

Civil Society Organisations' Responses to The Effects of The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Globally, civil society organisations (CSOs) operate in uncertain environments. Thus, resilient CSOs have a demonstrable ability to turn challenges into opportunities. The literature highlights how some CSOs successfully adapt to external threats to their existence. However, how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the operations of CSOs in Ghana and how these organisations are responding to the effects has received very little empirical attention and documentation. This paper examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs' operations and the strategic responses of these organisations. It draws on evidence collected in Ghana through qualitative and quantitative approaches. The paper argues that while the impact of the pandemic on CSOs was dramatic in the short to medium term, CSOs' resolve to ensure that they remain relevant to critical stakeholders, including mainly their intended beneficiaries and donors, has been their most vital survival anchor.

Keywords: Civil society organisations, COVID-19, strategic responses, organisational sustainability, Ghana

ABSTRAK

Secara global, organisasi masyarakat sipil (NGO) beroperasi di lingkungan yang tidak pasti. Dengan demikian, NGO yang tangguh memiliki kemampuan yang dapat dibuktikan untuk mengubah tantangan menjadi peluang. Berbagai literatur telah menyoroti bagaimana beberapa NGO berhasil beradaptasi dengan ancaman eksternal terhadap keberadaan mereka. Namun, bagaimana pandemi virus corona (COVID-19) telah memengaruhi operasi NGO di Ghana dan bagaimana organisasi-organisasi ini merespons dampaknya, hanya mendapat sedikit perhatian dan dokumentasi empiris. Studi ini mengkaji dampak pandemi COVID-19 terhadap operasi NGO dan respons strategis organisasi-organisasi tersebut. Ini mengacu pada bukti yang dikumpulkan di Ghana melalui pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa sementara dampak pandemi pada NGO sangat dramatis dalam jangka pendek hingga menengah, tekad NGO untuk memastikan bahwa mereka tetap relevan dengan pemangku kepentingan, termasuk terutama penerima manfaat dan donor yang dituju, telah menjadi jangkar kelangsungan hidup mereka yang paling vital.

Kata Kunci: Organisasi masyarakat sipil (NGO), COVID-19, tanggapan strategis, keberlanjutan organisasi, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on national economies and institutions worldwide have been devastating. Somehow, Africa's disease burden and associated fatalities have not been as bad as was anticipated (Kapata et al., 2020). As of May 10, 2022, confirmed COVID-19 cases across 55 African countries stood at 11,579,536, with 253,088 deaths and 9,709,681 recoveries. That notwithstanding, the effects of the

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pandemic on Africa and its institutions have been serious (Bamfo, Sarfo, Ansah, & Amoah, 2020; Yeboah, Antoh, & Kumi, 2021).

As part of efforts to curb the spread of the virus and its effects, African governments, including that of Ghana, instituted social distancing protocols, including a ban on gatherings, lockdowns, border closures and other travel restrictions. These measures had devastating and yet unintended consequences on private and institutional lives. The economy, health, and general wellbeing were adversely affected (Bamfo et al., 2020). As the Ghana Statistical Service's (GSS) business tracker survey conducted in 2020 indicated, early measures to curb the spread of the virus in Ghana impacted nearly all business establishments and household firms negatively. Some 51.5% of firms in the Greater Accra and 55.4% in the Ashanti region were closed during the country's partial lockdown (GSS, 2020). Curiously, business establishments' reliance on digital technologies grew only by 9.0% against a 37.5% increase in mobile money usage in the heat of the pandemic.

Even though it has received limited attention, the social economy (theorised to include CSOs and charities) has also been significantly impacted by the pandemic and its attendant restrictions and challenges (EPIC-Africa, 2020; CIVICUS, 2020). In Ghana, organizations that are neither private nor public are often referred to as civil society (government). Non-governmental or community-based organizations, both registered and unregistered, are often used to characterize the sector (Atuguba, 2015, p.83). They include but are not limited to all registered charities, NGOs, advocacy groups, community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, and many others (Atuguba, 2015).

While the presence of the civil society sector predates Ghana's independence struggle (Tsikata, Gyekye-Jandoh & Hushie, 2013), the country's socio-economic challenges and geopolitical state in the 1980s to 90s spurred on a certain kind of civil society activism while silencing others (Kumi, 2017a). Several interwoven factors were responsible for the growth of CSOs in Ghana in those days. They include the dire economic challenges of the country, which spurred on the service delivery CSOs (Gary, 1996). The dynamics of the CSO population in Ghana changed during the structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the economic recovery programme (ERP). There was a shift in aid from the State to CSOs (Hutchful, 2002), which further affected the relations between the State and CSOs.

Attempts by Ghana to democratise through the so-called 'good governance agenda' was another factor affecting State-CSO relations (Atuguba, 2015). Following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the end of the Soviet Union, many developing countries, including Ghana, returned to democratic rule. Under Ghana's parliamentary democracy, there was a boom in advocacy types of CSOs (Atuguba, 2015) with an increasing professionalisation of CSOs (Kumi, 2017b).

Presently, the forms of organisations that make up the population of organised civil society in Ghana are numerous and varied. They include groups formed for public benefit; “and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in fields like health, education, agriculture, governance, community and rural development, support for women, children, the poor and vulnerable persons,” as well as capacity development (National NPO Policy, 2020, p.1). The Department of Social Development reported about 9,333 registered local and international CSOs in Ghana as of May 2020 (USAID, 2020). However, many organisations in the country still operate within the civil society space without a license from the Non-profit Organisations Secretariat (NPOS). While these organisations may have registered with the Registrar General’s Department as companies limited by guarantee, their operations as CSOs are considered illegal without a license from the NPOS.

These CSOs are into all forms of social services provision, some of which are done in collaboration with government agencies and the private (for-profit) organisations. They also ensure a strong link between social capital and economic development (Anheier, 2017) in the country. These organisations keep and constantly renew the country’s sense of community, civic participation, social bonding, and spirit of volunteerism. CSOs in Ghana have over the years become instruments of social accountability in the sense described in the extant literature (Tsikata et al., 2013; Anheier, 2017). They have been known for ensuring accountability, transparency, and good governance in the country (Atuguba, 2015). Ghana’s civil society has remained a veritable check on the government and the private sector all through the fourth republic. They address diverse forms of social problems in the country. Their presence at the local level creates a proximity for empathetic and people-driven solutions through various innovative ideas and interventions.

While the sudden effect of the pandemic is being felt by CSOs globally (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2020; Stewart, Kuenzi & Walk, 2021), the work of CSOs in West Africa and Ghana appears to have been affected more dramatically (STAR-Ghana, 2020a). This is partly because, before COVID-19, CSOs in Africa were already grappling with the challenge of overreliance on external donors and uncertainties surrounding funding for long-term impactful programmes (LINC, 2020; Obadare & Krawczyk, 2022). Despite their known challenges for sustainability, CSOs’ work in the global south has continued to rely substantially on external funding sources (Obadare & Krawczyk, 2022; Amoah, 2019; Kumi, 2017a; Kumi, 2017b).

