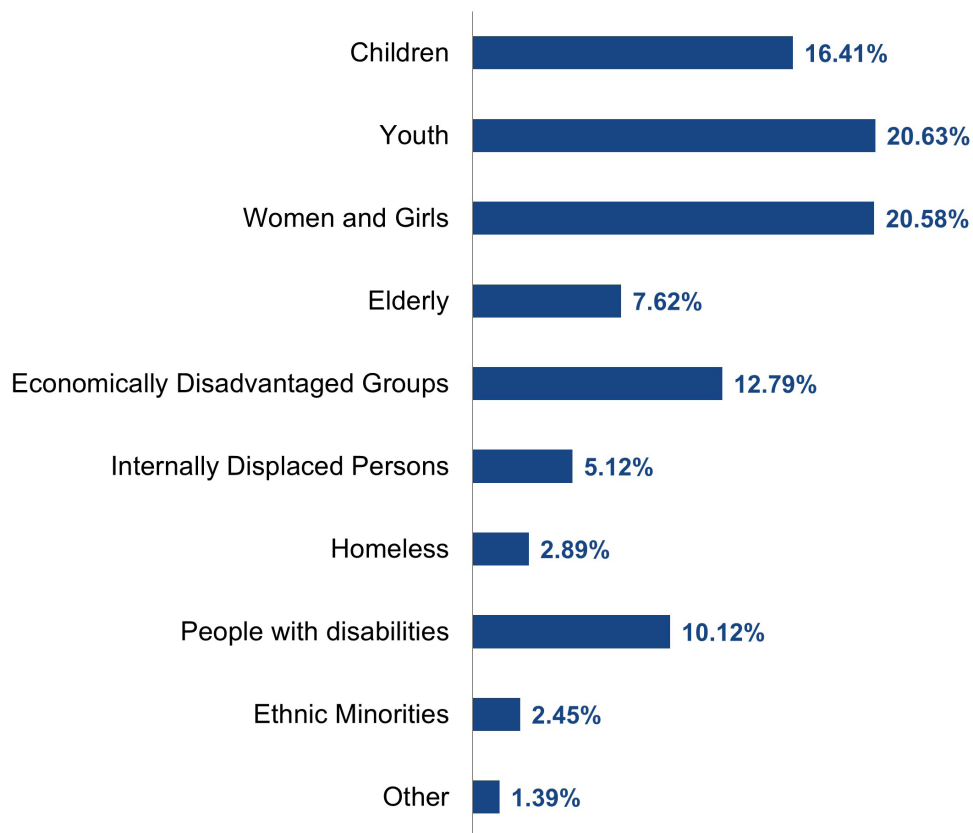
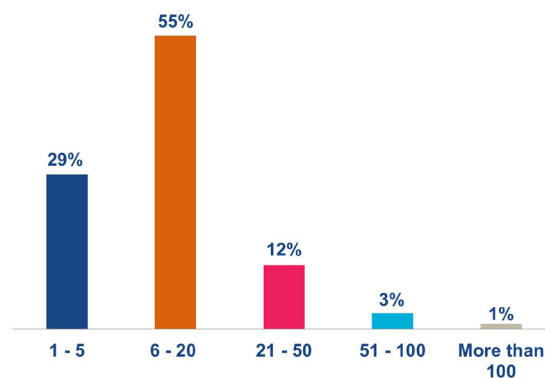


Figure 5: Staff Size

Over half of the respondents have a staff strength of between 6 – 20 employees.

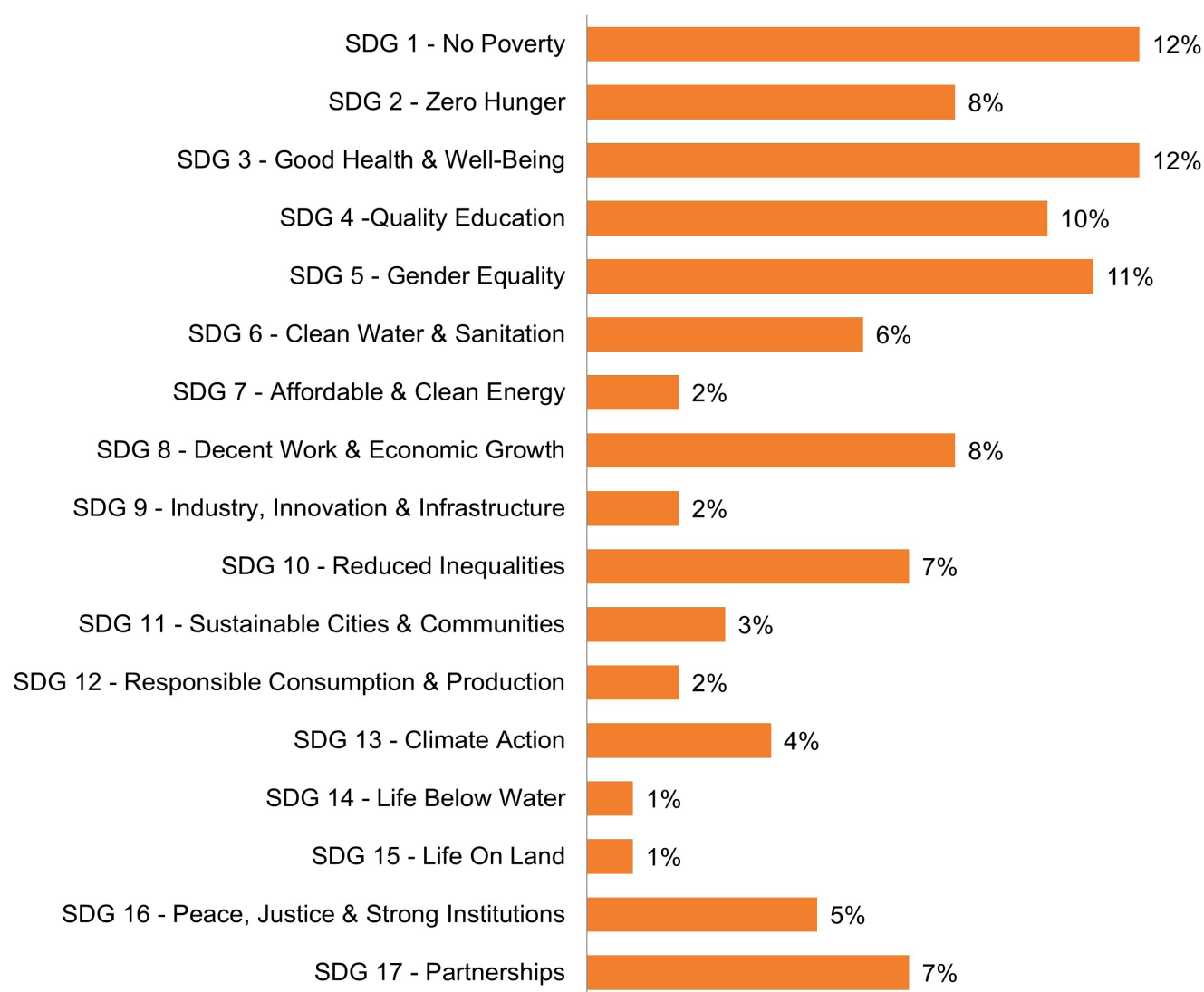


# Sustainable Development Goals



Respondents' work spans across multiple sustainable development goals.

**Figure 6: What Sustainable Development Goals does your organization speak to?**



Note: Respondents could select all the options that apply to them.



