

OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Twitter Chat - African CSOs : Mobilization during and after COVID-19

#AfricanCSOsfightCOVID 

This report highlights the key takeaways from the Twitter chat that EPIC-Africa hosted on April 2nd, 2020. The event provided a platform for African CSOs to discuss how COVID-19 is affecting their organizations, new challenges they are facing, and to share resources and ideas about how to respond to the crisis while keeping

their organizations strong and focused. This event was the first of what we hope will become an ongoing exchange of resources and ideas in a spirit of solidarity within the African CSO/philanthropy community. Twitter chat attracted close to 60 participants from over 15 countries and included both CSOs and funders.

Q1 What are some of the specific issues impacting African CSOs and the communities they serve during the COVID-19 pandemic?

COVID-19 has introduced new **operational and programmatic** issues that CSOs have not dealt with before. Participants in the chat highlighted the following issues:

<p>1</p> <p>Working from home.</p> <p>With few groups set to quickly transition from office-based work to working from home the learning curve is steep and in many cases complicated by patchy and often expensive internet connection. Few organizations have a technology strategy or the wherewithal to make this transition successfully. One organization expressed a feeling that “we are alone in this urgent shift to remote action, with the need to develop our own blueprint on how to continue work with our communities” and appealed for CSOs to draw together to share tips/steps/shifts and to learn from each other.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Mental health of employees.</p> <p>Organizations are grappling with how to support their staff as they navigate the challenges arising from being isolated, the new expectations on work outputs, lack of social interaction, need to constantly be on-call and the difficulty in doing “business as usual” in a crisis.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Child Protection.</p> <p>Groups working in education are concerned with how to increase child protection measures at family level to keep children safe. As schools close children at home are at much higher risk of violence and abuse, which could also increase early pregnancy and early marriage.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Responding to crisis.</p> <p>Many groups have no experience in responding to emergencies, yet to remain relevant they must now respond to the emerging needs of their beneficiaries-work that is outside their missions and expertise.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Mission Drift.</p> <p>To stay relevant, CSOs have to respond to the crisis. How to do this while staying true to their missions is something CSOs must grapple with. One participant cautioned CSOs not to lose sight of the larger picture and pre-Covid-19 concerns in various countries, including insecurity in Sahel, risks of political violence around elections (and what will happen to 2020 elections in West Africa for example?). While CSO work is crucial, quality of state policies (and political goodwill) will remain the first determinants of what happens to people in times of crisis and CSOs must continue their advocacy work towards systemic changes in public policies.</p>			

Q2 What are some of the major capacity challenges facing #AfricanCSOs to support the most vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Most organizations, even before COVID-19, had **limited capacity** in many areas such as data and technology, agility of organizational leadership, and staff fatigue resulting from limited human resources. Further capacity challenges that have surfaced are:

<p>1</p> <p>Poor IT and technology infrastructure. Lack of reliable internet connection, limited digital literacy and no access to remote collaboration tools make “working from home” difficult. Additionally, for some CSOs, the nature of the work, e.g. service delivery, makes “working from home” impractical.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Few have the capacity to scale their work. For groups with no prior experience in humanitarian/relief work, pivoting is difficult. It is equally challenging to move quickly from identifying problems to trying out solutions.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Lack of flexible contingency funding to enable rapid response. Most funding is tied to projects. COVID-19 is a new and unexpected issue and many CSOs may not have the flexibility to redirect some of their current funding to respond to emerging needs related to the crisis. The general consensus was that funders must be willing to unrestrict their grants.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Access to best practice and learning from peers in other countries that have experience of emergency response. Ineffective or nonexistent partner networks also hamper access to actionable information</p>
<p>5</p> <p>The understanding of the epidemic as a medical emergency was noted as an impediment and somewhat paralyzing. There is a need to reframe this as a social and economic issue as well needing advocacy, behavior change communication and social mobilization—all things that CSOs are good at especially in relation to ensuring that people’s basic human rights are respected.</p>		<p>6</p> <p>Absence of any proven way of handling this crisis — even the science seems to shift—e.g. were masks necessary or not, and no-one has a track record in managing this kind of epidemic.</p>	

Q3 What are some of the resources and sources of funding currently available to #AfricanCSOs to tackle this pandemic?

