



Centre for Philanthropy & Communities

The Impact of Covid-19 on Community Based Organisations and Community Foundations

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that has had extensive and wide repercussions across the world. It has resulted in a dramatic shift in how people live and operate at work and at home. The global measures put in place to curb the spread of the pandemic have been focused mostly on initiating nationwide lockdowns, quarantines, social distancing, sanitization and use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and sensitizing communities about COVID-19. The response by governments to the new coronavirus pandemic is disrupting the operations of business and civil society globally. Lockdowns and physical distancing measures are confining people to their homes and restricting their ability to meet, organize, trade, advocate, and socialise.

Zimbabwe has not been spared from the global pandemic. As of end of July 2020 there were 3 169 infections out of the 131 035 tests. 1 004 had recovered and 67 people had succumbed (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 31 July 2020¹). The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) introduced the lockdown on the 30th of March 2020. During the lockdown the public were discouraged from unnecessary travel, non-essential sectors were closed down and individuals in those sectors have had to remain at home or work from home; public gatherings of more than 50 people have been banned and inter-city travel has been banned. In addition, government has limited the provision of public transport within urban areas to the state-owned Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO). Other players in the sector can only transport the public if they fall under ZUPCO's programme. It has been 155 days² since the lockdown was announced.

The public discussions have mostly focused on the health dimensions of the pandemic. The pandemic has a broader negative impact on livelihoods. Various studies have in the past demonstrated the resilience that community-based foundations help create in terms of the solidarity and social capital that they engender. There is an urgent task to understand how these formations have been affected by COVID-19 and especially the lockdown measures introduced by government.

The findings of this report are based on responses received from 17 organisations that can be identified as either a Community Based Organisation (CBO) or a Community Foundation. The aim of the survey was to understand the impact of COVID-19 on these organisations' operations and finances as well as to assess the extent to which these organisations had made contingency plans during the national lockdown. The survey also sought to understand whether organisations under study had started any or joined any initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ <https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1289309097909616640/photo/1>

² As of 31 August 2020

2. COVID-19 and Its Impact on Civil Society

According to Epic Africa and @AfricanNGOs in their June 2020 report on “The Impact of COVID-19 on African Civil Society Organizations”, CSOs in Africa have a ‘tradition of performing crucial developmental, humanitarian and advocacy functions across Africa’. Such a role entails active and regular engagement with citizens and communities. The report, which was based on their survey of 1 015 CSOs across 44 countries (of which 7% of respondents were Community Based Organizations) also noted that the role and contribution of civil society towards mitigating COVID-19 has become more critical than ever, as governments alone cannot address the challenges caused by the pandemic.

The implementation of lockdown and stay at home orders happened very abruptly and gave organisations very little time to put in place plans and measures to adjust their operations. For many civil society organizations (CSOs), they have been forced to put planned activities on hold, while others are scrambling to shift their work online (Brechenmacher, Carothers, and Youngs, 2020).

In a study carried out by Philanthropy University with 500 social impact leaders from 67 countries, to understand how COVID-19 has affected their work, “approximately 9 out of 10 organisations have closed or limited their operations due to social distancing, lack of capacity or lack of resources”. The four³ major challenges faced by organisations in the survey because of COVID-19 were:

- The need for immediate funding and resources to stay operational during a period when funding is more constrained than ever.
- The urgency to provide staff with operational training, given social distancing and isolation protocols, especially around the transition to online work and use of remote-friendly tools.
- It is unclear what beneficiaries need at the moment and what the wider impact of COVID-19 will be going forward.
- Operations and programming are moving online, and organisations need the necessary technological resources and skills to adapt previously in-person activities and interventions. In addition, access to technology and online resources is expensive particularly in developing countries and this is limiting the amount of information and support organisations can provide to communities on the ground.

A number of governments around the world have put in place measures and strategies to support businesses and provide stimulus packages to keep economies afloat and prevent job losses. However, very little has been allocated to support the work done by community foundations and community-based organisations. In Zimbabwe, the government has made a number announcements around funds to support sectors of the economy and the vulnerable. There is no clear indication if the support will be extended to community-based foundations.

³ <https://philanthropyu.org/top-4-challenges-for-foundations-and-ingos-in-light-of-covid-19/> and <https://philanthropyu.org/implications-of-covid-19-from-the-perspective-of-500-social-impact-leaders/>

On May 4, 2020, government announced a larger COVID-19 economic recovery and stimulus package including measures to: (i) provide liquidity support to several sectors, including agriculture (ZWL\$6 billion), mining (ZWL\$1 billion), tourism (ZWL\$0.5 billion), SMEs (ZWL\$0.5 billion), and arts (ZWL\$0.02 billion); (ii) expand social safety nets and food grants (ZWL\$3.9 billion); (iii) set up a health sector support fund (ZWL\$1 billion); and (iv) upscale investments in social and economic infrastructure in Cyclone Idai affected communities (ZWL\$18 billion) (see Herald, 5 May 2020 - <https://www.herald.co.zw/covid-19-economic-recovery-and-stimulus-package-l-a-18-billion-package-9pc-of-gdp/>).

Given the many unknowns and potential severity of the COVID-19 pandemic that have been predicted by health experts and the World Health Organisation, the wider implication of the pandemic on the non-profit space is still not known. The crisis is unprecedented and there are many pressing and different needs arising that require a highly coordinated and collective response to address.

3. Background of Organisations

The survey responses were received from organisations operating across eight (8) of the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. No responses were received from organisations with operations in Matabeleland North and Midlands Provinces.



Figure 1: Areas of Operation

3.1 Areas of focus

The 17 organisations that responded to the survey are active in eight (8) thematic areas, with many working across multiple areas. The top three areas of focus are women and

gender, where 71% of the respondents indicated that this was a focus area of their organisation: rural development (59%) and youth (59%).

