

LESSONS IN DISASTER PHILANTHROPY



INTRODUCTION

For most countries, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. With surging cases across the globe, new virus variants emerging unpredictably, and diffuse relief aid failing to cover increasing needs, civil society organizations working to support vulnerable communities are carrying a heavy burden.

With a focus on India, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, and Argentina, this report inspects the lessons of charities in these geographies following successive waves of infections, and their interactions with donors, through the lens of disaster philanthropy. The results of the survey, augmented by interviews and case studies, intend to educate, inform, and influence stakeholders toward a more coordinated approach to aid distribution during times of crisis, one that allows vital nonprofits to focus on their missions and limit the energy they must dedicate to fundraising.

Since the start of the pandemic, CAF America has polled charitable organizations to track their shifting strategies, emerging needs, and donor engagement progress. This report revisits the trends of past surveys to bring a renewed focus on navigating times of crisis. As the world continues to weather COVID-19, there is an acute awareness that other crises lie ahead that require us to rethink how we support the social sector in fulfilling its critical role.

About this Report

In its eighth iteration, this report is the latest in CAF America's series of survey-based reports on the impact of COVID-19 on the international charity and donor sectors. In this latest survey, conducted from August 1 to September 7, CAF America polled 436 charitable organizations in five countries—India, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, and Argentina—to learn how recent surges in coronavirus cases have impacted their work and how they have adapted to the rapid changes brought on by the pandemic.

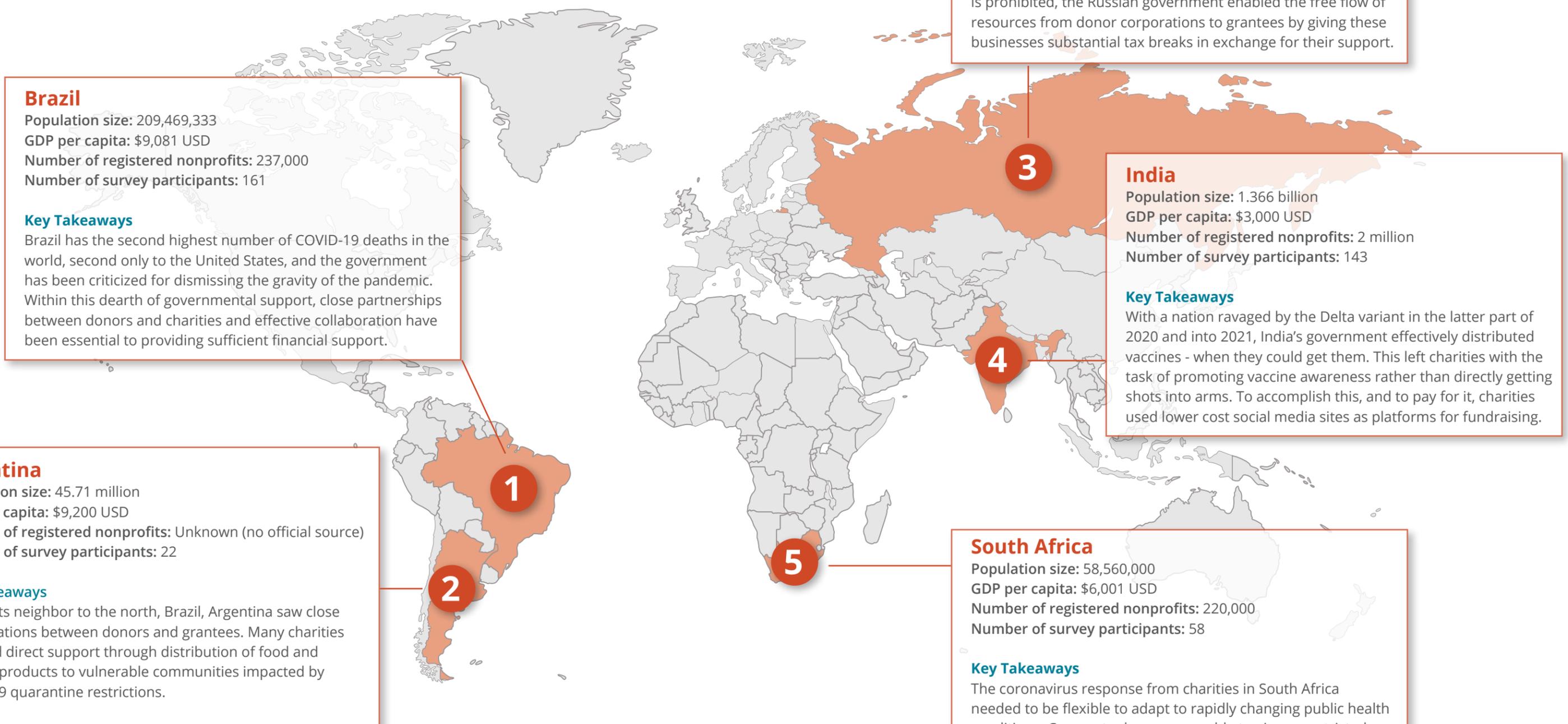
436
Organizations

5
Countries

CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE BY COUNTRY

For this report, we chose to focus on 5 specific countries that met the following criteria:

- At the time the survey was created, the countries had experienced acute increases in COVID-19 cases with widespread negative effects or extensive country-wide lockdowns
- CAF America has a significant presence of grantmaking or partners in these countries
- Charities in those countries were facing very serious challenges that have impacted charities worldwide



Brazil
Population size: 209,469,333
GDP per capita: \$9,081 USD
Number of registered nonprofits: 237,000
Number of survey participants: 161

Key Takeaways
Brazil has the second highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the world, second only to the United States, and the government has been criticized for dismissing the gravity of the pandemic. Within this dearth of governmental support, close partnerships between donors and charities and effective collaboration have been essential to providing sufficient financial support.

Argentina
Population size: 45.71 million
GDP per capita: \$9,200 USD
Number of registered nonprofits: Unknown (no official source)
Number of survey participants: 22

Key Takeaways
As with its neighbor to the north, Brazil, Argentina saw close collaborations between donors and grantees. Many charities provided direct support through distribution of food and hygiene products to vulnerable communities impacted by COVID-19 quarantine restrictions.

Russia
Population size: 143.76 million
GDP per capita: \$11,654 USD
Number of registered nonprofits: 143,000
Number of survey participants: 47

Key Takeaways
The Russian Sputnik V vaccine was the world's first COVID-19 vaccine, and entered distribution in August 2020. Although direct support of vaccination campaigns by civil organizations is prohibited, the Russian government enabled the free flow of resources from donor corporations to grantees by giving these businesses substantial tax breaks in exchange for their support.

