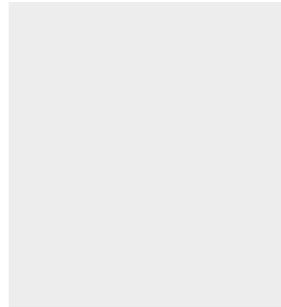




# Advocacy During COVID-19

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background on Advocacy</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Actors Behind Policy Advocacy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Advocacy Terrain Prior to COVID-19</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Advocacy Focused Organisations (AFOs) and COVID-19</b>	<b>7</b>
The future of Think Tanks is uncertain	7
Funding concerns	7
Working remotely	8
Assistance outside of International donors	8
The African Think Tank perspective	8
<b>Impact of COVID-19 on Advocacy Focused Organisations (AFOs) in Zimbabwe</b>	<b>10</b>
Background of Organisations Responding to the Survey	10
Area/ Province of Operation	10
Positions of respondents within the Think Tanks	11
Organisations' Thematic areas of focus	12
Organisations' Annual Budget	13
Day-to-day operations	14
Effects on the organisation's broader aspects	14
Aspects of projects lagging behind	15
Ability to pay salaries	16
<b>Measures in Response to COVID-19 Lockdowns</b>	<b>17</b>
Measures put in place to adhere to government set standards	17
Measures put in place to mitigate COVID-19 and its effects	17
Measures put in place for employees to continue working despite the lockdown	17
<b>Strategies adopted by organisations to cope with the crisis</b>	<b>19</b>
Strategies related to Information Technology (IT)	19
Use of Technology in day-to-day operations.	19
<b>Financial support and relations with funding partners</b>	<b>22</b>
Support given to organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic	22
Relations with funding partners	22
<b>Involvement in initiatives to mitigate COVID-19</b>	<b>24</b>
Involvement in initiatives/programs to mitigate COVID-19	24
Source of funding for initiatives developed due to COVID-19	25
<b>Impact and Overall effect of COVID-19 on Think Tanks in Zimbabwe</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Lessons Learnt and Areas of Discussion</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>29</b>

# Introduction

Zimbabwe, like the rest of the world was not spared from the COVID-19 global pandemic. The country went into lockdown in March 2020 and only essential services remained open. Most of the non-profit world inclusive of policy advocacy focused formations were deemed non-essential and had to resort to working remotely or effectively closing down. However, the wheels of government policy making did not slow down. In 2020 the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) passed 314 Statutory Instruments<sup>1</sup>. New policies were also implemented and amongst these, which probably might be the most notable, were the global compensation agreement aimed at resolving the outstanding compensation for former large scale commercial farmers and the National Development Strategy 1<sup>2</sup>.

Whilst ZANU-PF has never scored highly

on policy consultations this was probably a new low. Advocacy focused organizations were for the most part of the year struggling with survival issues and also trying to migrate to online ways of working. Their capacity to effectively track government's policy making processes and implementation was severely curtailed. In this report we explore the extent to which advocacy focused organizations responded to COVID-19 related changes such as lockdowns, funding constraints and limited room to carry out face-to-face consultations. The report is based on a survey of advocacy focused organizations. We were keen to know how COVID-19 had affected the internal operations of advocacy organisations and also to try and understand the various responses that have been made to government's own going policy processes.

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1. <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/4685>

2. [http://www.zimtreasury.gov.zw/index.php?option=com\\_phocadownload&view=category&id=64&Itemid=](http://www.zimtreasury.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&id=64&Itemid=)

# Background on Advocacy

A realisation has emerged in the last decades or so that officeholders in national and local government cannot be left to exercise their power without sufficient scrutiny from the citizens. The doctrine of the separation of power into the three branches, Executive, Judiciary and Legislative was meant to provide a balance of sorts. However, in practice, separation of power is very difficult, especially in a context where these branches are filled by people from the same political party or are appointed by the head of the ruling party. One of the earliest intentions of holding power in check was through the media which was largely referred to as the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate. It was assumed that an independent media could contribute towards the creation of a countervailing balance on power by writing or talking about the excesses of power. To a larger extent, the media especially investigative journalist have played a significant role in exposing excesses of power out of corruption

and forms of abuse.

However, even then, there remained a disconcerting gap, how to talk about public problems which are not necessarily due to scandal but could be due to weak conceptualisation, inadequately weak policy responses or inadequate buy-in from affected communities. Who should we talk about these things? Enter policy advocacy. It is important to note that advocacy in its pure form and the word "advocate" come from ancient Roman law to describe those who were called to the aid of someone or who took the role of champion on behalf of others such as lawyers or barristers in the legal system. For the purpose of this discussion, policy advocacy refers to a process where experts / communities analyse the course of a problem and develop policy-based solutions to address these in a manner that creates sustainable and enduring change.

**Typically, planning for advocacy entails the following,**

- Problem Identification
- Probable Solutions
- Mapping challenges to get from problem situation to the solution
- Consensus on the most effective ways of making that change happen

# Actors Behind Policy Advocacy

There are many actors that are capable of carrying out policy advocacy and they include special interest groups such as associations representing business, the disabled, identity groups and also intermediary cause driven non-profits which are established specifically for the task of carrying out advocacy. The terrain of advocacy focused organisations has grown in the past three decades. Prior to 1990, the majority of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were focused on service delivery in a complementary manner to what the state was doing. However, in 1992, the World Bank produced a paradigm shifting report which claimed that the lack of development in many parts of the global south was mostly due to governance challenges. They argued that, "good governance is central to creating and sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development, and it is an essential complement to sound economic policies."

For the first time in decades there was a renewed focus on what governments actually do, instead of looking at the problem as entailing increased flows of aid. The new emphasis was on systems of accountability – both within government and from government to those it serves. Such a system could only work with a reliable flow of information which without it the rules are not known, accountability is low, and uncertainties are excessive. According to the report, the characteristics of poor governance are:

- Failure on the part of government to make a clear separation between what is public and what is private hence a tendency to direct public resources for private gain
- Failure to establish a predictable framework of law and government behaviour conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of rules and laws

- Excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirements, and so forth, which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking
- Priorities inconsistent with development, resulting in a misallocation of resources
- Excessive and narrow based non-transparent decision making

The five (5) characteristics of poor governance literally gave birth to a game of governance and advocacy focused organisations and networks. Aid organisations inclusive of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and private philanthropy made significant investments in the project of reforming the state through an improved governance lens and the preferred tool was advocacy. Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world in refocusing from a service delivery focused level of intermediary NGOs to a phenomenal growth in governance focused entities. Since then, the governance movement has won some decisive victories including:

- Assenting to the need for broader consultations in the constitution making process
- Mobilisation for transparency in budgeting processes
- Raising historical systemic challenges to inclusive development
- Advocacy for equitable land reforms
- Promoting women's rights and gender equity

The governance focused organisations include intermediary NGOs, social movements, trade unions, associations of various

interests including residents, vendors, business, traders etc. the following table provides a summary of advocacy types of organisations and the table below shows the actions that they undertake.

Table 1: Advocacy types of organisations

Types of Actors	Common Strategies	Examples
Intermediary local NGOs	Policy analysis through research Publications Convenings Engaging officeholders especially Parliamentary Portfolio Committees and Ministry officials, public interest litigators	Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA)  Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI)
Intermediary International NGOs	Policy analysis through research Connecting local issues to global platforms Establishing campaigns on an issue Elevating issues to connect with regional experiences	Oxfam Action Aid International Save the Children Concern International Human Rights Watch
Associations of common interest	Mobilisation Petitions Engaging officeholders	Residents Associations Vendors Associations Lawyers Associations Business Associations Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC)
Networks of NGOs Association	Creation of broader platforms for engagement Collation of local level issues into a national focus	Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) Crisis Coalition
Faith Based Organisations	Pastoral letters Policy Briefs and Dialogues	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP) Bishops

# The Advocacy Terrain Prior to COVID-19

The work of doing advocacy has expanded since the early 1990s. However, the impact of advocacy on policy making has been highly uneven. As early as 2007, other scholars such as Ajakeiye (2007:9) had noted that the proliferation of policy research and advocacy focused organisations has not yet made an impact on policy making. As already noted, there have been some notable advocacy related achievements since the turn of the century despite the problematic ZANU-PF government. There are many instances where advocacy asks have been accepted into poli-

cy. However, these organisations carrying out advocacy have had to negotiate a difficult operating environment characterised by:

- Dwindling resources
- Low trust relationship between government and civil society
- Limited capacities to engage across a wide range of complex problems



Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 advocacy was focused on a number of wide range issues which include the rights of the girl child, and improved framework for natural resource governance, access to ARVs, improved service delivery, promotion of human rights etc."

Table 2 shows a glimpse of the advocacy terrain in Zimbabwe.