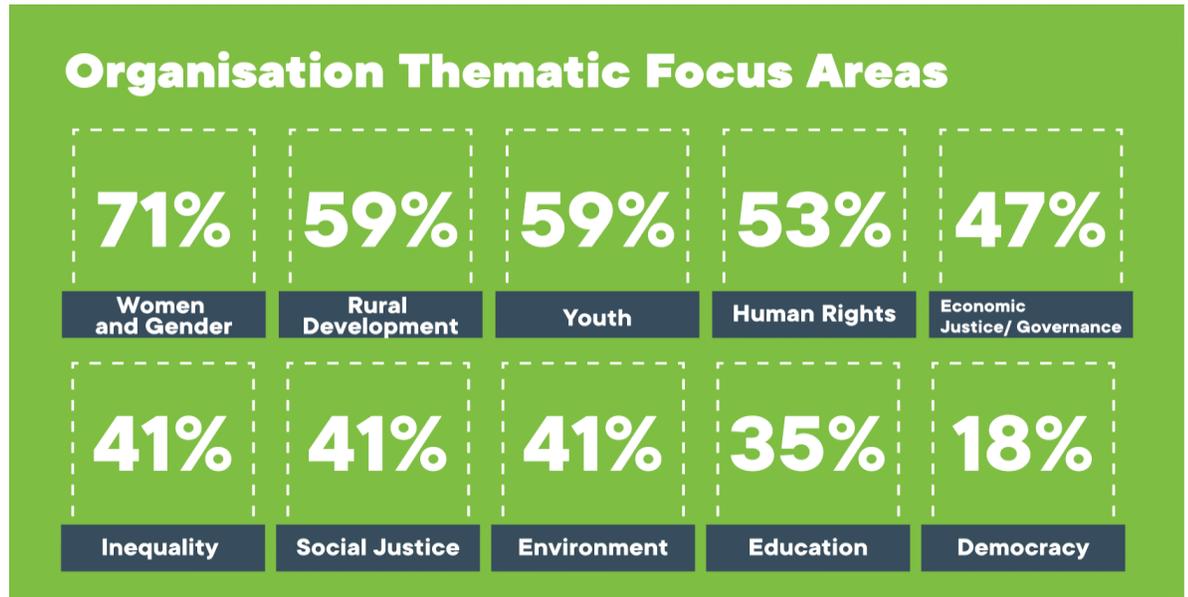


Figure 2: Organisations Thematic Focus Areas

3.2 Size of the organisations

The organisations surveyed had relatively small staff compliments, especially when it came to full-time and part-time staff. Fifteen of the 17 organisations (88%) indicated that they employed full-time staff. When analysed further, 73% of those organisations that employed full-time staff members indicated that they employed between 1-5 people. Eleven out of the 15 organisations employed part-time staff members. The majority (55%) of these organisations who employed part-time staff, employed between 1 – 5 people. Fourteen of the 17 organisations surveyed made use of volunteers. Four (29%) organisations employed between 1 – 5 volunteers, while another four (29%) had over 25 volunteers.



Figure 3: Size of Organisations

The majority of the organisations were membership based; with 71% (n=12) of organisations indicating that they had a membership base.

Is the Organisation Membership based?

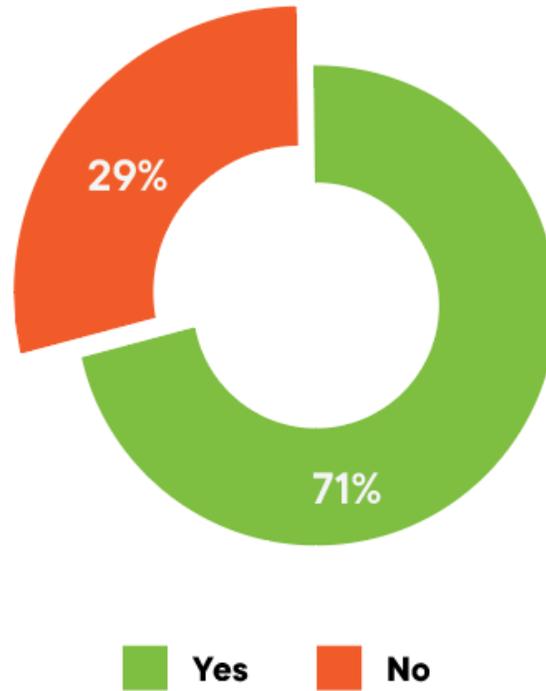


Figure 4: Are Organisations Membership Based?

Of the 12 organisations that indicated that they were membership based, 11 (92%) indicated that they had over 31 members and one (1) had between 11 – 20 members.



Figure 5: Size of Membership Base

4. Organisational Finances

4.1 Annual Budgets

Most of the organisations that participated in the survey had relatively small annual budgets. The annual budget of 53% (n=9) of the organisations is less than US\$50,000; 18% (n=3) had an annual budget of between US\$50,000 and US\$100,000. Two (12%) of the organisations indicated that they had annual budgets of over US\$500,000.

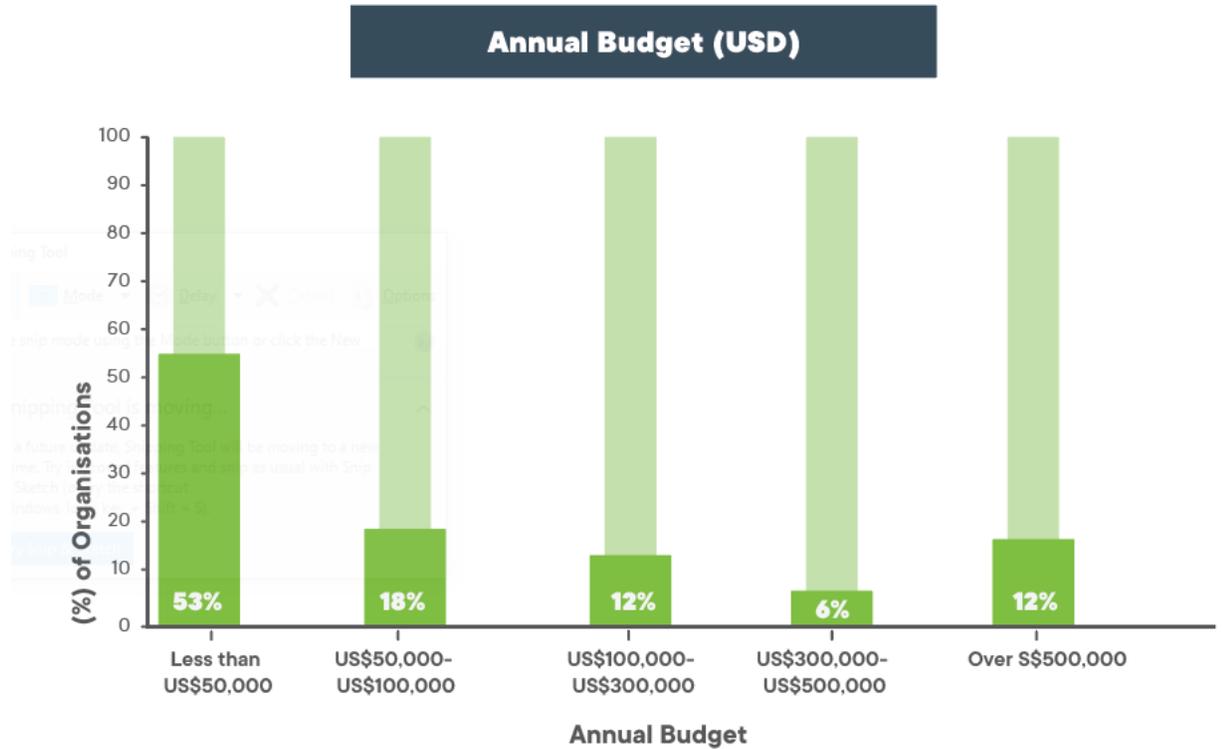


Figure 6: Organisations' Annual Budgets (USD)

