

How Civil Society Organizations in the Global South are Impacted by COVID-19



April 2020



About this Report

From April 3 to 14, 2020, LINC conducted an independent, self-funded survey of national, regional and local civil society organizations (CSOs) to understand **how the coronavirus pandemic is affecting their staff, their ongoing operations, and the communities they serve**. The survey was conducted in English, French and Spanish, including CSOs from low- and middle-income countries in Asia, Africa, Southeastern Europe and Latin America, and across a range of technical sectors.

Key Findings

- **Every CSO surveyed has been negatively affected by COVID-19**, changing their funding levels, their way of delivering services, and/or their internal operations.
- **Almost 65% of CSOs surveyed reported currently conducting activities to respond directly to the pandemic**, most commonly efforts to slow the spread of the virus, distribute food and supplies to families in need, and provide psychosocial support.

Funding is top of mind:

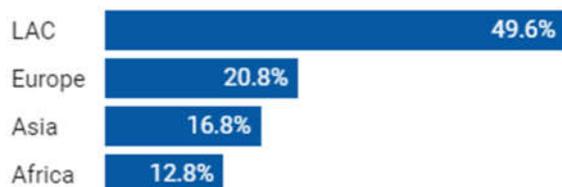
- **Nearly 13% of CSOs surveyed reported that they will have to close operations within the next month** without additional funding or more severe cost cutting measures.
- **Two-thirds of CSOs surveyed have taken at least one cost cutting action**, the most common being to cut services to their communities. Some organizations have enacted creative solutions to prevent closing.
- **Three-quarters of CSOs surveyed feared that there will be less funding available** for their work in the future due to the impact of COVID-19.
- **The most common request for support to maintain operations was financial of some type**, including direct funding as well as flexibility to adapt activities, targets and timelines.

The pandemic is also affecting activities:

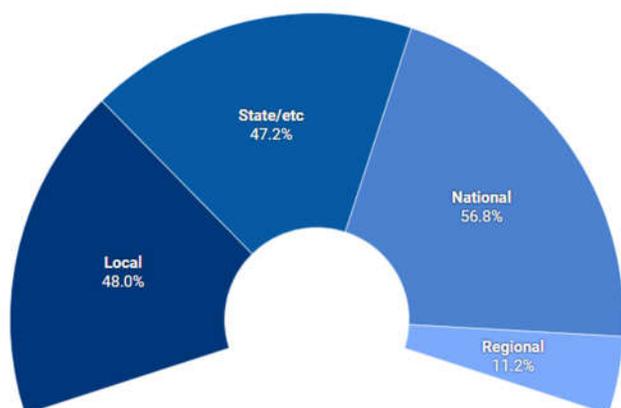
- Just over 80% reported that they were completely or partially working remotely. The remaining **nearly 20% reported being unable to work remotely** either due to a lack of IT infrastructure or a need for direct contact with their communities to provide services.
- CSO respondents emphasized that as important as direct support to combat COVID-19 is, **other development problems have not disappeared with the pandemic**, and will likely be worse after the pandemic.
- CSO respondents expressed significant interest in receiving **training, coaching or materials for managing in crises, establishing reserve funds, and developing business continuity plans**.
- While 95% of CSOs surveyed reported participating in coordination platforms for their work, **over 40% of those said coordination was paused due to COVID-19**.

Landscape of Organizations Surveyed

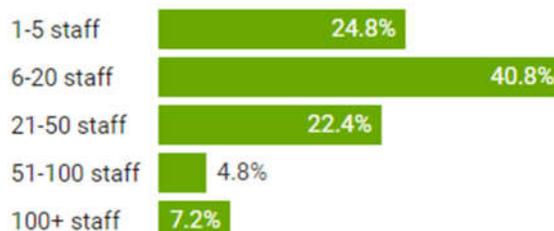
The survey included 125 respondents from 14 low- and middle-income countries across 4 global regions