India
Population size: 1.366 billion
GDP per capita: \$3,000 USD
Number of registered nonprofits: 2 million
Number of survey participants: 143

Key Takeaways
With a nation ravaged by the Delta variant in the latter part of 2020 and into 2021, India's government effectively distributed vaccines - when they could get them. This left charities with the task of promoting vaccine awareness rather than directly getting shots into arms. To accomplish this, and to pay for it, charities used lower cost social media sites as platforms for fundraising.

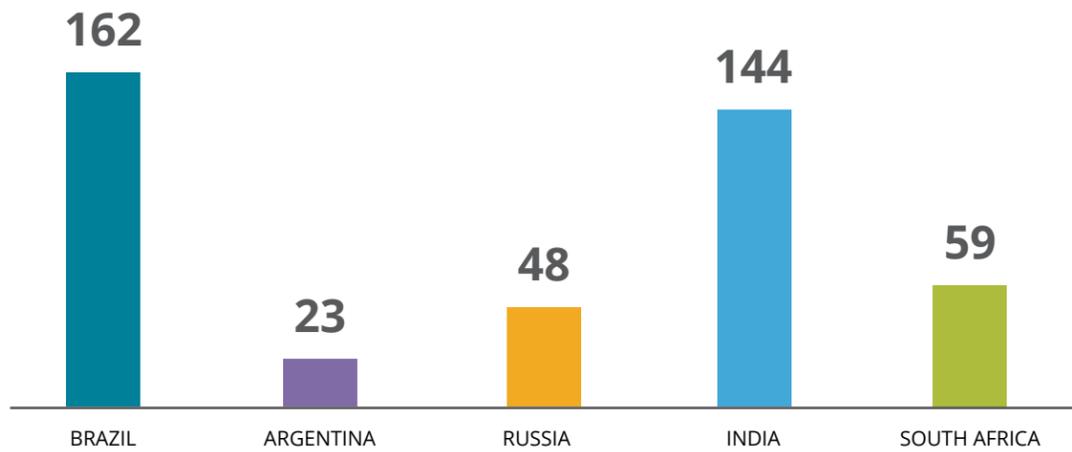
South Africa
Population size: 58,560,000
GDP per capita: \$6,001 USD
Number of registered nonprofits: 220,000
Number of survey participants: 58

Key Takeaways
The coronavirus response from charities in South Africa needed to be flexible to adapt to rapidly changing public health conditions. Corporate donors were able to give unrestricted funds to charities that enabled this flexibility, and these corporations also drew upon an international workforce with workplace donations that the employer matched to fund grants.

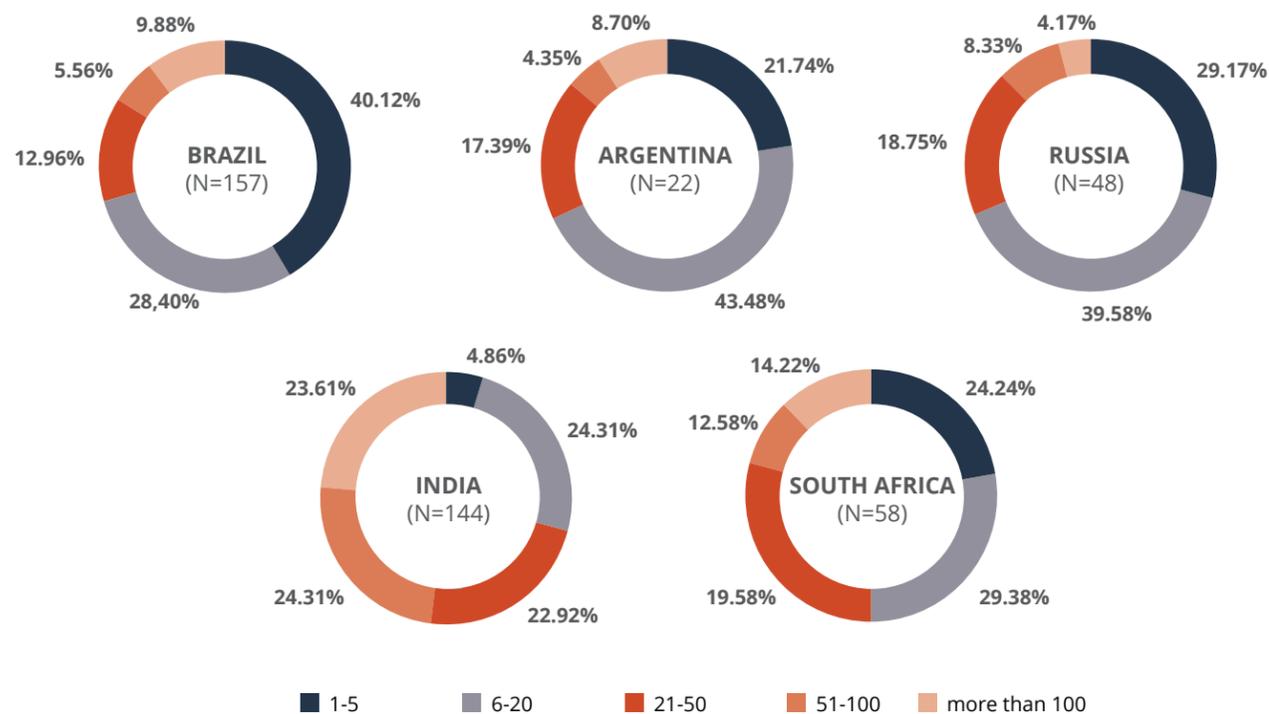
WHAT KIND OF CHARITIES ARE RESPONDING

We selected our five countries because of the COVID-19 situation unfolding in each one. This section shows the breadth of the charities that participated, and how they compare with each other in terms of their location, area of interest, size, and COVID-19 response.