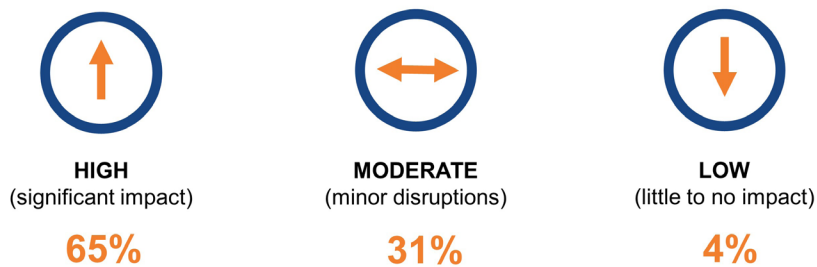
# **SURVEY RESULTS**



# OVERALL EFFECT OF COVID-19

More than half of respondents cited significant impact of COVID-19 on their organization while 31% reported minor disruptions to their organizations. Only 4% indicated little to no impact.

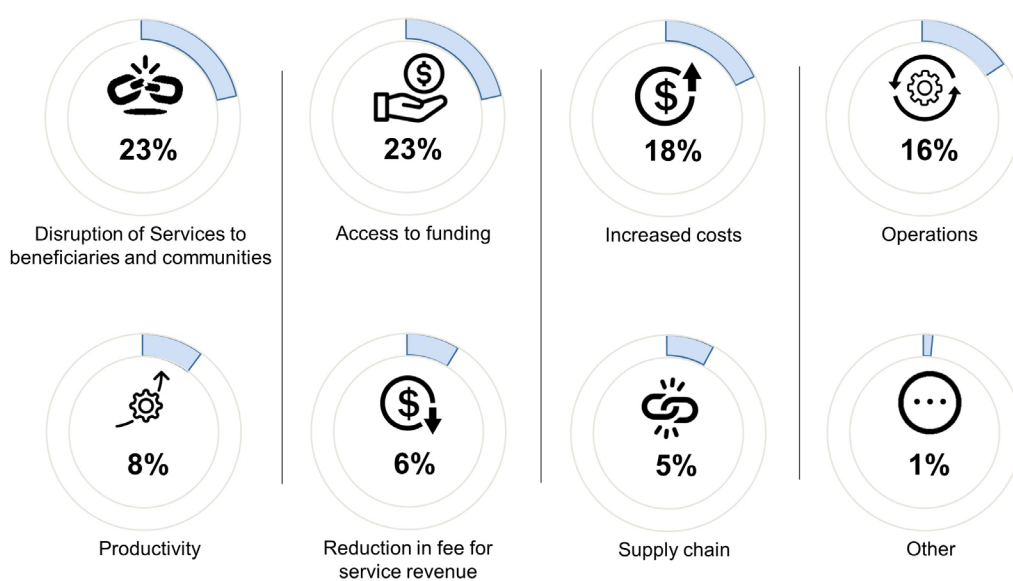
Figure 7: Estimate the level of impact COVID-19 is currently having on your organization.



## Areas of Impact

An equal percentage of responding organizations (23%) specified disruption of services to beneficiaries and access to funding as the areas of most impact.

**Figure 8: Which of the following areas has your organization experienced the most impact?**



Note: Respondents could select all the options that apply to them.

# IMPACT – SERVICES, OPERATIONS AND PEOPLE

## Service Delivery and Operations

In spite of the digital divide in Africa further exacerbated by COVID-19, more than half of the respondents (55%) reported they were able to deliver their programs and services virtually.

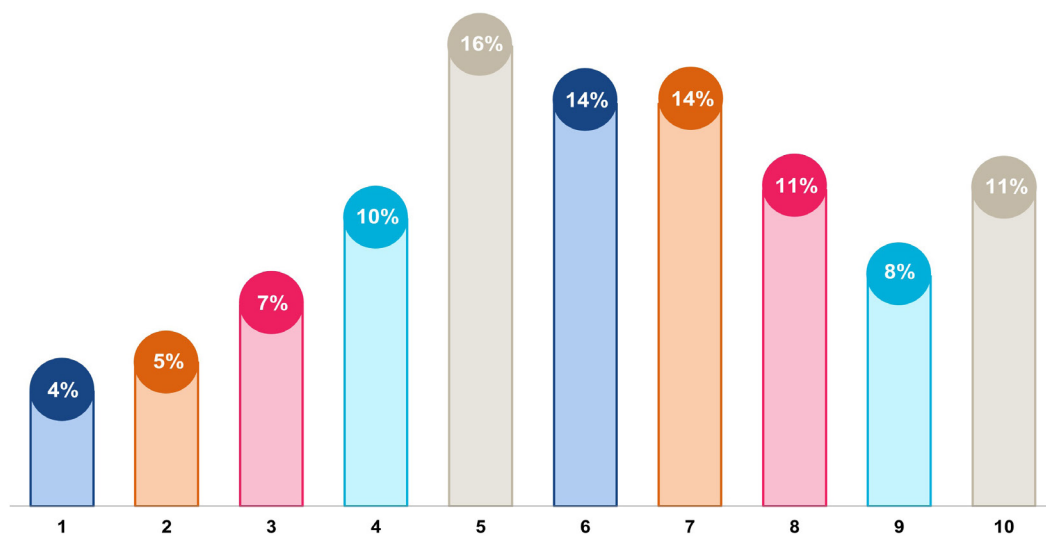
Figure 9: Able to deliver your services and programs virtually?





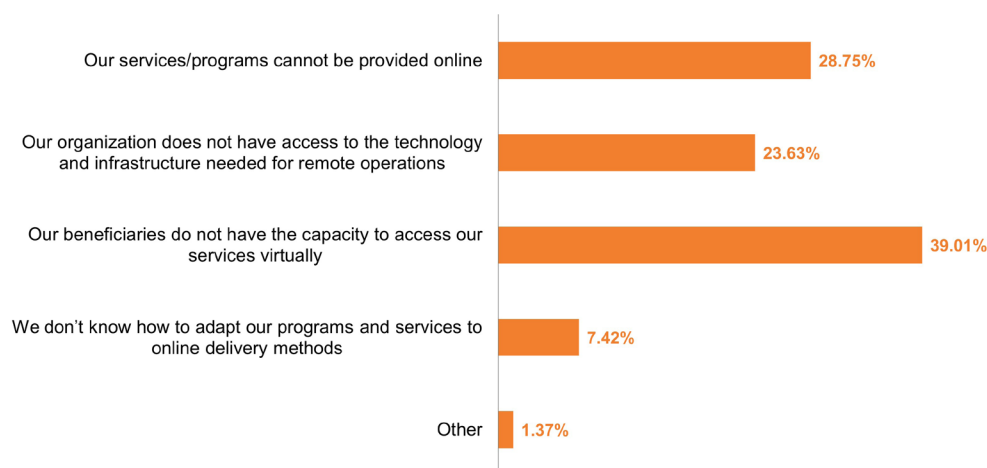
When asked to score the efficiency of delivering their programs online, nearly 19% of the respondents considered their approach to be very efficient. A little over a quarter of the respondents (26%) indicated their online methods of service delivery were not very efficient.

**Figure 10: On a scale of 1 - 10 (1 = "Not Very Efficient" and 10 = "Very Efficient"), how would you score your organization's online modes for service delivery?**



For the 45% of respondents who could not deliver their programs and services virtually, the major reason was due to the inability of the beneficiaries to access the services remotely (39.01%). The other significant factor is because the programs/services cannot be adapted for online delivery (28.75%). Only 7.42% reported they lacked the knowledge required to adapt their program to online modes of delivery.

**Figure 11: Share the reason(s) for not being able to deliver your services virtually.**



Note: Respondents could select all the options that apply to them.

## Demand for Service

76.54% of responding organizations reported an increase in the demand for their programs and services while 23.46% were also forced to cut back on their programs.