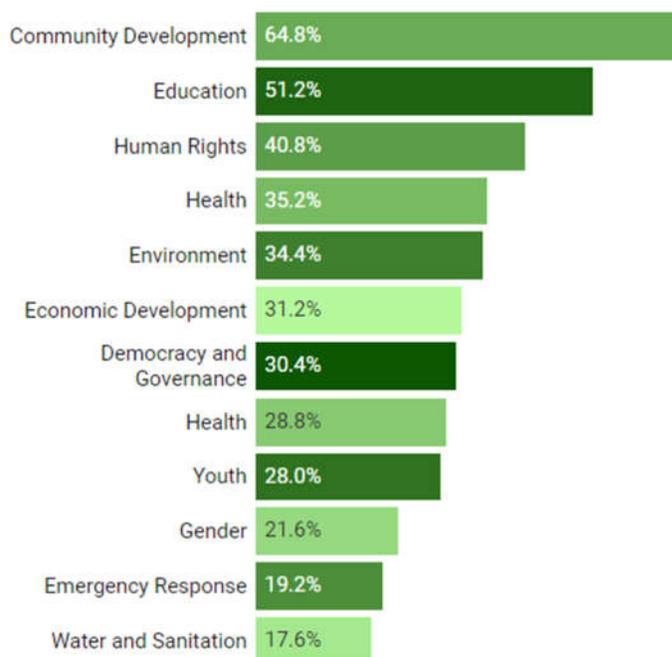
Respondent CSOs work at local, state, national and regional levels, and many work at multiple levels



Most of CSOs surveyed were small (20 or fewer staff) but CSOs of more than 100 staff were also included

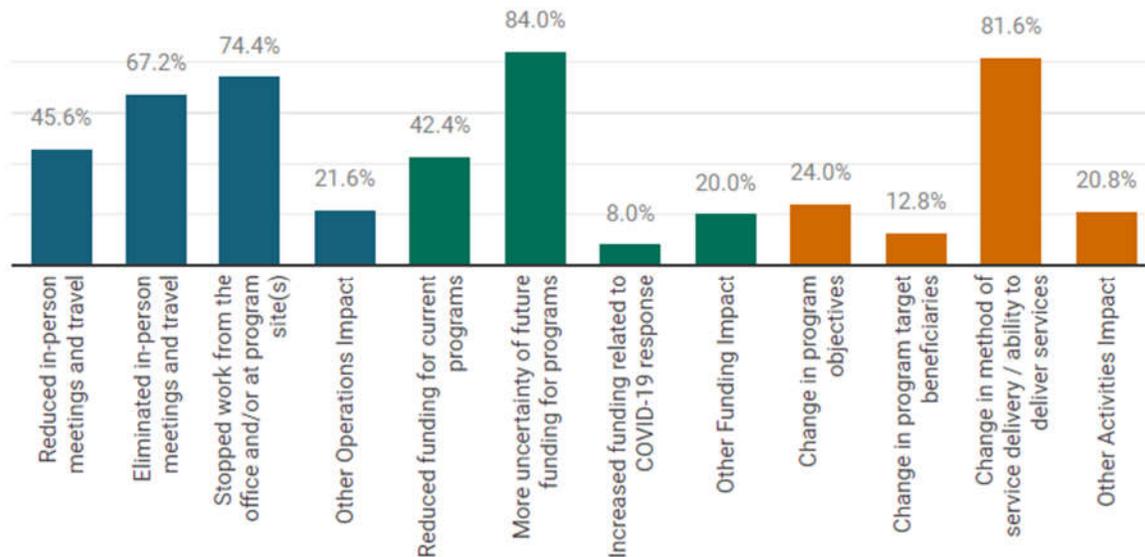


CSOs reported working in 12 technical sectors with some CSOs working across multiple sectors



Effects of COVID-19 on Operations

All CSOs surveyed reported being impacted by COVID-19, either due to a change in their operations, their funding situation, or their activities.

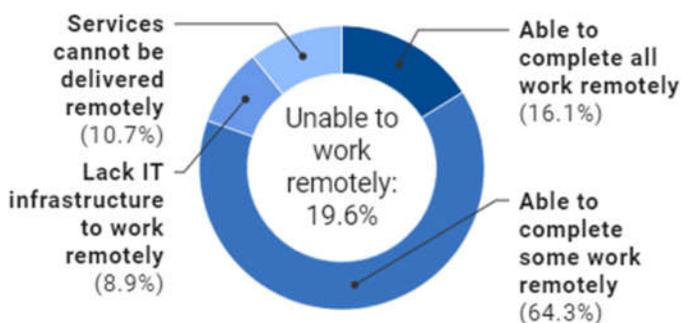


CSOs also noted other specific impacts to operations, funding and activities, including:

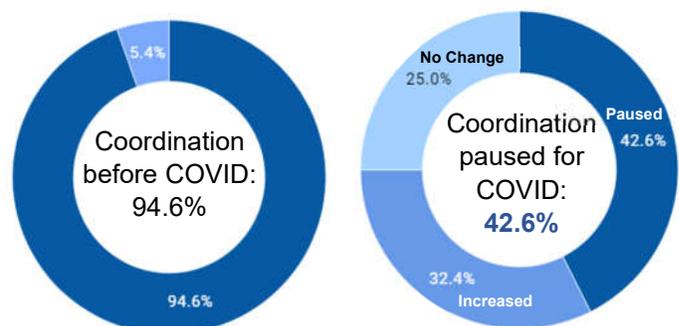
Operations	Funding	Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional trauma and low morale of staff Inability to complete necessary reporting due to government office closures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in funding and canceled donations Lost revenue from shuttered social enterprises Canceled fundraising campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminated volunteer activities Isolation of target populations and families who need support services Canceled programs, training, events Delayed and/or reduced results

Ability to work with their community and their partners

Almost 20% of CSOs surveyed cannot work remotely due to a lack of technology or services that require a presence in their communities

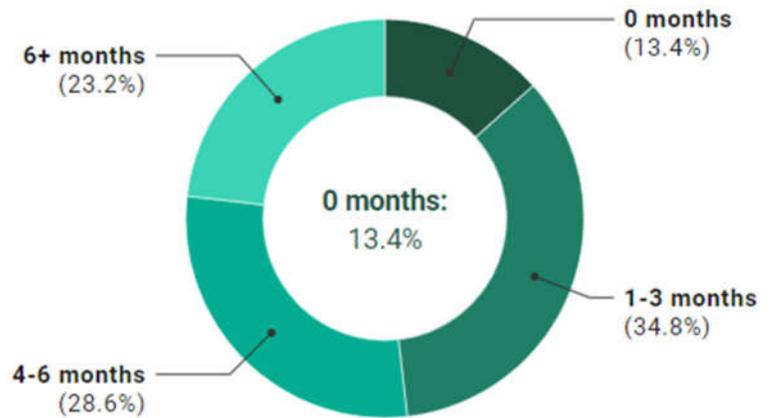


While 95% of CSOs were engaged in a coordination platform or effort before the pandemic, over 40% of those efforts have been paused



Financial resilience and cost-cutting measures

When asked about financial resilience, almost 50% of CSOs reported that they would have to close within 3 months without additional funding. These include well-established CSOs with decades of service to their communities. At the same time, almost 25% reported being able to continue operations for 6 months or more.

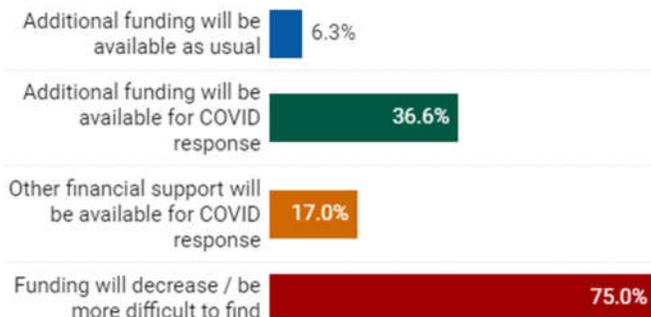


Action	Already Taken	%	Plan to Take	%
Layoffs	10	8.9%	23	20.5%
Close Office	18	16.1%	16	14.3%
Cancel Services	44	39.3%	31	27.7%
Miss Payroll	12	10.7%	30	26.8%
Delay Bills	12	10.7%	40	35.7%

As of the survey dates April 3-14, in order to survive the impact of COVID-19, CSOs have taken or plan to take cost-cutting actions. Note that **32% of CSOs surveyed have not yet taken any cost-cutting actions**, but 42% have taken only one action, and 25% have taken 2 or more actions.

Many CSOs have taken more creative measures to reduce their costs without turning to layoffs or elimination of program services. Those include **voluntary staff salary decreases, an agreed 50% reduction in staff salaries for 1 month, or staff agreed to volunteer for the organization temporarily**. Several organizations have also had to reduce staff benefits or reduce the number of participants in their programs.

