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Localising Humanitarian Learning:

Global Capacity Strengthening
Needs of Local Civil Society
Organisations in Technical
Expertise and Leadership



LESSONS LEARNED
Simulations and Training

**HUMANITARIAN
PARTNERS**

Submitted to: The Humanitarian Leadership Academy

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Table of Contents

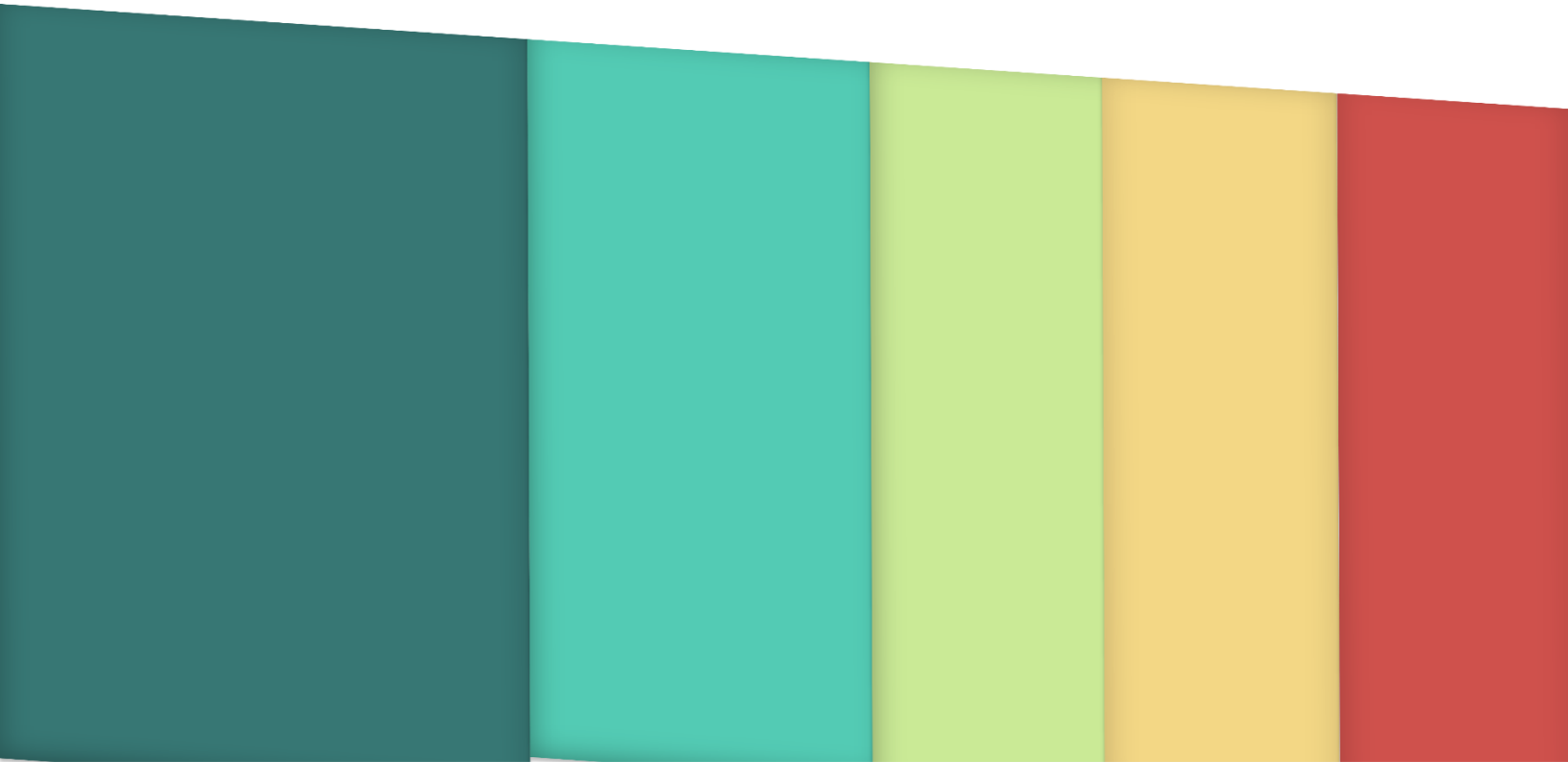
Acknowledgments.....	1
Executive Summary	5
Section 1: Introduction	12
1.1: Rationale.....	13
1.2: Participant Engagement.....	14
1.3: Review of Relevant Literature.....	15
.....	21
Section 2: Research Methodology.....	22
2.1: Survey.....	22
2.2 Key Stakeholder Interviews.....	23
2.3: Focus Organisation Case Studies: Deep Dive Interviews.....	24
2.4: Limitations	24
2.5: Interview Codes.....	25
2.6: Ethics	25
Section 3: Participant Demographics.....	26
3.1: Regional Distribution of Survey Respondents	26
3.2: Survey Respondents by Gender.....	28
3.3: Survey Respondents by Professional Role.....	29
3.4: Survey Respondent Organisation Demographics.....	34
3.5: Interview Participant Profiles	38
Section 4: Terminology, Definitions and Localisation	40
4.1: Introduction to Definitions and Terminology.....	40
4.2: Review of HLA Definitions of Terms.....	41
4.3: Comparing Participant and HLA Usage of <i>Technical Expertise</i>	42
4.4: Comparing Participant and HLA Usage of <i>Leadership</i>	49
4.5: Comparing Participant and HLA Usage of <i>Capacity Strengthening</i>	54
Section 5: Reported Capacity Strengthening Needs	55
5.1: <i>Technical Expertise</i> -Related Capacity Strengthening Needs	56
5.2: <i>Leadership</i> -Related Capacity Strengthening Needs	69
Section 6: Perceptions of Capacity Strengthening Modalities	78

6.1: Challenges of Online Delivery and Potential for Hybrid Models.....	78
6.2: Funding support	81
6.4: Experiential and Applied Approaches to Learning.....	83
6.5: Communities of Practice and Mentorship	85
Section 7: Participant Engagement with HLA.....	87
Section 8: Barriers to Capacity Strengthening.....	90
8.1: Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening	90
8.2: Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening.....	93
8.3: Intersectionality of Multiple Barriers	95
8.4: Barriers Related to Equality, Discrimination, and Inclusion (EDI).....	97
8.5: Barriers Related to Funding	101
8.6: Barriers Related to a Lack of Opportunities.....	105
8.7: Barriers Related to a Lack of Access	109
8.8: Barriers Related to Staff Capacity	110
8.9: Barriers due to Societal Structure.....	111
8.10: Barriers due to Digital Access and Technological Infrastructure.....	114
Section 9: Localisation	119
9.1: Language and Localisation	120
9.2: Participant Definitions of Localisation	121
9.3: Localisation and Capacity Strengthening.....	123
9.4: Localisation, Technical Expertise, and Leadership.....	125
9.5: Localisation and Donor Priorities	127
Section 10: Regional Snapshots.....	129
10.1: Regional Snapshot - Asia.....	130
10.2: Regional Snapshot - Eastern and Southern Africa	133
10.3: Regional Snapshot - Latin America and Caribbean.....	136
10.4: Regional Snapshot - Middle East and Eastern Europe.....	139
10.5: Regional Snapshot - Western and Central Africa.....	142
Section 11: Conclusion and Recommendations	144
11.1: Conclusions of Research	145
11.2: Recommendations	148

..... 153

11.3: Future Research 154

Works Referenced 156



Executive Summary

I think that the strengthening we need is how to present ourselves, how to show them that we exist, what we are doing, that we are doing it well [pause] and prove to them that what they do would cost them less if they did it with us who are already doing it. It's about fund saving. That training, directed to how to move from below to up there, how to show what we are doing, to get them to look at us, in a professional, scientific way. (LAC_05_KI)

The goal of this research was to develop a better understanding of the current and future capacity needs of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) globally, with particular emphasis on the areas of *technical expertise* and *leadership*. The findings of the study will contribute to HLA's mandate of supporting local civil society actors to strengthen capacities and promoting localisation, inclusivity, and equity in the humanitarian, development, and related sectors in which CSOs operate. ¹

The research methodology of this study was designed to be carried out iteratively between January and March 2022, completed in four phases of data collection as follows:

- desk research;
- a globally disseminated mixed methods qualitative/quantitative survey (n=236);
- 5 key stakeholder interviews in each of the 5 global regions of HLA operations (n=25); and
- focus organisation case studies in each region comprised of interviews with 2-5 individuals from the same organisation (n=25).

Survey and interview respondents included participants working at CSOs located in the five global regions of HLA operations: Asia, East and Southern Africa (ESA), Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), the Middle East and Eastern Europe (MEEE), and West and Central Africa (WCA).

A review of pertinent literature is presented in Section 1. For a full review of the research methodology, See Section 2. For a detailed examination of research participant demographics, see Section 3.

¹ By request of the sponsoring organisation, the study did not specifically target organisations focusing on one or many sectoral/technical areas as defined by the HLA. This may have contributed to some discrepancy between findings in this report and other internal conceptualisations regarding to this topic the details of which are highlighted throughout the report.

Framing the findings: Observations from the HLA steering committee

The HLA's Technical Expertise Strategic group commonly understands 'Technical Expertise' to refer to practitioners who are experts in the substance/content of sectors/programmes that deliver a product or service that affected populations need - food, health, nutrition, water, education, child protection, shelter, cash - and sometimes (increasingly) the cross-cutting/EDI aspects of these - gender, disability etc. This contrasts with the term "Operations" which generally relates to the financial, human resource, procurement and logistical processes and procedures needed to get the resources (incl. people and money) in place to be able to deliver the technical products or services. Both are essential parts of any humanitarian response.

However, in the interests of localisation, the research team was encouraged to provide research participants space to present their own interpretations of terminology. As a result, during the research it emerged that many local and national organisations had a different understanding of the term "Technical Expertise". This may be due to their different perspectives on humanitarian technical programming, as not all respondents were frontline emergency organisations or worked in technical areas. The findings in this report are framed by these differences in perspective, but should not be understood to undermine or supplant current HLA definitions or understandings of training needs among other communities..

Terminology

- The data collection and analysis methodologies used in this research were designed to respect the significance of language and terminology in decolonising aid structures. As such, survey and interview respondents were given the opportunity to express definitions and capacity strengthening needs in their own words.
 - See Section 4.1 for a full overview of the research team's approach to terminology and definitions.
- When asked to outline capacity strengthening needs related to *Technical Expertise*, respondents frequently described skills related to *Operational Expertise*, in categories such as project management, resource management, and resource mobilisation.
 - When asked about technical expertise capacity strengthening needs, 64% of survey responses included skills related to operational expertise.
 - Survey respondents and interviewees did not draw clear or consistent distinctions between *Technical Expertise* and *Operational Expertise*, as per HLA definitions of these terms.
 - See Section 4.2 for a full review of respondents' interpretations of the term *Technical Expertise*.
- There was similarly a lack of consensus in respondents' conceptualisations of *Leadership*, with a wide variety of key terms employed. No single term was cited by more than 14% of survey respondents when defining *leadership*.
 - When defining leadership, respondents frequently referred to the ability to guide individuals or teams (34 / 236, or 14%), the ability to complete tasks (33 / 236, or 14%), team management-related (24 / 236, or 10%), collaboration (24 / 236, or 10%), encouragement of participation (24 / 236, or 10%), and interpersonal skills (22 / 236, or 9%).
 - However, 52% of respondents employed terms related to HLA definitions of *Leadership*.
 - See Section 4.3 for a full review of respondents' interpretations of the term *Leadership*.

Reported Capacity Strengthening Needs: Technical Expertise

- When asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, survey respondents often identified skills that did not conform to the HLA definitions of *technical expertise*².

² The HLA have identified that there are two most likely potential reasons for this: the sampling approach and recognition that the number of local actors operating purely within the technical areas is limited and need to be given additional focus

- The capacity strengthening needs that were most commonly identified and described by survey respondents and interview participants were skills related to *operational expertise*, as per HLA definitions.
- When asked to identify the most important *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs in their organisation, survey respondents indicated the *operational expertise* areas of project management, resource management, and resource mobilisation:
 - 105 / 236 (45%) of survey respondents either explicitly indicated “project management” or listed related skills;
 - 45 / 236 (19%) either explicitly indicated “resource management” or listed related skills; and
 - 38 / 236 (16%) either explicitly indicated “resource mobilisation” or “fundraising” or listed related skills.
- Specific project management skill-strengthening needs included:
 - MEAL (45 / 105, or 43%),
 - proposal writing (36 / 105, or 34%)
 - project design (16 / 105, or 15%) and
 - report writing / reporting (16 / 105, or 15%).
- The majority of skill-strengthening needs categorised under resource management referred to financial skills (35 / 45, or 78%).
- Technology and digital literacy skill-strengthening was frequently referred to by interviewees, with particular emphasis on a growing basic digital literacy gap.
- EDI-related skill-strengthening was prioritised by interviewees, with a particular concern for an expansion of conceptualisations of inclusivity beyond topics related to gender and/or youth.
 - In particular, inclusion of people with disabilities was highlighted as an area of critical need for strengthening.
- For a complete discussion of *Technical Expertise* and *Operational Expertise*-related capacity strengthening needs, see Section 5.1.

Reported Capacity Strengthening Needs: Leadership

- When asked about capacity strengthening needs related to *Leadership*, survey respondents identified team management skills (54 / 236, or 23%) and interpersonal skills (53 / 236, or 22%) as well as general, non-specific references to management (25 / 236, or 15%).
 - The most commonly prioritised skills pertaining to team management were related to interpersonal communication (17 / 54, or 31%), teamwork (14 / 54, or 26%), teambuilding (10 / 54, or 19%), and goal-setting (10 / 54, or 19%).
 - Taken together, participants tended to emphasise interpersonal and soft skills over more specialised managerial skills, such as strategic planning and strategic vision.

- Participants highlighted challenges in preparing small “first generation” organisations, still lead by the original founder(s), for the transition to new generations of leaders
- Participants highlighted the importance of identifying potential leaders for inclusion in leadership capacity strengthening initiatives, rather than simply including people currently in leadership roles.
 - The identification of potential leaders is particularly important for including individuals from groups typically under-represented in leadership roles.
- For a complete discussion of *Leadership*-related capacity strengthening needs, see Section 5.2.

Perceptions of Different Capacity Strengthening Modalities:

- Overall, participants were less familiar with capacity strengthening modalities such as communities of practice, peer learning, or mentorship.
 - Instead, when asked about capacity strengthening modalities, participants tended to focus on digital vs. in-person lecture-based training and/or experiential vs. theoretical content.
- Despite the benefits of low cost and global reach, participants did not prefer purely digital capacity-strengthening deliveries.
 - Face-to-face deliveries were considered most effective.
 - Hybrid deliveries, in which online content is paired with formal or informal face-to-face workshops or study groups, was seen as an effective method to balance the benefits of digital and face-to-face modalities.
- Increased funding for capacity building programming, both for delivery organisations and for learners, was seen as an effective approach to improving capacity strengthening outcomes.
- For a full discussion of participants’ perceptions of different capacity strengthening modalities, see Section 6.

Respondents’ Engagement with HLA:

- More than half of survey participants (136 / 236, or 58%) had heard of HLA before engaging in this study, and nearly one third (69 / 236, or 29%) had taken part in HLA capacity building services in the past.
- This data was highly regionalised. Very few participants in Latin America and the Caribbean were familiar with HLA, and none had taken advantage of HLA services, which is unsurprising as this is a new priority region for the Academy.
- It is important to recall that HLA contributed to participant outreach in this project, both through their regional hubs and through global social media campaigns. This artificially boosted numbers of respondents familiar with the Academy. However, despite this support, the research team was pleased that 42% of participants were newly learning about HLA through this research.

- See Section 7 for a detailed study of research participants' familiarity and engagement with HLA services.

Barriers to Capacity Strengthening:

- The most commonly reported barriers to *technical expertise* capacity strengthening by survey respondents included:
 - Financial barriers (49 / 236, or 21%)
 - Lack of available opportunities (41 / 236, or 17%)
 - Inaccessibility of opportunities (41 / 236, or 17%)
 - Societal or structural barriers (40 / 236, or 17%), and
 - Barriers related to EDI (32 / 236, or 14%).
- Notably, 37 / 236 survey respondents indicated no major barriers to accessing technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities.
 - See Section 8.1 for a full discussion of barriers to accessing technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities.
- The most commonly reported barriers to *leadership* capacity strengthening by survey respondents included:
 - Barriers related to EDI (43 / 236, or 18%)
 - Lack of available opportunities (31 / 236, or 13%)
 - Inaccessibility of opportunities (31 / 236, or 13%).
 - Financial barriers (30 / 236, or 13%)
- Notably, 28 / 236 survey respondents indicated no major barriers to accessing leadership capacity strengthening opportunities.
 - See Section 8.2 for a full discussion of barriers to accessing leadership capacity strengthening opportunities.
- Barriers to accessing capacity strengthening were found to be multiple and intersectional, frequently overlapping to create challenging landscapes of access. In particular, barriers due to inadequate funding often exacerbated the impact of other barriers.
 - See Section 8.3 for a full review of the intersectionality of barriers to capacity strengthening, and Section 8.5 for a discussion of funding-related barriers.
- In general, survey participants frequently stated that no appropriate capacity strengthening opportunities were available to them (see Section 8.6) and that the opportunities available were often inaccessible due to geographical distance, language, or not being invited to take part (see Section 8.7).
- EDI-related barriers included but were not limited to those related to gender and age. In particular, participants highlighted the importance of greater effort to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in capacity-strengthening opportunities.
 - See Section 8.4 for a full discussion of EDI-related barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities.

- Interview respondents highlighted the importance of barriers related to digital access and technological infrastructure. These barriers related to limited digital literacy in some communities, a lack of ICT infrastructure in some communities, and access to adequate technological equipment. Cost and funding limitations in particular have the potential to compound digital access limitations.
 - See Section 8.10 for a full discussion of digital barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities.

Localisation:

- Localisation was highlighted research participants as a cross-cutting theme related to *capacity strengthening*, in particular with respect to supporting smaller local NGOs. Respondents stated that localisation is a concern among civil society actors in the humanitarian field due to an increasing awareness of power imbalances and resulting inefficiencies in response.
 - See Section 9 for a detailed discussion of localisation.
- Participants referred to the role language in localisation efforts. Capacity strengthening opportunities should be offered in local languages and also should prioritise locally-relevant terminology. When discourse is made inaccessible due to language, localisation bears the risk of being purely an intellectual exercise, rather than a tangible change in the way we work.
 - See Section 9.1 for more detail on how participants framed language with respect to localisation.
- Respondents highlighted a lack of locally-specific capacity strengthening and of locally-designed capacity strengthening initiatives. Respondents noted that the focus on capacity needs and priorities is based on international rather than local priorities. International trainers sometimes underestimate the skill and expertise of local organisations, and local organisations sometimes have more experience than international facilitators.
 - Participants advocated for increased adoption and appreciation of local knowledge, in particular with respect to localised models of program management and MEAL. However, the difficulty of convincing international donors and other actors to respect local ways of knowing or understanding was a significant barrier to achieving this goal.

Section 1: Introduction

Local organisations and actors are the first responders in any crisis and are increasingly understood to be the primary drivers throughout the stages of an emergency, including disaster preparedness, initial response, early recovery, long-term recovery, and community development. Nevertheless, the humanitarian sector has traditionally been slow to acknowledge the activities, capacities, and potential of local actors (Featherstone, 2021). Since the establishment of the Grand Bargain and continuing with the Grand Bargain 2.0 process (IASC 2021), emphasis has increasingly been placed on the transference of power and responsibility from international humanitarian agents to local disaster response and development actors.

Reflecting this global effort, in its 2022–2024 strategic plan the Humanitarian Leadership Academy³ (HLA) is committed to supporting local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in strengthening their capacity to affect change and make progress towards localisation. To better inform this strategic planning objective and thereby better meet the needs of smaller local organisations in the future, in August 2021 the HLA commissioned this study to update the Academy’s understanding of the capacity strengthening needs, gaps, and barriers of local CSOs globally, specifically in relation to the areas of technical expertise and leadership.

The study was commissioned to a multi-organisation research team consisting of [Lessons Learned Simulations & Training \(LLST\)](#), [Humanitarian Partners International - Partenaires Humanitaires Internationaux \(HPI-PHI\)](#), and [SNO Consulting](#).

Through this study, the research team has sought to contribute to the growing understanding of the unique and diverse contexts, pathways, strengths, and challenges of local civil society actors. Community-based and local CSOs present a significant opportunity for more creative, dignified, and respectful response and development initiatives that are more tailored to local and affected communities. However, these organisations also require improved opportunities for capacity strengthening, more effective partnerships, and financial resource support to ensure sustainable localised development.

To achieve these goals, the research team adopted a robust approach to ensure global representation. The study was conducted in the following four phases:

1. Desk research consisting of a scoping review of literature and documentation most relevant to the development and implementation of the study.

³ The Humanitarian Leadership Academy, a part of Save the Children UK, is a global initiative that provides context specific and locally relevant learning resources and facilitates collaboration to support local organisations in crisis and disaster response. HLA operates [Kaya](#), a source of hundreds of free online trainings for humanitarian and civil society organisations.

2. An online survey disseminated globally to civil society actors. A total of 236 responses were received.
3. Key stakeholder interviews with participants and CSOs from all five HLA regions of operation: Asia, East and Southern Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and West and Central Africa.
4. Focus organisation case studies comprised of deep dive interviews with multiple participants from each organisation, across the five HLA regions of operation. In total, 55 key stakeholder and deep dive interviews were included in the study.

1.1: Rationale

This study undertook to directly and extensively engage with smaller, locally-led organisations operating in relief, development, and humanitarian response efforts at various scales, including single country, municipality, and community. The study included local organisations and actors such as community-based organisations, regional networks, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other locally-led organisations engaged in local implementation.⁴

The goal of this research was to develop a better understanding of CSOs' diverse activities, areas of strength, and current and future capacity needs, particularly in the strategic areas of technical expertise and leadership. The findings of the study will contribute to HLA's mandate of supporting local civil society actors to strengthen capacities and promoting localisation, inclusivity, and equity in the humanitarian, development, and related sectors in which CSOs operate.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- Assess, generate insights, and provide recommendations on the existing and future capacity strengthening needs of CSOs in the areas of technical expertise and leadership.
- Assess the potential of HLA to support the capacity strengthening of CSOs, particularly in the strategic areas of technical expertise and leadership.
- Inform the HLA 2022-2024 strategy, specifically with regards to the capacity strengthening needs, challenges, and opportunities of CSOs in the areas of technical expertise and leadership.
- Support the HLA's commitment to improving localisation and local capacities in humanitarian response and development contexts by anticipating trends beyond 2024 and HLA's role in the future.

⁴ There was no specific targeting of the local organisations working exclusively in the humanitarian space, but best efforts were made to ensure these are first responders, even though they may still not identify themselves as humanitarian/technical NGOs. As is typical in many contexts, these are the organisations which first engage in humanitarian action in sudden onset crises.

This research was designed to cover the five global regions of HLA operations:

- Asia
- East and Southern Africa (ESA)
- Latin America and Caribbean (LAC)
- The Middle East and Eastern Europe (MEEE)
- West and Central Africa (WCA).

It is the hope of the research team that this project will lead to greater understanding of the impact and strategies of CSOs and result in capacity strengthening initiatives that will better support the sustainability of locally-led humanitarian and development efforts.

1.2: Participant Engagement

And I found that your research is important. You are talking about capacity building. And somehow there is a lot of things, a lot of programmes talk about capacity building in different fields of work, so I thought it's interesting. So I am part of it today. (MEE_01-01_DD)

I really like this interview because it is the first time I hear about strengthening. (LAC_04_KI)

It was the goal of the research team to ensure that the research was participatory and meaningful to survey respondents and interviewees. Wherever possible, participants were given space to express what aspects of capacity strengthening were important to them, in their own words and applying their own definitions. Research participants expressed a willingness and enthusiasm to support the study, to share their experiences, and to tell their stories – not just their stories as individuals but also the stories of their organisations and their communities. As one participant stated,

I definitely think that what you're doing right now is important, knowing what [Civil Society Organisations] need. Because obviously, if there's something which absolutely doesn't concern me, I will not be paying attention no matter how interesting the facilitator is. So, capacity building should definitely cater to the actual needs of the people. (ASA_01-04_DD)

The presentation of findings in this report prioritises the voices, experiences, and knowledge of the participants in this study. Findings from the survey are paired, to the greatest extent possible, with the qualitative data from the interviews. In doing so, the presentation of findings allows for the first-hand accounts of the interviewees to support, elaborate upon, and enrich the findings of the survey, and vice versa.

1.3: Review of Relevant Literature

The study began with a scoping review of relevant literature and documentation to develop a preliminary mapping of key concepts underpinning the research subject. Subsequent phases of the study were then informed by the findings of this scoping review (Mays et al., 2001). Source material and resources for the literature review were identified through searches in relevant academic and non-academic databases, reference chaining, and targeted searches in archives of key organisations. The selection criteria for materials emphasised the most recently published literature and resources and, to the greatest extent possible, prioritised publications by CSOs, CSO networks, and local academics from different global regions.

Resources identified by the research team were supplemented with documents provided by HLA and Save the Children UK (SCUK). These included relevant internal documents, related strategic planning and policy documents, and key third-party studies identified by the steering group.

Key insights drawn from the literature review and a brief overview of a selection of existing studies are presented below, with a focus on the major thematic areas which informed the survey and interview processes and are most relevant to situating the findings of the study. These topics include:

- Localisation
- Capacity Strengthening
- Technical Expertise
- Leadership.

Discussion has also been included of literature on the topics of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Funding, where they relate to the major themes listed above.

Localisation

In “Shifting the Power: Delivering the Localisation Agenda” (2017), Sawchuk defines *localisation* as “local actors [taking] their place alongside international actors in order to create a balanced humanitarian system that is more responsive and accountable to disaster-affected communities” (p. 1). Similarly, the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR, 2019) defines *localisation* as “a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for humanitarian responses” (p. 2).

On the subject of *localisation*, general themes that were identified across the literature include:

- definitions and understandings of *localisation* (Global Mentoring Initiative, 2021; Save the Children, 2020; NEAR, 2019);
- the importance of local organisations in humanitarian response and community outreach (HLA & British Red Cross, 2017);
- the need for evaluations of the effectiveness of localisation initiatives (Barbelet et al., 2021); and
- the importance of sustainability for localisation efforts (HLA & British Red Cross, 2017).

Key areas of focus for localisation identified included: partnerships, funding, capacity, coordination and complementarity, policy, influence and visibility, and participation (NEAR, 2019).

The Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD, 2016), which operates in countries across African regions, suggests that “Localization calls for an inclusive approach that utilizes local knowledge to tailor the ambitious global development agenda to specific local circumstances” (n.p.). With regards to international-local dynamics and the decolonisation of humanitarian systems, themes related to *localisation* that emerged as major critical areas and that proved pertinent to our findings were:

- the respective roles of local and international actors, including donors, in localisation efforts (Global Mentoring Initiative, 2021);
- partnership-based localisation and enabling environments for localisation (Christian Aid et al., 2019);
- respect for local approaches to EDI-related programming (Jayasinghe, Khatun, & Okwii, 2020);
- the need for a radical shift in traditional power structures to centre the priorities of local actors and communities in decision-making processes (Barbelet et al., 2021);
- the role of local stakeholders in the production of knowledge (Mwambari, 2019);
- the need for equal and direct access to funding for local actors (Save the Children, 2020); and
- the significance of language and terminology in decolonising aid structures (Peace Direct et al., 2021).

Of particular note is the relationship between *funding* and *localisation* highlighted in a significant number of studies. For example, in “Directions in a post-aid world? South-South development cooperation and CSOs in Latin America” (2018), Appe observes the preferential distribution of international funding to “elite” organisations with lesser connections to local communities (p. 273). Studies also emphasised the role of donors and the importance of financing local actors (Global Mentoring Initiative, 2021) and the impact of external pressures on the autonomy of local organisations that receive international funding (Appe, 2018).

Recommendations for donors with regards to funding and supporting localisation included: investing in capacity sharing, increasing funding to local actors, investing in equitable and ethical partnerships, and collaborating with other donors (Barbelet et al., 2021); and improving flexibility in funding modalities to support innovations and organisational learning, as well as increased focus on long-term outcomes and consistency in funding (Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, & Collada, 2021, p. 5).

Capacity Strengthening

The theme of *capacity strengthening* is prominent throughout the literature reviewed. It is frequently examined in relation to other key concepts considered in this study, most notably:

- Localisation
- Sustainability
- Capacity Needs
- Funding.

Capacity strengthening is also often referred to as capacity building, training, or other related terms (see further discussion in [Section 3: Definitions and Terminology](#)). As Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, and Collada (2021) explain, “Capacity strengthening is often equated with training and workshops. However, for a capacity strengthening intervention to be successful, it should take a holistic approach by incorporating also mentoring, coaching, accompaniment, peer-learning and field-based exposure” (p. 6).

With regards to *capacity strengthening* in Nigeria, challenges observed to long-term organisational strengthening and sustainability include: project dependency, financing, staff turnover, limited partnership building, and limited resources (Baudot Queguiner et al., 2021). With regards to *capacity strengthening* in relation to *funding*, Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, and Collada (2021) emphasise the following:

Investments in project management, monitoring and evaluation, financial management and leadership succession have received the greatest attention partly due to donors’ emphasis on results-based management. This has led to the neglect of investments in critical capacities such as sustainability, technological resilience and cybersecurity, adaptation to complex environments and internal governance structures. (p. 5)

Recommendations in “Pathways to Localisation: A Framework towards Locally Led Humanitarian Response in Partnership-based Action” (2019) include that capacity strengthening should be tailored to partnerships and to local actors, rather than a one-size-fits-all model (Christian Aid et al.). The authors also highlight the need for long-term capacity strengthening support, rather than short-term or project-based, as well as the need for

innovative capacity strengthening approaches, such as active learning, “mentoring, accompaniment, and secondments” (Christian Aid et al., 2019, p. 8). Priority areas for capacity strengthening identified in the localisation framework include: resources, funding, and proposal writing; MEAL systems; standard operating procedures; project management and financial management; policy, advocacy, and influencing; and organisational development and sustainability (Christian Aid et al., 2019, p. 7-8).

Recommendations for *Capacity Strengthening and sustainability* include the following observations by Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, and Collada (2021): “Contextual understanding of CSOs’ capacity needs, flexibility in funding, trust between donors and CSOs and developing sector-wide capacities as opposed to those of individual organizations are critical factors that contribute to the sustainability of capacity strengthening initiatives in the Global South” (p. 5).

With regards to *capacity strengthening and technology* in India specifically, Bandyopadhyay and Arvind (2021) observe that during the COVID-19 pandemic the “majority of support institutions had switched to digital platforms to conduct their training and capacity building activities” (p. 4). In the context of India’s significant digital divide in urban versus rural regions, this “switch to digital platforms has enabled wider outreach, while raising concerns about the ‘top-down’ approach of webinars, which restrict peer-to-peer interaction” (p. 4). In India, they found that “12 percent [of] CSOs expressed that they need to upgrade their capacity to use digital technology” (p. 10).

Successful capacity strengthening initiatives observed by Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, and Collada (2021) include:

- local resource mobilisation, technology, and leadership programmes;
- networking;
- capacity strengthening support partnerships among CSOs;
- partnerships with resource organisations;
- capacity assessments;
- consolidation of learning environments; and
- incorporation of diversity practices (p. 18).

Technical Expertise

The topic of *Technical Expertise* was highlighted by the HLA as a key pillar of interest in this study due its prevalence in past research on CSO capacity strengthening needs, strategic planning, and existing capacity strengthening portfolio. As such, research into this term began with a thorough review of HLA documentation (HLA, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; SCU, 2020; 2019) and was followed up by interviews with several HLA staff members to further refine the definition.

In the literature reviewed, the subject of *technical expertise* primarily emerged in considerations of the capacity strengthening needs required for humanitarian response operations.

In Bandyopadhyay and Arvind's (2021) study of capacity strengthening needs in India during the COVID-19 pandemic, they identify the following areas of technical expertise as priorities: long-term planning, monitoring and evaluation, quantitative data management, and tools for programme evaluations. In a similar vein, in "Localisation of Aid: The future of non-profit leadership in Africa," Daud (2021) indicates the need for increased capacities in monitoring and evaluation among "local non-profit organizations in the Global South" to better inform interventions and improve effectiveness (p. 3). In addition to these areas, capacity strengthening in EDI has also been identified as an essential cross-cutting technical skill for CSOs, specifically in relation to project management and MEAL (Guharay, 2020).

Several studies have identified the specific capacity area of *fundraising* (and fundraising-related skills) as a significant barrier for local organisations. For example, Bandyopadhyay and Arvind (2021) identify a need for increased capacity in funding regulation compliance, fundraising, and grant proposal writing.

Alongside consideration of fundraising capacities, *funding* emerged as a key theme and was discussed in relation to both *localisation* and *capacity strengthening*.

With regards to *funding* and *localisation*, Featherstone and Tasneem (2020) highlight the barriers faced by local organisations, such as "undergoing risk/capacity assessments successfully, being able to negotiate application procedures (which are often in English), having to compete with INGOs for funding, and facing challenges in securing indirect support costs" (p. 14). In "Barriers to African Civil Society: Building the Sector's Capacity and Potential to Scale-up," Moyo and Imafidon (2021) similarly point to the need to restructure funding systems.

With regards to *funding* and *capacity strengthening*, studies highlighted:

- funding as a determining factor for capacity strengthening and, consequently, effectiveness (Stühlinger & Hersberger-Langloh, 2021);
- organisations with limited funds must prioritise financing activities and response over capacity strengthening (Stühlinger & Hersberger-Langloh, 2021);
- a severe lack funding for capacity strengthening due to resource organisations' unwillingness to support CSO capacity strengthening or only supporting capacity strengthening as part of funded projects (Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, & Collada, 2021).

A notable body of literature highlights the need for capacity strengthening in areas of expertise related to *technology* as well as the significant barrier presented by technology related literacies and technological infrastructures (Featherstone & Tasneem, 2020). Moyo and Imafidon (2021), for example, emphasise the role of strengthening technology capacities in CSOs to address barriers to localisation in the African context. Bandyopadhyay and Arvind (2021) likewise identify digital and technology capacities as a priority area for future capacity strengthening efforts in India.

Leadership

The topic of *Leadership* was also highlighted by the HLA as a key pillar of interest in this study due its prevalence in past research on CSO capacity strengthening needs, strategic planning, and existing capacity strengthening portfolio. As such, research into this term also began with a thorough review of HLA documentation (HLA, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d; SCUK, 2020; 2019).

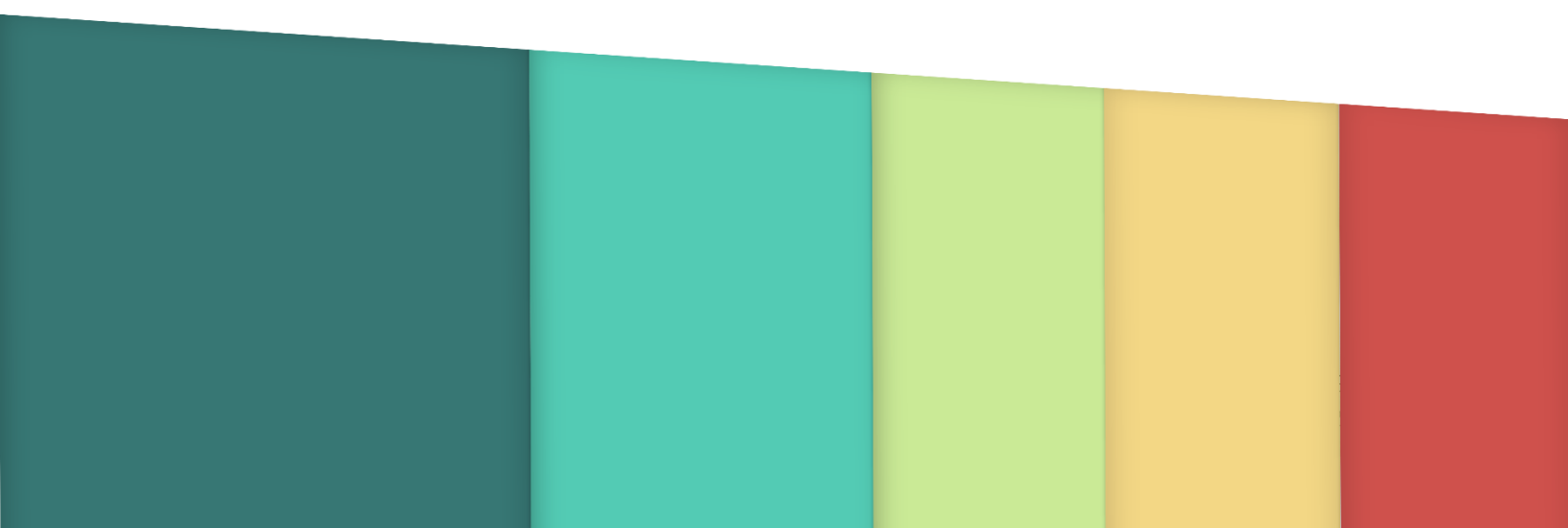
Based on this initial research, a preliminary definition of *leadership* was formulated as:

- The abilities and capacities necessary to make decisions and effectively direct teams in the context of humanitarian response; and
- the ability of local organisations to engage in decision-making and to inform the discourse and processes of humanitarian response.
-

Although *leadership* is discussed in several studies in relation to capacity strengthening and/or localisation, it is often referenced in passing or equated with synonymous terms such as: management, influence, governance, advocacy, etc. As a result, a clear definition of what *leadership* is and what skills it encompasses is difficult to discern in the majority of studies. For example, leadership is considered alongside project management and decision-making as areas for capacity strengthening (ActionAid et al., 2016). Daud (2021) discusses leadership in terms of challenges faced by local organisations due to a lack of “qualified technical leads who can guide these organizations in designing, implementing, and monitoring and evaluation of interventions” (p. 5).

Despite divergent definitions of leadership itself, many studies highlight leadership and leadership-related skills as key areas for capacity strengthening, including: planning, governance, policies, communication, mentoring, succession planning and organisational sustainability (often referred to as “Founder’s Syndrome”), and stakeholder engagement (Marita, Oule, Mungai, Thiam, & Ilako, 2016; Moyo & Imafidon, 2021; Kumi, Bandyopadhyay, & Collada, 2021). Research has indicated the need for expertise and professionalism capacity strengthening among board members as well as staff in leadership positions (Howe, Munive, & Rosenstock, 2019). Similarly, successful EDI initiatives require buy-in at the leadership and directorship levels, including formal organisational commitments and strategic objectives (Guharay, 2020).

On the topic of *leadership* and *organisational sustainability* specifically, Bandyopadhyay and Arvind (2021) emphasise creating a second leadership tier rather than concentrating all training opportunities on current leaders; this approach takes into account emergent and potential leaders, who will lead in the future, and it enables efforts “towards [the] decentralisation of decision-making” within the organisation (p. 17).



Section 2: Research Methodology

The research methodology of this study was designed to be carried out iteratively between January and March 2022, completed in four phases of data collection as follows:

- desk research, as outlined in the literature review above;
- a globally disseminated mixed methods qualitative/quantitative survey (n=236);
- 5 key stakeholder interviews in each of the 5 global regions of HLA operations (n=25); and
- focus organisation case studies in each region comprised of interviews with 2-5 individuals from the same organisation (n=25).

Applying this iterative approach to the study, the findings from each phase of research were used to inform subsequent data collection processes. The rationale for this structure of analysis was to develop a robust understanding of the central research topics by capturing broad themes through survey response, increasing resolution on preliminary findings via key stakeholder interviews, and finally gaining in-depth and nuanced perspectives through organisation case studies.

2.1: Survey

A mixed methods qualitative/quantitative survey was circulated globally to local CSOs, gathering feedback on organisation profiles, technical expertise and leadership-related capacity strengthening needs, and existing capacity strengthening programmes, including but not limited to those offered by HLA. The survey also requested feedback on existing gaps and anticipated future needs in technical expertise and leadership capacity strengthening programming.

The survey dissemination strategy included:

- sharing through the SCUK and HLA networks, including social media channels;
- outreach through regional and global civil society network organisations; and
- circulating through the professional networks of LLST, HPI, and SNO Consulting.

Survey dissemination outreach was conducted through emails, social media posts, and word of mouth. The survey was available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, and Kiswahili for a two-month period. A total of 236 responses were recorded, surpassing our projected response rate of 100. Qualitative survey data was coded by project staff and analysed in Microsoft Excel. The full survey participant demographic breakdown can be found in Section 2.7, Participant Demographics.

2.2 Key Stakeholder Interviews

Subsequent to the literature review and survey, 25 individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Discussions were oriented by the research questions of the study; however, participants were encouraged to speak from their specific experiences and given the space to focus on the topics that they felt were most important. Interview participants were identified through a similar recruitment strategy as the survey, with the inclusion of a select number of survey respondents who volunteered to elaborate on their responses in an interview format. The majority of interviews were conducted with non-survey respondents in an effort to minimise redundancy of contributions across the study elements and to maximise the overall reach of the study. We used a purposive snowball sampling strategy, with the aim of capturing equal gender representation and organisational, sectoral, and geographical dispersion.

Interviews ranged from a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 60 minutes and were conducted online using the video- or tele-conferencing platform of the participant's preference. Interviews were conducted by all research team members, primarily in English, with the option of French, Arabic, Spanish, and Kiswahili where appropriate. English interviews were simultaneously transcribed using Otter.ai, while interviews in other languages were translated by project staff (first-language speakers). Interview recordings were deleted once the reviewed transcripts were uploaded to the team's secure, password-protected Google Drive. Transcripts were anonymised through the removal of any identifying information (names, organisation names, past roles with dates, etc.). Analysis of interviews was then performed using QSR International's NVivo 12 qualitative research software.

The theoretical approach of this study was guided by qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000) and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), with the aim of capturing and communicating the perspectives of key stakeholders with minimal imposition of the researchers' interpretation. Analysis began with the open coding of 3 interviews (assigning "codes" or descriptive tags to ideas and themes in the text), followed by a research team meeting to compare our respective codebooks. After an iterative consensus building process, a common codebook was established, which was then used to code the remaining 22 key stakeholder interviews (as well as the 25 deep dive interviews discussed below). Representative quotes for each code were then identified and used to elucidate the global themes presented in the following sections.

2.3: Focus Organisation Case Studies: Deep Dive Interviews

The final phase in the qualitative data collection strategy was a series of case studies which consisted of deep dive interviews with 1-2 focus organisations (n=5/region) in each of the five regions. Organisations were primarily identified through participants in the key stakeholder interviews (if colleagues of a key stakeholder agreed to be interviewed, those interviews were counted towards the case study and an additional key stakeholder interview was then conducted to achieve the target numbers for key stakeholder and case study interviews). The second method used to identify organisations for case studies was through recommendations made by key stakeholder interview participants. Case study interviews were conducted using the same interview guide as key stakeholder interviews, and interview transcripts were analysed using the codebook described above. Particular attention was given to any differences in identified needs or perceptions of barriers communicated by individuals at different levels of the same organisation.

2.4: Limitations

Despite our best efforts to provide a holistic representation of civil society perspectives on technical expertise and leadership capacity strengthening, there were certain limitations that were inherent to our study design.

First, we acknowledge the challenges of working in a fully digital environment and the impact that this may have had on the accessibility of our research tools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other logistics restrictions, we were unable to travel to the regions in which our research was conducted. We recommend that future studies of a similar nature are conducted in person in order to reach communities with less internet connectivity and develop a better understanding of the capacity strengthening needs of organisations in these areas.

Second, we recognise that by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews online, we miss a critical element of building rapport through in-person interaction, being attuned to body language cues, and being able to provide refreshments as a small token of appreciation for participants' time. It was noted by one participant that they were using their personal data connection to speak with us, and while it is difficult to mitigate participant costs at a distance, future research may better anticipate these needs and make the necessary provisions.

Furthermore, due to the global scope of this study, participant selection for this study was made through the HLA contacts, local networks of CSOs, online mapping research, and word of mouth. We recognise that this sampling methodology may introduce bias in our findings.

We also recognise the limitations of our research in terms of language availability. While we were able to conduct interviews in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, and Kiswahili, many participants noted that communication in their first language or language of preference was

not available in this study. This may have led to a bias in our participant distribution towards those with some level of competency in the languages available, which inevitably results in limited diversity of perspectives.

Lastly, the theoretical approaches of grounded theory and qualitative description used in this study have been critiqued as lacking rigorous interpretive elements. We gently counter this claim by requesting the reader consider our attempts to present the data and findings with as minimal intervention or subjective analysis as possible. Our approach also required that we not impose definitions or structure upon the interviews. Rather, we began the interviews by asking participants for their definitions of technical expertise and leadership; these definitions then became the starting point for the conversation. In doing so, we challenge the approach of presenting interview participants with a presupposed problem or concept definition which forces them to bend their experiences, knowledge, and vocabulary to fit the terminology and logic of dominant international development and humanitarian aid systems. While it may be difficult to navigate multiple definitions of these key terms, respect for diverse languages and terminologies is essential to localisation efforts; we believe that this flexibility and openness will foster improved understanding and communication which are integral to sharing knowledge and capacities.

2.5: Interview Codes

Anonymised interview transcripts were assigned region-based codes.

Key stakeholder interviews were given codes in the format of `YYY_XX_KI`, where `YYY` refers to the region, `XX` refers to the interviewee, and `KI` refers to “key stakeholder interview”. For example, `WCA_04_KI` or `MEE_02_KI`.

Focus organisation case study interviews were given codes in the format of `YYY_ZZ-XX_DD`, where `YYY` refers to the region, `ZZ` refers to the organisation, `XX` refers to the individual interviewee, and `DD` refers to “deep dive”. For example, `LCA_02-02_DD` or `ASA_01-03_DD`.

Regional codes are `ASA` (Asia), `ESA` (East and Southern Africa), `LAC` (Latin America and Caribbean), `MEE` (the Middle East and Eastern Europe), `WCA` (West and Central Africa), and `GBL` (Global Network).

2.6: Ethics

This research plan was reviewed and approved by the Save the Children UK Research Ethics Evaluation Committee (REEC). The research team followed the commitments made to the Committee in all cases. For any questions related to research ethics, please contact Matthew Stevens at mstevens@llst.ca or Seema Patel at se.patel@savethechildren.org.uk.

Section 3: Participant Demographics

The target demographic of this study was smaller, locally-led organisations operating in relief, development, and humanitarian response efforts at various scales, including single country, municipality, and community. The target demographic thus includes local organisations and actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), local non-governmental (NGOs), regional networks, and other locally-led organisations engaged in local implementation. International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) were not included in the primary target demographic; however, responses received from INGO actors were included when relevant.

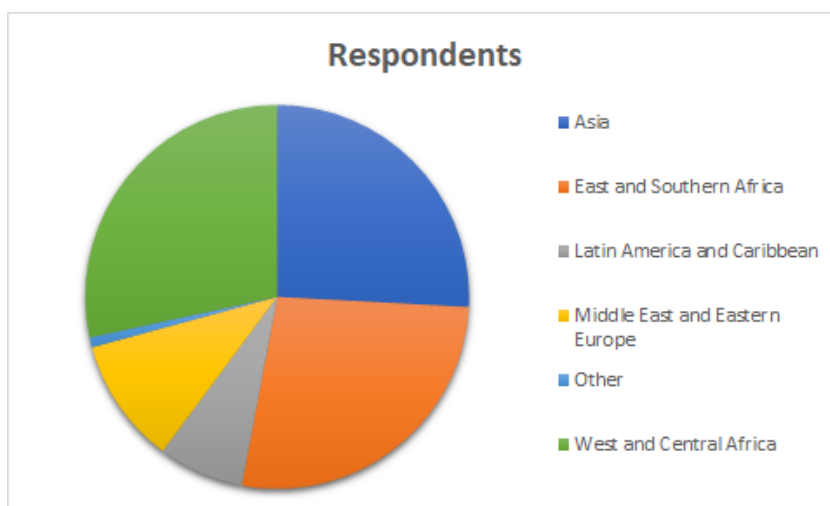
The first phase of data collection for this research was a globally disseminated mixed methods qualitative/quantitative survey. The survey collected 236 complete responses.

Subsequent phases of the research included key stakeholder interviews and focus organisation case studies consisting of deep dive interviews with multiple individuals within an organisation. A total of 56 interviews were conducted.

3.1: Regional Distribution of Survey Respondents

Based on the five HLA regions of operation, survey respondents were disaggregated by region as follows:

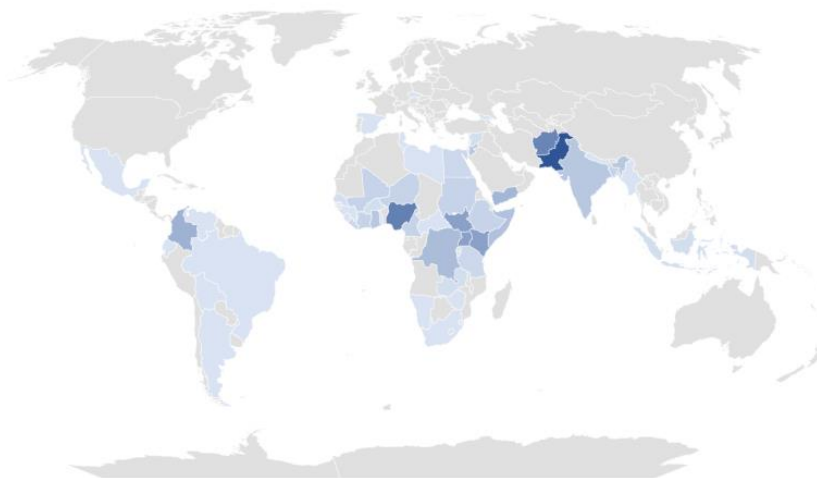
Region	Respondents
Asia	61
East and Southern Africa	64
Latin America and Caribbean	17
Middle East and Eastern Europe	25
Other	2
West and Central Africa	67
Grand Total	236



Of the two respondents who indicated “Other”, one was from Western Europe and one was from Central Europe.

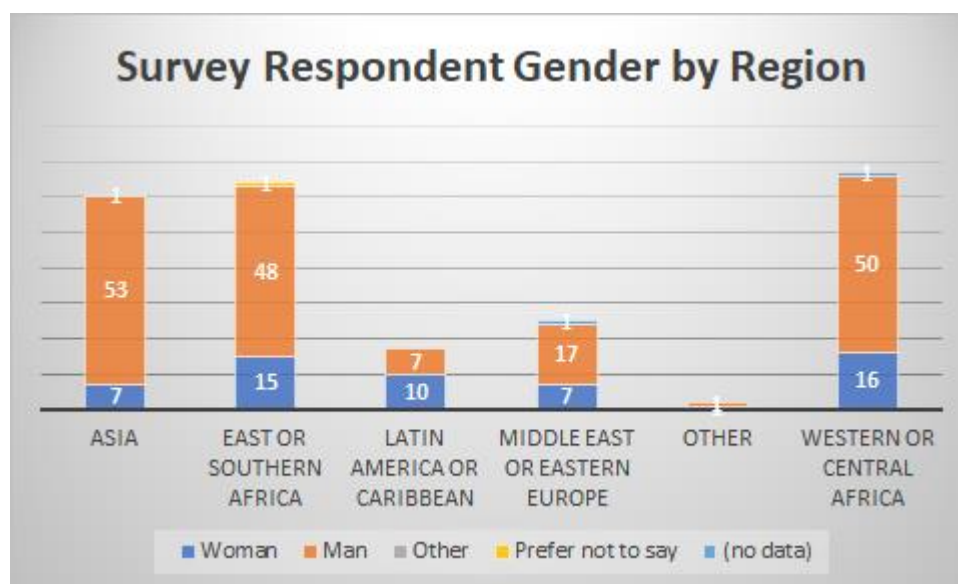
Due to the approach of sampling respondents via regional CSO networks, existing HLA contacts, and other professional networks (see Section 2: Research Methodology), national distributions of respondents tended to be skewed within regions.

Survey Respondents - Global



Asia (61 respondents)	East and Southern Africa (64 respondents)	Latin America and Caribbean (17 respondents)	Middle East and Eastern Europe (25 respondents)	West and Central Africa (67 respondents)
Pakistan (27) Afghanistan (18) India (6) Bangladesh (4) (no data) (2) Indonesia (2) Nepal (1) Myanmar (1)	Kenya (13) Uganda (13) South Sudan (13) Somalia (7) Ethiopia (4) Sudan (4) Tanzania (3) Zambia (2) Namibia (1) Zimbabwe (1) (no data) (1) Eswatini (1) South Africa (1)	Colombia (10) Bolivia (1) Mexico (1) Haiti (1) Brazil (1) Venezuela (1) Argentina (1) Ecuador (1)	Yemen (9) Jordan (6) Egypt (3) Syria (2) Palestine (1) Georgia (1) Tunisia (1) Lebanon (1) Libya (1)	Nigeria (19) Democratic Republic of Congo (8) Ghana (6) Niger (4) Mali (4) Cameroon (4) Côte d'Ivoire (4) Liberia (3) (no data) (2) Cameroun (2) Burkina Faso (2) Senegal (2) Central African Republic (1) Zambian (1) Togo (1) Guinea (1) Burundi (1) Sierra Leone (1) The Gambia (1)

3.2: Survey Respondents by Gender



Globally, 75% of survey respondents self-reported as men and 24% self-reported as women. The remaining 1% reported as “other”, “prefer not to say”, or declined to answer the question. The Asia region featured the least gender parity in response rate, with only 7 / 61 respondents (11%) self-identifying as women. More women than men (10F / 7M, or 59%) responded to the survey from the Latin America and Caribbean region. Other regions featured a gender dispersion close to the global average. See the chart below for a detailed breakdown.