It is worth noting that the CSO funding environment in Ghana is liberal without any interference from the State. The structure of funding in the country includes both traditional and non-traditional donors. However, the funding landscape is complex and very donor dependent (Kumi, 2017b). About 90% of CSOs’ funding in Ghana has remained

external, with only 10% raised from domestic sources (Kumi, 2017b). This supply-led and donor-dependent relationship renewed interest in CSOs' financial sustainability concerns when Ghana's attainment of lower-middle-income status in 2010 led to a shift in donor priorities (Arhin, Kumi & Adam, 2018). In this context, COVID-19 struck and further heightened concerns about the funding environment and CSO-donor relations.

Aside from the aforementioned, CSOs operate in environments with fragile digital infrastructure and lack the requisite knowledge and capacity to leapfrog advancements in digital technologies (STAR-Ghana, 2020b; Schwier & Holland, 2020). Other evidence suggest that COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll on grassroots organisations, their operations and programmatic engagements in many African contexts due to this challenge (EPIC Africa, 2020). The pandemic forced many CSOs to adopt remote working policies; yet, many of these organisations in Africa and Ghana are struggling with this transition (STAR-Ghana, 2020b). While many lack knowledge of the appropriate tools to adopt, others do not have the skills to manage these technological tools even where they have access. An even more significant challenge is the affordability of the technological resources for a critical mass of CSOs (Eribo, 2021).

As the fleck of evidence suggests, the COVID-19 pandemic affected and continues to affect CSOs in Ghana. However, the extent to which this might impact CSOs' operations and the organisations' strategic responses has not been well interrogated in the literature. This paper fills this knowledge gap by examining how CSOs (significantly, community-based organisations (CBOs)) have been impacted by COVID-19 and the organisations' strategic responses. It analyses the impact of the pandemic on the operations and programmes of CSOs in Ghana as a contribution to the literature on CSOs' resilience and capacity to respond to disruptive change (Judd & Krueger, 2016; Andersson, Cäker, Tengblad & Wickelgren, 2019; Ipsen & Edwards, 2021).

The paper draws on a study involving a survey of 86 CSOs, five (5) expert interviews and a focus group discussion with nine (9) CSO representatives between June and September 2020. It answers two (2) key questions: what are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations, programmes, and sustainability of CSOs in Ghana? How have CSOs in the sector responded to the challenges presented by the pandemic?

The remaining sections of the paper cover an overview of the literature, a discussion of the research context and methodological approach, a presentation and discussion of the findings, conclusions, and some implications for research, policy, and practice.

CSOs and COVID-19 in Africa: An Overview of The Literature

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative effect on people, organizations, and national economy. All societal institutions have responded in different ways to this influence. Globally, the role and contributions of civil society in the third sector in the

battle against the pandemic have varied (Beardmore & Gibbons, 2020). The sector's organisations have mainly been working with governments and the private sector to manage the impact of the pandemic while ensuring a strong recovery (James, 2020; KC, 2022). The global literature supports the view that pandemic-related activism naturally varies across contexts, but some standard features stand out in CSOs' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2020). Across different cities and contexts, there have been voluntary associations and actions from citizens (Savage, 2020) and mutual aid societies (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2020). The work of Newby and Branyon (2021) expanded knowledge of the impact of the pandemic on non-profit organisations with evidence from the USA. For example, Newby and Branyon's (2021) work revealed the lived experiences of frontline workers in non-profit organisations. Considering the nature of the impact of COVID-19, the revelations about its impact on service delivery in the non-profit sector were invaluable.

The Western literature further highlights the early shift in focus by CSOs from long-term projects to emergency relief services through institutional repurposing to remain relevant (Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2020; Schwier & Holland, 2020). While CSOs in Asia and Africa showed similar commitments, empirical studies of these responses have been limited (Schwier, Wallington, Holland, & Magoronga, 2020; EPIC-Africa, 2020; KC, 2022). Moreover, knowing the geopolitical significance of environmental factors to CSOs' growth, Africa's CSOs' experiences will most likely differ in detail.

Across Africa, the regional, sub-regional and national narrative on COVID-19 pandemic responses appears to have been skewed to State and private sector involvement (Patterson & Balogun, 2021; Eribo, 2021). Meanwhile, some evidence exists of the involvement of CSOs at all levels of society during the pandemic (see Adom, Osei, & Adu-Agyeman, 2020; STAR-Ghana, 2020a; Ohene, 2020; WACSI, 2020a; 2020b).

A survey of 1,015 CSOs across 44 African countries by EPIC-Africa in June 2020 assessed the early impact of the pandemic on CSOs. According to this study, the operations of 98% of CSOs in Africa had been disrupted because of the pandemic. The report shows that CSOs in Africa were not prepared to cope effectively with the challenges of the pandemic. Indeed, the ineffectiveness of national responses to the pandemic in Africa was blamed on the failure of most governments to recognise and utilise the expertise of CSOs in their response (Eribo, 2021). Despite the initial neglect, CSOs weaved into national responses to the pandemic. They developed and implemented their initiatives in support of governments' programmes and followed most government and private sector-led initiatives (Eribo, 2021). The CSOs were ensuring transparency in the implementation of response measures and accountability from stakeholders while offering an emergency response in providing and distributing food and aids, research, and documentation.

Following Ghana's first two (2) confirmed cases of COVID-19, the government introduced some preventive and control measures. Through a presidential directive, the Attorney-General immediately submitted emergency legislation under Article 21(4) I, (d) & (e) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana to the national parliament (Addadzi-Koom, 2020). The President also directed the Minister for Health to declare a public health emergency under section 169 of the Public Health Act, 2012 (Act 851) to govern the relevant measures (Addadzi-Koom, 2020). The latter introduced the Imposition of Restrictions Act (Act 1012) with the President's assent, after which the Imposition of Restrictions (COVID-19) Instrument, 2020 (E.I. 64) was issued, all in a bid to institute measures to curb the impact of the pandemic.

On April 20, 2020, the implemented partial lockdown was removed, and on Sunday, July 26, 2020, more lifting of restrictions on places of worship, pubs, and restaurants took place. Tourist attractions and outdoor drinking establishments were permitted to reopen in August 2020, but airports and land crossings remained mainly closed. Other precautionary measures, such as the need to wear face masks and the partial closure of certain levels of schools, were still in effect (Ministry of Health, 2020).

In an attempt to quickly address the hardship and suffering brought on by the epidemic, the business sector established the Ghana COVID-19 Private Sector fund (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021). With the help of this financing, Accra's first 100-bed infectious disease hospital was built. The civil society sector also launched a number of reaction initiatives to improve the situation of the populace, stop the spread, and address stigmatization, among other things. (WACSI, 2020c). The CSOs' traditional way of working involved intense community engagements; as such, the restrictions were thought to have dire implications for CSOs amidst disruptions to programmes and project delivery, financial resource strain, and other challenges of programme implementation.