**Figure 12: Experienced an increase in the demand for your programs and services?**

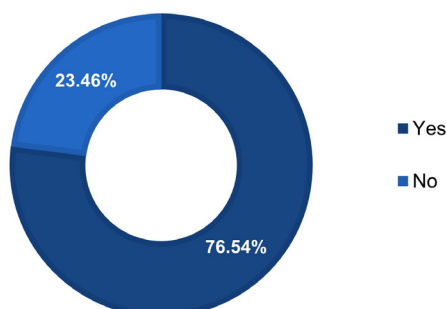
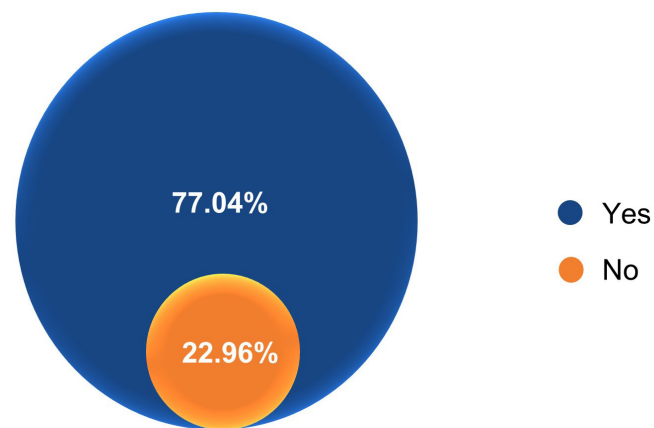




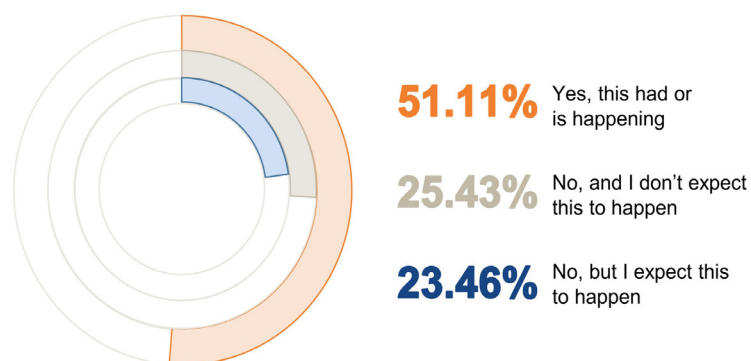
Figure 13: Cut back on programs and services?



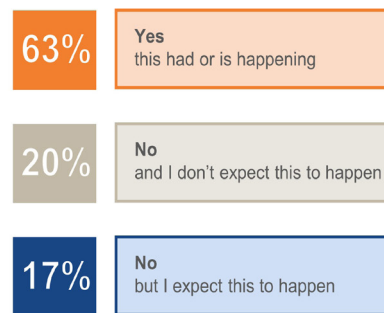
## Human Resource Management

51.11% of respondents indicated they conducted layoffs/furloughs. 23.46% who maintained their staff levels expects a reduction. A quarter of the respondents who retained their staff do not expect to conduct any layoffs/furloughs.

Figure 14: Reduced staff levels (e.g., conducted layoffs/furloughs)?

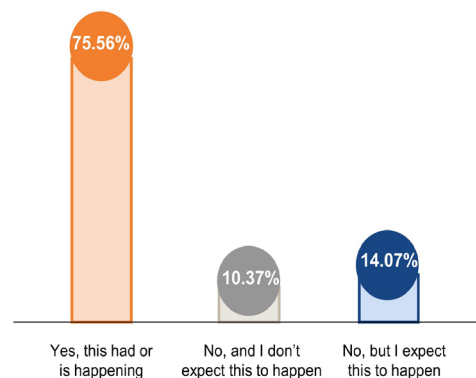


**Figure 15: Low staff/volunteers turnout for org. interventions?**



75.56% of responding organizations reported a reduction in staff hours. Nearly a quarter of the respondents did not experience reduced staff hours.

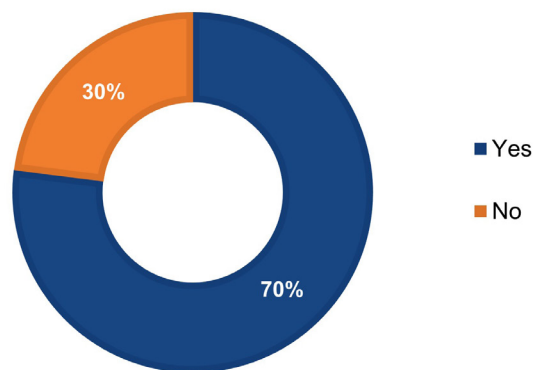
**Figure 16: Reduced Staff hours?**



## Staff Productivity

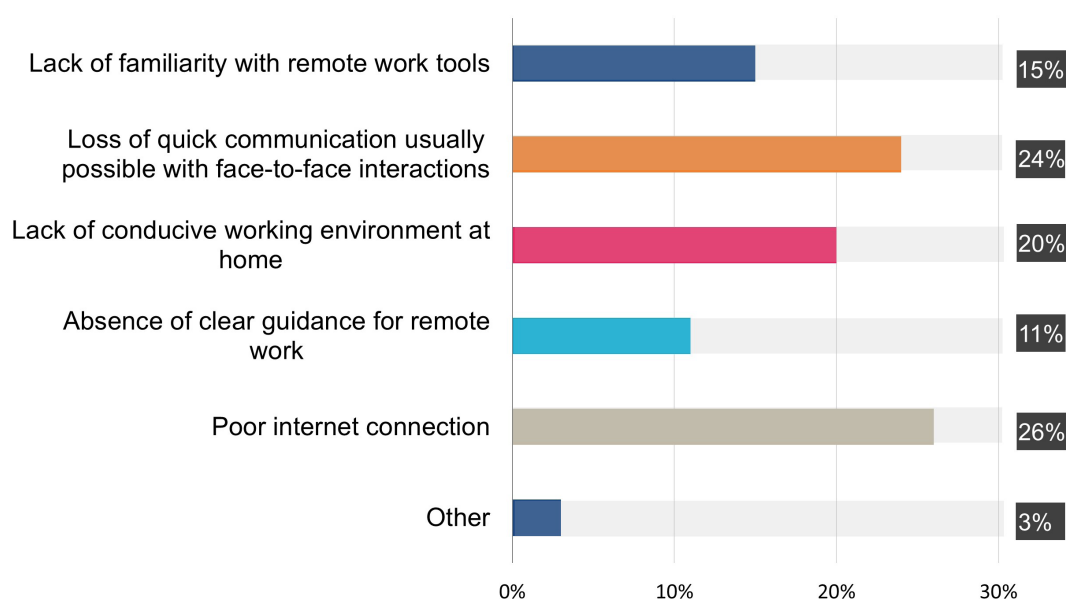
The majority of responding organizations (70%) confirmed they experienced a reduction in staff productivity. Almost all the respondents who reported a reduction in staff hours saw a decrease in staff productivity.

Figure 17: Experienced a reduction in staff productivity?



The high percentage of reduction in staff productivity can be attributed to teleworking which gained popularity in the 'new normal'. Working from home became the necessary practice as it represents the only way to continue working and minimize the risk of virus exposure. Expectedly, poor internet connection (26%) stood out as the major cause for the decline in staff productivity. This is followed closely by loss of quick communication usually possible with face-to-face interaction (24%) and lack of conducive working environment at home (20%).

**Figure 18: Let us know the reason(s) for the reduction in staff productivity.**



Note: Respondents could select all the options that apply to them.

Other responsible factors for low staff productivity levels expressed by the respondents include:

- Expensive rates of internet services
- Power outage
- Unavailability of remote work tools and equipment
- Reduction in salary
- Restriction of movement.