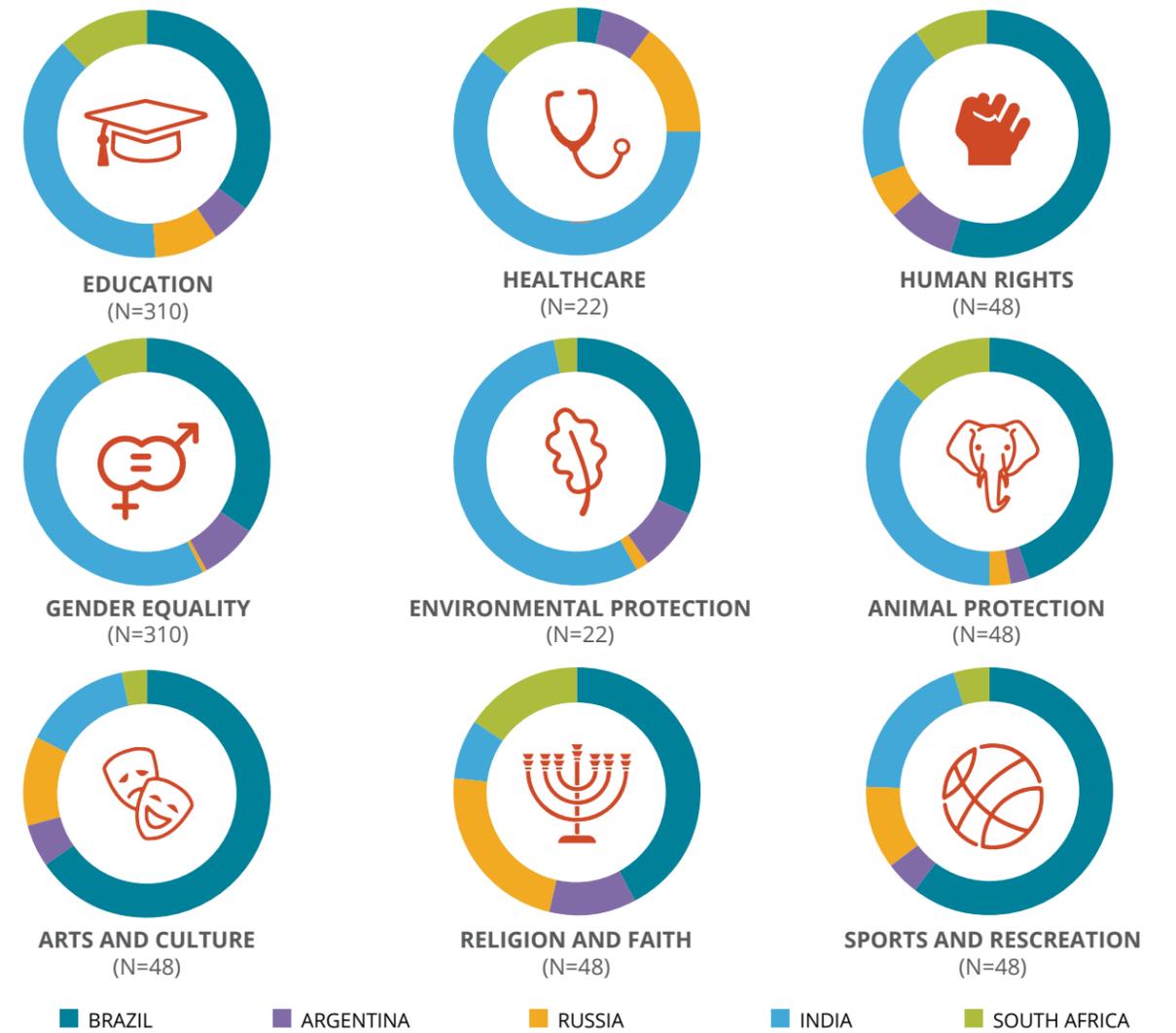
Where did respondents come from?



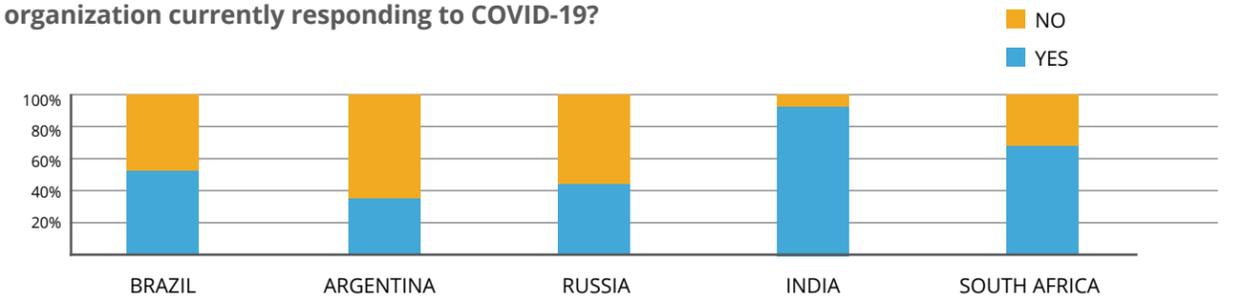
How many employees does your organization have?



Which issue area do respondents work in?



Is your organization currently responding to COVID-19?



WHAT CHARITIES ARE SAYING

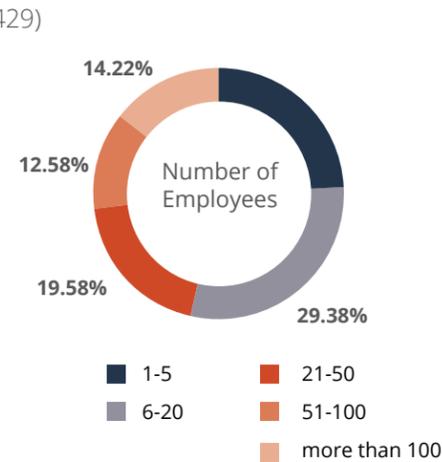
Charities responding to our survey had many things in common, but three strong themes emerged from their submissions: smaller organizations have had a more difficult time; the way charities fundraise has had to fundamentally change; and many organizations have adapted to view disaster and crisis planning as a core part of good charity governance.

SMALLER CHARITIES ARE MORE FRAGILE

Smaller organizations have struggled over the course of the pandemic as employees have faced illness or lockdown restrictions, and fundraising has become much more difficult when charities have limited staff resources. The disconnection from donors as well as communities they are committed to serving have proven an existential problem for small charities.

Across the five surveyed countries, there is an even cross-section of respondent organization sizes, with approximately 25% in each of the three smallest categories, and the remaining 25% representing organizations with 51 or more employees. One and a half years into the pandemic, it is welcome news that across the globe, smaller organizations continue to operate in large numbers alongside the larger and more established charities with larger fundraising bases.

How many employees does your organization have? (N=429)

