

The State of African CSOs

2019 REPORT

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About
the report

African CSOs are on the frontlines of development in Africa, yet their contributions remain largely invisible. EPIC-Africa compiled this report to bring attention to African civil society organizations - what they do, how they do it, and the organizational challenges that prevent them from achieving greater impact. This information is vital for individuals and organizations seeking to meaningfully engage with African CSOs.

The report offers a rare snapshot of African CSOs based on a sample of close to 400 CSOs from 46 countries. It provides a more nuanced picture of the CSO landscape: areas of focus, typologies, sources of funding and their strategic ability and adaptability. The report also raises many unanswered questions and pushes us toward further research and analysis. For example, what is the profile of the over 15% of individuals who are donating to African CSOs? How effective are African CSO boards (90% of surveyed organizations said they have a board of directors)?

The report is based on findings from the first edition of the African CSO Excellence Awards which were organized to highlight the importance of organizational capacity to achieve program impact. The awards evaluated performance across eight key elements of organizational capacity: Strategic Ability and Adaptability, Leadership and Governance, Financial Health and Management, Human Resources and Staff Development, Operations, Communications, Partnerships and Alliances and Monitoring and Evaluation. For more information on the awards please click [here](#).

We hope that you will get a clearer understanding of the African CSO sector from this report and be inspired to delve further into the issues that impact the organizational capacity of African CSOs. Our objective is to give individual donors, researchers, funders and CSOs alike the tools to address some of the main challenges facing African CSOs.

Why organizational capacity

An organizational effectiveness approach allows us to examine how an organization does their work. Not only do we ask if they are producing results, but we delve even further to find out : Are they finding ways to build their capacity and manage challenging environments; Are they laying the foundations to usher their organizations safely into the future?

Organizational capacity is integral to success, it should be a priority, a strategic investment to ensure program quality and implementation. This report incorporates the best practices in each of the areas evaluated in the African CSO Excellence Awards. This approach allows readers to see in which ways the most impactful and well managed CSOs in the 2019 cohort of the awards excelled.



Support for organizational capacity will allow CSOs to continue to be catalysts for the transformational change that our continent needs "

According to C.R. Hibbs, author of *'Integrating Capacity and Strategy: A Handbook for Next Generation Grantmakers and Grantees'* organizational capacity has been undervalued in philanthropic practice and literature. It is often treated as secondary to program strategy. Yet, organizations need the operational skills, knowledge, and infrastructure to successfully and sustainably deliver quality programming. Capacity building is therefore integral to strategy and deserves the same level of attention as programming.

Methodology

The report is based on data collected through the African CSO Excellence Awards which assessed eight key aspects of organizational capacity.



Applications for the awards were open between October 2018 and January 2019. CSOs nominated themselves by submitting data through a web-based portal. By sharing their data, CSOs got the opportunity to self-assess and consequently received a “capacity diagnostic report” that they could use as a benchmark and initiate conversations about their organization’s capacity with their funders. Over 1000 CSOs registered on the platform with close to 400 CSOs from 46 countries submitting in-depth information about their organizational practices. Winners were announced in May 2019 after a rigorous five-stage process which included:

Step I - Initial Ranking

The initial ranking of all applicants was done automatically through algorithms that were built into the online application.

Step II - Long Shortlist

The top 45 applicants (i.e the top five from each category of assessment plus the top five overall) underwent a second stage of assessment answering additional questions and providing further documentation. This process was conducted online as well to produce a final shortlist of 27 organizations.

Step III - Video Interviews

The top 27 applicants were invited to answer additional questions via video.

Step IV - Reference Check

References from peer organizations and donors were reviewed by EPIC-Africa.

Step V - Jury review

A **jury** of prominent CSO/philanthropy leaders evaluated a docket with recommendations for each category and selected the final winners.

This report highlights some of the most compelling data points collected throughout this process.

