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Greening the Grassroots: Rethinking African Conservation Funding

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Greening^{the} grassroots

Rethinking African
Conservation Funding

July 2022



Maliasili exists to help talented local conservation organizations overcome their challenges and constraints so that they can become more effective agents of change in their landscapes, communities, and nations. Through long-term support and partnership with a portfolio of over 30 leading community-based and national civil society organizations in eastern and southern Africa and Madagascar, Maliasili is working to increase the impact of a new generation of African conservation leaders.

Synchronicity Earth was established to raise new sources of funding and to help direct existing funding to the most effective, holistic, and innovative interventions to conserve overlooked ecosystems and species. Through its six conservation programs, Synchronicity Earth empowers donors to make the best decisions for their funding and enables partners (grantees) to carry out their work to the best of their ability by supporting them, beyond just funding, to grow their impact. Synchronicity Earth prioritizes support to local and national organizations, whilst also providing some support for vital global policy and knowledge sharing work enabling conservation priorities to be identified and acted upon.

About Maliasili and Synchronicity Earth

Maliasili and Synchronicity Earth share a commitment to community-based approaches to conservation that benefit local people, strengthen and reinforce human rights, and work towards social justice. As organizations working to support a diverse range of partners working at the local and national scale in different parts of Africa, we are working together to find ways of improving funding flows and practices for our partners and other local organizations, so that they can achieve more. This report is a first step in an envisioned process to improve funding practices, by improving understanding of core issues and perspectives of both African organizations, implementing the projects on the ground, and funders. We invite feedback on this report as well as any interest in collaborating on these issues, contact info@maliasili.org.

Citation:

Paul, R., J. Chick, E. Sulle and F. Nelson. Greening the Grassroots: Rethinking African Conservation Funding. Maliasili and Synchronicity Earth, July 2022. maliasili.org/greeningthegrassroots

Acknowledgments:

Maliasili and Synchronicity Earth wish to thank all the respondents to the online surveys as well as those gracious enough to lend us their time to be interviewed for this report, all of whom are listed in the Appendix.

We also acknowledge the many organizations and individuals contributing to the growing literature on this topic. We cited some of their work, as relevant, but we consulted many more articles and reports than are mentioned here, which all informed our thinking in important ways. This includes prior research on issues related to funding African conservation civil society organizations that Maliasili carried out with Well Grounded in 2015-2016, [available here](#).

Executive Summary



Addressing climate change, conserving biodiversity, securing indigenous and community land rights, and fostering more resilient livelihoods in rural communities across Africa all depend on action by community-based organizations. While several trends are pointing towards greater investment in such locally rooted conservation approaches, at present African organizations face critical challenges in securing the funding they need to scale up their efforts. Improving funding practices in ways that provide greater funding to the point of impact, at the local scale, is a critical yet underappreciated issue within African conservation.

Through interviews with nearly 50 African civil society organizations (CSOs) and funders, as well as an online survey, this report explores the issues around existing conservation funding practices in Africa. The report seeks to shed light on the key barriers and challenges that both CSOs and funders face, and to develop initial recommendations around ways to improve funding practices to better support African organizations.

Barriers to Funding Faced by African CSOs

92%

of CSOs identified lack of core/unrestricted funding as a barrier.

73%

of CSOs identified insufficient funding as a barrier.

71%

of CSOs said that short-term project funding is a barrier.

52%

of CSOs identified onerous proposal and reporting requirements as a barrier.

The principal barriers that African CSOs face revolve around a lack of core and flexible funding that aligns with the organization's own strategic plans and priorities. The prevalence of short-term project funding, accompanied by difficult reporting requirements, the high cost of securing funding, and restrictions on funding eligibility, all create a formidable set of barriers for African organizations.

In addition, African organizations frequently point to challenges with their partnerships with international organizations (INGOs), which are often inequitable in terms of the distributions of resources, in their view. Relatedly, the issue of racial bias as a factor in funding - both access and allocation - was raised in a number of interviews, with the perception that white conservation leaders in Africa have preferential access to funding in a way that limits many African organizations.

Amongst funders, the most prominent barrier to funding more locally-based organizations in Africa was the transaction costs related to finding and building relationships with local groups, as well as in making larger numbers of grants to small organizations. Additional challenges include the ability of African organizations to provide high quality proposals and reporting as well as gathering the data or metrics that funders and their boards expect. Funders also recognized their own capacity, and investments in local staff or presence, or the composition and backgrounds of their staff, as constraints that they face.

Recommendations for **Improving** Funding Practices

92%

of African CSOs surveyed said that longer-term funding would improve their ability to deliver.

77%

called for grants to be geared toward long-term outcomes instead of short-term projects.

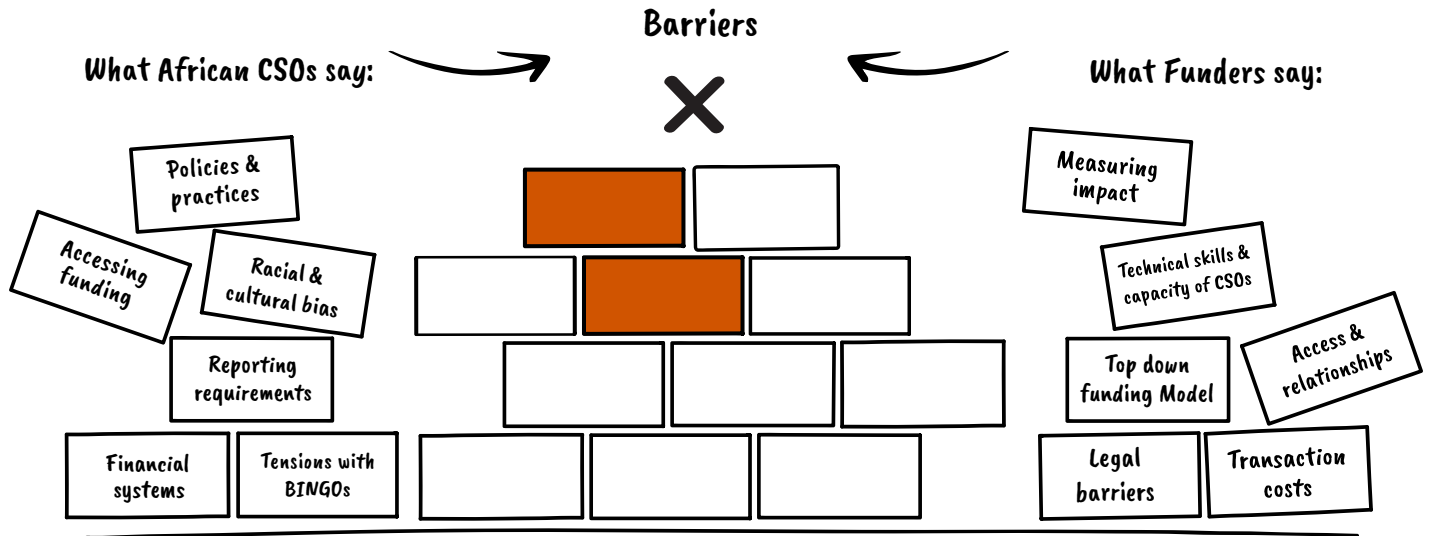
83%

called for more flexible or core/unrestricted grants.

In identifying solutions to overcome these challenges, African CSOs broadly recommended that funders provide longer-term funding aligned to outcomes instead of short-term projects, more core/unrestricted funding, and aligning their investments towards African organizations' own priorities and strategies. Simplifying and streamlining reporting, through measures such as common reporting or proposal frameworks accepted by multiple funders, was also a widespread recommendation.

Funders most frequently identified structural solutions through mechanisms such as pooled funds, re-granting entities, and funder collaborations or collectives.

What's preventing local African conservation organizations from getting access to GOOD funding

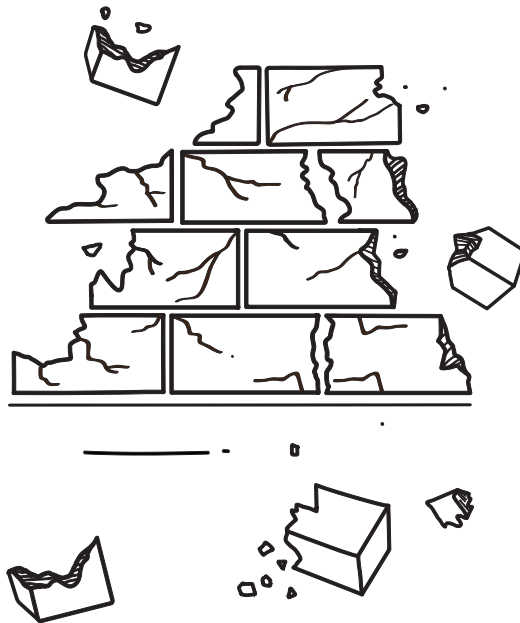


African CSOs perspectives

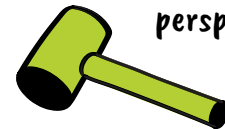


- Improve Funding Policies & Practices
- Make Funding Processes Easier and More Accessible
- Increase Direct Funding of African CSOs
- Improving funder-CSO relationships- building trust and sharing risk
- Strengthen CSOs' fundraising capacity and networks

Breaking down barriers



Funders perspectives



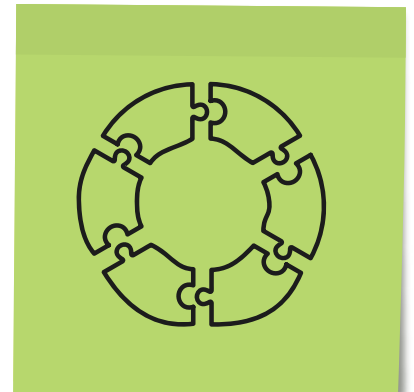
- Invest in more re-granters, pooled funds, and funder collectives, ideally locally-based ones
- Take on greater transaction (and other) costs
- Include those with local experience in decision-making
- Fund organizational development and capacity
- Utilize available mechanisms to address legal barriers
- Adopt user-friendly processes
- Treat CSOs and larger organizations equitably



Towards a shared set of **solutions**

Synthesizing the diverse perspectives of African CSOs and funders included in the study, the following insights emerged with regard to improving funding practices and building stronger partnerships across the funding value chain:

- African organizations and funders often converge in their diagnosis of key challenges and recommended solutions, but also have significant differences in their perspectives. Documenting these various perspectives, and creating opportunities for dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, will help all actors work towards practical, actionable solutions.
- The range of recommendations with regard to changing funding models and policies – i.e. to favor more long-term, strategically-aligned, flexible and core funding - echoes a large body of evidence and advocacy in the wider international development sector that is calling for similar reforms and improvements across philanthropy and international aid.
- Partnerships between African CSOs and international organizations, which often play an intermediary role in conservation funding, emerge as a key issue and source of dissatisfaction. Dialogue amongst African organizations, international organizations, and funders on how to strengthen these partnerships, improve equity and accountability, and address power dynamics, will be a key element of improving funding to the field.
- Pooled funds, which are growing in popularity amongst funders, and which we document several examples of, present a mechanism for enhancing learning, dialogue, and collaboration amongst funders and African organizations. Ensuring that emerging pooled funds take into account some of the issues around power, partnership, governance and resource distribution raised in this report will be important as more funding flows into African conservation and community-level organizations in the years ahead.



