

Monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on Civil Society Organizations in Data Ecosystems across Sub-Saharan Africa

Highlights from a survey of
CSOs in data ecosystems
across Sub-Saharan Africa

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Data Ecosystems are socio-technical complex networks, infrastructure, analytics and applications in which actors interact and collaborate with each other to find, capture, archive, analyze, publish, consume, or reuse data as well as to foster innovation, create value, and support new businesses. Different stakeholders including producers, users, funders, infomediaries play different roles in making data ecosystems function.

The Context

The Covid-19 pandemic has and continues to impact different sectors and data ecosystems around the world differently. Civil society organizations are important players in data ecosystems collecting, publishing, analyzing and consuming data as well as supporting different actors in the data ecosystem through advocacy, policy dialogues and data literacy initiatives. A lot of these activities have previously been structured as one-on-one interactions which have now been disrupted by the pandemic.

As such, CSOs in data ecosystems are among some of the affected spaces due to measures put in place to contain the pandemic. This working brief seeks to understand what the impact of the pandemic has been on CSOs in African data ecosystems and how the CSOs are adjusting to the new changes and provide recommendations for how CSOs can evolve and adapt to the new context in which they must operate.

Key Findings

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- There has been an increased use of online platforms for engagements and disseminating information to a wider audience
- There has been increased access to data published by the CSOs
- There has been a disruption in CSO activities and stakeholder engagements, most of which were previously predominantly face to face resulting in delays in program implementation
- There has been a disruption in access to funding/investments in data-related activities occasioned by the pandemic
- There has been an increase in CSOs costs to facilitate participants' attendance of virtual events