The majority of the respondents (59%) indicated that they received their funding from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). Organisations also received funding from international and local individual donors and membership contributions. Only 2 (12%) organisations indicated that they received any funding directly from Government.

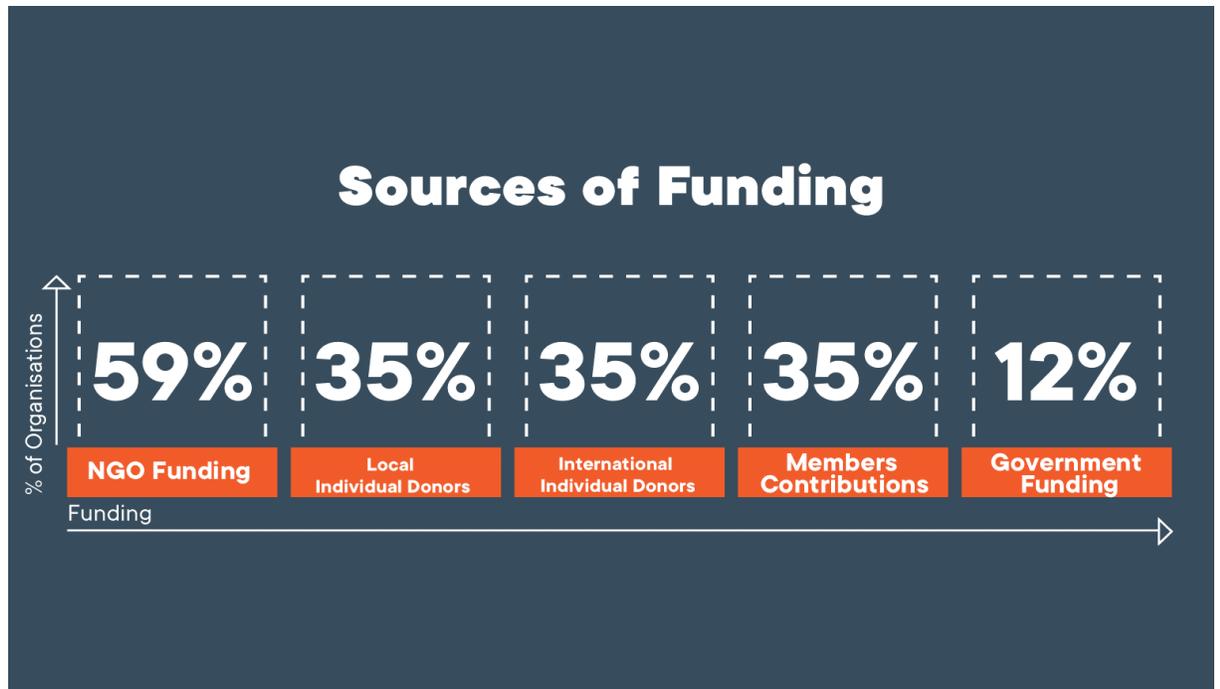


Figure 7: Sources of Funding

5. Organisations and use of technology

All 17 organisations indicated that they made use of technology in their day to day work. 94% indicated that they made use of emails and WhatsApp; 82% indicated that they used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn. The cost associated with making use of such platforms is limited to data costs as there are no licensing or subscription costs involved. The least used online/technology platforms were collaboration tools and applications such as Microsoft Teams, WebEx etc (18%); Human Resource software, applications, and platforms (26%) and project and data management software, applications, and platforms (26%). Often such applications come with a licensing or subscription cost. Only 41% of the organisations used online banking; however, it was interesting to note that 71% of the organisations used the Ecocash platform.



Figure 8: Digital tools/applications used by organisations

Over 50% of organisations reported that they provided staff members with basic technology devices/resources. Ninety-four percent (94%) of organisations indicated that they provided staff with laptops; 86% provided staff with airtime and 77% provided staff with data.