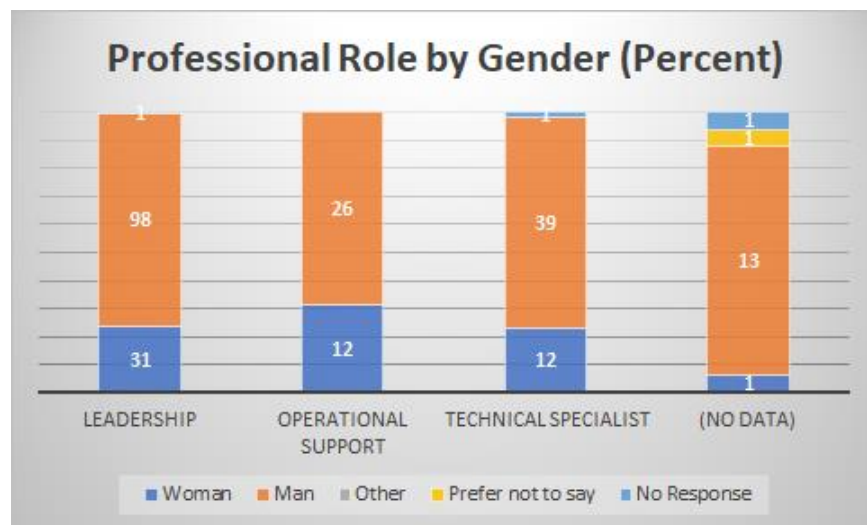
Participants by Region and Gender											
Region	Woman		Man		Other	Prefer not to say	(no data)		Grand Total		
Asia	7	11%	53	87%	1	2%	0%	0%	0%	61	
East or Southern Africa	15	25%	48	79%		0%	1	2%	0%	64	
Latin America or Caribbean	10	16%	7	11%		0%	0%	0%	0%	17	
Middle East or Eastern Europe	7	11%	17	28%		0%	0%	1	2%	25	
Other	1	2%	1	2%		0%	0%	0%	0%	2	
Western or Central Africa	16	26%	50	82%		0%	0%	1	2%	67	
Grand Total	56	24%	176	75%	1	0%	1	0%	2	1%	236

3.3: Survey Respondents by Professional Role

Survey respondents provided their position titles, which were categorised by the research team into technical specialist positions, operational support positions, and leadership positions. The majority (130 / 236, or 55%) of survey respondents self-reported as holding leadership positions. However, gender parity was similarly elusive among the remaining respondents: 51 / 236 (22%) reported holding technical specialist positions, and 39 / 236 (17%) reported holding operational support positions.



When analysed by gender, disparities in the respondent group played out similarly across roles. Notably, when considered by percentage of the total, a slightly larger share of women were found in operational support roles, followed by leadership roles. The smallest proportion of women were to be found in technical specialist roles.



These gender disparities played out similarly across regions, as seen in the table below.

Professional Role					
Gender by Region	Technical Specialist	Leadership	Operational Support	(no data)	Grand Total
Asia					
Woman		4	3		7
Man	10	36	3	4	53
Other		1			1
East or Southern Africa					
Woman	6	6	2	1	15
Man	13	23	10	2	48
Prefer not to say				1	1
Latin America or Caribbean					
Woman	2	7	1		10
Man		6	1		7
Middle East or Eastern Europe					
Woman	2	3	2		7
Man	4	9	4		17
(no data)				1	1
Other					
Woman			1		1
Man			1		1
Western or Central Africa					
Woman	2	11	3		16
Man	12	24	7	7	50
(no data)	1				1
Grand Total	52	130	38	16	236

The research team also sub-classified professional roles based on the criteria laid out in the figure below. The majority of respondents (76 / 236) self-reported as leaders of country-level organisations. Others commonly reported leading project or programme teams (20 / 236 each). Areas of technical speciality and operational support positions were highly diverse.

Professional Role by Region - Detailed Breakdown				
Professional Role	Woman	Man	Other / No Response / Prefer Not To Say	Grand Total
Leadership	31	98	1	130
(no data)		1		1
Founder	2	7		9
Program	7	13		20
Project	6	14		20
Regional		4		4
Country / Executive	16	59	1	76
Operational Support	12	26		38
Accounting		2		2
Administration	1	5		6
Communications		2		2
Fundraising	1			1
HR		2		2
IM	1	2		3
Implementation (General)	2	2		4
Internal Training	3	1		4
logistics		1		1
MEAL	1	3		4
Partnerships		2		2
Policy	1			1
Research		3		3
Shelter		1		1
Volunteer	2			2
Technical Specialist	12	39	1	52
(no data)	1	3		4
CASH	1			1
Communications		1		1
Development		4		4
Education	3	7		10
Health	2	4		6
Implementation (General)		8	1	9
Legal	2	3		5
MEAL		3		3
MHPSS	3	1		4
Nutrition		3		3
Risk		2		2
Grand Total	56	176	4	236

Survey respondents self-reported their years of experience with CSOs or other humanitarian organisations. Respondents were heavily skewed towards mid-to-late career humanitarian workers. Most participants held more than 15 years of experience.



However, this disparity in experience was heavily predicated on professional role. Survey respondents in leadership positions tended to report holding more years of experience than respondents in other organisation roles. The greatest number of respondents in leadership positions reported having more than 15 years of experience (42). The absolute majority of respondents in leadership roles reported more than 11 years of experience (75). Technical specialists were more often early- or mid-career. Operational support staff had a relatively even distribution of years of experience.

Professional Role					
Years Experience	Leadership	Operational Support	Technical Specialist	(no data)	Grand Total
Less than 1		5	5	1	11
1 to 3	6	8	14	3	31
4 to 6	17	7	11	3	38
6 to 10	32	8	10	2	52
11 to 15	33	4	4	1	42
More than 15	42	6	7	4	59
Grand Total	130	38	51	14	233

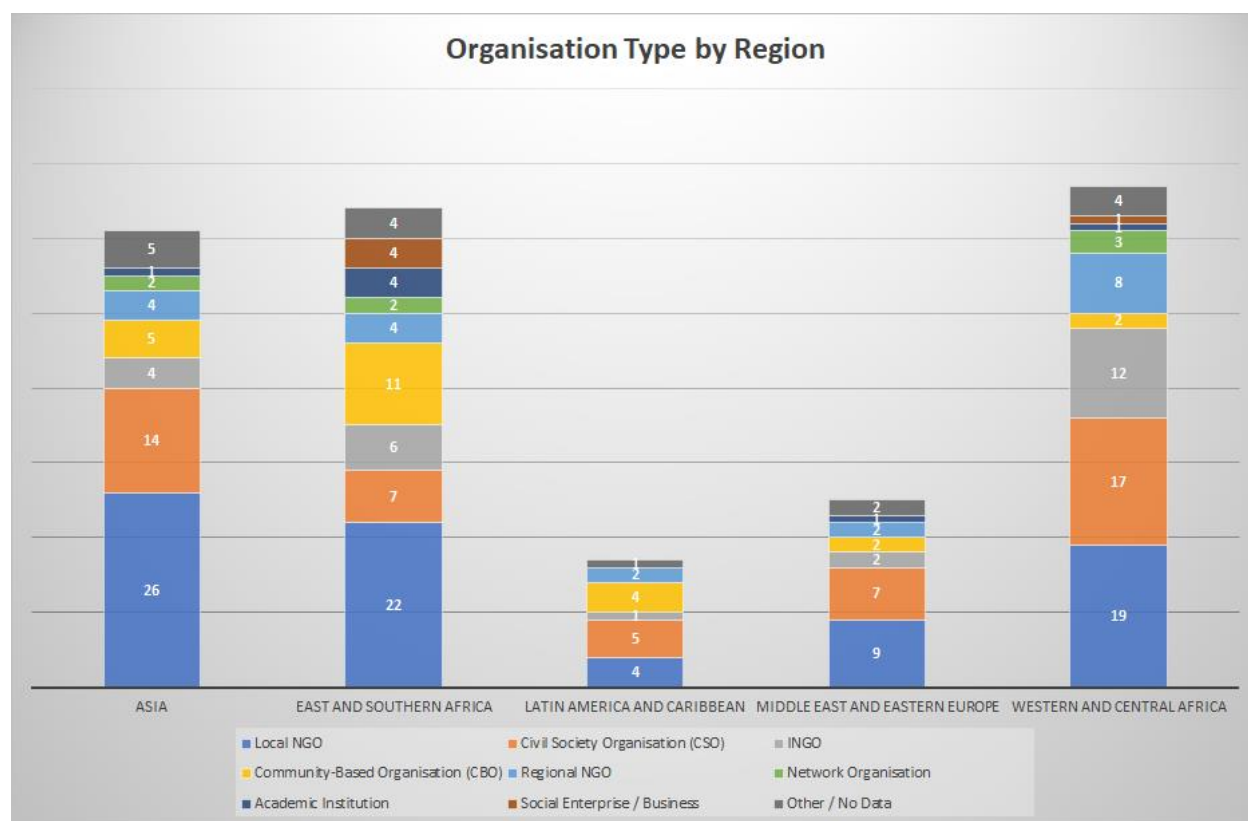
Overall, these trends in reported years of experience were observed across all five regions, as can be seen in the detailed breakdown below:

Professional Role by Region and Years Experience								
Professional Role	(no data)	Less than 1	1 to 3	4 to 6	6 to 10	11 to 15	More than 15	Grand Total
Asia								
(no data)				1			3	4
Leadership				2	6	16	17	41
Operational Support				1	1	1	3	6
Technical Specialist		2	1	3	2		2	10
East or Southern Africa								
(no data)			2	1	1			4
Leadership			2	5	11	5	6	29
Operational Support		2	4	2	4			12
Technical Specialist	1	2	6	2	5	1	2	19
Latin America or Caribbean								
Leadership			1	2	2	2	6	13
Operational Support			1		1			2
Technical Specialist						1	1	2
Middle East or Eastern Europe								
(no data)	1							1
Leadership			1	1	5	2	3	12
Operational Support			1	2	1	1	1	6
Technical Specialist			2	1	2	1		6
Other								
Operational Support			1			1		2
Western or Central Africa								
(no data)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Leadership			2	7	8	8	10	35
Operational Support		3	1	2	1	1	2	10
Technical Specialist		1	5	5	1	1	2	15
Grand Total	3	11	31	38	52	42	59	236

3.4: Survey Respondent Organisation Demographics

The majority of respondents represented organisations from the target demographic, self-reporting as CSOs (50 / 236), Local NGOs (80 / 236), and CBOs (24 / 236). Notably, no clear distinction was defined between these terms through the course of the research; this is trend discussed in more detail later in this section.

Regional organisations typically included local organisations operating in multiple cities within a region as well as regional hubs of CSOs, in correspondence with survey outreach strategies.



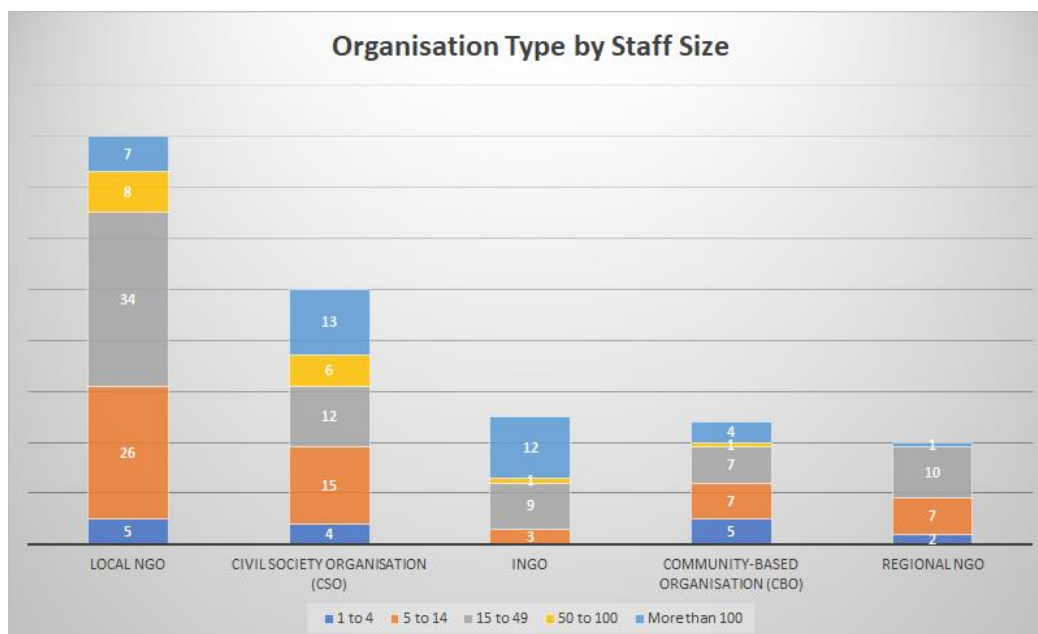
Region	Local NGO	Civil Society Organisation (CSO)	INGO	Community-Based Organisation (CBO)	Regional NGO	Network Organisation	Academic Institution	Social Enterprise	Business	Other	(no data)	Grand Total
Asia	26	14	4	5	4	2	1			4	1	61
East and Southern Africa	22	7	6	11	4	2	4	2	2	3	1	64
Latin America and Caribbean	4	5	1	4	2					1		17
Middle East and Eastern Europe	9	7	2	2	2		1			1	1	25
Other										2		2
Western and Central Africa	19	17	12	2	8	3	1	1		3	1	67
Grand Total	80	50	25	24	20	7	7	3	2	14	4	236

Organisations categorised by respondents as “Other” included for-profit companies, think tanks, government agencies, trusts, or other local non-profit organisations that the respondent did not choose to identify as a CSO, NGO, or CBO.

In order to achieve the most diverse sampling possible within the target demographic, no clear distinction was drawn between the terms CSO, Local NGO, and CBO through the course of the research. This approach also reflects the use of terminology by study participants. In almost all regions, more participants preferred to refer to their organisation as a Local NGO, rather than as a CSO or CBO. Interview data suggested that organisations often used these three terms interchangeably, but interviewees demonstrated a preference for using the term Local NGO when referring to their own organisation. Terms such as CSO or CBO were used more frequently to refer to the context in general.

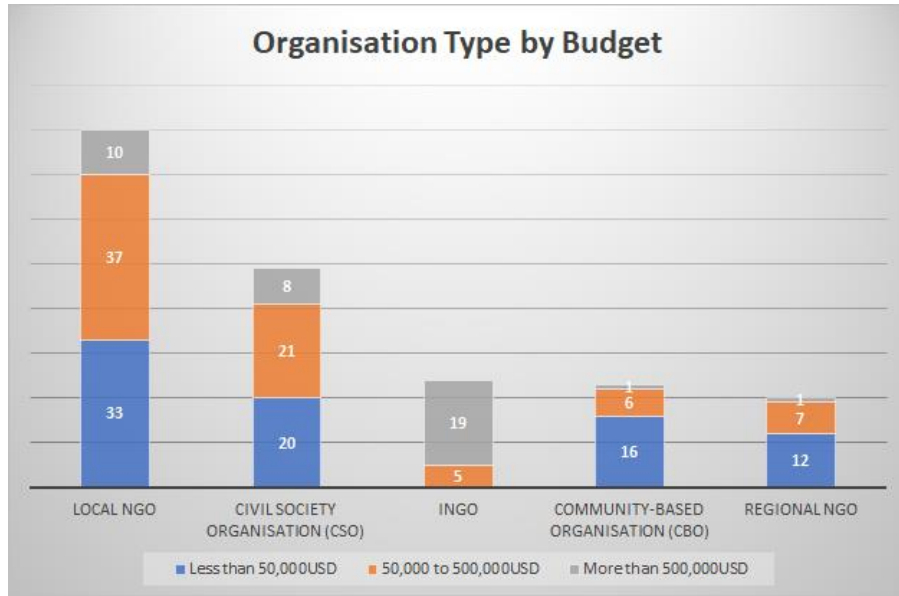
The majority of respondents’ organisations fell within the target demographic with regards to organisation size, in terms of both staff and budget. Respondents’ organisations tended to be smaller, with most having between 5 and 49 staff and/or volunteers.

Staff Size by Organisation Type						
Organisation Type	1 to 4	5 to 14	15 to 49	50 to 100	More than 100	Grand Total
Local NGO	5	26	34	8	7	80
Civil Society Organisation (CSO)	4	15	12	6	13	50
Ingo		3	9	1	12	25
Community-Based Organisation (CBO)	5	7	7	1	4	24
Regional NGO	2	7	10		1	20
Other	1	2		3	7	13
Academic Institution	3	1		1	2	7
Network	1	4		1	1	7
Social Enterprise	1	1	1			3
Business			1		1	2
Grand Total	22	66	74	21	48	231



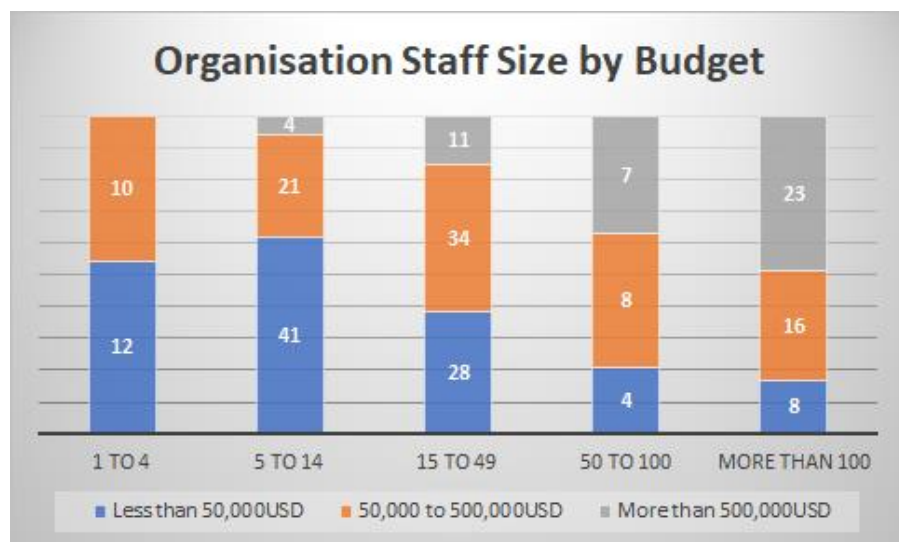
Organisation budgets followed a similar arc to their staff size, with roughly equal numbers of respondents indicating annual budgets of either less than 50,000 USD or 50,000 to 500,000 USD. Representatives of INGOs who responded to the survey tended to have the largest budget and larger staff. In most cases, organisations with smaller staff tended to have smaller budgets.

Organisation Type	Less than 50,000USD	50,000 to 500,000USD	More than 500,000USD	(no data)	Grand Total
Local NGO	33	37	10		80
Civil Society Organisation (CSO)	20	21	8	1	50
INGO		5	19	1	25
Community-Based Organisation (CBO)	16	6	1	1	24
Regional NGO	12	7	1		20
Academic Institution	3	2	2		7
Network Organisation	2	4	1		7
Social Enterprise	1	1	1		3
Business	2				2
Other	4	6	2	2	14
Grand Total	93	89	45	5	232



Organisation Staff Size by Budget

Organisation Budget	1 to 4	5 to 14	15 to 49	50 to 100	More than 100	Grand Total
Less than 50,000USD	12	41	28	4	8	93
50,000 to 500,000USD	10	21	34	8	16	89
More than 500,000USD		4	11	7	23	45
(no data)			1	2	1	4
Grand Total	22	66	74	21	48	231



3.5: Interview Participant Profiles

The 56 participants in key stakeholder and case study interviews included 28 women and 28 men. A minimum of 10 interview participants were sampled from each region, with the exception of the Middle East and Eastern Europe region, which included 9 participants. One interview participant was sourced from a global CSO network based in Europe. In order to protect the anonymity of responses, participants' countries of work, roles, genders, and areas of focus have been shared in aggregate.

Asia

Interview participants in the Asia region included 4F / 6M, working for CSOs, regional initiatives, and centres, based in India, Philippines, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Participants from this region were in leadership positions or coordination roles. Areas of focus included agriculture, gender-based violence, disaster preparedness, and community development.

East and Southern Africa

Interview participants in the East and Southern Africa Region included 7F / 4M, working for regional NGOs, CBOs, foundations, and disability organisations (DBOs), based in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, South Sudan, and Eswatini. Participants' roles included executive directors, programme coordinators, project/programme managers, gender officers, and project officers.

Latin America and Caribbean

Interview participants in the Latin America and Caribbean Region included 7F / 5M, working in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala. Roles included directors, volunteers, project managers, and coordinators. Organisations included regional NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, foundations, and faith-based organisations. Areas of focus included livelihoods and entrepreneurship, education, democracy and policy, nutrition, migration/migrants, gender and EDI, and youth.

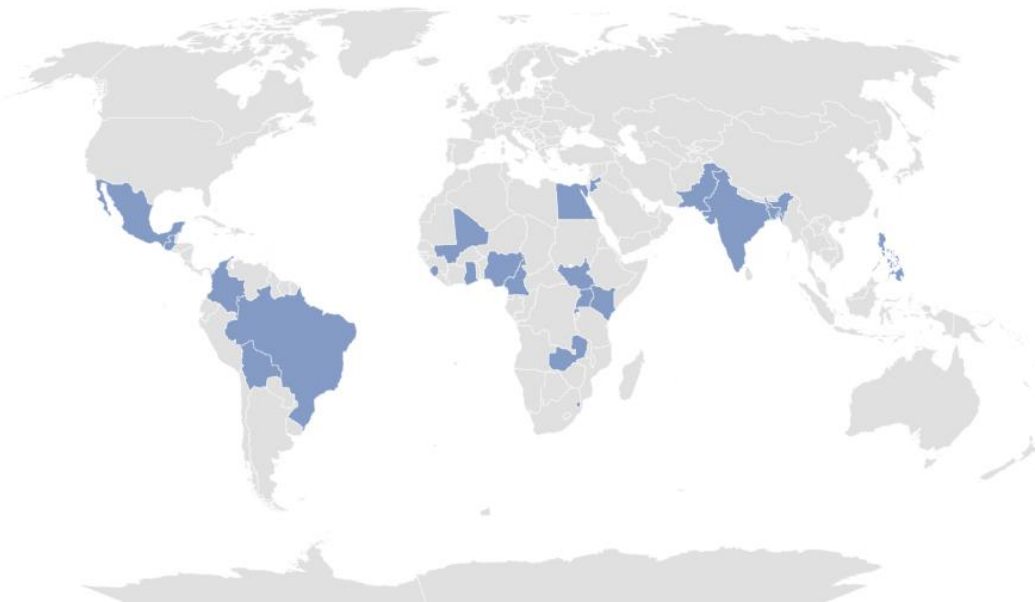
Middle East and Eastern Europe

Interview participants in the Middle East and Eastern Europe Region included 6F / 3M, working in Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan. Roles included coordinators, directors, project/programme managers, fundraisers and proposal writers, and human rights officers. Organisations included large national NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, networks, and independent consultants. Areas of focus included CSO capacity strengthening; coordination; community project implementation and community development; sustainable development; disaster response; digital communications; youth, gender, and people with disabilities; and human rights.

West and Central Africa

Interview participants in the West and Central Africa region included 3F / 10M, working for regional NGOs, CBOs, and foundations, based in Nigeria, Mali, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Cameroon, and Ghana. Many of the participants from this region had a technical focus on gender-related areas, including women's health, women's economic empowerment, women's peace and security, as well as areas related to capacity strengthening, youth, HIV/AIDS, community-led development, and participatory management of natural resources.

Interview Respondents



Section 4: Terminology, Definitions and Localisation

Interviewer: Are there any specific technical expertise capacity strengthening needs or training needs that you're facing in your organisation right now?

MEE_02-01_DD: Indeed, it depends on the role or the title or the position that you are holding inside the foundation. So let's say like project management or to manage the project itself and the budget, the timeline and implementing the indicators and the target during this timeline; the connection between the foundation and the donors themselves, the connection between you and the refugees or the CBOs who are implementing the project; technical writing, experiences and skills, the communication, the programme itself, data analysis.

4.1: Introduction to Definitions and Terminology

The data collection and analysis methodologies used in this research were designed to respect the significance of language and terminology in decolonising aid structures (Peace Direct et al., 2021; see also this report: Methodology, Section 2). In taking this approach, we sought to minimise interpretation bias and avoid epistemic injustice by engaging study participants not only as sources of experience to be translated into knowledge, but as knowledge holders themselves. As such, while time and attention were given to exploring and codifying HLA definitions of the terms *Technical Expertise* and *Leadership*, as laid out in the initial research questions, and participants were presented with these definitions, the research team nevertheless encouraged participants to apply their own definitions when forming their responses.

Despite being presented with HLA-approved definitions when completing surveys and during interviews, study participants frequently provided responses that did not conform to these provided definitions. In addition to listing *Leadership*-related skills under *Technical Expertise* capacity strengthening needs and (less frequently) *Technical*-related skills under *Leadership* capacity strengthening needs, participants also cited many skills that would be categorised by HLA definitions as *Operational Expertise*. This difference in terminology usage necessitated further examination of HLA definitions of terms beyond those laid out in the initial research questions.

Emerging from this re-exploration of terms, a central finding of the study was the highly variable use of terminology across all regions. There was a marked lack of consensus in

definitions and usage of *Leadership* and, across all regions, survey respondents and interviewees did not draw clear or consistent distinctions between *Technical Expertise* and *Operational Expertise*, as per HLA definitions of these terms. In fact, the research team found that when asked about *Technical Expertise*, both survey respondents and interviewees tended to discuss and describe skills related to *Operational Expertise*. A subsequent finding is that, when asked about *organisation focus* and *individual expertise*, study participants used terminology that would be categorised as *Technical Expertise*; however, when asked about *Technical Expertise* capacity strengthening needs, participants responded using terminology and describing skills that would be categorised as *Operational Expertise*, by HLA definitions.

Due to the observed widespread variation in HLA and participant usage of the study's core terminology, the centrality of language in localisation efforts (Peace Direct et al., 2021), and at the request of HLA for specific consideration of the findings about differences in terminology and for analysis of these findings in relation to HLA definitions, a detailed discussion of definitions and participants' usage of terms is provided to contextualise the terminology used in this report and to elucidate the findings of the study.

4.2: Review of HLA Definitions of Terms

Before the commencement of primary data collection, a preliminary list of definitions of key terms was produced based on consultations with HLA and during the literature review. The research team found some variation in how the terms *Technical Expertise* and *Leadership* were being employed by various team members was identified through these initial consultations. As such, in the early stages of the research, the definitions of these key terms were considered provisional, and it was determined that they would be further developed throughout each phase of iteration in the research process. In particular, the research team set out to refine functional definitions of the key terms based on information provided by survey and interview respondents. From the outset, the research team endeavoured to learn from respondents' definitions and understandings and sought to minimise assumptions about localised understandings of these terms. The research team therefore aimed to ensure that respondents were able to share their understandings of terms and concepts and that working definitions would be shaped by and for respondents.

