



**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**

# **BEYOND FUNDING: THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

December 2019

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# BACKGROUND

Since 2017, Restless Development and the Eastern Cape Communications Forum have led an innovative project funded by the European Union. The project, Towards a More Accountable South Africa (known as TAMASA), has focused on strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations and placing young people and youth civil society at the centre of change for development in the Eastern Cape. Centred around youth leadership, the aim of the project was to empower young people to effectively partner with decision makers to advance adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights within the province. By working through a combination of community volunteers and local civil society organisations, the project has built an informed, unified and coordinated network of changemakers. These changemakers – young volunteers, leaders and civil society actors – have come together to partner with government staff, community leaders and local service providers to improve the implementation of sexual reproductive health policies.

When designing the TAMASA project, Restless Development South Africa wanted to ensure that the work undertaken, and the experience of delivering the project, contributed to the evidence base that supported the case for collaboration between youth, the youth sector and government institutions.

In order to do this, Restless Development instigated two pieces of research: a youth-led research project (see Knowledge and Uptake of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights and Services in South Africa – A Case Study of Bizana) designed and undertaken by a team of young researchers; and a piece of desk research to review the state of civil society in South Africa. This report sets out the findings of that research.

It is set within the context of Restless Development's current focus on what youth civil society needs in order to really thrive – an area that we are exploring through research. Recently, Restless Development launched a multi-country DFID-funded programme on improving youth civil society effectiveness, which we will deliver in partnership with 7 organisations and in 8 countries – Uganda, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Madagascar, Lebanon, Iraq, Central African Republic, and the Occupied Palestine Territories. However, before we worked together to support youth civil society in these 8 countries, we investigated the challenges that youth civil society is facing globally and therefore what their needs are.

In order to understand the challenges that youth civil society organisations are facing, we: consulted 65 sources of academic and grey literature through desk research, captured survey data from 199 actors in 32 countries, and held focus group discussions with organisations in 5 countries.

Our report, *Towards a Thriving, Credible, and Sustainable Youth Civil Society*, highlights that youth civil society is not thriving; instead, organisations are merely surviving – and are in fact struggling to do so.

They face the following core challenges: Internally, they struggle with limited and inconsistent resources and organisational leadership and capacity gaps.

As a sector, they struggle with ineffective cross-sector coordination. Within the context that they operate, they struggle with negative perceptions of youth and working within restrictive contexts and shrinking civic space.

This research builds on what we have learned about the challenges youth civil society faces and seeks to understand their needs in greater depth.



# OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Originally, this research was planned as a piece of desk research, reviewing academic and grey literature on the context of civil society organisations in South Africa. However, when searching for literature on this specific context, we identified a gap – there were few sources about the context of South African civil society in particular. What sources were available mostly did not examine this topic in the present but instead in the context of apartheid and its end.

In order to address this gap in the literature, we determined that we needed to collect additional primary data. To do so, we interviewed civil society organisations reached under the TAMASA programme.

The interview guide that we developed was informed by outstanding questions that we have identified following the research on the state of youth civil society through The Development Alternative. The table below shows how what we have learned already is related to what we asked as part of this research.

What Our Previous Research Shows	What We Asked
Both individually and as a sector, youth civil society organisations lack the space–and sometimes the capacity–for strategic visioning.	What is the organisation’s <b>strategic vision</b> , and what is the goal or objective that they are trying to achieve?
Youth civil society organisations are predominantly engaged in a direct delivery role, where they are directed by donors and larger organisations according to decisions made without our input or feedback.	What <b>role</b> would civil society organisations like to play in delivering outcomes, and how would they like to be engaged by donors and larger organisations?
Youth civil society organisations struggle with organisational capacity gaps in key areas: in fundraising and resourcing, knowledge management, and collaboration.	Which areas of <b>capacity building</b> would those in civil society organisations like to be prioritised, and how can this support best be delivered?
Funding to youth civil society organisations is fragile and inconsistent - predominantly given in short-term, restrictive grants.	What is the current <b>financial situation</b> of civil society organisations?