## Strategies Employed to Sustain Staff Productivity

Respondents who did not experience a decrease in staff productivity were asked to share how they were able to sustain staff productivity during the crisis.

*Here is what they said:*

- Disbursement of COVID-19 relief fund to staff and volunteers.
- Training and retraining of staff and volunteers.
- Regular check on staff.
- Flexible work hours and free working days.
- Continuous engagement and motivation.

”

# FINANCIAL SECURITY & SUSTAINABILITY

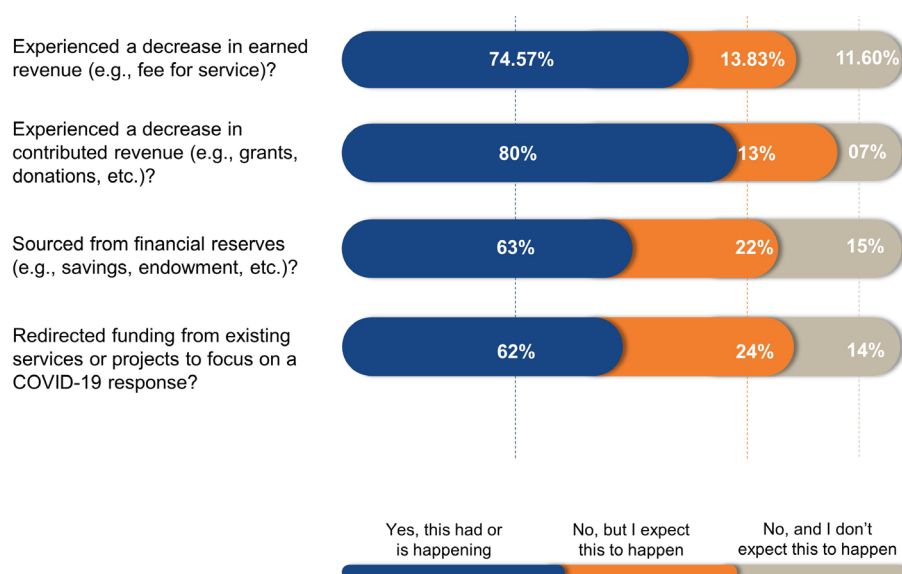
Financial security was one of the biggest challenges faced by organizations during this historic disruption. More than half of the respondents experienced a decrease in their earned revenue. 13.83% who did not experience any decrease expect it to happen while 11.60% do not expect it to happen.

About 80% of the respondents noted a decline in contributed revenue. 13% of those citing no decrease expect it to happen while an underwhelming 7% do not expect to see decrease in their contributions.

To continue their vital service to communities in a time of extreme financial constraints and increased demands, 63% of responding organizations were able to tap into reserves.

More than half of the respondents (62%) also reported redirecting funds from existing services and projects to respond to COVID-19.

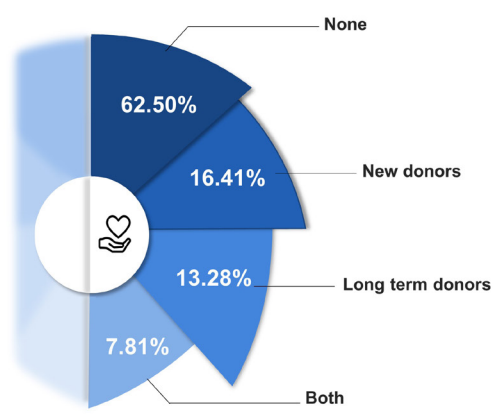
**Figure 19: Financial impact**





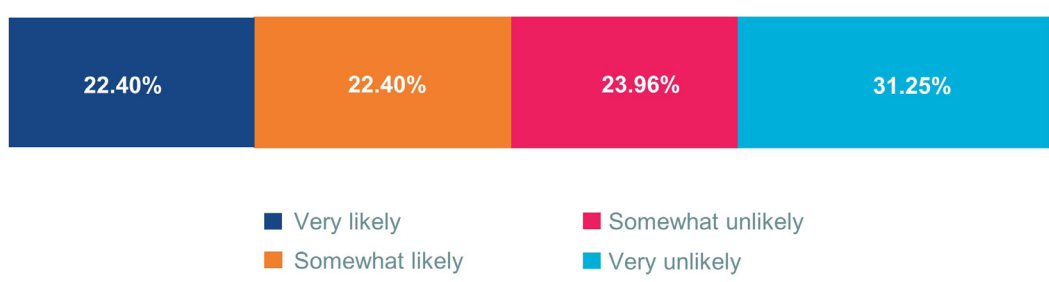
When asked about receiving funding from the last three months, more than half of the responding organizations (62.50%) issued a negative response. A closer look at the data shows fundraising trend during this time. Only 16.41% of the respondents have been able to raise funds from new donors.

Figure 20: Has your organization received funding from any of the following in the last three months?



About half of the respondents believe it unlikely that their organizations will be forced to close operations as a result of the financial constraints posed by COVID-19.

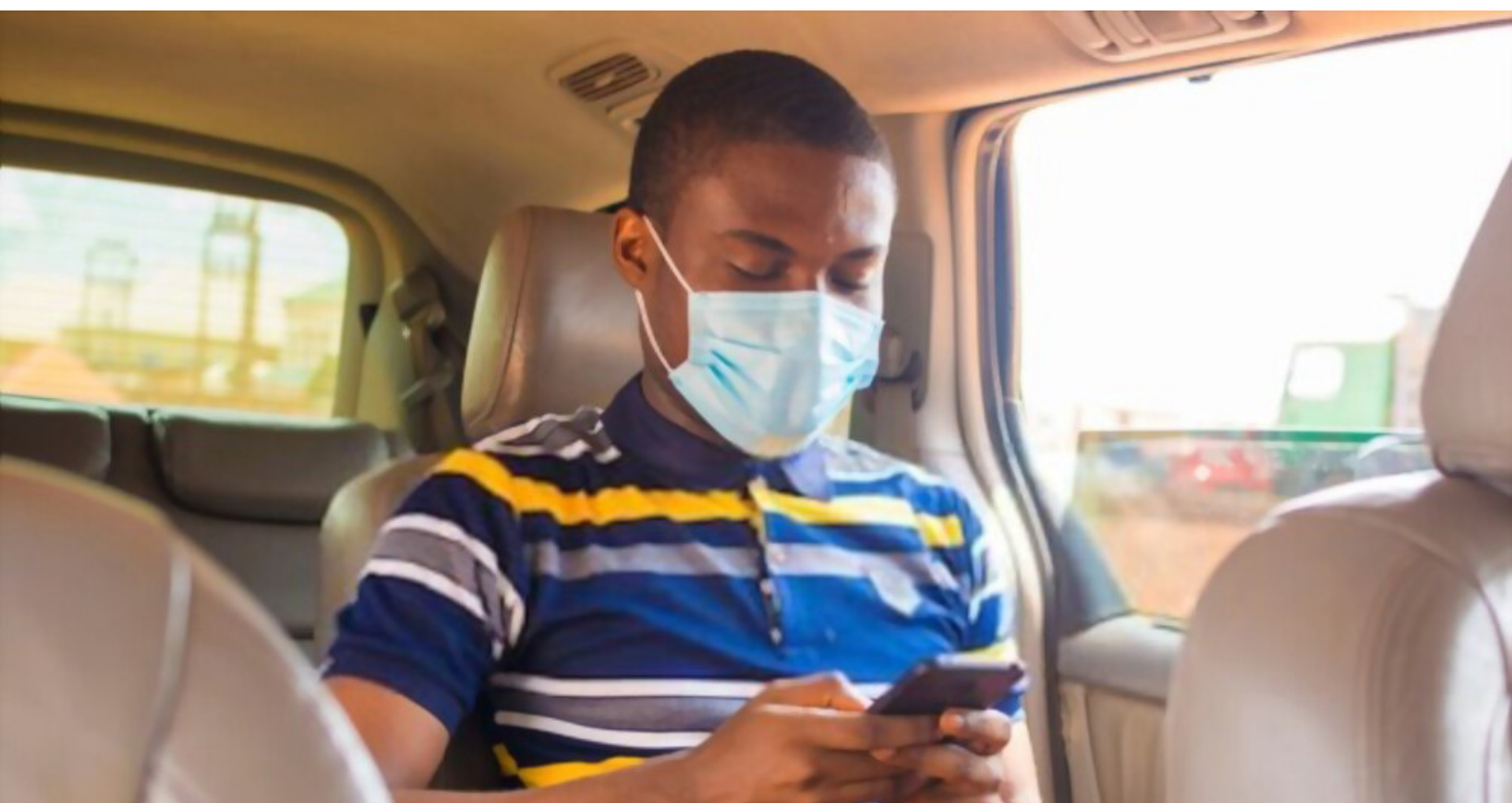
Figure 21: How likely is it that the financial challenges raised by COVID-19 will mean your organization will no longer be operating in six months' time?



