



Strengthening African Civil Society Organizations

For Improved Natural Resource Governance & Conservation



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About Maliasili Initiatives

Maliasili Initiatives is a US-based non-profit organization that supports the growth, development, and performance of leading civil society organizations and social enterprises working to advance sustainable natural resource management practices in Africa. Maliasili presently works with nine local partner organizations in east and southern Africa, and is involved with a number of wider technical and organization development activities at regional or global scales that are designed to advance innovative rights and incentive-based approaches to natural resource management. By integrating long-term and adaptive organizational strengthening services with technical expertise, Maliasili Initiatives is helping its partners achieve their full potential and scale up their impact – for people and nature.



About Well Grounded

Well Grounded is a non-profit, non-government organization registered in the United Kingdom that provides organization development support to civil society organizations in Africa so that they have real and sustainable impacts on natural resource governance and community rights. Well Grounded also promotes change by connecting organizations with each other to build a strong civil society voice. Its aim is to provide a unique response for each organization, based on its particular needs and priorities. Well Grounded currently works in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo and has also worked in the Central African Republic, Gabon and Liberia. Well Grounded's support enables African organizations to reach their full potential and achieve real, positive change for environmental and social justice.

Acronyms

AcT	Accountability in Tanzania
CEPF	Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FFI	Fauna & Flora International
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FODER	Forêts et Développement Rural
GDRNE	Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement
GEO	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
IRDNC	Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MCDI	Mpingo Conservation & Development Initiative
OCDH	Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDCI	Partners for Democratic Change International
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SDI	Sustainable Development Institute
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement
WCN	Wildlife Conservation Network
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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“Organizations matter. They make it possible for us to pool the strengths we have as individual human beings to achieve things that we could not do alone. They enable us to collectively mobilize our individual powers to face our human challenges with greater possibility.”

-The Barefoot Collective¹

“The measures I suggest to counter Africa’s many challenges are practical - an engagement in grassroots democracy and the strengthening of civil society, so people’s energies can be released to shape their own lives and development priorities.”

-Wangari Maathai²

Executive Summary

A wide range of local and national civil society organizations (CSOs) are central to processes of change and positive outcomes in the natural resource governance and conservation fields across sub-Saharan Africa. However, many committed and innovative CSOs face an array of internal challenges in their ability to grow, scale up, and achieve their goals. This study aims to better understand African CSOs' organizational needs, interests, and challenges; to explore how funders and partners are working to address those needs; and to identify opportunities for better practice and investments in strengthening African CSOs. It is based on semi-structured interviews with representatives of more than 70 leading African CSOs, international organizations, funders and organization development experts, as well as a broad and extensive literature review covering a range of issues and trends around organization development and capacity building, civil society funding, and natural resource governance.

Main Findings

- ▶ African CSOs play a central role in catalyzing positive changes in natural resource governance, management, and conservation, including in areas such as facilitating community natural resource management and local conservation initiatives; catalyzing new ways to obtain local resource benefits through sustainable enterprises; and working to change policies, hold decision makers accountable, and build collaborations that can bring about institutional change.
- ▶ African CSOs face a range of organizational challenges in their efforts to grow and sustain their impact, particularly around issues related to leadership, human resources, funding, vision and strategy, values and organizational culture. All of these issues are closely interrelated and an organization's relationships with external actors can either ameliorate or exacerbate these challenges.
- ▶ There is a renewed emphasis on funding for African CSOs by both public development agencies and some private funders, with a range of new models and approaches being deployed. Despite this, a range of long-standing challenges around the suitability of much funding, particularly as channeled as Official Development Aid (ODA), in supporting local CSOs persists.
- ▶ Increasingly, funding for African CSOs gets channeled through international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). However, there is frequently no systematic approach or methodology to supporting the organizational capacity, growth, and performance of these organizations. Even where there is a more systematic approach, there is limited empirical documentation of the impacts of organizational strengthening over long periods of time and despite considerable investment of resources.
- ▶ There are a range of challenges that arise in the context of these local-international partnerships. These problems tend to revolve around the power dynamics and accountability within these partnerships, and the potential for African organizations, particularly those without a clear strategy or strong internal leadership, to have their interests and operational focus distorted by external influences.
- ▶ Even when funders and INGOs do invest in organizational capacity development, they often fail to respond to local organizations' needs and use organization development models that are inadequate or ineffective. Often the function of capacity-building investments is largely a risk mitigation device used by funders and INGOs to enhance compliance with contractual obligations and expectations. The function of 'capacity building' is thus actually geared towards compliance with funder needs and requirements, and may not effectively support the long-term development needs of local organizations.

- ▶ There are underlying cyclic interactions between African CSOs' organizational needs and challenges, on the one hand, and international organizations' and funders' interests, choices, and patterns of behavior, on the other. Funders often demand high administrative capacity from CSOs for financial management, reporting, and overall financial and administrative compliance, yet can be unwilling to invest in the core organizational resources and attributes that enable such functions to be discharged. As a result, funding and CSO support modalities can serve to limit local organizations' ability to invest in leadership, human resource development, incentives and rewards for staff, and opportunities for organizational growth.
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Recommendations

Recommendations that emerge from the study's findings focus on five areas of intervention:

- ▶ **Improve partnerships** between African CSOs and international actors for greater long-term impact, by developing more collaborative and mutually accountable approaches to partnership design, structure, and investment.
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- ▶ **Change the way organization development support is delivered**, shifting to a more long-term, customized, sustained, and demand-driven organizational support paradigm. There needs to be greater understanding of the shortcomings and limitations of many conventional approaches to capacity building as a part of this shift.
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- ▶ **Support new approaches to organizational leadership development** to address one of the major gaps in the African natural resources field.
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- ▶ **Bolster investments in documentation and learning** to build up the base of empirical evidence about practices and impacts of organizational strengthening in the African natural resource management, governance, and conservation fields. This includes improving documentation of many ongoing practices and experiences in long-term investments in local organizations from within this field.
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- ▶ **Encourage greater dialogue** around fundamental organizational issues affecting CSO performance that relate to values, constituent accountability, financial sustainability, and the role and function of CSOs within the wider context of African civil society.
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1.

Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a key role in catalyzing changes in African natural resource governance in ways that promote more sustainable patterns of resource use. CSOs perform many critical roles and functions such as building rural communities' capacity to manage and benefit from natural resources; supporting communities to secure their rights over their land, forests, waters, and wildlife; developing new and innovative opportunities from sustainable resource use that enhance rural livelihoods; and facilitating coalitions and alliances that advocate for policy and governance reforms.

Despite widespread agreement on the importance of CSOs as agents of social and environmental change across Africa – and the considerable growth in scope and influence of civil society in many African countries over the past 20 years – many committed and innovative CSOs still face daunting challenges in their ability to grow, scale up, and achieve their goals. These challenges stem from a range of factors, including barriers inherent to working in rural areas with limited infrastructure and high levels of poverty. They also include the increasingly restrictive political and institutional environment in many African countries, where space for civil society has been facing new limitations and pressures in recent years. In addition to these external challenges, African CSOs, like organizations anywhere, face constraints in terms of their own organizational capacity, which they must address and overcome in order to succeed. These constraints include challenges in obtaining and sustaining adequate human and financial resources, as well as technical skills, strategic clarity, leadership, appropriate governance structures, networks and collaborations, and other critical elements that shape organizational performance.

The performance and capacity of local and national CSOs, as key actors in their societies' social and institutional processes of change, is a critical and strategic but largely overlooked issue within the natural resource governance and conservation fields. Despite the attention given to various forms of capacity development by many initiatives and organizations, the fact that organizational capacity so widely persists as a challenge suggests the need to re-examine existing understanding of the issue.

Study Purpose

This study provides a review of CSO development issues and practices in the African natural resources and conservation field. The core premise of the study is that for transformative changes in African natural resource governance to occur, there must be more effective and impactful African civil society leaders and change agents that can achieve greater impact at a wider scale. The purpose of the study is to explore and analyze African CSOs' organizational needs, interests, and challenges; to understand how funders and partners are working to address those needs; and to identify opportunities for better practices and investments in strengthening effective African organizations.

“Our interest in supporting African CSOs – or local organizations on the ground – is the realization that this is the only way that sustained outcomes will be achieved.”

-Director of the East Africa program of an international conservation organization

An underlying rationale for the study is that at present relatively little documented experience and analysis around organizational issues and practices within the African natural resources field exists. During the course of the study, it became increasingly evident that there is widespread recognition that these issues are vitally important and there are numerous efforts being made to address them in one form or another. Yet there is no consolidated body of knowledge or practice specific to the natural resources and conservation fields; virtually no documentation or evaluation of existing organization development practices and investments; and limited exchange of knowledge and information. There is also insufficient integration within the natural resources and conservation fields of the vast accumulated knowledge around organization management and capacity development that has been generated within the wider development field, as well as the private sector (i.e. business development and management consulting). Simply put, the natural resources and conservation field needs to place greater attention on the role of organizations in bringing about desired changes, understand factors that enable or disable those organizations to be effective agents of change, and build up a body of applied practice and knowledge that can inform the efforts and investments of actors within this field. This study is therefore a preliminary effort to address this set of gaps, with the hope that it will help catalyze further enquiry, action, and collaboration on organization development within the natural resources sector.

“To fulfill our role we need an enabling environment, which is sometimes missing for us as an organization – we don’t have adequate resources.”

-Director of a Tanzanian civil society organization

Methods and Structure

The study was guided by two basic and related groups of research questions:

- What are the major organizational needs, challenges, and constraints facing African CSOs in the natural resources field, and how are those needs supported or constrained by those organizations’ external support relationships (e.g. with international partners, networks, funders)?
- How are international organizations and funders in the African natural resources field working to strengthen civil society and support African organizations? What are current trends in terms of external funding and support for African CSOs that are shaping these patterns of investment? What are best practice examples or models for supporting the growth, development and improved performance of African CSOs?

To carry out the research, we conducted 72 interviews, from across the following categories of actors:

- Representatives of leading African CSOs working in the natural resource governance and conservation arena. (N=23)
- International organizations investing in supporting African natural resource issues, often through funding or technical partnerships with African CSOs. (N=23)
- Representatives of funding agencies, including both private foundations and public development agencies. (N=17)
- Independent organization development experts with experience in the African civil society space. (N=9)

Box 1: Definitions

For the purposes of this study, **civil society organizations** (CSOs) are understood as non-government and non-private sector and can be any grouping, formal or informal, of people working together for a common purpose. They may be local non-government organizations (NGOs), community based organizations (CBOs), unions or cooperatives, religious organizations or social movements. We acknowledge that civil society comprises a diverse range of actors, and we also recognize that different types of CSOs play a fundamental role in enabling people to work together to achieve common aims and interests within society. This array of organizations has recently been termed the ‘plural sector’³ and plays a key role in social change processes. **African CSOs** refers to any independent and autonomous organization based in an African country, and primarily staffed and governed by African nationals, and accountable to a local or national (i.e. ‘African’) constituency.

Organization development and **organizational strengthening** are used interchangeably in the report to describe the process whereby organizations consciously seek to improve their performance, impact, sustainability, and resilience. We also use more sparingly the related terms capacity building and capacity development, which also relate to the process of strengthening the internal capabilities of organizations, though these commonly used terms have tended to evade precise definition.⁴

In this study, **natural resources** refers to renewable natural resources and excludes non-renewable natural resources such as underground minerals, oil and gas.⁵ We use the terms **natural resource governance**, **natural resource management**, and **conservation** to broadly encompass the process of natural resource use, and attempting to ensure that use is sustainable through a diverse and broad range of institutional (governance) and active management practices. We use these distinct albeit overlapping terms to reflect the differing interests and motivations of diverse groups of actors in the subject of natural resource use, with some focused more on questions of community rights, tenure, and empowerment (i.e. ‘governance’), and others emphasizing resource sustainability (i.e. ‘conservation’).

To select our interview sample, we cast a wide net in our survey, including organizations involved across the spectrum of issues concerning land rights, forest governance, environmental justice, and biodiversity conservation. We identified organizations based on our own networks and knowledge of active and influential organizations within this broad arena across different regions and countries in sub-Saharan Africa. We targeted leading African CSOs – as defined by their general reputation, track record of impacts, and national/international profile – and international organizations and funders with a prominent interest and involvement in African natural resource issues. We sought broad geographic coverage, with African CSO interviewees from 11 countries including East (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda), Southern (Namibia), Central (Central African Republic, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon), and West (Liberia, Ghana, Burkina Faso) Africa. We also expanded our sample through the interviews themselves, as interviewees were invited to recommend other leading organizations, funders, or experts to include in our coverage.