Introduction

Language and Definitions

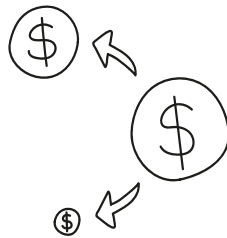
The focus of this report is on African nongovernmental, or civil society organizations, that are working with local communities on natural resource conservation and management issues. These organizations encompass a wide range of topics, interests, motivations, and perspectives. Some organizations are largely field-based, focused on hands-on work with communities in rural areas, while others work more at the policy level; inevitably many organizations do both. Some organizations work more on wildlife and biodiversity conservation, while others work on indigenous and community land tenure or forest governance. As a shorthand, we refer to this diverse range of organizations as 'African CSOs' or 'African conservation organizations'.

In contrast, the term 'international organizations' (INGOs) refers to organizations that operate in multiple countries, often with their headquarters and governance bodies in northern countries. We refer to these organizations as INGOs, though some quotes from interviews also refer to them as BINGOs, for 'big international NGOs.'

We acknowledge at the outset that these terms and definitions are necessarily imprecise given the tremendous diversity in organizations and the way they are used in different ways by different actors (e.g., in interviews).

Conservation efforts by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) are receiving a surge in global support. This includes major new financial commitments that aim to strengthen IPLC land stewardship and governance efforts, which are linked to both conservation and climate change policies and investments, as well as broader social movements to address racial and historic injustices. These forces contribute to increasing investments in local and community-based organizations in Africa and globally.

But putting those commitments into practice requires rethinking, revising, and improving existing conservation funding practices. At present, African organizations receive a small proportion of funding, despite the increased recognition of the critical role that locally rooted, community-led conservation plays for both climate and biodiversity conservation outcomes.



Globally, IPLC organizations and communities receive less than 1% of all climate funding, while African organizations receive approximately only 5% to 10% of private philanthropic funding invested in Africa.

Addressing climate change, conserving biodiversity, securing indigenous and community land rights, and fostering more resilient livelihoods in rural communities across Africa all depend on action by community-based organizations. **Major changes to funding practices must happen to get significantly more funding to the point of impact at the local scale, in ways that support local actors and their solutions to environmental and conservation challenges.**

The purpose of this report is to document these issues around existing funding practices in the conservation field in Africa, focusing on both challenges and emerging solutions. Through collecting feedback and insights from both African civil society organizations (CSOs) and funders, the report seeks to shed light on the key barriers and challenges that both groups face and to develop recommendations for ways to improve funding practices. The report thus provides greater empirical evidence for getting more and better funding into local hands at the point of impact.

Background: The Changing Landscape of Conservation Funding

“The most important things in the world that need doing cannot be done by large organizations. They will be done by many, sometimes hundreds, sometimes even thousands of smaller groups.”

—Andrew Steer, CEO, Bezos Earth Fund¹

“We need to shift the way money flows and the power relationships between those who do the work and those who fund it.”

—Amejali Ramos, ICCA Consortium²

New trends and shifts in thinking are favoring community-based solutions to global environmental challenges. A growing sense of urgency around climate change and biodiversity loss and a focus on ‘nature-based’ solutions to climate change have resulted in a surge of investments in ecological restoration and conservation as key to addressing environmental and social challenges. New conservation targets, such as the 30x30 goal of protecting 30% of the earth’s land area by 2030, are being advanced through global policy measures. This is accompanied by major new funding commitments such as the \$5 billion Protecting Our Planet pledge launched in September 2021.³

As more public attention and financial resources are directed toward nature conservation, field practices are also shifting, placing a greater focus on local conservation approaches. Mainstream conservation discourse now increasingly recognizes the importance of Indigenous Peoples’ and other local communities’ contributions to conservation, with a proliferation of new reports and studies demonstrating the positive impacts of such locally rooted efforts.⁴

More resources must flow to local actors in order to support change at the community level.

Accompanying these developments is the growing recognition that more resources must flow to local actors in order to support change at the community level. Community-based and grassroots organizations play a central role in conservation, particularly in supporting community natural resource management, facilitating local governance processes, and influencing national policy changes. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of community-level capacity during times of disruption and crisis.⁵

As one new report summarizes this growing consensus:

“National and local organizations are better placed to engage meaningfully at the local level and support the development of long-term capabilities and relationships to respond to climate change and nature loss.”⁶

In addition, social justice movements in the United States and elsewhere are calling to decolonize both international development and biodiversity conservation, by shifting greater power, agency, and resources to local leaders and organizations in Africa and elsewhere.⁷ In the conservation field, these shifts take place against long-standing debates about the respective roles of international, national, and local organizations, and how resources should be distributed to best achieve both effective and equitable outcomes.⁸

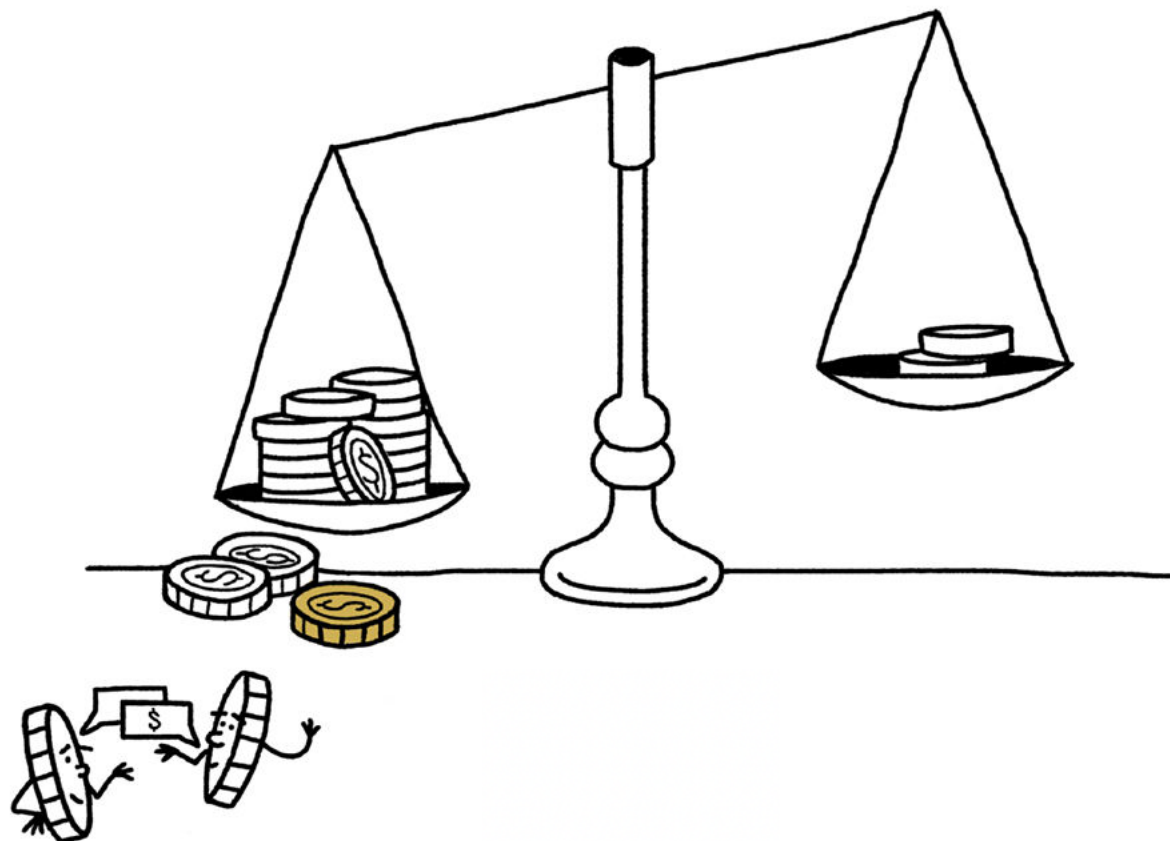
The African Context

In Africa, these trends bring a greater focus on how conservation efforts can be funded to better support African organizations. As much as in any other region in the world, addressing poverty and economic development in Africa is closely tied to the sustainable use of natural resources and ecological health, with increasing attention being paid to the role of natural resources in supporting conservation while also catalyzing economic growth.⁹ Forests, wildlife, savanna rangelands, wetlands, and coastal fisheries are all central to the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people living in rural areas, while also supporting major industries, such as tourism, that provide jobs and business opportunities. Over 80% of all the land in Africa is estimated to be communally used and managed rangelands and forests, although less than 10% of this area is legally recognized as under the control or ownership of IPLCs.¹⁰

Important shifts toward community-driven solutions are taking place in parts of Africa to help address these challenges. Conservancies managed and controlled by various configurations of communities and local landowners in countries such as Namibia and Kenya now encompass as much or more land as government-protected areas in those countries.¹¹ Indigenous and community forest-management practices are gradually gaining greater recognition in places such as Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.¹² And locally managed marine areas have spread considerably in countries such as Kenya and Madagascar.¹³

Only 10% of total philanthropic funding in Africa goes to African NGOs

African CSOs are critical in bringing about these kinds of changes. But African CSOs often struggle to access the resources they need to grow and sustain their organizations and to expand their impact so that they can deliver change on the ground. A recent study by the Bridgespan Group and African Philanthropy Forum finds that only about 10% of total philanthropic funding in Africa goes to African NGOs,¹⁴ while another recent global study finds that less than 1% of all climate funding goes to directly support Indigenous Peoples.¹⁵



In addition, the funding that African organizations, like CSOs all around the world, are able to access often comes with many constraints related to funding restrictions, reporting requirements, and limited timeframes. In 2009 the Bridgespan Group coined the term “nonprofit starvation cycle” to describe the way funders’ limitations on core funding and organizational overhead keep many social change organizations chronically under-resourced.¹⁶ More recently, Nicola Banks of the University of Manchester described how these practices continue to predominate in the international development arena:

“By keeping funding short-term, project based and heavily restricted, while failing to contribute to organisational overheads, the aid chain is not just failing to support or provide autonomy to local civil society, but is also actively preventing greater strength and sustainability to be built across it around the world.”¹⁷



Rethinking Funding Practices

In this context, developing more effective funding practices is critical. Unfortunately, it is generally an overlooked priority for conservation in Africa and beyond.