Key Findings

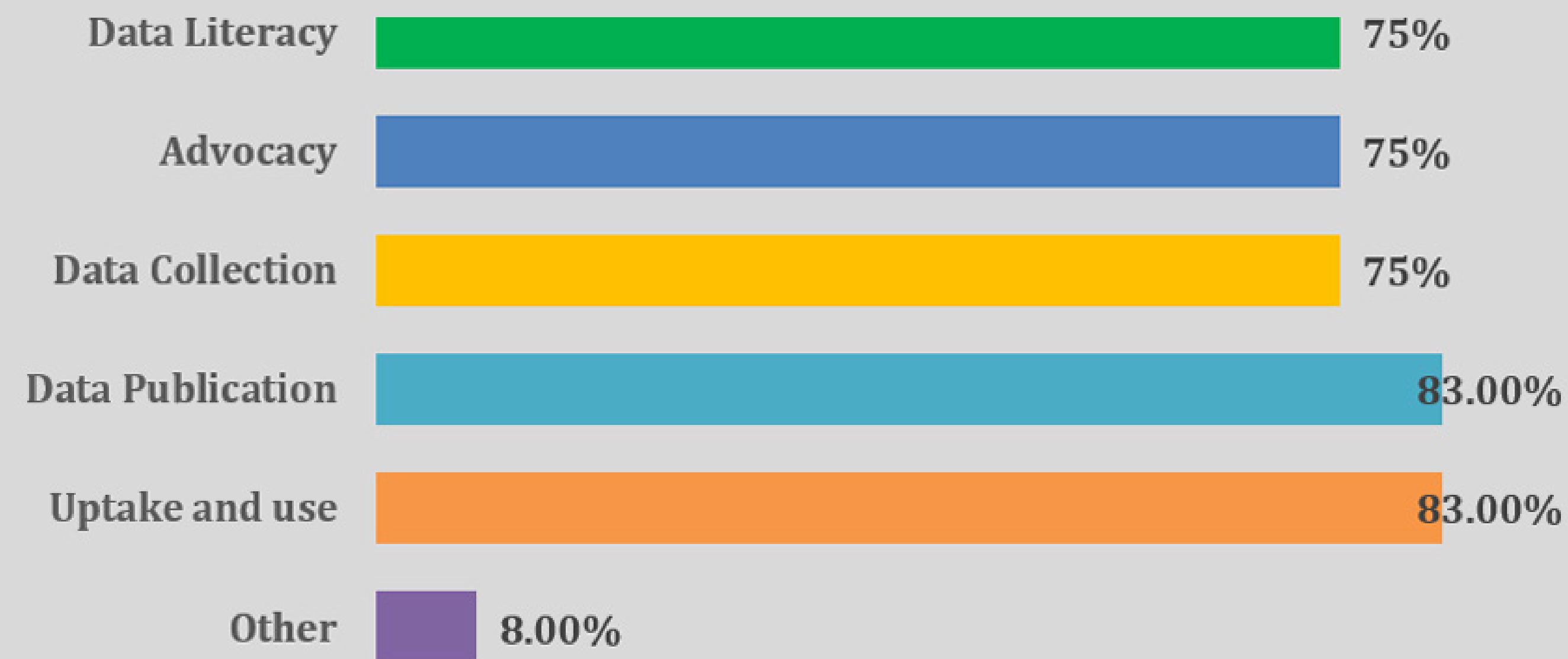
Key Findings

- There have been challenges in accessing consistent up to date data on the pandemic and its impacts
- Most data collection activities that involved face-to-face interactions were either postponed, delayed or moved online due to the pandemic resulting in a decrease in the amount of data and evidence available for different stakeholders
- There have been cancellations and postponement of key data related events
- There has been increased team fatigue for constantly having to engage virtually
- New models of collaboration are emerging that center grassroots organizations in data collection and program implementation
- There have been duplicative data initiatives especially focusing on the the covid pandemic and its impacts

The survey was administered to CSOs operating in data ecosystems across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Survey Participants

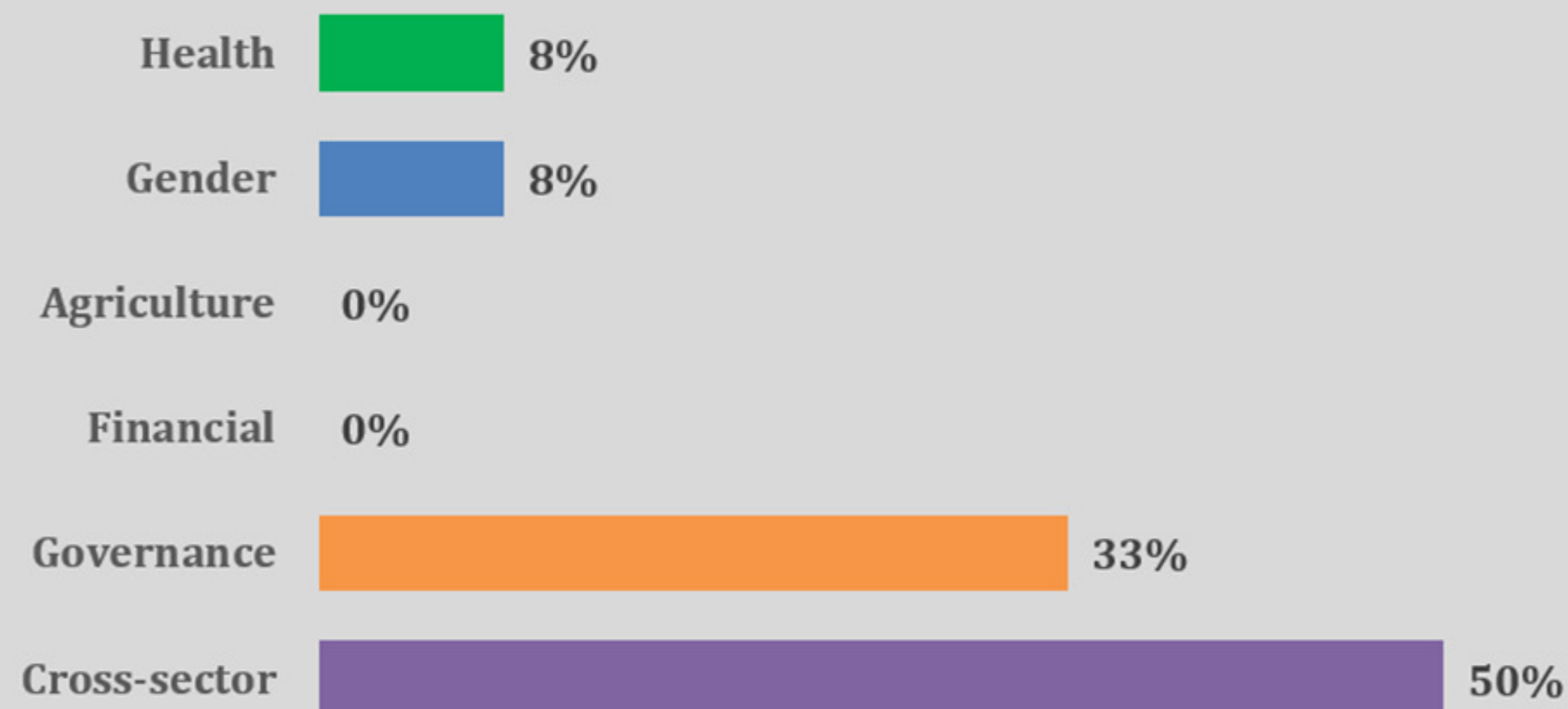
Participant CSOs areas of Focus in the Data Ecosystem