What Our Previous Research Shows	What We Asked
Youth civil society organisations often lack the awareness and skills to best collaborate with each other. Often, funding structures incentivise competition over collaboration.	In which spaces do civil society organisations <b>connect and collaborate</b> with each other, and what challenges do they face in collaborating?
There is shrinking civic space, in part because governments are often suspicious of youth civil society organisations.	How do civil society organisations describe their <b>relationship with the government</b> ?

In total, we interviewed 8 representatives from civil society organisations reached through Restless Development South Africa’s programmes. While we have been able to identify key themes, similar across multiple organisations, from this sample, we recognise that this is a small sample and will later determine how we can learn more from other organisations along the same questions.

Findings were analysed by a deductive thematic analysis approach.

# FINDINGS

## **Representatives we consulted showed a clear understanding of their organisation's mission and offer, which structures what they want to see from donors.**

Representatives we consulted showed a clear understanding of their organisation's mission and offer, which structures what they want to see from donors.

While their missions differ, overall, civil society organisations consulted in the research had a strong clarity around the primary goal or ambition of their organisation, which they easily expressed during the interviews. Additionally, several clearly communicated the unique offer they felt that their organisation could provide to those they serve – their approachability.

As one respondent expressed, the organisation that he represents is “unique from other organisations because [he organisation] uses all the strategies to make the community understand better [sic] and to make themselves more approachable by [sic] the people”.

Other representatives expanded on this to highlight why organisations like theirs should play the role that they desire to with larger organisations: to be given the funding to deliver, as they do best. As one representative explained, compared to civil society organisations, “larger organisations miss [sic] the relationship with the community and [the] link with the grassroots” because they do not work at that level.

One respondent expanded on this to explain why being so closely connected to the community was important: that the organisation is “well known in the community”. Expanding upon this, the respondent expressed that their “organisation has established a good image in the society, and people know and trust us”. This last point on trust is important because as much as organisations want to work for communities, they can only work with them if they are indeed trusted.

According to their descriptions, their proximity and accessibility to the people they serve enhances the quality of their impact, making them best poised for direct delivery. When asked what role they would like to play, they did not expect anything otherwise. Instead, they expressed that they would like other actors – particularly donors – to appreciate their context.

Respondents expressed that donors often do not understand their realities. One respondent elaborated that donors will sometimes assign tasks and responsibilities to civil society organisations "without considering what the organisation is basically [sic] working on".

Even where organisations are working from within their expertise, though, representatives expressed that donor expectations are not matched to what is achievable. They expressed that they are "not comfortable with the donor approach, whereby a donor assigns targets that cannot be reached in reality".

One representative expanded on this, saying: "For example, a donor would want to see a record of 5,000 HIV/AIDS victims [reached] even when the whole village has less than 4,000 total population".

Representatives did suggest a remedy for this, though: that donors spend more time with them, seeing their work and familiarising themselves with the context that these organisations work in. A representative mentioned that they would like "for donors to participate more and have site visits, but unfortunately, we see that they are sometimes engaged with other things".

However, it is not just more understanding that our respondents wanted to see from donors. As one respondent described, they would like "donors to be more engaged with us by providing...more support".

In terms of what support they would like to see, respondents mentioned that they would like donors to support them with capacity building.

A representative expressed that they would like donors "to attend more of our programmes, as well as provide capacity building on service delivery". In the words of this respondent, more understanding of their context should be complemented with more support to close some of their gaps.

Another respondent echoed these desires, stating that "donors should support and capacitate or strengthen us, even with policies, and join implementations of projects and site visits".

Which capacity gaps in particular should donors address? In part, some respondents expressed that it should be donors themselves who identify these. As one respondent stated, "donors should also give feedbacks [sic] in order to fill the gaps".



Which capacity gaps in particular should donors address? In part, some respondents expressed that it should be donors themselves who identify these. As one respondent stated, “donors should also give feedbacks [sic] in order to fill the gaps”. Likely this is because – once understanding an organisation’s context – donors could be best placed to identify where the gaps are due to their expertise and increased exposure.

While it might not be realistic for donors to play this role of providing capacity building, these responses are interesting in two dimensions. First, irrespective of who provides them with capacity building, those we consulted show a high appetite for feedback on their skills and for strengthening their capacity, particularly if this support is based on an in-person in-depth understanding of their work. Secondly, overall, the members of these organisations whom we spoke with wanted more direct donor engagement – not less.