Yet across the wider social sector and international development field, there is a marked shift toward getting funding closer to the point of action.¹⁸ Some philanthropies, such as the Ford Foundation's Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD) program, are calling for greater investments in core organizational capacities of grantees, including through greater provision of unrestricted funding.¹⁹ This is part of a wider shift in favor of 'trust-based philanthropy' that calls for long-term investments and more genuine partnerships between grantees and grantmakers. An emerging focus on systems change is also helping promote new ways of collaborating among funders to support long-term investments in grantee organizations.²⁰

Meanwhile, some larger government agencies are also beginning to place greater emphasis on directing funding to the local level. US Agency for International Development administrator Samantha Power recently announced a new goal for USAID to increase from 6% to 25% the proportion of its total funding going to local organizations over the next four years.²¹ At the Global Environment Facility, CEO and Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodríguez is advocating for new funding mechanisms that could provide direct funding to NGOs and help IPLCs access more funding directly.²²

The conservation field has typically focused on the total amount of funding invested in wildlife, forests, or ocean conservation, or the total level of funding for specific issues or geographies. **Overlooked, but now clearly of growing importance, is how funding is structured, designed, and delivered.** All the money in the world will not address current conservation needs unless funding translates into greater impact on the ground and effectively supports the work of those who are best positioned to deliver change. Given this reality, it is critical for the conservation field to take a closer and more critical look at funding practices and ways to improve them.

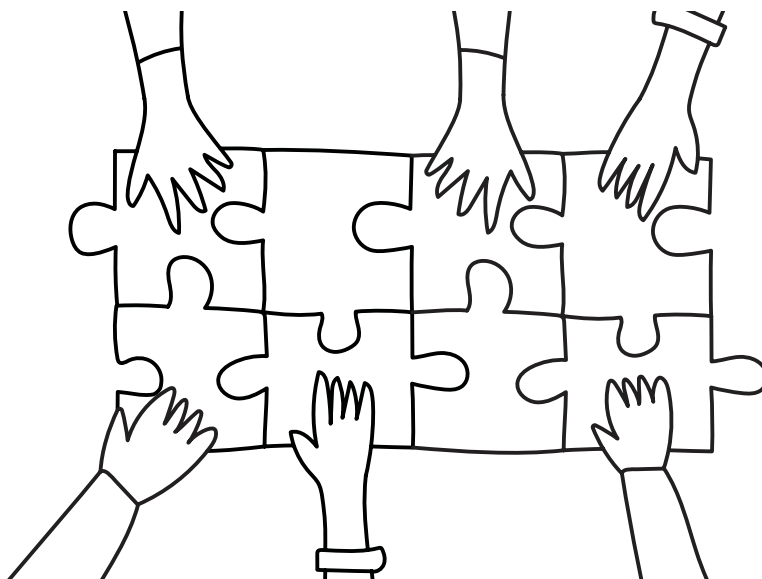
Methodology



This report has an intentionally broad scope, as we sought to collect a diverse range of perspectives from actors working and investing across Africa. We conducted a targeted online survey (in both English and French) that was widely distributed to African CSOs working on community-based approaches to conservation. A similar survey was sent to representatives of private philanthropic foundations. We also carried out a series of qualitative interviews (also in both English and French) with leading representatives of African CSOs focused on conservation or natural resources, as well as private foundations that support conservation in Africa. The surveys and interviews sought to understand the key barriers to resourcing local conservation organizations as well as to solicit ideas and examples related to potential solutions to address those barriers.

In addition, we consulted a wide array of recently published literature so that this report can build on work that's already been done and the recent profusion of thinking and writing on philanthropic models in the broader social sector.

In presenting our findings, we synthesized key points and issues from across a diverse set of African CSOs working in different geographies and on different issues, as well as from philanthropic funders, all of whom have different perspectives. We have used many quotes from both the CSOs and funders interviewed, attributing them with our interviewees' permission in many cases, because one aim of this report is to give greater voice to the collective and individual perspectives of these organizations and their ideas for improving funding practices and partnerships.



Coverage

A total of 48 CSO leaders responded to the online survey. Just over 70% of the organizations they represent are based in East or Southern Africa, with the remaining distributed across West and Central Africa. Conservatively speaking, these organizations spend at least \$24 million annually on conservation efforts on the continent. In terms of organization size, 52% employ fewer than 20 people, and a further 23% employ fewer than 50 people.

Among them, 81% focus on wildlife conservation, 56% on issues relating to IPLC land rights and governance, 48% on forest conservation or reforestation, 15% on marine conservation, and 31% on other areas.

Fig 1: Conservation focus areas - **African CSOs**

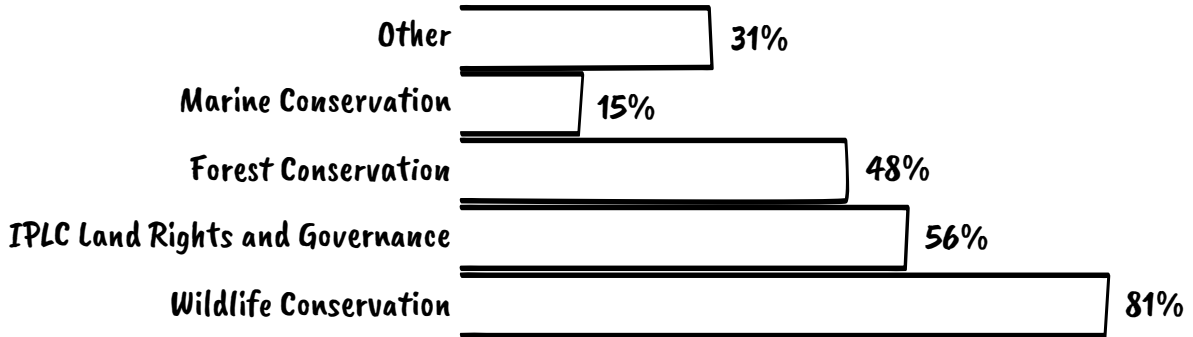
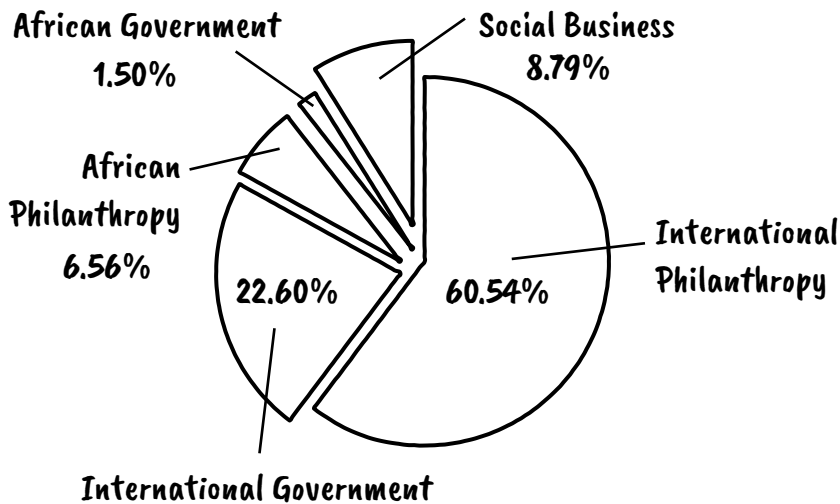


Fig 2. Funding sources for **local CSOs**



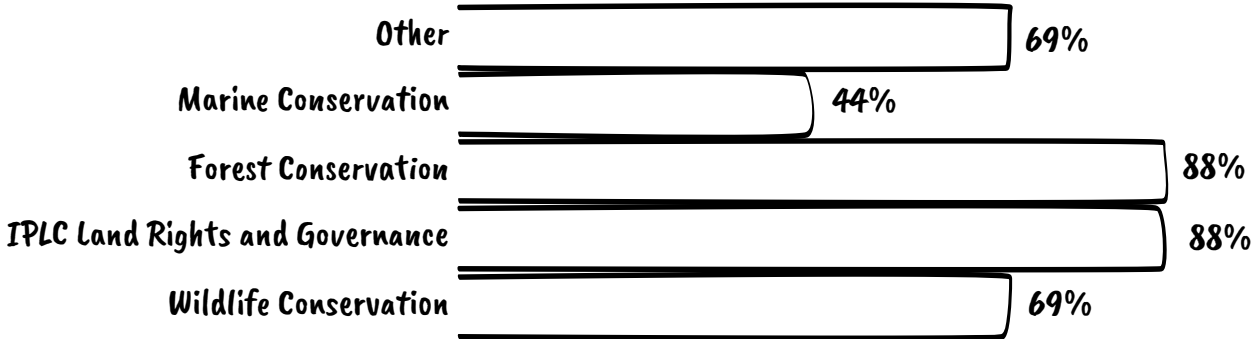
Finally, on average, 61% of their funding comes from international private philanthropy; 23% comes from international government funders (bilateral or multilateral); and only 8% comes from African sources, whether philanthropy or government. A further 9% of funding comes from social business activities, such as sales of products or services.