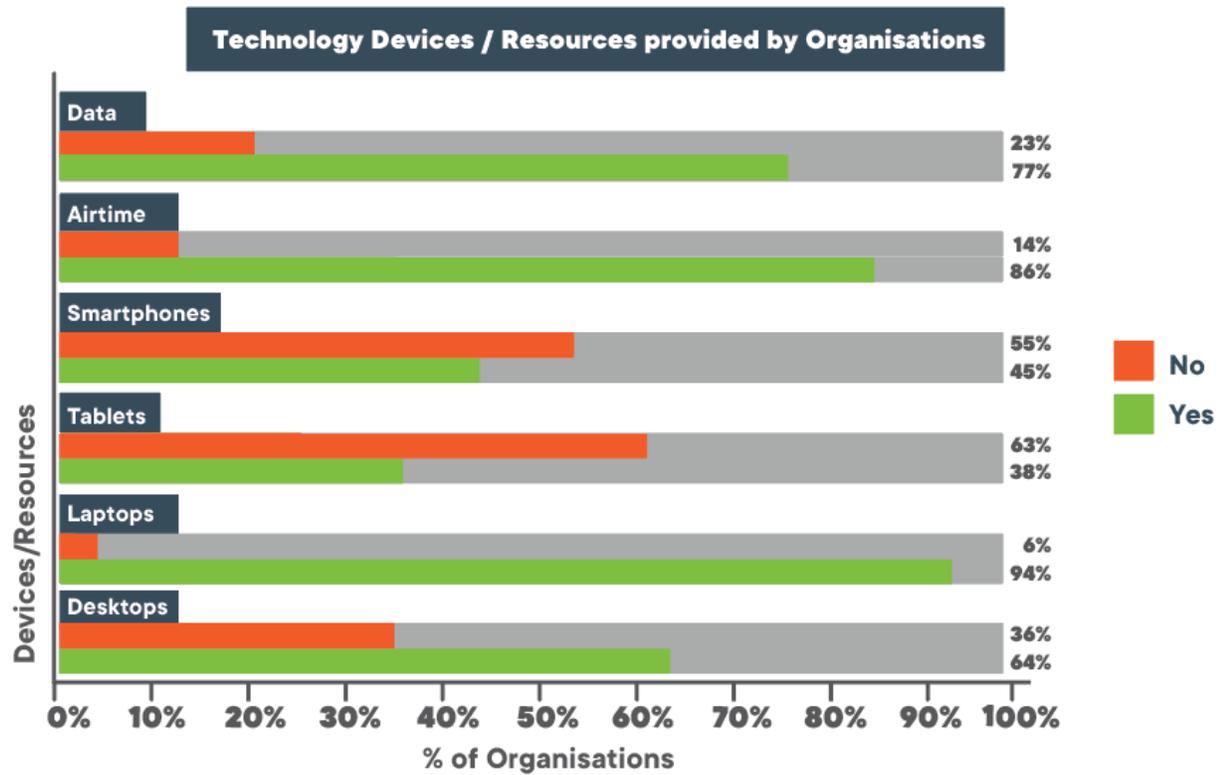


Figure 9: Technology Devices/Resources provided by Organisations

However, when analysed further the spread of these devices and resources within organisations was uneven. For those organisations that indicated that they had desktops, six (6) organisations indicated that less than five (5) people employed by the organisation had access to one; eight (8) organisations indicated that less than five (5) people had been provided with laptops. Five (5) organisations indicated that all staff had access to a laptop.

Staff with access to Device/Resources

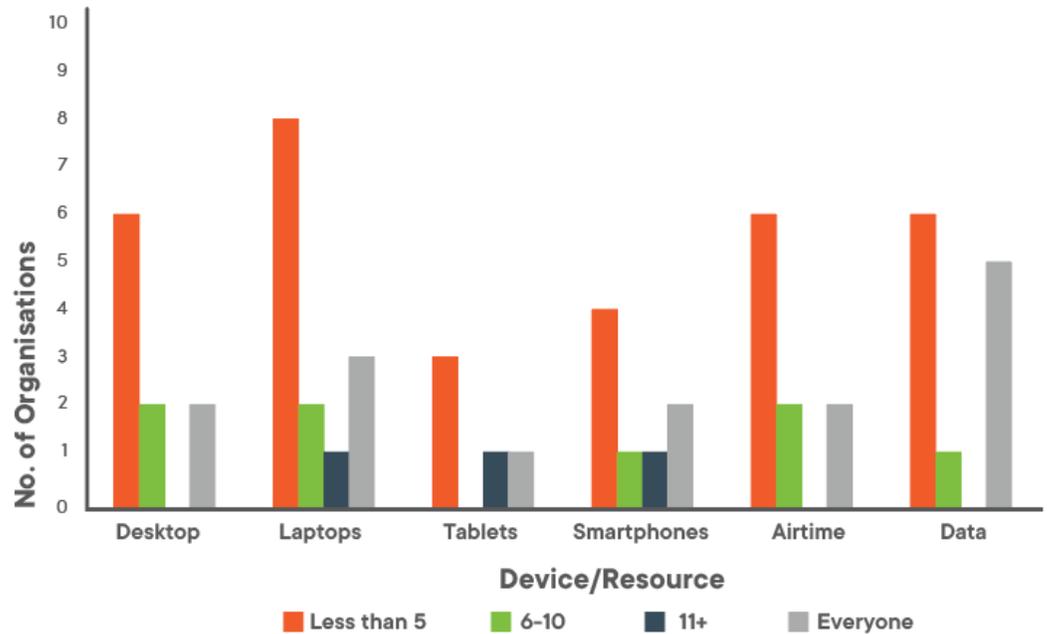


Figure 10: Staff with access to device/resources

It was encouraging to note that 71% (n=12) of the organisations had a strategy in place on the use of technology.

Existence of an Organisational Technology Strategy

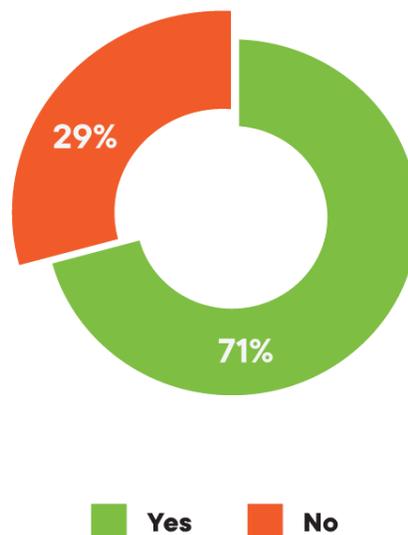


Figure 11: Existence of organisational Technology Strategy

However only 41% of the organisations had dedicated staff member or team responsible for helping staff to use technology.



Figure 12: Presence of dedicated staff member to help staff use technology

6. Impact of COVID-19 on operations

All 17 organisations indicated that their operations had been affected by COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown measures put in place by the government. One organisation completely shut down its operations until further notice. Seven (7) organisations (41% of respondents) closed their physical offices and their work is continuing as everyone is working remotely. Eight (8) organisations (47% of respondents) indicated that only essential staff have been coming to the office during the lockdown, while non-essential staff worked remotely. Four (4) organisations (24% of respondents) indicated that their office is still fully functional, but they had put in place high hygiene standards and social distancing measures.



Figure 13: Impact of lockdown on organisations

In terms of operations all the organisations had to postpone outreach activities due to COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions; 47% of organisations could not access financial resources; while 41% indicated that they missed project deadlines and had to postpone workshops.