**Organisations consulted all have fragile funding situations with limited portfolios of donors, which is mostly felt in limitations to the impact they would like to achieve and the teams they employ to do so.**

It is not surprising that those whom we consulted expressed that funding was their biggest challenge. Below are a selection to quotations from these representatives expressing this perspective.

**“Funding and finances are a struggle.”**

**“The current funding situation of the organisation is very bad.”**

**“The biggest challenge in achieving [our] organisation’s goal is the lack of funds.”**

However, in the responses of representatives, it is not just that resources are few. The challenge is also that their portfolios of donors are not very diverse.

One respondent described their organisation’s financial situation as “weak because [they] are dependent on a couple of donors”.

More than one respondent mentioned that they receive most of their funding from the Department of Social Development, in particular.

Even for those who are not dependent on a single donor, their financial portfolio still shows some fragility in other ways.

For organisations who had multiple donors (on average 4), their donors were predominantly from only a few different categories: government and larger organisations, mostly INGOs.

However, when asked, only a few of these organisations were aware of – and considering – different options to creatively secure resources.

The two representatives who mentioned exploring different options both mentioned their interest in using a social enterprise model, mobilising agribusiness techniques. However, both have not started yet: one because they lack the space and for the other because they lack water.

Receiving finances from only a few types of donors means that these organisations cannot manage portfolio of several different types of funding – with different restrictions and different flexibilities.

Instead, the type of financing that they receive from these types of donors causes those we spoke with concern about the “sustainability of [their] programming”, as a representative mentioned. As one respondent explained,

**"The biggest challenge with the current funding [we receive] is the difficulty to get a funder who will fund the organisation for three years. We only receive funds for a year [at a time], and when the year ends, most of our activities cease because we have no sustainable funding mechanisms."**

In fact, this is why one respondent mentioned that their organisation wanted to source funding from larger organisations: “in order to sustain the programmes that the small organisations are carrying out”.

In the perspectives of the representatives from these organisations, the impact of the limited finances that they are able to secure is felt in a number of ways.

For some of the organisations, the limitations of their financial situation means that they are not able to reach all of the people whom they would ideally like to serve.

As one respondent described, they need more financial resources in order to meet all of the needs they see. This respondent explained the impact of this limited funding on those they reach in the following way: “We still need to expand our services to various areas.

As for now, our organisation is only delivering services mostly [sic] to the Mount Frere area and rarely to Mount Ayliff.”

Another representative echoed these concerns: that limited funding affects their reach, meaning that they cannot reach all of those who might need their services.

This respondent stated, “the biggest challenge in the organisation is the shortage of funds, as there is a large number of children who need nutrition services, but we can manage only to serve few numbers”.

When describing what expenses the funds they receive cover, most respondents mentioned that they predominantly cover costs associated with direct activities. As a respondent explained, “we have limited funds to specific fields and projects, which lets us lack in other areas”.

What respondents explained that they did not cover well was investments in people. As one respondent explained, because of their financial situation, the organisation “has limited labour”.

Part of this challenge means that these organisations struggle to fund the team sizes that they would like to achieve the goals they have. When asked what they would like to change about their financial situation, one respondent explained that they would like to “employ more to spread consciousness faster and wider to the communities”.

**Volunteers are not always a solution to staff gaps:**

Some organisations address the challenges of maximising reach through limited staffing structures by working with and through volunteers. However, one respondent expressed that “working through volunteers can be challenging because they are slow” – often because they are juggling this work alongside other priorities. So, sometimes volunteers can pose a solution to reach but are not always a replacement for formally employed staff.

However, it is not just that organisations struggle to fund roles generally; it is also which roles they can and cannot afford. One respondent explained the challenge well in its complexity:

**"Currently, our organization has only 4 staff members and 30 caregivers, who assist the organisation in home-based care service delivery. With limited funds, our organisation cannot manage to employ more skilled employees, such as a monitoring and evaluation officer [or a] fundraising officer."**

What this respondent conveys is that the challenge is felt in two dimensions: that they struggle to fund the staffing structure they would like to have and that that impacts whether they can afford to fund specific technical roles in particular. Just as funding is predominantly spent on activities, so too is staff funding predominantly spent on funding the people who deliver them – not core, strategic roles.