In terms of funders, 15 representatives of private philanthropies responded to the survey. It must be noted that several funders were unable to fill out the survey because of a combination of internal policies around data sharing as well as the unavailability of specific data relating to funding smaller or local organizations. In addition, with regard to funders, our focus was largely on private philanthropic foundations in North America and Europe. This report did not survey either government or multilateral funding entities nor any Africa-based philanthropic foundations.

Of the funders who responded, they collectively fund work across nearly all African countries and contribute, conservatively, at least \$65 million annually to conservation funding in Africa.

Of the respondents, 88% support work on issues relating to IPLC land rights and governance, 88% on forest conservation, and 69% on wildlife conservation.

Fig 3: Conservation focus areas - Funders



The surveys were followed by 37 qualitative interviews with leaders of community-based conservation organizations from 15 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. Roughly 60% of these organizations are based in East or Southern Africa, with the remaining distributed across West and Central Africa. Finally, we interviewed 12 representatives of conservation funding organizations, with 7 from the United States and the remaining from Europe or representatives of European foundations based in Africa. (See the Appendix for the full list of interviewees.)

Barriers: African CSOs' Challenges in Accessing Funding

In this section, we highlight the main barriers and challenges that CSOs face in accessing funding.

92%

of CSOs identified lack of core/unrestricted funding as a barrier.

73%

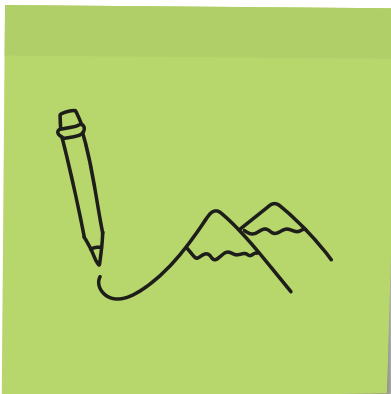
of CSOs identified insufficient funding as a barrier.

71%

of CSOs said that short-term project funding is a barrier.

52%

of CSOs identified onerous proposal and reporting requirements as a barrier.

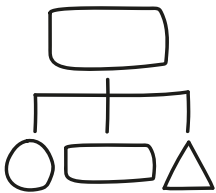


Barrier 1. Funding Policies and Practices

“Conservation is not a one-year program...Donors should shift to longer-term funding and not one-off [grants].”

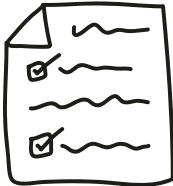
—Olivier Nsengimana, Executive Director, Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association

By far the biggest set of funding barriers cited by CSOs are related to policies and practices established by donors. These issues can be grouped into four distinct challenges:



Short-term and project-based funding

Lack of core/unrestricted funding



Eligibility barriers to applying for funding

Donor-driven priorities

Short-term and project-based funding:

For the purposes of this report, we define short-term funding as that for less than two years, though oftentimes funding is for only a single year. Approximately 73% of survey respondents cited insufficient funding and 71% cited short-term funding as problems they face. This was also raised as a significant barrier in most of our interviews with CSOs, with some contrasting this with their need for multiyear, flexible funding in order to implement their own strategic programs designed for long-term, sustainable impact. For example, as Rahima Njaidi, Executive Director of the Community Forest Conservation Network of Tanzania (MJUMITA), said,

“If we can get funding that supports our strategic plan, it would be a breakthrough. The funding we receive is project-based, so a lot of important work is left behind.”



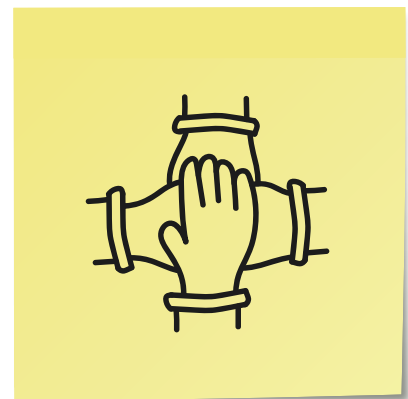
Lack of core/unrestricted funding:

In the CSO survey, 92% of respondents as well as many interviewees cited the lack of core or unrestricted funding as a major problem. This perspective was captured by Willie Boonzaier, Program Director at Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) in Namibia, who said:

“For field-based organizations to survive, donors must have a budget available for core activities. For example, we do not have funding for communications (not even for maintaining the website), or training staff, succession planning, and so on. These might sound like luxuries, but they are important for organizations to function efficiently. We can’t find any donor who funds these activities.”

This was echoed by Alda Salomão, Senior Legal Advisor at Centro Terra Viva in Mozambique, who asked:

“Donors generally impose strict limitations on payments for administration costs, including personnel payments but over 70% of our work involves professional and intellectual skills. Therefore, if you are not paying for administration costs, you are cutting off the legs and hands that you need to implement the work.”



Eligibility barriers to applying for funding:

This was more of an issue with respondents in West and Central African countries, where CSOs tend to be smaller and more likely to pursue bilateral and multi-lateral funding, because relatively few private philanthropies fund in this region. A common example of this is when a donor requires that an organization has managed at least \$1 million in the past, which is a difficult threshold for most local or national CSOs to attain. In addition, for several types of bilateral or multilateral funding, local and national CSOs are not eligible if they do not apply in consortia with international NGOs. However, sometimes the eligibility requirements can become even more granular.

For example one CSO leader in Central Africa described encountering eligibility criteria that included:

1. A board of directors’ resolution authorizing the organization to even apply for funding;
2. Audited financials even from small CSOs; and
3. Membership in certain networks. These are not isolated issues, of course.



The eligibility concern also dovetails with the short-term funding and lack of core funding issues mentioned above, as was made clear by Aristide Kamla, President of the African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization (AMMCO) in Cameroon:

“Most of our grants did not allow us to recruit an accountant. We also could not meet their requirements because we did not have a specific software program to manage our finances that they required. We would need to pay a license for it, and also hire a qualified accountant or financial manager who knows how to manage it. And you cannot hire somebody like that with a grant of \$15,000 or \$20,000.”

Donor-driven priorities:

Many CSOs cited the challenges of meeting donors’ funding conditions, which often come with preconceived ideas of what the priorities should be, and do not always align with the actual needs on the ground or with an organization’s interests or priorities. As Antonio Chipata, Executive Director of Associação de Conservação do Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Integrado Rural (ACADIR) in Angola, says,

“We do not accept money that dictates what we must do...We want the money that supports our mission.”

“We’re very keen on fisheries work as well...”



Barrier 2. Challenges Accessing Funding

“We do not have funds to go around the globe to meet donors and chat with them.”

—Matthew Becker, CEO, Zambia Carnivore Programme

A second set of barriers stems from challenges that African CSOs face in accessing funders in the first place. And then once they have obtained access, presenting their work in a convincing way is an additional challenge. These issues have both logistical and cultural dimensions to them and can be grouped into two distinct challenges: accessing funders and convincing funders.

Accessing funders:

Many African conservation CSOs work in rural, often remote areas; thus, attempting to connect with funders in North America or Europe presents a serious challenge. Many interviewees reported this as a pressing concern. They know that building relationships is critical, but having offices or a legal presence in donor countries – as larger international NGOs do – is unrealistic and far beyond their means. Paine Mako, Executive Director of Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) in Tanzania, notes,

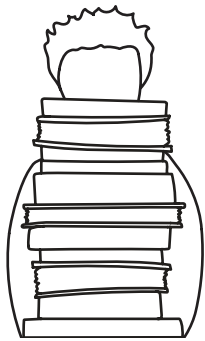


“Nowadays if you are doing an application, you must build some kind of relationship, which will give you a chance to secure funding. [But] for organizations that are rooted in the field, they have to find a balance between the work on the ground and investing in building relationships, trust, and networks, many of which are located far away from the field.”

This structural challenge is compounded by many common donor practices, such as conducting targeted searches for grantees based on network recommendations and not opening funding calls to the public, all of which privilege the few CSOs that have built a strong brand or have figured out the keys to unlock access in northern countries. Some respondents expressed frustration because they are confident that their work would speak for itself if only donors could see it.

Convincing funders:

Respondents expressed many challenges with building the fundraising and communications skill sets needed to convince funders to invest in them. Our interviewees cited the difficulties of mastering proposal writing, the expense of hiring professional grant writers, and, particularly in Francophone Africa, the challenges of writing proposals in English. One-third of the online survey respondents recorded difficulties with effectively branding their work in ways that attract funders. And sometimes, even when an organization is confident in its funder pipeline, it can stumble if it does not have the capacity to develop proposals.



Barrier 3. Reporting Requirements

“Remember, our primary goal is not to write narrative reports; it is to do work on the ground.”

—Alda Salomão, Senior Legal Advisor, Centro Terra Viva

CSOs struggle with the complicated and differing reporting systems that many funders require. 52% of survey respondents as well as most interviewees cited this as a challenge to acquiring funding. CSOs noted that while donors want information on how grant money is used and the measured impact, almost all donors require reporting using different formats, structures, and vocabulary. This variation in reporting requirements makes it extremely difficult for CSOs to provide reports in an efficient way that avoids overextending their team capacities. These varied and complex reporting structures impose major costs on African CSOs and draw resources away from doing the actual work in the field that delivers on their missions. Matthew Becker, of the Zambia Carnivore Programme, noted,

“Sometimes I have to drop some grants which I could have gotten – simply because of their reporting requirements.”

This can sometimes stretch to unfathomable demands, as this example from IRDNC’s Willie Boonzaier indicates:

“IRDNC is managing 40-plus grants each year, and the majority of these have their own specifications in terms of what they are prepared to pay for vehicle kilometer rates, which means you cannot manage finances on a single financial system.”