Even though scenario planning has been a CSO culture for many years, the unexpected and tumultuous nature of the COVID-19 pandemic was expected to make it difficult for CSOs to react effectively. Meanwhile, much of the existing knowledge has mainly been state-centric. The literature has largely regarded the government's management of the disease, its impact on the private sector, and its responses (Agbozo & Jahn, 2021; Quakyi, Asante, Nartey, Bediako & Sam-Agudu, 2021; Antwi-Boasiako, Abbey, Ogbey & Ofori, 2021). So, beyond the fleck of information in the form of blogs and news feeds, very little is known in terms of empirical research evidence on the impact of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes and the sector's response in Ghana.

Other analyses have also looked at the implications of the disease pandemic on the larger economy (Bamfo et al., 2020; Aduhene & Assibey, 2021), the private sector and its responses (Yeboah, Antoh & Kumi, 2022; GSS, 2020) as well as vaccine hesitancy, management, and uptake (Agyekum, Afrifa-Anane, Kyei-Arthur & Addo, 2021). Limited

studies have considered civil society in the COVID-19 pandemic discourse locally. Arkorful, Abdul-Rahman, Ibrahim, and Arkorful (2021) investigated the impact of corruption on trust, satisfaction, and transparency in Ghana and found that corruption has adverse consequences on citizens' satisfaction, trust, transparency, and participation in COVID-19-related activities (Arkoful et al., 2021). While noting the salience of civil society in pandemic management and governance, Arkoful et al. (2021) did not provide any insight into how the pandemic might be inhibiting the CSOs themselves from playing their significant roles in the fight. Its coverage also did not include how CSOs might respond to the challenges they faced as part of the pandemic environment.

Kumi (2022) also demonstrated the pandemic's effect on the shrinking civic space and Ghana's 2020 elections as a contribution to the literature on the influence of COVID-19 on civic spaces. However, our knowledge of the impact of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes and how the organisations may respond remains limited.

This paper, therefore, extends the literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on civil society organisations globally by examining the effects of the pandemic on CSOs and their strategic responses in Ghana. It provides a unique background for understanding how CSOs in the global south may be working to adapt to the external threat of COVID-19 to their existence.

The study's analysis is guided by organisational resilience theory (Tengblad, 2018). It contributes to two key research streams in resilience studies – organisational responses to external threats (Linnenluecke, 2017) and the adaptability of operational models (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007). Organisational resilience is seen in this work from the perspective of Tengblad to refer to the capacity of a CSO to become a selected variation over time. The conceptualization here has connections to pre-existing complexity arguments that emphasize the significance of unforeseen circumstances and unexpected outcomes in this discourse. Resilience theory states that these unanticipated experiences may have both positive and negative effects.

As open systems, CSOs are greatly affected by many factors in their environment and the influence of these factors may happen simultaneously (Anderson et al., 2019). In this paper however, attempts are made to reduce this complexity in the environment by focusing exclusively on CSOs ability to deal with one source of disruption in their environment, which is COVID-19 and its consequences.

The pandemic's effect on the CSOs is analysed retrospectively to appreciate the organisations' responses to the threat to their survival. Analytically, the framework looks at four (4) traits which are fundamental principles of organisational resilience: Risk awareness, preference for cooperation, agility, and improvisation (Figure 1).

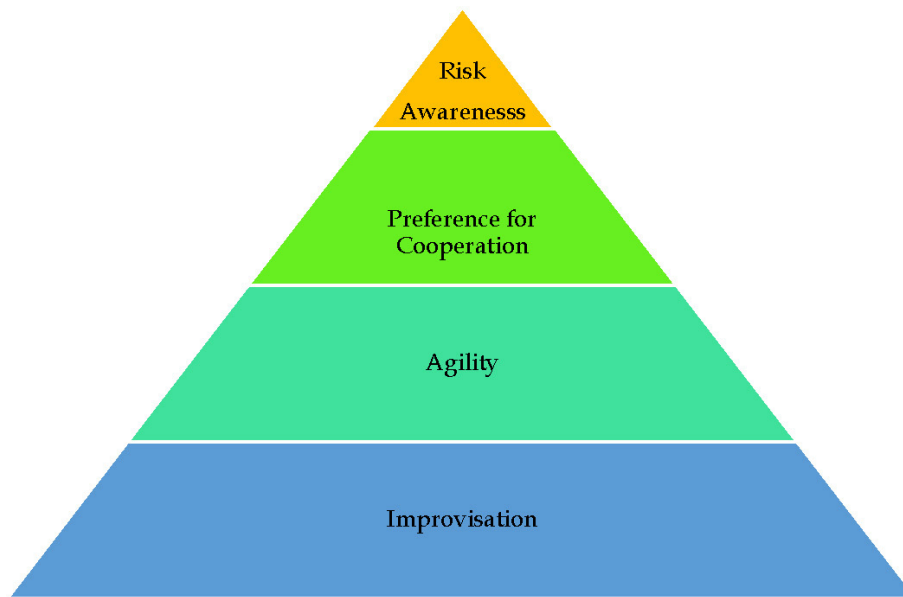


Figure 1. A Framework for Understanding the Traits of Organisational Resilience

The first and most fundamental thing in the process towards resilience is for an organisation to recognise the risk and try to avoid it together with its undesirable outcomes. In the next step, the organisation mobilises resources (including cooperation with others) to avoid or stop the undesirable happening. Agility is demonstrated in quickly finding solutions if the undesirable has happened as in the case of the pandemic. In doing this, the ability to improvise may be required because most unexpected events (like COVID-19) create novel situations and experiences that have not been seen before by these organisations. Therefore, in the context of the present analysis, a resilient sector is a sector that finds an adequate balance between stability and efficiency and changes capacity to survive the storms of COVID-19.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sequential explanatory cross-sectional research methodologies with a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques were used in the study. The quantitative research methodology was employed to acquire a thorough understanding of how the COVID-19 epidemic was affecting CSOs in Ghana. The method also looked at how the organizations handled the pandemic's consequences and the resulting limitations on their operations and initiatives. To get an in-depth understanding of the specific experiences of various organizations and the situation from the viewpoint of important sector leaders, the qualitative methodologies of in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion (FGD) were used. In 2020, the research was carried out between June and September.

A digital database maintained by the West Africa Civil Society Organization (WACSI) lists all CSOs, CBOs, NGOs, and FBOs in the area that are legitimately registered and actively operating. For this research, the main population utilized to get virtual access to the CSOs was organizations listed on the WACSI e-directory system. CSOs based in Ghana who have registered on the site were sent an email asking them to respond whether they would be interested in taking part in the study's survey and focus groups. 86 out of the 211 organizations contacted on the list took part in the survey, and nine (9) participated in the FGD.

The study conducted key informant interviews with five (5) CSO leaders in the country. These leaders were selected based on their wealth of knowledge and experience in Ghana's CSO sector operations and activities and their organisations' participation in coordinated sector activities during the pandemic.

It was not prudent to undertake field visits under the circumstances of the COVID-19 precautions and restrictions. So, all interviews and focus group discussions were conducted virtually using the Zoom meeting app. The study used a questionnaire, an interview guide, and a focus group discussion guide as instruments for the data collection. The survey received 86 valid responses from the CSOs (at a response rate of 41%) used for the analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis were used on the data. The SPSS data analysis program was used to analyze the survey data using descriptive and nonparametric statistics. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. It required careful reading of the transcripts that emerged from the interviews and the FGD, followed by a detailed evaluation of the data to look for concepts and noteworthy patterns of common knowledge that often surfaced across interview transcripts. In accordance with the discussion's broad framework of influence of COVID-19 on CSOs' operations and programs, the emergent patterns were classified and their interpretations were evaluated.