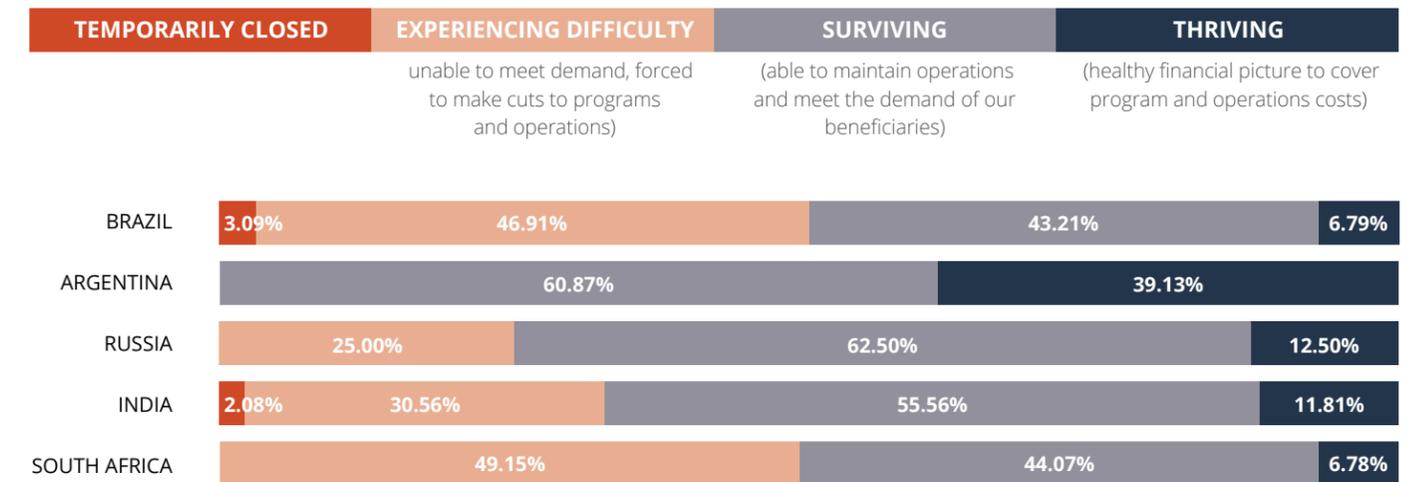


Donate to smaller and medium-sized NPOs. They are on the ground responding very pragmatically to disasters and often are underfunded...In fact, small NPOs must compete for funds [from] the large Fund[ers]."

- South Africa

We asked about four distinct levels of well-being: thriving, in which an organization is doing better than average and likely growing in its capacity to serve; surviving, in which an organization is able to sustain operations but unable to do much more; struggling, in which the organization is vulnerable to failure and managing to stay afloat with considerable effort; and closed.

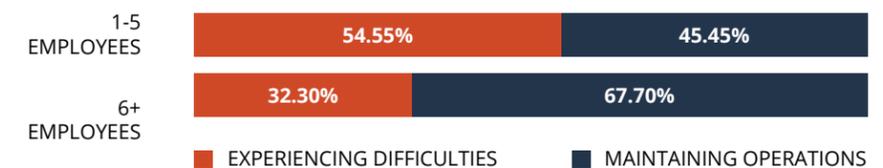
How is your organization performing overall? (N=436)



We found that organizations with five and fewer employees are 56.5% more likely to say that they are “struggling” as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as opposed to all other larger organizations surveyed.

Larger organizations, on the other hand, seem to be much more able to weather the storm. For organizations with more than 21 employees, 7 in 10 respondents reported that they were getting by (compared with only 36% of organizations with 5 or fewer employees), and 12% reported to be thriving (compared with only 6% of organizations with 5 or fewer employees).

Does the size of the organization impact their survival



TAKEAWAY: Large organizations (with 21+ employees) are roughly twice as likely to report that they are surviving or thriving than small organizations (1-5 employees).

It is important to note that all but five of the organizations polled are still operational, indicating that the survey pool represents organizations that have largely fared well through the pandemic. As the pandemic has carried on, we’ve seen this consolidation of the stronger organizations in our respondent pool as a trend carried forward from past surveys.

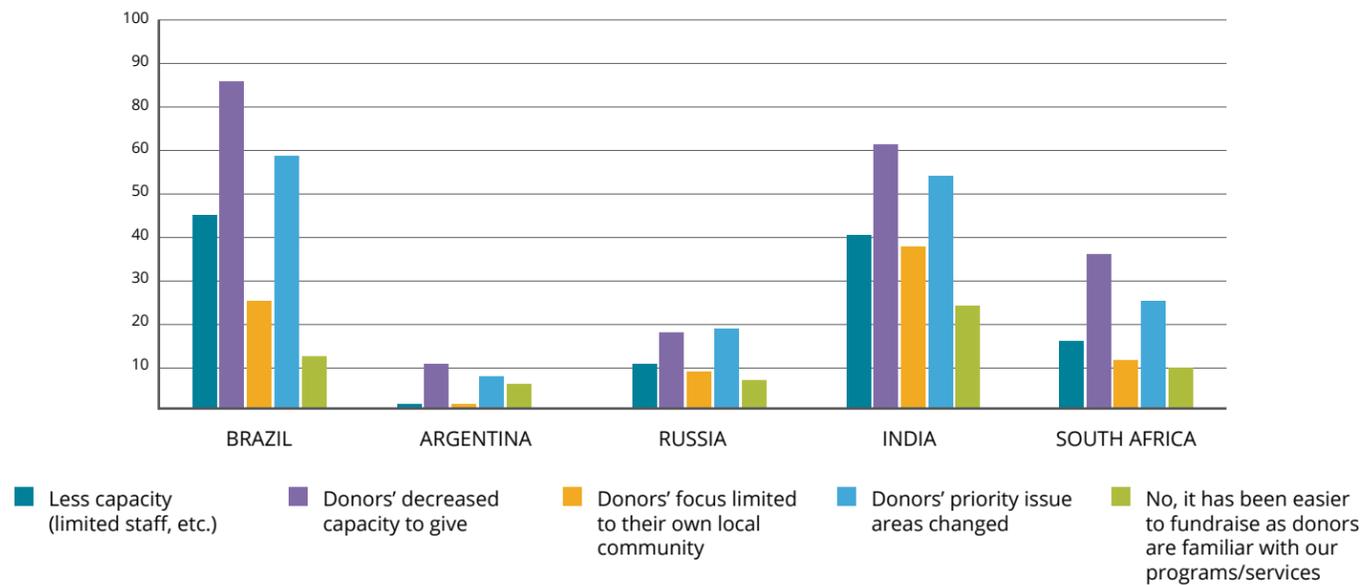
FUNDRAISING HAS CHANGED

All sizes of charities we surveyed, large or small, have seen a reduction in donations during COVID-19. This reduction has applied to both individual and corporate donations, both of which were impacted by a severe worldwide economic downturn that many nations are still grappling with.

Charities have had to adapt quickly to constantly shifting demands and donor interests promulgated by the pandemic. Normal fundraising channels such as special events and annual campaigns have been closed off due to social distancing regulations. Charities that were nimble enough to shift all or most of their fundraising to online portals at their websites have fared better.

As the crisis wears on, however, funding for charities is in decline. Among the explanations, according to survey respondents, is donors' decreased capacity to give. As the economy suffers, both individuals and businesses are unable to give at the same rate. It is also noteworthy that 41% of respondents find that donors' priority areas have changed, as many have shifted their focus to immediate needs over causes that required longer-term, sustained funding. This is an important lesson during times of crisis, as this shift in donor interest means that organizations that support basic needs in civil society that are not focused on the disaster itself are more likely to suffer when funding is diverted toward crisis relief activities.

Compared to the first year of the pandemic (March 2020–March 2021), what changes have you experienced in your fundraising during the recent COVID-19 surge (April 2021–present)?