Through the first phase of data collection, analysis, and reflection on these preliminary findings with HLA and other stakeholders, it became clear that significant differences existed between the HLA usage of key terms and their usage by research participants. The research team therefore developed provision written definitions representing the functional use of key terms. These definitions should not be seen as officially endorsed by HLA. Nor can these definitions be understood as a comprehensive reflection of all research participants' usage of the terms. However, for the purposes of data analysis, the following definitions were adopted:

- **Technical Expertise** was defined as: the specialised skills and capabilities necessary to run humanitarian response operations effectively.
 - During analysis, this term was refined, and it was understood to be used by HLA to refer to: the skills, methodologies, policies, and best practices that contribute to the completion of highly specific tasks or goals.
 - Examples of these specific tasks include those related to the United Nations Cluster Approach (cash and livelihoods, shelter, health, education, WASH, etc.).
 - Technical expertise also includes highly specific skill sets, such as those related to legal, protection, EDI, digital technology, etc.
- **Leadership** was defined as: the abilities and capacities necessary to make decisions and effectively direct teams in the context of humanitarian response; and the ability of local organisations to engage in decision-making and to inform the discourse and processes of humanitarian response.
 - It was understood to be used by HLA to refer to: the skills, methodologies, policies, and best practices that relate to either the successful and respectful management of teams, or the interpersonal “soft skills” required to successfully and respectfully manage relationships in a work setting.
 - Examples include of leadership skills include but are not limited to: relationship management, motivation, mentoring, goal-setting, strategic planning, etc.
- **Operational Expertise** was not given a preliminary definition, as it was identified as an additional key term during the course of analysis.
 - It has been understood to be used by HLA to refer to: cross-cutting skills, methodologies, policies, and best practices that contribute to the completion of many different tasks or goals.
 - Examples of these skills include: project management, resource management/mobilisation, strategy and planning, etc.

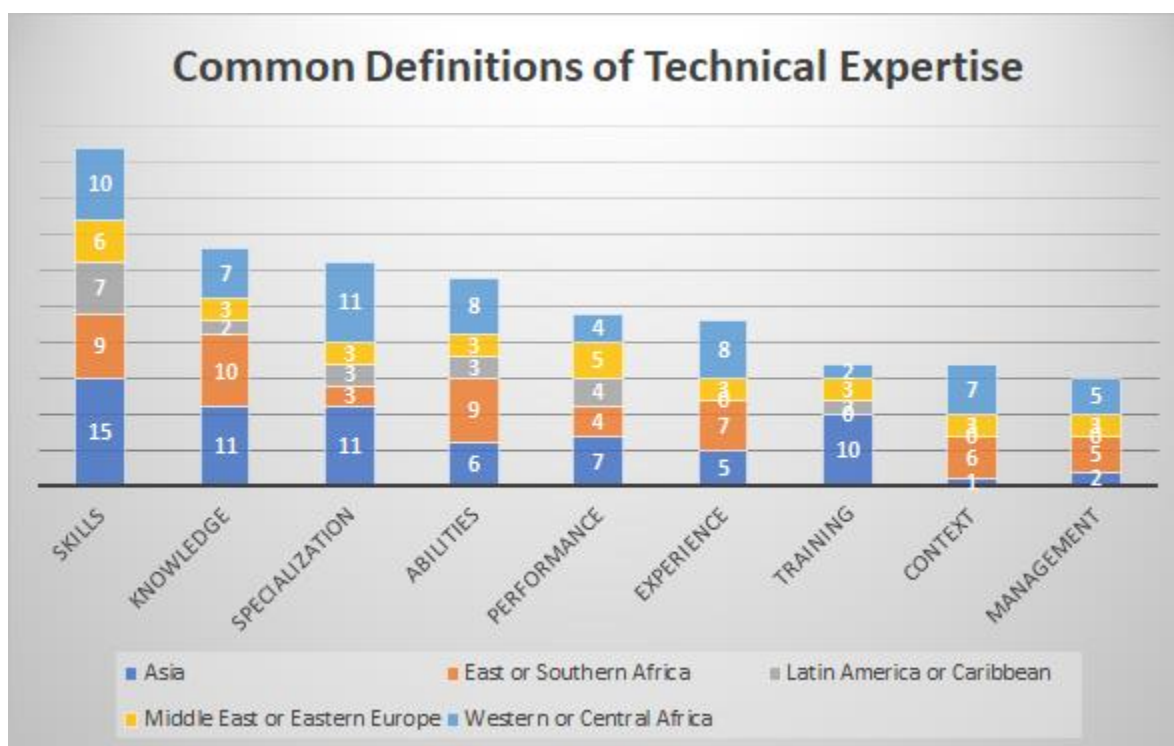
However, in many ways the definitions of key terms were most notable for the strong distinctions between the functional definitions employed by HLA teams and by research participants worldwide. In the following sections, we will consider how these terms were deployed by participants and how their usage relates to that of HLA.

4.3: Comparing Participant and HLA Usage of *Technical Expertise*

It is hard to talk about technical expertise or skills since it is hard to disconnect it from the theory, or you can have great emphasis in the theory and disconnect it with the operations. I call it a process of management. This starts with planning and goes until evaluation, monitoring, control, execution, etc. Someone's technical expertise is not measured by their level of knowledge, their age, nor their titles. (LAC_04_KI)

When survey respondents and interviewees were asked to share their definition or describe their understanding of the term *technical expertise*, their answers varied significantly, suggesting highly diverse understandings and usage of the term. In the quote opening this section, for example, the interviewee equates technical expertise with theory, operations, and processes related to project management (including monitoring and evaluation, control, and execution).

Overall, participants tended to use terminology and concepts to describe technical expertise that were variously related to: skills, knowledge, specialisation, abilities, performance, experience, training, context, and management. Some referred to technical expertise as “the skills in specific areas of knowledge” (LAC_01_KI), while others described it as “the knowledge one acquires, be it an ability or knowledge gained from studying” (LAC_02_KI). Similarly, when asked to share their thoughts on the term technical expertise, one interviewee stated, “We don’t always have the necessary capacity and skills”; the interviewee continued to describe technical expertise as the “required skills to do the job”, “the technical skills to implement these projects”, “management skills”, and “methodologies or approaches” (MEE_01-01_DD).



Technical Expertise Definitions - Most Commonly Cited Concepts													
Region	Skills	Knowledge	Specialization	Abilities	Performance	Experience	Training	Context	Management	Capacity		External	
										Building	Technology	Support	Reputation
Asia	15	11	11	6	7	5	10	1	2	1	3	2	0
East or Southern Africa	9	10	3	9	4	7	0	6	5	2	0	0	0
Latin America or Caribbean	7	2	3	3	4	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Middle East or Eastern Europe	6	3	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	0	1	2	1
Western or Central Africa	10	7	11	8	4	8	2	7	5	5	2	2	4
Other	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	48	35	31	30	24	23	18	17	15	8	7	6	5

In contrast, other interviewees emphasised specialisation in their understandings of technical expertise:

When we say technical, I think [of] sectoral expertise. Say for example, if someone is working on any specific sectors, for example, water management or maybe forestry development, then a person should have an orientation or expertise related to that sector. That is one way of looking at the sectoral expertise. Maybe agronomist or engineer, those who lead the water management, these kinds of technical expertise. (ASA_01-05_DD)

Some participants viewed technical experts as the core of an organisation: “[they’re] the brain of every organisation, the technical experts” (WCA_02_KI). Another participant similarly explained, “When we talk of technical expertise in the area of CSOs, I will connect this technical with organisational capacities, and I will look at it from the individuals running the organisations, their skills to appreciate the functions of the CSO” (ESA_01_KI).

Others felt that technical expertise could be defined so broadly that it was all encompassing, and as such meant nothing specific at all:

Nothing is technical. Okay, everything is technical, if you work in a process-oriented institution ... Listen, everything is for outcome. So there's nothing technical about it. I don't want to make institutions more technical in nature. I want institutions that have to be caring. It has to be focused. It has to be goal-oriented. (ASA_01-03_DD)

Some participants described technical expertise as a similarly broad concept but in a more holistic sense, encompassing all parts of a programme. For example, one participant from the East and Southern Africa region articulated technical expertise as follows: “Technical capacity, rather than systems, are like soft and hard skills required to run a programme. The soft ones ensure that things happen holistically through engaging people and stakeholders to play their role” (ESA_03_KI).

When asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, there was a clear global trend among participants to refer to topics categorised by HLA as *operational expertise*, such as project management, strategy and planning, resource management/mobilisation, etc. Correspondingly, survey respondents and interviewees both demonstrated an understanding and usage of *technical expertise* that included a majority of the skills that fall under the HLA rubric of *operational expertise*. Explicitly identifying different areas of operational expertise, one participant stated clearly, “Technical expertise means [doing] needs assessments, proposal writing, concept note writing, and reporting” (ASA_04_KI).

Reported Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs, Categorised by HLA Definition						
Region	Technical Skills	%	Operational Skills	%	Leadership Skills	%
Asia	31	51%	41	67%	16	26%
Africa	36	56%	38	59%	8	13%
Latin America and Caribbean	5	29%	11	65%	2	12%
Middle East and Eastern Europe	12	48%	17	68%	10	40%
West and Central Africa	34	51%	43	64%	10	15%
Other	1	50%	2	100%	0	0%
Grand Total	119	50%	152	64%	46	19%

When asked to identify the most urgent *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs within their organisation, 152 / 236 survey respondents (64%) highlighted at least one skill related to *operational expertise*. This interweaving of terminology was observed across all regions. As an open-ended question, respondents were able to indicate more than one capacity strengthening need, and many respondents indicated an equal need for both *technical* and *operational* skills. 119 respondents (50%) mentioned *technical* skills corresponding to the HLA definition of *technical expertise*, and 46 respondents (19%) referred to *leadership* skills such as team management or interpersonal skills.

The more expansive understanding of *technical expertise* - inclusive of both *technical* and *operational* skills - demonstrated in survey responses was also observed in discussion with interview participants. One interviewee in the Middle East described a person with technical expertise as “someone who’s involved in the technical things, leadership skills, implementation, this stuff” (MEE_02-02_DD). A second interviewee in the same organisation

described technical expertise as “expertise that can enhance the work and the quality, the quantities. Let's say, it's like third party things that the person himself can benefit from and conduct a better service” (MEE_02-01_DD). Similarly, an interview participant in Latin America defined technical expertise as “knowledge people have to execute their activities” (LAC_01-02_DD).

Some participants defined technical expertise as skills gained through specific formal training or certification, with a secondary appreciation for work experience or study. For example, one participant stated that “technical capacities have a lot to do with formal knowledge, studies, courses, more formal information, plus the work and life experiences” (LAC_02-02_DD). Similarly, a representative of a global network hub described technical expertise as “something that requires knowledge that can be acquired by qualifications or by practice or qualified by experience, so to speak, that then provides a set of skills to deliver something” (GBL_01_KI). While discussing formal training as a personal capacity strengthening need, another participant described technical expertise in terms of a balance of both formal training and experience:

But after years, I think that, okay, I need to start thinking about studying this instead of just depending on the acquired experience and accumulated over the years. So definitely, I need to start thinking of taking extra courses or maybe start a new degree or something. So both are really good ... to have a good balance, you need to have the proper study or field of study or experience. The actual experience. (MEE_01_KI)

In order to better understand how participants in different professional roles might conceptualise terms differently, the research team compared responses across different categorisations of roles. While both technical specialists and operational support staff were more likely than organisational leaders to employ the term *technical expertise* in accordance with the HLA definition, large numbers of both of these professional categories classified *operational expertise* skills as *technical*.

Reported Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs, Professional Role vs HLA Definition						
Professional Role	Technical Skills	%	Operational Skills	%	Leadership Skills	%
Leadership	60	46%	94	72%	27	21%
Operational Support	25	66%	25	66%	3	8%
Technical Specialist	25	48%	23	44%	12	23%
Grand Total	110	50%	142	65%	42	19%

For example, one participant in the Middle East made the distinction between *technical expertise* of planning and management, as separate from implementation: “the technical expertise that we need in [this country] and in the Arab world is about strategic planning and management. On the other hand, we are experienced in implementation” (MEE_04_KI). This is contrary to the understanding that planning and management skills are related to operational expertise or leadership.

In a similar example, when a professional engineer who had transitioned into cash and livelihoods programming was asked about technical expertise capacity needs, she replied:

We need to do more strategic planning ... we have it, but it's not standard. Everyone is just ... thinking outside the box, but not in templates, and in some skills that we should have. So I guess the first thing we should start with is strategic thinking skills. We need that. The first thing. As an industrial engineer, we used to work on too many skills to have or templates to work on. Actually, in the local NGOs, we don't use it, like Canvas, like strength and weaknesses. We used to call it SWOT analysis. Actually, these things we are not using as we should. (MEE_02-02_DD)

Another interview participant also pointed to SWOT analysis, a common project management tool falling under the definition of *operational expertise*, being used to assess technical expertise needs:

Technical expertise, when you look at the leadership in the coalition, we would do what we call a SWOT analysis, and it is like capacity mapping to find out the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation. When it comes to expertise there is a focus on certain areas such as gender. We train our organisation, and we teach them on gender disaggregation, so what we do is that we look for an expert and using the capacity mapping they can do the training. (WCA_05_KI)

Most participants in leadership roles tended to describe a strong connection between *leadership* skills and *technical* skills (including skills defined by HLA as both *operational expertise* and *technical expertise*). One interviewee, for example, explicitly identified a relationship between *technical expertise* and *leadership* skills: “the technical expertise and leadership capacities are strongly bound. Being a leader is not easy” (LAC_04_KI). When asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, another interview participant similarly focused on *leadership*, emphasising governance in particular:

The most urgent capacity strengthening skill required by CSOs is leadership. Governance in specific, because we have witnessed a lot of fights between

boards and secretariats, and this is usually due to failure to understand each party. You will find the secretariat doing the work of the board and the board doing the work of the secretariat. Also, sometimes when money increases in the institution you see a lot of fights emerging. The biggest training would be on governance because once governance is sorted then also programming is sorted. (ESA_02_KI)

When another interviewee was asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, she similarly stated, “Leadership is the number one priority” (MEE_01_KI). When prompted by the interviewer for clarification, she explained her understanding of *leadership* as a *technical* skill:

Interviewer: When you're talking about technical expertise, do you think leadership is kind of a part of technical expertise, or do you think it's something separate?

MEE_01_KI: Some people are really good at leading others, and some are not. But with the proper guidance and learning sources, they become better. They understand the meaning of leadership, and then they start applying the good method of leadership. So yes, definitely.

However, this same individual associated *technical expertise* with field staff as opposed to office staff:

In relation to humanitarian work and the technical aspects ... Usually the field staff are more concerned with the technical part. So this is what pops up in my mind when you say technical expertise ... Because when I work with NGOs, they always define technical as the field staff. So they are concerned with this part. (MEE_01_KI)

For a complete analysis of the *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs reported by survey respondents and interviewees, see Section 5.1.

4.4: Comparing Participant and HLA Usage of Leadership

Leadership capacity is more related to the question of how you put into practice that which you studied in theory, in that technical expertise. For me, it has more to do with attitude, values, beliefs that drive this organisation, but I think that the technical, political, and organisational are all related to this leadership capacity. They have to go together. They have to be connected. (LAC_02-01_DD)

Leadership is a journey ... We do not look at leadership as a position but as a function. It is about the impact you make in that position. (WCA_04_K1)

Both within and globally across all regions, study participants employed highly diverse definitions of *leadership* and used a broad range of terms and concepts to articulate their definition. None of the response categories identified during analysis included more than 34 / 236 survey respondents (14%), indicating very weak lines of agreement amongst respondents globally. This lack of strong trends in definitions of leadership was also observed within regions and across professional roles.

Leadership Definitions - Most Commonly Cited Concepts																			
Region	Task completion	Guiding	Team Management	Collaboration	Participation	Interpersonal Skills	Influence	Decision Making	Institutional Structure	Organizational Management	Goal Setting	Strategic Planning	Motivation	Strategic Direction	Support	Teambuilding	Capacity Building (Leadership Efficiency)	Communication	Problem Solving
Asia	9	3	6	5	7	11	1	8	3	4	6	4	5	3	2	2	1	1	1
East and Southern Africa	5	13	2	0	2	0	5	2	1	3	1	0	1	2	0	3	0	2	0
Latin America and Caribbean	4	6	6	5	6	2	2	3	1	0	4	3	1	1	4	2	0	0	2
Middle East and Eastern Europe	7	1	7	7	3	4	2	2	4	5	2	3	1	1	1	0	2	5	1
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West and Central Africa	8	10	3	7	6	5	8	2	5	2	0	0	1	2	2	2	5	0	4
Grand Total	33	34	24	24	24	22	18	17	14	14	13	10	9	9	9	9	8	8	8

The most commonly cited terms in survey responses describing *leadership* included:

- the ability to guide individuals or teams (34 / 236, or 14%),
- the ability to complete tasks (33 / 236, or 14%),
- team management-related (24 / 236, or 10%),
- collaboration (24 / 236, or 10%),
- encouragement of participation (24 / 236, or 10%), and
- interpersonal skills (22 / 236, or 9%).

One interview participant described the diversity of *leadership* as a concept as follows:

That's a very broad concept to discuss. [laughter] Leadership is like having the power to affect your peers or the surrounding colleagues, but it's mistakenly known as the manager and his or her staff. So if you want to define leadership, I think it's the soft skills that define this leader. (MEE_01_KI)

Professional Role	Task completion	Guiding	Team Management	Collaboration	Participation	Interpersonal Skills	Influence	Decision Making	Institutional Structure	Organizational Management	Goal Setting	Strategic Planning	Motivation	Strategic Direction	Support	Teambuilding	Capacity Building (Leadership)	Efficiency	Communication	Problem Solving
(no data)	1	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
Leadership	20	20	14	16	16	14	12	10	9	11	8	5	7	7	7	3	3	4	5	5
Operational Support	6	5	3	3	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0
Technical Specialist	6	7	4	3	6	2	3	1	2	4	2	2	0	1	0	1	3	3	1	0
Grand Total	33	34	24	24	24	22	18	17	14	13	10	9	9	9	9	8	8	8	8	5

Another interviewee drew a similar distinction between leadership and management while also highlighting the diversity of leadership skills:

It's not easy to have the leadership skills to be in leadership, and not all the managers are leadership. They have leadership skills. They are not leaders. So you have to be active, you have to be creative, too many things just to be a leader. So it's not that easy to have the leadership skills. (MEE_02-02_DD)

When asked to identify priority capacity strengthening areas related to *leadership*, 122 / 236 survey respondents (52%) described at least one skill falling under the HLA definition of *leadership*. This indicates a stronger correlation of respondents' usage of *leadership* and the HLA definition of *leadership*, compared to the lesser degree of correlation in understandings of technical expertise. However, respondents were almost as likely to describe *operational* skills when discussing *leadership* (97 / 236, or 41%).

Region	Technical Skills	%	Operational Skills	%	Leadership Skills	%
Asia	11	18%	27	44%	37	61%
East and Southern Africa	4	6%	34	53%	27	42%
Latin America and Caribbean	1	6%	4	24%	11	65%
Middle East and Eastern Europe	2	8%	11	44%	18	72%
West and Central Africa	7	10%	21	31%	28	42%
Other	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%
Grand Total	26	11%	97	41%	122	52%

Interview participants also often described *leadership* as including *operational* and *technical* skills, as summarised by two interviewees:

Leadership, I think it's related a little bit to the technical but taking things to a strategic level ... the ability to bring people together, to inspire people, to mobilise people, connect people, to have collaborative leadership qualities. So going from the detail perspective, as could be the technical, to going more to a wider picture and inspiring others. (GBL_01_KI)

I think even with leadership skills, you need technical expertise. I'll give you a smaller example. For example, if communication is a skill, a good auditor or good communicator who can motivate our team members are those who can explain things in a better way. [So] it is a skill, but it is a specific technical aspect which would be required for better leadership. So I think there is nothing like a set of technical expertise and a set of leadership skills. I consider all the skills which can fall into the technical compartment as far as [leadership] expertise is concerned. (ASA_01-05_DD)

While some study participants described leadership very closely to HLA definitions, others presented quite different understandings of the concept. Some interviewees articulated a more general or even theoretical understanding; for example, one participant described leadership in terms of authentic collective representation: "Being a leader isn't representing yourself, but representing a collective" (LAC_02_KI).

Others described leadership in terms of motivation and/or influence. One participant, for example, articulated leadership as "the impact [of one person] on the person and their team. So the motivation, I guess, is making the right choices for the foundation and the donor" (MEE_02-01_DD). Similarly, another participant explained leadership as "the disposition to positively influence others" (LAC_01_KI).

In the same vein, some participants understood leadership in terms of being a role model. Highlighting the relationship between leadership and setting a positive example for others, one interviewee described the qualities of "good" leadership as follows:

Who is a good leader? This is one who must appreciate the mission and the goal of the organisation and influence other members to align with the goals and targets of the organisation. However, you can be a leader or a president of a very large organisation or even of a country, but this does not automatically make you a good leader. A good leader must lead by example. You cannot talk about accountability, serving the people, keeping the reputation of the organisation, yet you are doing the opposite. (ESA_01_KI)

Some participants described leadership in terms of social change, in particular among youth. For example, one interviewee explained, “When I hear ‘leadership,’ I always think of youth and how they can be leaders and agents to social change here in [my country]” (MEE_02_KI).

However, others expressed scepticism of this idea, equating the concept of youth in leadership with “influencers” in social media:

Even leadership is now global. We start to have a shared leadership, which can be very important but at the same time very dangerous, because the concept of being and becoming a leader is lost. There is a theory that says that leaders are TikTokers. No, a leader is not a TikToker, and a TikToker is not a leader. So I think we have to strengthen the concept of leadership and return to the origins of leadership. I’m not saying that the leader is one person and everyone who’s under does as he or she says. But we need to find the purpose of becoming a leader. (LAC_01-01_DD)

Some interviewees demonstrated the diversity in definitions of leadership by describing it as a holistic practice, requiring understanding and competence in a wide range of skills and abilities across the organisation. These competencies bridge *leadership* skills as well as *technical* and *operational* areas of expertise. As one participant described:

How the same organisation is presented in the place where it works and its community as a leader organisation ... to involve more people and create a movement for common good. Those leadership abilities are wide, and the technical capacities have to be very well formed to be able to achieve the leadership ones. More than leading the team, it’s also about leading the community, listening to the community. For them to listen to you, you have to build trust, start to open doors. They are all those capacities that enable you to enter, to have that conversation, to be able to execute those actions and projects in an efficient, effective, equitable, coherent way for the communities with which you are working. (LAC_01-01_DD)

Another interviewee described leadership similarly, emphasising the holistic knowledge, skills, and understanding required:

I also think that in the social sector it’s very hard to commit only to the financial part of the institution, although that is formally your function, because if you don’t mix it with other things, if you don’t learn about that tree of problems and projects until you see the impact that it’s going to generate when executed, you have no notion of what you’re doing. For someone to

coordinate a third sector institution, I believe you need to learn about all the areas, from fundraising to financial and project management. You have to learn it all. (LAC_02-01_DD)

Perhaps the broadest articulation of leadership was presented by a participant in the West and Central Africa region, who described leadership as a function, rather than as a position, and provided a detailed explanation of how this leadership function was driven by character, context, and culture:

We do not look at leadership as a position but as a function. It is about the impact you make in that position. There are those nascent leaders that have talent but no experience. There are also the emerging leaders who are mid-way in the leadership journey, and then there are the seasoned leaders who [we] will work with to transition. We look at three main things: the character, the context, and the culture. and then we look at competencies. On character, we look at their values, and one of the things we emphasise on is that we need to live the values of the organisation and the sector; a lot of the values are espoused but not lived. We have deep and reflective conversations on this. On the competencies, we look at what skills and attitudes are needed to be an effective civic leader in these times, the knowledge needed to lead an organisation in this very disruptive season. On context and culture, we realised that many leaders have no skills to operate in the context and the culture that they are part of. For instance, there is a context in the sector, at the local government, but there is also a subculture in the organisation that must be understood. So we put all these things together so that we can tackle leadership in a holistic and comprehensive manner. (WCA_04_KI)

For a complete analysis of the *leadership* capacity strengthening needs reported by survey respondents and interviewees, see Section 5.2.

4.5: Comparing Participant and HLA Usage of *Capacity Strengthening*

Capacity strengthening, it's to take the skills that an individual already has from their background, from their own qualities, etc., and by different initiatives that could be training, mentoring, etc., to improve those skills. So moving away from the building to the strengthening because we're not starting at zero. (GBL_01_KI)

IFCB (1999b) has defined capacity building as "development of both individuals and the organisation". The definition points to the need for capacity developers to focus, not only on the individuals, but also on the organisation. (Bandyopadhyay & Arvind, 2021, p. 8)

While ascertaining participants' definitions and usage of the term *capacity strengthening* was not a primary focus of the study, it was noted during analysis that the term *capacity building* was more frequently employed than *capacity strengthening* by both survey respondents and interview participants.

For example, one participant stated, "a lot of trainers or INGOs come to make capacity building for local NGOs. But unfortunately, the local NGOs make the capacity building for INGOs" (MEE_04_KI). Another interviewee similarly used the term *capacity building* when asked about future technical expertise *capacity strengthening* needs: "In the next five years, the various technical expertise we will need for that time is capacity building. I feel like if we develop capacity building and integrate them, the gap will be filled" (ESA_05_KI). Even when prompted by interviewers explicitly with the term *capacity strengthening*, participants quickly reverted back to the terminology of *building* rather than *strengthening*: "whenever I hear capacity strengthening it is what new skills we can build the capacities of our team members" (MEE_02_KI).

The term *strengthening* was more commonly used by staff in larger organisations, especially those who had more years of experience or who worked for organisations that specialise in capacity strengthening. In particular, participants working in regional hub organisations, participants who were more connected to international networks, and participants who engaged in capacity strengthening/building as part of their work were more likely to use the term *strengthening*. For example, one participant explained, "To me capacity strengthening means improving an individual or an organisation to be able to have great results or function promptly towards achieving their goals and objectives" (ESA_07_KI).

In both survey responses and interviews, it was also observed that participants frequently used the term *training* synonymously with *capacity strengthening* and *capacity building*. When

asked about preferred modalities of *capacity strengthening*, for example, participants would often immediately describe different formal *training* environments (e.g., face-to-face, online) rather than discussing other modalities such as mentoring, coaching, or communities of practice. For example, when asked about improving the effectiveness of *capacity strengthening* methods, one participant replied, “As a good practice based on the [context in my country is] to bring people to a particular space. Then for follow up this can be done online” (WCA_02-01_DD). This quote illustrates how *capacity strengthening* is taken to refer primarily to the traditional modality of *training*. Another participant described how they situate training centrally in capacity strengthening/building initiatives among other modalities:

Capacity building or capacity enhancement is a long-term process, and it is not an event in terms of the structure training, you can achieve their important part in capacity building. Structured training is an important part. But there has to be a clear long-term plan of these structured interventions as well as handling support and follow up. (ASA_01-01_DD)

Other participants, with more experience in delivering capacity strengthening initiatives, were even more inclusive of diverse modalities in their definitions:

[Capacity strengthening] needs to match the organisation's priorities but also a preferred way of learning. So that it's what a community or group wants because it's how you create ownership. So that it's informed by them ... ideally, again, in a local language but also that it's representative of that community. So that could be many, many things. But ideally, what we were saying, addressing the needs of underserved and underrepresented communities. (GBL_01_KI)

Participants' prior experiences with, perceptions of, and preferences for different capacity strengthening modalities and delivery methods are further discussed in Section 6.