The transcripts were then organised in line with the themes developed through the analysis and interrogated further for convergent and divergent interpretations. The key themes that emerged from the analysis included the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs' operations, funding, domestic resource mobilisation and sustainability, COVID-19 and donor-CSO relations, and CSOs' role and relationship with stakeholders (see Figure 2).

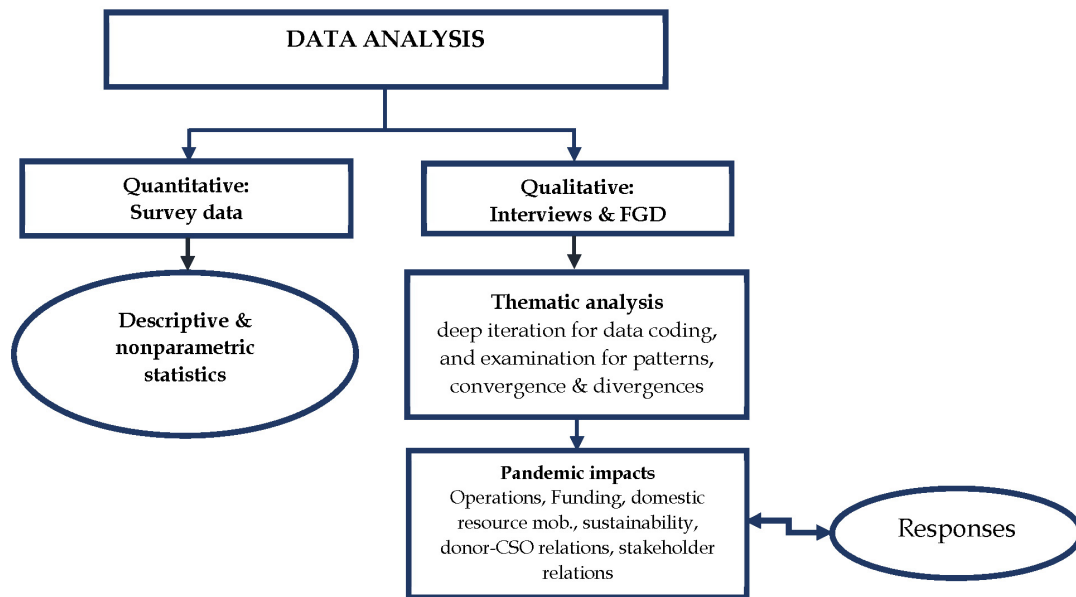


Figure 2. Diagrammatic Presentation of the Data Analysis Process

In order to provide a thorough understanding of the study topic, these themes were then triangulated with the survey results and presented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper begins with a presentation of some characteristics of the 86 CSOs included in the survey. This will be followed by the key findings which are organised in line with the major themes of the study.

As regards the socio-demographics, most of the organisations (87.2%) described themselves as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with only 12.8% identifying themselves as community-based (CBOs), faith-based (FBOs), coalition or network organisations (see Table 1). However, it is essential to note that NGOs' usage as an organisational description in Ghana is often generic. It is thus pervasive to find that many CBOs and FBOs present themselves as NGOs. Most organisations (50%) have existed for a decade or less. Significantly, 34.9% have existed between 11 and 20 years, confirming reports of the boom in CSO numbers across Ghana in the past two decades (Amoah, 2019; Kumi (2017b; Atuguba, 2015) due to some socio-economic and political factors (Tsikata et al., 2013; Hutchful, 2002).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participating CSOs

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Description of Organisation	Non-governmental organisation	75	87.2
	Community-based organisation	5	5.8
	Faith-based organisation	3	3.5
	Unions/coalitions/umbrella organ	3	3.5
	Total	86	100
Existence	Less than 5 years	21	24.4
	Between 6-10 years	22	25.6
	Between 11-20 years	30	34.9
	21 years and above	13	15.1
	Total	86	100
Geographic Location	Capital city	36	41.9
	Urban	22	25.6
	Semi-urban	11	12.8
	Rural	16	18.6
	Others, please specify	1	1.2
	Total	86	100.0
Level of Operation	Community	13	15.3
	District	14	16.5
	Regional	15	17.6
	National	43	50.6
	Total	85	100.0

About 41.9% of the CSOs in this study are located in the capital cities of their region or district where the impact of COVID-19 was most felt. Only 18.6% are located in rural Ghana. Many CSOs' operations (especially in urban areas) span several contexts. It is noted in the non-profit literature that the location of CSOs is influenced by several factors, including "extreme needs, goal congruence and resource dependency" (Kumi, 2017b, p.64). Despite this, some CSOs in this study had difficulty describing their geographical location because where they are located has sometimes differed from their places of operation.

The majority of the CSOs included in the research focused on issues related to community development, disabilities, youth activities, environment and wildlife conservation, education, health, water and sanitation, human rights, and culture and food security. The theme areas that the CSOs represented in this research cover are shown in Figure 3.

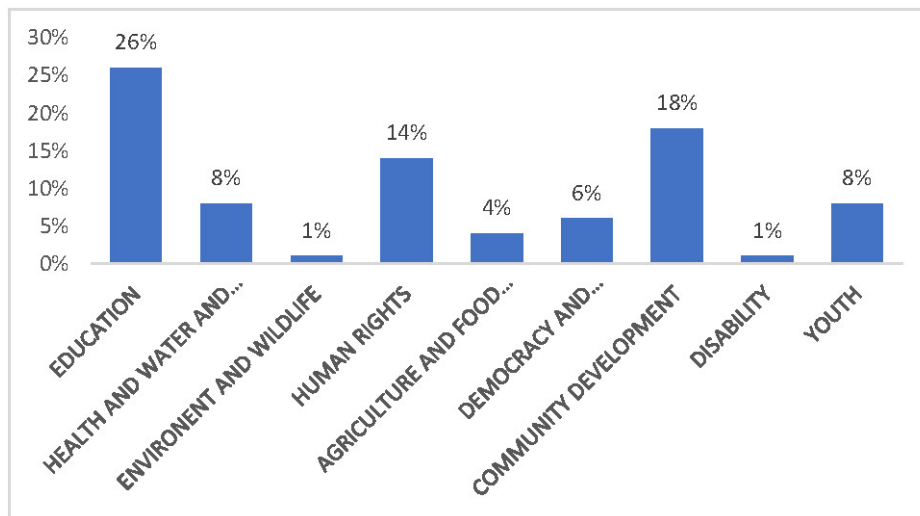


Figure 3. CSOs' Thematic Area of Work

It is worth noting that there is a reasonable probability that the high number involved in education, as seen in Figure 3, also describes organisations active in advocacy. Giving a fair view of the size of the organisations, Table 2 describes the number of paid employees (full-time) in the CSOs. Curiously, over half of the CSOs (54.3%) had five (5) or fewer full-time paid employees. Even though the number of paid employees may not be the best measure of a CSO's size, that statistic gives a good appreciation of their size, considering that assets may not also be a good measure given their non-profit nature.