The African CSO landscape :

an overview

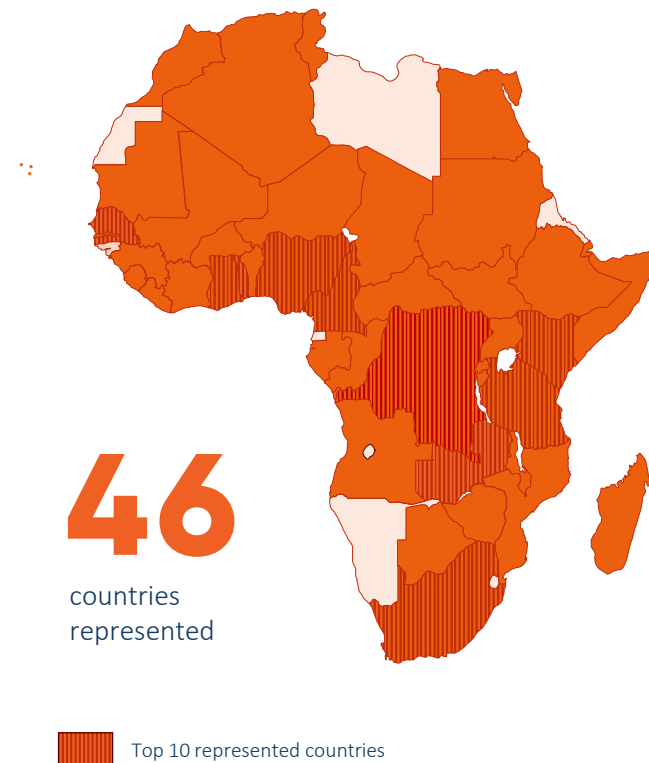
Data Highlight

Close to
1,000 

CSOs registered on our platform

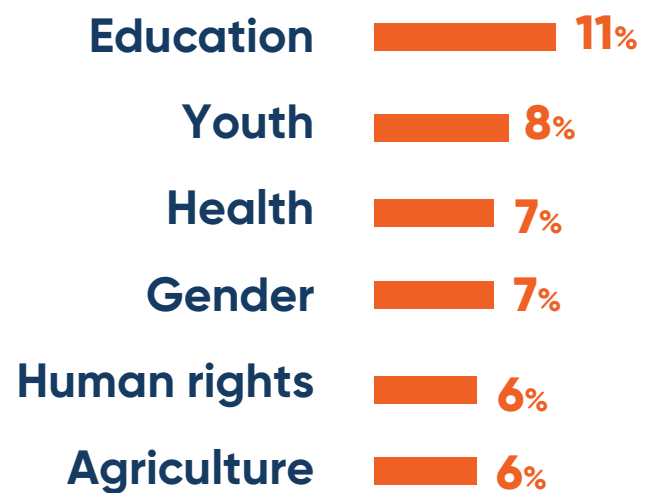
389 

Fully Vetted CSOs



Areas of focus

The top 6 areas of focus of the African CSOs surveyed are:

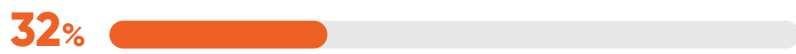


Data overview

Strategic focus

The CSOs surveyed showed that the main areas of strategic focus are:

Capacity building



Policy research



Service delivery

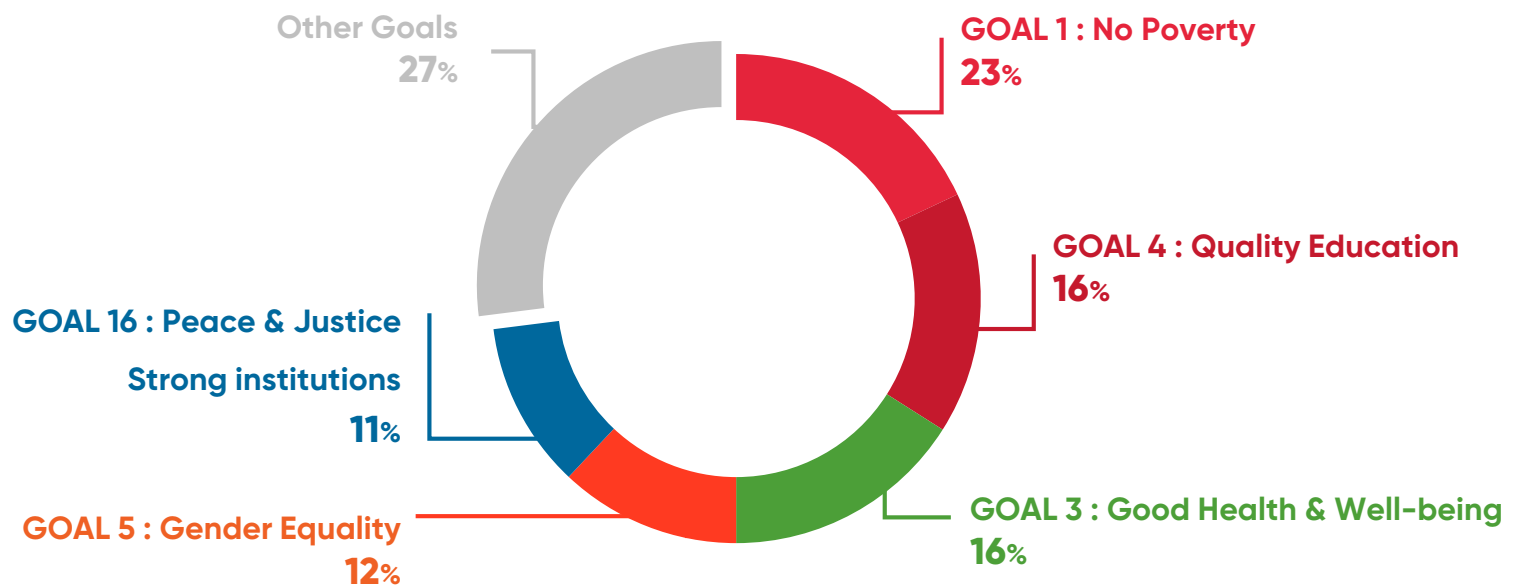


ThinkTank/Policy research



Top SDG goals

The top 5 SDGs represented in the survey are:



Geographic reach of African CSOs

The majority of African CSOs surveyed operate at the national level, followed closely by those operating at the community level:

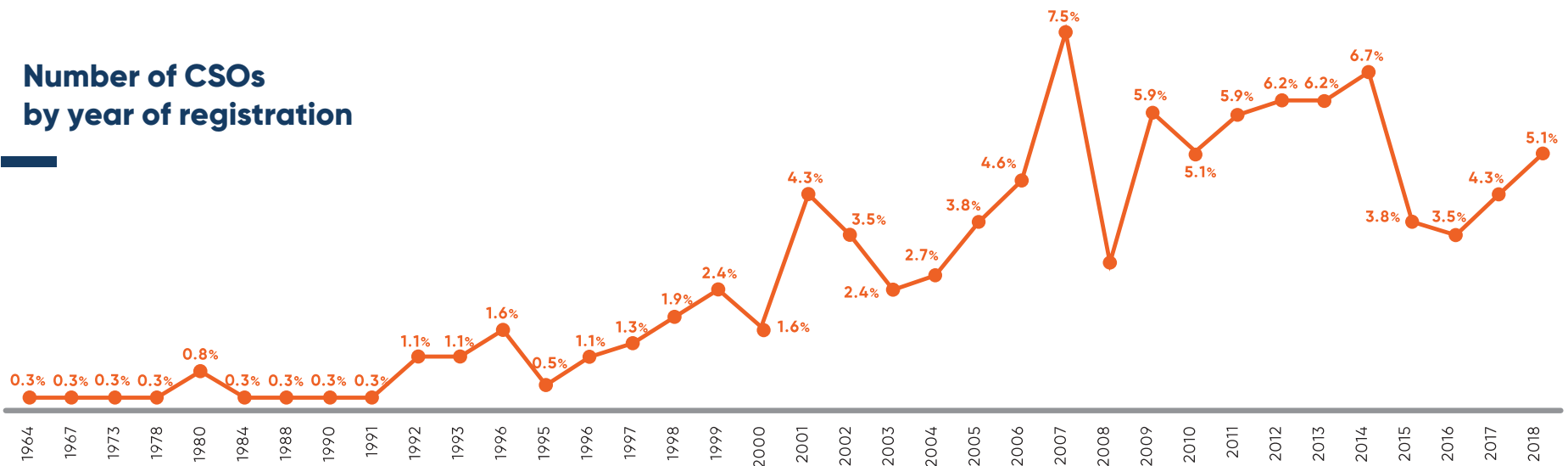


CSOs by year of registration



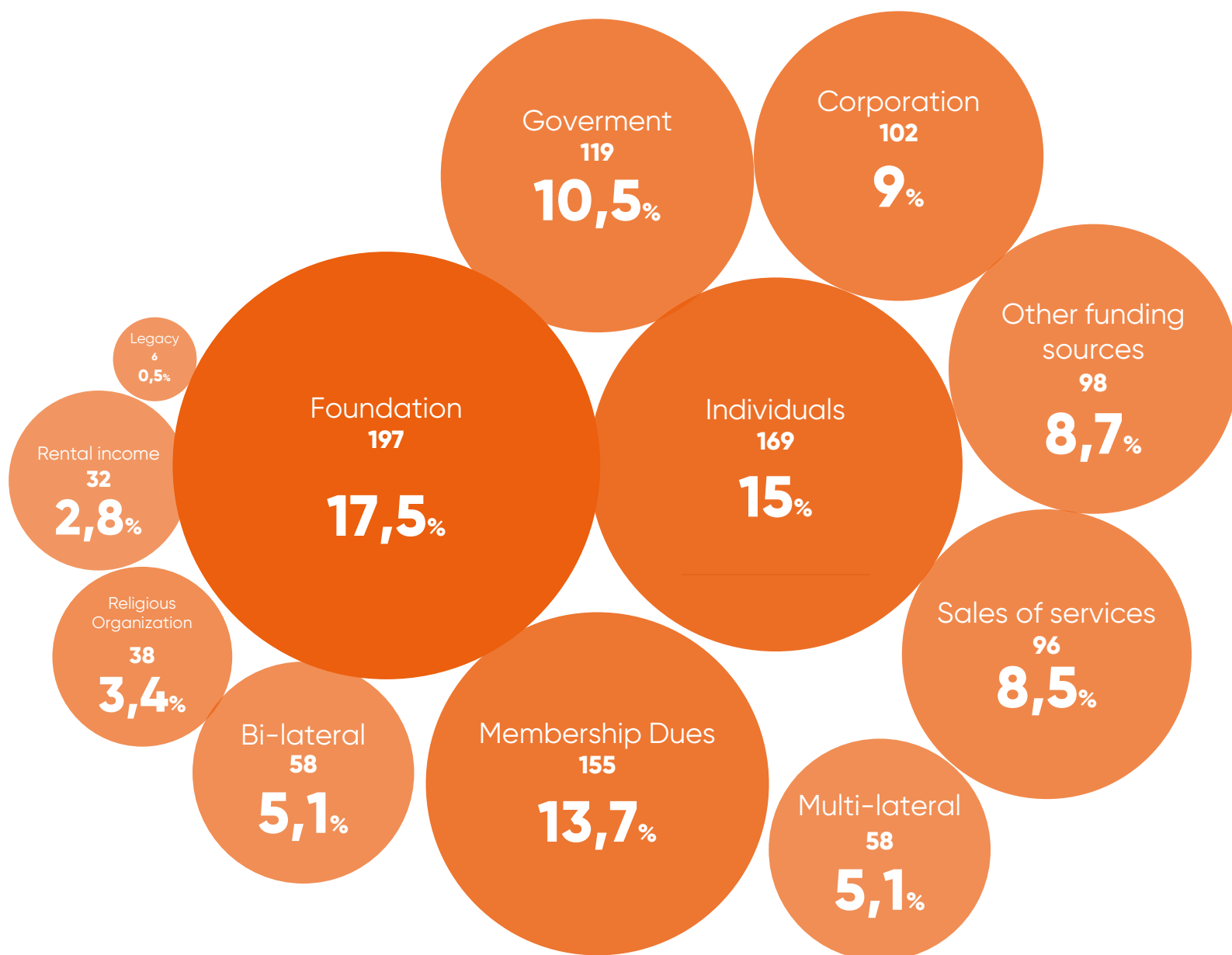
of CSOs surveyed were created after 2007