Table 2: Advocacy terrain in Zimbabwe

Issue Area	Advocacy Actors	Strategies
Girl Child Rights	<p>Musasa Project</p> <p>Save the Children</p> <p>Gender Links</p>	<p>Advocacy (Engage policy makers on issues of conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives which impact negatively on women and girls)</p> <p>Putting the most vulnerable children first through programming, emergency response and advocacy</p> <p>Policy and movement building Communication for social change Local action for gender justice</p>
Improved framework natural resource governance	<p>Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA)</p> <p>Advocates4Earth</p>	<p>Promote environmental justice, sustainable and equitable use of natural resources, democracy and good governance in the natural resources and environment sector</p> <p>Earth and her species, wildlife and nature are afforded the best legal and advocacy services Climate Justice, Extractives and Renewable Energy Achieve the adequate protection of people's environmental justice and human and people's rights in the Global South</p>
Access to ARVs	<p>Family AIDS Caring Trust (FACT)</p> <p>Africaid Zvandiri</p>	<p>Implements sustainable development initiatives to improve people's livelihood Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) HIV Prevention, HIV and AIDS care and support as well as health activities that complement Ministry of Health and Child Care</p> <p>E-support groups for caregivers and children and young people living with HIV</p>
Improved service delivery	Residents Associations	Co-ordinate and assist citizens in representing their interests to the elected member of council and to the executive branch of Government
Addressing inequality and promoting pro-poor development	Labour and Economic Development Research Institute Zimbabwe (LEDRIZ)	Develop through research well-grounded pro-working people policy positions designed to influence development processes and outcomes at national, regional and international levels
Advancing democracy and human rights	Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum	Promotes and protects the rights of all people by providing leadership and coordination on the Human Rights Agenda in Zimbabwe

# Advocacy Focused Organisations (AFOs) and COVID-19

Globally the majority of organisations that carry out policy research, analysis and advocacy are also referred to as Think Tanks. On Think Tanks (OTT), a web-based platform that studies and seeks to connect think tanks globally has carried out a survey of 138 Think Tanks, looking

at how they are responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>. According to the study, several organisations have either totally changed their strategies or adapted them to align with the Insights emanating from these include the following:

## The future of Think Tanks is uncertain

According to Hans Gutbrod (2020)<sup>4</sup>, Think Tanks across the globe expressed varied sentiments regarding the future of Think Tanks, post COVID-19 in their responses to the OTT survey. The level of optimism slightly outweighed the pessimism as most responding organisations felt that setbacks

will be felt, but they will be able to recover. West African Think Tanks indicated concerns on the ability to recover, with some possibilities of closure. The CIVICUS Monitor<sup>5</sup> also highlights the loss of civic space due to the national lockdown measures put in place by governments.

## Funding concerns

Over 40% of the responding organisations to the survey indicated that their current funding was strained and accessing new funding, especially those in the pipelines at the onset of the pandemic has been challenging. (Gutbrod, 2020). Some funding opportunities were completely dropped and some delays in funding partners' responses were noted. Related to this were concerns around 'research agenda drift.' COVID-19 brought with it new opportunities especially around research and development. Donors were mostly interested in assisting organisations that were pursuing some

research agenda that is related to the crisis.

Within the Sub-Saharan Region, respondents in the On Think Tanks survey (2020)<sup>6</sup> were grateful and cognisant of the significant role played by international donors especially during the pandemic but also expressed the need for donors to allow for flexible funds that can cater to critical moments such as these. More often than not, donor funds either lack a contingency allowance or are not flexible enough to allow for adjustments.

## Working remotely

Apart from the general struggles of working from home such as internet loss, poor network coverage, electricity cuts, and high data costs, some Think

Tanks noted that mental health and well-being in the workplace has become a critical concern<sup>7</sup>. According to a survey done by Forbes in March

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3. [https://onthinktanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/COVID-19\\_SurveyReport\\_1.pdf](https://onthinktanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/COVID-19_SurveyReport_1.pdf)

4. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/how-the-pandemic-is-impacting-think-tanks-overview-of-ott-survey-results/>

5. <https://monitor.civicus.org/COVID19/>

6. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/COVID-19s-effect-on-think-tanks-in-10-headlines/>

7. OnThinkTanks Survey Report (as in 5 above)

2020<sup>8</sup>, working from home has led to a blurring of lines between professional and personal life, tipping the work-life balance. The Mental Health

Foundation in August 2020<sup>9</sup> also raised the need for organisations to consider operating remotely.



The March 2020, Forbes report highlighted that many employees are working parents and guardians and that the national lockdown has forced the whole household to be in one place as the majority of children became home-schooled."

Of note was the surge in the tasks and duties of the communications departments as all products and communication shifted to being delivered wholly online, resulting in some staff failing to cope (Ibid).

EY Global<sup>11</sup>, a multi-disciplinary professional services organisation identified the lack of policies on

'how to operate within a crisis' as one factor why governance (the Board of Directors or Trustees) in organisations were failing to assist the organisations to at least swim within the current if they cannot thrive. They raised the need for organisations to consider establishing 'pandemic-specific' policies and procedures which will aid in coping mechanisms when need be.

## Assistance outside of International donors

Most Think Tanks globally rely on international donors to support their work and advance their research. The OTT survey found that 67% of the Think Tanks had not, at the time of answering, announced or provided any form of financial assistance to the sector (which encompasses Think

Tanks, universities and NGOs). Only about 25% had received some type of support or financial assistance from their governments, usually coming with a caveat that alters their research agenda.

## The African Think Tank perspective

According to Diawara (2020)<sup>12</sup>, the majority of Think Tanks in Africa indicated that they were facing drastic challenges due the pandemic. There was a likelihood amongst the majority of them of down-sizing or even closing of the organisations especially due to lack of financial support and the delays experienced with their existing donors in availing funds. In Senegal, reduction of staff was

prohibited, by order of the president of the country.<sup>13</sup> Think Tanks such as Consortium for Economic and Social Research (CRES) faced a gloomy future and may be susceptible to organisational drift to be able to remain relevant and operational.

COVID-19 has accentuated the adoption of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial revolution, especially in Africa, which

8. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/vickyvalet/2020/03/12/working-from-home-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-what-you-need-to-know/#440179fa1421>

9. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-working-during-coronavirus>

10. Forbes (as in 7 above)

11. [https://www.ey.com/en\\_gl/COVID-19/COVID-19-and-pandemic-planning--how-companies-should-respond](https://www.ey.com/en_gl/COVID-19/COVID-19-and-pandemic-planning--how-companies-should-respond)

12. <https://onthinktanks.org/articles/COVID-19-and-african-think-tanks-challenges-needs-and-solutions/>

13. <https://www.dlapiper.com/en/africa/insights/publications/2020/04/senegal-covid-19-and-the-right-to-work/>

was lagging behind the rest of the world. Most Think Tanks were not ready to take on the 'new normal'<sup>14</sup>. Provision of flexible funding support to be able to cater during times like these was also raised as a need<sup>15</sup>. Respondents to the 2020, OTT survey on Think Tanks in Africa<sup>16</sup> also noted that they had neither been considered for support nor offered support by the government. They however raised the need to remain steadfast and positive to the cause; to continue in their work of providing capacity building, evidence-based research, policy analysis and advocacy services to the government.

In Zimbabwe the responses to COVID-19 and related measures have been uneven. Several Think Tanks especially advocacy focused organisations (AFOs) called on the government to recognise them as essential services during the lockdown period as their work compliments government efforts in the fight against COVID-19. A survey conducted by the Combined Harare Residents Associations (CHRA)<sup>17</sup> during the onset of the lockdown indicated that there was total ignorance by residents especially on issues

such as social distancing, hand washing, wearing of masks especially at water collection points, a phenomenon prevalent in high density suburbs where clean water delivery (tap water) is a challenge. This non-compliance was caused by the lack of basic service provision and a need to fend for their families.

The National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO)<sup>18</sup> raised the need for the government to consider enlisting NGOs under essential services given the role they play in research and awareness raising, which aid in curbing the spread of the virus. Further, recent documentaries by Resident Associations in Mutare<sup>19</sup> and Harare<sup>20</sup> reiterated sentiments expressed by residents and acknowledge the role being played by AFOs and development partners in mitigating the effects of the crisis through awareness campaigns, information dissemination, provision of some personal protective equipment (PPE) such as hand sanitisers and face masks as well as helping with governance systems at water collection points.<sup>21</sup>

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14. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adigaskell/2020/05/11/is-a-blurred-work-life-balance-the-new-normal/#117c11b18130>

15. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-COVID-19>

16. OnThinkTanks Survey Report (as in 11 above)

17. <https://www.facebook.com/Kubatana/posts/csos-operations-an-essential-service-during-the-lockdown-period-via-chra-hararea/3222472067764170/>

18. NANGO newsletter (as in 1 above)

19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX5I0gpOKG0&feature=youtu.be>

20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oD2GGPvvgA&feature=youtu.be>

21. <http://nangozim.org/sites/default/files/publications/Issue%202020-%20COVID-19%20Realities%20Newsletter.pdf>

# Impact of COVID-19 on Advocacy Focused Organisations (AFOs) in Zimbabwe

We carried out a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on organisations that carry out policy research and advocacy across the country. The survey was administered using online methods. Invitations to respond to the survey were sent to 18 organisations and 12

(66%) responded. In the survey we assured respondents that we would treat their responses anonymously. We also followed up the survey with key informant interviews of advocacy focused organisations.

## Background of Organisations Responding to the Survey

### Area/ Province of Operation

The majority (58%) of responding organisation are based in Harare, while 25% of the respondents operate from Masvingo and Matabeleland North provinces. Only eight per cent (8%) have operations across the country.