Interviews were based on semi-structured questionnaires developed in advance and used by all interviewers. Information collected from the interviews was supplemented by a review of relevant published literature and documentation on the subject of the study.

The major limitation of the study is the scope of the subject addressed, in relation to the limited overall resources available for the study. We explicitly intend this to serve as a broad scoping and synthesis of important trends, patterns, and organization development issues in the African natural resources field, recognizing that this 'field' is one that lacks clearly delineated boundaries, and which encompasses a diverse range of environmental, conservation, resource governance, trade, social justice, land rights, and rural development interests and actors. Moreover, while we focus the study on the organization development of African CSOs, we draw on relevant literature and analyses from the wider development, social enterprise, and organizational management fields. A more narrow segmentation of our subject would have possibly produced more precise findings relevant to a smaller pool of actors in a more defined geographic region. However, the intention of the study is to be relatively broad as an initial effort to better understand and document a relatively unexplored subject area, and thereby establish a foundation for more intensive and delineated action-research in the future.

The structure of the report is organized through the following sections:

Section 2 : describes the external operating context for African CSOs working in the natural resources field. This highlights some of the characteristics of this particular set of issues and some of the major operational and organizational challenges that African CSOs face in working to address them.

Section 3 : presents brief examples of the role African CSOs play as agents of change at different scales on natural resource and conservation issues.

Section 4 : reviews the major organizational challenges that African CSOs face with respect to their own internal development and performance, and their experiences with how external financial, technical, and organizational support is addressing their growth and capacity.

Section 5 : describes current trends, practices, and models in funding of African CSOs.

Section 6 : explores the relationship dynamics between international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and African CSOs, and the key influence this relationship has on African organizations' capacity and performance.

Section 7 : discusses issues surrounding conventional approaches to capacity-building and how those respond to African CSOs' organizational needs.

Section 8 : provides a synthesis of the interactions between the internal organizational challenges African CSOs face and the types of external support they receive.

Section 9 : shares a set of recommendations for collectively building a stronger, more impactful African civil society.

2.

Background

Natural Resource Governance, Political Economy and Civil Society in Africa

Natural resources such as forests, wildlife, water, fisheries, grasslands, and soils lie at the center of African countries' national economies and rural communities' livelihoods. Societies in most African countries remain strongly rural and agrarian, with the majority of people making their living through agriculture, pastoralism, and the use and sale of wild foods and other products, including fish, bushmeat, and non-timber forest products. At the national level, wildlife and forests play critical roles in global industries, such as tourism and timber production. Wildlife and nature-based tourism is a major source of commerce, employment, and foreign exchange in many countries in eastern and southern Africa,⁶ and timber is a leading source of export income for countries such as Cameroon and Gabon, second only to oil.

The economic uses of African natural resources are increasingly linked to global patterns of trade and commerce. Wildlife tourism is international in its market. Trade in timber and wildlife – both legal and illegal – is also driven by global demand. International hunger for mineral and oil resources is putting pressure on important and fragile ecosystems, and escalating conflicts over land rights and access, a phenomenon particularly visible in resource-rich countries such as those in the Congo Basin. Land itself, as the key resource underpinning agriculture, biofuels, forestry, livestock production, wildlife ranching, and other activities, has become an increasingly valuable commodity over the past decade, leading to a surge in land acquisition across sub-Saharan Africa.⁷ The region has consequently been at the center of global debates around land use, tenure, and land acquisition in recent years as demand for land increases, values rise, and conflicts between different land users and social groups become more pronounced.⁸

The centrality of land and natural resources to African economies translates directly into the political realm. Control over valuable natural resources is central to political relations in African societies, including for patronage, alliance-building, and personal enrichment.⁹ Institutional reforms aiming to decentralize, devolve, or otherwise democratize natural resource governance must confront a wide range of deep vested interests and relationships.¹⁰

A critical feature of African natural resource governance in this context is the enduring centralization of control over land and natural resources. This centralized control over resources is driven by relatively high resource values in a context of historically centralized political institutions, such as the concentration of political authority in the executive branch.¹¹ In regions such as central Africa, nearly all land and forests, as the most valuable renewable resources, are owned by the state (Figure 1), and play a key role in local and national political orders and power relations (Box 2). Similarly, wildlife's high economic value in countries such as Tanzania shapes wildlife policy and governance regimes in fundamental ways, by creating strong incentives for perpetuating a status quo that has historically excluded local communities from wildlife and tourism value chains while creating opportunities for political elites to engage in both legal and illegal forms of commerce.¹²

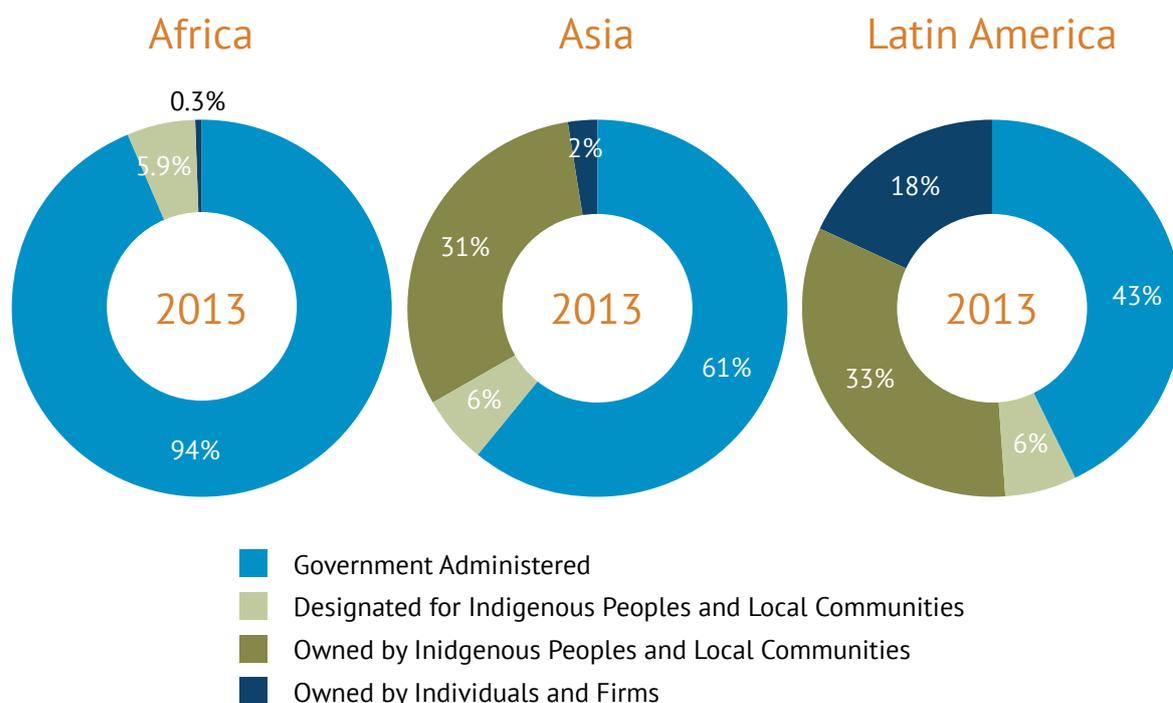


Figure 1: Statutory recognition of forest tenure by region in 2013.¹³ (Source: Rights and Resources Initiative).

Box 2: Forest Governance and Political Order in the Congo Basin

The countries of the Congo Basin forests – Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic – have markedly different colonial and post-independence histories, but also share many factors in common. All six are rich in natural resources and weak in governance. Home to the second largest area of continuous tropical forest cover after the Amazon, they all have well over half of their citizens living in poverty. Customary rights to land are not fully recognized in the legislation of any of the six countries¹⁴ and in all their constitutions, the state is the owner of the land and natural resources. One-quarter of the sub-region’s lowland forests are formally allocated to commercial logging concessions¹⁵ and there is also extensive informal logging. In both formal and informal sectors, the timber trade is part of a political economic system that frequently entrenches the power of elites and institutionalizes corruption. Indeed, logging interests played a large role in the composition and power base of the newly independent states emerging from the former French Equatorial Africa and hence the political makeup of the modern day Congo Basin states.¹⁶ Changes in forest governance that redistribute rights, incentives, and benefits in this context have powerful implications for the basic ordering of society, and the political composition of the state itself.

All development issues and interventions involve questions of power, rights, and control over resources. However, the politicization of natural resource governance issues are particularly pronounced because natural resources are so closely tied to patronage and access to wealth in many African states. In turn, for many or most African CSOs working for more sustainable natural resource uses and governance arrangements, challenging the status quo and vested political-economic interests is an essential part of their work. This often places such CSOs in conflict with many powerful actors, both in government and in the private sector.¹⁷ African CSOs working on land rights or natural resource issues may carry out some activities that are technical in nature and which can be

more easily done in partnership with government agencies, for example, in supporting communities' technical management capacity. But much of CSOs' work in this field is inherently oriented towards catalyzing social and institutional changes that affect control over valuable resources and thereby the distribution of wealth and power in their societies.

The connection between natural resource values and political and economic power relations in many African states creates fundamental challenges for organizations attempting to strengthen local rights and benefits related to natural resources. These challenges are compounded by the overall centralization of political authority and restrictions on citizens' agency across the region. This political environment has a major impact on the opportunities and challenges facing regional CSOs; 17 of the 30 lowest country scores in the annual CIVICUS review of the 'global enabling environment' for civil society in 2013 were recorded by African states, while only three African states (Botswana, Namibia, and Ghana) ranked in the top 50 globally.¹⁸

The operating context for CSOs across much of Africa has become more restrictive in recent years as many countries have instituted new controls on CSO rights to operate or obtain funding from foreign sources.²⁰ In East Africa, there has been a wave of recent new restrictive laws pertaining to CSO operations, funding, and use of information. In Kenya, for example, there are concerns that recent measures will "shut down NGO operations, outlaw public demonstrations and gag the media – endangering conservation programs and the environment, doing serious economic harm to the country, while weakening independent voices and rolling back democratic gains."²¹ Similarly, new cybercrimes legislation in Tanzania has sparked domestic and international controversy, with particular concerns surrounding the way the law could restrict publication of information on the country's ongoing wildlife poaching crisis and thereby undermine conservation initiatives.²²

These increasing pressures on CSOs affect their basic ability to operate, raise funds, and obtain and share information relevant to their work, and are thus a threat to efforts to improve natural resource governance and sustainability across Africa. Such trends make an examination of patterns of CSO growth and development and external patterns of support even more salient in the face of such escalating challenges.

“With a vibrant civil society that speaks up and gets heard at every level – from community to international – that’s when you get change.”

-Coordinator of an international NGO

“Capping funding for NGOs is a gimmick by the government to weaken their operations... Without the financial muscle, NGOs will not be able to undertake advocacy.”

-Chairman of the Law Society of Kenya¹⁹

3.

African CSOs as Change Agents

Despite the manifold challenges they face from their operating environment in the form of political restrictions and other constraints, African CSOs play a critical role in bringing about transformative impacts in natural resource governance and conservation outcomes. These impacts involve a wide range of roles, skills, commitment, and ingenuity, from working directly with local communities to build capacity and generate new economic opportunities (e.g. from community natural resource management), to policy and legal reform efforts. Often leading CSOs work at multiple scales and are leaders in facilitating the types of collaborations and collective action that are required to achieve large-scale impacts. The basic role of CSOs as social change agents, with specific reference to changes in natural resource governance, is depicted in the figure below.