# COVID-19 RESPONSE

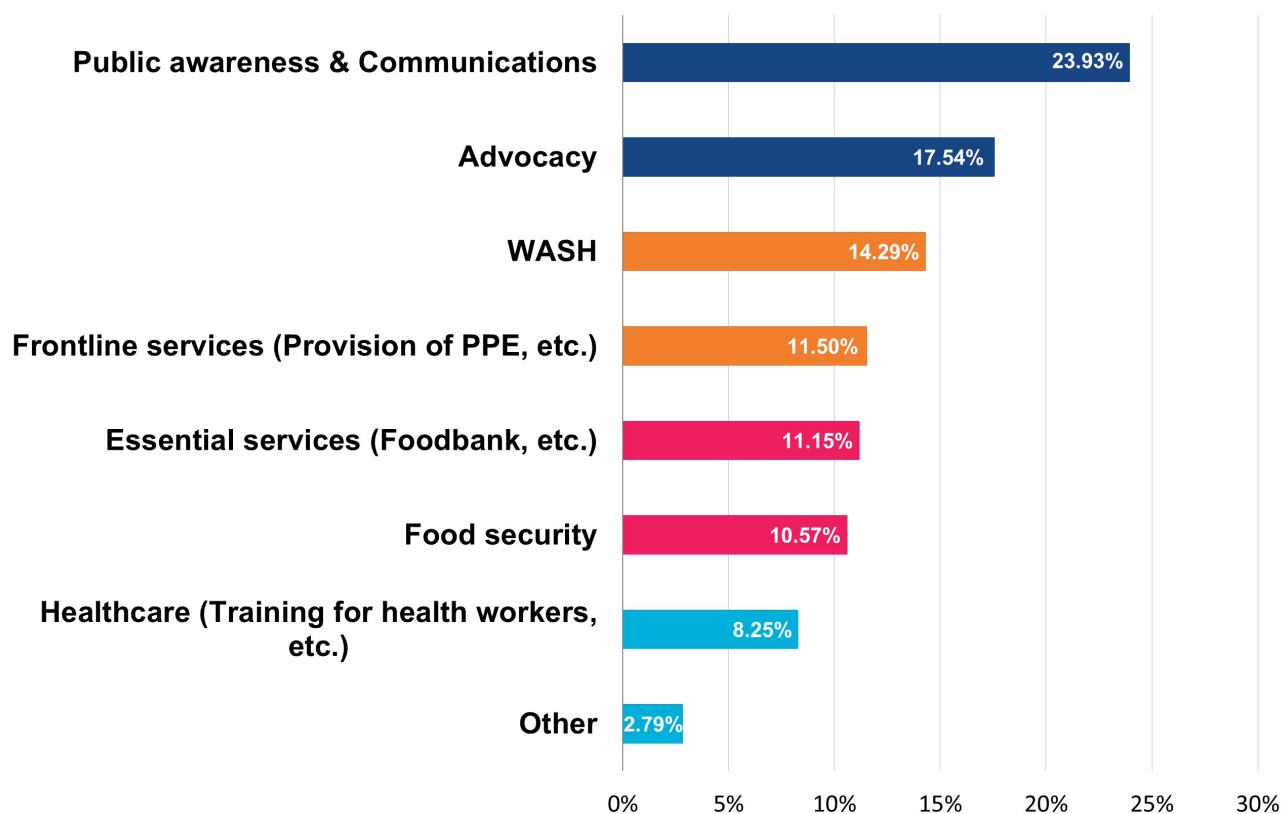
Majority of the responding organizations (68%) continued to deliver on their mission in spite of the lockdowns, providing vital services (onsite and online) to combat the socioeconomic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Figure 22: Is your organization providing direct services to those affected by the impact of the pandemic?**



## Type of Services

Figure 23: What type of services?

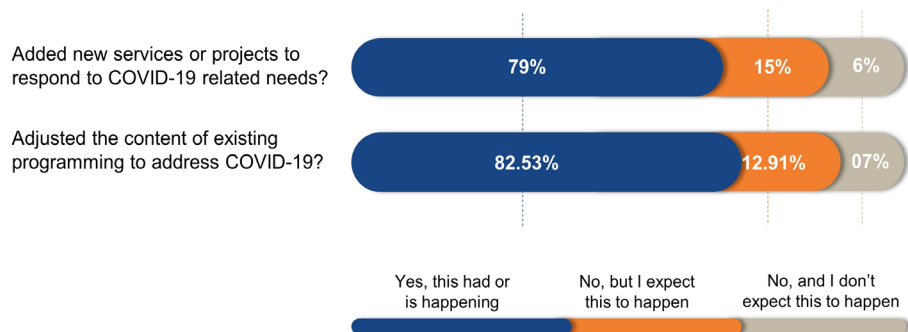


Other vital services highlighted include:

- Mental health and Psychosocial support
- Digital skills training
- e-business training
- Cash transfer to vulnerable households

Organizations shifted priorities to quickly address the situation. 79% of respondents added new services/projects to respond to COVID-19 related needs and 82.53% adjusted the content of exiting programming to address the needs of their local communities.