Perhaps this is why most of the representatives whom we spoke with had such a high appetite for capacity building. If you cannot hire more people to build the staff structure you would like to have, then you focus on building the capacity of those who are already there to deliver these roles. This a link that some respondents made directly: that it is the combination of a “lack of funds and capacity building [that are] the biggest challenges hindering [their organisations] from achieving [their] goal”.

**Representatives we consulted showed a clear understanding of their organisation’s mission and offer, which structures what they want to see from donors.**

When asked which areas their organisation needs capacity building in, respondents gave a range of responses: in fundraising and proposal writing, in human resources (particularly developing policies), in project management, in monitoring and evaluation, and in communications and advocacy.

While their capacity building needs are diverse, there is something consistent in the type of capacity building that these organisations desire. None of asked for capacity building in technical areas or in areas related to direct delivery. All asked for capacity building in management and strategic areas, precisely in those areas where they struggle to hire core, central functions.

Because their needs are diverse, there is no one area that capacity building programmes should be designed around. However, there were two areas where multiple organisations mentioned they would like additional support: in financial management and in growing the leadership that guides them – that of their boards.

It could be tempting to identify that organisations struggling to secure funding only need fundraising skills. However, what the representatives we spoke with highlighted was that they need more holistic support in managing their funding situation: that capacity building should “focus on financial management”, as a respondent mentioned, ensuring strong management across the lifecycle of any funding received.

One representative expressed that “the biggest capacity need of [our] organisation currently is financial management because finance and budget is the base of [any] project”. In part this is about using existing funds effectively, as another respondent expressed, but in part it is about more than that.

It is also about how organisations make the case for securing more funding. A representative explained this in the following way: that the “organisation is doing a [sic] great work, but sometimes [they] don’t get funds because [they] don’t have a [sic] proper and clear financial management”.

In order to secure the funding they need to improve their financial situation, organisations need to instill confidence in donors that they will be able to use the funds effectively – and they cannot do so without strong financial management skills.

Interestingly, one of the capacity areas that organisations expressed that they needed did not even have to do with members of their own staff – but instead with their leadership, their boards.

Some respondents expressed that one of the capacity gaps that they faced challenges with were those of their boards. As one respondent explained, in addition to lack of funds, one of the biggest challenges their organisation faced was “passive board members, who are difficult to work with [and who] do not see the impact and importance of the organisation’s work, mission, and vision”. This respondent expressed that he was hoping to do something about this gap – “to empower the board members”.

He was not alone. Another representative similarly stated that: “the board members need to understand their roles in the organisation”. In response, this respondent suggested that capacity building efforts could also be targeted at “strengthening board members’ participation within the organisation”.

While perhaps capacity building should be delivered to board members directly, it should be complemented with capacity building of organisations to learn how to select board members and how to work with them effectively – a need highlighted by the respondent who was struggling with



board members who did not seem to be on board with the organisation's work.

Because boards can bring in external technical expertise and help make the strategic decisions organisations say they struggle with the capacity for, capacity building around ensuring boards are effective is important.

Aside from staff training in direct activities and delivery, respondents did not mention any additional capacity building opportunities offered to staff members in other – particularly strategic – areas. Some respondents expressed that while they do not have these opportunities now, they are “hoping for them in the future”.

For the moment, most organisations are accessing these from external service providers: other larger organisations and government entities who have offered capacity building or training workshops.

And several respondents mentioned that multiple members of their teams had accessed such training in the last 2 years. In fact, one of the respondents was planning to attend a training on monitoring and evaluation the following week. Another respondent described how 4 different members of staff – including himself – had accessed such training within the last year alone.

So, with all of this training, why are there still gaps? In the experience of our respondents there are two main challenges.

First, capacity building opportunities and trainings are offered to individual representatives of organisations, not the organisation as a whole. Therefore, without intentionally planning how to share the learning with other members, the result remains at the individual – not institutional – level.