Number of CSOs by year of registration



Sources of funding

Foundations* have emerged as the most frequently cited source of funding for the African CSOs in this survey:



* This graphic highlights a variety of funding sources for most African CSOs. Many organizations cite foundations as a main source of funding, both local and internationally based. Most organizations are actively trying to diversify their sources of funding and while the amounts may not be significant, they seek to garner support from local sources of funding.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY :

DATA

HIGHLIGHTS

Below are data highlights from the eight areas of organizational capacity evaluated during the African CSO Excellence Awards. The best practices emphasize the behaviors and strategies that helped the winners in our 2019 cohort to stand out and be more impactful. In showcasing these practices, we hope to contribute to the industry consensus on how excellence and sustainable impact should be modeled in the African CSO sector.





Strategic ability & adaptability

72% 
of the organizations surveyed have a **strategic plan**

93% 
of the organizations surveyed have a **set of values**

95% 
of surveyed CSOs have a **mission statement**

This indicator assesses the clarity and coherence in articulating what social problem the organization is working to solve (vision and theory of change), where they will focus (priorities), how they will succeed (objectives and outcomes) and finally what abilities they will need to achieve the impact they seek.

Best practice

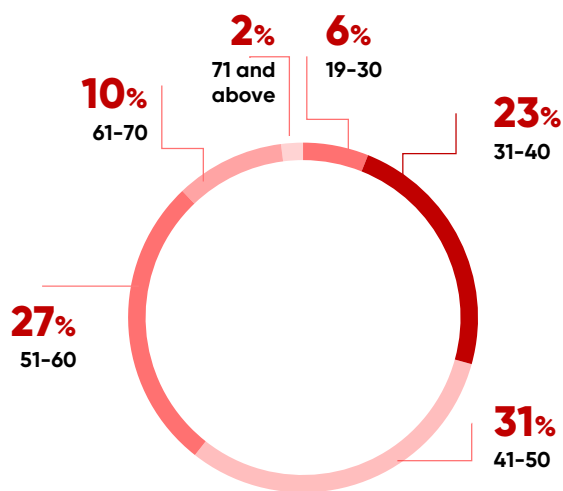
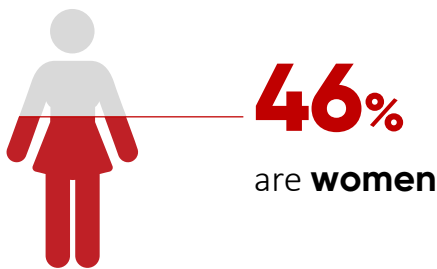
- **Strategic plans are based on what they have learned through evaluation of the previous strategic plan and in-depth analyses of the landscape they inhabit**
- **Explicitly link programmatic outcomes to organizational capacity in other areas, such as people and budgets**
- **Emphasize learning as a tool for ongoing course correction**



Leadership & Governance



Board of directors have an average of **5 members**



Age range representation of board of directors members


This indicator evaluates the capacity of the leadership (the board and the chief executive) to guide their organizations through their aspirations by resetting and driving strategy, with integrity and no conflicts of interest. It examines the governance structures which maintain the organization’s accountability, reputation and integrity.