CSOs fear that the pandemic will decrease funding available for their programs & services



Almost 25% of CSOs reported having no flexible funding to allow for adapting to the situation



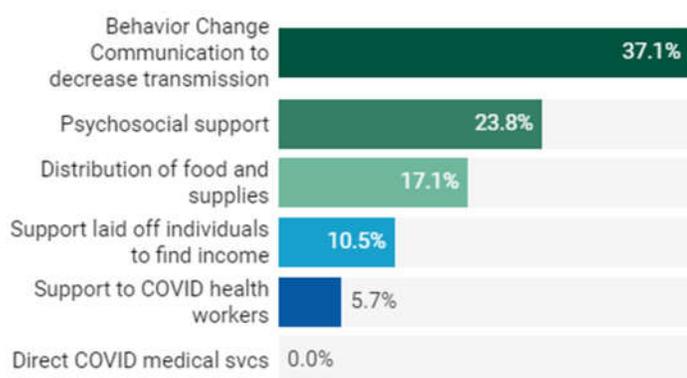
Coronavirus Response

When asked if they are providing services to respond directly to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 65% of CSOs reported they are (19% said their existing services already respond and 46% have added new services)



Direct response activities

Although none of the CSOs surveyed are providing medical treatment to COVID patients, those 65% are providing a variety of services to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

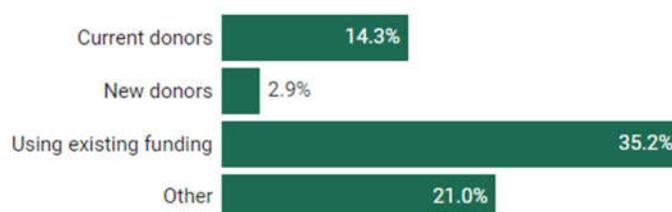


Local and national organizations have quickly begun to respond to the needs of their communities dealing with the impact of COVID-19:

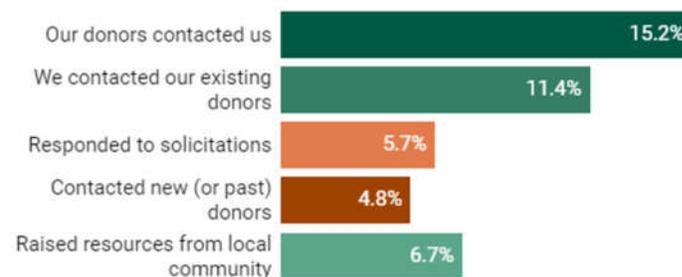
- Created "support funds" in collaboration with other CSOs to:
 - provide PPE to health workers,
 - send unconditional cash to vulnerable families,
 - microcredit for household needs,
 - engage enterprises in creating a local support fund
- Supporting local government to conduct analysis of the COVID impact on municipal finances
- Providing households training on self-sufficiency for water, food, housing, energy and waste management
- Advocacy on behalf of at-risk populations like migrant workers
- Radio programs on safe practices during pandemic
- Providing information to identify accurate (vs. false) information on coronavirus in social media

Funding coronavirus response activities

CSOs providing services to respond to COVID-19 used a variety of sources to fund their efforts.



Over 15% of CSOs providing direct COVID response were contacted by their existing donors to support their work.



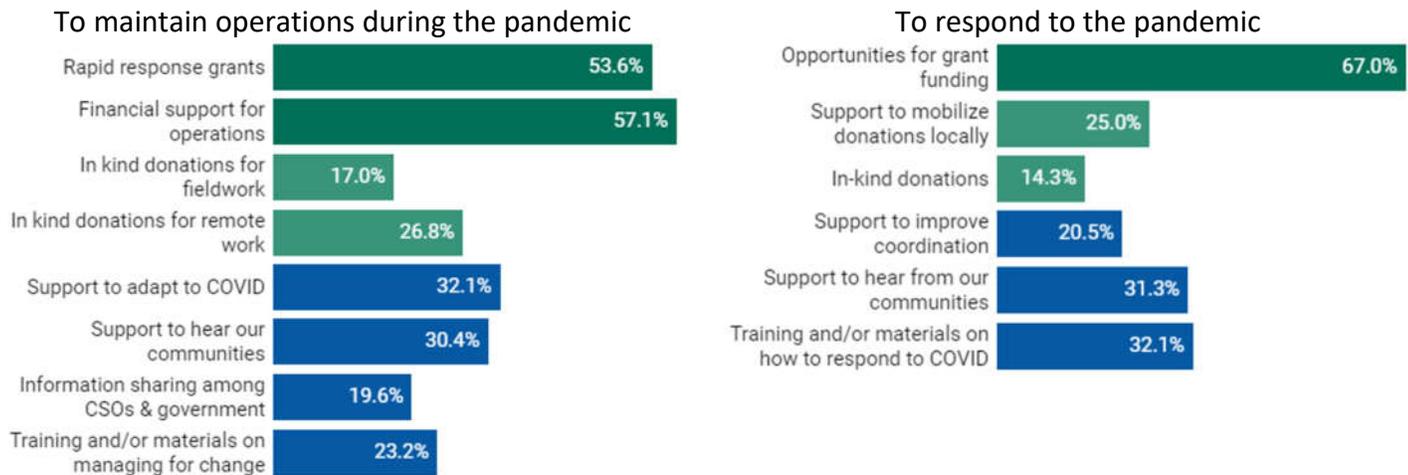
CSOs responding to the needs of their community used creative means to fund their responses:

- Mobilized in-kind donations from the local community
- Used savings from cost cutting measures to provide resources to local families in need
- Formed partnerships with other local CSOs to provide combined services
- Disseminated information on social media to raise awareness of community and CSO needs

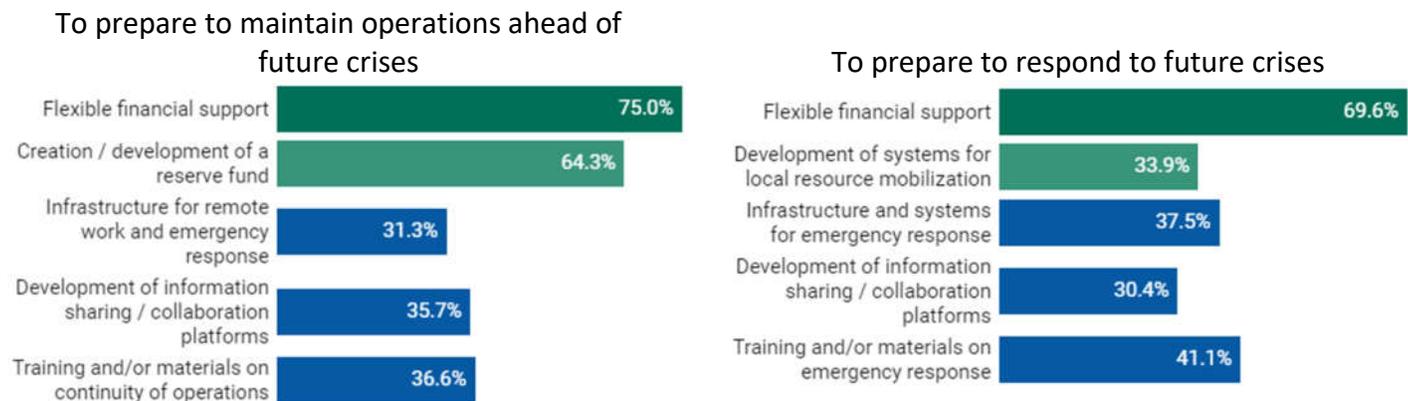
Short- and Long-term Requests from International Stakeholders

We also asked CSOs what type of support they most needed in the short-term to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, and in the long-term to prepare for future crises. Not surprisingly, **responses tended to focus on financial resource** needs, but **training, information sharing platforms, and community input** were also frequently cited needs.

Short-term needs



Long-term needs



CSOs cited some immediate needs to respond to the impact of COVID-19 in local communities:

- School supplies and remote learning support;
- Basic hygiene needs and PPE (soap, hand sanitizer, masks, gloves) for staff working in communities and for community members as well;
- Food and basic supplies for community members in need;
- Medical supplies for local healthcare workers;
- Equipment needed to help community members work from home and continue to earn at least some income during stay-at-home restrictions;
- Support to local government to communicate ways to slow transmission and protect yourself from COVID-19, and to provide testing and treatment as possible.

CSO Concerns

Concerns and suggestions

CSO respondents also shared specific examples of needed support as well as their concerns around donor provision of resources for short- and long-term needs.