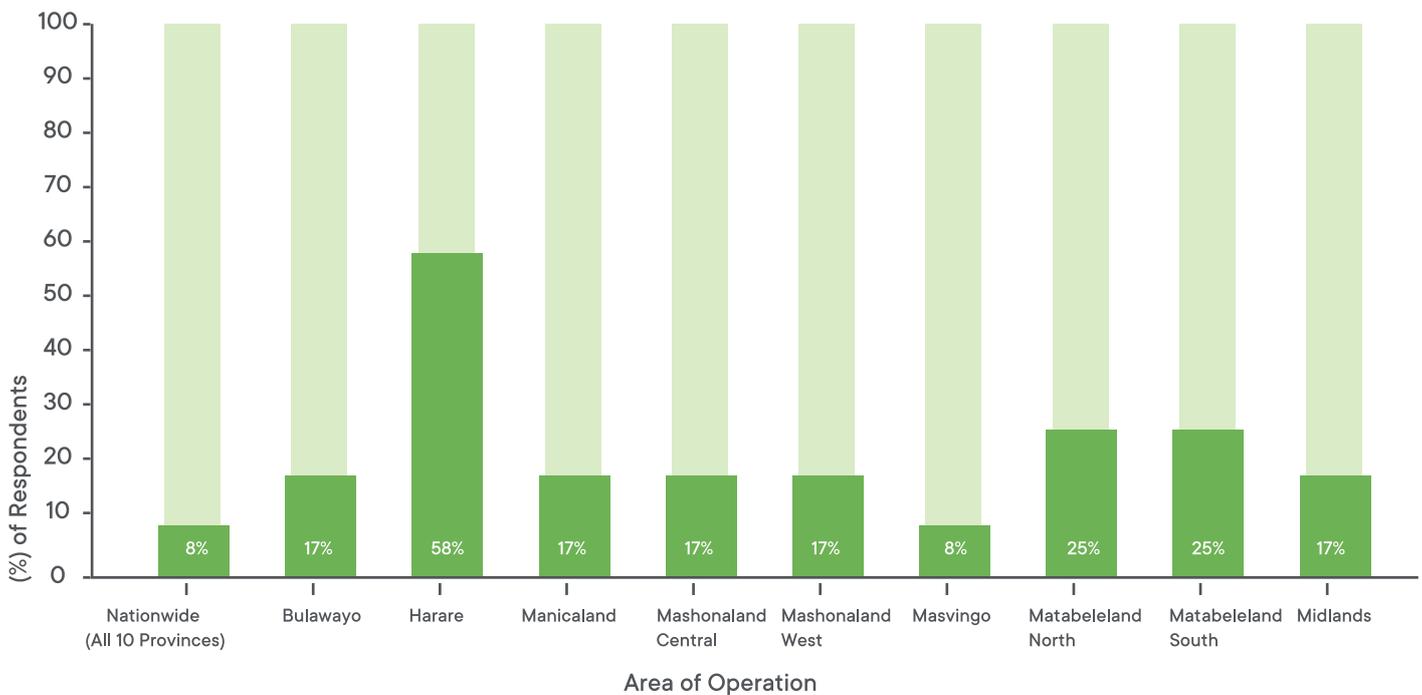


Figure 1: Area of Operation

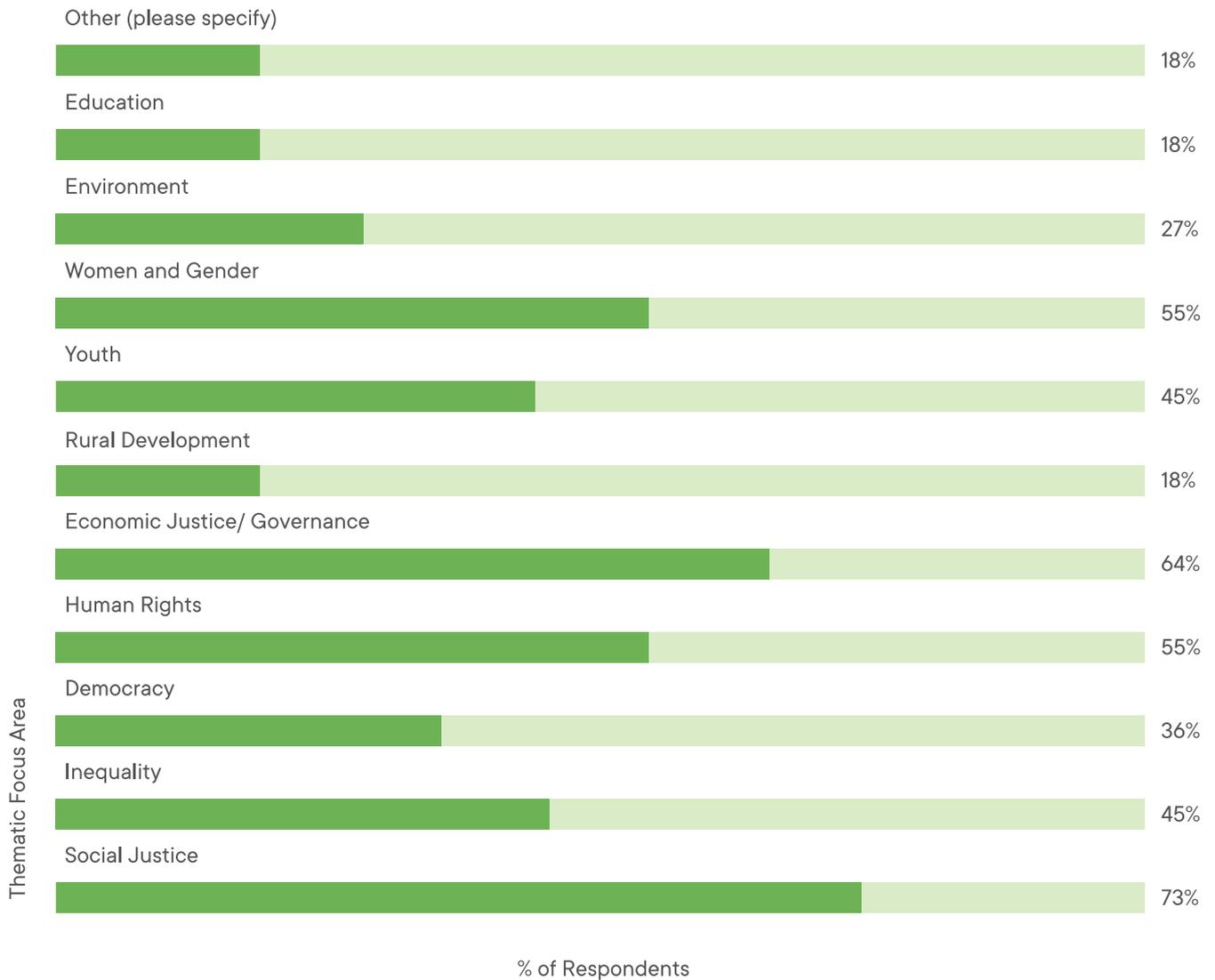
## Positions of respondents within the Think Tanks

The main respondents to the questionnaire were staff placed in the following positions within the Think Tanks:

Table 3: Positions of respondents within the Think Tanks

Position	Percentage %
Executive Directors	33.33%
Programs/Project Coordinators	33.33%
Programs/Project Managers	25%
General staff members	8.33%

## Organisation Thematic Area of Focus



**Figure 2: Organisational thematic area of focus**

In a question which allowed for multiple responses, we found that organisations under study focus on ‘Social Justice’ (73%), ‘Economic Justice’ (64%) and ‘Women and gender’ (55%). The least areas of focus were ‘Education’ and

‘Rural Development’ at 18%, respectively. Two organisations identified other thematic areas of focus outside of the ones we had pre-coded: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Capacity Development.

## Organisations' Annual Budget

The majority (45.45%) of the respondents indicated that their annual budget for 2020 was over US\$500,000.00 and only 9.09% were operating within a budget of between

US\$50,000.00-\$100,000.00. None of the organisations were operating on an annual budget less than US\$50,000.00.

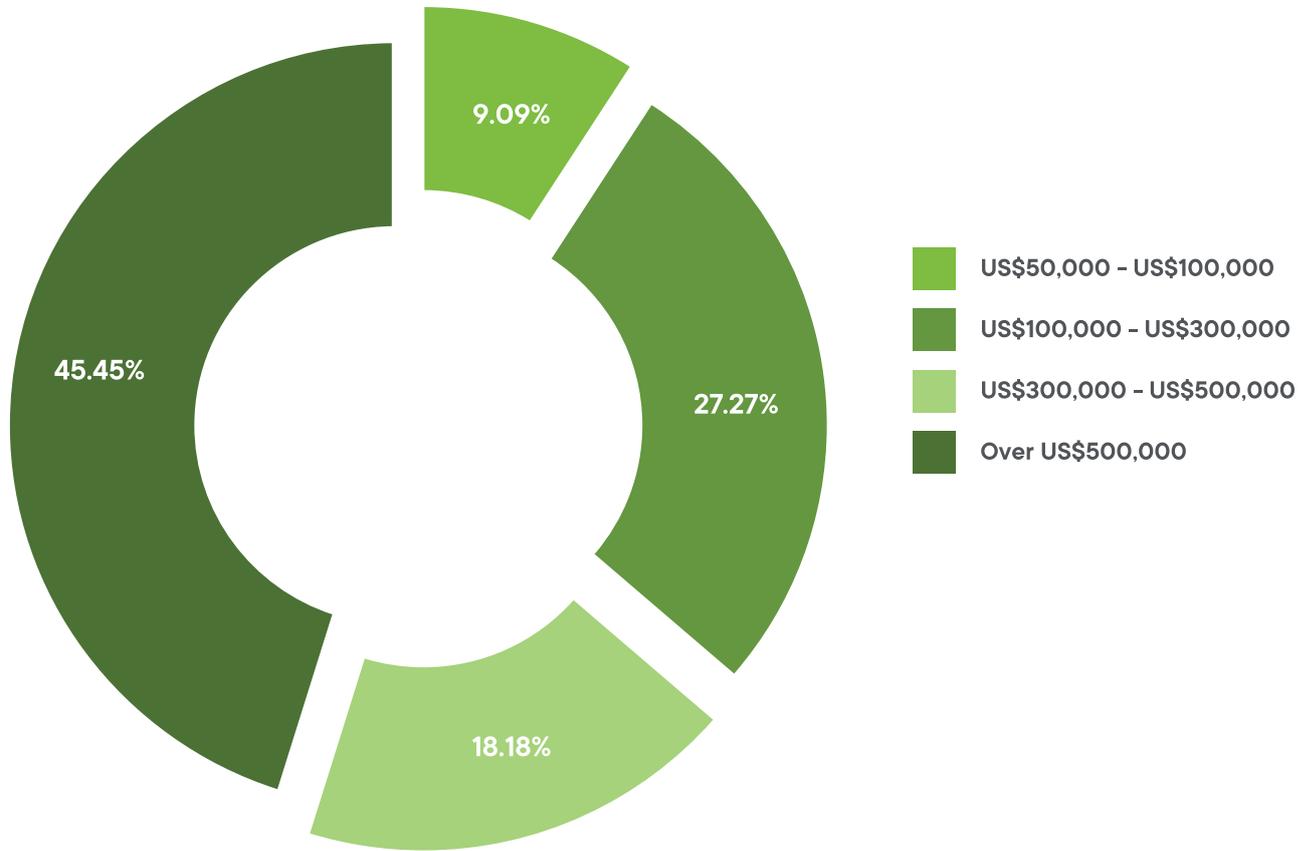


Figure 3: Organisations Annual Budget

## Day-to-day operations

When asked about the aspects of their day-to-day operations that had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 77.78% of the respondents indicated that their community engagement and outreach was affected the most. A similar percentage of respondents also indicated that train-

ing and capacity building initiatives were moderately affected. Administration as a department was noted as slightly affected whilst 33.33% of the respondents indicated that their innovation hubs/ Information Technology (IT) were not affected at all by COVID-19.