Best practice

- **Have leadership and governance structures in place, board of directors and a chief executive who possess substantial experience and qualifications**
- **Constitutions/by-laws include stipulations to safeguard integrity, such as conflicts of interest and codes of conduct for the board and officers**
- **The boards of directors are diverse, and have a stipulated term limit**



Financial Health & Management

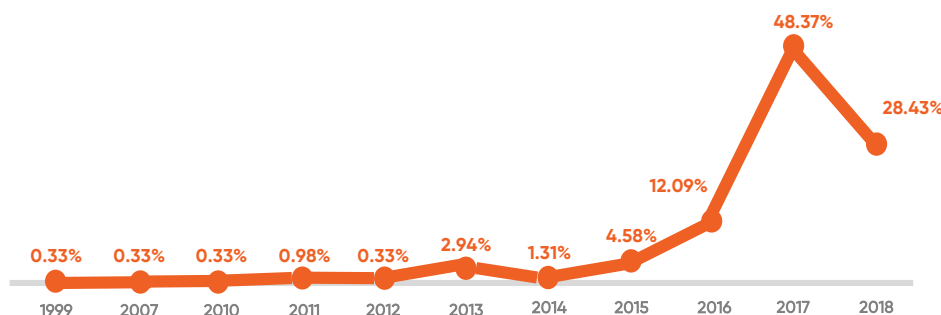
 **18** months is the average **grant duration**

 **20%** of grants only are for **core support**

70% 
 surveyed CSOs that have at least **3 funders** for the last 3 fiscal years

Year of the most recent external audit of financial statements

Almost 50% of all surveyed organizations had conducted an external audit in the previous year



This indicator evaluates the capacity of an organization to develop and maintain financial policies that protect the organization and assure its sustainability, most notably through diverse funding sources, ongoing controls and sound financial decision making.

Best practice

- **Diverse funding sources: including foreign private foundations, local businesses, individuals, events, own income**
- **Consistently conduct annual external financial audits**
- **Documented internal control guidelines to ensure operational efficiency, compliance with applicable laws and regulations**
- **Detailed financial management policies and procedures**



Human Resources & Staff Development

 **18** is the average **staff size**

46% 

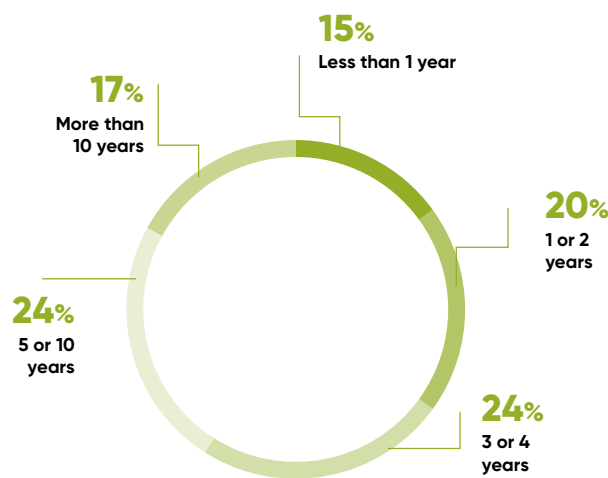
of the organizations surveyed have a **human resources manual**

This indicator analyzes the adequacy of professional experience and skill sets of the people working in the organization as well as the policies and processes for managing people from recruitment to retention.