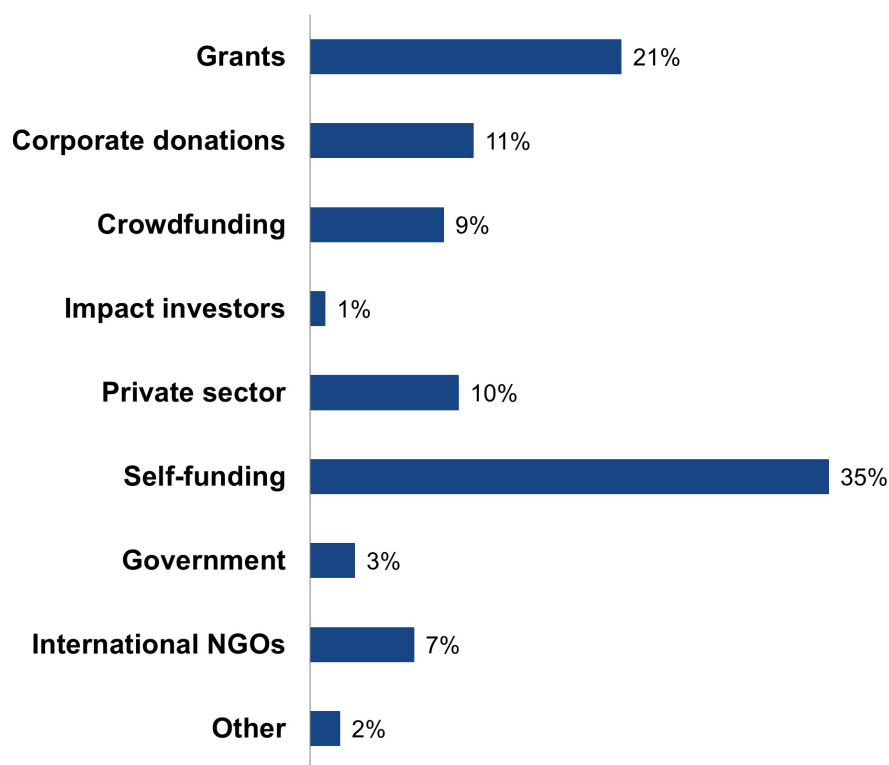
Figure 24: Covid-19 response



# COVID-19 Response: Funding Sources

Services to communities in response to COVID-19 impacts were largely self-funded as indicated by majority of the respondents (35%). This is followed by funding from grants as reported by 21% of the respondents. Corporate donations (11%) and the private sector (10%) made up the next top funding sources respectively.

Figure 25: Indicate funding source(s) of your COVID-19 response.



Note: Each respondent could select all the options that applied.

Other funding sources noted by respondents are from Family and friends and Individual donors.



# UNDERSTANDING ONGOING NEEDS

## Greatest Need/Concern for Social Change Organizations in Africa

COVID-19 left unprecedented challenges, and uncertainty in its wake for many social organizations. We asked respondents their greatest need/concerns for their mission and those they serve.

There is critical need to have institutional support to sustain the current programs but also new grants to carry out new interventions using the conducive delivery tools to match the new normal.

“

Our inability to reach most of them and this is due to the fact that most of them and their guardians are not totally used to the digital way of doing things, they are still stuck in the face to face interface.

Reduced protection of newborn because of missed immunization dates due to fear of contacting Covid-19 in hospitals and health institutions.

“

Greatest concern for the population we do serve is the issue of access to quality routine essential Reproductive, maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescents Health Services. During this COVID-19 pandemic there are reports of more frequent stock out essential drugs and services and lack of PPEs that are making health facilities to not function fully and causing significant disruption to these services.



We serve adolescents aged 13-24, the ones who need our services more are teens from low income families who have no personal laptops, who don't have the means to recharge their phone lines (when they have an android phone) consistently so as to continue learning online or stay in touch with peers. My concern is that there is a tendency for the rise of negative behaviors amongst youth as a result of restlessness and reduced positive interactions.

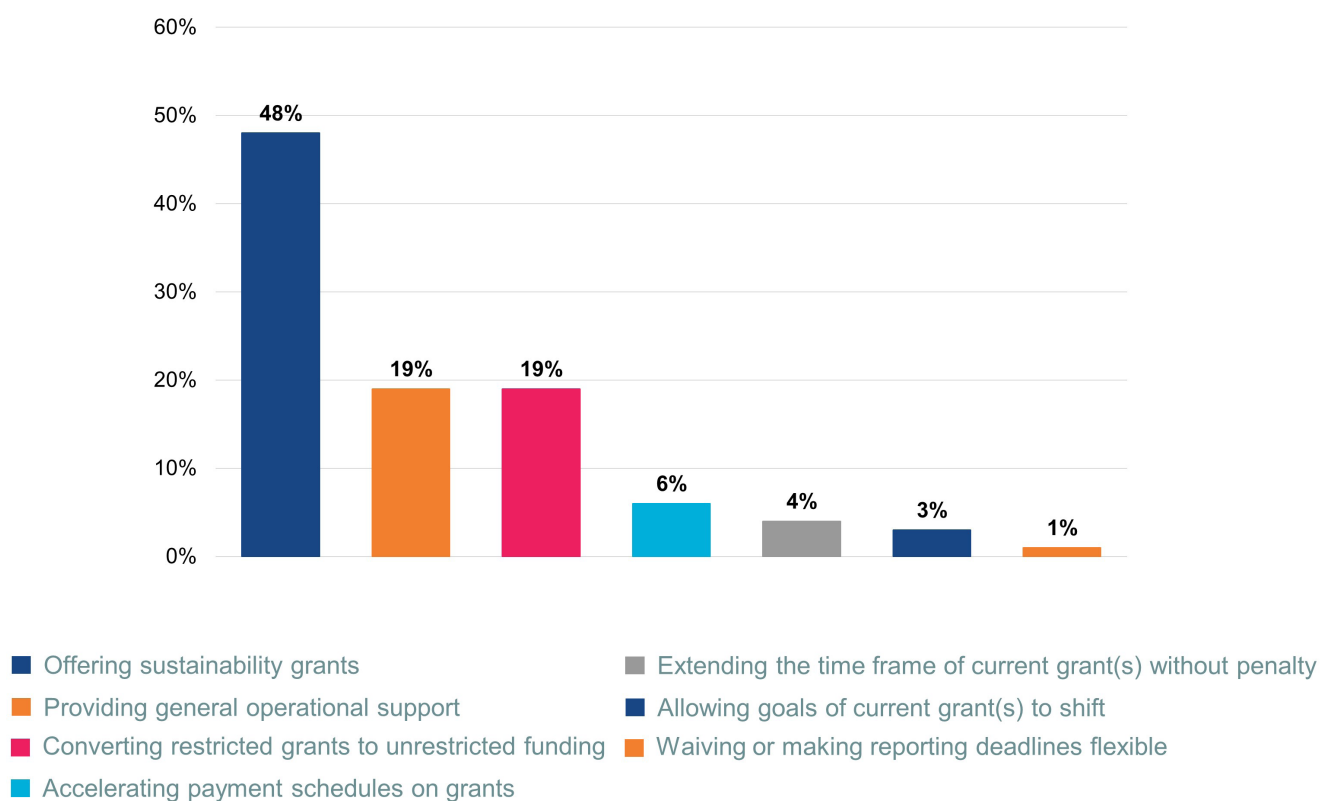


Covid-19 has created an even greater inequality gap for those who are already vulnerable, underprivileged and underserved. Continuing to provide accessible, affordable, compassionate health care services, without an inflow of international donations has been an incredible challenge. It has forced us to look internally and focus more strongly on securing local sustainability in a shorter time frame. Failing to do so could eventually mean clinic closures, leaving the most vulnerable people in our area with no healthcare options.

## Preferred Form of Donor Support

Nearly half of the respondents reported their most preferred form of donor support during this time is sustainability grant. An equal percentage of responding organizations indicated general operating grants and unrestricted funding.