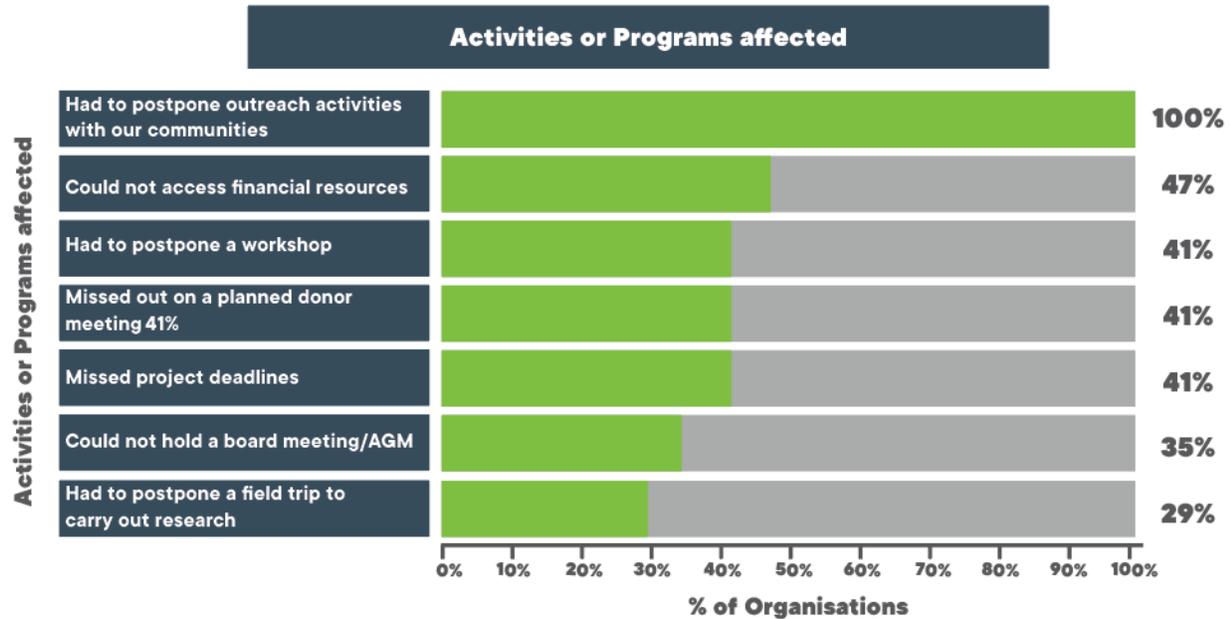


Figure 14: Activities of programs affected by COVID-19

Affected day-to-day operations, include face-to-face activities such as training/capacity building and community engagement. Other affected areas include banking/finance as well as human resources. Organisations felt that their use of technology had been slightly affected.

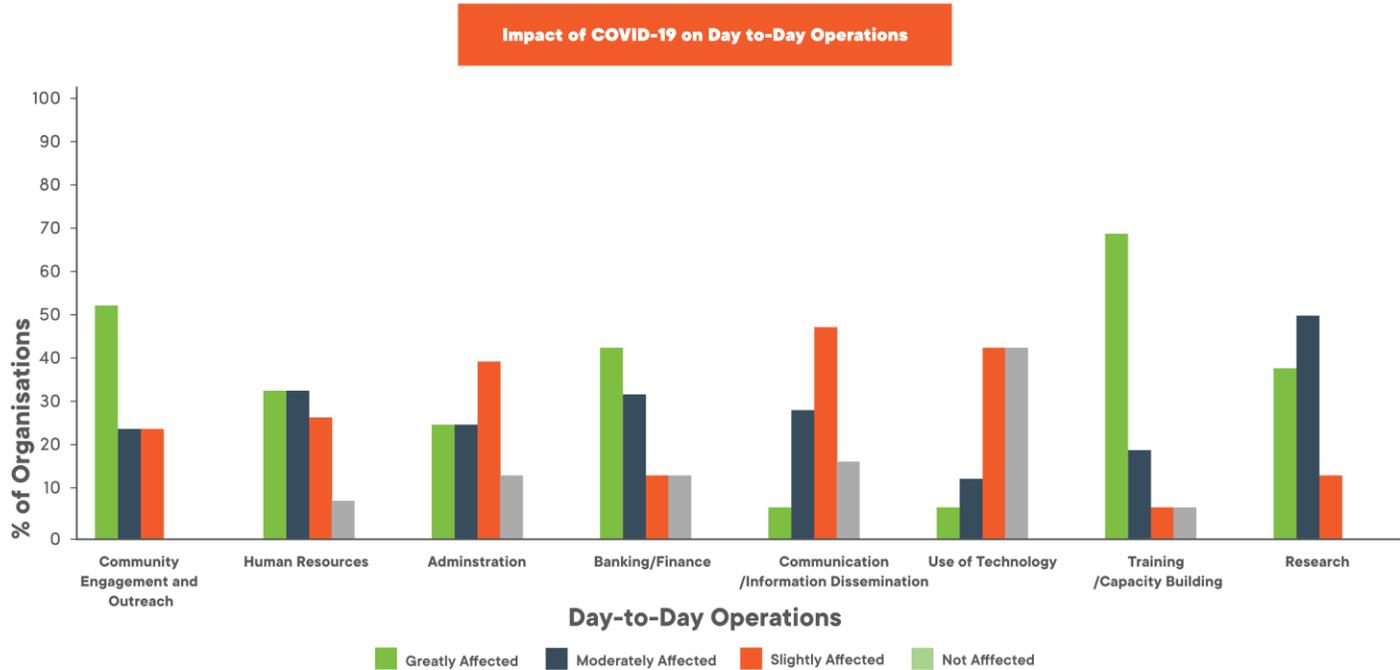


Figure 15: Impact of COVID-19 on day-to-day operations

6.1 Measures put in place by organisations to continue with operations

The 16 organisations that have not shut down have put in a number of measures to continue with operations during the lockdown. For most organisations (88%), they have set up WhatsApp groups for staff to communicate with each other and the communities that they work with. 59% of organisations had invested in online applications/products (e.g. Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams) for all staff to continue to engage with each other.