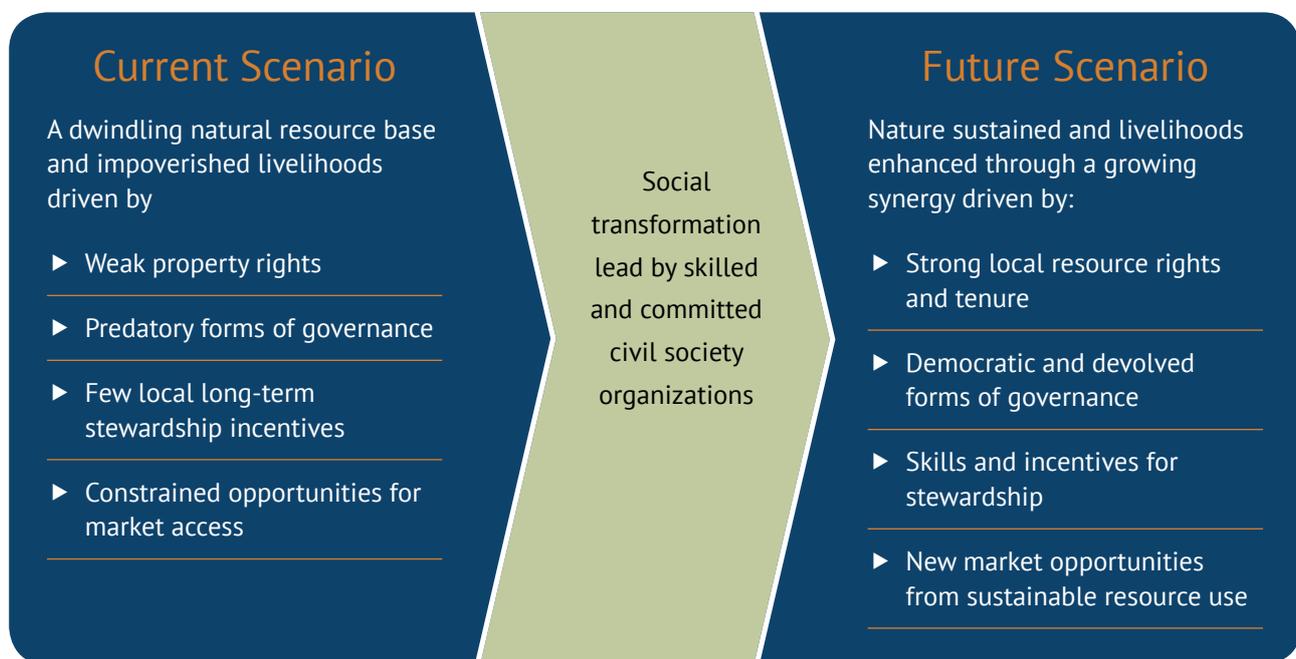


Figure 2: A simplified theory of change for the role of civil society organizations in bringing about more sustainable patterns of natural resource governance.²³

Some prominent examples of the roles and impacts of leading African CSOs, drawn from this study's sample of CSO interviews as well as other organizations, include the following:

- **Building local capacity for improved community natural resource management.** In Namibia, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC) has played a central role since its founding in the early 1980s in supporting local communities to manage wildlife and generate economic benefits, playing a central role in Africa's leading example of large-scale community-based natural resource management (Box 3). Similarly, in Kenya the Northern Rangelands Trust has become a leader in developing and scaling up that country's own community conservancies model, which now covers an estimated 10 million acres of rangeland and savannah and where wildlife populations, rangeland health, and human security have all witnessed positive changes since the late 1990s.²⁴
- **Developing new economic opportunities based on sustainable resource use and innovative enterprises.** In Tanzania, the Mpingo Conservation and Development Initiative (MCDI) manages Africa's only Forestry Stewardship Council group certificate for community forestry, enabling local communities in southeastern

Tanzania to control revenue from timber harvesting in village forest reserves. This rapidly growing model generated over USD \$96,000 for communities managing over 100,000 hectares of forest in this region in 2014.²⁵ This has created new opportunities for Tanzanian communities to generate revenues from sustainable resource use in Village Land Forest Reserves, which are provided for in the 2002 Forest Act and represent one of the most progressive frameworks for community forest management in Africa. MCDI also recently has become an innovator in connecting carbon offsetting (REDD) with community forest management, developing the first methodology for fire management in dry Miombo woodlands that has been approved by the Verified Carbon Standard.²⁶

- **Generating action-research to raise public awareness and provide the basis for policy engagement.** In the Republic of Congo, a study on the situation of indigenous forest peoples produced by Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH) resulted in the development and promulgation of a new law protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. Active engagement by CSOs in community forestry in the Democratic Republic of Congo has informed the recent legal texts on community forest concessions that open the door to community management of forests and hence long term forest protection.
- **Exposing and challenging malpractice and unsustainable resource use and governance.** In Liberia, during Charles Taylor's regime, the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) exposed the trade in conflict timber, resulting in the imposition of UN sanctions on such timber. More recently, SDI's work has focused on a major review of timber permits and concessions in Liberia, resulting in the cancelling of all Private Use Permits and major changes in the national Forestry Development Authority.
- **Facilitating coalitions that can catalyze major governance reforms.** The Kenya Land Alliance played a central role in the 2010 constitutional reforms that adopted a new framework for recognition of community land tenure, as well as additional community rights to make decisions about natural resources. The East African Wildlife Society has played a key role in building coalitions, including through facilitating various working groups, that enable different actors to collaboratively work towards forest governance and wildlife policy reforms in Kenya at various times over the past two decades.²⁷ During the late 1990s, the Kenya Forests Working Group played a key role in bringing together multiple actors to successfully challenge government moves to degazette an area equivalent to around 10% of the country's remaining highland forests.²⁸
- **Monitoring natural resources policy implementation.** In the Central African Republic, national CSOs secured a watchdog role for civil society in the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement process (VPA). The national civil society natural resources platform, la Plateforme de Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement (GDRNE), has developed a working model for civil society to carry out external monitoring of forest governance.

African CSOs working at local and national scale are uniquely positioned to achieve such impacts because they are part and parcel of, embedded within and connected to, their communities and societies. As Section 2 describes, there are profoundly political dimensions to natural resource governance and conservation processes and effective organizations are able to understand, navigate, and influence those processes, something which international organizations are rarely able to do, or are not perceived as legitimate in engaging with. As the above examples illustrate, many significant policy and institutional changes, as well as large-scale shifts in resource rights, tenure, and conservation, are connected to the agency of effective and innovative African organizations. The next section explores the organizational factors that underpin the capacity, performance, and sustainability of such CSOs.

Box 3: Scaling Up Community-based Natural Resource Management in Namibia

Namibia is one of Africa's leading examples of transforming natural resource governance institutions in ways that generate large-scale benefits for local communities, the national economy, and conservation outcomes. The role of strong local civil society organizations has been a key to the changes that have taken place over the course of the past three decades.

A central role has been played throughout this period by Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), founded by 1993 Goldman Environmental Prize recipients, Garth Owen-Smith and Margaret Jacobsohn. IRDNC emerged in Namibia in the 1980s to champion and pioneer a new model of community-based conservation in a context of widespread wildlife depletion, civil conflict, and rural poverty.²⁹ The effectiveness of these approaches in generating local support for conservation and leading to wildlife recoveries led to the formal adoption of new wildlife policies in Namibia after it won independence from South Africa in 1990. Through the establishment of Communal Conservancies, provided for in legal reforms passed in 1996, self-defined rural communities can obtain broad user rights to wildlife on their lands, including rights to 100% of revenues generated from tourism and trophy hunting. Today there are about 80 conservancies spread over 150,000 km² of land, comprising nearly 20% of Namibia's total land area. These conservancies have contributed to wildlife recoveries across much of the country over the past three decades, including rare species such as black rhinos, elephants, and lions, all of which have increased in the communal lands of northwestern Namibia. Increasing wildlife and more secure community management rights have helped enable commercial investment in wildlife tourism and hunting in the conservancies through a range of joint ventures. By 2012 the conservancies generated approximately USD \$5 million for these communities in direct benefits, including cash returns, employment, and in-kind benefits such as game meat, and contributed over ten times that to the national economy.³¹

IRDNC and other local groups in Namibia, such as the Namibia Nature Foundation, were at the forefront of championing the key policy and legal reforms in the mid-1990s that created the conservancy framework, and have worked with communities around the country to support and scale up conservancies since that time. IRDNC plays a central role supporting and strengthening around half of all the conservancies, facilitating joint ventures, and developing innovations in areas such as indigenous natural plant harvesting and rangeland management.³² Namibia is recognized as Africa's leading example of community-based natural resource management today, largely due to the work of these pioneering Namibian organizations.³³

4.

Strengthening and Sustaining African CSOs:

Experiences, Priorities, and Challenges

Background: Understanding Organizational Performance

The fields of organization development and management contain a multitude of models, theories, and frameworks for thinking about the various ways organizations perform. Much of the organizational management field was initially shaped by the study of private companies, as carried out both by academics studying businesses and consulting firms that actively work to improve the performance of those companies.³⁴

Efforts to understand organizational performance began to permeate the international development field during the 1990s, as the emergence of 'civil society' became a widespread pillar of development policy and investment in the post-Cold War period. For example, research supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre developed an analytic model for understanding organizational performance based on three basic categories:³⁵

1. The external environment or context that an organization operates within;
2. The organization's capacity, which includes its strategic leadership, structure, human resources, infrastructure, and various management functions;
3. The organization's motivation, which includes organizational history and culture.

During the 1990s, as more aid and development funding flowed to CSOs in many parts of the world and 'capacity building' became a mainstream component of these investments, a wide range of firms, organizations, and consultants emerged to provide organizational support services. Organizational capacity assessments, using frameworks featuring categories of organizational performance and attributes such as those noted above, became a widespread tool, including in the African natural resources field.³⁶ As 'capacity building' work became a mainstream element of the wider development field, practitioners such as the South African organization, Community Development Resource Association (CDRA), developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of these processes of organizational growth and development:

"In all the work which we ourselves have done with organisations, in all the research we have done, the same points keep arising as regards the organisation with capacity. That organisation is directed and focused; that is, it has a clear sense of its own identity in terms of its own strengths as well as in terms of its intended impact in its relationships with others and with its context. It focuses on its sources of inspiration. It is able to strategize and to prioritize, and it is able to adapt its strategies with flexibility and foresight...It takes the time to learn from its successes and failures. It takes the time to understand itself, to evaluate honestly, to become aware of its strengths and weaknesses, to hone its methodology and sharpen its strategic edge..."³⁷

The understanding of organizational performance has continued to evolve, as the overall scope of funding and social influence of CSOs continues to grow in many parts of the world. In the United States, as international development philanthropy has grown, there has been a renewed focus on organizational performance, capacity and strengthening, driven by funding groups such as US-based Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) and the publication *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. New work continues to develop original analyses of key factors underlying exceptional organizational performance in the development and environment fields from a range of angles. The importance of networks, collaboration, and collective action amongst multiple organizations in achieving large-scale social and institutional change has become a significant emphasis in recent discourse, influencing an understanding of what constitutes ‘capacity’ to deliver impact.³⁸

Research Findings: CSO Challenges and Constraints

Our interviews with African CSOs and their international collaborators and funders focused on identifying key factors that shape organizational performance, capacity and sustainability, and, in turn, the major challenges organizations face in those areas. The main findings, as summarized in Table 1 and Figure 3, revolve around fundamental organizational concerns of human and financial resources and leadership, as the most frequently discussed factors and constraints. That these issues were raised most prominently is hardly surprising; they are critical determinants of performance for any organization, and are often inherently challenging given the social and economic context that African organizations operate within. The remainder of this section discusses these specific factors, providing more details and perspectives from the interviews. We also include a discussion of issues related to organizational structure, motivation, and accountability, which did not arise as prominently as other CSO concerns, but which we feel merits particular attention based on initial dialogues held around the preliminary findings of this research.³⁹ Although the research focused on identifying and discussing constraints to organizational capacity, we also provide some examples where African CSOs have themselves developed their organizations in ways that have overcome some of those constraints, distilling some of the lessons from those experiences.

<p>► Leadership: 53% of CSOs and INGOs interviewed said that leadership is a critical component to a successful organization.</p>
<p>► Human Resources: More than 50% of all CSOs and INGOs interviewed said that finding, building and keeping highly skilled staff is critical to their overall performance.</p>
<p>► Core Funding: Almost 80% of CSOs and INGOs interviewed said that adequate funding, especially to support an organization’s core costs, is essential to its overall success and impacts.</p>

Table 1: Key factors shaping Africa CSOs’ organizational capacity and performance as identified in interviews (N=46).

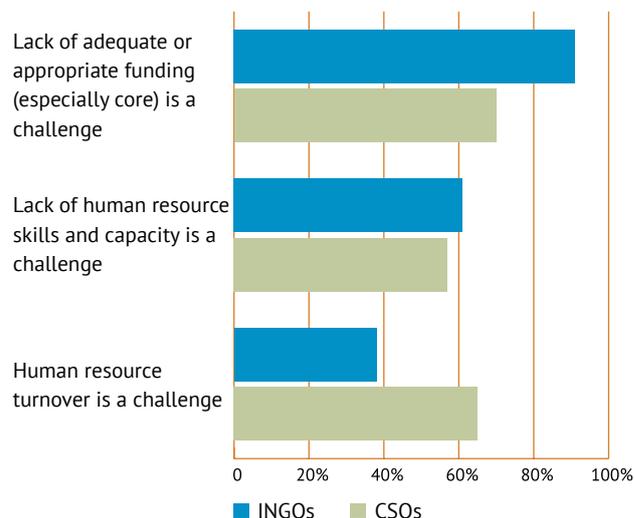


Figure 3: Most frequently mentioned organizational challenges identified by CSO and INGO interviewees (N=46).