Some CSO **dedicated funding sources** that participants shared include:

<p>1</p> <p>Charities Aid Foundation Southern Africa has launched an emergency fund to support local South African nonprofits</p>	<p>2</p> <p>There’s a growing list of #COVID19 funding opportunities for Africa from Governments, Intergovernmental Organizations, Development Financing Institutions, Foundations, HNWLs, etc.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Philanthropist, Community Funding (beyond money, also health professionals to create awareness about the #COVID19, tech educators to teach kids over the internet, religious and traditional leaders to bring hope and keep people sane)</p>	<p>4</p> <p>https://civictech.guide/coronavirus/#funding... and the Open Tech Fund has alternative sources that might be helpful going forward (non-COVID specific)</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Engine Room is proactively offering pro-bono support for organizations looking to understand and work more effectively remotely as they maybe transition to new work environment. The blog post here describes this: https://www.theengineerroom.org/building-trust-while-working-remotely/</p>			

Q4 How can #AfricanCSOs mobilize and leverage funds from within the continent, both individual giving and private sector donations? What role can technology play?

Emergency funds are being launched in various countries, with some dedicated to CSOs—see question 3 above. There have been **sizeable commitments** from **#AfricanPhilanthropists** but most of it is going to governments. In some countries, CSOs are not seen as part of the solution even as they seek foreign support and appeal to current funders to allow them to redirect existing grants. Also many participants proposed that it is time to think outside the box. Innovative CSOs who can partner with SMEs and propose innovations based on our local realities. See one EU fund here offering an example of this type of opportunity: https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/startups-and-smes-innovative-solutions-welcome-2020-mar-13_en]

Other ideas shared include:

<p>1</p> <p>COVID-19 offers African CSOs an opportunity to reposition themselves as leaders at the frontline. The nature of this crisis means that we may not see the all too familiar NGO emergency/humanitarian-led response that often relegates local groups to the sidelines. This is truly the moment to “localize”! To leverage the moment, CSOs will need to be more organized as a sector and mount a CSO-led messaging campaign.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Time to embrace different fundraising approaches including embracing giving circles, peer to peer donations, etc.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Technology can help to bring visibility to CSO-led efforts, enable sharing of locally relevant innovations and best practices, facilitate coordination, amplify messages and facilitate local individual giving—but we need a structured and coordinated approach.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>There are several online giving platforms such as M-Changa that CSOs can tap into to drive individual giving.</p>
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Q5 What are some of the examples of governments coordinating with African CSOs to respond swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The necessity of coordination, especially in an emergency, cannot be overemphasized. CSOs have an important role to play, especially at the community level where government may be absent or mistrusted, yet governments may not always involve local groups in their coordination processes. **African CSOs should assert themselves and demand a seat at the table**, but they need to come to the table with concrete proposals as unfortunately the government does not always know or appreciate the sector’s contributions. An example of CSO engagement in coordination include:

<p>1</p> <p>In Kenya the government is working with larger NGOs and the private sector. There needs to be coordination from the CSOs to form a task force that will be able to include smaller organizations who are on the frontlines in communities.</p>

Q6 What should #AfricanCSOs ask for from the Global COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund?

The fund is meant to support WHO’s work to track and understand the spread of the virus; to ensure patients get the care they need and frontline workers get essential supplies and information; and to accelerate efforts to develop vaccines, tests, and treatments. Participants advised specifically that:

<p>1</p> <p>CSOs should demand total transparency in how the fund is allocated and accounted for.</p>

Q7 What are some of the lessons that #African CSOs took from the Ebola response in 2014 that can be useful today?

Participants highlighted the following three key points:

<p>1</p> <p>Epidemics are not just medical issues, but have critical social and economic dimensions</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Structures already in place for the #Ebola response could be scaled up for a #COVID19 response. NGOs involved in the DRC Ebola for example created coalitions to improve information sharing and coordinate their work.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Coordination is key and needs to be played by some central authority so that each player’s contributions are effectively distributed.</p>
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Q8. What are some of the questions that funders should be asking their African grantees now to ensure they can respond to and survive the COVID-19 pandemic?

<p>1</p> <p>How are you doing as an organization and how are you responding to the crisis? A program officer from the Hewlett Foundation shared that she is contacting all of her grantees asking how COVID19 is affecting their operations & programs, and working with them to offer more flexible or alternative use of funds, etc. We are keeping our commitments and not asking grantees to cut budgets, she said.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Another funder, OSIWA, urged grantees to ask if current funding is adapted and can apply to rapid response or if it needs to be redirected. Beyond financial resources, funders can facilitate partnership building. Overall, LISTEN to your partners/grantees.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Is your CSO best placed to respond now or later? What will be the long-term impacts of COVID19 on your core mission/programs and how may you need to pivot in the future? One trend we want to avoid is CSOs changing their core mission due to new funding available in this emergency response area. There are unique opportunities in post COVID community needs and resilience building. CSOs can also help fill this gap.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Listen to grantees: Encourage rescheduling of deliverables; Support new ways of working; Give greater flexibility with fund management; Simplify reporting and applications</p> <p>@civicus</p>
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