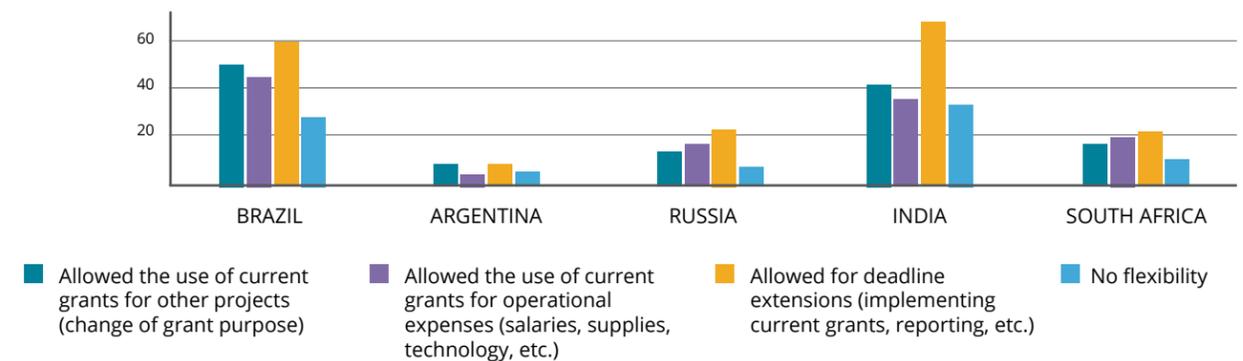
Respondents that claimed to have had more effective fundraising during the pandemic have seen a larger percentage of their fundraising come from individual donors rather than corporate or institutional support.

According to the [2021 Bank of America Study of Philanthropy: Charitable Giving by Affluent Households](#), wealthy donors were also more likely to make “unrestricted” gifts in 2020, the study found, meaning that donors told charities to decide for themselves how best to use their contributions, rather than requiring that a donor’s money only be used for certain purposes of the donor’s choosing.

This style of charitable giving became more popular in 2020, with high-profile philanthropists such as MacKenzie Scott, the former wife of Jeff Bezos, handing out billions in unrestricted gifts to nonprofits across the country.

“During the pandemic, unrestricted giving by affluent Americans supported continuing operations at many nonprofits, enabling them to continue serving their communities, and was a significant aspect of giving behavior during the pandemic,” said Una Osili, professor of economics and philanthropic studies at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

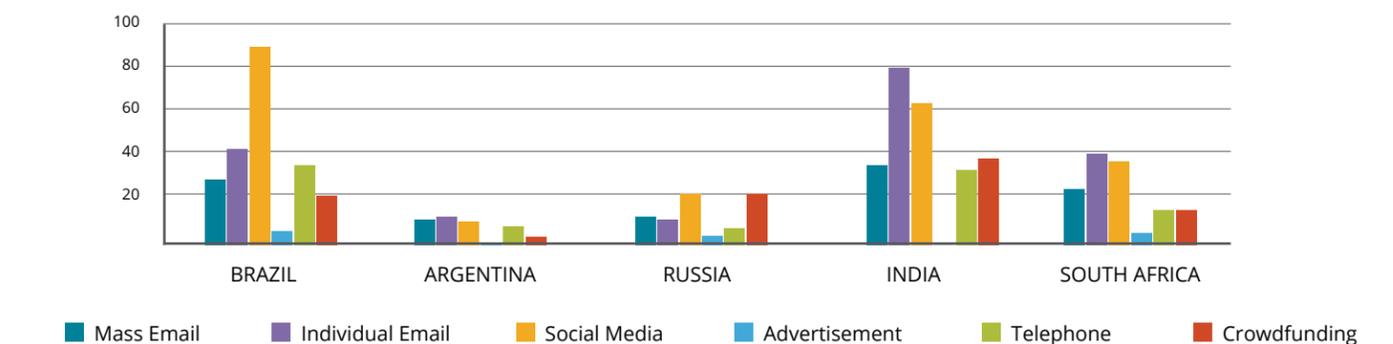
During the first year of the pandemic (March 2020–March 2021), many organizations experienced increased flexibility from their donors. Have your donors shown flexibility to help during the most recent COVID-19 surge (April 2021–present)?



The approach to large numbers of individual donors engendered by website fundraising portals has also been a factor. These portals allow charities to scale up their fundraising appeals, and even small donations from many thousands of respondents can make a big difference.

Reflecting the trend towards donations from individuals, many charities have used low-cost social media sites for their advertising, public relations and fundraising needs, rather than boutique PR firms or contracted grantwriters. In CAF America’s 2021 report [The Face of Charities During COVID-19](#), 49.4% of survey respondents reported that they created new digital donation opportunities for donors.

What were your communication channels?



Fundraising itself also demands human and financial resources that many charities have lacked during the course of the pandemic. Those charities that have shifted reliance on staff to less labor-intensive technological methods have fared better. But whether human or technological resources have been called upon, the old maxim that to make money, one must spend money has held true during COVID-19. In *The Face of Charities* report, 19.57% of respondents reported that they dedicated more internal resources to fundraising, 27.45% of respondents said they engaged board members in fundraising, and 34.61% of respondents shared that they were focusing on new donor segments in the face of the crisis.

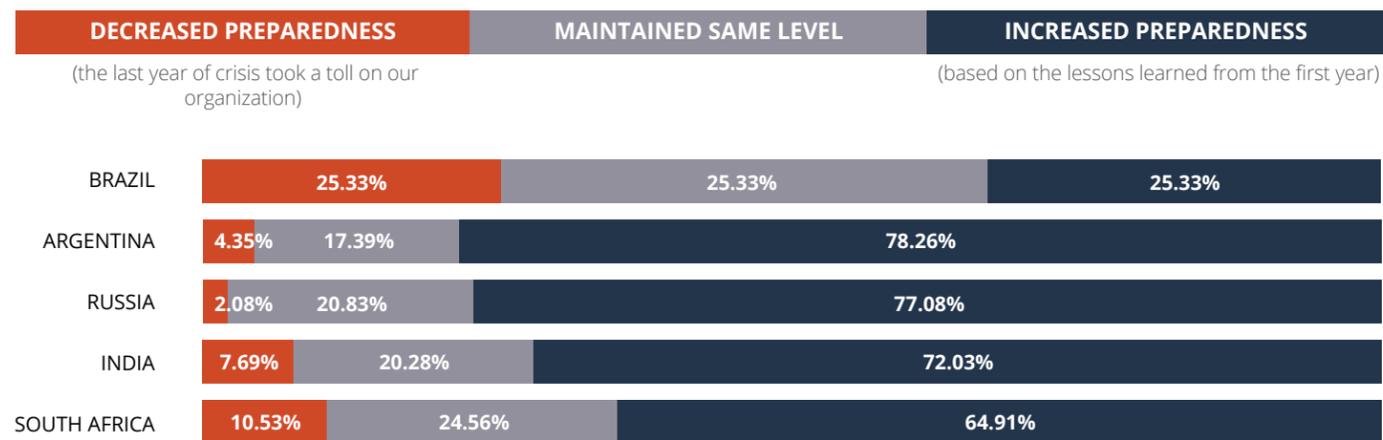
CHARITIES ARE ADAPTING

Charities have learned the importance of planning for disasters

Across all 5 countries surveyed, charities highlighted the importance of planning for disasters, creating contingency plans for disruptions to donation streams, and understanding how they can continue to serve their constituencies when disaster strikes.