Section 5: Reported Capacity Strengthening Needs

In both surveys and interviews, participants were invited to describe *technical expertise* and *leadership* skills most in need of capacity strengthening. As discussed in Section 1.2 and Section 2, participants were invited to provide open-ended responses based on their own definitions and understandings of *technical expertise* and *leadership*. As a result, responses to both lines of questioning involved both *technical expertise* and *leadership*-related skills, as well as skills related to *operational expertise*.

5.1: Technical Expertise-Related Capacity Strengthening Needs

We feel that we lack the skills in fundraising because we no longer just compete with national NGOs. In today's world, we compete with international organisations. The problem is not only the language, but also how to think and submit proposals. Usually, we try to work in the fields that we are experienced in and when we need more skills we outsource them. (MEE_01-01_DD)

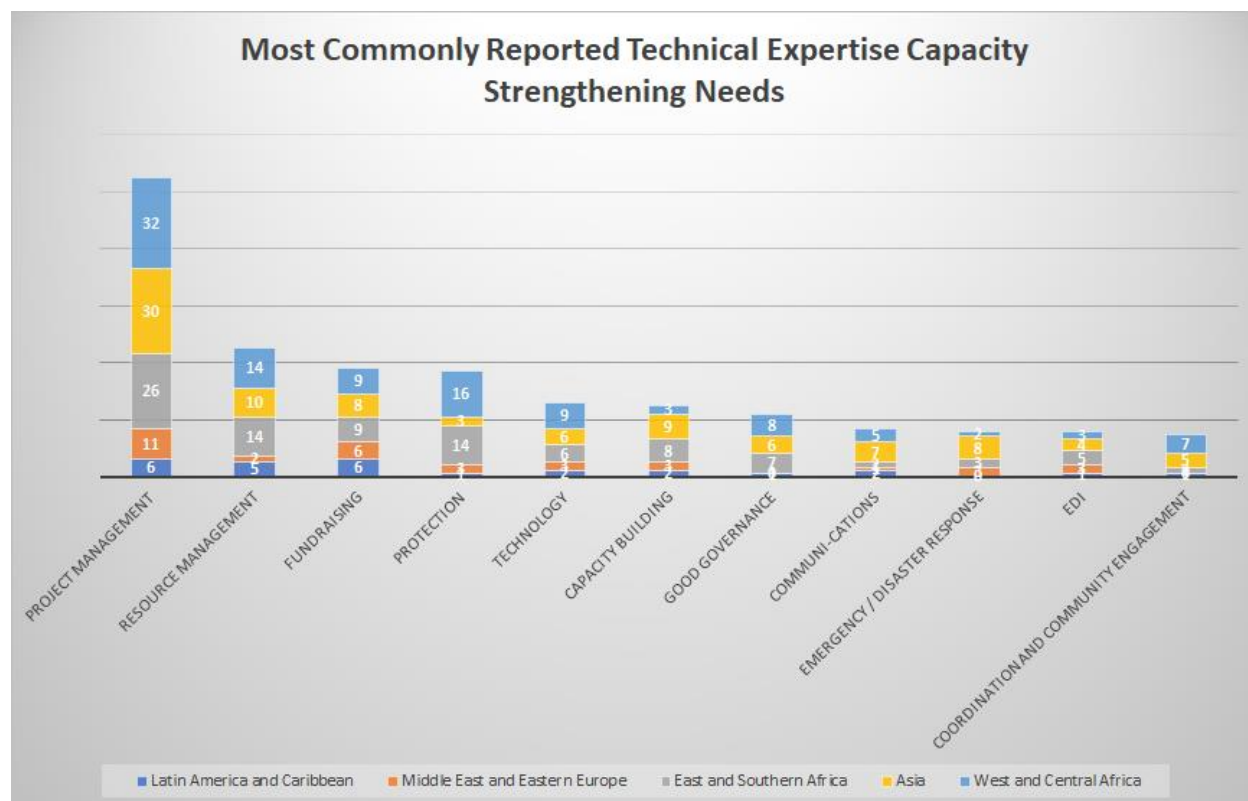
Professional Role	Technical Skills	%	Operational Skills	%	Leadership Skills	%
Leadership	60	46%	94	72%	27	21%
Operational Support	25	66%	25	66%	3	8%
Technical Specialist	25	48%	23	44%	12	23%
Grand Total	110	50%	142	65%	42	19%

When asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, survey respondents often identified skills that did not conform to the HLA definitions of *technical expertise*. The capacity strengthening needs that were most commonly identified and described by survey respondents and interview participants were skills related to *operational expertise*, as per HLA definitions.

A detailed examination of both the *operational expertise* and *technical expertise* skills cited by participants when asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs follows in this section.

Project Management, Resource Management, and Resource Mobilisation

Across all five regions, participants indicated a prioritisation of capacity strengthening needs in *project management*, *resource management*, and *resource mobilisation* in their organisations.



When asked to identify the most important *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs in their organisation, survey respondents indicated the *operational expertise* areas of project management, resource management, and resource mobilisation:

- 105 / 236 (45%) of survey respondents either explicitly indicated “project management” or listed related skills;
- 45 / 236 (19%) either explicitly indicated “resource management” or listed related skills; and
- 38 / 236 (16%) either explicitly indicated “resource mobilisation” or “fundraising” or listed related skills.

Most Commonly Reported Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs											
Region	Project Management	Resource Management	Fundraising	Protection	Technology	Capacity Building	Good Governance	Communications	Emergency / Disaster Response	EDI	Coordination And Community Engagement
Asia	30	10	8	3	6	9	6	7	8	4	5
East and Southern Africa	26	14	9	14	6	8	7	2	3	5	2
Latin America and Caribbean	6	5	6	1	2	2	1	2	0	1	1
Middle East and West and Central Africa	11	2	6	3	3	3	0	1	3	3	0
Africa	32	14	9	16	9	3	8	5	2	3	7
Grand Total	105	45	38	37	26	25	22	17	16	16	15
	Operational	Operational	Operational	Technical	Technical	Operational	Technical	Operational	Technical	Technical	Operational

This prioritisation of capacity strengthening needs in project management, resource management, and fundraising / resource mobilisation was identified as a clear global trend in survey responses. Interview participants across all regions similarly indicated capacity strengthening needs in project management and resource management, as well as the related areas of resource mobilisation and fundraising. As one interview participant explained,

If I had funding, I would use it to train the field staff in topics related to project management ... in a way that they can have, not only the operations part, but also a more active role with the team in [our city], on issues such as planning, coordination, management. (LAC_01-03_DD)

Another participant similarly expressed the importance of skills related to project management, such as project design, proposal writing, and MEAL:

If you don't have the project management capacity, that you are able to teach how to write a project ... you know, like the problems and how to develop the concept, how to get the objective, you know how to work on the M&E, the measurements, how to evaluate whatever you are planning, these are all things that are lacking. And it's creating a lot of disadvantages in our region and our community, [because if we had those skills we would see] a lot more programmes, [and] people can yield the benefit. (WCA_02_KI)

Notably, participants drew explicit connections between project management and gaining access to fundraising opportunities. One example can be found at the opening of this section, as the interviewee highlighted the connection between fundraising and proposal writing skills (MEE_01-01_DD). Another respondent similarly emphasised that their priority skills for strengthening were those related to “managing the project or anything related to the project and its implementation, because if you succeed doing this, you will gain more donations to implement more projects and get bigger and provide services for a lot more people” (MEE_02-01_DD).

Participants expressed an interest in improving their capacity to manage and mobilise international funds in particular. This is illustrated by the following participant, who shared that:

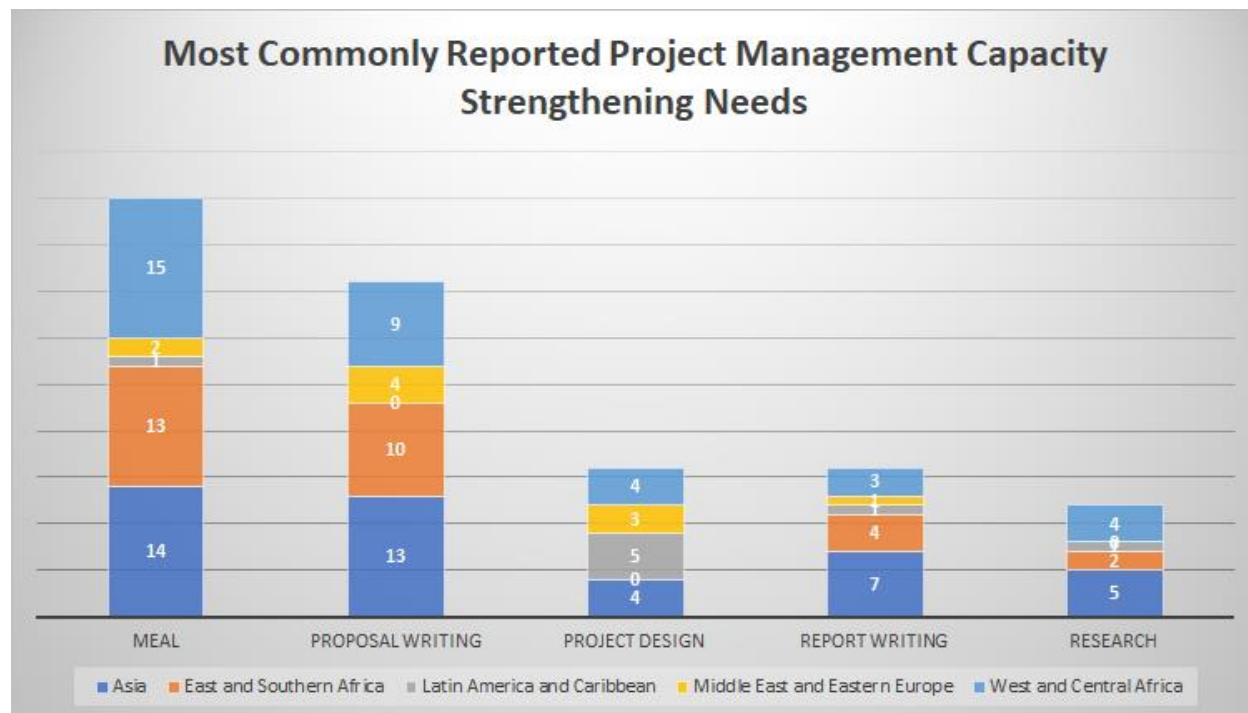
Capacity building for us is a continuous process, and we need to continuously build our capacity in resource mobilisation, in fundraising activities, [and] project management, since our organisation is donor-driven and each financial institution has its own systems and management process. So we need to constantly build our capacities to meet the requirements from the financial institution or the target community. (WCA_01_DD)

Participants' interest in engaging with international funding regimes was often linked to the ability to better deploy the terminology and language of the international humanitarian regime; elsewhere in the study, language is notably linked to localisation issues. See Section 9.1 for an in-depth discussion of localisation as it relates to this research.

Participants' responses related to project management were analysed at two levels. When considered responses based on the specific project management skills mentioned, commonly identified capacity strengthening needs included MEAL (45 / 105, or 43%) and proposal writing (36 / 105, or 34%). Many survey respondents also indicated capacity strengthening needs related to project design (16 / 105, or 15%) and report writing / reporting (16 / 105, or 15%).

Most Commonly Reported Project Management Capacity Strengthening Needs (Technical Expertise)

Region	MEAL	Proposal Writing	Project Design	Report Writing	Research	Humanitarian Standards	Theory Of Change	Needs Assessments
Asia	14	13	4	7	5	1	0	1
East and Southern Africa	13	10	0	4	2	2	0	0
Latin America and Caribbean	1	0	5	1	1	0	0	0
Middle East and Eastern Europe	2	4	3	1	0	1	0	0
West and Central Africa	15	9	4	3	4	1	2	0
Grand Total	45	36	16	16	12	5	2	1



Similar priority areas for capacity strengthening were identified by interview participants. Many interviewees, for example, highlighted needs related to MEAL, specifically improving capacities in monitoring and assessment:

There is a gap at the moment of identifying the beneficiaries who will best use the funds we raise. Because sometimes the aid is limited to a certain group of people from a parish or a specific place, but if we had tools for how to locate the populations with the greatest needs, that would be great. (LAC_05_KI)

Another interviewee in the Middle East similarly explained, “We have a problem identifying the needs of the beneficiaries. It is assumed that the needs are always financial. There is no capacity to do an effective assessment, even though it should be easy because the workers are already in the field” (MEE_01-02_DD). Better understanding of humanitarian standards and the ability to link them to project management were explicitly linked to the achieving of financial sustainability for local organisations:

For us, it is needed to be more organised in order to do systematic work. Financial security: we need to plan ahead in order to be more sustainable and not depend on the funding to continue our work. When we implement our work, we need to create an M&E system. CHS core humanitarian standards, I think every local NGO that focuses on the seven components of the CHS will move forward with its technical expertise. (MEE_04_KI)

Most Commonly Reported Resource Management Capacity Strengthening Needs					
Region	Finance	Human Resources	Data Management	Logistics	Procurement
Asia	8	4	2	1	1
East and Southern Africa	14	3	1	3	0
Latin America and Caribbean	2	0	1	0	0
Middle East and Eastern Europe	1	1	1	0	0
West and Central Africa	10	2	4	0	1
Grand Total	35	10	9	4	2

Participants' responses related to resource management were also analysed at two levels. When considered responses based on the specific resource management skills mentioned, the vast majority of survey respondents indicated financial skills (35 / 45, or 78%), such as accounting, financial management, financial systems, general finance, etc. This trend was global. Other commonly requested skills related to resource management included human resources (10 / 45, or 22%) and data management (9 / 45, or 20%), but these were significantly less commonly cited.

Interview participants also provided insight on a need for resource management capacity strengthening. As one leader of a small organisation explained, "All financial work at [my organisation] is done by me. I had to learn to create budgets because no one else knew how to do them. It is not easy to teach these skills to other employees, even those who studied accounting" (MEE_04_KI). He went on to explain that this was a regional trend: "A lot of local NGOs I see don't have any experience in financial reports, in how to build budget, how to make reallocation about budgets, how to make the whole experience about budget, how to deal with budgets" (MEE_04_KI). Another participant described the increasing importance of resource management and resource mobilisation over time:

I think the need for technical expertise has changed over the decades as well as depending on the sector in which the organisation is working. So, you need different kinds of expertise. So, and this is one area of expertise, another area of expertise is organisational effectiveness. The leadership systems, culture, structure, how they should reorganise themselves, funding resources, [and] financial management is another area. (ASA_01_DD)

Technology and Digital Skills

Despite only 9% of survey respondents indicating technology-related skills as a priority area for capacity strengthening, the need for digital skills, ICT infrastructure, subject of and challenges related to technology were frequently highlighted during interviews.

Technical skills related to using technology primarily referred to using computers and mobile devices; specific programmes, applications, and software; and/or skills in digital literacy and digital communications, such as internet competency, online communications platforms, networking, and social media. As discussed in Section 8.10, technological capacity strengthening needs are frequently tied to technology barriers, especially internet connectivity, ICT infrastructure, and digital literacy.

Interview respondents specifically identified technology-related capacity strengthening needs in digital communication skills, the use of accounting software and office software, and leveraging social media to showcase impact and create visibility. Additional capacity strengthening needs included: using computers and related technological equipment; using Android systems; coding and animation; as well as the need for access to ICT tools and current technologies.

These skills were often referred to in relation to the pivot to remote and digital working conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic; in this context, participants highlighted an urgent and increased need for foundational skills in computer literacy. One participant explained, “Communication skills are something we want to focus on if we had the funding. As well, technology in general because suddenly we pivoted to online, and we use Zoom all the time which is supposed to be easy, but many people struggle with it” (MEE_01-01_DD). Another interviewee described how the most technological capacity strengthening needs are in basic digital literacy, and the challenge this is posing for their team:

So, we could say almost all main technical expertise needs strengthening: communication, interpersonal relations, how to separate my personal needs and my professional context. We have organically been training the team on some of these. The projects team, which is a bit more qualified, gives the in-field team some tools. They teach them to use Excel, Word. But it is exhausting. These are qualified people, with master’s degrees, careers, who are teaching how to write an email. (LAC_01-01_DD)

Many interview participants described the challenges of strengthening digital literacy skills among their teams:

We have learned everything like... ‘bam’! For example, in [our country] we have almost 1,000 people enrolled in our courses. But I have had to learn

things on the run, to reinvent our work. Some of our team members don't know how to share a document online, or how to do maths sums in Excel. ... There are great needs. (LAC_01_KI)

Interview participants also frequently identified the potential risk presented by insufficient basic digital literacy skills among team members: "Technological abilities are also important. There are still people who don't have a deep understanding of computers, Excel, Word functioning. How do I write an email, how do I introduce myself, how do I make decisions in which I don't put myself at risk or put the organisation at risk?" (LAC_01-01_DD). Another participant explained how it is increasingly difficult to engage with international humanitarian regimes without at least a basic level of digital literacy:

The digitisation of everything is now actually the need and every institution is doing that. To me, I think smaller organisations do not have that capacity. If you observe, we receive a request for proposals, every now and then, but we have to fill up the proposal format online. And they are really very technical. To me, I think one of the very, very important requirements for the civil society organisation is to build their capacity, how to deal with such kinds of technical requirements of proposal development. (ASA_03_KI)

Increased digital exposure is also associated with increased risks, and risks related technology were cited as a challenge and difficult to assess. As one participant explained, "Digitalisation is very important. We need help with cybersecurity" (MEE_01-03_DD).

Participants described specific challenges associated with social media as well as its importance for both internal and public communications. As one interviewee explained, social media has become crucial for organisations to develop an online presence: "We do a lot of work here, but we have a problem regarding the media. We don't know how to show impact in a good way and that's affecting our work. Now we're thinking of hiring an in-house expert for media, and we're hoping to build capacity for our team in this area as well" (MEE_01-01_DD). Another interviewee identified similar capacity needs relating to social media, and its role in communication for multiple purposes with many different types of audiences: "Communication skills are really important. It's not just about posting a picture on Instagram. How do I communicate with my beneficiaries, with a possible ally, with a partner, with my team? We have to work on that" (LAC_01-01_DD).

It is worth noting that these aforementioned technology-related and digital skills are in many ways integral to identifying and participating in funding opportunities as well as producing grant proposals and donor reporting. Simultaneously, and paradoxically, funding is required to strengthen skills related to technology use and to acquire the necessary technological infrastructure (i.e., one cannot apply for funding without access to internet, computers, etc., to

compose and submit the funding proposal, and/but one cannot gain access to the internet or a computer without funding to pay for this equipment and infrastructure).

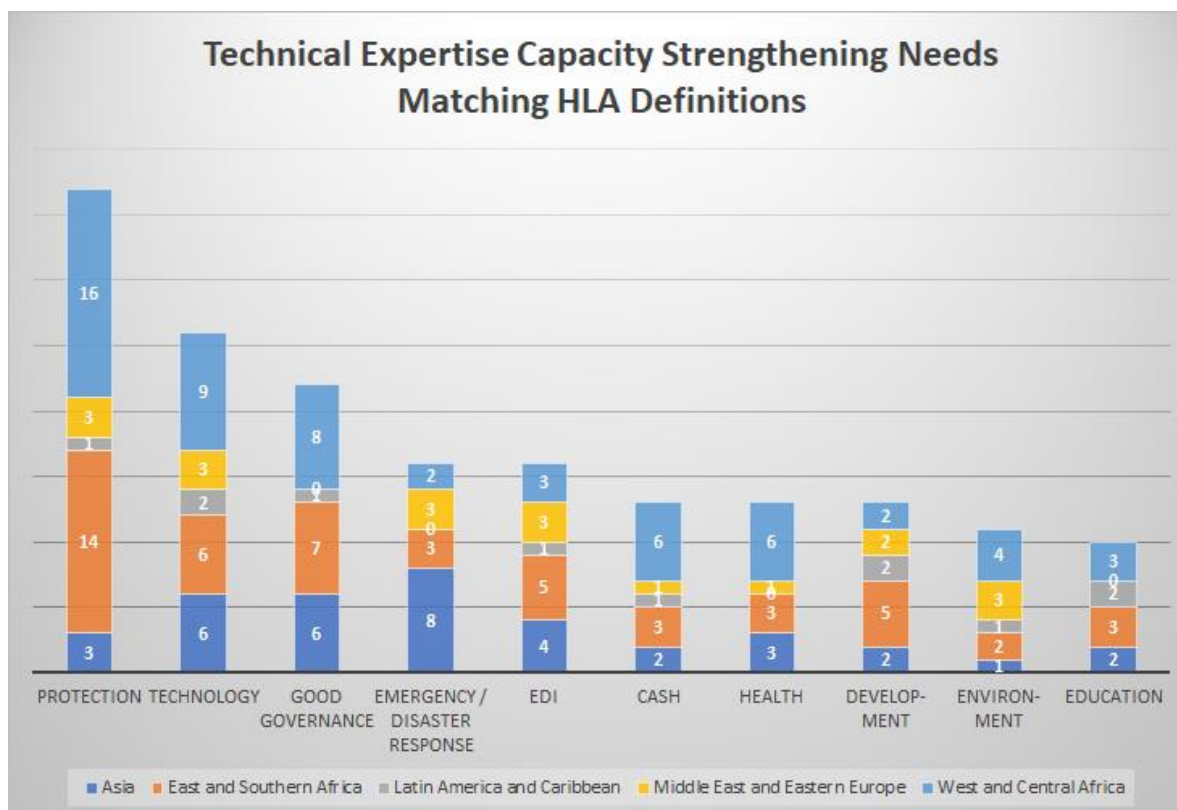
As participants have described, digital skills are increasingly universal throughout all facets of humanitarian operations, and those left behind are finding it increasingly difficult to catch up. As one participant explained, “We have an executive council and external virtual volunteers. For the directors, we need training in management and technology, and also how to manage and channel international and national funding. Each role needs specific training” (LAC_01_KI).

Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs Corresponding to HLA Definitions

Most Commonly Reported Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs Matching HLA Definitions																	
Row Labels	Protection	Technology	Emergency / Disaster			CASH	Health	Education	MHPSS	Nutrition	WASH	Shelter	Displacement	Peace-building	Environment	Development	Other
			Good Governance	Response	EDI												
Asia	3	6	6	8	4	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
East and Southern Africa	14	6	7	3	5	3	3	5	2	3	2	2	2	3	1	1	1
Latin America and Caribbean	1	2	1	0	1	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middle East and Eastern Europe	3	3	0	3	3	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
West and Central Africa	16	9	8	2	3	6	6	2	4	3	3	2	1	1	1	0	0
Grand Total	37	26	22	16	16	13	13	13	11	10	7	5	5	5	2	1	1

Relatively few skills that conformed to the HLA definition of *technical expertise* were cited as priority areas for capacity strengthening in survey responses and interviews. Capacity strengthening needs that fell under the *technical expertise* pillar included skills related to protection (37 / 236, or 16%), technology (26 / 236, or 11%), good governance (22 / 236, or 9%), EDI (16 / 236, or 7%), and general emergency / disaster response (16 / 236, or 7%). Few respondents indicated technical capacity strengthening needs related to the United Nations Cluster Approach (cash and livelihoods, shelter, health, education, WASH, etc.). Skills identified as capacity strengthening needs tended to relate more cross-cutting areas of *technical expertise*, as seen in the figures above.⁵

⁵ Local CSOs which may not identify as “humanitarian” are typically first responders in sudden-onset crises, and as part of their localisation agenda HLA strives to serve these actors alongside more traditional humanitarian actors. However, the HLA steering committee for this research has noted that when these organisations receive more funding to respond to humanitarian crises, their capacity strengthening needs may change to be more closely align with those of the traditional UN-led Cluster sectors as they will be doing more of the work currently dominated by the international organisations. It should be noted that the impact of international funding on localisation agendas is explored in detail elsewhere in this study.



Survey responses indicating protection skills, as the most commonly cited category of technical skills requiring strengthening, were subjected to a second level of analysis. Notably, when examining requested protection-related skills in detail, the most commonly identified areas of capacity strengthening needs were child protection and safeguarding. However, globally, numbers were quite small, and there was considerable regional variation, making it difficult to draw any conclusions from the limited number of responses.

Most Commonly Reported Protection Capacity Strengthening Needs

Row Labels	Child Protection	Safeguarding	Human Rights	Legal	Social Justice
Asia	1	1	1	0	0
East and Southern Africa	5	5	1	1	1
Latin America and Caribbean	0	0	0	0	0
Middle East and Eastern Europe	0	0	1	1	0
West and Central Africa	7	4	2	2	1
Grand Total	13	10	5	4	2

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Let me start by identifying key issues that come up when talking of equality, diversity, and inclusion. The greatest issue we have (globally) is race, however, in Africa, this may not be an issue. There are issues of ethnicity, religion, gender, and class. (ESA_01_KI)

While less commonly referenced in survey responses, interview participants frequently highlighted the importance and need for capacity strengthening on the topic of EDI. Many participants described a lack of understanding of approaches to achieving EDI among staff members in their organisation, including those in leadership positions:

There is little understanding of EDI, even among women who are at my level. They need capacity to train them on this; they need to know they are not there. We can talk about rape and someone says that the way we dress makes us get raped, and then they are blaming the victim. There is a need for a tool to demystify these terms, especially gender equality which is the most difficult term for people to internalise. When you mention gender equality, they say that we want 50-50. This is not it. Some of these organisations take celebrities and make them ambassadors for gender equality and all they say is nonsense and continue to give a wrong definition of gender equality. The misconceptions are many. (WCA_05_KI)

Other interview participants spoke of the challenges of implementing EDI strategies and achieving effective EDI within their organisation and communities. For example, one interviewee described a need for EDI capacity strengthening with regards to gender inclusivity:

When it comes to the male and female gender issue, then again, in my experience, male people always feel, in Bangladesh, more job insecurity [as a] female. And also, there is the mindset among the male, that they don't usually allow females on their team. They're not willing to accept females on the team. (ASA_02_KI)

Another interviewee articulated the need for implementation of concrete gender-transformative actions, rather than simply making empty gestures:

For me, and from our experience at the institute, the issue of diversity and inclusion of women, black people, and indigenous people happens in the daily practice; it doesn't work by only having a nice discussion and putting in our bylaws that we defend women, black people, etc., and in reality having the organisation's leaders all men and only one woman, just to say she's there,

and her ideas not being really respected nor heard. So I think the first great step is, aside from understanding the importance of including diversity, is choosing practice so that it really happens. It needs to happen; it shouldn't stay in the theoretical discussion. We need for example, in the issue of training, to bring other references different from the European men, etc. We need women who speak in the economic sector; we need black people who speak in the third sector - that is the first step, to look for new referents. The second issue is to challenge machismo, racism, homophobia everyday, and that can be achieved with leadership education bringing concrete and real examples of what is actually happening. (LAC_02-01_DD).