Leadership

More than 50% of the African CSOs and INGOs interviewed said that leadership is a critical component to a successful organization, and the majority of these respondents said that leadership, including leadership transitions, is a serious challenge for organization development and performance in Africa.

Many organizations that perform well and achieve impact tend to depend heavily on a single, highly committed, and gifted individual, or small group of individuals, who provide the driving force and vision that underpins an organization's work. A number of interviewees identified this as the critical ingredient in organizational performance and impact.

Related to this is what one funder referred to as "the ephemeral leadership challenge," meaning the difficulty of retaining leaders within organizations over the long haul, and the tendency for organizational performance to decline, or even collapse, when founding leaders move on. Just as important and potentially problematic to the development of an organization is the phenomenon of the 'founder effect,' whereby an initial founding individual may refuse to prepare an organization for the inevitable leadership transition that organizations require to grow and sustain themselves over time. In such situations, organizations often remain stuck in personalized ways of working, dominated by the individual founder, and are unable to grow and evolve as internal and external conditions change.

In relation to these dynamics, many international organizations and funders identified leadership transitions and shortfalls as a major constraint to the performance of the CSOs they work with and support, and thus a major risk factor in organizational impact and sustainability. One prominent funder of natural resource governance in East Africa called the leadership transition problem their "worst nightmare;" another identified the greatest problem being simply that there are "not enough good leaders."

An additional leadership challenge facing some African CSOs relates to organizational culture and social norms. One African organization development specialist explained it thus:

"In many countries and cultures on the continent, there is a very authoritarian context – whatever the type of leader, it is very hard for subordinates to question authority or to take decisions for themselves. The civil society sector is more open to seeing this, but the way they run is still very authoritarian: lots of people are scared of their bosses."

Several respondents identified this preoccupation. Indeed the organizations perceived to be the most effective by the interviewees are ones where leadership skills are recognized and respected in more than one person involved in the organization. For example, a key to the ability of the Sustainable Development Institute, a leading Liberian CSO, to successfully negotiate a leadership transition from the founder has been the founder's emphasis on sharing authority and cultivating secondary leadership within the organization since its early days (see Box 4).

"Leadership- this is the number one thing – if an organization has a good leader that can direct where funds need to go and provide the push for what needs to happen, almost anything is possible."

-Senior manager of an international conservation organization in East Africa

Box 4: Leadership for Organizational Sustainability and Impact within the Sustainable Development Institute, Liberia

The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) was set up in 2002, during the Liberian civil war, initially emerging out of a key piece of research⁴⁰ that exposed large-scale corruption and human rights abuses in the Liberian timber industry and the complicity of the then-Liberian government. Since then, SDI has become a leader on natural resource governance reform in Liberia, and has carried out and published a range of influential reports, advocated for policy and legal reform, focused on community land rights and forest governance issues, and built a strong and trusting relationship with communities on the ground, supporting them to take action on natural resource governance issues. SDI's work has been globally recognized; the founding director, Silas Siakor, received the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2006 as a result of his achievements and leadership.⁴¹

When analyzing SDI's success, Siakor identified the following factors that made the difference for them:⁴²

- **Vision:** SDI started from a very clear value position: "we knew what we wanted to do and, at the time, nobody else was doing it."
- **Strategy:** "We laid out a clear campaign agenda and we identified the key people to reach to make it happen. We are always looking down the road to see what is coming up. We position ourselves so we're ready to take opportunities as they present themselves. It's this long term view that means that SDI emerges among the leaders when a key issue arises."
- **Human Resources:** SDI has a strong track record of retaining staff and building internal capacity, partly because of the following factors:
 - The appreciation of everyone's contribution.
 - The willingness to give people a say in how the organisation is run and giving them a sense of ownership, a feeling of responsibility and security in their jobs and career.
 - Being part of the success story – and celebrating those – provides collective motivation.
 - Being in SDI gives a platform for high-level engagement – e.g. sitting down and talking about national issues with decision makers.
- **Partnerships:** Making a conscious effort to build longstanding and mutually respectful relationships with international organisations.
- **Leadership:** SDI is now managed by a team, with the original director gradually disengaging from his role. A key for SDI is that the team accepts a consensus decision and that individuals are ready to accept that others don't agree with them. *"Everyone should be prepared to give away power from time to time."*

This insight and the willingness to genuinely share power and decision making has been essential to SDI's growth and development.

Human Resources

Sixty-two percent of African CSOs and fifty-four percent of INGOs interviewed mentioned human resource capacity and skills as prominent challenges, and half said that human resource turnover is a problem as well. These challenges generally revolve around several factors.

First, as noted there is often a leadership and human resources shortfall in the civil society space within the African natural resources field. Skilled individuals are in relatively short supply, in high demand, and have

more lucrative and secure professional opportunities in the private sector or working for funders and international organizations. In this context, retaining talented staff is a major challenge and was frequently cited as a barrier to organizational development and growth. This is exacerbated by overdependence of organizations on single individuals, and a failure to institutionalize knowledge and skills. Coaching and mentoring of junior staff is often inadequate, unless made an explicit objective of senior leadership (see Box 4 and 5 as counterexamples).

A somewhat different challenge revolves around the negotiation of organizational transitions and evolutions. An individual with experience with both international CSOs and bilateral funding agencies in the region commented similarly, *“CSOs are started by passionate people driven by goals of defending rights of local people. But they don’t necessarily have the skills and knowledge to run an organization, to manage significant sums of money, to understand management culture. This is where it falls apart.”*

This highlights an additional dimension of the human resource challenge that faces leading African CSOs; as they grow they need a combination of human resource skills to develop and change – skills that the founding leaders of organizations often lack. As organizations grow they may require a broader suite of personnel that will enable them to develop organizational systems, to improve management and learning practices, and to guide strategic adjustments and make technical innovations. Recruiting and retaining talented individuals with a diverse set of skills can be a major organizational challenge for African CSOs.

“Attracting and retaining staff becomes difficult when your contractual agreements are project based.”

-Representative from an African CSO

Funding

Ninety percent of CSOs interviewed commented that a lack of sufficient or appropriate funding is a major challenge they face as an organization. These concerns relate to both the amount of funding and the ways that funding is provided. Specific challenges raised include:

- Short-term funding cycles, such as annual grants;
- Related to short-term cycles are gaps in funding and delays in disbursement, leading to cash flow problems, which in turn can create problems in terms of paying salaries and retaining staff;
- Limitations imposed by funders on core costs, salaries, and overheads;
- The predominance of restricted or project funding, while limiting core organizational funding at the same time. One African CSO leader commented that, *“all funding is project driven and there is no structural funding now;”*

“There is a lack of skilled staff, a lack of a trained workforce... It’s a perennial problem, you train existing staff, get them up to speed, then they leave and go elsewhere and you have to do it all over again. It doesn’t get the organization where you want it to go.”

-Representative from an international NGO

“Funding so often drives the directions and actions [African CSOs] take. It distorts their mission, ethics, and ideas of what they want to be.”

-Representative from an international conservation organization

- A preoccupation with compliance rather than outcomes and impacts by some funders. One East African CSO leader stated that donors *“only want to know that money is being spent in the way that they want and are not interested in you as an organization.”*

Such funding patterns tend to force CSOs into a ‘projectized’ operating framework, whereby the organization becomes dominated by highly restricted, often short-term and low-volume project funds. This makes it difficult for organizations to invest in and maintain a focus on long-term organizational mission and impact.

An additional challenge related to funding that arose in many interviews, mainly an issue raised by international partners of African CSOs, as well as by some funders, was the challenge of absorbing or managing too much funding in too short a period of time. As one international organization’s country director in Tanzania observed, *“Once an organization is successful, donors are all over them like a rash. It is hard for an organization to maintain what they were before.”*

“At times we end up taking on work just to keep afloat...Most of the time, the type of support that we are receiving doesn’t really support our sustainability. It’s short term...and allowed investments into staff salaries and overheads are unrealistic.”

-Representative from an African CSO

Box 5: ‘Running an African NGO’ - Lessons from Namibia

Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), as described in Box 3, is one of the most accomplished organizations in the African natural resources field. In 2011, IRDNC published a *Lessons from the Field* booklet⁴³ examining and analyzing their first two decades of work, including one chapter entitled ‘running an African NGO’. Factors IRDNC’s team identified as keys to their organizational growth, resilience, and impact include:

- Emphasizing long-term goals, vision, and planning perspective on all of IRDNC’s work, and maintaining these in the face of shorter-term funding cycles, contracts, and projects. This approach has *“earned credibility as well as trust and respect of communities and partners, and has contributed to real sustainability.”*
- Developing inclusive and participatory management structures that reflect and emulate the kinds of governance institutions that IRDNC facilitates at the community level. This includes developing shared leadership models, participatory staff planning fora that represent a significant investment of time and effort, yet are key to fostering inclusion, ownership, and dispersed leadership across the organization.
- Ensuring flexibility and responsiveness through planning processes and fundraising approaches, so that work can adapt according to changing circumstances on the ground or major opportunities that arise.
- Recruiting and maintaining a highly diverse team featuring *“a spectrum of skills, personalities and cultural perspectives,”* that mixes technical and administrative proficiency with field-based facilitation and relational skills. This includes an explicit-focus on team-building and coaching and mentoring of staff members.

Box 6: Creative Solutions to Retaining Staff and Generating Income in Cameroon

Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER) in Cameroon is an NGO that has been growing in reputation and impact since its foundation in 2002. FODER works on information and awareness raising, external independent monitoring, transparency and anti-corruption, and promotion of indigenous and community rights on natural resources and land in Cameroon.

During its early growth, FODER hit a crisis point: their funding diminished, they weren't convinced that the direction they had chosen was the most effective, and they lost some key members of staff. However, they explained that this crisis provided a major organizational opportunity:

“Although there was a crisis, it was an important transformation process. During this period, we had to count on the skills and competencies of the people we were left with, and we developed a volunteer program. We also put everything up for question, and doing that absolutely helped us to clarify our vision, mission, and what we were doing. We questioned ourselves, our activities, and where and how we were getting our income (our dependency). When things go badly, it's time to think about changing.”

These days, FODER has a rigorous approach to selecting staff. They also invest in training and supporting staff members and in trying to ensure that all staff have opportunities to attend trainings and events that improve their skills, knowledge and values in order to deliver better results for FODER and meet their personal goals.

This investment in staff in turn generates not only confidence and team spirit, but also new source of income for the organization:

“We sell the skills we have as consultants – in mapping, forest inventory, management, communication, and facilitation. We have equipment that we rent to others. So between 20-30% of our annual income comes from consultancy, renting equipment, and service provision.”

Vision and Strategy

Vision and strategy are cross-cutting issues that relate to why an organization does what it does, how it represents itself, how it invests its resources, and how it thinks about its own organizational needs and capacity. Strategy came up explicitly in a number of interviews, though not as frequently as concerns around financial and human resources. This may be because strategy is so all-encompassing an organizational issue, and one that also requires a greater level of self-awareness. For example, the Barefoot Collective notes that often a lack of funding “stems from a lack of the ability to convincingly present an organization's purpose, strategy or capabilities to potential funders.”⁴⁴

“[Our] priorities end up being dictated by the availability of project funding.”

-Representative from an African CSO

Possibly due to their funding and political contexts, African CSOs often react to immediate circumstances – including both threats and opportunities – rather than consistently pursuing a long-term strategy. Saying ‘no’ to proposed initiatives and opportunities is a critical attribute for organizations, particularly those with limited resources, but one which many organizations struggle with.⁴⁵ As a result, they spread themselves thin and have less impact than they could. Being strategic in relation to advocacy was identified as being particularly important

and especially challenging. As one INGO explained, “as well as getting a say in a decision-making process, CSOs then need the capacity to make use of that space and the ability to set the agenda.” A number of respondents identified that while CSOs have been reasonably effective in certain situations at getting a seat at the table, some have struggled in then making strategic use of that seat to achieve impact.

Values and Organizational Culture

Beyond the more immediate and tangible challenges around resources and leadership, a deeper suite of motivational and value-related issues emerged during the study. These mostly revolved around the prevailing business models of many African CSOs, the potential for disconnect between CSOs and their constituents, and motivations that are not focused on achieving results and impact. Alluding to challenges around motivations that inform some organizations, a leading organizational facilitator in East Africa noted that, “being the leader of a network or an organization is often just an elitist position and is not informed by the need to really struggle for something.”