Table 2. Total Number of Full-Time Paid Staff

Number of Staff	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 5	44	54.3
6 - 10	22	27.2
11 - 20	9	11.1
21 - 40	4	4.9
61-100	1	1.2
Above 100	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

Less than 20% of the organisations employ 11 or more workers full-time, confirming an earlier observation by Amoah (2019) that CSOs in Ghana operate with lean staff supported by interns and volunteers.

Also contributing to our appreciation of the size of the CSOs is information on their budgets. Agreeing with the background characteristics presented above, most CSOs (51%)

had operational budgets of less than US\$20,000. Of this number, nearly 26% reported annual budget amounts of less than US\$5000.

Table 3. Current Estimated Annual Budget of Participating CSOs

Estimated Annual Budget	Frequency	Percentage
Under US\$5000	21	25.6
Between US\$5001 and 20, 000	21	25.6
Between US\$20,001 and US\$50,000	13	15.9
Between US\$50,001 and US\$100,000	9	11.0
Between US\$ 100, 001 and US\$300,000	9	11.0
Between 300, 001 and US\$ 500,000	2	2.4
Above US\$500,000	7	8.5
Total	82	100.0

In line with the data on staff strength, only 11% of the CSOs had an annual budget amounting to US\$300,000 or more. The funding sources of the organisations were explored. The funding sources range from international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies (such as the United Nations, DFID, and DANIDA), philanthropic and grant-making foundations to individual donations. Figure 4 presents the funding sources of the CSOs in this study.

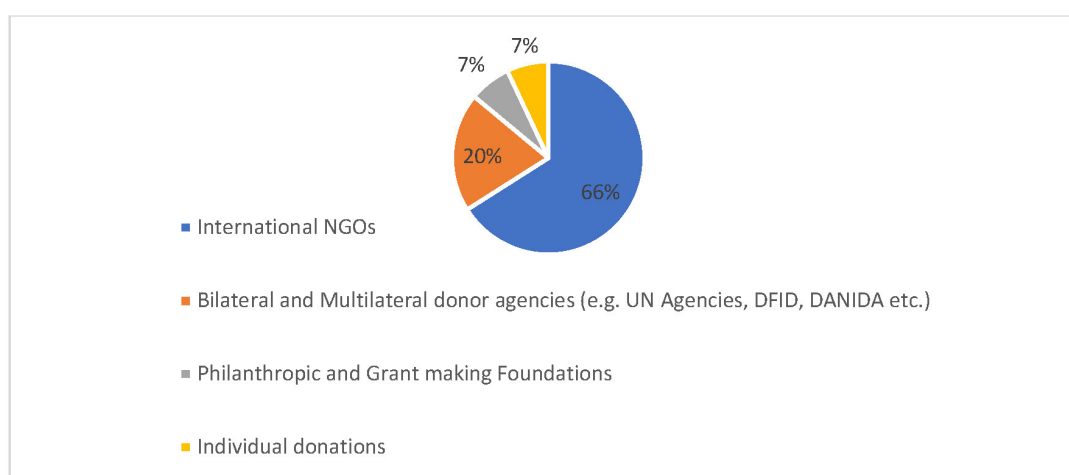


Figure 4. CSOs' Sources of Funding

Figure 4 shows that the majority of CSOs – 86% or more – traditionally receive funding for their activities from outside Ghana, as shown. Understanding the effect of the global health pandemic (COVID-19) on the operations of CSOs in Ghana is crucial given their dependence on external funding sources. It would be fascinating to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic scenario may be affecting how civil society organizations are funded.

Effects of the COVID-19 on the Operations and Programmes of CSOs

The results show that Ghana's CSOs were affected in various ways. First, the strategies implemented by the state to curb the spread of the virus meant the imposition of restrictions on movement and large gatherings, among other things. Overall, a majority of CSOs (83%) reported during the survey that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively affected their operations:

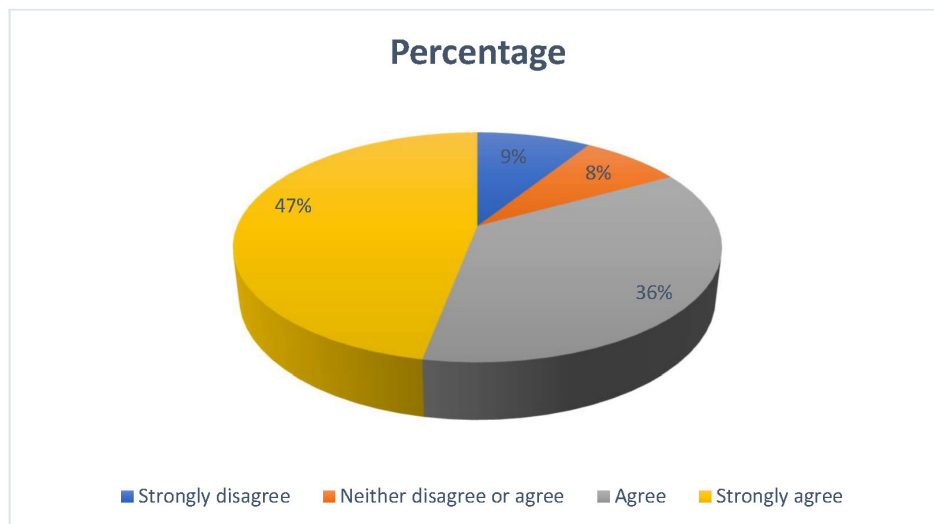


Figure 5. CSOs' Report on Whether The COVID-19 Pandemic Negatively Affected their Operations

The interviewees noted that implementing the various COVID-19 interventions, procedures, precautions, and response measures significantly curtailed the operations and programmes of their organisations. The imposition of restrictions in the form of lockdowns implied that many CSOs in the affected regions could not effectively function from their offices or even engage their communities of beneficiaries as they were not listed as essential services.

Sadly, only 33% of the CSOs reported having a policy of working remotely from home. Before the pandemic, most of these organisations (67%) had no policy to support remote working.

Many of the CSOs shared their initial apprehension about working from home. Some 79% of the CSOs closed their offices during the partial lockdown imposed across the country's major cities. These organisations were compelled to work remotely or remain indefinitely closed. About 89% of the CSOs indicated that the pandemic and its attendant challenge of remote working came as a surprise. They did not have the policies or resources to support remote working. Thus, for most CSOs (71%), the implementation of remote working policies was COVID-19 -induced.

Despite their lack of preparedness, some of the CSOs were compelled to become innovative as the dominant thought among Ghanaian CSOs that working from home was not consistent with the context of CSOs' work was challenged. Also, the thought that because they lacked the logistics, remote working was never a thing to consider waned.