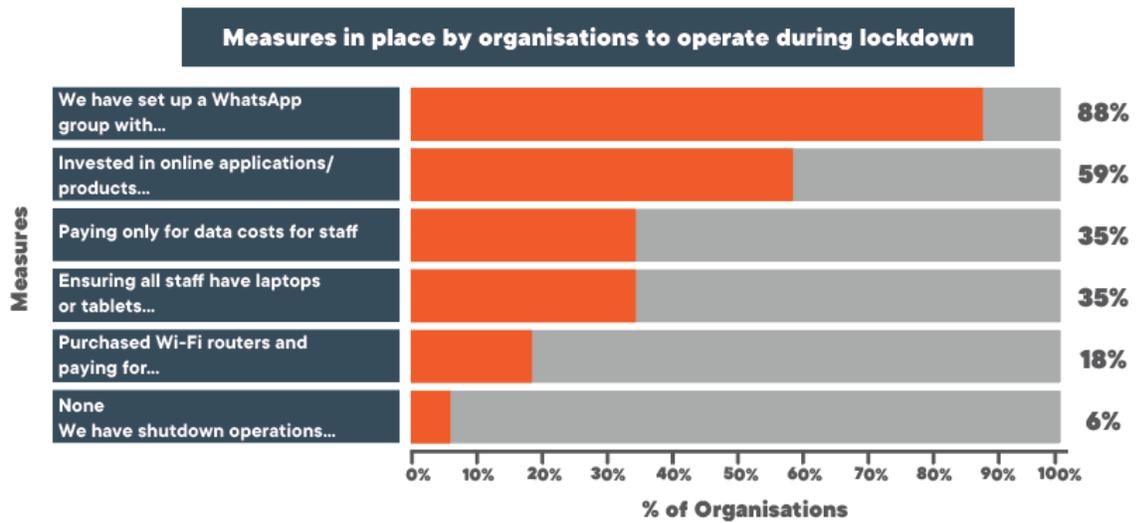


Figure 16: Measures in place by organisations to operate during lockdown

Less than 50% of the organisations have been able to buy all staff protective personal equipment (masks and gloves) and sanitisers.

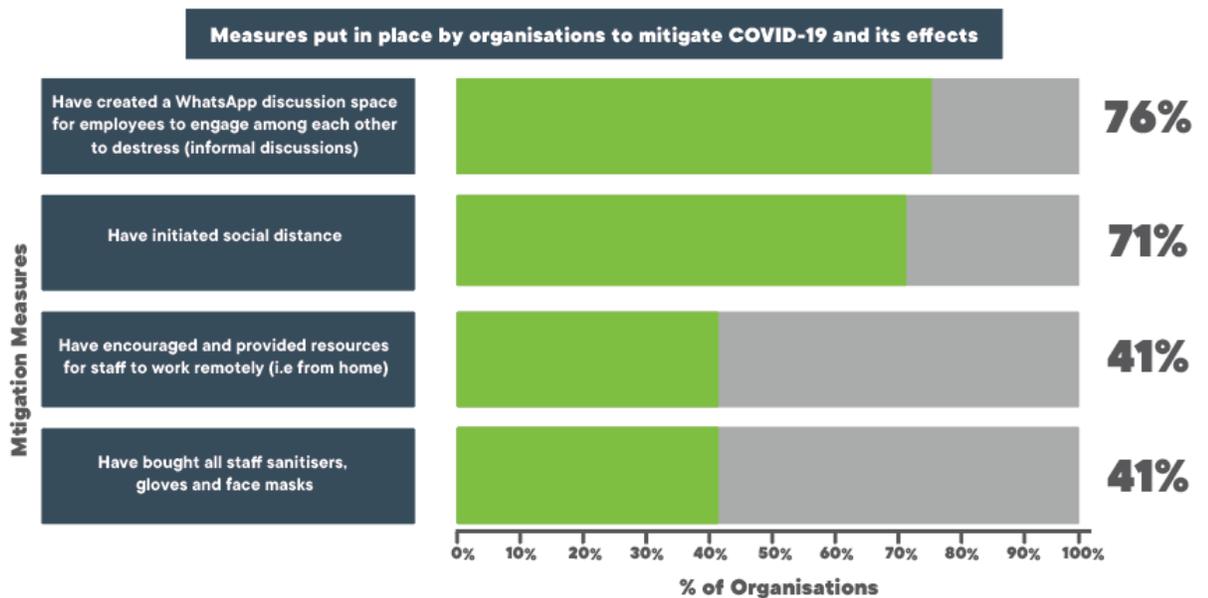


Figure 17: Measures put in place by organisations to mitigate COVID-19 and its effects

6.2 COVID-19 and Impact on Donor Relations and Funding

Four organisations (24% of respondents) have had to request and get approvals for no-cost extensions; 18% of organisations indicated that they had received operational support from funders in the face of the pandemic. Whilst 18% (n=3) of the organisations indicated that they scaled down their current projects/operations and another 18% (n=3) indicated that they had to stop taking subscriptions/contributions from members. None of the organisations have seen their projects/operations scaling up during the lockdown period.

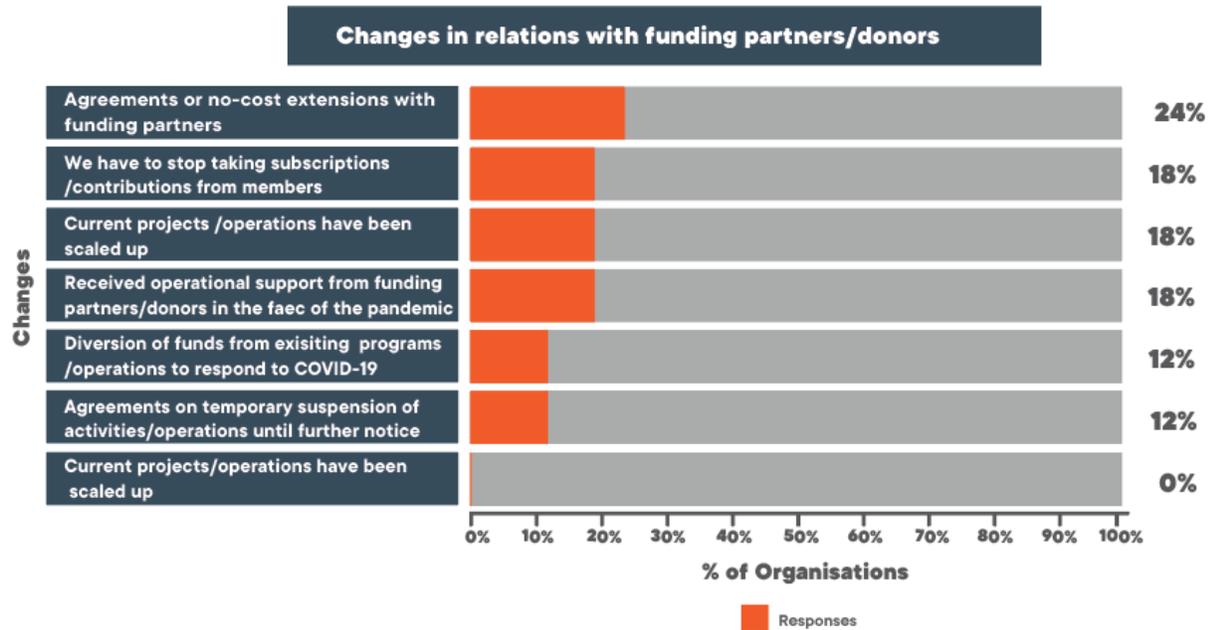


Figure 18: Changes in relations with funding partners/donors

Most organisations (47%) indicated that they had not been offered any additional support during the lockdown period. For those who had received support, it has been support predominantly from NGOs and the organisations membership base (24%). Only two (12%) organisations indicated that they had received support from government.