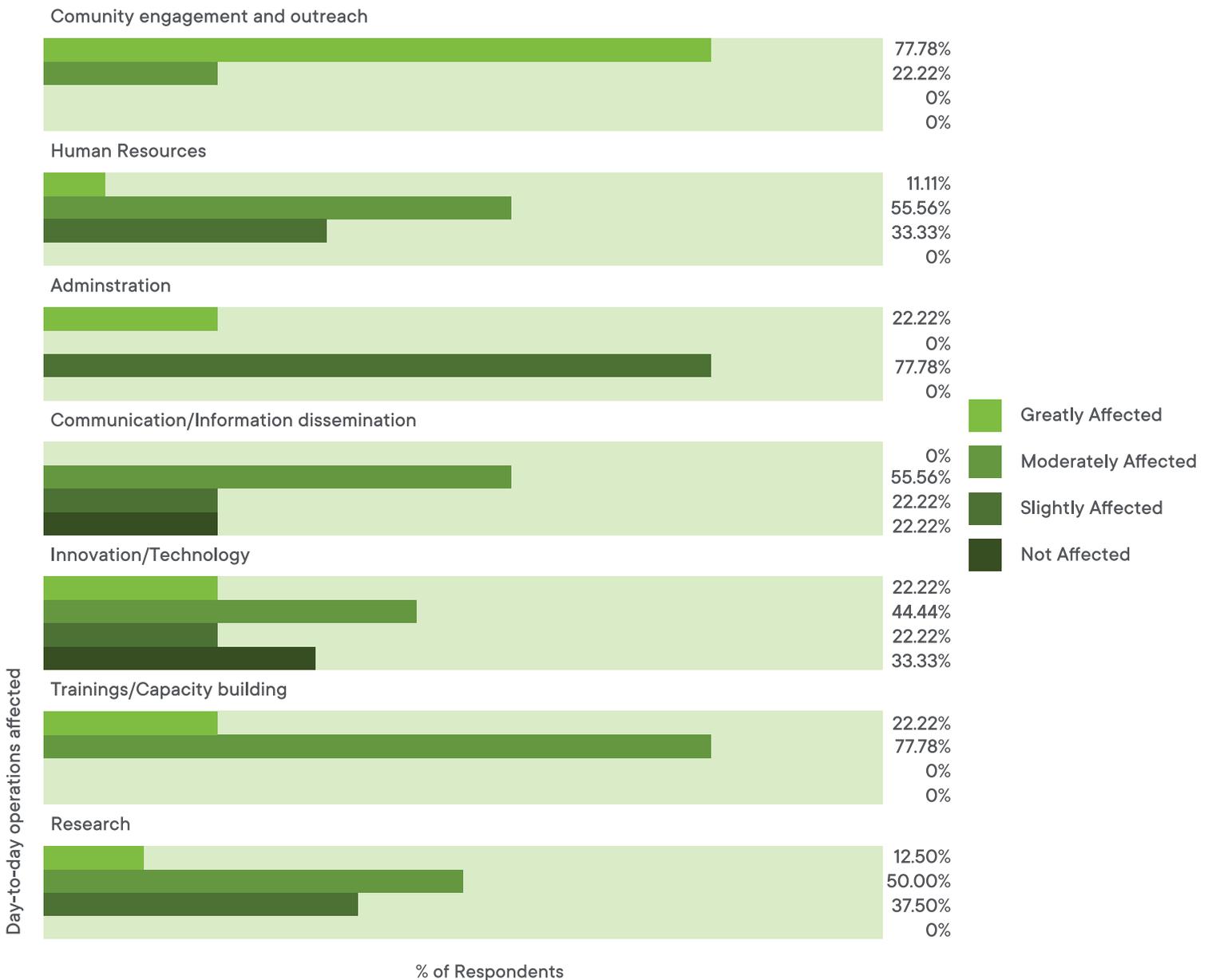


Figure 4: Day-to-day operations affected

## Effects on the organisation's broader aspects

Up to 50% of the organisations that responded pointed out that their staff was overwhelmed, stressed, and depressed because of the crisis. They further indicated that the organisation's governing body had been unable to effectively

respond to the crisis crossed by COVID-19. A third (33.33%) of the respondents indicated that they were not prepared to implement processes for working remotely.

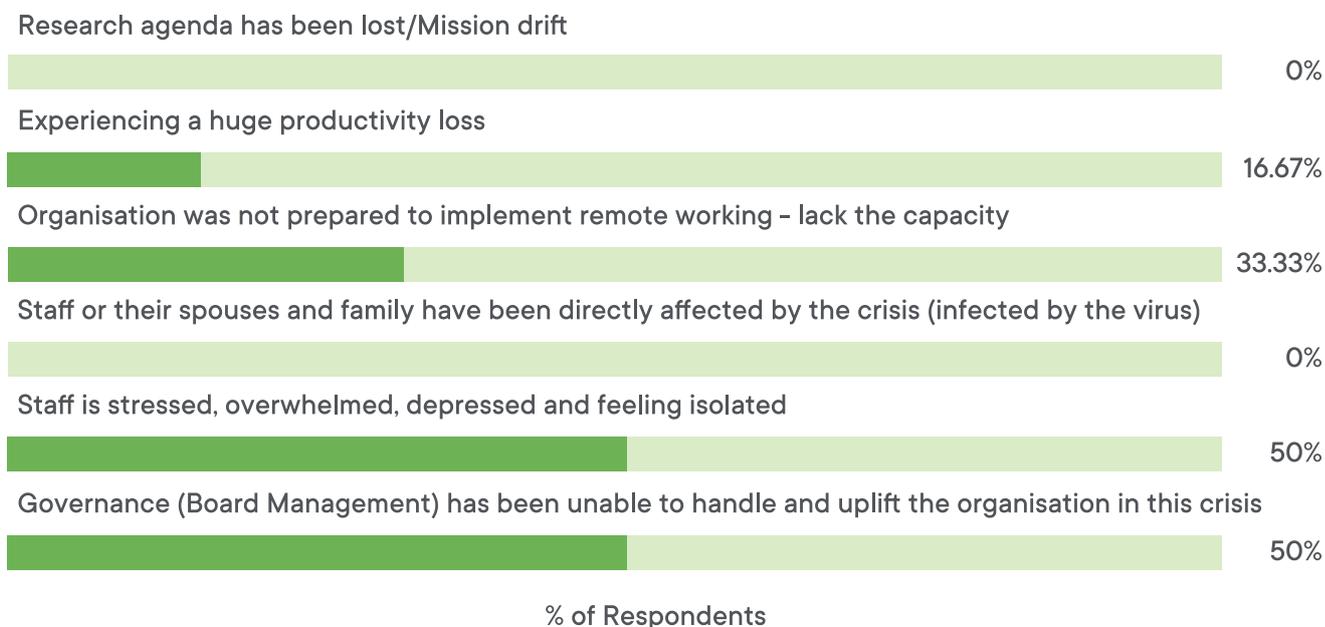


Figure 5: Broader aspects of organisations operation affected

### Aspects of projects lagging behind

Think Tanks together with most Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) work is premised on providing evidence-based research and recommendations for use by policy makers. Most of this work is run as projects/programs. All the responding organi-

sations indicated that they had to postpone at least one workshop, 77.78% had to postpone field trips and 56% actually missed project deadlines due to the effects of the pandemic.

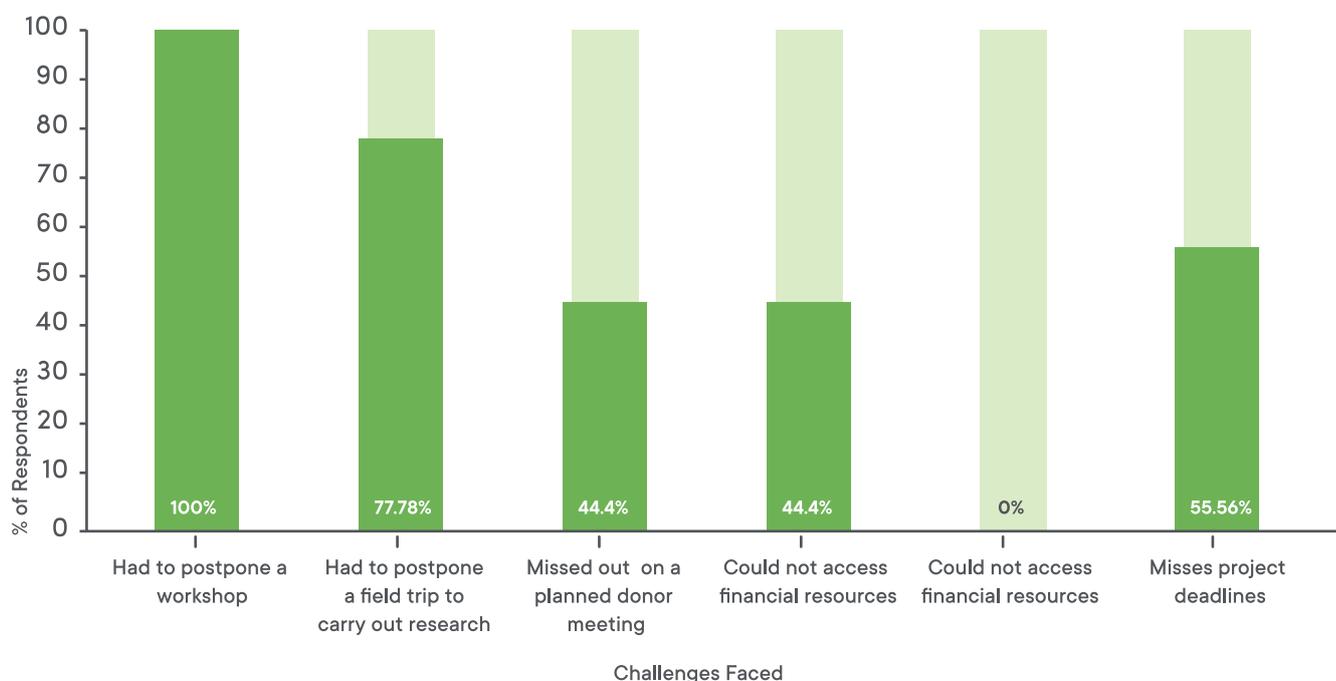


Figure 6: Aspects of projects lagging behind

# Ability to pay salaries

Only 11% of the responding organisations indicated that they had completely failed to pay salaries during the crisis.