Another interview participant described an organisational culture of gender-based discrimination she experienced in her work:

So I was in discussion with the founder about a certain level of employees ... because that level of employees was only dedicated for men. And when I asked why, he told me because men don't have children, they don't have to take a lot of vacations and that kind of blah, blah, blah, blah. And he dedicated another activity of work to women. And when I asked them why, he said, "because they're patient, they can handle the work on this, and they are more dedicated to that kind of work", which does not make sense. It doesn't make any sense at all, because both are really capable of doing each other's work. But this is his stereotyping of these two different jobs. So definitely, there is a lot of everything and every way possible. (MEE_01_KI)

This same participant went on to describe the potential for positive reinforcement of EDI-related capacity strengthening if more women were given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability:

I find that exchanging experiences is the best way to change that kind of stereotyping. Especially if you give a very successful example, who would explain how they managed to achieve that kind of success. And then the case that is, applying that kind of stereotype would realise how much they need to change their mentality and their way of thinking, to start doing the example of success. So it means both, setting success examples and going step-by-step through training. (MEE_01_KI)

For discussion of gender and leadership in relation to capacity strengthening barriers, see Section 8.4.

Notably, many participants also pointed to the need for an expansion of conceptualisations of inclusivity beyond topics related to gender and/or youth. For example, disability inclusion and the inclusion of older populations is often overlooked in discussions about EDI and in EDI practices in the humanitarian sector. In particular, several interviewees indicated that EDI capacity strengthening is needed specifically on disability inclusion:

In terms of inclusivity and equity, we are still doing poorly, and I would blame this on lack of information. A simple example is on disability inclusion. We find ourselves conducting a meeting without minding about PWDs; you convene a meeting and take it to a hotel on the 3rd floor, and there is no lift or walkway that can accommodate a person living with disability, and this is insensitive ... Additionally, sometimes when we mobilise people, we forget about the disabled and engage only the able-bodied. When we look at gender, we find the sector is full of men, and it was not planned intentionally but we need to be more intentional and ensure women are involved. I blame this on lack of information. (ESA_02_KI)

Another interviewee described the resource-related challenges of taking actions to ensure disability inclusion:

Yes, yes, the barriers are there. Because of the very fact that people cannot ... when it comes to diversity, we try ... because a person with disability ... where they are functioning really needs to be understood and how they are integrated into the mainstream. You find that most of the tools used in the capacity training, we have to find someone who does sign language, the environment, and it becomes a challenge ... here in Zambia we do not have ... even when you want to print handouts, brochures, it is usually difficult ... just for you to print out a brochure it takes a lot of time because there is only one printer here, so we have those challenges. (ESA_05_KI)

One participant in the Middle East drew attention to the challenges of achieving inclusivity in planning projects targeting specific communities of interest, in particular older populations: "There is no respect for the streets or the elders. I'm not sure who is going to work on this issue because most projects focus on women's rights, gender equality, or entrepreneurship" (MEE_01-02_DD).

As a final note, we were reminded by a participant in the West and Central Africa region to think about whose ideas are heard, and who is empowered to lead the conversations related to diversity and inclusion:

I was in New Guinea, ... and I was fighting for diversity in the office. When the white propose something it is adopted, and when the black proposes something suddenly it does not make sense. They kept shutting us down. Some of the ethics in the UN are diversity, and I was walking the talk there. There is a lot that needs to be done with the black and white dichotomy. (WCA_05_KI)

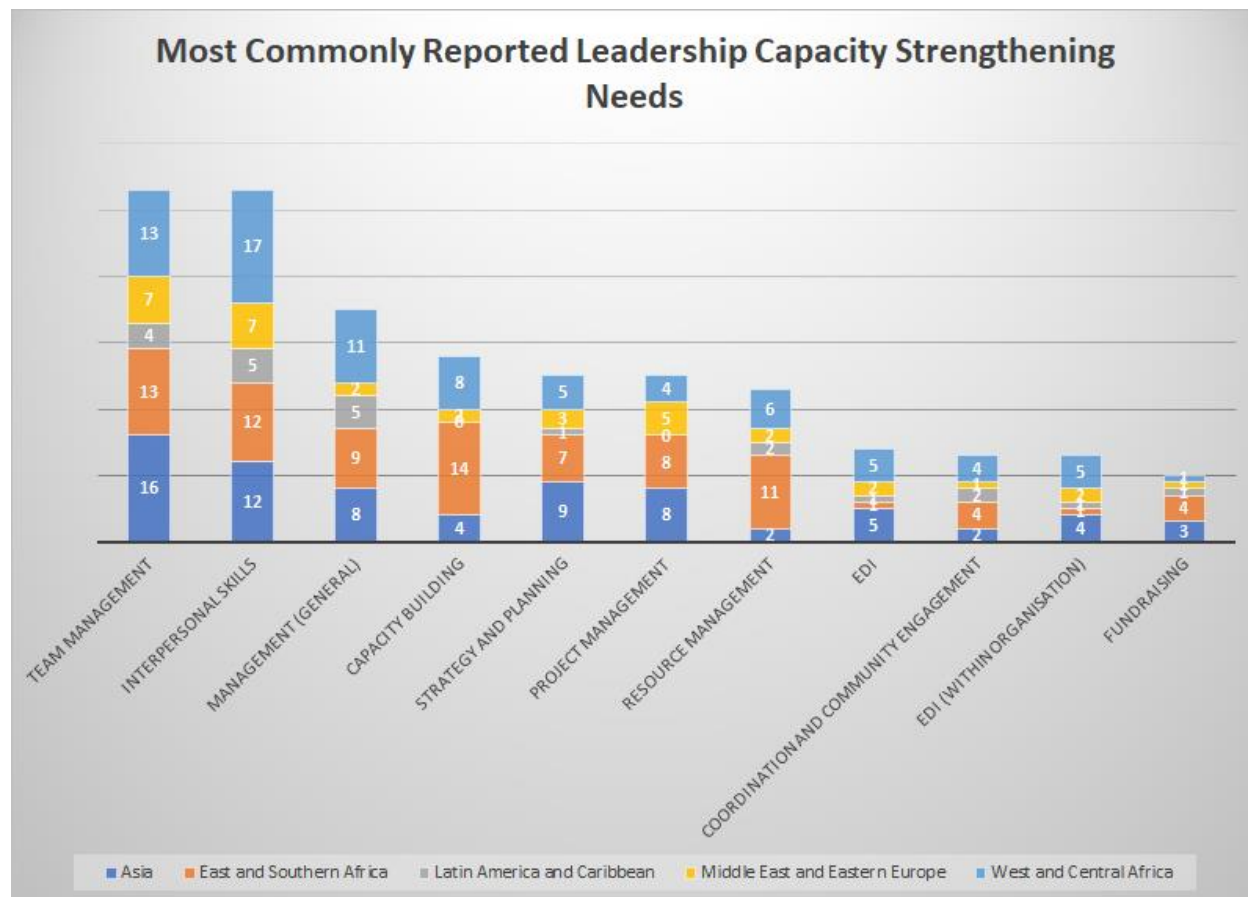
This anecdote illustrates the distance that still remains to be covered in terms of EDI skill-strengthening, and how technical capacity strengthening can help remove barriers to localisation.

5.2: Leadership-Related Capacity Strengthening Needs

Many leaders understand what leadership is about and the different leadership styles; many have gone through training, but the challenge is the application. And another challenge at the executive level is loneliness, because there are few programmes that bring executive directors together to share not only their success but their challenges, enabling them to learn from each other. (WCA_04_K1)

Globally, when asked about capacity strengthening needs related to *leadership*, participants indicated a diverse range of *leadership* skills related to *team management* and *interpersonal skills*. Specific skills indicated as needed were focused on leaders' abilities to effectively organise, respectfully engage with, and motivate their teams.

Most Commonly Reported Leadership Capacity Strengthening Needs											
Region	Team Management	Interpersonal Skills	Management (General)	Capacity Building	Strategy And Planning	Project Management	Resource Management	EDI	Coordination And Community Engagement	EDI (within organisation)	Fundraising
Asia	16	12	8	4	9	8	2	5	2	4	3
East and Southern Africa	13	12	9	14	7	8	11	1	4	1	4
Latin America and Caribbean	4	5	5	0	1	0	2	1	2	1	1
Middle East and Eastern Europe	7	7	2	2	3	5	2	2	1	2	1
West and Central Africa	13	17	11	8	5	4	6	5	4	5	1
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	54	53	35	28	25	25	23	14	13	13	10
	Leadership	Leadership	Leadership	Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational	Leadership	Operational



Participants tended to identify team management (54 / 236, or 23%) and interpersonal skills (53 / 236, or 22%) related to leadership, as well as general, non-specific references to management (25 / 236, or 15%). These trends were broadly global, with small regional variations (as seen in the figures above).

In addition to *leadership* skills, participants identified capacity strengthening needs in a range of *operational expertise* skills related to leadership roles, such as capacity strengthening, strategy and planning, project management, and resource management.

Most Commonly Reported Team Management Capacity Strengthening Needs							
Region	Interpersonal Communication	Teamwork	Teambuilding	Goal Setting	Self Care	Conflict Resolution	Staff Retention
Asia	5	2	3	3	2	1	1
East and Southern Africa	3	6	4	2	1	2	3
Latin America and Caribbean	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Middle East and Eastern Europe	4	2	1	1	1	0	0
West and Central Africa	4	3	1	3	2	2	0
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	17	14	10	10	6	6	4

The most commonly prioritised skills pertaining to team management were related to interpersonal communication (17 / 54, or 31%), teamwork (14 / 54, or 26%), teambuilding (10 / 54, or 19%), and goal-setting (10 / 54, or 19%). Taken together, participants tended to emphasise interpersonal and soft skills over more specialised managerial skills, such as strategic planning and strategic vision.

Most Commonly Reported Interpersonal Skills Capacity Strengthening Needs										
Region	Mentorship	Decision-Making	Motivation	Responsibility	Support	Awareness	Tolerance	Inspiration	Creativity	Organization
Asia	1	4	5	1	3	1	4	0	4	2
East and Southern Africa	2	1	0	3	0	3	2	2	0	0
Latin America and Caribbean	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	1
Middle East and Eastern Europe	0	3	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
West and Central Africa	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	7	2	1	4	4	2	2	2	0	1
Grand Total	11	10	9	9	9	8	8	6	4	4

Participants prioritised a diverse range of interpersonal skills such as mentorship, decision-making, motivation of colleagues, personal responsibility, supportiveness, awareness, tolerance, etc. Interpersonal skills were frequently cited by interview respondents as sorely lacking:

One of the areas [of leadership capacity needed] is Emotional Intelligence (EQ). [Finding] leaders who know how to manage talent is another big issue ... In civil society we have many experts who are technically savvy but poor leaders. Many experts sound amazing on platforms, but they are very poor at managing people and growing institutions. Emotional intelligence and people management, training, and coaching is a big gap. (WCA_04_K1)

While all the strengthening of all of these various interpersonal skills was mentioned by respondents in all regions, there was considerable regional variation in prioritisation (as seen

in the figures above). However, given the relatively small numbers of responses per category it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on regional variations in prioritisation.

Most Commonly Reported Capacity Strengthening-Related Capacity Strengthening Needs				
Region	Training	Mentorship	Coaching	Peer Learning
Asia	5	1	1	1
East and Southern Africa	12	2	1	1
Latin America and Caribbean	0	1	0	0
Middle East and Eastern Europe	2	0	0	2
West and Central Africa	3	7	5	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	22	11	7	4

Providing or delivering capacity strengthening to staff and team members was also highlighted as an important skill for leaders. Skill-strengthening in the area of general training was the most commonly mentioned modality, with mentorship and coaching also frequently cited as important skills to be developed in leaders. Interview participants cited the role that leadership can play in capacity strengthening:

I have had to learn things on the run, to reinvent our work ... So initially, the knowledge is in the director, me, and I can share it with them. But slowly we have been acquiring technology and doing the training. But I don't know it all. There are great needs. (LAC_01_KI)

While topics related to strategy and planning were less commonly cited by survey respondents as a key area of capacity strengthening, the need for better planning was mentioned frequently in interviews. As one participant explained, "Right now, we need to strengthen some capacities. For example, right now, one of the most important ones is planning. It's fundamental that the team, especially the team in the field, has the tools to be organised" (LAC_01-01_DD). Another interviewee described the tendency to prioritise implementation over planning in their region: "In local NGOs here, we don't usually plan. Our work is spontaneous. For example, we don't create a safeguarding policy, but we do everything that needs to be done. Capacity strengthening can help us with methodology and management" (MEE_04_KI). In contrast, another participant described the positive impact that increased capacity in planning has had on their organisation:

So we've been strengthening the team in an organic way, but also understanding our needs, both personal and professional. Right now, after

our planning for the next three years, we've identified that we need to strengthen certain capacities in our team to be able to reach those goals. So identifying the organisation's strengths and weaknesses, we can strengthen the team. (LAC_01-01_DD)

Strategic planning and critical thinking to support CSO leaders was identified as an important skill in need of development. Strengthening of this skillset would enable leaders to be proactive rather than reactive; for instance, leaders would better understand the skillsets which exist within an organisation, anticipate needed resources before shortages occur, develop more and stronger partnerships, or anticipate and addressing potential inefficiencies. Strengthening these skills would enable leaders to see how they can better deliver services to communities, identify staff needs, and troubleshoot problems when they arise.

Many leaders described the challenge of moving into a leadership position without formal capacity strengthening to support them:

You feel comfortable in your field (because you have trained for it), but once you enter the management level, it is a different ball game altogether. You have to forget about your psychology, economics, or what have you, and you have to manage people, and we are not all people managers. You learn by doing, there is a lot of self-introspection that is necessary as an NGO leader ... as you are confronted with situations that you have not been confronted in the past: death, fraud, good situations, celebrations, difficulties with people, sexual harassment. It is like a rollercoaster going up and down, and with these situations you are not really prepared for them. (ESA_05_KI)

Engaging with participants at various levels of local NGOs allowed for a deeper understanding of needs and capacities related to leadership. For example, some participants indicated dissatisfaction or frustration with leaders they have interacted with in the past. One participant explained: "It's easy to find a manager, but it's hard to find a leader who can unite people and inspire them. This is very important, and we lack leadership skills. Not everyone can be a leader because you need specific skills" (MEE_01-01_DD).

This need for leadership-related capacity strengthening was often expressed by lower-level staff in strong, occasionally emotional terms. Descriptions of leadership challenges were frequently value-laden, indicating strong feeling about existing gaps in leadership capacity. One participant described their past challenges in dealing with managers as follows:

Sometimes leaders, or we're gonna [sic] call them leaders, they're good at what they're doing. But they don't know how to communicate it with others. Like, they don't know how to express it. They just do, do, do, do, and they don't

express the action. I find that that's a gap that needs to be fulfilled in one way or another, and also to talk but the motivational talk, not just the orders and the plans and that's it. The motivation, you need to motivate your teams, because this is part of being a leader. You need to give them the urge to do it by themselves, not just to give them orders and they just obey it. (MEE_01_KI)

Notably, however, terms employed were often relatively non-specific. Participants frequently spoke simply of “management” or “leadership” while struggling to choose more specific terms to help define the precise need. As the same interviewee further explained: “Some people are really good at leading others, and some are not. But with the proper guidance and learning sources, they become better. They understand the meaning of leadership, and then they start applying the good method of leadership” (MEE_01_KI). In this example, the participant struggled to identify specific elements of being “really good” at leading teams.

Often, the needs highlighted in interviews were more focused on the interpersonal skills related to management, such as respectful personal conduct, motivation, kindness, etc.

One of the areas is Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Leaders who know how to manage talent is another big issue. Additionally, the area of self-care. In civil society we have many experts who are technically savvy but poor leaders. Many experts sound amazing on platforms, but they are very poor at managing people and growing institutions. Emotional intelligence and people management, training and coaching is a big gap. (WCA_04_KI)

Relationship building, both internally with staff and externally with other organisations, was identified as a key skill gap for leaders. As one participant described, “Some of the capacities that I think leaders will need to have are in terms of decision-making, good communication, and how to handle work relationships” (ESA_05_KI). Another interviewee similarly explained:

Most civil society leaders need to learn negotiation skills especially with regards to other sectors such as the government and private sector. Another thing is multicultural competencies; we need leaders that can understand and operate in a lot of cultures. The third thing is we need leaders that are able to build long-term partnerships; partnership building and strategic thinking are critical to ensure civil society becomes more robust looking forward. (WCA_04_KI)

Some participants urged more creativity and innovation in management styles. For example, one participant (herself in a leadership position) stated she would like to see more collective management and internal power-sharing:

In the area of leadership, the need today is to study collective management in the third sector. Since we live in a capitalist society, we end up saying that [the director] has the responsibility, but it's not only [the director]; it's also [another staff member], [a third member of staff], and the other members of the institutions. Then collective management is a very highlighted need with the issue of leadership. Apart from that, how we are building the organisation and solving our internal conflicts and the conflicts with other entities that are frequently power disputes, how are we learning that disputing power is important and necessary, but a power that is shared, working together with other organisations. (LAC_02-01_DD)

Another participant, also in a leadership role, highlighted the need to be more strategic in communications and organisational representation:

I would like to start lowering this leadership, from the director and founder, me and [another team member], and start to transmit it. I don't want it to be "[my name], the migrant who helps migrants". That is not [our organisation]. That is not it. For this new strategy, part of the organisational strengthening is that we all manage the same pitch, which will change depending on the stakeholder: if it's the beneficiaries we will speak to them in one way, but all of us the same way, with the same mouth, words. And for that we have to reinforce our strategy and know exactly what it is we do, how and with whom. So we are right now [making] that small start. (LAC_01-01_DD)

Some participants observed that succession planning was a potential risk to "first generation NGOs" (i.e., organisations still operating under the founding leadership group). These organisations were often poorly equipped to hand over responsibilities to a new generation of leaders. Intergenerational mentorship and succession cultures were identified as gaps that have limited the emergence of stronger leadership in local CSOs. As one participant explained:

In India, majorly they're first generation CSOs. They have been here for let's say, 25 years or 30 years. So [they are] still being led by the [original] founder or the executive director of that organisation. ... that person is a great leader, he's taking care of his employees implementing good projects and things like that, but then who will or take over or who will be after him? Or her? ... There has to be few people who have the same, or not even the same, but they should have the capacity to lead the organisation further in on that part, or maybe a better part. (ASA_02_DD)

In some contexts, this challenge was referred to as "Founder's Syndrome":

The major problem that civil society has is “Founder’s Syndrome”. What I can say from a leadership point of view, unless the leader is seeing the bigger picture then he will not let go. The starting point is analysing that and triggering that change as well as mentorship so that the journey can begin, and it becomes a whole cycle. For instance, if I go into the board of an organisation and then you compare with people who founded it, it is completely different because of how they think. The leader needs to analyse the journey, this analysis really helps to create a leadership that is required within the CSOs networks. (ESA_01-03_DD)

Capacity Strengthening for Potential Leaders

Related to “Founder’s Syndrome”, some participants described how existing leadership capacity strengthening opportunities are often targeted only toward staff currently in leadership positions, such as management and senior staff roles. Further to this, as one interviewee explained, access to leadership capacity strengthening is also limited by gender- and EDI-related barriers:

We found that only 22% of institutions are women headed. ... Today, most of the privileged people are the leaders ... I run a capacity building program [but] only for the [current] leaders. ... Women, transgender people, those leaders need to be strengthened ... not those who already have the privilege. (ASA_03_DD)

Several interview participants emphasised that they struggled to self-identify as potential leaders prior to engaging in leadership capacity strengthening opportunities, and that external support in being identified as potential leaders had powerful impacts on their careers. Notably, the emphasis on support for potential leaders was especially prominent among women and young women participants. As one interviewee explained, even very short sessions can have a significant impact:

Yeah, I had a training before, but it was really brief, like it was for three hours. And I found it very informative, because I've never thought of myself as a leader before. But people told me that I'm a natural leader, and I didn't know what that mean. I am not a leader, but people say that you have the potential of a leader. So I attended this training, and afterwards, I thought: Okay, I need to explore that track. And I would love to have more leadership training in the future, which I did. And I'm going to have leadership training about leadership in the coming few weeks with a very respectful organisation. And I'm gonna [sic] learn from other leaders, global leaders. (MEE_01_KI)

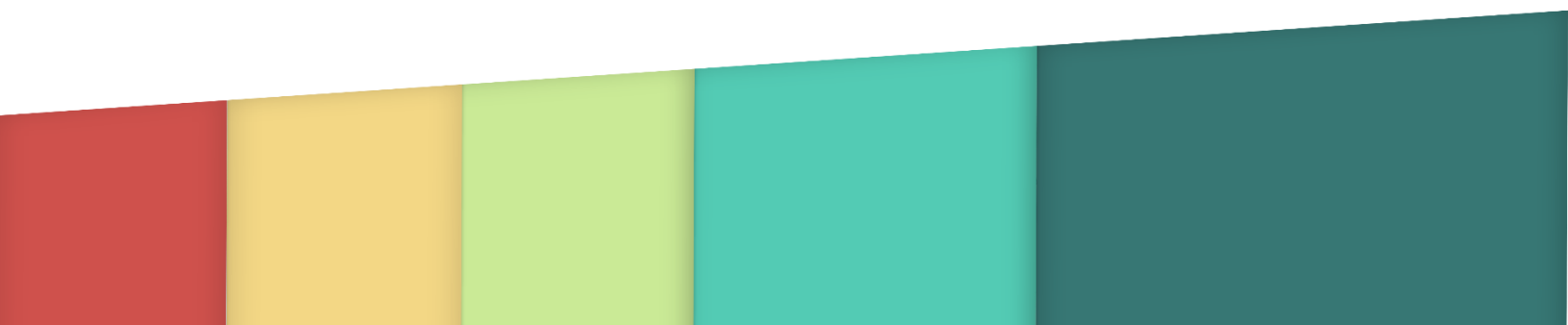
Another participant specifically described how support in self-identifying as a leader was particularly important to empower a new generation of leaders who are women:

I forgot to mention one programme I participated in about leadership with [a local organisation]. It helped me identify that I was a leader. I'd never had a leadership programme, so it was good training ... The process I had with [a regional network hub], it's been very interesting, to be able to uncover my skills, the networking I've been able to do, having new scenarios to tell my story, understanding that telling the story, speaking ... It's been more like a process of empowerment and finding those spaces. Being able to participate at a conference, a panel, etc., opens you up, to prove yourself. You start to advance in that process until you develop the skill and become empowered. I had the opportunity there to show my leadership. (LAC_02_KI)

Another interviewee described the positive impact that women in leadership can have on future leaders and on challenging gender-related barriers. In particular, when women have access to opportunities to publicly represent their organisations and share their knowledge and expertise, they are given a unique opportunity to inspire others and counteract stereotypes:

Here we are four women leading, which will motivate other women because when they go to meetings, they will see other women leading processes and organisations, and we will change little by little that reality. The idea is to dismantle that culture, because the third sector is very machista, and the private sector is even worse. It would seem that women only understand education and community management, and that we know nothing about finance and economics, for example. Then I think the first thing is to challenge this with education and then motivate organisational changes. There is no other way. (LAC_02-01_DD)

The identification in motivation of potential leaders, in particular those who belong to social groups which are traditionally underrepresented in roles of leadership, is essential to ensuring a more equitable and inclusive new generation of leadership. It is important to note that the work has already been initiated in all regions, largely under the leadership of local organisations. Continuing to support these locally-relevant efforts to promote future leaders will be a key contribution to localisation efforts, as discussed in Section 9.



Section 6: Perceptions of Capacity Strengthening Modalities

Across all regions, participants offered a diverse range of perceptions on various modalities of capacity strengthening tools. Participant experiences also varied from having had no past formal capacity strengthening experience, to having attended many trainings, to being expert facilitators themselves who self-identified as “trainers”.

6.1: Challenges of Online Delivery and Potential for Hybrid Models

Participants frequently reported a strong preference for in-person learning. People who had previously not had access to in-person capacity strengthening opportunities but did have steady and affordable access to internet seemed most amenable to taking part in high-quality, free-of-charge, online capacity strengthening opportunities. Many participants were receptive to hybrid models, recognising resource restraints; however, interviewers observed that participants with significant past capacity-strengthening experiences were often more dedicated to in-person delivery models.

Several participants had strong critiques of the effectiveness of online training, with one senior level CSO leader stating that virtual modalities are ineffective when compared to in-person, field-practice oriented, lay-language training. Capacity strengthening opportunities which incorporate these methodologies were conversely seen as more accessible. One participant explained:

No, I [see] myself as a trainer actually, I call myself a public educator ... I will never go for an online training, never, because even my driver tells me, he said “Sir, when we are face to face, we understand only 20%. When you are online, the effectiveness is only 2%.” In fact, in the last two years, I must tell you, increasingly we are losing our effectiveness. Because who is thinking in what way, who is doing what through this online thing, you aren't able to find out because we need to have face to face meetings. Because our work is more process oriented, [our team is not exclusively] higher education students where you give a lecture and people understand it. Our work has many nuances, that a lot of debate and discussions need to happen in order. Despite [our organisation having] all kinds of facilities, you cannot do effective training, even using all these facilities available. So I will rather prefer printing programs which have more practice attached to it. Because with field practice, everything is critical. In fact, that friend of mine was telling me, “Here's the

language he will use in a training program. And the language you use in your daily work is completely different. So people are not able to translate the language we use in a training program into their daily kind of work.” (ASA_03_DD)

This scepticism of digital capacity strengthening was echoed by another participant, who stated that they:

firmly believe that ... training has to be face-to-face. Even if there are some very good ones, and people with the skills to take them virtually, who have that commitment, there are others who do need the experience, it should be hybrid. Or maybe that in the virtual training you can get the chance to have some experiences and activities that force you to go out into the streets, the field. (LAC_01-01_DD)

The challenge of making digital capacity strengthening engaging was noted by another participant, who in particular noted that locally-relevant language use is even more important in digital media:

When it comes to technical capacity building on technical expertise, it gets even more boring than capacity building on regular topics ... what needs to be done in those situations is really just break down the things that you want to talk about into very, very easy language, and in very, very easy to understand ways. (ASA_04_DD)

Another participant observed that older leaders may not be as comfortable in virtual spaces as youth in their organisation:

So to me, [I have so many] years’ experience and I was born an activist, so I understand this sector differently than the people who have been joining nowadays. The youth, they are very active and they know the digital requirements, and technical requirements a little bit [and how to do] the engagement of the community. (ASA_03_KI)

This participant also observed that the process of holding governments and people accountable is harder in the digital world.