Another challenge relating to the culture and values of CSOs is that of their power relationships with their ‘beneficiaries.’ A number of interviewees highlighted the danger of CSOs becoming self-selected representatives of community or indigenous voices. This can happen even to organizations that start with the best of intentions. Just as INGOs can become gatekeepers to funding and influence and restrict access to African CSOs, so can CSOs behave similarly in relation to the communities with whom they work.

A related set of issues concerns the basic funding model of CSOs in the region, and the prevailing dependence on foreign or external sources of funding, known as ‘donor dependence.’ Such patterns of CSO financing weaken accountability to local constituents, including both rural communities and the overall public society that CSOs are ostensibly serving. Relatedly, one civil society expert from Tanzania observed:

“Many NGOs are formulated to do x, y, z for the community, however if the community is part of the mission (and actually wants this service), what contribution is it making? If the community really wants that service, they should be willing to pay for it.”

While the inability of local constituents to financially support CSOs in African countries is often attributed to poverty, it may also be a function of both the preferred business models of many CSOs, the availability of large volumes of donor funding, and weaknesses in the downward accountability of many CSOs. But such dependence on external funders, rather than local constituencies, can weaken CSOs’ financial sustainability, local accountability and ownership, as well as legitimacy in terms of the perception of government and society in general. These fundamental issues of organizational values, motivation, governance, and accountability are not frequently raised in the discourse around organizational capacity and civil society development in Africa – they are not conventionally factored into thinking around what constitutes ‘capacity’ in organizations – yet they are an important element in the overall dynamics of civil society and its strengthening.⁴⁶

“Today there is high unemployment; sometimes young people start NGOs because they can earn a living in this sector. But starting an organization because of unemployment results in a fundamental difference in values in people running NGOs.”

-East African organization development expert

An unexpected implication of the research and subsequent dialogue around our preliminary findings is the need to open up further discussion around organizational capacity and performance to include these deeper strategic, governance, and financial issues facing CSOs. We pick up on this issue again in the recommendations provided in Section 9.

5.

Funding African CSOs:

Trends, Models, and Challenges

As the previous section described, the ways in which African CSOs access funding and other forms of external support and investment has a major impact on their ability to operate and function and thus to achieve their goals. This includes important considerations such as the way funds are allocated and targeted, the duration of funding and grant cycles, and the level of reporting and administrative compliance requirements associated with funding. Of more broad importance is how funders think about and structure their investments, whether strengthening organizations is one of their explicit objectives, and if so, whether they have a strategy for doing so.

Aiding CSOs? Trends in Official Development Assistance Support to Civil Society

The policy and practice of development aid, shaped by the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and subsequent processes, has undergone a range of reformulations during the past ten years. These shifts include a range of implications for how official development assistance (ODA) supports African CSOs. Global ODA has increased substantially over the past two decades, from roughly \$73.1 billion in the mid-1990s to \$118 billion in 2012 (in 2011 dollars).⁴⁷ It constitutes more than four times the total of private grants in overall financial flows to development activities globally.⁴⁸ Sub-Saharan Africa received \$42.2 billion in ODA in 2009 and CSOs received approximately 16% of the total ODA.⁴⁹

An important change stemming from the Paris Declaration and the 2008 Accra Agenda has been providing greater formal recognition and support for the distinct role of CSOs in development processes. The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan (2011) encouraged all parties to implement fully “their respective commitments to enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors...that maximizes the contributions of CSOs to development.”⁵⁰

As funding agencies have channeled increasing volumes of aid directly to coordinated government budget support, they have also increasingly sought to direct funds more explicitly to support civil society as part of the overall development landscape, leading to a steady increase in ODA to civil society since 2009 (Figure 4). Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a greater increase in the proportion of total ODA flowing to or through civil society than other regions (Figure 5). Although there is a great disparity between countries in the proportion of total ODA that is channeled to civil society,⁵¹ many donor countries are targeting civil society more explicitly and in some cases has led to increases in both total funding and core organizational support.⁵² For example, a recent review found that the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency’s (SIDA) aid budget had increased its proportion provided to and through CSOs from 19% in 2007 to 32% in 2011.⁵³

Global Aid Via Civil Society

Official Aid: Gross Disbursements: All Donors; US \$b:
Constant 2012 prices

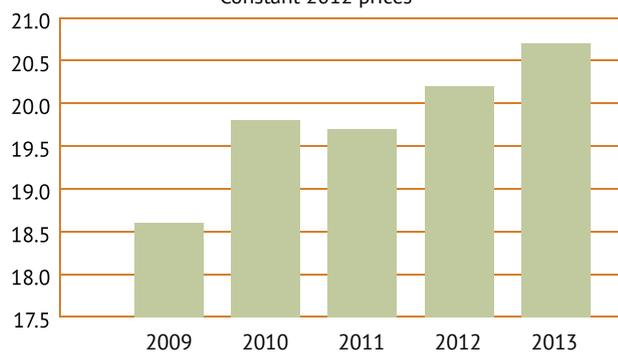


Figure 4: Global aid via civil society, 2009 – 2013.⁵⁴ Note that these figures refer to all civil society organizations including both northern and southern organizations. (Source: Baobab).

Regional Shifts in Aid Via Civil Society

% change in Gross Disbursements 2010-2013; Regional figures exclude humanitarian

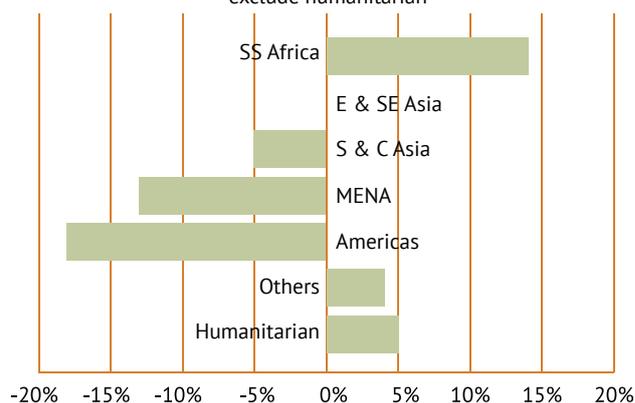


Figure 5: Regional shifts in aid via civil society 2010-2013.⁵⁵ (Source: Baobab).

Despite these shifts, fundamental challenges persist in terms of the suitability of much ODA relative to the types of financial support that African CSOs require. The Civil Society Partnership for Development Effectiveness, in reviewing the commitments made in the Busan Declaration, notes that CSOs are still widely constrained by donor policies and modalities of support, including:

“An inappropriate mix and choice of funding modalities, unpredictable timing and long delays, shrinking opportunities for financing that is in response to CSO priorities and programs, and high transaction costs due to a lack of harmonized requirements by donors...the terms of donor finance often preclude (or seriously limit) support for core basic operational functions of the organization. This lack of support for these functions undermines the capacities and sustainability of CSOs, particularly those in developing countries, to sustain effective programming capacities to achieve impact over the medium and longer term.”⁵⁶

A major challenge for government development agencies in the context of supporting African CSOs, particularly relatively small or grassroots organizations, has long been the transaction costs involved in making relatively small grants that require a high level of oversight. Today’s prioritization of efficiency within aid agencies, while simultaneously increasing funding outflows, has led to even greater pressures on internal staffing capacities and on activities that require high levels of research, due diligence, and oversight. As one public funder explained in an interview, “[our agency] has cut down on staff and is handling more and more money, so we are handling fewer and fewer and bigger and bigger programs. We don’t have the capacity to handle support to smaller and weaker national CSOs.” Another representative from a bilateral funding agency based commented on the internal institutional challenges they face and how this influences their tendency to channel support through INGOs:

“It is not easy working with organizational capacity development, given the results we have to provide. We often feel this is pushing a square peg into a round hole. We are constrained by the type of funding, which is earmarked to spend on a particular set of results. We are trying to get lots of money out and might only have five mechanisms to do so. This money will often go into one big partner for one program; this expedient approach sometimes allows for the international NGOs to be funded but ignores the local organizations.”

As the quote above alludes to, one of the major tactics used by development agencies to channel funds to local organizations is to utilize INGOs (or ‘northern NGOs’) as intermediaries. In 2009, according to research compiled by INTRAC, OECD donor countries “provided around five times more aid to CSOs based in their countries than to international and local CSOs based in developing countries.”⁵⁷

As development agencies face greater pressure to demonstrate impact and value for money, monitoring the impacts of investments in CSO capacity is a notable challenge. Three major bilateral funders active in natural resources funding in Africa explained that although CSO organization development is fundamentally important, they have little or no baseline data to understand the current state of CSO capacity and likewise, had no data from the start of major funding programs that expressly included civil society capacity building as an element. Another major bilateral funder did undertake regular capacity assessments of CSOs at a country level, but did not have fine-grained detail about different sectors. As explained above, the majority of the public funders tend to fund natural resources work via INGOs and they often depend on these INGOs to assess, deliver and evaluate the organization and capacity development of their African partners. As one staff member of a bilateral funding agency explained, *“although the instinctive understanding is that there has been some improvement of capacity, it’s not really possible to say what and how. The assumption has been that if NGOs work together, they’ll strengthen one another’s capacity, but there isn’t much tracking of it and any analysis is carried out after the event.”*

A number of emerging trends and examples indicate that aid agencies are working to channel more resources directly to CSOs in target countries and to find new ways of providing more appropriate funding. The United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Local Solutions Initiative has committed the agency to increase the share of its worldwide portfolio going directly to local CSOs to 30% by the end of 2015.⁵⁸ Research published in 2013 suggests that the proportion of overall donor funding routed to INGOs versus local CSOs may be declining.⁵⁹ A notable element of this trend is the increase in multi-donor funding mechanisms, such as civil society support programs or expressly established organizations, such as the Foundation for Civil Society in Tanzania, for pooling and directing funds to local CSOs.⁶⁰

Box 7: Investing in Tanzanian Environmental CSOs by DfID’s AcT Program

The UK Department for International Development’s (DfID) Accountability in Tanzania (AcT) program, a six-year (2009-2015), £31 million initiative managed by KPMG, has provided core, multi-year funding to more than two dozen CSOs working in the natural resources and environment sector.⁶¹ This program is notable in its level of core organizational investment in leading CSOs, its reasonably long-term approach, as well as for the additional organizational support services it provides grantees as a complement to its funding. One Tanzanian CSO that has received funding from AcT, commented that they are, *“the first donor we’ve ever had that has been willing to have a project line for staff training.”* Another AcT recipient recommended this approach of *“finding capacity gaps and trying to address these...Most donors use a due diligence tool to assess capacity but they don’t end up building capacity; it is very rare that they do anything about it after understanding your weaknesses.”*⁶²

Rethinking CSO Support Models? Trends in Private Funding

Private grantmaking operates according to substantially different institutional incentives and constraints than public aid agencies. Private foundations often have much greater freedom to craft their own strategies and investments than public agencies tend to have. Private aid comes in many forms, from the large-scale family trust or foundation, such as the Ford and MacArthur Foundations in the US, both active in the African natural resources field; to organizations such as Comic Relief in the UK, whose money derives from large scale public fundraising; to newer forms of individual giving via the internet, bundled by non-profits such as Global Giving; to smaller trusts and foundations that have a very specific focus; to direct family to family or community to community remittances from diaspora families and communities outside Africa.⁶³ These latter remittances are substantial: it is worth noting that recent estimates of diaspora remittances to Africa suggest that the total sum sent annually is significantly more than the amount provided as ODA.⁶⁴

Private aid tends to be more directed towards frontline and community projects rather than larger scale systemic change initiatives.⁶⁵ As two analysts of private giving pointed out, “official aid supports countries, private aid supports people.”⁶⁶

With this different perspective, private funders have increasingly been a source of innovative thinking and practice around CSO funding and support models over the course of the past decade. Networks such as the US-based Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), a coalition of funders “committed to building strong and effective nonprofit organizations,” promote core, unrestricted funding and a wide range of tailored investments in organizational capacity, leadership, and collaborations across the US philanthropic community.⁶⁷ The rise of so-called ‘venture philanthropy’ since the 1990s as an important and intellectually influential component of the development field in the US and Europe has further contributed to the focus on these types of investment models. Venture philanthropy draws on experience in the private sector, including many relatively new foundations linked to US technology companies’ founders’ wealth and philanthropic interests. It is also now a global phenomenon, tending to focus on “building organizational capacity in entrepreneurial social purpose organizations.”⁶⁸ These approaches emphasize long-term investments (e.g. 7-10 years), core unrestricted funding investments in organizations rather than discrete projects, and a focus on outcomes and results as opposed to inputs. Venture philanthropy investors also tend to emphasize non-financial support mechanisms such as organization development and technical assistance, leadership training and network access.⁶⁹