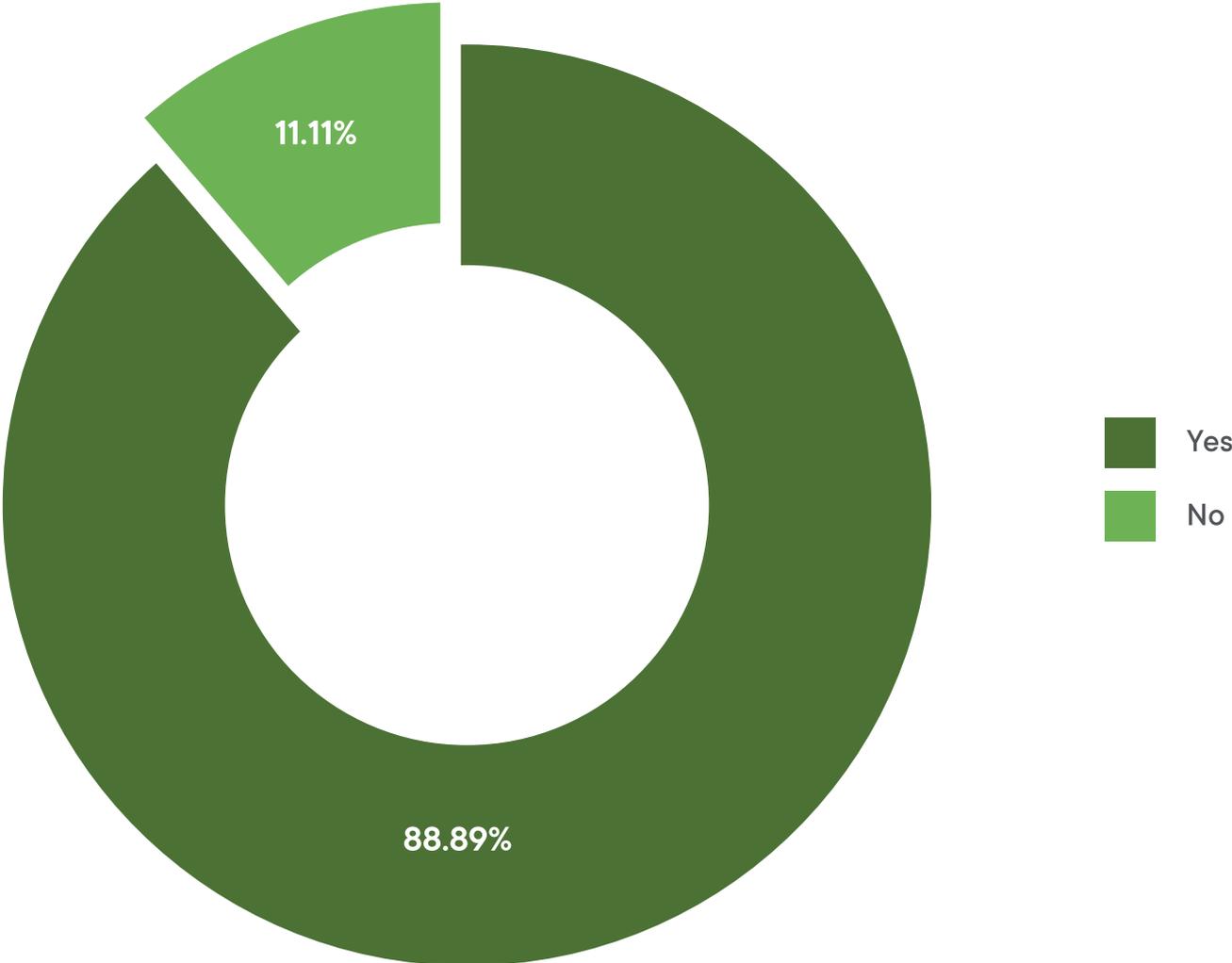


Figure 7: Ability to pay staff salaries

# Measures in Response to COVID-19 Lockdowns

## Measures put in place to adhere to government set standards

The majority (89%) of respondents indicated that they only allowed essential staff such as Finance and Administration officers to be physically present at the office; while the remainder of their staff worked remotely, while 11% shut

down their physical offices and all staff worked remotely. The remaining 11% kept their offices fully functional during the lockdown period. None of the respondents shut down operations due to the crisis.

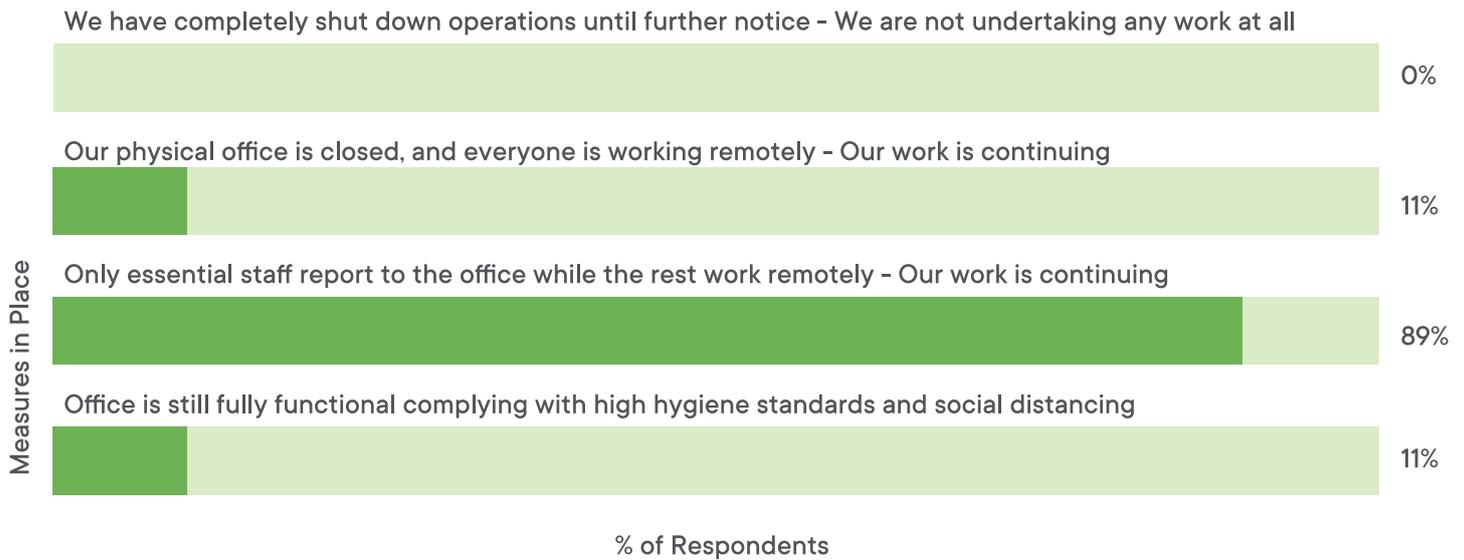


Figure 8: Measures put in place by organisations to ensure adherence to Government restrictions

## Measures put in place to mitigate COVID-19 and its effects

The majority of respondents (89%) encouraged and provided resources for the staff to work remotely. Only essential staff such as those responsible for operations and finance report physically at the office. 89% of the respond-

ing Think Tanks also purchased sanitisers, face masks and gloves for their employees and devised measures to ensure social distancing is adhered to.