While the effects of the pandemic on the CSOs have been diverse, the critical areas with the most short-term effects were restrictions on staff movement, reduced staff strength, cancellation of meetings, conferences, training, workshops, and related campaigns. Other effects included the cessation of fieldwork, reduced community engagements, and the loss of funding.

Table 4. Impact of COVID-19 on Operations and Programmes of CSOs in the Short-Term (i.e. 1-3 Months)

Effect	Frequency	Percentage
Restriction of staff movement	39	46.4
Reduced staff strength	19	22.6
Cancelled meetings, conferences, and travels (national and international)	11	13.1
Reduced or cancelled operations (e.g., training, workshops, and campaigns)	9	10.7
Cessation of fieldwork and inability to have community interactions	2	2.4
Increased demand for services	3	3.6
Loss of funding	1	1.2
Total	84	100.0

Notably, organisations that worked at the community levels and had activities that required community engagements were reported being the hardest hit regarding operations and programmes. Most community-based organisations decried the fact that the pandemic disrupted their project implementation. A representative of one women's development and empowerment NGO in Accra indicated that they were on the field when COVID-19

struck which meant that they had to put all projects on hold. This programme officer described the situation as a total disconnect from their communities of beneficiaries (Masa, an FGD participant). One other participant referencing her network of NGOs said that most of their members engaged in community-level engagements were folding up because of the reduction in funding for their project (Ama, a participant at the FGD).

Similar cases were shared during the in-depth interviews with some key informants. For instance, one interviewee described their community-level work as “almost non-existent” due to the pandemic (Kate, key informant). She explained further that their partners who went to the community level were given stringent rules to follow. Some of these rules of engagement meant that the community people had to bring their own chairs from their various homes for meetings. Others also could be allowed in the communities for only a couple of hours which was not the case before COVID-19.

Contrasting the general narrative, some 3.6% of the organisations indicated an increased demand for their services mainly because of the pandemic. Complexity theory, which highlights the centrality of unforeseen events, and their unanticipated consequences holds that these consequences could be both positive and negative. Here, we find that, depending on the focus of the organisation, the pandemic presented even more opportunities for their work. While admitting that the impact of the pandemic has been undeniably negative, some participants emphasised that the pandemic shed light on the significance of their projects and increased demand for their services. This was particularly the case for organisations whose target group was street children and the network of organisations engaged in WASH activities. As one participant from Kumasi in the Ashanti region explained, “the target group of her organisation are street children and knowing that children were one of the most affected groups by COVID-19, they “had to initiate new activities that could meet their needs within this time” (Janis, FGD participant).

Through fresh initiatives, the organizations in this category continued to operate throughout the lockdown and fed children on the streets of large cities. In certain cases, the organizations gave vulnerable populations living in temporary housing uncooked food (such as rice, oil, and others).. In these examples, the CSOs reported working actively through a realignment of their activities to continue to serve their beneficiaries effectively. Thus, despite its devastating effects on many organisations, COVID-19 came to reinforce the significance of their work. During the FGD, some CSOs some CSOs in WASH also shed light on how the pandemic re-emphasised the importance of their work. Describing the situation of her network of organisations, Yaa (a participant), said that COVID-19 just came to re-emphasise what they were working on (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in schools). With the advent of COVID-19, WASH became a very essential service, thus, reinforcing whatever members of her network organisations were already advocating for – sustainable WASH services for everyone, everywhere. For many of these organisations, their traditional advocacy for sustainable Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

(WASH) in schools had to quickly shift to the community level as schools were closed. Here, organisations in WASH demonstrate agility and the strength of improvisation required in unexpected events like COVID-19 (Anderson, Caker, Tengbla, & Wickelgren, 2019).

Many respondents (57%) identified the projected loss of money as having the greatest impact on their organization's activities when asked about the expected medium-term (6–12 months) impact of COVID-19 on CSOs. Additional disadvantages included a rise in organizational expenses from implementing technology infrastructure to accommodate remote working, a decrease in employee size and mobility, a cancellation of meetings and travel, and a decrease in community involvement. The pandemic reportedly made it more difficult for 84% of CSOs to provide programs and services to target areas..

The initial impact was severe for the majority because they worked directly with the people. In most cases, their activities involved direct engagement with the people at the local level. As some participants noted, their organisations were “actually grounded” (Vora, FGD participant) in the heat of the COVID-19. Some CSOs working with women at the local level could not go to the community to engage the women and were also unable to move online because their beneficiaries did not have internet enable phones. As Vora puts it, “*they have just ‘yam phones’, so you can’t even do this zoom thing. Even calling them on the phone is difficult because they have a poor network*” (Vora, FGD participant). ‘Yam phones’ describe analogue phones which are not internet-supported.

Significantly, 86% of poll participants said that without more cash, their companies wouldn't be able to pay employees for the following four to eight weeks. 17% of those who responded to the study said that their organizations had to fire some employees in order to survive..

While 58% of the CSOs said they were prepared to adapt their organisations to cope with the negative implications of the pandemic on their operations, a good number of them (42%) were not prepared. Whereas many of the CSOs (65%) took appropriate measures in response to COVID-19 to safeguard their operations, a significant minority (35%) appear to have been unable to do anything or done too little.

Other critical areas found to have been impacted by the pandemic were funding, domestic resources mobilisation, CSO-donor relations, and general sustainability.

Funding, Domestic Resource Mobilisation and Sustainability Concerns

According to the available research, CSOs may already be suffering the effects of COVID-19 on their financial resources. (Vandyck, 2020; Eribo, 2021). So, this study sought to understand how these organisations were financially impacted and whether this affected local resource mobilisation efforts. Confirming Kumi's (2017b) revelation on the donor-dependence nature of CSOs in Ghana, 86% of the organisations in this study listed external (foreign) funding sources as their primary source of funds.

Delay and a decrease in donor financing were the most prominent consequences of the pandemic on CSOs' organizational finance, among many other repercussions. Sadly, based on the conversations, it seemed that 90% of the CSOs would likely be impacted by any halt in project financing. Any reductions in project financing posed a danger to the survival of many CSOs. Some said that changes in funders' goals would probably have an impact on their rapport with donors. As part of mitigation efforts, some donors took some action. They include the extension of project completion dates, cancellation of project activities, and a discussion of details regarding the use of already disbursed donor funds. The study found that donors had mainly been flexible with CSOs in Ghana regarding changes in project deliveries and amendments to programmes and projects.

According to the survey's findings, 77% of CSOs thought the pandemic will have a substantial impact on their financing in the next three to six months. 38% of the CSOs responded negatively when asked whether they will survive the following 6 to 12 months without new money. 40% of the remaining 62% who think they would survive do so with considerable personnel and program reductions. When asked whether they have financial reserves to lessen the effect of COVID-19 on their financing for the next 6-12 months, 73% of the CSOs gave the affirmative.

Despite the negative consequences, 18% of the organizations said that the pandemic offered chances to mobilize local or non-traditional resources. Street kid advocacy groups were among the organizations that had some success with local fundraising. Because few CSOs successfully mobilized domestic resources throughout the time period, it was a minority experience.