Secondly, training must also be well targeted to those who are accessing it, but this is not always the case. As one respondent explained, “most of the people working in the organization are not well learned, not skilled, so even when they attend the training they would not be able to apply what they have been trained”. Training must be informed by participants baseline knowledge and skills to ensure that they both absorb and apply what they have learned.

## **Receiving capacity building in one area can highlight needs that were not noticed before in others.**

A respondent described how it was through the training that he received from the Department of Social Development in governance that he learned more about his role as a manager and “the role of board members”. This training helped him identify that his board members had gaps in their understanding of their role and led him to identify that he needed more support with capacity building board members. Therefore, when training is delivered it can help those receiving it see gaps that they had not seen before.

This is not to say that organisations do not want to continue to receive capacity building through workshops and trainings. Instead, for those who suggested how future capacity building be delivered, this is how they suggested that it be delivered – “through trainings,” as one respondent mentioned.

Instead of changing the modality through which capacity building is delivered, capacity building programmes must consider two things: that the content be accessible to those being trained and that training focus not just on individual learning but also how that will be applied.

## **Organisations have a high appetite for learning, which they access through fora where they connect with other organisations (such as the ASRHR coalition convened by Restless Development), but beyond learning, it is unclear what these spaces have led to.**

Overall, the representatives we spoke with expressed a high appetite for learning from others. As one respondent expressed, we “would like to engage with larger organisations in order to learn from them”.

According to others, this is precisely the role that they would like other organisations to play: that they want to “learn best practices from larger organisations. Therefore, what they would like larger organisations to do is to convene spaces where organisations like theirs can learn from everyone’s best practices, as Restless Development has done through the SRHR coalition.

While some representatives we spoke with only mentioned the coalition organised by Restless Development, others expressed that there are multiple spaces – including and beyond that organised by Restless Development – where they connect with other organisations. Some of these other spaces mentioned include the following: the Matatiele NGO forum, the local Youth Council, the Makado East Support Group, and the Vhembe Office Forum.

In the words of those whom we consulted, the advantage of these fora is the network-building opportunity that they offer.

Below are some selected quotations from respondents who mentioned this.

**“The collaboration is good and creates connection and a network.”**

**“The space is good, and we connect to others for support.”**

**“It provides a platform to share information and build a network.”**

**“There are [sic] good networking among organisations.”**

It is interesting that so many different organisations mentioned the benefit of these spaces using the same word: network.

What is the benefit that these organisations find through networking?

According to those we consulted, it is in the potential for learning. As one representative explained, meeting in these spaces “has been useful because it is where we get to exchange project progress and learn good experiences from each other”.

Another representative expressed that they felt the coalition organised by Restless Development was an effective space “because we get to learn from different organisations operating in different provinces and get to know [the] different strategies they use in implementing their projects”. Beyond being interesting, respondents stressed that it is through this learning that their organisations are able to “assist each other to grow”, as one representative mentioned.

Another expanded on this to explain that through this connection they are able to “know how organisations work and rise, and it assists us to help one another to grow”.

Yet aside from the learning that they gain from these spaces, few representatives mentioned that these spaces lead to new work or to seeking funding together.

One representative did mention that in these spaces they “seek financial and resource support from other organisations, who might want to collaborate with them”.

Another respondent gave an example of how “there was a coalition of different organisation to write a proposal to the National Development Agency as a cluster organisation”.

However, in both cases it is unclear whether this interest – in the case of the former – and this effort – in the case of the latter – materialised into any new business or work.

Therefore, in the experience of the representatives we spoke with, these spaces function better as spaces for connection than as spaces for new collaborations as they are currently structured. This could be because of the challenges that some of the organisations face in working together.

When asked what challenges they face in collaborating with other organisations, representatives gave diverse answers.

For some, the challenges are purely practical. One respondent mentioned this clearly, saying, “the main challenge in collaborating with other CSOs is the distance.

For example, the organisations are located in far areas which are only accessed through commuting long distances” – which might or might not be possible given resource constraints. Working so closely with particular communities at the grassroots might mean that organisations do not have wide geographic reach, limiting the overlap of their reach with that of other organisations.

For others, it was more about challenges in the way that they work with other organisations or how interested they perceive them to be.