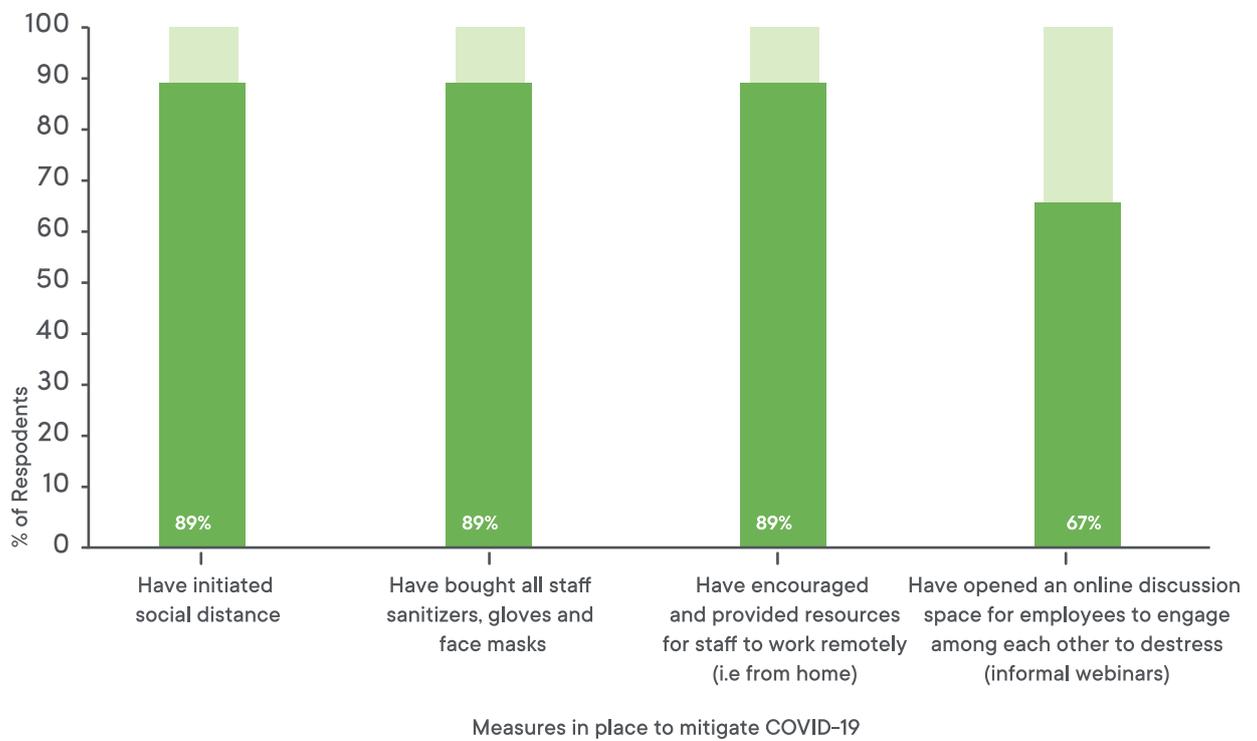


Figure 9: Measures put in place to mitigate COVID-19 and its effects

Further, our survey indicated that 67% of the organisations who responded opened up informal lines of discussions and communications for colleagues to engage and keep connected.

These communication lines are known to provide a platform for staff to de-stress and decrease the feeling of being 'lonely', much like a coffee break chat at the office would.

## Measures put in place for employees to continue working despite the lock-down.

None of the organisations in our sample shut down operations. They invested in online applications and products that allow them to work remotely. Approximately 88.9% ensured

that staff had essential hardware (laptops and tablets); 55.56% purchased both Wi-Fi routers and data while 44.44% exclusively paid for data.

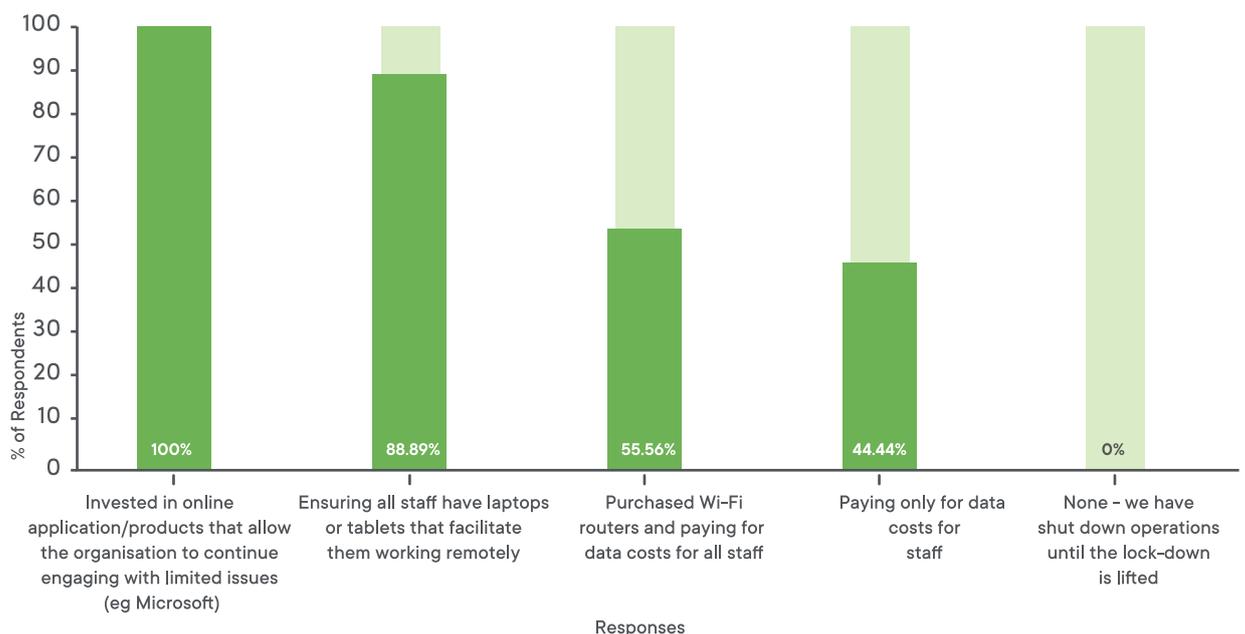


Figure 10: Measures put in place for employees to continue working despite the lock-down

# Strategies adopted by organisations to cope with the crisis.

## Strategies related to Information Technology (IT)

Only 37.50% of the organisations were certain of the existence of a strategy specific to the use of technology while the majority (62.50%) of the respondents noted that 'some elements' of a strategy were in place.

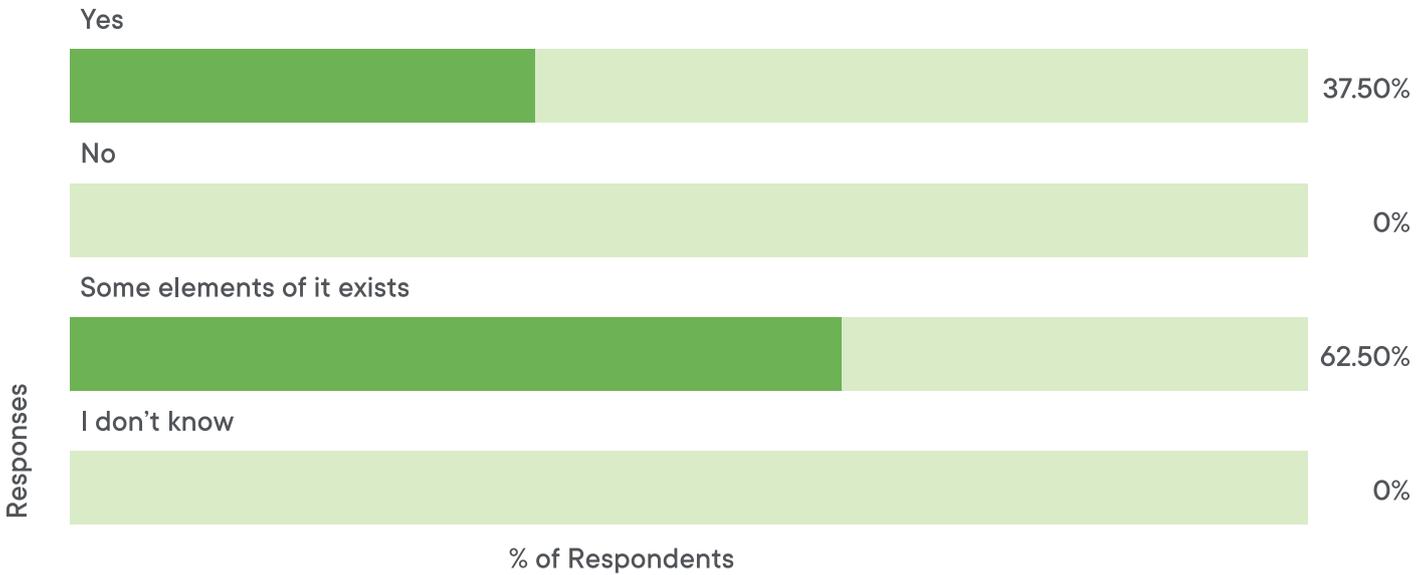


Figure 11: Strategies related to Information Technology (IT)

## Use of Technology in day-to-day operations.

All the responding organisations indicated that they used technology in their day-to-day work, especially during the lockdown. However, as the crisis worsened; they have had to adopt some digital strategies with online conferencing tools being the most widely used (88.89%).

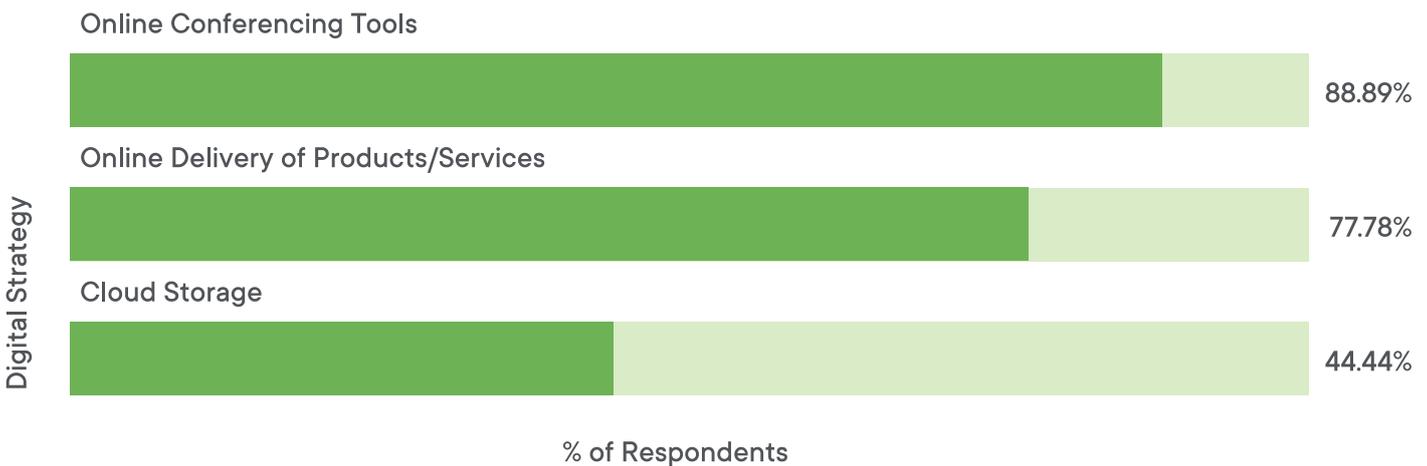


Figure 12: Digital strategies adopted by Organisations

The use of online conferencing tools and applications has inevitably increased as the pandemic forced most organisations to operate remotely. Our survey highlighted Skype, ZOOM and interestingly, WhatsApp as the most used (89%) while only 33% of the organisations were making use

of Microsoft Teams. There are no licence costs for WhatsApp and the entry level packages for Skype and ZOOM are also free. This may explain the popularity of these three (3) over Microsoft Teams.