Note: Most CSOs have initiatives across all identified areas of focus

50% of surveyed
CSOs implement
cross-Sector data
initiatives

Thematic Focus Areas of Surveyed CSOs

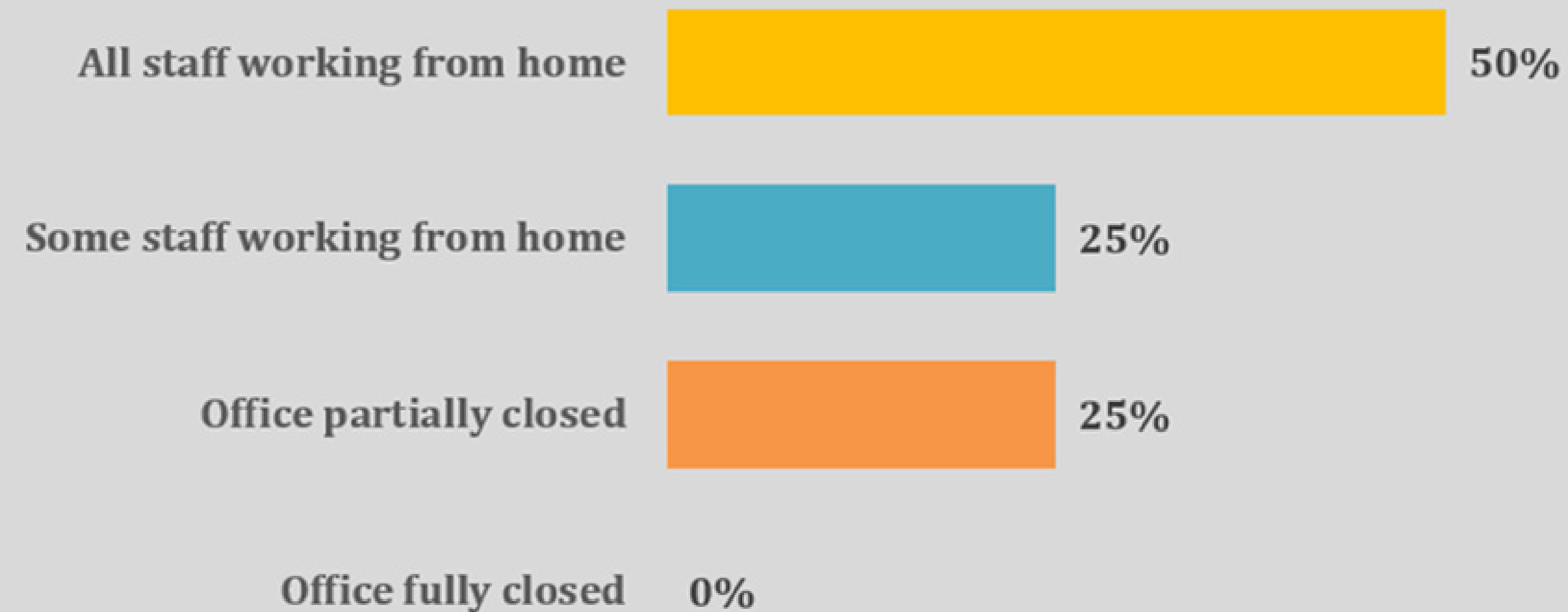


Note: We did not receive responses from CSOs working in the Agriculture and financial sectors.

CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Activity and Operations

- Most activities that involved face-to-face interactions either stalled due to the pandemic or moved online. For most CSOs, remote working has become a norm with rotational working helping ease office traffic.

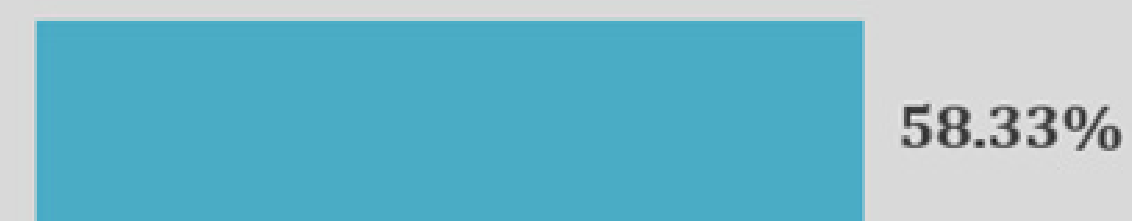


CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Data Collection

- Most CSOs had to delay or postpone their data collection processes while others moved the exercise from face to face to alternative channels. Very few decided to cancel data collection altogether.

Data collection moved from face to face
to alternative channels



Data collection cancelled



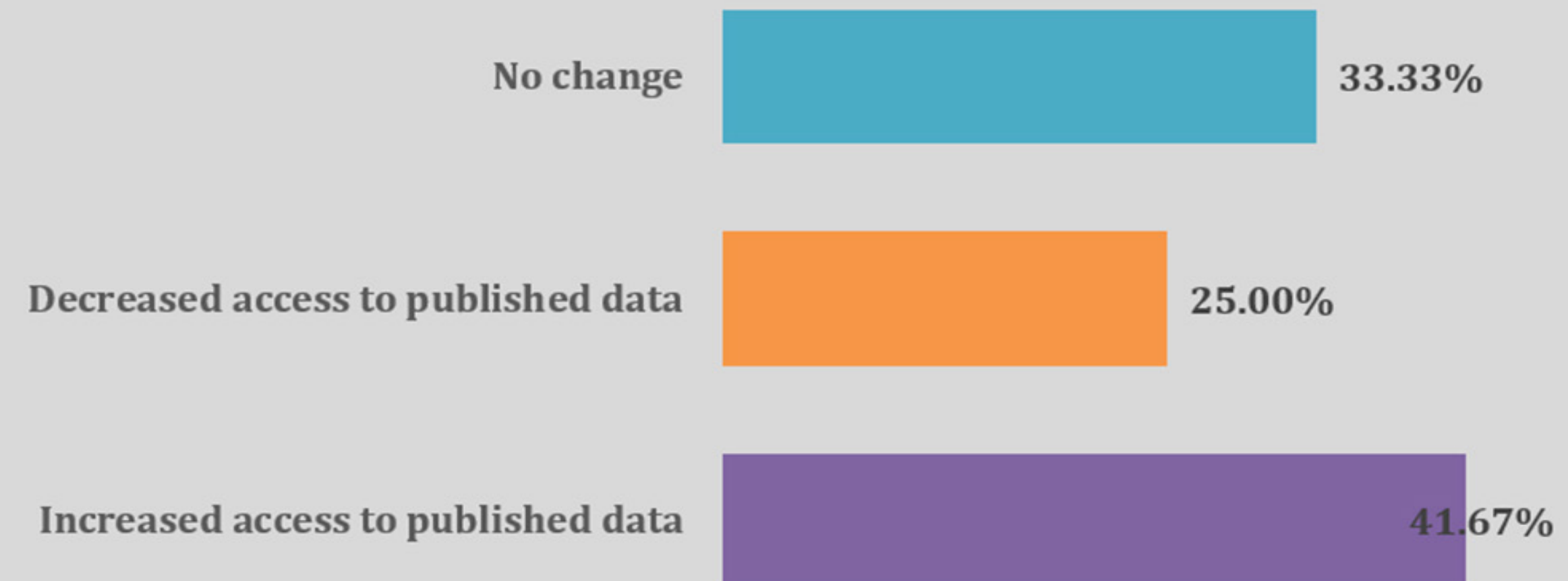
Data collection delayed/postponed



CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Data Availability, Access and Collaboration

- There has been increased access to data published by the CSOs.