The growing debate around philanthropic models in the US foundation community is advancing a range of progressive ideas about how to most effectively invest in organizations in ways that sustain growth and impact. For example, in a recent essay, one American ‘venture philanthropist’ calls for grantmakers “to fundamentally change the underlying practices we use to construct our philanthropy,” including by providing unrestricted funding – 100% core organizational support and long-term funding – for ten years or more.⁷⁰

There is some evidence that shifts towards these types of investment models among private funders are starting to take shape. In a recent survey of US grantmaking foundations, respondents indicated that they were allocating a median of 25% of grant funds to core organizational support, up from 20% in 2008 and 2011 surveys.⁷¹ UK-based foundations, which have for a long time put great emphasis on support to both national and international CSOs, are also actively exploring how that support can be most effective. One recent report explains, “a priority for many foundations working internationally is to strengthen civil society infrastructure with the aim of enabling people to address problems from within their own resources.”⁷²

Although private grantmaking accounts for around \$30 billion in annual development funding, the influence of changing private models of support to CSOs has had limited impacts in the African natural resources and conservation fields, due to the simple reason that relatively few private foundations are significantly invested in these fields. There are some exceptions, such as the Ford Foundation, which has among the most long-term and distinguished track records amongst large private funders of supporting leading African natural resource CSOs (Box 8). A smaller-scale example in the conservation sector is the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), a US-based funder of small conservation organizations and projects that focus on endangered species, including a number of African organizations. WCN uses what it terms a 'conservation entrepreneurship' model of support explicitly adapted from venture capital investing.⁷³

Box 8: Long-Term Support of East African CSOs⁷⁴

The Ford Foundation's East Africa natural resources program has developed a fairly comprehensive approach to investing in their grantees, which could usefully inform the practices of other funders and international organizations in the region and beyond. Ford's East Africa natural resource grantmaking portfolio comprises a range of local and national CSOs of varying size and structure that generally all work at the interface of social justice, community land and resource rights, and sustainable development. Ford's investments are fairly long-term, running for up to eight years, and grants are complemented by a range of customized and demand-driven organizational support services, for which additional funding is available ranging from around 15% to up to 40% of the total grant. Ford aligns its grants with its grantees' organizational strategies and explicitly makes an investment in that organization, rather than a pre-determined set of outputs.

The organizational forms of support provided to complement grants include regional and international peer learning opportunities, coaching and training around board governance, financial sustainability training, placements for grantees within larger international organizations, sabbaticals at academic institutions, and additional coaching and mentoring support. In providing these services there is a preference for peer-to-peer learning amongst grantees, rather than one-size-fits-all trainings, which have been found to be less effective and less desired by grantees.

6.

International Partnerships

Partners or Funders

The relationship between African CSOs and international NGOs is often the most critical and influential set of relationships that local organizations have. INGOs are often involved in providing the first seed support to help establish or capitalize local CSOs from the outset; they play a key role in providing technical expertise, access to networks and resources and are often significant direct funders. These partnerships can be critical to supporting, sustaining, and growing successful local organizations, or they can lead to relationships of dependence, distort the accountability and ownership of CSOs away from local constituents, lead to top-down pressures on CSOs' strategic choices and investments, and ultimately undermine the development of capable and sustainable African organizations.⁷⁵

The relationship between INGOs and CSOs varies tremendously; some INGOs have explicit strategies around investing in local organizations and enhancing their agency as a core part of their strategies and theories of change. For example, the Rainforest Foundation Norway's 2008-17 strategy states that, "An active, organized, and well-informed civil society is as important for securing the rights of forest peoples and protecting the rainforest as it is for the development of democracy, transparency, and good governance in society at large."⁷⁶ Other INGOs may work through partnerships with local CSOs, but primarily through a project construct and without any deeper investments in organizational capacity. Alternatively, INGOs may perceive of their role as similar to local organizations as direct service delivery agents, and wind up competing with local groups for resources and influence.⁷⁷

The relationships between African CSOs and INGOs are thus highly variable and important to the short-term objectives and long-term interests of both parties. The structure, design, and dynamics of these partnerships are consequently an important factor in the organizational capacity, performance and sustainability of African CSOs. The African natural resources field includes a diverse suite of INGOs with different interests, approaches, and ways of working. International organizations dedicated specifically to biodiversity conservation are a major influence in African countries, with large international NGOs spending an estimated \$200 million annually on conservation in sub-Saharan Africa.⁷⁸ Prominent among the large INGOs in Africa are the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, The Nature Conservancy, Birdlife International, Fauna & Flora International, and the African Wildlife Foundation.

Other international organizations active in Africa, such as the International Institute for Environment and Development and the World Resources Institute, focus less on conservation than on action-research and policy-oriented work at the interface of environmental sustainability and human well-being, though there is increasing overlap between conservation and development fields in practice.⁷⁹ Also prominent are INGOs principally concerned with transparency and accountability, such as Global Witness, Greenpeace, and the Environmental Investigation Agency among others and those interested in promoting the land and resource rights of local forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples, such as the Rainforest Foundations UK and Norway, FERN, and the Forest Peoples Programme among others. Other international organizations more focused on social justice and human rights, such as Oxfam, are also active around issues such as land rights and natural resource governance across large parts of Africa.

Partnership Issues and Challenges

The financial relationships between African CSOs and INGOs are often constrained by the nature of the funding, as discussed in the previous section, with funders placing numerous restrictions on the duration and uses of their grants. Interestingly, although a number of INGOs stated that donor restrictions limited their room for maneuver in terms of how they are able to support their African CSO partners, at least two funders identified that they felt that this inflexibility was coming from INGOs themselves. One explained that although as a funding agency they had certain due diligence and anti-corruption rules, they found that the INGOs that transferred their funding on to national partners were much more demanding and restrictive in terms of reporting, record-keeping and so forth. It would appear that some INGOs almost practice a type of self-censorship: they make assumptions about donor expectations and do not necessarily push back on issues important to African CSOs such as salary levels and adequate investment on human resources to tackle the 'brain drain.'

During the research, there were concerns voiced about INGOs effectively treating African CSOs as sub-contractors, with responsibility for delivering certain outcomes but without any deeper investment in the health and performance of the organization. As a CSO from the Congo Basin explained, *"There are international organizations who want to set up here. Rather than seeing organizations like ours as a partner, they see us as agents to execute their project activities."* And as one senior official of an international organization in East Africa commented:

"Too often INGOs see a donor opportunity, see multi-year multi-million funding, and say 'who can deliver'? There needs to be a greater degree of honesty on behalf of INGOs and donors and partners. They need to be realistic about who's good at what, what we can do, what we can deliver. If CSOs lose track of their core business, they lose credibility with their constituencies and communities."

It is also worth noting that a number of CSO interviewees used the words 'partner' and 'funder' interchangeably when discussing INGOs – even when talking about any one INGO with whom they have a close relationship. As one African CSO from the Congo Basin explained, "local NGOs have very little room to maneuver in their negotiations with their partners, who also have their own mission, vision and priorities. So local organizations have to conform with the missions and objectives of the funders." Despite the fact that this was a statement often repeated in different forms by several of the CSOs interviewed, some of the INGO interviewees strongly resisted the idea that they are effectively funders, insisting on the partnership nature of the relationship and denying that there is necessarily a power relationship implied in the fact that they are de facto gatekeepers for funding.

A particular challenge related to funding is whether there is allocation in budgets to ensure that CSOs can put time and resources aside to develop their organizations. One INGO explained that they have never had a problem providing for this; they include capacity strengthening in their budgets as a matter of course and it is usually funded. Others, however, identified that with the increasing results-based focus of much ODA funding, it is difficult to obtain this type of funding. One Tanzanian respondent commented:

"INGOs (and their donors in turn) need to reach further and deeper in their understanding of the contexts. They have to take stock of the historical lessons of getting it wrong. They have to recognize that while they may think they are doing a good job, local actors may take a very different view."

- International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC)⁸⁰

“There is not a lot of capacity building out there. The needs are enormous, but there is not much going on. Part of the challenge is paying for it...nobody is committing funds for capacity building – funds are given for implementing programs rather than money for you internally to build capacity. Those who give you funds need to account for how it is spent.”

One network of conservation organizations, the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, is explicitly trying to respond to this problem, seeking and securing funding and building connections in order to improve investment in partner organizations. But this network is generally an exception. For many INGOs, organization development is not their core business and it is not something that they have the time or resources to invest in. As one explained:

“In the past, we have invested a certain amount in partner organization capacity. We funded, for example, training for finance staff. That was great for a short while – but some of the trained people left and the training didn't really stick. In the end, we have taken the decision that it's not our core work and we hope that other organizations can pick up the baton and deliver – because it is really essential.”

Each INGO has its own vision and mission and is trying to realize these. Although all of them identify organization capacity as being a major barrier to achieving their objectives, they are not necessarily in a position where they can respond to the real needs of African CSOs.

Collaboration and Capacity Strengthening

While many INGOs do not necessarily see organizational capacity as part of their core business, all of the African CSO and INGO interviewees identified strengthening *technical* capacity and, at times, collaborative action, as being extremely important. A number of interviewees cited a range of ways in which this capacity is developed, including one-off trainings to ongoing mentoring and coaching relationships. Many cited collaborative work as being an excellent route to strengthening technical capacity through learning by doing.

Some of the international organizations active in Africa have developed a track record, over varying periods of time, of supporting and strengthening many of the region's outstanding CSOs. For example, The Nature Conservancy and Fauna & Flora International (FFI) have for at least a decade both been core supporters of the Northern Rangelands Trust, which has grown, partly as a result of this sustained core financial and organizational support, into one of Kenya's leading organizations in the community natural resource management arena. FFI operates through an explicit local partnership model and makes a range of relatively structured investments in local organizations' capacity. The Nature Conservancy also has a history within the conservation field of making long-term investment in local organizational capacity in certain regions,⁸² and more recently in eastern and southern Africa, and developing and refining its own methodological approaches to organizational strengthening.⁸³

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Rainforest Foundations (UK and Norway) have had long-term partnerships with several influential provincial and national CSO networks, with both supporting technical capacity, and with the Rainforest Foundation-Norway in particular investing substantially in organizational capacity. IUCN Netherlands and FERN are other international organizations that have developed long-term targeted collaborations with African CSOs.

WWF's Namibia office has played a notable role in supporting Namibian organizations both as a funder and as an active collaborator on policy and technical issues, which has played a key role in that country's successful scaling up of community-based natural resource management (see Box 3). As another example, the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF), a joint civil society funding mechanism managed and conceived by Conservation International, has

increasingly prioritized investments in local civil society since it was established in 2001, and includes the growth of local CSO capacity as one of its main impact monitoring metrics in its reporting to funders (Box 9). Perhaps going the furthest in terms of orienting conservation investments around national-level organizational capacity is the Birdlife International network (Box 10).

Box 9: Investing in Civil Society Capacity in Biodiversity Hotspots

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund⁸⁴ (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. CEPF's goal is to strengthen civil society and capacity for biodiversity conservation in global biodiversity hotspots. CEPF awards grants directly to civil society groups in order to build local and national constituencies for conservation alongside government partners. CEPF has made investments in about two dozen regions or sites, including seven in Africa. CEPF is highly notable within the conservation field in that it is one of the only programs that has adopted metrics for civil society capacity development as a core part of its strategic monitoring and evaluation framework, and systematically collects data on these outcomes.

CEPF has provided support to at least 1,500 civil society groups, spread across 51 countries, spending \$116 million from 2000 to 2010.⁸⁵ It provides two levels of grant: 'small grants' of up to \$20,000; and 'core grants,' which are above that amount. In some cases, the recipients of core grants pass on funds to local groups or individuals in the form of 'sub-grants.' In addition to funding, CEPF provides civil society with various forms of direct and indirect organizational strengthening support. Across its funding regions, CEPF has invested in various approaches to civil society capacity strengthening, including those that relate to: values (trust, membership and clear strategies); expertise (technical training); communication (media, communication, campaigns); networks (issues-based, local, national, international); and momentum (funding, management systems, governance). These investments have had reportedly significant impact in establishing local CSO capacity and networks effectively working for conservation outcomes on the ground in countries such as Madagascar and South Africa.⁸⁶

Box 10: Formalizing Long-Term Organizational Investments Through Network Structures

Within the conservation field one of the most notable formal northern-southern CSO partnerships in terms of emphasizing local capacity development is Birdlife International. The Birdlife International network comprises over 120 organizations around the world, with the secretariat provided by the UK-based Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Britain's leading avian conservation group. Birdlife works globally to promote the conservation of 'Important Bird Areas,' which often serve as broader hotspots of biodiversity, and pursues its work through national CSOs that act as the in-country partners. Birdlife provides long-term funding and technical support to its partners, including peer-to-peer support through the network, and has developed an 'organizational health-check' monitoring framework to track the status and progress of the network's members across a range of organizational indicators.⁸⁷

Partners or Competitors?