Respondents mentioned a variety of specific challenges, including: that some other organisations are “lazy in attending meetings planned”, that there are communication gaps, and that there is a difficulty not just in building relationships but maintaining them.

More research would need to be done to deeply understand what hinders collaboration on new work between organisations.

However, it is clear that even if spaces are provided to share and learn from the expertise of others, more needs to be done beyond to transition connection into collaboration.

### **Organisations consulted expressed that they have a positive relationship with the government, as government actors treat them as partners – though some do struggle with direct collaboration on delivery.**

Most of those whom we spoke with have had quite a bit of interaction with government stakeholders over the past 2 years.

Predominantly, this interaction is around the delivery of activities and services – either with the CSOs delivering on behalf of government entities or delivering in partnership with them.

For example, one respondent explained that their organisation “collaborated with the government through [an] awareness campaign about sexual abuse”.

One respondent explained why organisations interact so often with the government: “After changing from NGOs to CSOs, now the CSOs are working as government supporters in helping to solve community challenges, which is different from NGOs when these organisations were the watchdog of the government.”

According to this respondent, then, interaction between the government and civil society organisations has increased recently, as civil society organisations have become more active in holding the government accountable.

So, with this increased interaction, how do members of these organisations find working with the government? One representative described a negative experience of working with government, explaining that the organisation’s “relationship with [the] government is not quite good [sic] but is forced by memorandum”.

Therefore, they must work with government actors to deliver work and ensure they receive the funds they are meant to – though they did not go into detail about what in particular made the relationship with government bad.

However, overwhelmingly, most organisations whom we consulted characterised their relationship with the government as positive. Below are some selected quotations from respondents expressing this view.

**“[We] have been in a [sic] good collaboration with the government through the local municipalities, the Department of Labour, and the Department of Social Development.”**

**“[We] are in a good relationship with the government actors, as we work and report directly to the Department of Social Development. We have a partnership with the clinics, and the Premier’s office invites [our] organisation to attend meetings whenever [they are] conducted.”**

**“[Our relationship is] good with the sectors of the Department of Health, Department of Social Development, and the South Africa Police Service.”**

**“We work closely with the government, thanks to the clinic and the Department of Social Development and the municipality.”**

From these respondents’ descriptions, most have a good relationship not only with one government institution, but instead with multiple – often at both the local and the national level – simultaneously.

Therefore, for many of the organisations whom we consulted, they have rather dense connections to the government.



Additionally, in the words above, this is because of the work that they do together as well as the fact that they are always invited for meetings, in the words of one respondent. Another respondent explained why these regular meetings are so important:

**"Our organisation's relationship with [the] government is good. The government is welcoming and has a good flow of communication with the organisation. We also have regular meetings to evaluate [our] activities and results. The flow of communication aligns well. The collaboration with the government is working well because of the focus on the same targets."**

In this respondent's experience, then, it is the combination of having the same vision of success and regularly meeting and communicating to assess progress on shared objectives that accounts for the positive relationship they feel they have with the government. They feel that the organisation and the government are working towards the same thing together in partnership.

This highlights what other respondents also mentioned: that the positive relationship that organisations we consulted feel they have with the government is attributable to the collaborative way that they feel government actors interact with them – even when facing challenges.

As one respondent mentioned, "government actors are supporters and try to help find solutions".

Another respondent expanded on this to explain how they do so: "We do war rooms together, and stakeholders are involved".

Therefore, when facing challenges in delivery, these respondents have seen that government actors do not blame them but instead work with them to surface solutions, demonstrating partnership.

Despite their positive characterisation of their relationship with the government, some organisations did report that while they have good relationships with the government, they do face some challenges.

As one respondent explained, "our organisation's relationship with the government is both good and challenging, especially in monitoring and intervention; however, they do attend to [sic] some of our programmes when invited".

In the words of this respondent, they have experienced good presence and good communication from government actors, through their attendance of meetings. However, this is not all that they would like to see; they would also like to see more attention to delivery and tracking the progress of that delivery.

Another representative echoed this feeling, expressing that they would like to see more interaction around direct delivery: “[Our organisation] has a good relationship with the government, but when it comes to collaborating on work, some of the stakeholders do not offer any support to the organisation”.