Over 50% of survey respondents shared that in comparison with the first year of the pandemic (March 2020–March 2021), their preparedness to respond to disaster or crisis has increased based on the lessons that they learned. As CAF America’s COVID-19 report series has demonstrated, the charitable sector has experienced significant challenges, but their flexibility and adaptability has uplifted the sector and has resulted in organizations that are more prepared to continue their business during future times of crisis.

How has your organisation’s preparedness to respond evolved? (N=421)



In CAF America’s January survey, reported in *FUTURE-PROOFING NONPROFITS FOR THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD, The Voice of Charities Facing COVID-19 Volume 6*, respondents shared their most-needed resources for building resilience:

Which of the following areas of support or advice would help you to improve? (N=770)

- 1 Building and sustaining financial reserves **63.38%**
- 2 Strategic planning **52.73%**
- 3 Contingency planning **44.55%**
- 4 Developing a risk management framework **43.25%**
- 5 Budgeting and financial reporting to donors **33.77%**
- 6 Assessing the effect of your country’s government policy and regulatory changes that are or are likely to affect the financial security of your organization **33.90%**

An organization located in South Africa, shared that:

The biggest learning has been to ensure that we prioritise planning for our readiness to respond to disaster and crisis relief...[W]e have had to change from reactive response to proactive readiness as the time to deploy relief is critical, especially medical supplies as these [have] lif[e] or death implications.”

The ability of an organization to continue operations when a crisis hits is a measure of its resilience. Many survey respondents touched on the theme of resilience, both from an organizational and a financial perspective. An organization responding from Argentina, shared its multi-pronged recommendations for weathering future crises:

Have a reserve fund to face moments of crisis. Maintain close and fluent communication with teachers and directors of rural schools. Strengthen relations with the public sector.”

The need for this type of planning is evident: in May, a CAF America report found that almost half (46.49%) of the 570 charities responding did not have a risk mitigation strategy in place. 52.73% of charities in that survey indicated that support or advice for strategic planning would help them improve.

CAF International and CAF Resilience

Within CAF America’s global network, the CAF Resilience Fund stands as an excellent example of how we are building capacity in the charity sector. While this 5-year project originally started as an experiment to assist small charities in the UK, the COVID-19 pandemic offered the 10 participating charities a real-life test of the lessons they were learning through the program. Through its 5-year journey, CAF Resilience identified six core “characteristics of resilience” that were evident in the charities that were the most successful:

- A clearly articulated and widely understood charity mission and purpose
- Effective leadership from both the board and senior staff
- Awareness of the external environment in which they operate
- Networks and partnerships that support the charity’s mission and purpose
- Finances and operations that are fit for purpose
- An ability to capture and communicate their theory of change and charity impact.

Through the program, the charities participating observed the following benefits of their increased resilience:

- Being better placed to analyse options and make well-informed decisions
- Feeling optimistic and in control of their charity’s future
- Culturally more cohesive and motivated as a whole staff team
- Confident in how they want funders to work with them as a partner

¹ **Original response:** “Poseer un fondo de reserva para hacer frente a momentos de crisis. Mantener una comunicación cercana y fluida con docente y directivos de las escuelas rurales. Fortalecer las relaciones con el sector público.”

ROADMAP TO RESILIENCE

The ability for nonprofits to respond quickly and with adequate resources is essential in any disaster, but particularly with the COVID-19 pandemic and its ever-shifting demands on public health infrastructure.

As we discussed in our Volume 6 report, a roadmap to resilience is important for charities to lay out and follow. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a crucible that many charities have not survived, and for the ones that did, the global pandemic provided an unintended and quick learning curve. Let's review the elements of resilience and the strategies charities are using to prepare themselves for future challenges.

Building Resilience

Over the course of CAF America's research on the impact of the pandemic, we have observed six thematic areas to a charity's ability to survive such a significant disruption to their operations, finances, and staff. These areas are technology, communications, finance, fundraising, DEI, and leadership.

Technology

There is a direct link between organizational resilience and the ability to adapt to online operations that will remain the case post-pandemic. Key areas of development included fundraising through digital technology, identifying digital tools to better connect with stakeholders, formulating digital strategies, and enhancing online programs and service offerings.

Communication

Strengthened communication was critical for fundraising and storytelling to appeal for greater support, for compelling impact reporting, communications with non-digital and other stakeholders, and video presentation to enhance outreach. The trend towards more cost-effective communication on social media channels and through online newsletters and reports is likely to continue post-pandemic.

Finance

Areas critical to charities' long-term success include building and sustaining financial reserves, strategic planning, contingency planning, and developing a risk management framework.

Leadership

While the majority of charities expressed confidence in leadership, there is still a need for improved skills and planning. Nearly 60% of charities surveyed indicated an interest in building their change management skills during and beyond the crisis. Other identified skills to improve include strategic planning, building crisis-resilient teams, organizational mental health and wellbeing, and effective internal communication and staff engagement.

Fundraising

The pandemic has brought into focus the fundraising challenges faced by smaller charities that have their entire staff dedicated to serving the increased needs of their beneficiaries. Of the organizations unable to dedicate resources to developing and implementing new fundraising initiatives, 65% had 20 employees or fewer.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

To build resilience, charities understand the need to embed DEI into larger discussions on global philanthropy and their long-term strategies. Social progress relies on the continuous pursuit of DEI to produce more effective organizational and programmatic outcomes.



LESSONS FOR DISASTER PHILANTHROPY

Funding for Resilience (NEW)

When asked about the main lesson learned from their experiences during the pandemic, a recurrent theme in the responses of charities is that they see a pressing need for funding and planning to weather unexpected crisis events. This need for resilience is a topic already approached by a report from our partner office in the United Kingdom. This study examines the effectiveness of resilience building strategies and support, and shows the effects of these actions on charity operations.

One key element uncovered in this publication is the idea of ‘resilience funding’. In the words of the report:



Resilience funding is ‘all inclusive’. It is used to free up a charity’s time, energy and attention so that the charity can give appropriate focus to building its strength and flexibility... It is about enabling the creation of space and time for the charity to reflect and achieve change, alongside facilitating support through the skills and networks required to develop resilience.”

Unrestricted grants for the purpose of building infrastructure and capacity play a crucial role in enabling charities to both survive and provide meaningful community support during disaster events. Creating this in advance often allows for much greater immediate response to crisis than a last moment grant once a calamity has already taken place.