- ***Unrestricted / flexible funding and core support increases resilience and speed of response:*** Organizational sustainability grants and core support funding is crucial for CSOs to adapt to rapidly changing situations and to continue operations during crises. Flexible funding that gives CSOs the decision-making power to extend timelines, shift target populations and adapt success metrics is necessary for rapid response to changing local conditions. This is particularly difficult when a regional (or global) crisis makes it difficult for donors to respond to requests in a timely manner.
- ***Local foundations and community reserve funding will prevent closure of valued local CSOs:*** Locally managed foundations and “emergency relief funds” would also go a long way to provide flexibility and rapid response to the types of short-term challenges caused by crises like the coronavirus pandemic. CSOs requested support to establish such funds and the transparent management required for their success. CSOs also suggested working with government offices to provide matching funds as incentives for raising funds and for collaboration across sectors.
- ***Development problems are being de-prioritized during the pandemic:*** CSOs expressed particular concern that international stakeholders are shifting priorities to the immediate needs of the pandemic at the expense of long-term development problems. Respondents emphasized that the complex development problems they work to address are not going away during the pandemic – and they will most likely get even worse due to the pandemic. Additionally, they note that addressing many of the development problems they face will mitigate the impact of future crises. With coronavirus, for example, environmental pollution has been directly linked to more severe impacts of COVID; and improved access to clean water and sanitation facilities decreases the spread of the disease.
- ***Grass roots organizations represent an opportunity for more targeted response in emergencies:*** CSO respondents noted a perception that larger national (and international) organizations tend to attract much more support during regional or global crises. Meanwhile, those organizations rely on the local presence, local context expertise, and local contacts of grass roots organizations. Those organizations are also able to mount a faster and more targeted response to the emergency, while keeping the long-term needs of their community in mind as well.
- ***Information sharing and multi stakeholder collaboration can make responses more efficient:*** Local CSOs see these platforms as mechanisms to avoid duplication of efforts, to amplify impact through collective action, and to learn from the experiences of others – whether in response to a specific global crisis like the coronavirus pandemic, or in making progress in addressing complex development problems. In addition to more local collaboration platforms, this will require participation in regional and international learning communities.

The survey also gave respondents the opportunity to ask questions of international financial and technical support providers. Questions fall into a few clear categories and are summarized here.

CSOs' funding questions and doubts due to COVID-19

Availability of funding

- What funding is currently available for COVID-19 response efforts?
- Is there any “clearinghouse” or database of funding available globally for this effort?
- What funding is currently available to keep valued community-based organizations operational through this crisis?
- What funding is currently available to support critical non-COVID-19 programs and services?
- Are accelerated or rapid processes in place for emergency funding?

Shifting Donor Priorities

- Are donors suspending funding not related to COVID-19 immediate responses?
- Do donors foresee any longer-term changes in funding priorities as a result of COVID-19 or will work generally return to previous priorities?
- Will planned financial support be reduced and redistributed to respond to COVID-19-related priorities?
- What are the strategies of various donors and INGOs for responding to the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on our communities?

CSOs' technical assistance questions in the face of COVID-19

CSO Operations and Management

- What capacities are necessary or important to improve our long-term resilience to disruptions like COVID-19?
- How can we continue to manage our human resources while working from home / remotely?
- What strategies can we employ to reduce costs during periods of difficult financial situations?
- What strategies can we employ to sustain our operations when donations are paused?
- How can we use the challenging impacts of the coronavirus pandemic to create opportunities to improve our organizational management?

Adapting Programs, Services and Activities

- What tools or approaches can be used for conducting advocacy during “shelter-at-home” restrictions?
- What tools or approaches can be used to mobilize community members or other groups while working from home?
- What can CSO field staff do to protect themselves from COVID-19 while working with local community members?
- How can CSOs continue to provide necessary support within their mission while still providing more targeted response to the impacts of COVID-19?

Next Steps

LINC would like to thank the many representatives of local, regional and national CSOs that participated in the survey. We are committed to sharing these results back to CSOs for their use, and to sharing with international donors and NGOs as well so that we, the global development community, can respond more effectively to the needs of CSOs. LINC will provide updates and feedback on our website at www.linclocal.org/covid-19, including answers to CSO questions such as those on this page above, learning materials that can serve CSOs through this and future crises as requested in the short- and long-term requests section above, and additional information to help donors and INGOs better support CSOs. ***If you have any questions about this report or would like to discuss collaboration on further research to support local, regional and national CSOs, please contact us: covid-response@linclocal.org or info@linclocal.org.***



About LINC

LINC works alongside local actors to create sustained change.

LINC is a US-based organization that assists local and international organizations to effectively design projects, increase institutional capacity, forge lasting partnerships, and measure impact. We have developed ground-breaking tools to map organizational networks, measure social capital, and leverage systems-based approaches to development. We understand the unique constraints local organizations face, and offer accessible solutions via training, consulting services, research and advocacy. At LINC, we believe that a practical approach to engaging committed, capable local organizations in leading their own development increases international development effectiveness and sustainability.