Instead, this respondent expressed that, “the organisation would want the government stakeholders to fully offer their collaboration in all levels rather than waiting to receive the activity reports from the organization”.

Therefore, these organisations have appreciated enhanced interaction with the government and want more – not less – collaboration from the government in delivering on shared targets.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Donors – and larger organisations – should spend more time with civil society organisations on the ground, learning about their context, their work, and their offer.**

While those in civil society organisations have a clear understanding of what their organisation's offer is and what they want to achieve, they do not feel that donors always do.

According to those whom we consulted, this became especially apparent when setting expectations about what these organisations can deliver, which they felt sometimes misses what their core offer is and includes targets that are not achievable in the contexts in which they work.

Donors – and the larger organisations who subcontract these organisations – should prioritise taking the time to go on-the-ground and see how these organisations implement their programmes and activities and to appreciate the landscape in which they do so. Those whom we consulted called for this directly.

**Funding structures should be adjusted to better afford for long-term strategic work, not just direct delivery.**

Among those whom we consulted, the biggest challenges that they face with their funding situation were: 1| that grants are given along short term, often 1 year, timelines and 2| that these grants do not support investments in strategic human resources. The way that funding is structured now places an emphasis on short-term direct delivery instead of strategic achievement of objectives.

Donors must adjust their perspective to consider how they can invest in the strategic vision of organisations, by seeing these organisations as strategic partners and not just as direct implementers. Funding should be multi-year and not just fund activity-based roles but also core central functions necessary to ensuring the achievement of the organisation's objectives and to sharing any learning they have with others.

**To address the fragility of their funding portfolio, support should be given to civil society organisations in diversifying their portfolio and in how to manage the funds they have.**

Most of the organisations whom we consulted were either funded just by one or two donors, or just by one or two types of donors.

Therefore, their funding portfolios are not diverse and lack flexibility. Instead, civil society organisations need support in identifying how to access different types of funding from different types of donors simultaneously.

Once they have funds, organisations need to know how to manage them effectively and how to set up systems to instill confidence in future donors that the money they give will be used well. Therefore, capacity building that seeks to improve organisations' financial health should not only look at fundraising but also at holistic financial management, such that organisations can effectively manage funding from when it is received to when it has been used and must be reported on.

**Because needs are diverse, capacity building should offer a menu of options so that organisations can select what they need. However, any capacity building should consider a few key things.**

While financial management skills and capacity building for board members did emerge as areas where multiple organisations said they needed support, aside from these areas, their capacity needs are diverse. In their description, there is no one package of skills that organisations feel they need. Therefore, it would be helpful instead to offer capacity building as a menu of options so organisations can select which areas are of the biggest priority to them.

In the description of respondents, capacity building can often stop with the training sessions either because those attending lack the capacity to know how to apply what they have learned or because trainings are delivered to individuals, not institutions. Instead, all capacity building should involve action planning of next steps, mapping how lessons can be applied and how lessons will be shared with others in the organisation. Providers of capacity building should provide ongoing coaching to support those they have trained on delivering these action plans.

**Convenors of spaces where organisations can connect and share learnings should ensure that these spaces also afford opportunities for collaboration, where organisations can co-design new business.**

Organisations consulted described that they often had access to multiple spaces where they could connect with other organisations and share learning. They also show a high appetite for learning. However, it is unclear what this connection and learning has led to. Instead, convenors of spaces for connection must transition them to spaces for growth and collaboration. This requires restructuring spaces to not just capture learning but also to determining how individual organisations can apply it and to not just connect organisations but also to help them brainstorm what new work they could do together by combining their insights and models.

## **Government actors should continue to work with civil society organisations as partners collaborating to achieve joint targets and objectives.**

Where government actors have successfully worked with civil society organisations, it has been where they have worked with them in a way that makes these organisations feel like they are partners, working together towards the same vision. Government actors should continue to support the positive relationship they have built with civil society organisations by continuing to set targets and objectives collaboratively with these organisations, ensuring that every actor is working together towards a shared goal. Once targets and objectives are set and work is underway, they should ensure that there are opportunities for joint delivery and that progress is assessed together, through a regular flow of information and frequent interaction.





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