**Figure 26: What form of donor support best suits your organization's efforts to respond to the impact of COVID-19?**

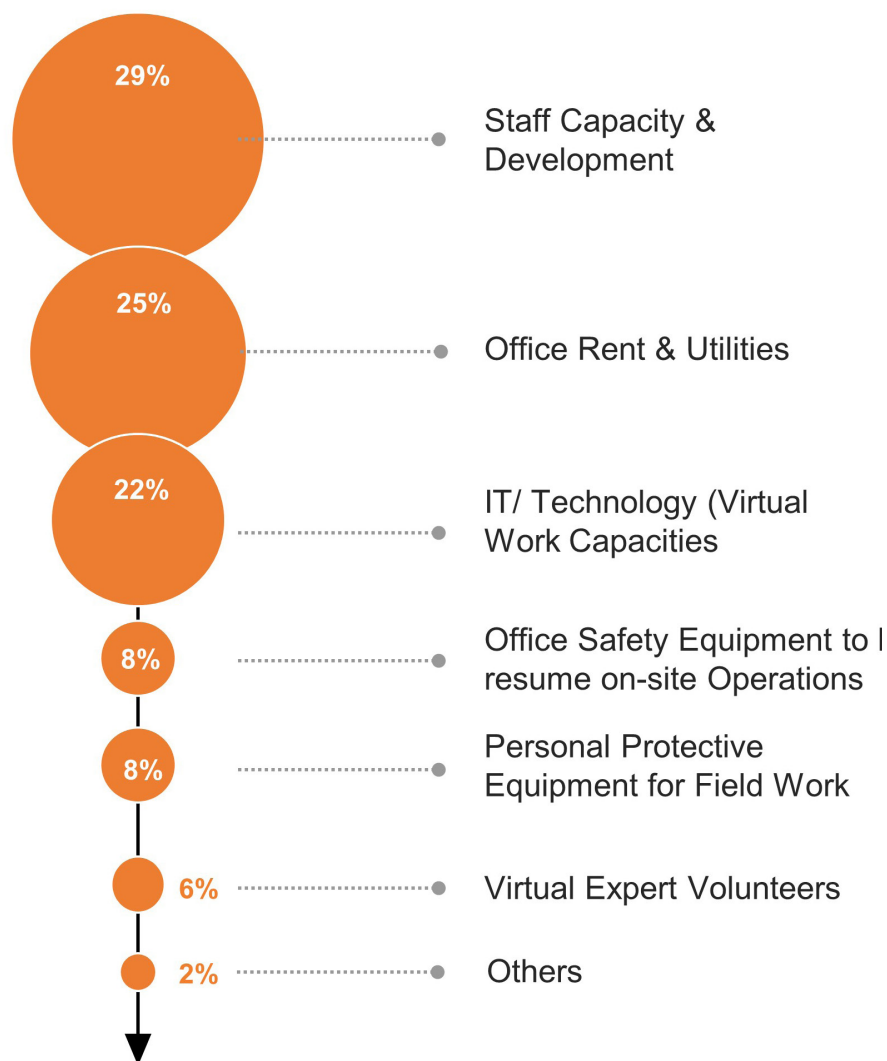


Note: Each respondent could only select one response.

## Operational Support

According to surveyed organizations, staff capacity development and office rent/utilities stood out as the top two priorities they require in operational support. Virtual work capacities came a close third with 22%.

Figure 27: What form of operational support do you urgently require?



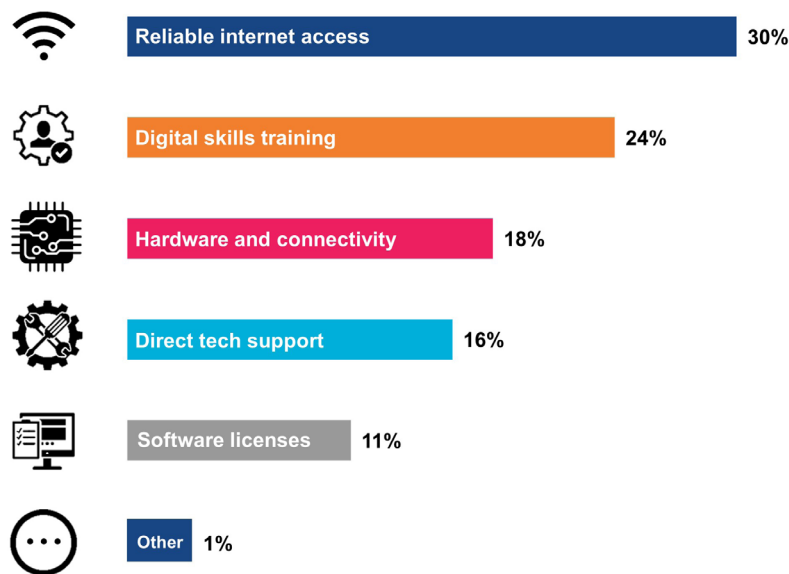
Note: Each respondent could select up to two responses.

## Technology Investments

COVID-19 revealed the significance of digital capacities as work practices changed dramatically. Despite Africa's substantial digital divide, figure 9 showed that 55% of respondents turned to technology to continue their vital services to communities.

According to the respondents, the top three priorities for technology support they require are reliable internet access, digital skills training, hardware and connectivity respectively.

**Figure 28: What technology investments does your organization urgently require to facilitate continuity of your operations?**

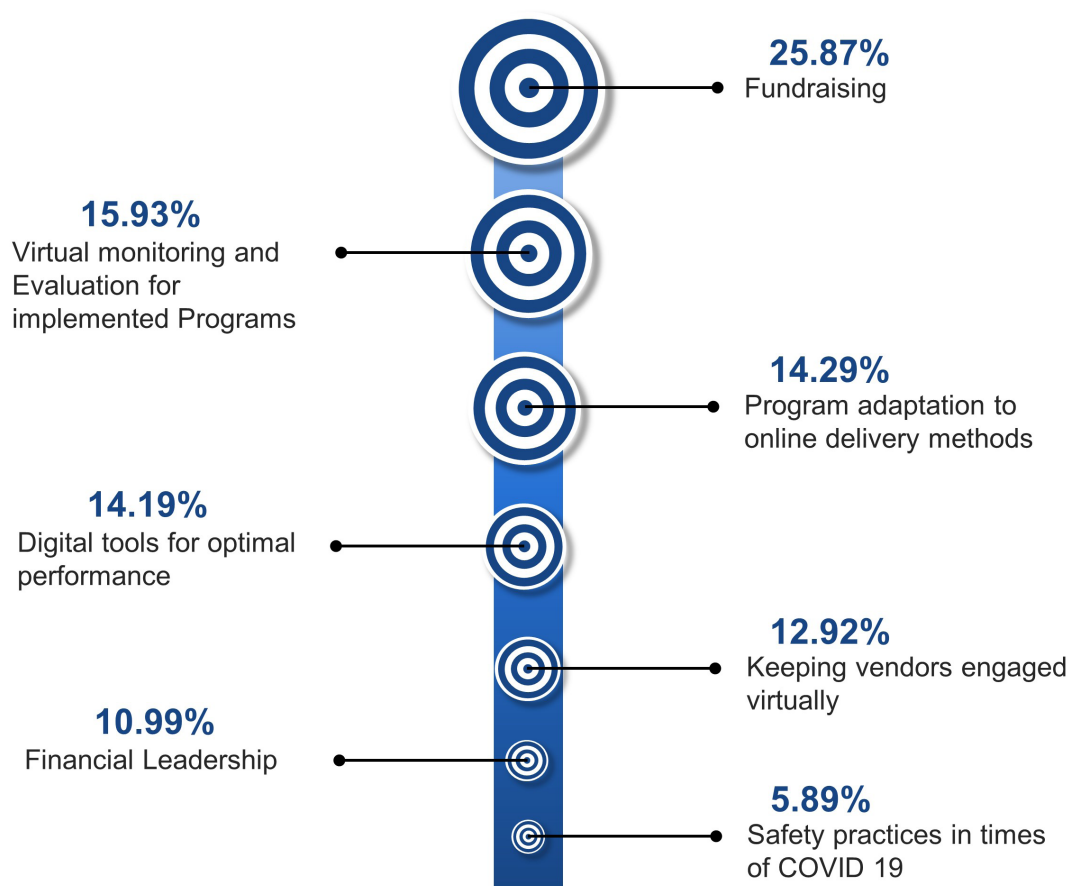


Note: Each respondent could select up to three responses.

## Capacity Building

Required to indicate their top three areas for training support, respondents identified fundraising (25.87%) as the major learning priority. With 15.93%, virtual monitoring and evaluation for implemented programmes turned up as the next priority for the respondents. Program adaptation to online delivery methods emerged as the third-placed learning priority with 14.29%.