Despite these notable models and examples, questions have long existed around the overall dominance of the conservation field, in particular, by international organizations and how this can displace and undermine the capacity of

African CSOs.⁸⁸ Some conservationists from developing countries, emphasizing the importance of African organizations that are embedded in their social and political context, have cautioned on the potential for INGOs competing for funding with and “edging out local institutions essential for sustaining long-term conservation.”⁸⁹ In East Africa, with a prominent historical backdrop of conflicts between local communities and government conservation areas around land rights and natural resource access, some INGOs primarily work through partnerships with state agencies rather than local CSOs, and have come into conflict with African organizations and local communities.⁹⁰ While WWF has developed a strong model for supporting leading national organizations in Namibia, this model of investing in local partners is not mainstreamed across the WWF network and in other countries WWF is more of an implementing actor, and may not prioritize investing in local CSOs in such a long-term strategic manner.

In conclusion, across a great diversity of actors and partnership models and dynamics, two overarching points emerge with regards to the relationship between INGOs and local CSOs. First, while many international organizations work largely through what they term ‘local partner organizations,’ there is frequently no systematic approach or methodology, including in the way funding and organizational support are delivered, to supporting the organizational capacity, growth and performance of these organizations. Even where there is a more systematic approach, as in the case of the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund or Birdlife International (Boxes 9 & 10), there is limited empirical documentation of the impacts of organizational strengthening over long periods of time and despite considerable investment of resources. This inhibits learning and overall adoption of effective practices in the field and may contribute to ‘reinventing the wheel’ with regards to the organizational support practices of different INGOs in their own partnerships.

Secondly, and related to the general lack of systematic approaches to strengthening African CSOs, there are a range of challenges that arise in the context of these local-international partnerships and which were identified through our interviews. These problems tend to revolve around the power dynamics and accountability within these partnerships, and the potential for African organizations, particularly those without a clear strategy or strong internal leadership, to have their interests and operational focus distorted by external influences. Both INGOs and African CSOs need to be aware of these dynamics and consider ways of improving the design and execution of their relationships, a point we return to in Section 9.

Box 11: Building North-South Networks and Local Capacity for Democratic Reform

As an example of effective long-term civil society development and investment derived from beyond the natural resources field, Partners for Democratic Change International (PDCI) is a network comprising 20 member organizations or ‘centers’ in different parts of the world, including a number of African countries. Over the past two decades, PDCI has developed a ‘sustainable impact investing’ model that “invests in building the individual capacity of local leaders as well as building an institutional home (the Centers) to serve as a hub for long-term democracy-building and peaceful conflict management.”⁹¹ Their approach represents an innovative “global model for establishing and scaling-up national, sustainable centers on governance, rule of law, and civil society development with a focus on conflict and change management.”⁹²

PDCI’s approach represents an international network explicitly built around a partnership model that invests in the long-term organizational development of national CSOs. Because PDCI has made the establishment and strengthening of autonomous organizations in the countries where it works one of its central objectives and strategies, it has developed a set of methodologies for doing this work. Such examples of long-term, impactful north-south partnerships in the wider democracy and governance field can serve as a great resource to inform the natural resources and conservation sector.

7.

From Compliance to Capacity

An issue that arose as an important factor in the way African CSOs receive external support in terms of their growth and development pertains to the way ‘capacity building’ tends to be delivered. Even where organization development services are available and are funded, the way these services are provided may limit their impact and value to African organizations. Opening up greater examination and reflection on what constitutes effective investments in organizational capacity is an important issue in strengthening CSOs. Without doing so, ‘capacity building’ activities may actually be harmful to the capacity and performance of recipient organizations.

One of the foremost issues is the purpose and motivation of investments in African CSOs’ capacity. Often, the function of such investments is largely a risk mitigation device used by funders and INGOs to enhance compliance with contractual obligations and expectations. The function of ‘capacity building’ is thus actually geared towards compliance with funder needs and requirements. One interview with a bilateral European funding agency representative made it clear that their organizational support to grantees is primarily focused on the ability of African organizations to meet their financial compliance expectations, and organizational support focuses only on these functions.

Recent reviews of CSO funding and support mechanisms capture this dynamic. INTRAC notes that “Northern CSO capacity development activities too often focus on helping partners comply better with their own or donor reporting requirements than developing their organizational capacities more broadly.”⁹³ Another in-depth review of civil society basket funding mechanisms finds similarly that:

“The capacity development support offered by civil society funds is most frequently focused on donors’ need to ensure grantees comply with the standards of the fund in terms of project cycle and financial management... An appropriate balance needs to be found between supporting grantees to comply efficiently with a fund’s requirements and investing in their sustainability and accountability to other stakeholders, not the least their own constituencies.”⁹⁴

The compliance concerns of funders and INGOs shapes capacity building investments in many ways. For example, conventional approaches to organizational assessment often approach capacity in terms of compliance and reporting factors. The Barefoot Collective, a global community of social change leaders and practitioners, usefully poses the question: ‘Does organizational assessment help anyone?’

“The tools and checklists usually focus more on the formal, visible aspects of an organization such as its structures, procedures and management systems, especially the financial accounting systems, with the aim of assessing its capacity to manage the funding it gets from the Northern donor.”⁹⁵

A senior official at an East African INGO raised a similar issue during an interview:

“It is easy to focus too much on ‘how often does board meet, is there a HR manual’ without proper accountability systems to the constituencies that they serve. Because we have to be so concerned about donor risk management, the bigger focus is on the measurable bits rather than ‘is this constituency supported, does this constituency respect the work of this organization, etc.?’”

In its crudest form, organizational capacity assessments as currently practiced effectively evaluate the ability of African organizations to comply with and fulfill external funders’ needs and expectations, particularly with regards to financial management and reporting, rather than examining what an organization’s overall growth and development needs and challenges are. These assessments are often funded by donors, carried out by external consultants, and as such are oriented towards their needs, rather than those of the African organization being assessed.

A report on civil society capacity in the DRC highlights this problem, which is common at every level: “Although all interviewed CSOs consider capacity building as one of their intervention strategies, only 8% of CSOs systematically analyze the capacities of beneficiaries before engaging in capacity building. 55% do not undertake any needs analysis.”⁹⁶ The author is talking here about Congolese CSOs in relation to communities, but it became clear during our research that the same applies to INGOs and funders in their approaches to supporting CSOs. And when “organizational diagnoses” are used, they are all too frequently tailored to analyzing the CSO’s resemblance to what is perceived to be an effective model by outside agencies.

Many capacity-building services continue to be provided through generic, one-size-fits all, short-term (e.g. a two-day or one-week course or workshop) training packages. Some reflective funders who prioritize organizational strengthening of grantees commented that short-term, non-customized, one-off training events are less effective forms of organizational support, because they do not respond to an individual organization’s particular needs and do not provide sustained follow-up (e.g. see Box 8).

In this sense, organizational strengthening and capacity building support services available to African CSOs are often largely shaped not by their own needs, but by the needs and interests of their funders. Perversely, this can result in capacity building practices that do not actually build the capacity and performance of African organizations. Efforts to design and implement effective capacity development of African CSOs therefore needs to consider not only the way that organizations are funded, the investments that are made in capacity support or organizational growth, but also the way that support and services are delivered, and whose interests they are oriented towards.

8.

Synthesis:

Internal Challenges and External Support

African CSOs play a key role in the development of just, equitable and sustainable management of natural resources in their communities and societies. There are many examples of real and significant positive changes catalyzed by CSOs in a context of increasing pressure on land and natural resources both nationally and internationally. However, a number of key organizational issues often hold CSOs back from being able to realize their full potential.

The overwhelming organizational capacity challenges facing African CSOs, according to this study's findings, revolve around interconnected shortfalls in human resources and financial resources. A key to effective organizations is, as a foundational element, a committed, dedicated, and visionary leader or group of founding leaders – this is the sine qua non of leading African CSOs in the natural resources field, as tends to be the case in the wider social change field, as well as in many of the world's foremost private businesses. But for organizations to be sustained and grow, these leaders must be able to broaden their human resource base, add management and administrative functions and capacity, and build a senior management team such that organizations are not overly dependent on a single individual – while sustaining a vision and shared values that keep the organization focused.

The challenge is that the supply of individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values, that such organizations require is, for the most part, insufficient. This shortfall varies considerably within Africa; for example, South Africa and Kenya have a considerably higher supply of skilled individuals than, say, Sierra Leone or Liberia, simply due to a range of historic and social factors.

Human resourcing challenges are closely tied to financial resourcing challenges. The challenge for African CSOs is not only in the supply of talented and committed staff, but in retaining them. A number of respondents expressed concern and frustration with the challenge of retaining staff, particularly in the context of capacity-building investments in individuals, which are then lost when staff members depart. Ironically, one of the challenges in retaining staff lies in the inability of African CSOs to compete with development agencies and INGOs in terms of salaries and compensation.

Ultimately, African CSOs face the challenge of finding, hiring, training, and retaining skilled and talented staff and finding the financial resources to adequately compensate and reward these staff. Human resources are, it should be emphasized, the most critical element in the ability of African CSOs to pursue and achieve their mission and goals.

It is thus a major and somewhat perverse challenge that prevalent funding patterns often greatly limit African CSOs' ability to invest in their staff, and thus in their core organizational capacity. Funding which limits provision for salaries, as many grants do, or provides low caps on overhead charges, restrain organizations from sustaining the human resources that they require to do their work.⁹⁷

Funders demand high administrative capacity from CSOs for financial management, reporting, and overall financial and administrative compliance, yet can be unwilling to invest in the core organizational resources

and attributes that enable such functions to be discharged. As one African CSO leader noted, while funding parameters effectively limit organizations' ability to invest in their human resources, "donors do not recognize that their own reporting requirements are part of the reason that such staff development is necessary." Funding patterns and modalities effectively 'starve' organizations of their ability to invest in leadership, human resource development, incentives and rewards for staff, and opportunities for organizational growth.⁹⁸