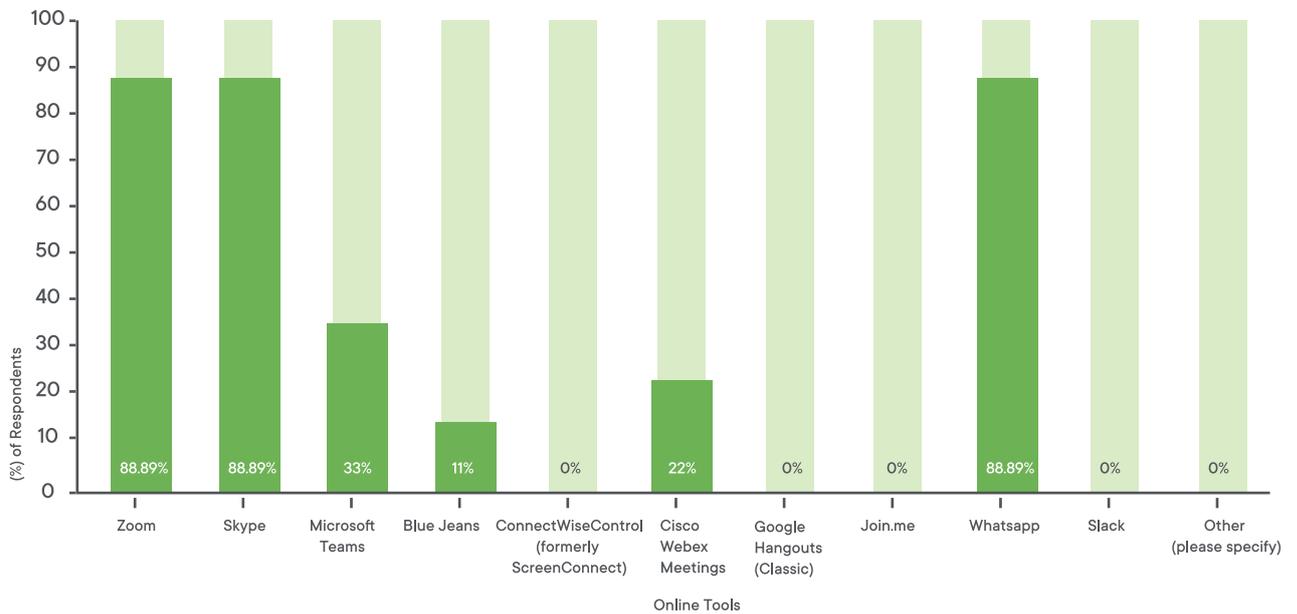


Figure 13: Online conferencing tools

Further, the respondents also indicated that they all used and were dependant on Social media platforms as well as emails to communicate. About 80% of the responding organisations also

made extensive use of data management software and applications. 60% indicated that they had increased their use of collaboration tools such as Chat, Microsoft Teams and WebEx.

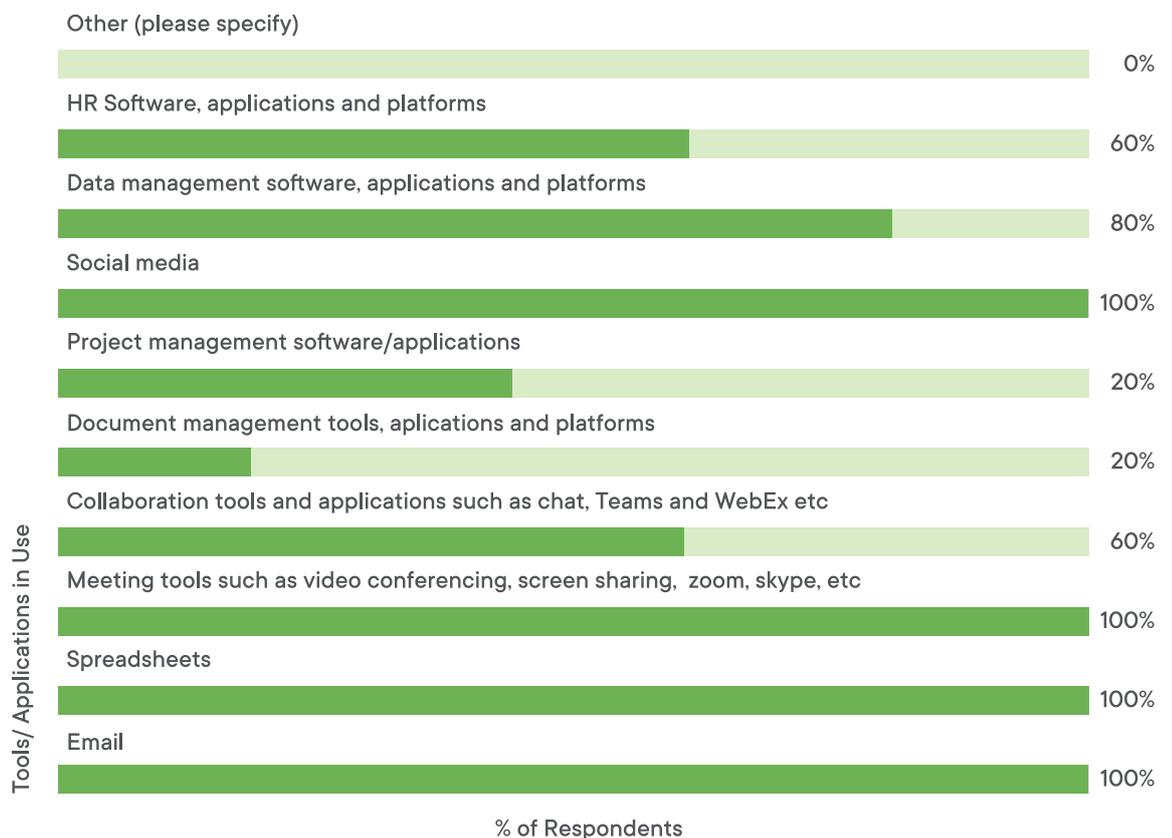


Figure 14: Tools / Applications used

The majority of the responding organisations (62.50%) have a 'dedicated' member of staff responsible for effectively leveraging technology

while the remaining (37.50%) do not have this as a centralized function.

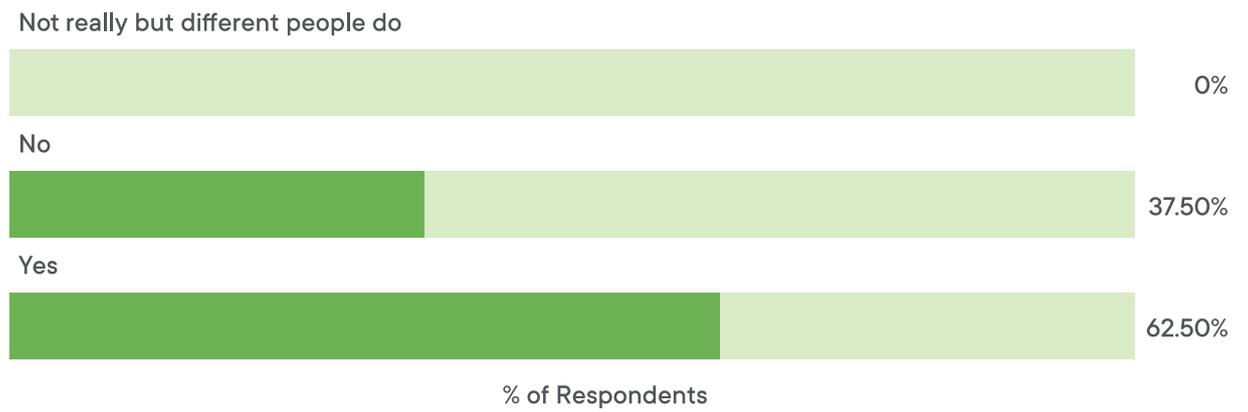


Figure 15: Presence of a dedicated member or team responsible for effective leveraging of technology within the organisation

# Financial support and relations with funding partners

## Support given to organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic

The results of our survey highlight international donors provided support to all the respondents. To complement international funding, we also found that 22% of the respondents were supported by lo-

cal donors and 11% by community organisations. No support was received from the government or financial (bank) institutions.