Unfortunately, this is not available to a large proportion of charities. Only 54.6% of charities surveyed in Volume 6 said they had any reserves at all.

So what does this mean for donors? Knowing that more resilient grantees are better prepared to help their communities ‘weather the storm,’ both literally and metaphorically, funders will need to consider factoring this into their strategy for disaster philanthropy.

There are two dynamics of this strategy that may be challenging.

First, that many grantees will need support for programs beyond just disaster response. Resilience takes on many forms, and though funding may be part of a broader disaster and crisis response strategy, these organizations will likely need more support than just the funds needed to maintain crisis deliverables in the short term.

Second, that funding won’t necessarily have an immediate, visible impact. Traditionally, impact measurement for disaster response work is based on the number of people served, age groups, and similar metrics. Resilience funding has no direct measurable impact, instead building capacity for more effective use of disaster funding in the long term. Your impact measurement and reporting approach may need to adjust to reflect the changes to your strategy.

CASE STUDY

RESILIENCE GRANTMAKING IN ACTION

Harnessing Employee Engagement for a Lasting Impact

Donor:
F5 Foundation

Grantee:
Molo Mhlaba Schools

Grant Amount:
\$55,000.00

In mid-2021, South Africa experienced a surge in COVID-19 cases just when the country was gripped by widespread protests over former President Jacob Zuma’s arrest. In a country with a long history grappling with racial inequality and wealth disparities, impoverished communities were pushed to extreme levels of vulnerability over a year into the pandemic.

It was in this context that the F5 Foundation, through one of the global technology company’s local employees, identified and engaged with the nonprofit Molo Mhlaba Schools. Recognizing their needs were changing by the day, the Foundation was interested in committing to a multi-year grant of unrestricted funds, which has since been dedicated to education programming—including STEM education—and more immediate COVID-19 response needs.

Through the pandemic, the continuous interruptions to teacher-learner contact time and a looming uncertainty of more lockdowns has added to the burden on teachers, now tasked with planning for in-class work as well as the possibility of work that can be taken home. Molo Mhlaba Schools Director Rethabile Sonibare was immensely appreciative, expressing that, “F5’s proactive support and offering us an



Photo: <https://molomhlaba.org>

unrestricted grant when we most needed it ensured that we could rapidly respond to the humanitarian crisis our communities were facing while also keeping programmes and staff paid. This responsiveness and short turnaround of the grant meant we could offer continued food relief, PPE, and prepare our school to operate under the new COVID-19 protocols that South Africa adopted.”

The multi-year grant from F5 provides Molo Mhlaba Schools with the stability to offer job security for some of its staff, ensure continuity of classes and after school clubs, and sustain the provision of much-needed nutrition to local students. “We were really pleased to have our programme funding secured for a period of two years. It really takes the pressure off in terms of planning for learner enrollment, programme planning, and building in the M&E systems that are needed to ensure the success of programmes.”

F5 Foundation provided funding for COVID-19 relief and STEM Education with additional support from workplace giving campaigns. Additionally, F5 has contributed paid volunteer time to encourage local employee support.

F5 harnessed its global workforce to identify, get to know, and ultimately fund a cause through its foundation that not only addresses a critical need for a vulnerable community but also aligns with the priorities of the business.

RESILIENCE GRANTMAKING IN ACTION

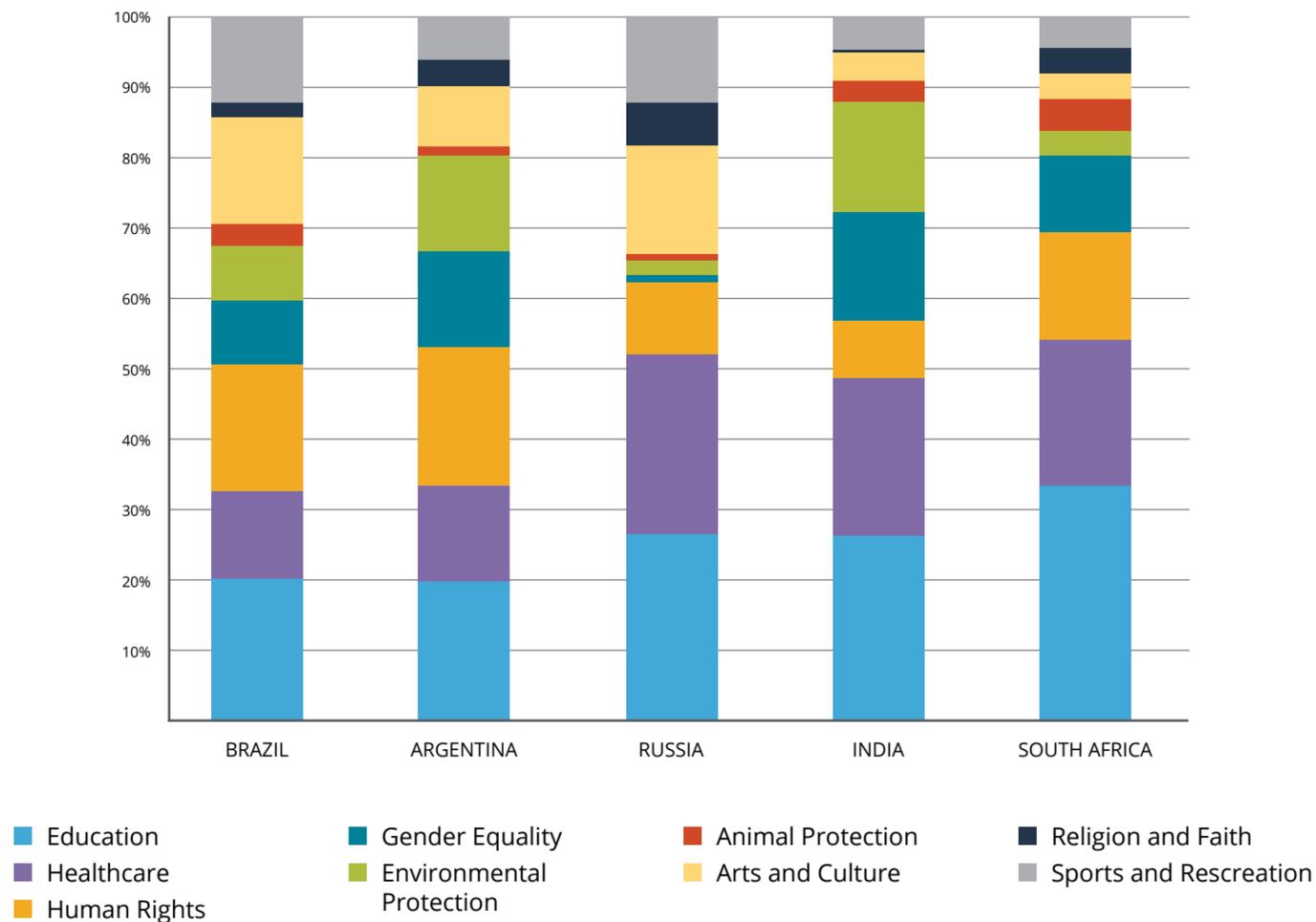
Disaster Philanthropy: A holistic approach

At its best, disaster philanthropy not only addresses the crisis caused by a pandemic or natural disaster, but it also fosters resilience in communities as whole institutions and not only in the charities that serve them. The holistic needs of vulnerable communities must also be met in order to build resilience and independence in the face of future disasters that are inevitable. Thick skin is better than many bandages placed after each successive crisis.