Only 32% of the CSOs had generated any funds locally to supplement their donor financing before to the survey, despite the fact that 69% of CSOs considered the pandemic offered potential for CSOs in Ghana to mobilize domestic resources to support their efforts. The majority of the participants in this study agreed that CSOs lacked the capacity (i.e., technical, personnel, and material) to mobilize domestic resources to support their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding supports earlier claims by Vandyck (2020) that lack of capacity for local fundraising remains CSOs' weakest link.

In addition to the capacity problem, several important issues concerning the underutilization of domestic resources were brought up in the qualitative study, some of which need further investigation. For instance, in the expert interviews, several practitioners discussed the challenge of gaining local access to the typical financing from corporate partners. Due to these partners' focus being diverted to the Ghana National COVID-19 Trust Fund established by the government, this source of money was not used.

Others in the discussion ascribed the CSOs' failure to mobilize domestic resources to the public's long-held belief that CSOs are affluent organizations that survive entirely on foreign aid and do not need local support. This issue relates to a historical trend in which the civil society has prioritized foreign donors above internal givers and beneficiaries when it comes to accountability (Amoah, 2019). This has contributed to the notion in Ghanaian culture that NGOs only provide aid to individuals over time.

According to the FGD and expert interview inputs offered in the debate so far, there are a variety of reasons why CSOs are unable to mobilize local resources. Reduced financing from foreign donors to CSOs in Ghana was identified by Kumi (2017b) as an imminent danger to the country's civil society space. The current results confirm that domestic resource mobilization is still a difficult challenge for CSOs in the global south, notwithstanding Kumi's (2017b) conclusion that social innovations in domestic resource mobilization presented the possibility for CSOs' financial sustainability in Ghana (Vandyck, 2020).

Nearly half (49%) of the CSOs in this research were not likely to continue to offer services to their beneficiaries between four and eight weeks of their existence, according to the study's findings on the function and relationships of CSOs with stakeholders. Additionally, although the majority of CSOs (67%) were confident that intended beneficiaries could continue their project activities after COVID-19, a sizeable minority (33%) were not.

CSOs' Strategic Responses to COVID-19

It became clear in this study that the CSOs recognized the risk of COVID-19 but could not avoid it with its undesirable outcomes. The data shows, however, that the organisations mobilised resources (which included cooperation) to reduce the undesirable outcomes. They demonstrated agility in staying afloat despite the disruptions of the pandemic through some improvised responses (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007). This section discusses the CSOs' strategies in minimizing the impact of the pandemic on their operations, funding, and donor and stakeholder relations.

Responses to the Impact on Operations and Programmes

The study found that the CSOs implemented several measures in Ghana to mitigate the disruptions caused by the pandemic to their operations and programmes. to ensure their survival and ultimate sustainability in the long term. While the responses were varied, key among them were reductions in and realignment of existing programmes, adoption of digital technologies, and downsizing. Most CSOs (64%) had to reduce existing programmes and services, while a relatively small section (17%) relied more on digital technologies, among other measures. Some CSOs had to realign their operations to mitigate

the effects of the pandemic. Recognizing the threat of COVID-19, some organisations were proactive in integrating COVID into all their interventions. For instance, one participant noted that most of their scheduled community-level engagement meetings failed. In response, they quickly recorded voice messages and distributed same to mosques and churches to be played to the community members (Asa, Key informant). Another vital strategy for the CSOs was the reliance on digital technologies. In addition to reducing existing programmes and services, a critical number of organisations used one digital solution or another. As with many organisations worldwide, using online technologies enabled many of the CSOs in Ghana to remain relevant and serve their communities of beneficiaries.

The above notwithstanding, it would be naïve to assume that digital solutions were enough in dealing with the problem of reach during the pandemic. This recognition was apparent during the FGD and was further reiterated during the interviews. The quote below places this discussion in context:

So, we are using online tools all right. ...this is a strategy to continue to reach out to our constituencies. However, by doing that, we definitely know that some communities do not have even internet, to have electricity, to have a smartphone or a laptop to be able to call into some of these meetings. So, that in itself is also a negative (Kate, a key informant).

Therefore, despite attempts to lessen the harmful consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the measures used could not completely undo the pandemic's detrimental effects. Sometimes the job done by CSOs could not be efficiently executed by other methods due to its nature. Regarding downsizing, several CSO representatives said that in order for their organizations to survive, some employees had to be let go. In one such instance, an executive director described how he had to meet with project workers to notify them that the project would not be funded and that they had to suspend their work during the interview (Kwasi, a key informant). In essence, they had to convince some of these employees to leave the company since the epidemic had made it impossible for them to get finance for their initiatives.

Strategies for Mitigating the Effects of COVID-19 on Funding

Common tactics used by CSOs to lessen the pandemic's financial effect included focused on current initiatives, cutting down on administrative costs and travel, relying on the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) models, and engaging in social entrepreneurship.

About 80% of the organisations reported that they realigned their projects and activities to remain relevant and resilient. Others had to cut administrative expenses to reduce the financial impact of the pandemic. However, a few others resorted to local fundraising, even though many admitted this was not easy.

The VSLA model is one area that continues to capture the interest of many CSOs at the local level. According to the report, VSLAs were becoming into focal places for the local populace. It was discovered that several CSOs helped communities create VSLAs to keep their beneficiaries close and get ongoing assistance. The VSLA is a corporation that makes financial contributions to a single source for the benefit of all of its members. Once the funds had grown significantly, they were used as a source of loans for VSLA members and, sometimes, CSO operations. Some FGD participants highlighted the need to expand these VSLAs in order to make up for the reduction in financing for local level activities. During the key informant interviews, several individuals revealed similar tactics. For instance, Godson (a key informant) told the VSLA about his organization's experience in places without banking institutions. This participant claims that all of the beneficiaries in the villages where they operate depend on the VSLA, which functions like a corporative credit union and provides revenue for farmers and other NGO operations.

Even though social entrepreneurship had been recognised as a strategic response to sustainability challenges in Ghana (Arhin et al., 2018), there appeared a unique reawakening of CSOs to its potential as an organisational resilience strategy during the pandemic. The pandemic taught the CSOs lessons about turning their attention to sustaining their activities through self-financing models, projects, and activities.

Strategies for Mitigating the Effects of COVID-19 on Donor-Relations

As regards donor relations, many CSOs wrote to their donors to start discussions on stalled projects and their inability to meet delivery timelines. Some donors withdrew their support out of concern over their survival. However, the reports indicate that many donors were flexible in responding to the challenges.

Some CSOs reported that they had to look for new and emerging funding opportunities around COVID-19 to make up for the impact of distortions in existing donor relations. Thus, some CSOs resorted to domestic resource mobilization. A focus group participant drew attention to her organization's successes with local fundraising efforts for the provision of hot meals and other essentials for the poor and vulnerable during the lockdown and beyond (Janis, FGD participant). She indicated that people followed their fundraising campaigns on Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media platforms and sent in money to support their activities. It is important to reiterate the point that despite the efforts made, as has been made clear so far, only a few organisations were successful at raising funds locally.