Figure 19: Support given to organisations during lockdown

At the time of the survey only 35% (n=6) of the organisations were able to pay salaries for their staff.

Are you able to pay salaries for your staff?

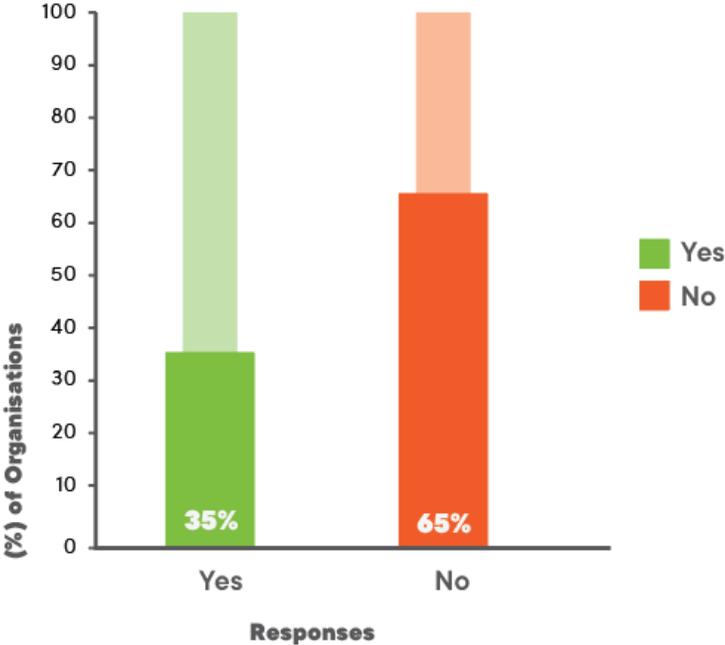


Figure 20: Organisations ability to pay salaries

6.3 Involvement in response to COVID-19

When organisations were asked if they had started or were part of initiatives in response to COVID-19, 82% (n=14) indicated that they had introduced programming or initiatives focused on responding to the pandemic.

Organisations initiatives/participation in initiatives in response to COVID-19

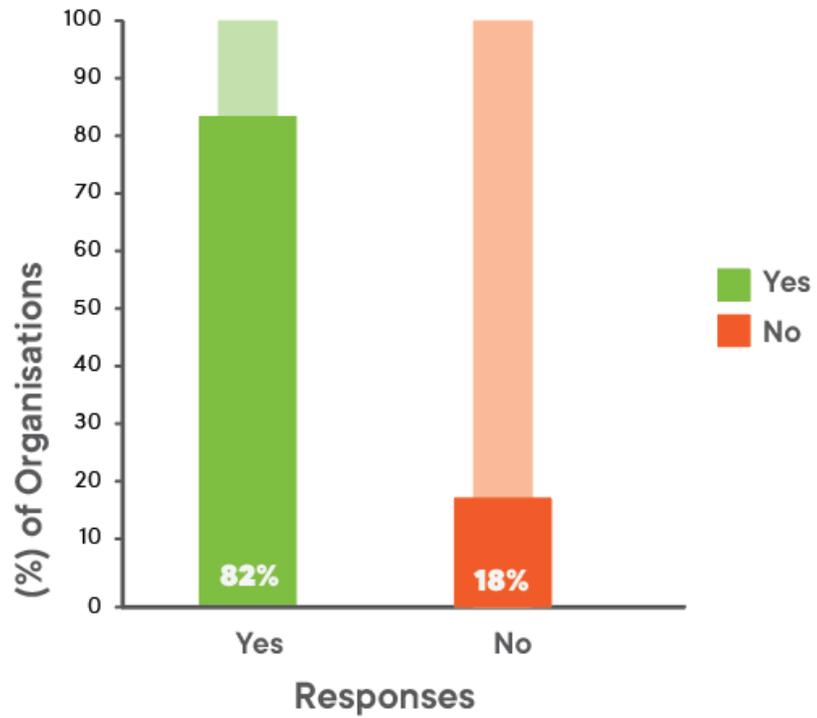


Figure 21: Organisations initiatives/participation in initiatives in response to Covid-19

For those organisations that indicated that they had introduced programs/initiatives specifically in line with COVID-19, 93% said their efforts have been focused mostly on information dissemination.



Figure 22: Focus of Organisations COVID-19 Interventions

The funding to initiate these new activities around COVID-19 was drawn from various sources; 50% (n=7) of the organisations indicated that the money came from existing funding partners/donors; 29% (n=4) of organisations indicated that the money came from member contributions; with another 29% (n=4) indicating that funding came from local individuals. None of the organisations indicated that they had received funding from government to support their initiatives.