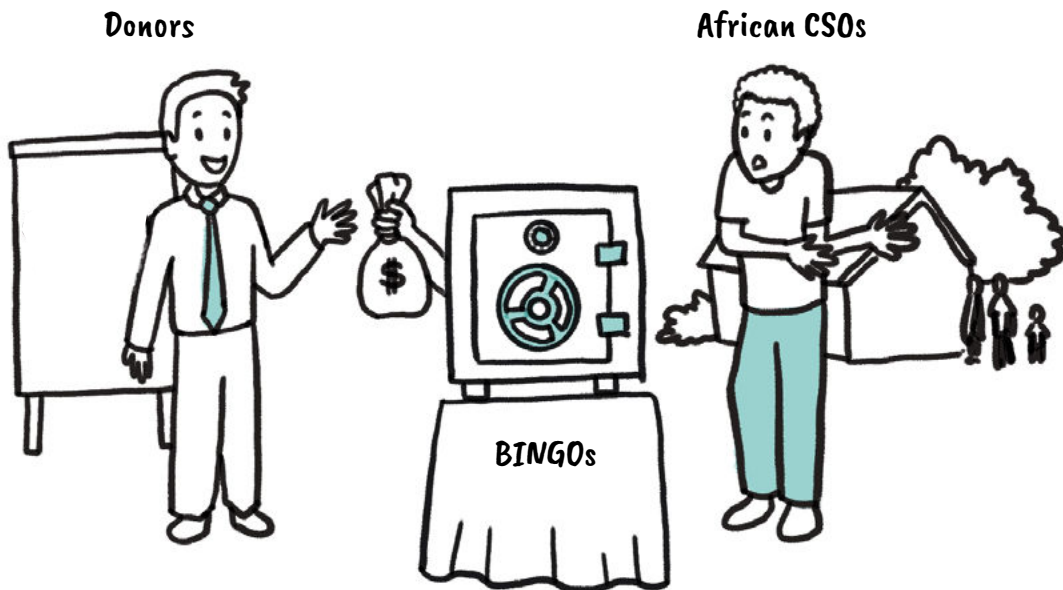
CSOs also frequently noted that while donors expect them to comply with these strictures, those donors weren’t usually willing to fund the costs associated with that compliance.

Barrier 4. Tensions with Intermediary Organizations: The Role of INGOs

“Where international NGOs do work with national NGOs, the funding allocated to national NGOs can be degrading and not reflect what should transpire in a partnership.”

—Evariste Mbayelo, Programmes Coordinator, I3D, Central African Republic

CSOs shared tensions they face with international NGOs (INGOs), both in terms of their partnerships with these organizations and in the perception of being in direct competition with them. A significant portion of our interviewees felt strongly about this as a challenge to accessing and managing funding. From the CSOs’ perspective, INGOs are viewed as intermediaries that channel funds from the donor to them, while often appropriating more than their fair share, given they are not doing as much of the actual work on the ground as the African organizations.



The perception that CSOs do most of the work for far less of the money was brought up often. As one CSO said,

“We are the implementing partner, but the international NGO keeps 40% of the money for their administrative costs, but they only fund us for one month of administration costs. So the 60% earmarked as project funds falls on us for implementation without core funding.”



These intermediaries often impose their own restrictions in addition to those of the donors. As Yusuf Ibrahim Hussein, County Director of Global Initiative for Resilience and Development (GIRD) in Somalia, noted,

“The bureaucracy and restrictive policies imposed on local NGOs often come from the international NGOs rather than from donors.”

It must be noted that African CSOs interviewed were often unaware of legal requirements and restrictions in donor countries – such as government (IRS) rules governing foundations in the United States that make it easier for donors to fund organizations with legal charity status in the United States than to fund local African CSOs. Furthermore, while some larger international organizations were criticized for their practices, others were hailed for being examples of strong funding partners that fostered the long-term growth of African CSOs. Sometimes – as in the case of one prominent international NGO and one prominent aid agency – they were criticized in one country and lauded in another. Thus, there are nuances that should accompany this critique, and the subject of partnerships and relationships between international NGOs and African CSOs is an important one worthy of additional inquiry and dialogue.²³ That said, a widespread perspective among the African CSOs was one of unhealthy competition, unfair contracts, insufficient core funding, and downright favoritism.

Barrier 5. Racial and Cultural Bias

“Most large donors come from the global north and a level of comfort is afforded to conservationists coming from the same background. Many African leaders thus have greater difficulty making connections with them.”

—Andrew Stein, Executive Director, Communities Living Among Wildlife Sustainably (CLAWS) Conservancy, Botswana

Related to inequitable relationships between African organizations and their international, often northern-based counterparts is the identification of racial and cultural bias in how different organizations, and even different leaders within the same organization, are treated within the field. This sentiment was widely echoed by several of our interviewees, nearly all of whom asked not to be quoted because of concerns with potential repercussions. One of these organization leaders described what it often looks like on the ground:

“Sometimes, the organization managed by a black leader may get \$200,000 and will have four objectives, while the one with the white leader may just have two objectives but is awarded \$1 million. We must have equal rights in terms of distribution of donor resources.”

One of the funders interviewed for this survey agreed with these sentiments, describing the history of the conservation sector in Africa as stemming from

“the white, western, PhD student who dedicated their life to African wildlife. They were important. But we have moved on from them now and we have to move towards local organizations and help them grow into the future face of conservation.”

Colleen Begg of the Niassa Carnivore Project in Mozambique, one of the individuals interviewed in this study, describes the links between racial bias and background, and funding processes and access in an interview with Mongabay last year that reflects some of the key points that emerged from this study as well:

“To me conservation really is one of the last bastions of racism and exclusion on the continent and it is very resistant to change. Some of this reluctance is exacerbated by funding cliques (everyone is on everyone else’s boards) and proposals more designed for short-term research grants than conservation.”²⁴

Barrier 6. Financial Systems: Moving Money

A final challenge identified relates to financial systems. This was mentioned by the majority of our Francophone interviewees (where this challenge is most acutely felt). CSOs cited delays in bank transfers due to funder policies, extraordinary challenges in withdrawing money from certain in-country banks, and frequent encounters with corruption in the financial system. While they didn’t blame funders for this, CSOs requested that funders anticipate such issues in advance and plan accordingly, such as by disbursing money in fewer tranches to avoid losing a great deal of time with each withdrawal.

Barriers: Funders' Challenges in Supporting Local Organizations

Transaction costs

for funding many small organizations was the single most significant barrier for foundations (63%) to fund local or small conservation organizations.

Almost half

funders said that a lack of CSO capacity and skills in writing proposals was a challenge.

The barriers in funding local organizations cited by funders fall into five categories.

63% cited the higher transaction costs involved in making grants to smaller organizations as their biggest barrier to funding them

Barrier 1. Transaction Costs and Legal Requirements

Of the funders in the survey, 63% cited the higher transaction costs involved in making grants to smaller or more locally based organizations as their biggest barrier to funding them. Related to this is the absorptive capacity of smaller organizations, as many are not at a scale where they can take the amount of money that some funders, particularly larger funders, seek to distribute. The difficulty that US-based funders have in supporting organizations that are not tax-exempt through 501(c)(3) status was also frequently cited as an issue.

Interestingly, only one funder commented that the funding processes might be too onerous for smaller organizations to access – and yet this was a frequently cited issue among African CSOs.

Barrier 2. Technical Skills and Capacity of CSOs

“Often, what we think of as skills and training is really just cultural differences.”

—Annette Lanjouw, Executive Director, Arcus Foundation

In the funder survey, 44% of respondents cited the lack of skills and training of smaller organizations as a barrier in their ability to present effective proposals and report on how funds are used.

Writing grant proposals requires a certain level of skill and experience and can be particularly challenging in one's second or third language. Several of the funders interviewed also noted this as an important issue that prevents them from effectively making the case to their own boards to fund local organizations. Some of this is attributable to lack of experience with the industry-speak of the nonprofit sector – from framing problem statements and log frames or theories of change – but sometimes it just comes down to cultural differences between how funders like to receive information (for example, compellingly written documents in English) and how CSOs are best able to provide evidence of their work (verbal presentations or field-based demonstrations).

Barrier 3. Access and Relationships

Related to the above, a major challenge is the difficulty of access. On the funder side, and particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hard to visit grantees and potential new grantees in person, which makes building trust-based relationships directly with organizations in Africa a challenge. Funders are also conscious of the challenges CSOs face around gaining access to the places in the global north where most funders live. This is partly due to limited travel budgets and cumbersome visa procedures, but it is also due to funders accepting proposals on an invitation-only basis, thereby leaving some CSOs out of the game entirely.



One of the interviewed funders also acknowledged the challenge faced by the CSOs that funding is often tied to a particular individual or leader rather than to the organization or area of work. This makes it hard for second-generation leaders of CSOs to access the same donors that the first-generation leaders cultivated. As the Arcus Foundation's Annette Lanjouw stated,

“Many donors are funding specific people or relationships, not projects. That works less well for African CSOs when they cannot access the funders.”

Yet even when access is possible, the issues of language and cultural differences come into play. Compared with CSOs in Anglophone countries, where the majority of private philanthropists operate, CSOs based in Francophone and Lusophone countries are significantly disadvantaged.

Barrier 4. Measuring Impact

Another common concern among funders was measuring impact in the conservation field. Several funders said that proving the impact of the work of African CSOs to satisfy their boards is a challenge. Foundation staff often noted that board members and directors are looking for hard data and proof of impact that smaller organizations cannot show very easily or effectively. One funder noted that the most important requirement to be able to fund more local organizations is “being able to make the case, with documented evidence of the impact of local organizations, to know that money can be distributed in an equitable and fair way...We need that in order to convince our board.”

Barrier 5. Top-down Funding Models

While the issue of top-down or ‘colonial’ funding models was an important theme among African CSOs, it is also something that funders are conscious of as well. ‘Funder mindsets’ was often euphemistically used to describe the tension around who was making decisions to fund what projects, an issue that goes back to the earliest days of funding organizations in Africa (as well as other places located far away from the funder’s own home). What this leads to, as many pointed out, is that the people making the funding decisions are often significantly different in terms of their demographic background and lived experiences from the people who receive the funding, and thus funders often lack the context of the work on the ground (from thorny political dynamics to logistical difficulties with internet access).

Funders often lack the context of the work on the ground

Solutions: Improving Funding to African CSOs

“Africans have the capacity to deliver. Let donors give us money and we will do well.”

—John Kamanga, Executive Director, South Rift Association of Land Owners (SORALO), Kenya

African CSOs’ Perspectives

92%

of African CSOs surveyed said that longer-term funding would improve their ability to deliver.