Another participant noted that, when conducting online capacity strengthening sessions, it can be difficult to know the true engagement of participants receiving the content. This results in increased difficulty proving the achievement deliverables from the capacity strengthening exercise. When delivering their own training programs, the participant preferred to avoid any

printed materials at all, instead opting for interactive, situation-based discussions that allowed people to work through questions in real time:

So online training is not effective at all, in my point of view, because you are here and the other person is maybe roaming around somewhere. So what kind of deliverables are you making? You can't show that. So the training that I rendered didn't have any slides or any written material as well. It was very interactive. We were given certain situations that if this happens, then what will you do? What, how will you deal with this kind of situation? Then we'll present it, things like that. (ASA_02_DD)

Conversely, participants recognised that hybrid delivery models for capacity strengthening had potential to mitigate many of the challenges involved in purely digital modalities. However, some participants felt that hybrid approaches require further study and experimentation to evaluate both their impact and cost-effectiveness:

I know there's been a lot of talk about hybrid capacity strengthening. But that's a tricky one, because it becomes more expensive. There's more, well, trying to keep people engaged in person and online. So I think that needs a bit of exploring but a lot of people want to do hybrid. (GBL_01_KI)

Participants highlighted the perceived benefits of hybrid models, in particular when balancing outcomes with practical restrictions due to funding limitations and the role of the pandemic in shifting global systems towards digital models. They also drew attention to the importance of contextualisation within these hybrid training spaces:

One of the challenges we are having is that most of these (trainings) are not physical and of course this is partly because of the COVID. I think it would be better to combine physical and online. I think it would also be good for those participating to share, for instance in [this West African Country] we have different contexts, the context is different in the North, the East, the West and the South, so I think it is important to bring these people in the same room to share their ideas. Again, it is good to bring people from other countries via zoom or even physical so they can learn from other countries on how they respond to their needs. I think if things are done this way it will be good because maybe you might have encountered a challenge in the community and those people have also encountered it and can share [and] help in the learning process. (WCA_02_DD)

Hybrid spaces, in which content is delivered digitally but presented or workshopped in face-to-face environments, were seen as an effective strategy to mitigate at least some of the trade-offs involved in digital capacity strengthening modalities.

6.2: Funding support

A lack of funding for capacity strengthening was frequently identified by research participants as a significant barrier to capacity strengthening engagement, development, and prioritisation (for a full discussion of financial barriers to capacity strengthening, see Section 8.5). As such, the provision of unrestricted funding to apply towards staff capacity strengthening was seen in itself as a potential capacity strengthening modality.

Participants identified how underfunding of organisations which deliver capacity strengthening programs leads to a need to charge tuition fees, bridging the funding gap by passing the costs on to attendees. This cost further exacerbates the inaccessibility of capacity strengthening opportunities to people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or working for under-resourced CSOs:

One of the ways they try and sustain their training programs is that they do not offer them free of cost, so they do charge the minimum fee, so you gather 15-20 people at a certain venue then there are chargers, you have to pay the trainer, you have to pay for the venue, and you have to pay for the stay of the participants, their food and materials you use to train, etc. (ASA_05_KI)

These costs were perceived to increase with the quality of the training, again increasing the skills gap between well-resourced CSOs and lower resourced CSOs:

What tends to happen is there's a gap and resources, like a lot of these trainings, you know, the better the training, the more, you know, high profile people that are a part of the capacity building, the more expensive it is because you have to pay your honorarium to the facilitators, and to the people who are conducting the capacity building event. So that tends to be very un-economical for CSOs. There are so many CSOs who are so small, and they do such local work, they don't have lakhs of rupees for one particular training for their staff. So a lot of them usually look out for the free capacity buildings and the free training. And those are usually not of that level, as would be, you know, a really amazing one, probably, so that definitely, resources are a huge constraint for especially the local CSOs because they don't have the resources to be able to provide that level of training for their staff. (ASA_DD_04)

One participant identified that effective capacity strengthening support for women in CSO leadership is similarly expensive. In this way, the lack of appropriate capacity strengthening funding contributed to a continued inequitable representation of women in leadership roles:

If we are very serious that women leaders, who are few in numbers, attend these kinds of programs, we have to walk an extra mile to motivate them to attend these courses, and will have to be extra sensitive to see that there we can design training programs to their base and the indigenous population, [which] surely will cost. (ASA_01_DD)

In other cases, limited access to unrestricted funding has led to a re-framing of capacity needs to reflect the interests of the donor rather than the actual needs and priorities of local organisations or their staff:

Most resources are spent on training. Donors will ask the organisation based on their organisational assessment what areas need strengthening and then allocate money for training, additionally a lot of resources are allocated to project and programme support. So, there is little funding for systematic long-term capacity development plan for organisations. You will find organisations having to plan to get unrestricted funding to achieve their own sustainability, which is not a bad thing but it is very challenging for local organisations as their resources are already stretched thin. (WCA_04_KI)

Another respondent explained further how a lack of funding drives organisations to prioritise subjects based on donor interest rather than local need:

...No, no, no. Capacity strengthening funding has reduced drastically, a lot of funds are going to interventions such as water and sanitation, GBV; in fact, between this year and last year I have gone for 6 capacity building programs on GBV, and I do not need it and the funders keep bringing it. When you look at the UN agency, it is GBV; when you look at all these organisations, it is GBV. (WCA_05_KI)

Increased access to unrestricted funding to local capacity strengthening organisations would help improve tuition-free or tuition-reduced access to capacity-strengthening opportunities. Similarly, funding potential trainees directly to would help increase engagement with existing capacity strengthening opportunities.

6.4: Experiential and Applied Approaches to Learning

Participants indicated that the most effective capacity strengthening programs are interactive, situation-case-based, and integrate the experiences of learners. This was seen as contrasting with the commonly employed digital capacity strengthening methodologies described in previous sections, which are more static. Blending of interactive methodologies with digital content delivery is an area in which hybrid capacity strengthening can have impact.

Experiential modalities of learning foster peer-learning and the strengthening of knowledge-sharing networks within the CSO community. The importance of interactive trainings can be seen in this passage from an interview participant in the Asian region, who identified that long, unengaging sessions make it impossible for attendees to remain attentive:

I feel that it should be interactive, because if a capacity building program is not interactive, people will sort of doze off [and] not be able to pay complete attention. Because capacity building programs in my experience are not usually like, you know, one or two [hours], they go on for like, two or three days. So to be able to retain the interest of the participants throughout those two, three days, or even if it's one entire day for five or six hours is not easy. So it has to be as interactive as possible. ... Apart from that I also think some example exercises, case studies, you know, not completely theoretical - how much of the session is based on practicality [is how] successful the training program will be and [how much] retention of the concept [there will be]. (ASA_DD_04)

These sentiments were similarly echoed by another participant in the Middle Eastern region, who stated simply that “Online training sometimes is long and not necessary. 3 hours training is so long and people lose focus” (MEE_01-01_DD).

There were many terms used by participants to capture a common pedagogic approach: interactive, participatory, situational, case based, experiential. These types of training were relatable and tied to practical applications, which made learning moments more memorable to participants:

The best training, which I still remember, was the training that basically engaged participants in a process where we could learn from their experiences. We firmly believe as an organisation and [I as] a professional, to have experience based learning [and] participatory learning. (ASA_DD_05)

Another participant described the lasting impact of a similar interactive capacity strengthening opportunity:

I got the chance to attend several trainings and courses that presented the information in different ways. And the most memorable training I had was experience based. The trainer was very smart about that. It was interactive training. It wasn't self-paced or recorded training. So the trainer had this idea of us thinking about our previous experiences, and then he tried to link it with the subject of the training and just make every one of us go through the process, from their experience perspective, not just giving us the information by spoon. (MEE_01_KI)

Participants similarly reacted positively to learning and training “by doing”. Similar to the interactive training modalities described above, participants highlighted the value of capacity strengthening opportunities that were embedded in their daily work. As one participant described, “Training by doing. This can happen by giving the trainees the resources to start an initiative in real life. This way they learn on their own” (MEE_01-03_DD).

Another contrasted the value of “learning by doing” to theory-based training approaches:

Learning by doing is the best approach that we used, because when we use only a theoretical approach it doesn't help. For example, the human-centred design training that we did included real examples and issues that we attempted to solve. This helped everyone to understand and learn. (MEE_01-01_DD)

One participant communicated that while there is a place for theory based training, skills based training with opportunities to apply the newly developed skills is critical not only for the learning of the individual but the learning of the community. In applying such a model, the impacts of the capacity strengthening are sometimes dramatically improved:

I would see training in two ways, training based on theory and you assimilate into you being able to do things, and other training, where you are really bringing skills to do hands on [work], so those are two types, which are different. And for training with knowledge, it's easy, you can be together in groups, and even only by video call, and you train people. But when it is skills based like preparing the yogurt? ... how do you follow someone from point A to Z to make sure that the training is assimilated, but is also used. Sometimes people are trained but they never get the opportunity to use the training [when] there is no follow up, there is no mentorship to make sure of what you got, you are not able to translate to others and so that they can also benefit the country where there are less means to train more people. (WCA_01_KI)

6.5: Communities of Practice and Mentorship

Capacity strengthening programs can take the form of the establishment or support of communities of practice, in which members share their experiences, insights, and learning. Communities of practice were not commonly referred to by study participants; however, this may indicate a lack of familiarity with this particular capacity strengthening modality rather than a lack of interest. One participant felt that, despite being less familiar to learners, communities of practice could have significant benefits to their professional community contingent on the buy-in of their peers:

I don't know if it was because people didn't really understand what it was or the benefits of [communities of practice], but it didn't come up as a priority or preferred way of learning. It's something that [we] would like to do more of. But if there isn't that interest, and also someone to champion those different communities of practice, there wasn't much need, as we don't have the capacity, the [staff] to lead on that. But we do see the benefits. I think it's not as common as other ways of learning. So it needs to be further promoted [because] there's benefits to communities of practice, to working groups, but they need to be championed by CSOs. (GBL_01_KI)

Other learning modalities which were referred to by research participants were mentorship and peer learning. Participants recognised their colleagues and fellow professionals in the sector have a wealth of information and suggested a variety of ways that they could engage with them to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between individuals and institutions. One participant suggested the creation of “resource hubs; social networking; institutional twinning; coaching and clustering” as broad, coordinated efforts (ESA_05_KI). Others spoke passionately about the impact that mentorship had on their own career development. As one interview respondent described:

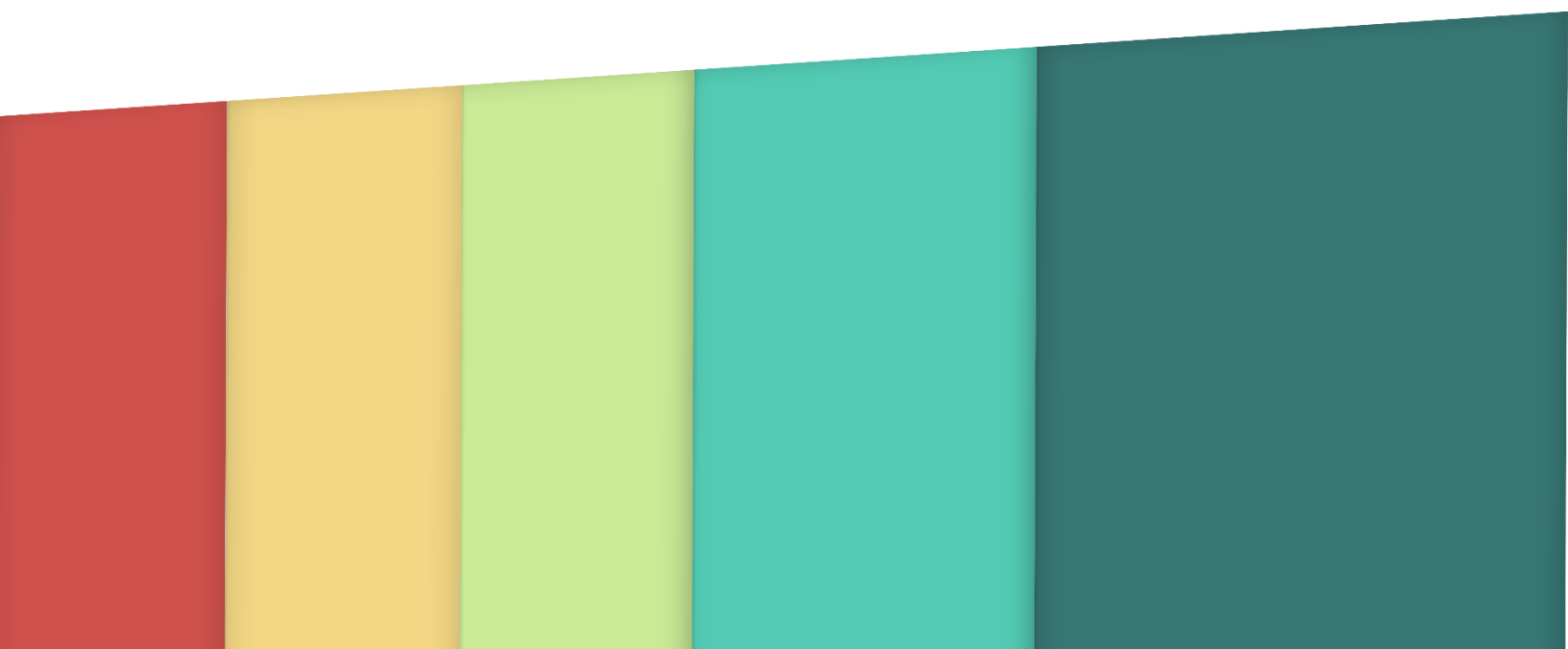
I was blessed having a good mentor who walked me through all the steps and mentored me step-by-step, teaching me what I need to take care of, what resources I need to find, look for, and start studying what is proposal writing and how to form and structure all the aspects of the proposal. But other people don't have this chance to evolve and start gaining the experience they need. (MEE_01_KI)

The positive impacts of developing mentorship programs were discussed by another participant, particularly for individuals who may be underrepresented in leadership positions:

When we deliver [our mentorship program for women], it's been quite successful, because I think it is not just learning technical skills, but also, again,

the thing we were saying about face to face, creating a network where you can find other people with similar expertise or opportunities for partnering, but also someone sharing the same challenges. (GBL_01_KI)

While communities of practice, mentorship, and peer learning were less frequently referred to by research participants, this may be due to a relative unfamiliarity with these approaches to learning. Evidence suggests that these modalities may be effective if deployed in locally relevant ways and take advantage of existing networks within regions.



Section 7: Participant Engagement with HLA

I remember, I don't know, four or five years ago when Coursera started. It used to be one of the only platforms you have to build your skills online. Now there's so many online platforms for people to choose from. It's becoming a bit saturated, I would say. There's webinars every day. So much to choose from. I got an email today from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, I think. There's Kaya, of course, then other organizations doing their own, how's it called, self paced learning, they can have their own course and stuff, and CSOs can also learn there. (GBL_01_KI)

Survey participants were asked to report whether they had previously heard of the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, and if so, whether they had participated in any HLA capacity building services.

Global Familiarity with HLA				
Regions	Heard of HLA		Participated in HLA Services	
Asia	31	51%	9	15%
East or Southern Africa	42	66%	31	48%
Latin America or Caribbean	5	29%		0%
Middle East or Eastern Europe	14	56%	8	32%
Western or Central Africa	42	63%	20	30%
Grand Total	136	58%	69	29%

More than half of survey participants (136 / 236, or 58%) had heard of HLA before engaging in this study, and nearly one third (69 / 236, or 29%) had taken part in HLA capacity building services in the past. Notably, this data was highly regionalised. Very few participants in Latin America and the Caribbean were familiar with HLA, and none had taken advantage of HLA services, which is unsurprising as this is a new priority region for the Academy. East and Southern Africa featured the largest proportions of those familiar with the Academy and had taken part in the most services.

It is important to recall that HLA contributed to participant outreach in this project, both through their regional hubs and through global social media campaigns. This artificially boosted numbers of respondents familiar with the Academy. However, despite this support, the research team was pleased that 42% of participants were newly learning about HLA through this research.

Interview respondents who were familiar with HLA frequently had positive things to say about their past experiences with HLA services. For example, one participant stated:

The strategies that HLA uses to capacitate or strengthen is very good and beneficial to those who do the online training, I have implemented what I have done in HLA, and I have seen the results, my colleagues and superiors have seen the results as well and it has been of encouragement to them to continue the courses. On sustainability, I think it is very sustainable because it gives you a fresh understanding of every situation that you may come across in the workplace, in duty stations, in the communities or any environment that you find yourself in as a leader. Nothing needs to be changed within the courses that you render within the online platform, but more courses of various forms should be introduced that can help people to understand and study through HLA. (ESA_07_KI)

Another participant highlighted HLA's positive impact on local capacity:

I really appreciate that they are investing in local capacity, this is one of the greatest thing that plays out in the country. Secondly, they have been really supportive, when you go to the online platform, also you can go to the Save the Children offices without appointments and get the support you need. It has been a humbling thing that they can interact with us at any time. They went as far as supporting the process for the last 15 months. (ESA_04_KI)

Despite an overall positive experience with HLA and Kaya Connect, some participants highlighted several areas that they felt could be improved in HLA's programming. One participant asked that some of the "maybe many courses [on Kaya] can be joined together" by theme, and organised into diplomas "since diplomas are looked at as higher" and are easier to represent concisely on CVs (ESA_04_KI). Another requested "more courses on COVID-19 and the linkages between COVID-19 and other chronic illnesses like diabetes" as well as "training on diet, nutrition and physical activity" (ESA_07_KI). The same participant felt that sometimes the prerequisites for courses were not available or easy to understand: "Looking at the project management course done by HLA, it really needs you to have an accounting background, even the beginners excel course needs a bit of an accounting background. It is required for you to pass, and get credit for it" (ESA_07_KI).

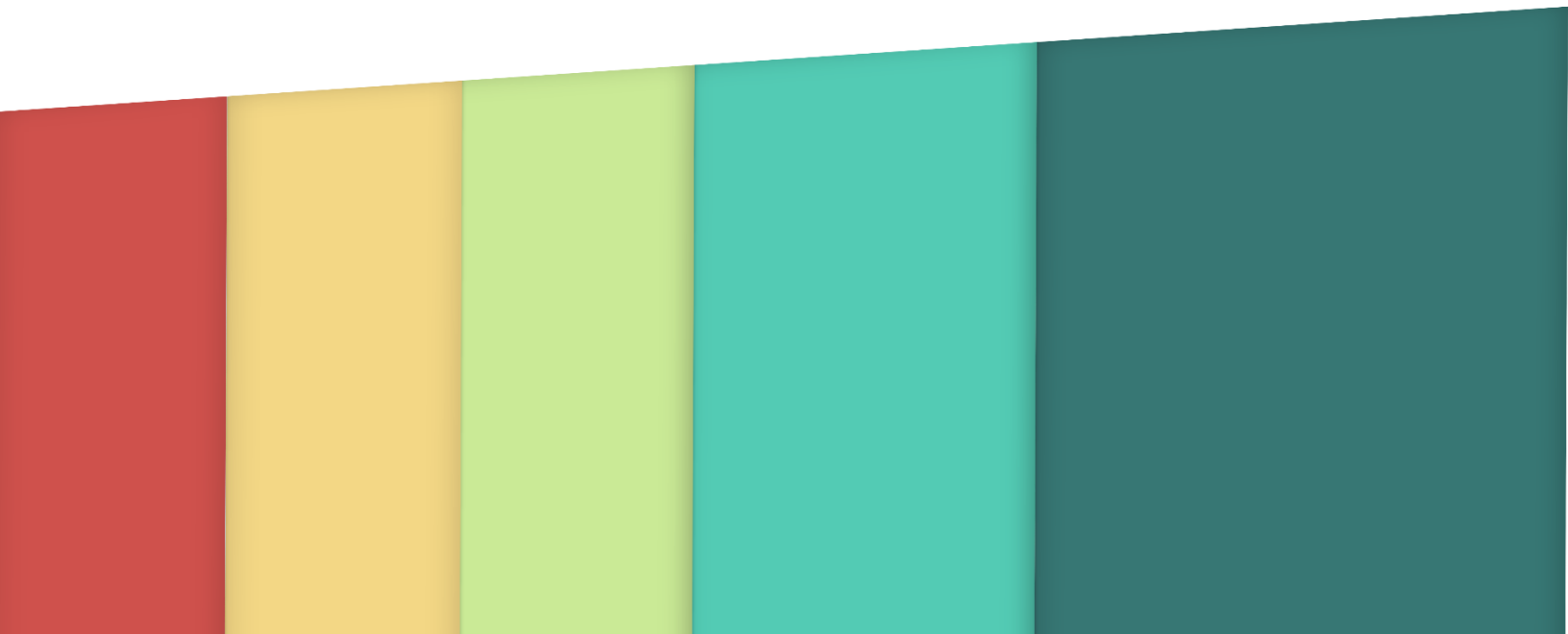
One participant felt that Kaya could be more extensively utilised to train local face-to-face trainers, and this could be supported by the regional HLA teams: “the in-country [HLA] staff involved should train more trainers, and these trainers need to be trained further. HLA should give their trainers an opportunity by giving practical assignments to ensure they can deliver whichever trainings in all contexts” (ESA_04_KI).

Another suggested that “HLA to start a network group for its learners, where we can communicate as learners and encourage others” (ESA_07_KI). The same suggested that more direction could be given on how to collect and display the digital badge system (ESA_07_KI).

To summarise, participant suggestions included:

- organising individual courses into larger e-diplomas;
- clearer presentation of course pre-requisites or other helpful preparatory information;
- simpler methods to represent achievements;
- more courses related to the intersectionality of COVID-19;
- using HLA as a hub for localised training of trainers; and
- using HLA as a hub for peer-to-peer learning.

It should be noted that many of these observations were not widespread, with the exception of the final two points which are considered in more detail in Section 11.2: Recommendations.



Section 8: Barriers to Capacity Strengthening

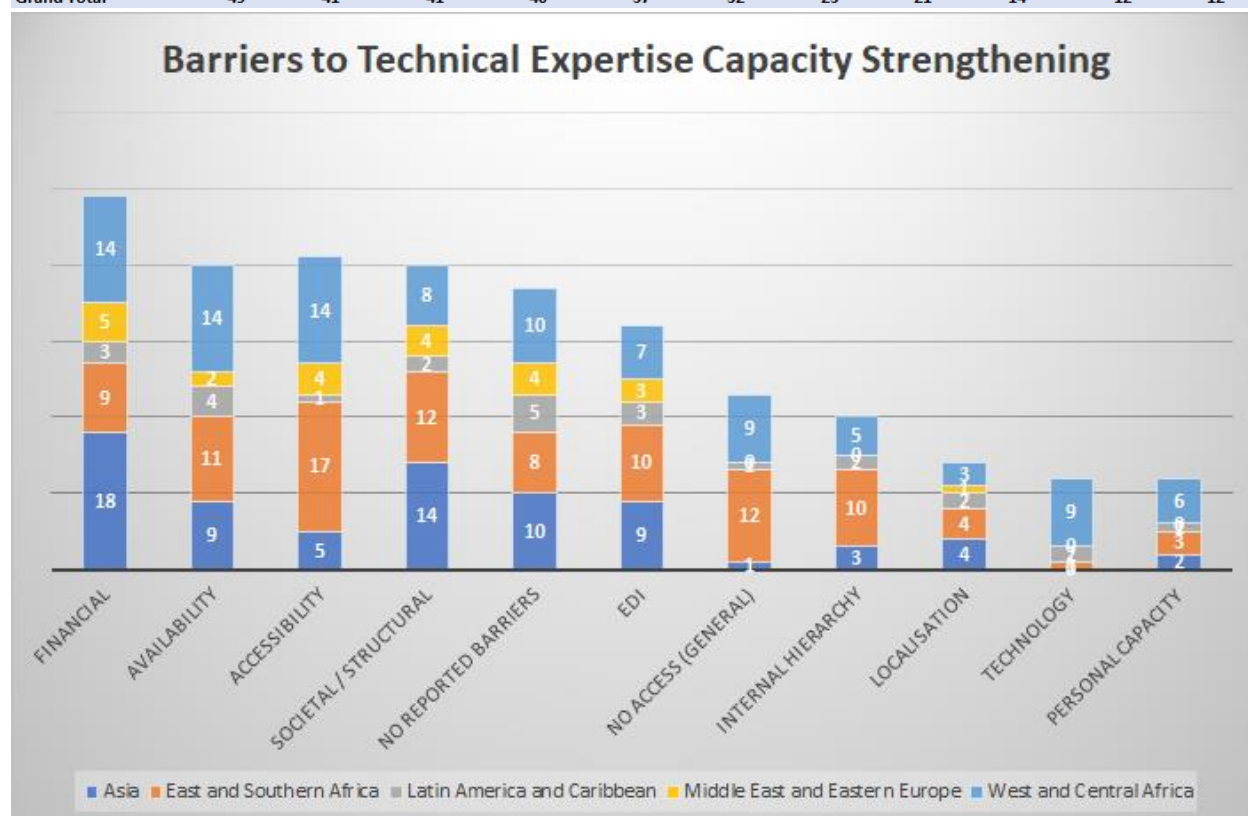
What I have shared in terms of challenges, most of the CSOs in [my country] are facing worse challenges than what I have just presented. We have many organisations that are unable even to cover running costs, I am talking of admin, let alone overhead costs, so you can imagine how hard it is for them to access capacity building sessions. Some of the courses are online and are payable and others are free, and they do not have the internet, and so the challenges are enormous in most organisations in [this country]. We should be building sustainable capacity so that they will be able to sustain themselves, one of the challenges we have is that when they send their volunteers to go for the free capacity building opportunities, the next opportunity they get they leave the organization because the organization is unable to contain them and pay for the stay. So, staff turnover becomes the order of the day, and that is because financial sustainability is a great challenge, we need to make sure the capacity building is linked with sustainable capacity programs to enable the personnel to stay. (WCA_01-01_DD)

Respondents to this study highlighted a wide range of barriers to accessing both technical expertise and leadership capacity strengthening opportunities, with significant regional differences. This section will present an overview of these barriers, followed by a series of subsections which will examine various barriers in detail.

8.1: Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening

There was a high degree of regional variation in survey responses describing barriers to technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities.

Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening											
Region	Financial	Availability	Accessibility	Societal / Structural	No reported barriers	EDI	No access (general)	Internal Hierarchy	Localisation	Technology	Personal Capacity
Asia	18	9	5	14	10	9	1	3	4	0	2
East and Southern Africa	9	11	17	12	8	10	12	10	4	1	3
Latin America and Caribbean	3	4	1	2	5	3	1	2	2	2	1
Middle East and Eastern Europe	5	2	4	4	4	3	0	0	1	0	0
West and Central Africa	14	14	14	8	10	7	9	5	3	9	6
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Grand Total	49	41	41	40	37	32	23	21	14	12	12



In survey responses, participants most frequently cited personal or organisational financial limitations (49 / 236, or 21%) as a barrier to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities related to technical expertise. These financial barriers were most frequently highlighted in Asia, MEEE, and WCA. For a full discussion on financial barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities, see Section 8.5.