**Figure 29: Indicate the top three (3) capacity building/training support you urgently require in your organization.**



Note: Each respondent could select up to three responses.

# PRIORITY AREAS FOR AFRICAN SOCIAL CHANGE ORGANIZATIONS IF PROVIDED WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDS

When asked what they will prioritize if given additional funds to address issues related to the global crisis, majority of the remarks were centered around increased digital capacities to broaden reach, capacity building and staff welfare, skills training to those whose jobs/livelihood were impacted by COVID-19, healthcare in underserved communities and much more.

Capacity building to increase the livelihood and income of women impacted by Covid-19.



Acquiring more space, equipments, tools and a multiple user wifi router that can accommodate 50 computers and above for virtual video lessons.

Addressing Sexual Abuse/Gender Based Violence that has currently increased because of the stay at home and lockdown arising from the pandemic.



Staff capacity building and Program adaptation to online delivery methods.

Socio-economic recovery amongst the informal settlement community that we have worked with over the last decade.



Increase our programs and render more support to those who are in dire need for it.

Support in terms of funds to schools in low income areas to develop their teacher capacity for virtual learning.



Provision of IT facilities to support our online service delivery activities

Computer equipment and software Staff salaries and stipend volunteers who will provide valuable services to communities in response to Covid-19.



Online programmes for virtual access to disadvantaged children.

Improving food security.



Supporting communities to resuscitate affected livelihoods means in the post-covid-19 era.



Personnel safety, more tech support (equipment) capacity building and livelihood Programme for most vulnerable groups.



Optimal digitalization of our projects and services.

We will give priority to programs that are related to health care and especially training of community health workers in the under serve communities providing them with safety materials.



Support for health workers and economically empowering 'at risk' youths in various communities who have been adversely affected by the Pandemic.

Increasing operational capacity, strengthening production capacity, improving our entire value chain.



Providing financial support and palliatives to persons with disabilities and the indigent.

Strengthening internet and power infrastructure development, digital skills training.



Empowering small businesses owners, who lost their businesses due to pandemic..

Organise more tailored programmes and seminars both online and face to face that ensures the youths are exposed to and fully equipped with right skills to meet the changing landscape of employment and entrepreneurship in a digital world.



I would work with school counsellors to provide support to adolescent girls who experienced gender-based violence during the lockdown. Many of them were unable to access help during the lockdown and the psychological effects could affect their academic performance

# THE UPSIDES

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The crisis has offered social change organizations the opportunity to improve, reflect on their operating models and revise their strategies for better development outcomes. Although not a required question, nearly all the respondents had something to say when asked to share any positive aspects, upsides or opportunities the crisis has brought to their organization.

**Featured here are the commonly reported upsides:**

On the positive side we've learned on how best to work more efficiently, physical meetings don't always have to happen also and we've also been able to ascertain the level of seriousness of our beneficiaries.



It has made us restructure our organization and the frequent usage of data to attend to the needs of our clients. It has allowed us encourage our clients to see the benefits of good health and hygiene.

It has made possible for us to realize that most of the programs and activities we did one on one could be done virtually with almost the same results.



The greatest opportunity covid-19 has brought to us is digitizing our processes and making our work seamless than ever. We can actually do more with technology.

It has provided an opportunity for the Organization to come up with a framework of response to emergency situations.



It has helped us learn to adapt to new skills and techniques to achieve our targets.

Use of social media platforms. Exposure of our work internationally.



New found partnerships in knowledge development for urban informal settlement community vulnerability and resilience.

We never thought of engaging young people online until the COVID -19 pandemic, now we engage over 200 young people every Saturday evening for leadership development.



We have been gotten non-financial support from different organizations including waivers on certification courses, free passes to key sector events, and free digital services on Google & Canva.

The crisis has helped us to develop useful skills such as adaptability skills in organizing virtual meeting, which equally reduce program cost. This crisis has also resonated the need for us to plan and save money for rainy day.



It has provided opportunity for the organization to come up with a framework of response to emergency situation.

# LOOKING FORWARD & BUILDING BACK BETTER

Nonprofits and other impact organizations across Africa have shown great commitment, solidarity and leadership toward their constituents during the crisis. These organizations have proven again their critical role as the continent's social safety net. They shaped the response to the pandemic; providing essential services to vulnerable populations and delivering vital resources to the front lines.

While COVID-19 shows no sign of relenting in other climes when compared to Africa, the economic impact is

projected to be worse for the continent. For social change organizations, this spells uncertainty for the future of their beneficiaries and their organization. The social sector is an essential part of the recovery of our communities and will require enormous support to combat the long-term impacts of COVID-19.

Now that organizations have assessed their weaknesses and potentials during this crisis, it is salient to develop greater resiliency and expand capacity to prepare for recovery efforts and sustainable impact.



The following recommendations will support the sector in building back better:

## **Social Change Organizations**

- **Continue on the Digital Transformation Path**

It is imperative that the sector must not relent in its adoption of technology for operations and service delivery. The future of work is here and COVID-19 made it abundantly clear that digital capacities are critical to business continuity and the long-term success of social change organizations. Digital capacities are critical during recovery and for delivering services on a greater scale. To ensure digital preparedness, organizations must establish a vision or long-term strategy (Digital initiatives and policies) for how they will use technology.

- **Conduct Market Research for Beneficiaries**

To deliver exceptional impact amid a rapidly changing political and social environment in the wake of COVID-19, no voice is as crucial as those directly receiving services or benefitting from the organization's programs. Social sector organizations need clear insights on how to best serve their communities. Answering the question: "What does our constituents need us to do?" will inform impact strategy and program design to meet the changing needs of beneficiaries. Constant engagement, monitoring and listening to individuals who benefit from the organization's efforts will drive deeper understanding of their needs and interests.

- **Seek Pro bono Support from Professionals**

Pro bono or volunteer support would be a crucial resource for social change organizations as the sector transitions from immediate response to ongoing recovery. Organizations should explore ways to connect with professionals interested in volunteering their skills to support their capacity needs.

## Donor Community

- **Investments in Digital Infrastructure**

New funding and support for digital technologies are needed to enable social sector organizations maximize their impact now and in the longer-term. Collective action from the donor community to address the technology gap will deliver significant change to the sector.

- **Provide Sustainability Grants**

Social change organizations need all the support they can get to continue their charitable work to communities. Sustainability grants will cushion the overwhelming constraints brought on by the pandemic and help teams focus more on their constituents' needs.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



ACT Foundation would like to thank all the African social change organizations who participated in the survey.

We would also like to acknowledge everyone who leveraged their platform to create awareness about this survey across the continent.

We are committed to sharing the survey findings broadly with key stakeholders, donors and decision makers who are in position to help the development community build back stronger for sustained impact.

If you have any questions or enquiries about the survey and report, please contact: [programs@actrustfoundation.org](mailto:programs@actrustfoundation.org).

## ABOUT ACT FOUNDATION



Aspire Coronation Trust (ACT) Foundation is a grant making nonprofit organization established in 2016 to support local, national and regional nonprofit organizations working to address challenges and associated vulnerabilities across the African Continent. We promote broad based participation/partnership with other institutions and donor organizations aimed at building sustainable communities and to provide innovative solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges.

Our support spans across four (4) focus area: Health, Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Environment. Since inception, we have supported 59 organizations in piloting significant change across our focus area.

We are committed to ensuring the sustainability of NGOs, NPOs and CBOs through strategic capacity building trainings around organizational development, impact measurement, monitoring and evaluation, board governance, financial management, fundraising, communication and much more.

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Tel: +234 812 293 9984  
Website: [www.actfoundation.org](http://www.actfoundation.org)

  Aspire Coronation Trust Foundation  
  Actfoundation\_