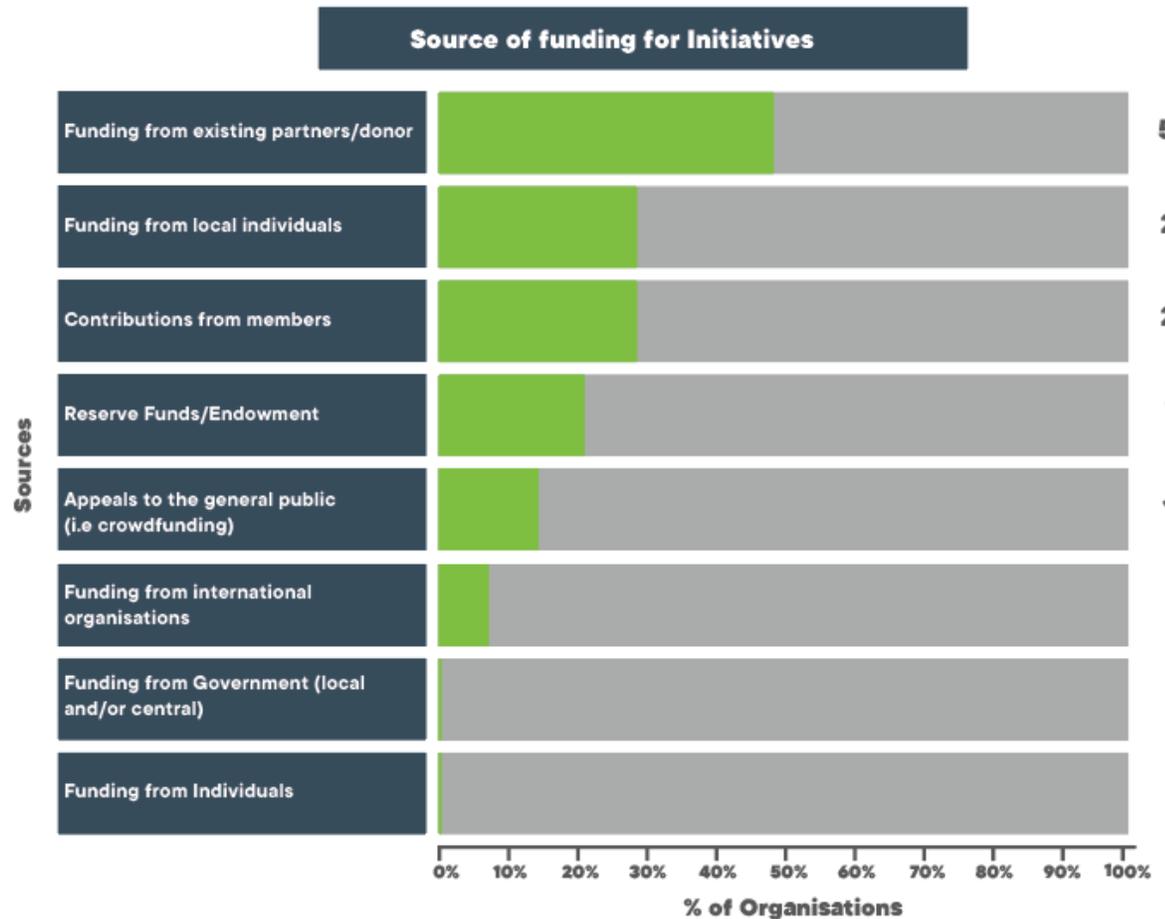


Figure 21: Source of funding for initiatives

7. Analysis of Findings

Based on the survey responses and findings, some of the key outcomes are:

a. Organisations will close without an increase in support to cover operations costs

The most immediate challenge for the organisations that have responded to our survey has been focused on remaining operational and re-defining how they can continue to work under the current lockdown and social distancing provisions in place. However, this is challenging in an environment where the majority of organisations have not seen an increase in funding to help support operational costs. Only 18% of organisations (See Figure 18) indicated that they had received operational support from funders in the face of the pandemic. None of the organisations in our survey indicated that they had managed to scale up projects or operations.

The struggle to remain operational is also reflected in the fact that only 35% of the organisations surveyed were able to pay salaries (see Figure 19). As organisations are unable to cover staff costs, the strategy for

organisations has been focused on redirecting resources, suspending activities, not taking subscriptions/contributions from members, as well as completely shutting down. All these strategies focus on reducing operational costs and operations. Most organisations (47%) indicated that they had not received any support during the lockdown period.

At the time of the survey only one organisation indicated that they had completely shut down operations, however there is potential for this number to increase if the funding base of CBOs and Community Foundations shrinks further as the number of COVID-19 cases rises and the lockdown period is extended.

b. COVID-19 has increased the shift to online or remote work

Only 24% of respondents (i.e. four organisations) indicated that their offices were still fully operational during the lockdown period; with the majority of organisations indicating that some or all their staff were working remotely. Working virtually creates the need for organisations to have the required technology and appropriate devices. While 94% of organisations indicated that they had laptops, only 5 of the 17 organisations indicated that all staff members had a laptop (see Figure 10). In addition to the right devices organisations also need to ensure that employees have access to data to access internet and remain connected to the organisation's servers and to communities. Only 5 of the 17 organisations indicated that all their employees had access to data.

While it is important for organisations to have made the shift to working virtually, it has had an adverse effect on programming as all organisations indicated that they had to postpone outreach activities. Organisations working directly with communities have to think about how they can possibly adapt or change their programming in light of the lockdown and social distancing measures in place, and the ways in which technology could be used to continue with outreach activities. This will also require employees to acquire or improve their skills around the use of technology to carry out their work.

c. Need for increased funding to support operational costs for organisations and programming around COVID-19

At this stage and in the more immediate future, a bigger proportion of funding for CBOs and Community Foundations will have to be focused on ensuring organisations stay afloat and can make the transitions required to operate within a COVID-19 environment. In addition to needing more technological resources, organisations will need the requisite PPE (masks, gloves, sanitisers) to continue to carry out some of their activities that still require face-to-face interactions with the communities they engage with.

In addition to more funding for operational costs so that organisations can adapt to the new working environment, funding for CBOs and Community Foundations will have to be re-directed towards COVID-19 related activities. From the survey, 82% of the organisations had introduced programming or initiatives focused on responding to the pandemic; with the primary focus of those interventions being around information dissemination. However, more funding and effort needs to be put towards providing communities with the necessary resources required to reduce infection i.e. PPE, soap/sanitizers as well as

providing financial support or food parcels to households whose level of vulnerability has increased due to the impact of COVID-19.

8. Conclusion

This survey carried out by SIVIO on the impact of COVID-19 on the work of Community Foundations in Zimbabwe has raised a number of issues that require careful thought and consideration as to how they can be addressed. The pandemic is still growing and the implications for organisations will change and more work will need to be done to assess the impact of COVID-19. Given the role that these formations play as part of broader civil society there is need for a concerted intervention to ensure that organisations do not permanently close down because of COVID-19, and can also be part of the collective response required in Zimbabwe, across Africa and globally to beat the pandemic.

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About SIVIO Institute

SIVIO Institute (SI) is an independent organisation focused on ensuring that citizens are at the centre of processes of economic-political-economic and policy change. It aims to contribute towards Zimbabwe's inclusive socio-economic transformation. It is borne out of a desire to enhance agency as a stimulus/catalyst for inclusive political and socio-economic transformation. SIVIO's work entails multi-disciplinary, cutting-edge policy research, nurturing citizens' agency to be part of the change that they want to see, working with communities to mobilize their assets to resolve some of the immediate problems they face.