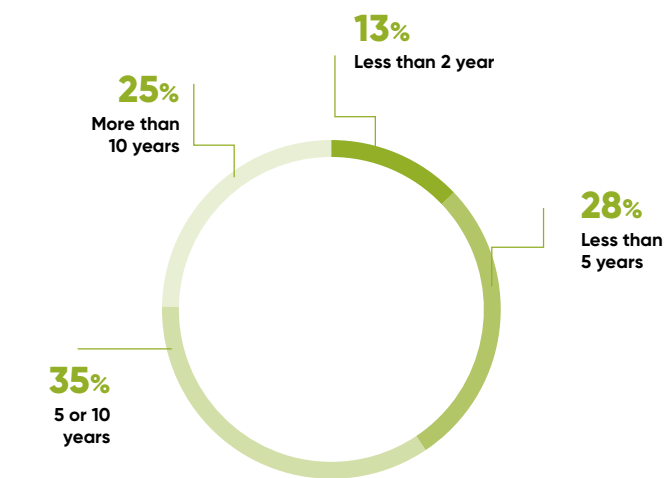
Best practice

- **Staff has the relevant skills and experience needed within the organization**
- **Demonstrate a strategic lens in people management**
- **Offer staff capacity development as a means to build organizational capacity while motivating staff and thus minimizing staff turnover**

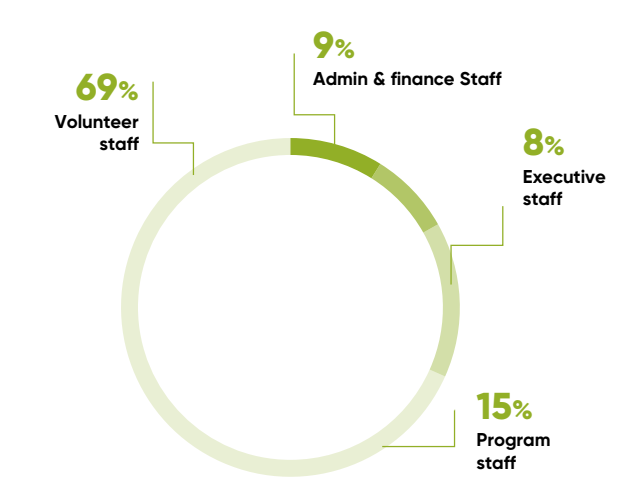
Number of years experience of staff members



Length of tenure as head of an organization



Staff profile





Operations



85%

of the organizations surveyed do not have an **IT strategy**

74% 

of the organizations surveyed have a **legal advisor**

56% 

of the organizations surveyed are aware of and take advantage of legal and fiscal frameworks that could benefit their organization **e.g. duty-free purchases of goods and services**

This indicator evaluates the adequacy of an organization's physical facilities, IT environment, and access to legal services to operate effectively and manage risk.

Best practice

- **Demonstrate awareness of operational risk and are taking measures to mitigate them such as retaining legal counsel to advise on issues such as staff contracts**
- **IT strategy in place aimed at leveraging technology to advance their missions**



Communication



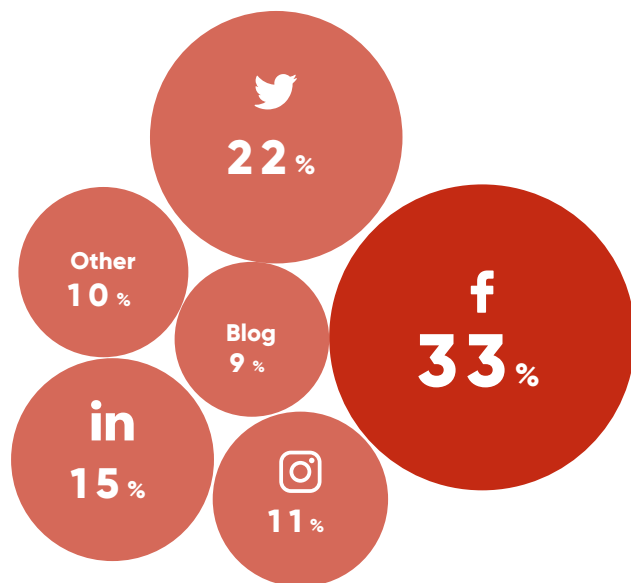
60%

do not have a **communication strategy**

94% 

of the organizations surveyed have a **website**

Most used communication channel



This indicator assesses an organization's ability to identify, reach and influence audiences in line with its mission. It evaluates the efficiency and appropriateness of the communication channels used to achieve the organization's goals.