Mitigating the Effects of COVID-19 on CSOs' Role and Relationship with Stakeholders

Despite the devastating effect of the pandemic on CSOs' operations and programmes in Ghana, many were involved in programmes and initiatives aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic on beneficiary communities. Most of the CSOs (85%) reported active involvement in working with other CSOs and beneficiaries to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. They were mainly engaged in advocacy and community education, data gathering and information sharing, coordinating donations and support for the vulnerable, and providing online capacity building (e.g., training and workshops).

Nearly 79% of the CSOs engaged in activities to inform the public about the risk factors and preventive protocols. Other activities included data collection at the local level, counselling support, relief distribution and others. It is essential to mention that many of the organisations involved in public education during the pandemic also engaged in some vital service delivery activities in the form of support to vulnerable communities. In many cases, households and health facilities in beneficiary communities benefited from hand washing materials, facemasks, and alcohol-based hand sanitisers. Civil Society Organisations collaborated with local governments within the WASH sector to deliver sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene projects.

Despite the fact that all parties involved appreciated and understood how COVID-19 had an influence, the responses from the public, business, and civil society sectors varied significantly. The implementation of COVID-19 response measures suffered from a lack of coordination and cooperation across stakeholders, which reduced its efficacy in reducing COVID-19 and its effects.

Discussion

Numerous publications agree that civil society organizations must actively participate if there is to be a successful response to the COVID-19 epidemic (James, 2020). However, this research discovered that the government's reaction to the epidemic in Ghana failed to acknowledge or include the important responsibilities CSOs play in times of emergency. Ghana is often cited as having an atmosphere that allows CSOs to function freely and without any fears in the setting of west Africa. However, there are also serious concerns raised by the government's complete disregard for CSOs in the first national COVID-19 response. Could the government be rethinking what responsibilities CSOs should have in the nation? With its COVID-19 response spending, was the government attempting to conceal from the watchful eyes of civil society? These issues could not be addressed right once, but the CSOs' reaction in this situation shows how robust the industry as a whole is to disruptive change.

We acknowledge that CSOs in Ghana did not recoil from the battle against the pandemic's effects and spread. By striking a balance between dependability and efficiency and adapting their strategies and capabilities to be able to weather the COVID-19 pandemic's storms, the CSs showed exceptional resilience. They persisted in reclaiming their area via both solitary and group efforts. The fact that the organizations in this field were discovered to be reviving public places and ensuring that Ghanaian residents were heard via their lobbying is particularly noteworthy. To guarantee that the constituency they assist continues to get what is justly theirs from the state, the CSOs sponsored several webinars, seminars, and other events. At these forums and conversations, the pandemic danger to health, rights, public space, and democratic process were evaluated along with suggestions for how stakeholders can respond to ensure an effective post-pandemic recovery.

The discoveries here raise questions about the value and contributions of civil society to the country's development and whether this is genuinely recognised beyond the usual political rhetoric. CSOs' contributions to policy formulation, successful implementation, monitoring, and the general wellbeing of society have not been well conceptualised to guide government decisions. While civil society might be doing a lot, its contributions are not documented in a way that makes it difficult for governments to ignore or fail to see the value of engaging and supporting the sector.

Without a doubt, CSOs drew many lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed CSOs quite uniquely to their weaknesses and strengths and provided a sense of reawakening for the sector. The pandemic also provided the sector's organisations with an opportunity for deep introspection. Many were awakened to how the civic space might be closing in hitherto open systems like Ghana.

Evidence shows that as open systems, CSOs' work reflects the socio-political contexts within which they are immersed. This paper reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic affected CSOs' operations, programmes, and activities, with severe implications for their sustainability. It also shows that CSOs recognised the threat of the pandemic to their sustainability and took steps to mitigate its disruptive outcomes (Linnenluecke, 2017; Tengblad, 2018). The findings demonstrate the potential of CSOs to become more agile and resilient to future disruptive changes through the lessons learnt in their responses to the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper supports the view within the broader organisational resilience literature that a positive change could be engineered through a damaging pandemic (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007). It proves the ability of CSOs in the global south to be creative and innovative in challenging environments. While recounting its negative impacts, the

pandemic, as demonstrated by this paper, has caused radical and yet transformational changes in the civil society sector.

The paper stimulates discussions regarding local resource mobilisation as a viable response to CSOs' financial sustainability challenges in the global south. As seen here, interest in creating resilient CSOs in the global south will not happen without the creation of legal frameworks that support local giving. Also, the dream of a sustainable civil society sector will require that CSOs invest in technological resources, build human capacity, and ensure transparency and accountability in developing and implementing programmes and services.

There is a need to strengthen the capacity of CSOs in digital technologies, invest in institutional capacity, and build the capacity of CSOs in domestic resource mobilisation. African governments should also consider enhancing CSOs' operational capacity through emergency funding and involve CSOs in future emergency response strategies.

Implications for Practice

The neglect of CSOs in developing and implementing national COVID-19 response strategies in Africa reveals a lot about governments' limited appreciation of civil society's value and contribution to the region's development. Changing this observation will require legislation that demands the representation of CSOs in the development and implementation of all social intervention programmes and a concerted effort to improve research and documentation of the activities and impact of CSOs in the region. Investing more resources in research and documentation will ensure that all stakeholders appreciate the collective relevance of CSOs.

The revelations in this work have made clear the level of distress suffered by CSOs during the pandemic. It revealed, among others, the lack of capacity in digital technology adoption, local resource mobilisation and CSOs' over-reliance on dwindling external donor funding as critical challenges. Thus, investing in digital technologies and building the required capacity promises to improve the resilience of CSOs. Closely related to this, diversification of financial resources and enhancement of capacity for local resource mobilisation holds an excellent promise for CSOs' sustainability. In essence, CSOs, through this pandemic have recognized the value of characteristics like flexibility, adaptation, corporation, improvisation, and agility in remaining sustainable.

The pandemic showed that CSOs' limited collaboration with the private sector affected their ability to mobilise substantial local resources to sustain their operations in difficult times. CSOs' increased collaboration with the private sector will help the organisations build financial reserves for uncertain times. CSOs should also work on enhancing their image in society through a commitment to peer and downward accountability. CSOs must constantly practice accounting to beneficiaries on their stewardship, especially

regarding financial resources they receive in their name. When this is done, CSOs will be seen as trusted advocates worthy of local support. This will change the fortunes of CSOs in local resource mobilization.

Also, the CSOs should turn attention to innovative ways to mobilise local resources. VSLAs are obviously helpful. The communal lifestyle of the African people (Amoah & Afranie, 2015) could be leveraged for human and intellectual resources through volunteering. This measure can help CSOs deal with the problem of foreign aid dependency while intensifying local ownership.

The subject of providing flexible and core funding for CSOs has become even more crucial during this pandemic. Governments and multilateral agencies need to consider this a priority, if CSOs are going to be prepared for future pandemics.

The value of increased collaborations between CSOs cannot be overemphasized. CSOs in Ghana and similar West African contexts should come together to create active networks and partnerships. This will create effective coordination in the sector to avoid duplications in roles and service delivery and increase resilience in sudden disruptions. A well-coordinated sector is more likely to be effective in engaging the government and in creating spaces for civic actions that are impactful.

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