77%

called for grants to be geared toward long-term outcomes instead of short-term projects.

83%

called for more flexible or core/unrestricted grants.

The solutions suggested by African CSOs to overcome their funding barriers typically fall into five categories.

Solution 1. Improve Funding Policies and Practices

Considering the critical importance given to funding policies and practices, it’s no surprise that this was the focus of African CSOs in their suggested solutions to improve funding access.

In our survey results, 83% of CSOs called for funders to provide more core/unrestricted funding. Similarly, 92% recommended that funders provide long-term funding (of greater than one year, and many even said that two years was too short). Of the respondents, 77% noted the importance of funding geared toward long-term outcomes rather than short-term projects. Similar proportions of our interviewees also emphasized the importance of these two areas; indeed, we conjecture that for those who didn’t explicitly mention this solution, it was because they have found some measure of success in attaining this type of funding and not because they wouldn’t highlight its importance.

These types of funding are particularly important because achieving conservation impact, particularly in working with local communities, is a long-term process; key initiatives often take years to deliver their outcomes. Dr. Carmel Kifukieto, Programmes Coordinator at Centre d'Appui à la Gestion des Forêts Tropicales (CAGDFT) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, summed it up:

“The sort of funding we seek is that which can sustain the programs of the organization over a decade, as that lets us focus on influencing the change we seek to bring about.”

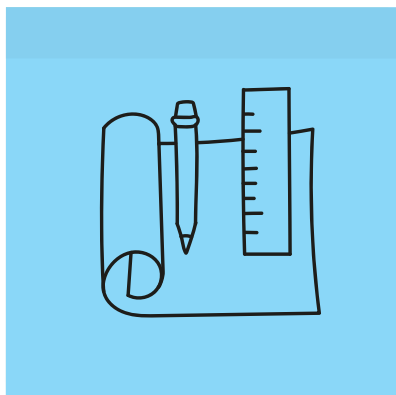
A third key funding practice emphasizes the importance of funding that is flexible and responsive, particularly in the context of volatile and rapidly changing environments. A positive example of the value of flexible, long-term funding was provided by Willie Boonzaier of IRDNC in Namibia:

“Bread for the World has been funding us for the past 12–15 years now. They have been very responsive to changing environments. For example, during COVID-19, they responded fast to allow us to focus the funds on COVID-19-related activities. They have been an extraordinary funding partner.”

Finally, there is a desire to see funders align their investments in African organizations with grantees' own strategic plans and priorities. This is a response to challenges many African CSOs described with funders taking a top-down or predetermined approach to their investments. For example, Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, CEO of Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH) in Uganda, said,

“Funders must listen to their potential grantees and understand their needs and priorities. Grants that are top-down are not sustainable and impactful.”

When funding does align with and support African CSOs' own priorities, it can make a transformative difference. Alda Salomão of Centro Terra Viva described an example of this:



“[One] donor said, ‘we are supporting your strategic plan’. It was this commitment for core funding that made a difference. It is thanks to institutional support funding that we are known all over Mozambique.”

Solution 2. Make Funding Processes Easier and More Accessible

A second set of solutions relates to making funding processes easier and more accessible to small organizations. Currently, much of the available funding for African organizations is not user-friendly or designed with the needs of grantees in mind. More than 50% of the organizations surveyed cited this as an important area of recommended improvement. AMMCO's Aristide Kamla calls on funders to base their decisions more on organizations' track records and potential for impact:



“Donors could change the application process itself by giving the organization a chance to express itself based on what it has already achieved rather than on how well they can write a project proposal.”

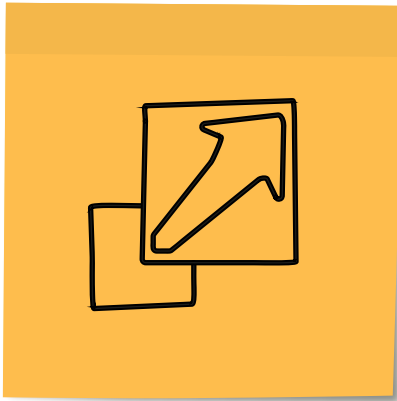
CSOs often feel that eligibility criteria are designed to exclude African organizations. Julien Matte, National Coordinator of Groupe d'Action pour Sauver l'Homme et son Environnement (GASHE) in the Democratic Republic of Congo echoed this belief and suggested

“Why not proactively help African organizations apply by supporting them to meet the requirements? Otherwise, it is mostly INGOs that can access their funding.”

Another suggestion is to move away from funding processes that are invitation-only. When funders don't make their funding calls transparent, it can prejudice them against local organizations that may not have the networks or communications channels to catch those funders' attention. IRDNC's Willie Boonzaier recommends

“a call for proposals accompanied by proper consultation with potential partners or people on the ground. If donors understand our environment and organizational requirements, then they would have more appropriate proposal components that suit actual needs on the ground. This will resolve a lot of issues.”

Organizations also want reporting on their grants to be simpler and less costly, as was made clear in the section above. CSOs suggested that donors adopt a standardized reporting format or to be willing to accept reports created in a common organizational format.



Solution 3. Increase Direct Funding of African CSOs

“Being a subgrantee is such a challenge because what trickles down to you as the implementer is so little, yet you do so much, and you end up not seeing the value of the grant.”

—Mercy Marende, Field Officer, Kwetu Training Centre, Kenya

Given the tensions inherent in channeling funds through larger international NGOs, it’s no surprise that the CSOs strongly advocated for more direct funding, without going through ‘middleman’ intermediary organizations. Some CSOs suggested that funders could divide the same amount of funding they provide to a large organization amid 10 to 15 African organizations and see how much more impact they might achieve through such an approach. African CSOs believe that more direct funding would help them get the amounts of money commensurate with the work they do and address some of the challenges with intermediary partnerships as they are currently structured. John Kamanga of SORALO believes that

“if donors give money to local organizations, they will realize a lot more impact and avoid the wastage of funding that happens with BINGOs, where often only a very small amount reaches the local organizations.”

Solution 4. Improve Funder-CSO Relationships: Build Trust and Share Risk

African CSO leaders felt there would be many advantages to building stronger relationships between donors and their organizations. AMMCO’s Aristide Kamla believes that this would also get around some of the information bottlenecks created by current systems and their heavy reliance on funding intermediaries:

“Donors do not understand the reality in the field, because they rely on information from the intermediary organization, which is why they demand financial or technical requirements that are not adequate or not feasible.”

An additional suggestion from CSOs is for a mindset shift toward funders being more tolerant of failure as a normal and necessary ingredient on the road to success. As Alda Salomão puts it,

“Donors should understand that there are risks that need to be taken for an organization to acquire the capacity, skills and levels of preparedness needed for it to be able to do its work with the necessary technical quality, appropriate governance procedures, and so on. Until this is achieved, mistakes will be made and this is normal. If you do not allow mistakes to happen, then you will never enable these organizations to grow.”

Solution 5. Strengthen CSOs' Fundraising Capacity and Networks

Many African CSO leaders also believe that funders can do more to build fundraising capacity in their grantees and help those grantees access other funders in their network. Desire Simplice Kozo, Technical Advisor at Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems (REPALCA), said,

“Those partners who know us should introduce us to other donors or share new funding opportunities with us. They could also provide us with capacity-building support in the domains of proposal development and help us build a team to develop proposals.”

CSOs felt this support could come from other aligned organizations as well.

In the online survey, CSOs identified their top three support priorities for enhancing their fundraising capacity:

77%

of African CSOs requested greater support with accessing donors who provide unrestricted funding.

68%

requested greater support in developing communications materials that enable them to publicize their work and impact.

65%

requested support in accessing new donors that they currently cannot reach.

Funders' Perspectives

“The challenge is no longer hearts and minds, but solving logistical barriers to the flow of capital. There is a lot of money out there willing to go to local organizations. And all the challenges are solvable.”

—Andy Bryant, Executive Director, Segal Family Foundation

From their perspective, funders also provided their own recommendations to overcome the barriers in supporting African CSOs. While these recommendations are described below, it is interesting to note from the outset that only one funder in the survey and one funder who was interviewed talked about the need for more funding being unrestricted and flexible, two things that are of prime importance to African CSOs.

This contrast might simply be a function of the fact that many of the funders we interviewed already provide relatively unrestricted or flexible funding, but given the near unanimity on the CSO side about the paucity of such funding, it may also point to a larger disconnect between what different groups see as most important.

With that noted, the recommendations from funders fall into the following seven categories:

Pooled funds can offer a unique space for funders and grantees to learn together.

Solution 1. Invest in More Regranters, Pooled Funds, and Funder Collectives, Ideally Locally Based Ones

In recent years, regranters, pooled funds, and collectives have all grown in popularity across the philanthropic and international development arena and are now coming to the fore in the conservation and natural resources field as well. A regranter is an intermediary organization that both receives and gives grants. A pooled fund is a specific funding structure that multiple funders contribute to for a specific purpose and outcome. Pooled funds are usually managed

by a regranter of some sort, though other mechanisms do exist; and pooled funds are, of course, not the only thing that regranters support. Pooled funds can also offer a unique space for funders and grantees to learn together. By contrast, a collective, which may or may not be a pooled fund, is usually a network of organizations of different sizes and scopes that are focused on a common end goal, though using different strategies and addressing different parts of a problem.

The majority of the funders we interviewed noted the importance of regranters and pooled funds as effective ways for funders to overcome their barriers around the larger transaction costs inherent in making more, smaller grants to African CSOs. As one funder put it,

“Regranters allow us to impact a lot of organizations with some feedback and exposure but without the oversight and administrative work that we don’t have capacity to do.”

A regranter essentially functions as a trusted intermediary that takes on the capacity constraints of funders, and thereby increases those funders’ confidence in the local groups they are supporting, since the regranter will also work with the CSOs on any issues that arise. In truly excellent cases, the regranter eventually encourages funders to fund the CSOs directly, while remaining on hand to provide support as needed.

Some funders also believe that supporting local grantmaking organizations like the Congolese Women’s Fund, to name one example mentioned, is particularly important. Those with experience in supporting collectives also felt it was an excellent way to ensure that smaller organizations can get ‘a piece of the pie’ while targeting specific conservation outcomes.