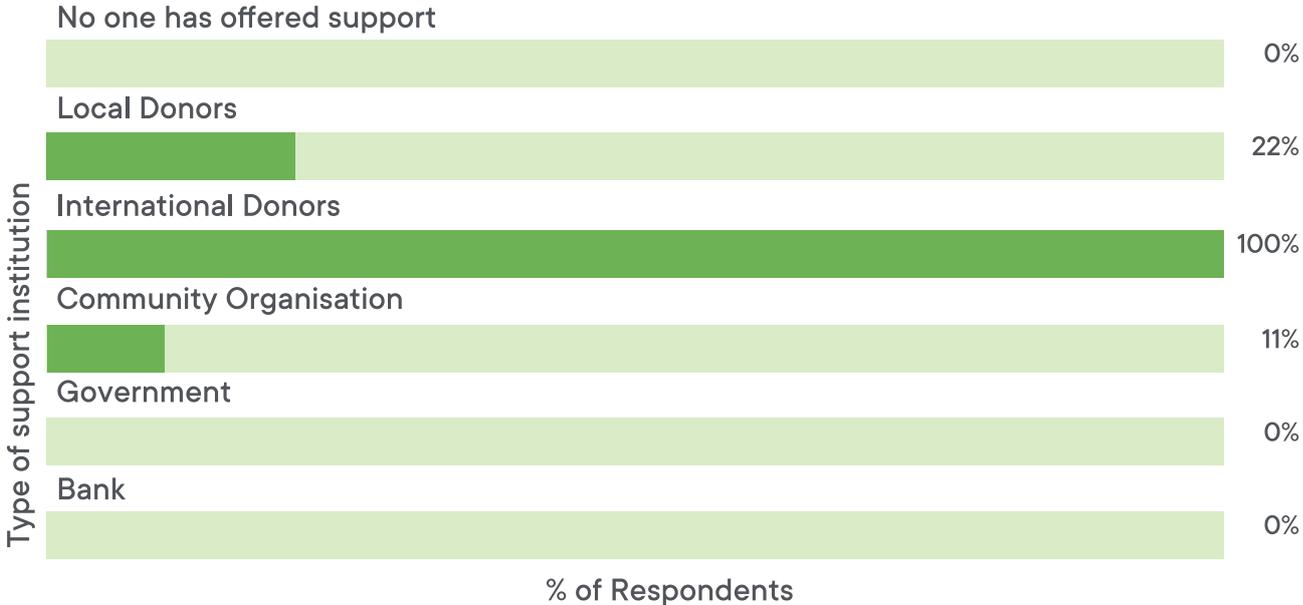


Figure 16: Support to organisation during this time

## Relations with funding partners

About two-thirds (67%) of the respondents have either scaled down on their projects or have actually received new support from donors in the face of COVID-19. The rest of the organisations (56%) have either had to divert their funds from existing projects to be able to fund COVID-19 related initiatives or have had agreements with their fund-

ing partners to temporarily suspend operations or have had no-cost extension agreements with their funding partners. Unfortunately, none of the responding organisations have had their projects or programs scaled up to give provision to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.



Figure 17: Relations with funding partners/investors

# Involvement in initiatives to mitigate COVID-19

## Involvement in initiatives/programs to mitigate COVID-19

When asked if they had initiated programs to raise awareness and mitigate against COVID-19, all responding organisations indicated that they had; they were mainly involved in information dissemination through various platforms to the communities that they serve. Approximately 87.50% were also involved in the provision and

distribution of hand sanitisers and soap while 62.50% went as far as procuring PPE such as face masks, hand gloves, surgical gowns, and caps for health workers. At the time of reporting, none of the organisations indicated that they were providing food parcels to the vulnerable communities.



Figure 18: Efforts towards mitigating against COVID-19 (initiatives developed)

# Source of funding for initiatives developed due to COVID-19

Most of the COVID-19 related initiatives were funded by their existing donors, and of this 50% was sourced from international donors, 25% from internal reserves and some from international and local individuals as well donations received through crowdfunding.



Figure 19: Source of funding for initiatives developed

# Impact and Overall effect of COVID-19 on Think Tanks in Zimbabwe

We asked the respondents on what they think could be the overall impact of COVID-19 on their organisations. The majority (89%) of the respondents were very optimistic, they felt that they would be able to weather the storm. They

expressed that overall, there would be minimum impact with a few setbacks. Only 11% thought that they would perform better considering the research and advocacy opportunities that came up due to COVID-19.

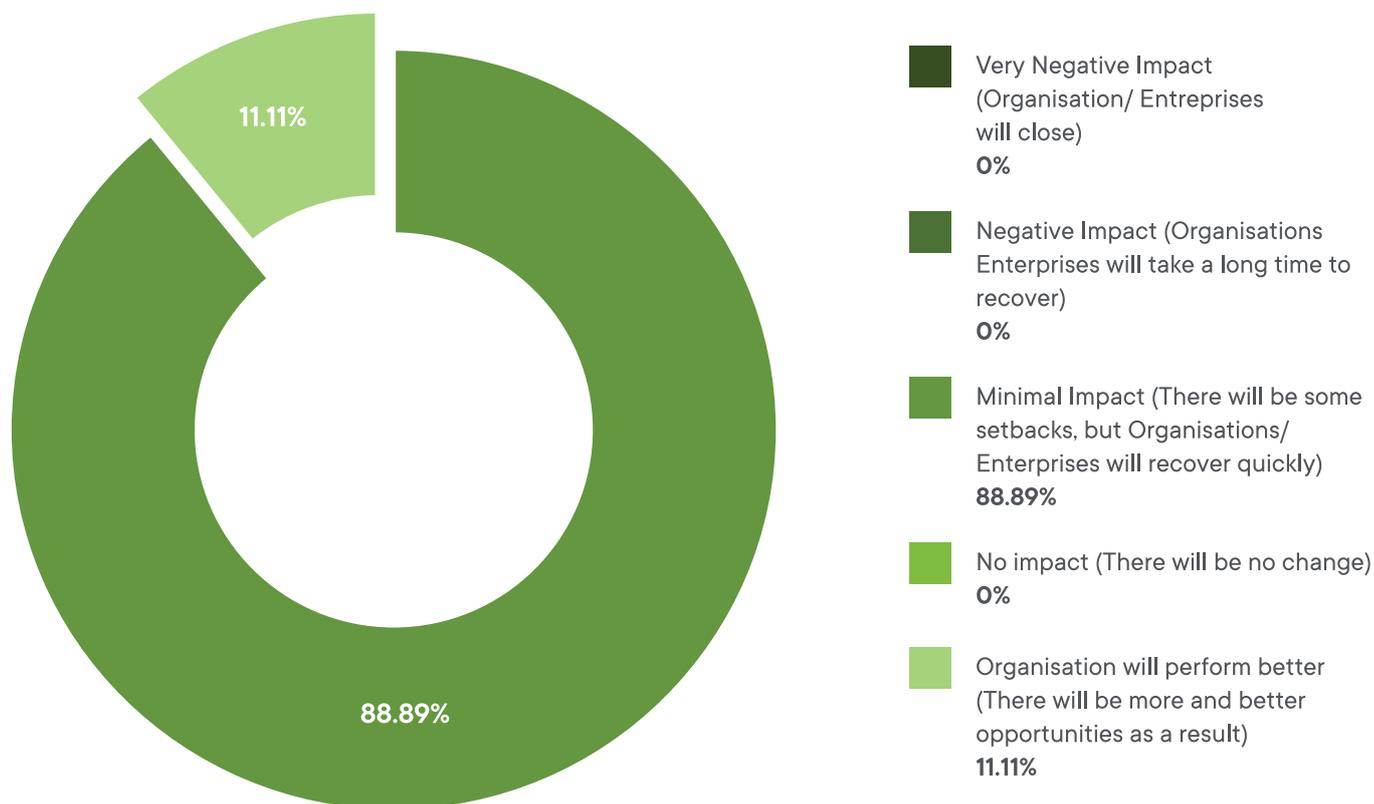


Figure 20: Perceptions on overall impact of COVID-19 within organisation

## Lessons Learnt and Areas of Discussion

Most Think Tanks, globally as well as those who responded to our survey, exhibited a level of ‘agility’ in having to adjust to change in the working/operating environment. They were able to react and adapt in a crisis, especially as far as information technology (IT) and even the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is concerned. They have managed to produce notable work in the form of policy briefs, think pieces, discussion pieces, blogs and even peer reviewed papers that have influenced policies around COVID-19 and its mitigation.

The pandemic has also created opportunities for Think Tanks to re-evaluate their work and roles. Administration costs especially rentals have usually stretched the budgets of Think Tanks. The ‘new normal’ has provided an alternative way of attaining the same results but at a much cheaper cost. This has the potential to allow for re-allocation of resources to, for example, strengthening human capital within the organisation through online trainings to enhance their digital literacy.



However, the ‘new normal’ has also increased the need to expand in the use of technology with costs such as data and even purchase of hardware now required not for one office, but several sites of operation where staff operate from remotely."

On a different note, five (5) out of the 12 responding Think Tanks commented that they had to change their focus and research interest to concentrate on what the funders/donors were currently interested in, COVID-19 research. This suggests that Think Tanks may need to strengthen their donor relations which may allow them to negotiate the terms for the research (swim), face completely drift, focusing on donor interests (go with the tide) or completely shut down operations (sink), due to lack of funding.

None of the organisations under study completely shut down their operations, although some downsized. They also noted that the pandemic had caused minimal impact with setbacks being experienced and that they will quickly recover post pandemic. This suggests that their attitudes remain positive despite facing adversities around operations and funding. While this positive thinking is important; Think Tanks and related organisations are bastions of learning and research, they require flexible financial assistance to be able to stay relevant.

The organisations under study are known for being hubs of expertise and ideas that are rooted in evidence-based research to influence the policy making processes. Their responses are not necessarily representative of broader civil society but provide important insights on how COVID-19 disrupted ways of working. Despite their optimism about the future very few made a significant contribution in terms of developing COVID-19 specific interventions. There was very limited input by AFOs into COVID-19 related policy making. In fact, the media played a more visible role in tracking use of public resources. Some of the work done by the media led to the dismissal of the then Minister of Health and Child Care. As already stated, government’s policy making machine was in overdrive in a context where advocacy entities were trying to reposition themselves and were learning to work virtually. The above suggests the need for improved capacities and ensuring that organisations are nimble and adaptable to new operational challenges.

On the other hand, the impact of COVID-19

on health delivery, socio-economic well-being and the broader economy has made the work of these advocacy focused organisation even more relevant. It has brought to the fore the need for structural reforms around improved health delivery, viable social safety nets and inclusive economies. These are issues that have been on the radar for many but without comprehensive advocacy. Perhaps the new conditions could sway government to pay attention to the issues being raised via advocacy.

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