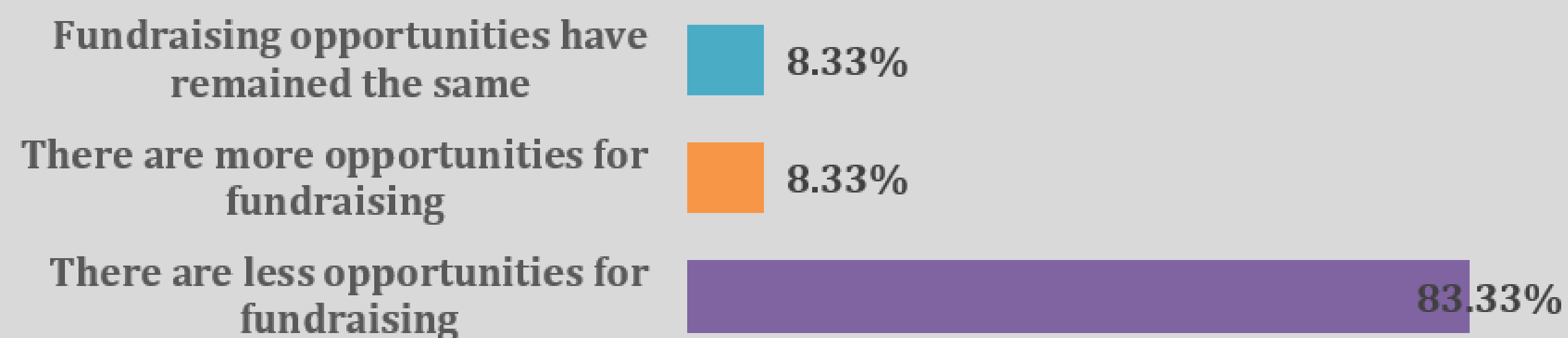


- There has also been increased use of online platforms for engagements and innovative ways for disseminating information to a wider audience.

CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Access to Funding for Non-COVID-19 Data Initiatives

- There has been disruption in access to funding/investments in data-related activities occasioned by the pandemic. There have been fewer fundraising opportunities for data initiatives not focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Changing donor priorities have impacted access to funding for data initiatives not focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic.



CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

How CSOs are Adapting to Challenges Presented by the Pandemic

- CSOs reduced in-person meetings and resorted to online engagements
- CSOs adopted online/digital data collection methods such as, mobile phone-based survey
- CSOs reduced international and local travel due to various travel restriction placed by WHO and national governments
- CSOs transitioned to working from home/remote working arrangements from primarily working from the office
- CSOs reduced operations involving face to face interactions such as conferences and field work or data collection exercise
- For CSOs still working in the field, new protocols for activities that will involve face to face interactions were established.

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Opportunities in the Data Ecosystem Presented by the Pandemic

- Most CSOs are leveraging digital technology and other innovative approaches to continue the implementation of their projects. These solutions range from developing online training platforms, adoption and use of digital data collection devices and applications, software, digital data sharing applications, and platforms that allow for remote monitoring of data flows and sources
- CSOs have embraced remote working. This is likely to be a trend going forward due to the savings made on rent and maintenance especially for small organizations.
- There has been increased reliance on the web, cloud-based collaboration and meeting platforms and new technologies to support projects. This has improved collaboration across counties, regionally and globally.
- Increased funding by donors for programs addressing the impact of COVID-19.

CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Going Forward

- Increased funding by donors for data related initiatives as a means of sustaining existing work progress on data for development initiatives
- CSOs need to expand traditional work portfolios by exploring additional areas of work on data as a means to expand fundraising streams. Health data for instance is an area traditionally not tackled by many governance-focused CSOs but is increasingly an area with increased funding and potential for impact
- CSOs need to maximize on the available resources and opportunities for partnership/collaboration locally, regionally, and globally. This reduces duplication of activities and ensures efficient use of available resources

CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Going Forward

- To survive external shocks like COVID, CSOs need to explore avenues for additional resource mobilization such as fundraising from local philanthropists
- There is need for CSOs to embrace digital transformation in their operations going forward. This includes the use of digital data collection, sharing and motoring devices, applications, and software, and cloud-based collaboration and meeting platforms.

Thank you to all CSOs who participated in this survey!

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