Solution 2. Take on Greater Transaction (and Other) Costs

While regranters and pooled funds are effective ways for funders to overcome high transaction costs, several funders, including the Arcus Foundation's Annette Lanjou, also believe it's important to "be brave and be willing to take on the transaction costs. Funders need to get out there, get to know people, and be willing to take risks.

Lillian Cheng, from the Liz Claiborne & Art Ortenberg Foundation, commented:

"Foundations could also staff up to be able to make and manage more small grants. Foundations are not the organizations lacking resources in this equation. While some foundations prefer to maximize their giving by running lean, staffing up would also allow foundations to spend more time building knowledge, developing closer relationships, and being better overall partners to their grantee organizations."

Thomas Bacha, Director of the Small-scale Initiatives Program of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which has supported many CSOs working in Central Africa, also said it was important for funders to realize the downstream impact of not being willing to take on transaction costs:

"Big amounts of money are sometimes definitely part of the problem. Because funders are interested in giving larger amounts of money, BINGOs end up with the money; not necessarily because they have more impact, but because they can administratively handle more money. It then gives the BINGO a lot of power in the relationship with African CSOs, who are reduced to scrambling competitively to access the funds. The best solution is for funders to be willing to provide smaller amounts of money."



Solution 3. Include Those with Local Experience in Decision-Making

"We were able to build strong relationships based on trust because we are based in the region."

—Charlotte Karibuhoye Said, Director, West Africa Program, MAVA Foundation

Another key part of the solution is including people with experience of working in Africa, and ideally those from the CSO communities themselves, in decision-making. Funders cited three ways in which this could happen. First, of course, funders could hire people in the regions they fund and set up either offices or networks of staff and consultants. One funder quipped that foundations have too many PhDs and not enough local practitioners on their teams. Another recommended that funders and regranters could consider bringing local experts to the table and have them make final funding decisions.

Foundations should also consider piggybacking off one another's infrastructures, perhaps doing joint site visits and due diligence and sharing the staff costs.

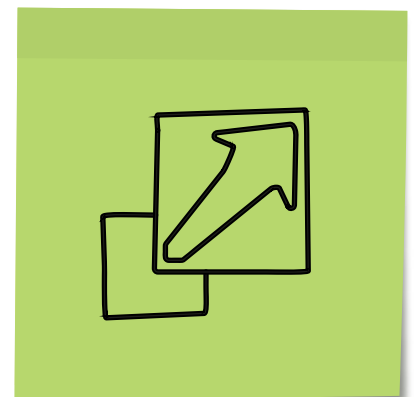
Even when funders don't want to hire staff in-country, they could be more intentional in hiring people with experience working in Africa for their teams. While this was extremely rare a few decades ago, there are far more people these days with local experience on foundation teams. As Imani Fairweather Morrison, Program Director at Oak Foundation, noted:

“When I started in philanthropy 17 years ago, I was often the only person of color in a room. That has shifted dramatically in recent years. Funders need to have a mindset of being of service to their grantees. That's why hiring culture is so crucial. It is important to have people who can be effective bridges between local organizations and foundations, and who have experience working with and being part of the communities they serve.”

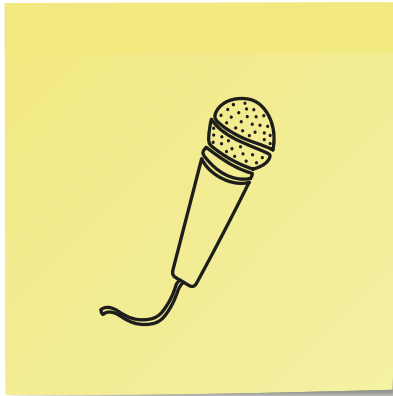
A third idea often mentioned was the increasing numbers of African philanthropists entering the donor community. In theory this should lead to more funding for local organizations, but it's been observed that African philanthropists tend to create operating foundations rather than grantmaking ones. Funders referenced the 2021 report by the Bridgespan Group and the African Philanthropy Forum, which stated, “Between 2010 and 2019, African donors directed 33 percent of their large-scale gifts towards their own operating foundations, with just 9 percent going to African NGOs.”²⁵ And when they do donate, they seem to typically prefer non-African led organizations, with the same report finding that “African organizations...only received 9 percent of grants (by value) from African donors.” Nevertheless, as more African philanthropists emerge, this may be a potential new area for greater conservation funding.

Solution 4. Fund Organizational Development and Capacity

To overcome the barrier of African CSOs lacking the technical skills to engage in professional fundraising as well as to develop their organizations effectively to attract more funders, many of our interviewees noted the importance of funders including capacity building and organizational development services as part of their funding package. For example, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, among others, has a whole team dedicated to organizational effectiveness as part of a conscious effort to invest in building stronger grantee organizations.²⁵ Their training often takes place in a cohort model, which in turn provides peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities among multiple grantees, leading to network effects at the local level.



Another example comes from the MAVA Foundation, which hires consultants to work with a subset of grantees to design action plans for organizational development. MAVA then funds the action plan. Often, a required deliverable of the action plan is a strategy to get funding from other donors, which has been successful.



Some interviewees also felt that funders could do more to give their grantees exposure to other funders as a way to raise their fundraising skills and capacity. Andy Bryant, Executive Director of Segal Family Foundation, a social-development-focused organization with deep experience in supporting CSOs in Africa, described how they

“underwrite the costs of grantees to attend big-ticket conferences like the Skoll World Forum and Opportunity Collaboration, to enable them to get face-to-face interactions with other funders. This has had a massive return on investment, something like 10 times what we’ve spent on it.”

Segal Family Foundation also regularly invites other funders to their annual grantee convenings, providing more opportunities for their grantees to engage with funders.

Given that measuring impact was also cited as a barrier to effective fundraising, more than one interviewee recommended that foundations should include additional funding for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in their funding packages. This would address the commonly noted practice in which funders require M&E data from grantees but don’t fund the collection and analysis of the data. To name a positive example, Yusuf Ibrahim Hussein commended a partnership with Germany’s GIZ agency, in which it not only provided additional funds to enable GIRD to meet the reporting requirements but also invested in training the GIRD team to do so on a wider scale, as well as providing network opportunities that built trust between GIRD and funders.

Solution 5. Utilize Available Mechanisms to Address Legal Barriers

While many funders prefer to support large international NGOs to overcome domestic legal barriers in sending funding overseas, it was also noted that there are well established procedures to overcome these barriers. For instance, Segal Family Foundation has negotiated a discounted rate with a partner that fiscally sponsors a large number of African organizations, thus enabling Segal to fund African CSOs directly. In addition to fiscal sponsorships, other mechanisms such as equivalency determinations and expenditure responsibility grants also provide solutions to this problem. Funders are often well aware of all these legal mechanisms; rather it’s the intention to make the effort to utilize them that indicates whether funding local organizations is a priority.

Solution 6. Adopt User-Friendly Processes

While African CSOs often mentioned the challenges of communicating effectively with donors, whether in terms of providing updates on their work, or delivering reports, or making funding proposals, only a few funders mentioned solutions that would enable local organizations to speak more authentically and effectively about their work. One funder suggested that foundations stop relying on written reports and find other ways that better fit the skills of African CSO staff to communicate, prioritizing – and funding to generate them when needed – stories around innovation, accountability, absorption capacity, compelling leaders, and meaningful impacts.



Solution 7. Treat CSOs and Larger Organizations Equitably

Some of the tensions between local, African CSOs, and INGO intermediary organizations are increasingly attracting the attention of funders, who are often sympathetic to the perspective of the African CSOs. Several funders are proactively taking steps to ensure that CSOs are treated as equitably as possible and that the roles and distribution of resources are appropriate.

A number of funders also stressed the importance of shifting investments to African conservation leaders, which addresses a range of the challenges surfaced in this report related to power, access, race, and organizational relationships. One of the funders interviewed described the history of the conservation sector in Africa as stemming from

“the white, western, PhD student who dedicated their life to African wildlife. They were important. But we have moved on from them now and we have to move towards local organizations and help them grow into the future face of conservation.”

As an example in this area, Charlotte Karibuhoye Said, of MAVA Foundation, noted that their collective impact model in West Africa has been extremely successful. In this model, they bring together a consortium with a lead partner (typically an international or regional NGO that works across multiple countries), which signs agreements with other partners including African CSOs. MAVA not only ensures that the funding includes coordination and overhead costs but also insists that all partners get the same overhead rate, regardless of their size. By promoting transparent and equitable partnerships for collective impact, MAVA has seen strong and sustainable organizational networks develop around their shared objectives.

Key Findings and Recommendations

In this final section, we bring together the key findings and recommendations for practical action to improve funding of African CSOs, leading to greater impact.

Improving Funding Policies and Practices

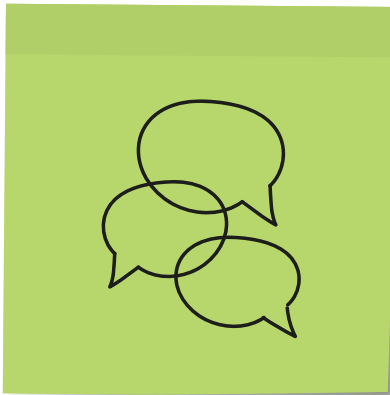
The findings of this report provide clear guidance on ways that funders can improve their grantmaking and investments in African CSOs. Conservation efforts need to pay greater attention to how funding is structured and managed, moving beyond a focus primarily on the total amount of funding allocated to conservation, which does not necessarily translate to conservation impact.

The key improvements to funding practices called for by African CSOs include:

- **Provide more unrestricted or flexible core funding** for organizations to invest in core functions.
- **Move beyond short-term project grants** to more long-term funding.
- **Make grants more flexible** and aligned to grantee CSOs' priorities and strategies, rather than being top-down and predetermined.
- **Simplify and streamline reporting** and adopt common or shared reporting formats that can be used with multiple funders.
- **Make funding calls** and application processes more transparent and accessible.
- **Promote greater investment** in transaction costs and greater acceptance of risk by funders.
- **Build stronger direct relationships** with African CSOs and provide direct grants to them wherever possible, rather than through intermediary INGOs.