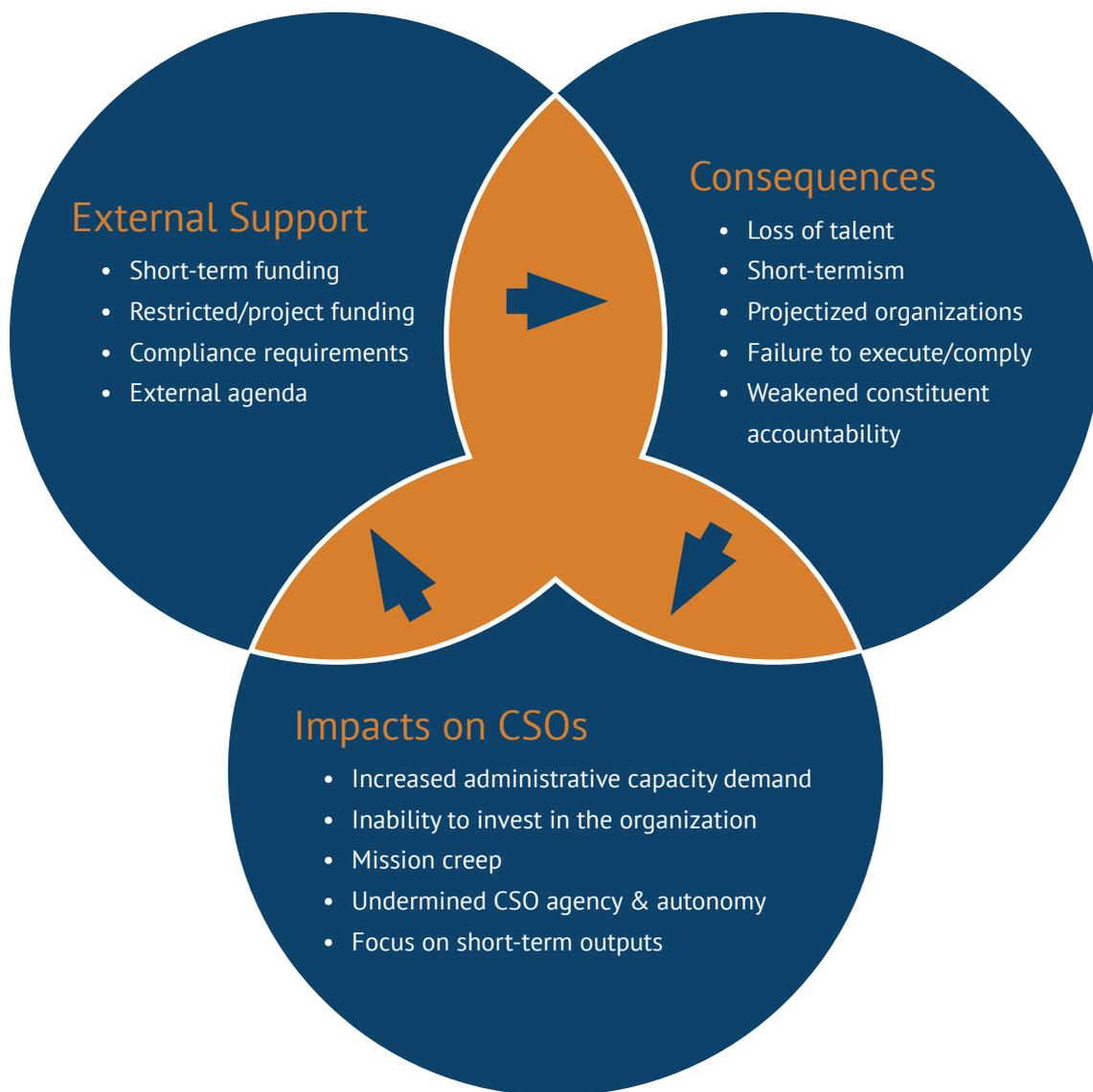


Figure 6: Cyclic interactions between internal organizational challenges for CSOs and external influences.

The dynamics around resource shortages, or inappropriate funding models, also contributes to distortions in organizational accountability. Organizations that become dependent on short-term project funds become almost inherently unable to respond in a flexible and effective manner to the long-term concerns of their core constituents. When organizations become more responsive to external funding interests and priorities than those constituents' needs, questions of accountability and legitimacy amongst civil society become even more pronounced.

“For donors the issue of value for money is important, – but value for who?”

-Representative from an African CSO

African CSOs face funding challenges in part because they are, with a few exceptions, so heavily dependent on foreign funders and organizations. The conventional African NGO model – what one interviewee usefully termed as ‘first-generation’ NGOs that grew exponentially in the post-Cold War political liberalization period of the 1990s – has been almost entirely funded through external sources, and this business model has for the most part not been questioned. In other regions, though, as development funds have been reduced, and the domestic economy and middle class has grown, there are increasing questions about such business models – both their sustainability and their legitimacy.⁹⁹ A number of our interviews noted that the prevalence of CSOs in different parts of Africa that are in essence primarily interested in capturing rents from the development sector, and are not mission-driven or highly motivated to achieve impacts, can lead to cynicism and reduced investment in civil society as a whole.

Such dynamics also contribute to an increasing emphasis by funders on compliance, oversight, and value-for-money, as they try and force positive results from organizations that are at times disconnected from their own long-term mission and purpose. This, in turn, effectively weakens the case for funders’ long-term investments in CSOs in general. Breaking these destructive cycles in order to better enable influential, innovative, and high-impact local organizations to reach their potential for social and environmental change is imperative for improving impacts in African natural resource governance and conservation outcomes.

The prevalent strategy for surmounting this institutional mismatch between the funding preferences and mandates of northern development agencies and local African organizations is routing funds through intermediary northern INGOs. To a degree, this is an effective strategy: many of the leading African CSOs in our sample obtain a significant proportion of their funding from northern INGO partners and there are many positive aspects of these relationships. There are, however, also significant challenges, including widespread concern about the tendency for international organizations to treat local organizations effectively as sub-contractors, extracting deliverables from them in exchange for funding, but not investing more deeply in the organization itself. These kinds of more limited, transactional relationships tend not to allow for the kinds of partnerships that result in long-term CSO growth and impact.

When there is investment in the organizational aspects of CSOs, they are frequently in the form of generic short-term training workshops and courses and one-off interventions, often focused on the ability to meet funders’ own compliance requirements, which may have less impact than more customized and sustained approaches.

Finally, a broader issue that emerged from the research is the overall role of CSOs; in effect, they are self-appointed spokespeople on the issues on which they work. This is often highly appropriate as CSOs fill a gap and create space for those who have less voice and power and broaden both discourse and action on natural resource governance. However, there is always the risk that the CSO itself will become part of the problem it is trying to resolve; the funding and upward accountability challenges outlined above, together with limited attention to internal issues can create an organization that does not, ultimately, deliver positive change or respond to its constituents’ needs. Issues of culture, values and representation and accountability within organizations as well as current funding and business models thus need careful attention in considerations of what approaches deliver long-term capacity development and stronger, more resilient organizations.

9.

Recommendations

1. Improve North-South Partnerships and Investment Models

International organizations are often the most important collaborators and allies of African CSOs. Yet the dynamics of these partnerships are complex and variable and often do not serve to strengthen local organizations, thus ultimately undermining the shared interests of both parties. These partnerships should be more explicitly built on strong, long-term relationships aimed at growing effective and sustainable African organizations that can deliver change and impact on the ground. The organizational objectives of INGO-CSO partnerships should be more explicit and incorporated into strategic frameworks related to outcomes and impacts. Specific opportunities and potential actions to address this issue include:

- INGOs should provide more space for internal reflection on their operational definitions of ‘partnership’; how they support or detract from their partners’ capacities, and what that means for their organizational missions and their work. Greater individual and shared strategic thinking around partnership models, considering some of the issues raised by this report and other analyses of this subject, should take place as a part of the development of strategies and investment models in the natural resources and conservation fields.
- New investment and funding models should be explored and promoted as a component of north-south partnerships, such as the extension of INGO funding framework agreements to southern CSOs.¹⁰⁰
- African organizations should provide greater demand-driven leadership to create parameters for their partnerships, be selective in choosing INGOs to partner with, and do their part to promote partnerships that really support them.

2. Change the Way Organization Development Support is Delivered

Despite a vast body of knowledge and experience around organization development and capacity building, the actual design and delivery of organization development in practice often remains ill-suited to its purpose. There needs to be a practical shift in the way most organization development and capacity building is provided to African CSOs, towards more long-term, customized, sustained and demand-driven forms of support (Figure 7). Some of the more progressive and adaptive funders and international organizations mentioned in this report provide support to local CSOs along these lines, but these remain the exceptions to prevalent practice.

A key to achieving this shift in practice is recognizing and being conscious of the reality that many institutional incentives, for both funders and INGOs, tend to promote sub-optimal practices i.e. short-term, projectized, one-size-fits-all investments. It will require greater awareness of the organization development process, the impacts of different types of organizational strengthening investments, and internal commitment to strengthening results and outcomes in order to achieve such a shift in practice.



Figure 7: A proposed paradigm shift for investing in and strengthening African CSOs.

3. Support New Approaches to Leadership Development

Leadership is a critical factor in organizational performance, particularly for small or early-stage CSOs such as many of those working on natural resource issues in Africa, particularly at the community level. One of the chief constraints to African CSOs is the human resource shortfall and in particular the shortage of effective leaders who can grow, change, and sustain vibrant organizations. Leadership is also subject to chronic under-investment, by CSOs, INGOs, and funders alike; for example, it is estimated that less than 1% of all US foundation grants support leadership development, despite the widely recognized importance of leadership in social change.¹⁰¹ The natural resources field needs to examine the way that leadership is currently nurtured among both young, future leaders and established organizational leaders: at present, most leaders learn by doing and do not have the time and space to reflect on their leadership. There is a need to promote the skillsets in self-evaluation, management and support of teams, entrepreneurship, organization development, and strategy that leaders need to sustain and grow their organizations. There are many lessons and experiences to draw from beyond the conservation and natural resources fields.

4. Bolster Investments in Documentation and Learning

Considerable improvements in the provision of organizational support to African CSOs could be made through better documentation and sharing of knowledge, practice, and information, on subjects such as funding models, organization development approaches, and CSOs' own experiences with their growth and development. There are a great deal of experiences, lessons, and tools to draw on from the wider development and business arenas but relatively few are widely understood and deployed by natural resources and conservation actors. Equally, where there are strong long-term experiences, such as by a number of conservation organizations that work through partnership frameworks, there is relatively little documentation and analysis of those experiences or provision of replicable methodologies.

Better documentation and sharing of existing practices and exchanges between the natural resources field and the wider development sector could greatly strengthen existing practice and support models for CSOs in the natural resources field. This would also assist many international organizations and practitioners to access existing information or methodologies that they could draw on in their own capacity development support to local CSOs, and avoid reinventing the wheel in this area. Some existing platforms and initiatives in this area, such as the Capacity for Conservation program of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, which includes organizations with long-term experience such as FFI and Birdlife International, could be drawn on for greater learning, analysis, and documentation.

5. Promote Dialogue Around Fundamental Issues of CSO Accountability, Constituencies, and Sustainability

An important element of strengthening African CSOs active on natural resources is encouraging both local leaders and external supporters to explore challenging questions around their values, identity, organizational culture, legitimacy and accountability. Examining these issues requires opening up an understanding of organizational health and capacity beyond standard funder and INGO concerns around administrative competence and contractual compliance, the standard focus of much capacity building and organizational assessments, to underlying questions about the role of civil society. The dangers of CSOs becoming self-appointed spokespeople and the way in which funding relationships drive CSOs to be more accountable to funders and partners than to the communities they work with require greater consideration in this regard. New funding models that enhance organizational sustainability and reduce external dependence, and different ways of organizing are prime areas for exploration and exchange. Many organizations, particularly in the social enterprise space and amongst social movements, have innovative examples to offer and inform actors within the natural resources field.

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Annex I

List of organizations and individuals interviewed

- ▶ Accountability in Tanzania (ACT), KPMG Programme
- ▶ Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE)
- ▶ ACT Kenya
- ▶ Action Aid
- ▶ Birdlife International
- ▶ Brainforest
- ▶ Capacity Building and Leadership Institute
- ▶ Carrie Foster
- ▶ The Christensen Fund
- ▶ Comic Relief
- ▶ Community Development Resource Association
- ▶ Community Development Support Services
- ▶ Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
- ▶ Davine Thaw
- ▶ East African Wildlife Society
- ▶ EASUN
- ▶ Embassy of Finland, Tanzania
- ▶ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- ▶ Fauna & Flora International
- ▶ FERN
- ▶ Ford Foundation- East Africa Regional Programme Office
- ▶ Friends of Lake Turkana
- ▶ Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD)
- ▶ Haki Madini
- ▶ Integrated Rural Development for Nature and Conservation (IRDNC)
- ▶ International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
- ▶ International Land Coalition (ILC)
- ▶ International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC)
- ▶ Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD)
- ▶ Maison de l'Enfant et de la Femme Pygmée (MEFP)
- ▶ Réseau Ressources Naturelles (RRN)
- ▶ Kenya Land Alliance
- ▶ Kivulini Trust
- ▶ MDF Training and Consultancy
- ▶ MJUMITA
- ▶ Mpingo Conservation & Development Initiative (MCDI)
- ▶ MS Training Center for Development Cooperation (MS-TCDC)
- ▶ Mwambao Coastal Community Network (Mwambao)
- ▶ Namati
- ▶ Namibia Nature Foundation
- ▶ Natural Justice
- ▶ Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
- ▶ Oxfam
- ▶ Dynamique des Groupes de Peuples Autochtones (DGPA)
- ▶ Tree Aid
- ▶ Policy Forum
- ▶ Proforest
- ▶ Rainforest Foundation-UK
- ▶ Réseau CREF
- ▶ Sea Sense
- ▶ Segal Family Foundation
- ▶ SNV Netherlands Development Organization
- ▶ Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)
- ▶ Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
- ▶ Synchronicity Earth
- ▶ Tanzania Forest Conservation Group
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy, Africa Program
- ▶ Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT)
- ▶ UNDP Small Grants Programme, Kenya Office
- ▶ USAID
- ▶ Desert Research Foundation of Namibia
- ▶ World Resources Institute
- ▶ WWF Regional CBNRM Programme
- ▶ WWF Coastal East Africa Initiative
- ▶ WWF in Namibia



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