Best practice

- **Written communication strategy document with objectives tied to the mission and well defined tools and activities for operationalizing the strategy**
- **Documented strategies for identifying, reaching and influencing their audiences**
- **Dedicated communications staff**



Partnerships & Alliances



90%

partner with others

The partnerships and alliances indicator measures an organization's capacity and reputation for creating value with others. It evaluates the organization's use of broader networks and their willingness to collaborate with partners to further program goals.

Best practice

- **Willingness to collaborate with others and have several partnerships with a range of actors, including local businesses, governments, peer organizations, and research institutions**
- **Consulted by others and participate in technical panels locally and in other countries**



Monitoring & Evaluation



70%

have not had an **organizational evaluation**

This indicator evaluates the extent to which an organization assesses its performance through regular use of performance indicators, feedback loops and learning. It also examines the extent to which M&E results serve as a tool for strategic decision making and day to day management.

Best practice

- **Undertake external evaluations of their previous strategic plans to guide the development of current strategic plans, highlight MEAL as a priority for capacity building**
- **Conduct organization wide evaluations as well as project evaluations**
- **Have a dedicated monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) function/department**

TOP 10 TIPS FOR FUNDERS

In our continued effort to give more voice and visibility to African CSOs, EPIC-Africa asked the question: What advice would you give to funders to help them be more effective partners? Here is what African CSOs had to say :

01

Promote core funding in lieu of project funding as this lifts up the grantees mission rather than donor driven projects which may lead to mission drift and the weakening of the institution

02

Exercise patience, impact, the measure of success that funders are after, takes longer than a single project cycle. Consider flexible multi-year grants structured to build on ongoing learning and evolving opportunities

03

Be humble, seek advice to understand the specific geographic, political and cultural context in which grantees operate

04

Localize, increase the size and number of grants going directly to African grantees. They are grounded in local reality and more likely to provide sustainable solutions to many of the difficult problems that funders aim to tackle. They also stick around when conditions are most dire and foreign groups evacuate

05

Re-imagine grant making, simplify grant procedures, consider oral presentation of proposals- especially for Community Based Organizations- to level the playing field. Consider differentiated grant making including funds for startups, and offer other support beyond money such as access to networks and training

06

Promote transparency in the sector by making publically available all information on funded organizations/projects and evaluation whenever security is not a concern. This raises the visibility of your grantees and strengthens their credibility and local legitimacy

07

Build meaningful relationships and cultivate trust with grantees by – cocreating solutions, cultivating a cross-learning agenda including helping CSOs to consistently evaluate themselves, and becoming champions of your grantees among other funders, governments and other stakeholders

08

Connect grantees working on similar issues in the same country and/or region so they can learn from each other

09

Fund capacity building of your grantees when structuring your grants, not just the particular project. This helps CSOs strengthen their operational infrastructure so that they continue to do the work they do even after your grant has ended

10

Cover the full cost of implementing a project, including the associated management fees - many funders are reluctant to cover the latter which in lieu of core support is needed for project implementation



Acknowledgements and Credits

EPIC-Africa would like to thank the hundreds of CSOs who generously shared their data with us. We now have a more robust knowledge of the African CSO landscape.

We would also like to thank all the partners and judges who supported this initiative and helped to make the 1st edition of the African CSO Excellence Awards such a success.

Our Partners