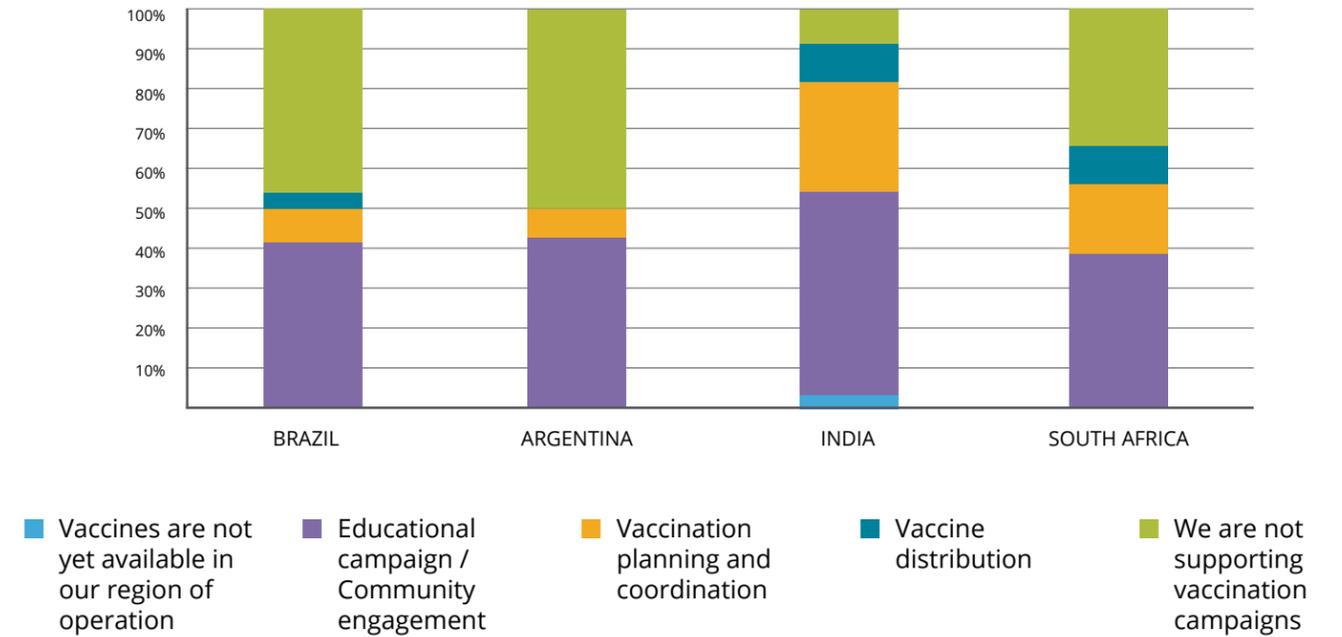
In this light, donors should view the funding of charities as an upfront investment that allows these organizations to thrive, to meet their charitable goals, and to address both community and global needs, rather than a series of expenses incurred after a never-ending string of existential crises.

Additional Survey Responses

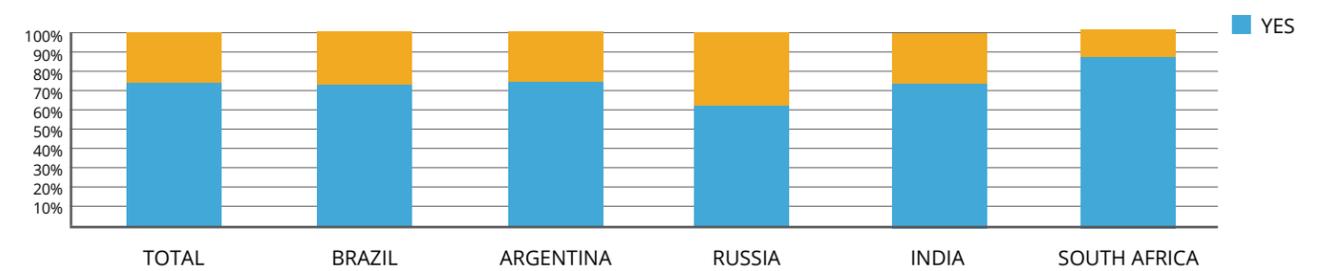
Scope of work by Country



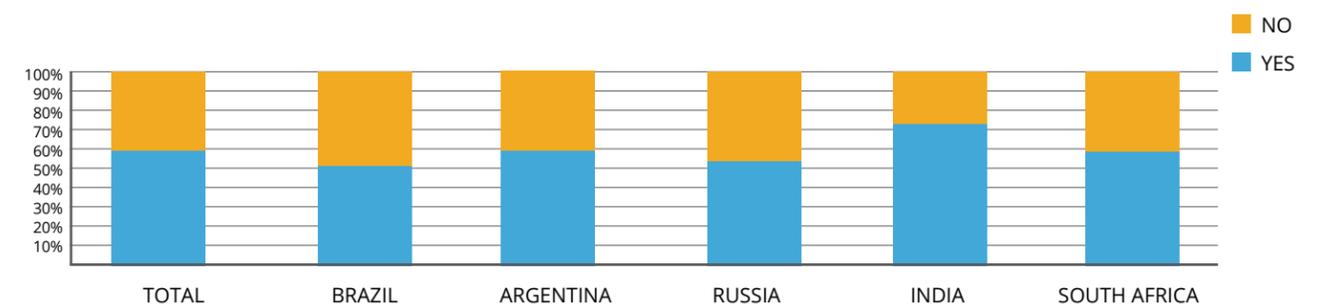
Has your organization played a role in supporting vaccination campaigns?



Did you fundraise during the recent COVID-19 surge (April 2021-present)?



Have you received funding to support your efforts related to the recent COVID-19 surge (April 2021-present)?



Since 1992, CAF America's core mission has been to facilitate domestic and cross-border giving by Americans to validated charities across the world.

Through donor advised giving and our industry-leading due diligence protocols, we enable our donors to make strategic, cost-effective, and tax-advantaged gifts while reducing the risk, reputational exposure, and administrative burden associated with cross-border giving.

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