There is clear momentum for many of these changes in the wider global development arena, as demonstrated by the hundreds of signatories to a recent open letter, “Shifting Funding Practices” by Catalyst 2030, a coalition focused on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.²⁷

For their part, many funders recognize these issues but also face internal limitations, tax and financial reporting requirements, and historical practices of their own to overcome, and they must negotiate their own internal governance and decision-making structures.



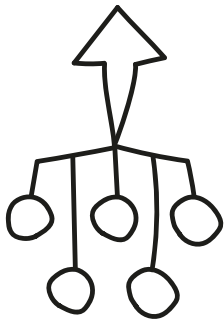
Intermediaries: Improving Partnerships between INGOs and African CSOs

One of the most striking findings from this report is the extent to which African CSOs are calling for improved relationships with international organizations – or INGOs – as intermediaries in many of their funding relationships. While a number of positive partnership examples were highlighted, the overall sentiment was of disappointment and a strong need for improvement, particularly in resource distribution and allocation of responsibilities.

These heightened concerns around the role of INGOs in conservation dovetail with an emerging agenda in the broader international development sector around decolonizing aid, philanthropy, and programming. This report shows how these concerns are also salient in the African conservation sector, which has its own particular history of this, and where there is now an overdue attention on issues relating to race, power, agency, and leadership.²⁸

The following ideas could help to critically review and ultimately strengthen north-south partnerships across the value chain in African conservation:

- Further research to collect additional details and insights on existing partnership issues, challenges, and positive models, with regard to INGOs and African CSOs in the conservation sector.
- Direct dialogue between leaders of INGOs and CSOs to surface these issues and develop shared solutions or commitments on both sides. There may be opportunities through other ongoing initiatives, such as the Luc Hoffmann Institute’s Future of Conservation NGOs project, to address these issues.²⁹
- Existing platforms for collaboration and coordination, such as the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group, could provide a forum for dialogue and the development of standards or codes of conduct for such partnerships as well.



Pooled Funds: Opportunities for Learning and Collaboration

A key area for further action and inquiry, as noted by many funders, is the development of pooled funds and other forms of funder collaboration. Effectively designed and governed funds of this sort can address a range of the issues and barriers described in this report, ideally as a complement to additional efforts by funders to increase direct investment in local organizations. As larger amounts of funding flow toward conservation issues in Africa and elsewhere, a range of new pooled funding mechanisms are being created to channel resources to African CSOs. New or emerging funds include, for example, Blue Ventures' Frontline Communities Fund and the Rights and Resources Initiatives' Community Land Rights and Conservation Finance Initiative,³⁰ among others. These funds also provide a valuable opportunity to increase learning and exchange around funding African CSOs, as well as ensuring effective feedback and input from these African CSOs on the design and governance of these funding mechanisms.

Pooled Conservation and Environmental Funds Supporting African CSOs: Examples

- The International Land and Forest Tenure Facility (Tenure Facility) invests in local, national, and Indigenous civil society actors spread across Latin America, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, to secure land and forest rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, while sharing the knowledge, innovations, and tools that emerge across its global network. In 2021 Tenure Facility's partners achieved the titling of over 5.1 million hectares of indigenous and community land and forest and were on track to document and verify claims of an additional 10 million hectares.
- The Agroecology Fund is supported by over 40 private foundations, with the purpose of enabling just and sustainable food systems. Initially established in 2012 with the support of four foundations, through a participatory governance structure based on the expertise of local advisors, it has awarded \$14.4 million through 223 grants to collaborating organizations in 82 countries. The fund's grantees are primarily local farmers' and Indigenous Peoples movements and focused on food sovereignty and agroecological systems. The fund also hosts a platform for donor and grantee learning and collaboration, including with bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. The Fund is now developing a more regional structure closer to its grantees, such as a new East Africa Fund.
- Blue Ventures advances community-based approaches to marine conservation, supporting roughly 40 local partner organizations across 15 countries in Africa and Asia. They are currently developing a Frontline Communities Fund that will provide flexible, patient funding and hands-on technical support to help these groups develop from small, credible community-based organizations to mature, impactful organizations able to take on more direct financial support. Blue Ventures is committing \$20 million over the next three years to seed the fund and intend to raise a total of \$80 million by 2030.

Conclusion



This report is intended as a step towards better documenting and understanding the core barriers facing African conservation organizations in their ability to secure the funding they need in order to deliver on their goals and ambitions. We acknowledge important gaps in this report, which are themselves opportunities for additional research designed to deepen our understanding of funding issues. First, many funders were unable to pinpoint exactly how much of their funding goes to African CSOs versus international organizations. This may require mapping out the value chains of particular subfields or geographies. Second, we did not include information from public funding agencies, which is a major gap given that this is where the majority of conservation and environmental funding in Africa ultimately derives. With many public development agencies increasing their investments in African CSOs, further research on this front should be a priority.

That said, one key finding from this report is the importance of understanding the different perspectives among CSOs and funders. Despite the obvious practical salience of these differing perspectives, we know of no previous report that has attempted to document them in the African conservation and natural resources field, and we know of no existing efforts at systemic dialogue between African CSOs and funders on these issues. A mutual understanding of the nature of the barriers and each set of actors' perspectives is a prerequisite to joint action. Thus, perhaps the most consequential outcomes of this report would be for funders and African CSOs to understand each other's challenges and circumstances, and engage in more direct dialogue geared toward practical solutions.

We hope to support that process as much as we are able, and welcome other collaborators in doing so.

Appendix: Interviewees

Interviewees – African CSOs

| Name | Title | Organization | Country |
|------------------------------|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Dr. Aristide Kamla | Founder/President | African Marine Mammal Conservation (AMMCO) | Cameroon |
| Wirsiy Emmanuel | Founder/Team Leader | Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) | Cameroon |
| Ponda Sah | Founding President | Rural Development and Environmental Restoration Guard-Cameroon (RUDERG-CAM) | Cameroon |
| Denis Nyugha | Coordinator | Sekakoh | Cameroon |
| Marlene Djoumessi | Technical Assistant | Tube Awu | Cameroon |
| Desire Simplicie Kozo | Technical Advisor | Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems (REPALCA) | Central African Republic |
| Evariste Mbayelo | Programmes Coordinator | I3D | Central African Republic |
| Siham Benmama | Assistant Coordinator | Endangered Species International Congo (ESI Congo) | Congo Brazzaville |
| Noe Mabilia | Technical Advisor | Endangered Species International Congo (ESI Congo) | Congo Brazzaville |
| Julien Matte | National Coordinator | Groupe d'Action pour Sauver l'Homme et son Environnement (ONG GASHE) | Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) |
| Chouchouna Losale | Vice National Coordinator and Programmes Manager | Coalition des Femmes Leaders pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (CFLEDD) | Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) |
| Dr. Carmel Kifukieto | Programmes Coordinator | Centre d'Appui à la Gestion des Forêts Tropicales (CAGDFT) | Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) |
| Theophile Gata | Executive Director | Centre d'Appui à la Gestion des Forêts Tropicales (CAGDFT) | Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) |
| Nahounou Daleba | Programmes Manager | Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement (JVE) | Cote D'Ivoire |
| Paine Makko | Director | Ujamaa Community Resource Team | Tanzania |
| Willie Boonzaier | Programme Director | Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) | Namibia |
| Angus Middleton | Director | Namibia Nature Foundation | Namibia |
| Matthew Becker | CEO | Zambia Carnivore Programme | Zambia |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------|
| John Kamanga | Executive Director | South Rift Association of Land Owners (SORALO) | Kenya |
| Rahima Njiadi | Director | The Community Forest Conservation Network of Tanzania (MJUMITA) | Tanzania |
| Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka | Founder and CEO | Conservation Through Public Health | Uganda |
| Olivier Nsengimana | Founder and Executive Director | Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association | Rwanda |
| Andrew Stein | Founder and Director | Communities Living Among Wildlife Sustainably (CLAWS) Conservancy | Botswana |
| Alda Salomão | Senior Legal Advisor | Centro Terra Viva | Mozambique |
| David Obura | Founder and Director | Coastal Oceans Research and Development - Indian Ocean (CORDIO) | Kenya |
| Rachel McRob | Founder | Conservation South Luangwa | Zambia |
| Antonio Chipata | Executive Director | Associação de Conservação do Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Integrado Rural (ACADIR) | Angola |
| Colleen Begg | Co-Director | Niassa Carnivore Programme | Mozambique |
| Mercy Marende | Field Officer | Oceans Alive/Kwetu Training Centre | Kenya |
| Fiona Moejes | CEO | The Mawazo Institute | Kenya |
| Justin Beswick | Programme Manager | Bahari Hai | Kenya |
| Isa Gedi | Senior Community Development Officer | Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) | Kenya |
| Nyaga Kanyage | Director | The Coastal and Marine Resource Development (COMRED) | Kenya |
| Yusuf Ibrahim Hussein | Country Director | Global Initiative for Resilience and Development (GIRD) | Somalia |
| Lorna Slade | Co-Founder | Mwambao | Tanzania |
| Ali Thani | CEO and Co-Founder | Mwambao | Tanzania |
| Juma Mohamed | Assistant Program Manager | Mwambao | Tanzania |

Interviewees – Funders

| Name | Title | Organization | Country |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Nick Lapham | President | BAND Foundation | United States |
| Annette Lanjouw | CEO | Arcus Foundation | United States |
| Kent Wommack | Executive Director | Liz Claiborne & Art Ortenberg Foundation | United States |
| Lillian Cheng | Senior Program Officer | Liz Claiborne & Art Ortenberg Foundation | United States |
| Andy Bryant | Executive Director | Segal Family Foundation | United States |
| Kai Carter | Program Officer | David and Lucile Packard Foundation | United States |
| Francesca McGrath | Program Manager | Arcadia Fund | United Kingdom |
| Imani Fairweather Morrison | Program Officer | Oak Foundation | Switzerland |
| Charlotte Karibuhoye Said | Director, West Africa Program | Mava Foundation | Senegal |
| Jason Haggins | Managing Director | Sall Family Foundation | United States |
| Peter Lindsey | Director | Lion Recovery Fund | Zimbabwe |
| Thomas Bacha | Director | Small Scale Initiatives Program, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) | France |

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