Availability of opportunities was frequently cited as a barrier to technical expertise capacity strengthening (41 / 236, or 17%). Availability was most commonly identified as a barrier in ESA and WCA, and was less of a concern in Asia and MEEE. Frequently mentioned sub-categories of availability-related barriers included a lack of training options (27 / 41, or 69%) and a lack of

information about what options for capacity strengthening might exist (16 / 41, or 39%). For a full discussion of the availability of capacity strengthening opportunities, see Section 8.6.

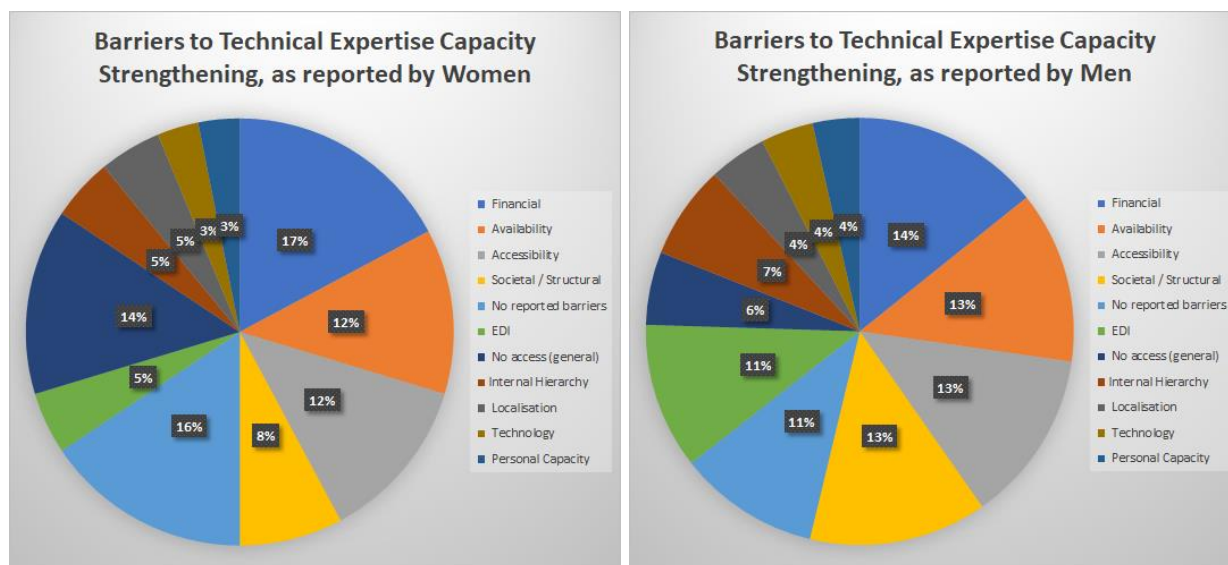
Accessibility of existing opportunities was another commonly cited barrier to technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities (41 / 236, or 17%). Accessibility was most frequently cited as an issue in ESA, WCA, and LAC. Most survey respondents simply indicated that opportunities were inaccessible without providing further information; however, some common terms related to accessibility included the physical location of the training, including rural-urban divides (11 / 41, or 27%), the opportunity not being open to CSOs (6 / 41, or 15%), or that existing trainings were not at an appropriate level (6 / 41, or 15%). For a full discussion of the accessibility of existing capacity strengthening opportunities, see Section 8.7.

Societal or structural issues were commonly cited as barriers to access (40 / 236, or 17%), however, the presence of these barriers was highly regional. Regions in which societal issues were a primary barrier were Asia (14 / 61, or 22%) and ESA (12 / 64, or 19%). Common societal issues included violence or insecurity in the region, governmental policy, or society-wide issues of discrimination.

Notably, 37 / 236 (16%) of survey respondents indicated that there were no major barriers to technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities in their regions. A similar proportion of respondents from all five global regions reported facing no major barriers.

When participants' survey responses were examined by gender, there were few major variations in cited barriers. Globally, women were more likely than men to report that they faced no major barriers to technical expertise capacity strengthening, and were less likely to report the existence of barriers related to EDI or societal/structural constraints. However, given the overall divide in gender among survey respondents, some of this trend can perhaps be attributed to selection bias towards women who have already accessed the necessary training to establish careers.

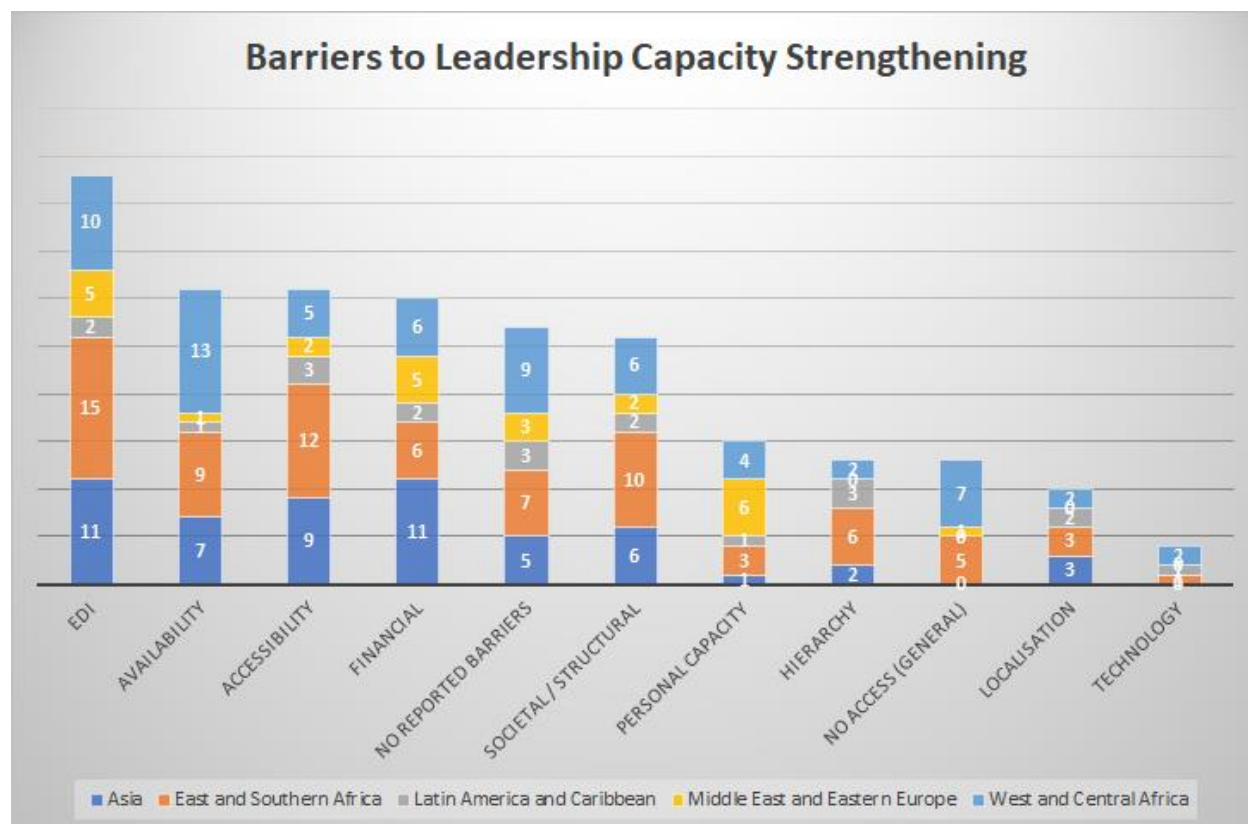
Gender	Financial	Availability	Accessibility	Societal / Structural	No reported barriers	EDI	No access (general)	Internal Hierarchy	Localisation	Technology	Personal Capacity
Woman	11	8	8	5	10	3	9	3	3	2	2
Man	36	33	33	34	27	28	14	18	11	10	9
Other	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No data	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	49	41	41	40	37	32	23	21	14	12	12



8.2: Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening

Survey respondents identified a similar set of barriers to accessing leadership capacity strengthening opportunities as to technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities, with one key distinction: in the case of leadership, barriers related to EDI were the most commonly cited barriers to accessing leadership capacity strengthening opportunities.

Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening											
Region	EDI	Availability	Accessibility	Financial	No Reported Barriers	Societal / Structural	Personal Capacity	Hierarchy	No Access (general)	Localisation	Technology
Asia	11	7	9	11	5	6	1	2	0	3	0
East and Southern Africa	15	9	12	6	7	10	3	6	5	3	1
Latin America and Caribbean	2	1	3	2	3	2	1	3	0	2	1
Middle East and Eastern Europe	5	1	2	5	3	2	6	0	1	0	0
West and Central Africa	10	13	5	6	9	6	4	2	7	2	2
Other	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Grand Total	43	31	31	30	28	26	15	14	13	10	4



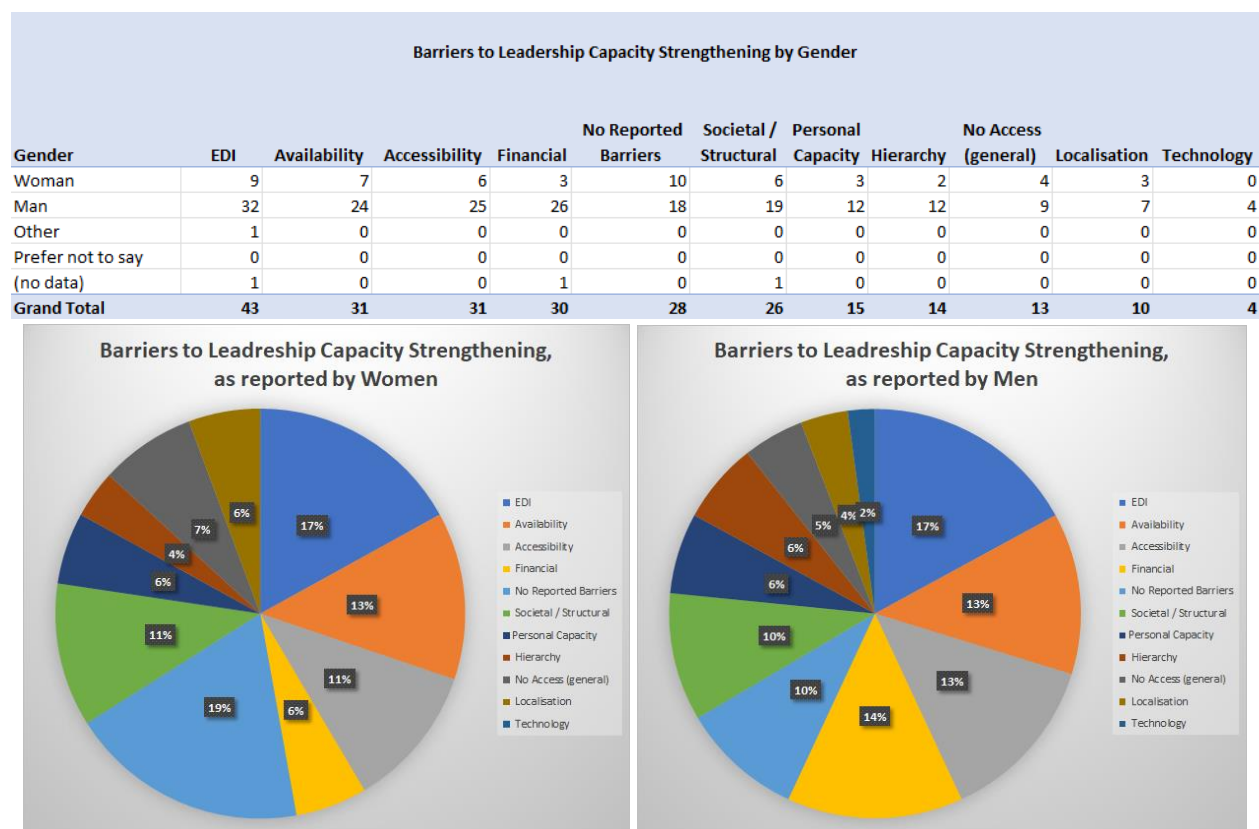
Issues relating to EDI were cited as barriers to leadership capacity strengthening in 43 / 236 of responses (18%). Of those responses, 35% referred explicitly to gender as an axis of discrimination. There were no other commonly reported forms of discrimination by survey respondents; most respondents simply stated that discrimination was a barrier without providing a more specific explanation. See Section 8.4 for a full examination of EDI-related barriers to capacity strengthening.

Availability of opportunities was frequently cited as a barrier to leadership capacity strengthening (31 / 236, or 13%). Of these, 20 respondents of 31 (64%) cited a lack of options, and 13 of 31 (42%) reported having no information about capacity strengthening opportunities that may exist. For a full discussion of the availability of capacity strengthening opportunities, see Section 8.6.

Accessibility of opportunities was also commonly referred to as a barrier to leadership capacity strengthening (31 / 236, or 13%). Of these responses, the most common barriers to be specifically cited were an inappropriate location (7 / 31 or 23%) and a lack of access for CSOs (5 / 31, or 16%). However, it should be noted that the small number of respondents makes it difficult to definitively identify trends among this group. For a full discussion of the accessibility of existing capacity strengthening opportunities, see Section 8.7.

Financial limitations were also frequently cited as a barrier to leadership capacity strengthening, mentioned by 30 / 236 (13%) of survey respondents. For a full discussion on financial barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities, see Section 8.5.

When disaggregated by gender, no strong differences in responses between men and women can be discerned, with the exception of the same global trend seen in technical expertise responses in which women are more likely than men to report experiencing no barriers to access.



8.3: Intersectionality of Multiple Barriers

Respondents indicated that barriers to capacity strengthening would commonly intersect to create challenging landscapes of access. These various, intersecting challenges can cause serious difficulty for participants to access training for themselves or for their staff. As one participant described: “Sometimes the training that we need is not available, or we don’t hear about them. Also, if the training is not free, we struggle because we are a small NGO” (MEE_04_KI). Another participant outlined in detail how challenges can intersect making their barriers to engagement more complex:

Yes, sometimes it's the financial barriers, because to pay for a certain training, it would cost you a lot of money that you are not making, because the levels of income in [this country] is not that high, especially for those who are working with NGOs and humanitarian efforts. So to be able to afford the cost of this training would be high, and they can't afford it. So this is number one barrier. Of course, lack of information. Sometimes people don't know what kind of gap I'm experiencing, and they need how to tackle it. Sometimes they don't know how to define that. Sometimes the time of the training wouldn't be suitable for their work agendas. And their workplaces are not supportive for them to take an excuse or something to go attend these trainings. (MEE_01_KI)

Availability of funding for capacity strengthening can in particular intersect with and heighten the severity of other barriers. For example, when assessing issues of discrimination and equality of access, funding can severely aggravate barriers to access. When limited funds must be prioritised, fewer opportunities are allocated to participants who are traditionally deprioritised for capacity strengthening. A participant described this challenge with respect to staff hierarchy:

When I talk about funding, there are courses online, like read.co.uk that offer training for trainers and courses for capacity building on data analysis, NCDs and more but you have to pay for them. Some CSOs in our region do not have the funds to train their volunteers, as for me, I am a volunteer in this organisation and I do not get any stipend, the data that I use is financed by myself, it is not something that I am given by my organisation. So, most organisations do not have any funding for this even from those given by donors, the government or the private sector. So, the funding I am talking about is to assist CSOs to get the training on certain aspects especially for capacity building to help them to perform well. Another thing, is to capacitate them to perform their goals or objectives for each financial year. (ESA_07_KI)

Another participant described the lack of financially accessible trainings as well as lack of inclusive, participatory training methodologies and coverage of EDI issues in trainings:

What we currently have available is not always free. The organizations [already] have the hardship of starting, and probably don't have the money to pay for a course. For example, in the area of fundraising, which is where we have focused our energy, the existing courses are not offered by the public sector but by the private sector, at least where we've found them, and most of them don't include participatory methodologies, they don't talk a lot about popular

education, when we speak for example about racism, women oppression... they don't cover any of that. (LAC_02-01_DD)

Throughout this section, it should be understood that, despite being examined in isolation, all of the following barriers are intersectional in nature. They co-exist and in such cases may serve to heighten challenges of access. In particular, availability of funding is a key factor in compounding other types challenges of access.

8.4: Barriers Related to Equality, Discrimination, and Inclusion (EDI)

Topics related to equality, discrimination, and inclusivity were commonly cited as barriers to both leadership (43 / 236, or 18%) and technical expertise (32 / 236, or 14%) related capacity strengthening opportunities. Typically, responses indicated that either gender was the axis of discrimination being experienced, or responses only indicated discrimination in general as a barrier to accessing capacity strengthening.

Gender

Women in particular faced challenges in accessing capacity strengthening for both leadership and technical expertise related skills. One participant succinctly described the situation as it relates to leadership: "This is how women have struggled to get into leadership: because of patriarchy, stereotypes and a lot of structural barriers" (WCA_05_KI).

Discussions of barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities often blended with discussing access to the sector in general; however, these sector-wide barriers were often described as relevant to both contexts. As one participant explained,

[Gender] is a big barrier when it comes to capacity building and even in other working environments. In times of capacity building you will hear them complaining "she is a woman and she cannot deliver fully and there will be an excuse" or "she is married and her husband will not allow her so even if we can get a single lady it is okay, we know we will get her full attention and time." So, this has always been a barrier and when women are allowed to work: they tend to deliver much more, but without being given the opportunity for capacity building definitely we cannot deliver much. So in terms of invitations they will not require women, and unless the men are unavailable. It is a very big barrier here ... Sometimes, you may give them the opportunity but they refuse because they feel they should just be at home. Even when they are given the platform they hardly come out, you can do the research, sometimes because

of the culture and religious of certain sects the women decided to shy away though they have been given the platform. (WCA_02-03_DD)

Discrimination against women and youth were often mentioned together as co-constituent barriers which were very difficult for participants to overcome. As one respondent described, “When we talk of gender equality, yes we have fewer female staff but we are trying to get more women included and this is something we are taking very seriously. And that is why we have gender policies in place as well as child protection policies” (ESA_04_KI). Another explained, “We don’t have equality in sensitive positions. They think that men can do a better job, especially in management positions. We need to work on this. For inclusivity, women and youth don’t get the proper chance” (MEE_01-01_DD).

Participants identified the need for more women to be trained as leaders to counteract the preponderance of men in upper leadership roles:

When you look at local organisation, those at high leadership levels are mostly men. There is a need for women to be mentored and supported to take on the responsibilities that are needed in these high management levels. There is a need for analysis on the level of disparities to allow organisation to chart the course forward. (ESA_03_KI)

Some women who participated in interviews shared that, at points in their career, they struggled to self-identify as leaders or potential leaders. This challenge can be considered both a barrier to capacity strengthening and a capacity strengthening need; see Section 5.2 on leadership-related capacity strengthening needs for a complete description of this complex challenge.

Some participants felt that there were clear ways in which their work integrated the perspectives and participation of women, stating that their inclusion is critical to their interventions success:

[There are] no barriers in the participation of women and youth. We can involve them, [as] I described there is a need to be working with the grassroots level communities and [make them] aware them about their rights and how they can join with us and strengthen our [work], we can involve them in the proposal planning, proposal implementation, and we are accountable to the communities [so] their participation is very important, especially women's participation is very important in our activities and interventions. So we can actually see them on the community level or institutional level. (ASA_04_KI)

Notably, as in survey responses, many women did not self-report as experiencing any particular discrimination when accessing capacity strengthening opportunities related to technical expertise or leadership. For example, one participant explained:

Interviewer: Do you think that there are any barriers from an EDI perspective?

ASA_02_DD: I don't feel so? No.

Interviewer: You feel as though you've had kind of equitable access to all opportunities

ASA_02_DD: Yes, equitable, or let's say more, because they will think, okay, that's a female sitting over there, you need to speak up, you need to keep your points. Okay.

Interviewer: And do you feel that that's good? That's appropriate?

ASA_02_DD: It's fine. Yeah there is a particular attention to engaging people who are not men, older men.

When observing passages such as these, however, it should be recalled that 176 / 236 survey responses were men, indicating an underlying bias in the community of respondents.

Age

Discrimination related to age was not commonly cited amongst survey respondents. Only three survey respondents globally indicated the existence of discrimination related to age. However, it should be noted that survey participants tended to skew towards mid-career humanitarian workers; this bias may have impacted these findings, as discrimination due to age was frequently referenced by interviewees.

Discrimination due to age was most frequently linked to topics of leadership. Barriers related to age were cited both for youth and for the elderly. One participant said that leadership capacity strengthening opportunities “are available, but they are not enough. There is a lack of opportunities for the youth” (MEE_01-03_DD). When discussing challenges for youth to access positions of leadership, one participant stated, “The biggest challenge here is that the leaders, who are like 70 years old, don’t realise that life changed, and the peoples’ needs changed” (MEE_01-02_DD).

Another participant from the same organisation stated that older participants are given opportunities to lead that younger potential leaders may be better equipped to take on:

In general, we need to focus on the managers and how they lead the organisation because sometimes managers are hired because they are the oldest not because they have the skills. In some organisations, the managers stay in the same position until they die and then the management is passed to the following generation. (MEE_01-01_DD)

Another participant described the challenges related to over-emphasising the inclusion of leaders who are elders, and excluding youth:

[S]ometimes we organise meetings, and they are sent to the organisations or the PDs of the executive directors, so the executive directors may end up attending a meeting that is not for them, maybe the meeting was for a particular staff member in the organisation. So the senior leaders attend these meetings and leave behind their subjects such as the youth, these are the challenges I see but this is mostly in the past. (WCA_02_DD)

Notably, this individual has also indicated to a trend of improvement in this area.

Conversely, one participant highlighted the lack of prioritisation of capacity strengthening opportunities for older people: "one of the groups that tend to be sometimes forgotten is older people. And so we would like more members that have expertise in building the resilience of older people, but also older people to inform our strategies." She then went on to outline some of the intersectional challenges of reaching the elderly:

But if we're trying to reach older people by digital methods, we're not going to get there. And then subgroups of older people, older people with disabilities, how accessible are the webinars, the workshops, the platforms? Yeah, so it's again for mainstream groups, and we have to ask ourselves, how inclusive are we, our capacity strengthening initiatives being? (GBL_01_KI)

Disability

People with disabilities described serious challenges in accessing capacity strengthening. Notably, two organisations which support people with disabilities were interviewed in Eastern and Southern Africa. One participant explained:

I have attended a number of trainings where persons with disability are not considered in the training environment in terms of the vision and the hearing environments... they suffer the most... and then English... there is someone with hearing disability and no one there can sign for them ... we need to put into consideration such as people with disability with different requirements such as the those with physical, hearing or seeing impairments. (ESA_05_KI)

Participants described the challenges of making capacity strengthening opportunities truly accessible to people with a range of different abilities when training organisations are working within limited budgets. The above participant went on to explain:

Yes, yes, the barriers are there. [B]ecause a person with disability... [their specific accessibility requirements] really needs to be understood, and how they [can be] integrated... we have to find someone who does sign language, the environment, and it becomes a challenge... here in [this country] we do not have... even when you want to print handouts, brochures, it is usually difficult. (ESA_05_KI)

Physical infrastructure was often a challenge to effectively including people with disabilities:

One of the things that they do not look at in the trainings is how people with disabilities can access these trainings, even the buildings they need ramps. Even town hall meetings in communities they do it in ways that are challenging for people with disabilities to access these venues. (WCA_02_DD)

Another participant at an organisation that delivers capacity strengthening opportunities globally stated:

We don't get that many applications from people with disabilities. But then I've also thought, Okay if we got many applications, would we have the capacity to make those [changes]? Because so I prioritise [including] people with disabilities, but ... can we really cater [to them]? (GBL_01_KI)

Despite these challenges, better integration of people with disabilities is extremely important to ensure equality of access. When asked about whether they experienced any challenges related to EDI, one respondent who represents an organisation championing the rights of people with disabilities stated that they are "marginalised," "used to not being heard," and "not ... integrated well enough" (ESA_06_KI).

8.5: Barriers Related to Funding

I don't think there is any funding opportunity... In my perspective, if there is to be growth in this humanitarian sector then we need to look into funding capacity building as a priority because it is what determines the outcome and impact of our work... Forget about these short-term things, look at the next 5-20 years, we got independence and still, we are vulnerable and cannot deliver humanitarian assistance effectively, instead of humanitarian needs decreasing they are increasing yet billions of dollars have been spent. When it comes to accountability and impact, there is nothing much that is being done. (ESA_04_KI)

In our organisation capacity building is lacking, like I mentioned few of us have undergone capacity training and we lack capacity training in our organisation, which is the default of a CSO in the region: not having capacity training. Most CSOs, cry for funding for capacity training... (ESA_07_KI)

Lack of funding was a significant global barrier to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities for both technical expertise and leadership. In survey responses, participants most frequently cited personal or organisational financial limitations (49 / 236, or 21%) as a barrier to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities related to technical expertise. Financial limitations were cited as a barrier to leadership capacity strengthening by 30 / 236 (13%) of survey respondents; however, when considering the other commonly cited were discrimination, lack of availability, or lack of access, this data suggested that when opportunities could be found they were expensive. The difficulty of paying the costs of accessing capacity strengthening opportunities was mentioned in every region.

Interviewees frequently referred to cost as the primary barrier to accessing training. As one participant explained, "There are training centres that are available to provide these kinds of trainings ... Unfortunately, the issue of fees becomes an issue for most CSOs, these trainings are costly, but the opportunities are there" (ESA_02_KI). Another stated, "Pretty much all foundations, the main thing that they're always looking for, and the main problem is that they don't have money. All foundations, they're always trying to have this, looking for donors and money and doing all these kinds of things, for their money, in order for that money to help" (LAC_03_KI). Another explained,

The opportunities are limited because of the financial aspect, there are many projects that are shut down, and they cannot acquire leadership skills when we are putting capacity building programs we do it for the community and not ourselves... We have a very small budget to gain skills on leadership we will need funding for that the partners may be available but we are not, we do not know them. To be able to ask for funding for the leadership you must know partners that fund leadership programs but we are not very encouraged on this. I think this is one of the shortcomings. (WCA_01-03_DD)

Some participants in West and Central Africa indicated that, while funding still remains short, trends are improving:

Actually, no. [The funding] is not enough; however, it has grown through the years. The fact is that almost all or 80% of financing is directed to projects and there is little input for strengthening the skills of the staff delivering these projects. But I confess, it has improved and is much better than it was 10-15 years ago, however, it remains at a deficit. The truth is that donors are more

*interested in the sustainability of the project rather than in the organisation.
(WCA_04_KI)*

Participants identified the need to access more funding opportunities in general as a barrier to capacity strengthening. “The problem is that the organisations that cannot find funding opportunities do not receive any training.” (MEE_01-02_DD). This intersects with the identification of a need for strengthening of project management skills (including proposal / grant writing), fundraising, and financial management capacity building discussed in Section 5.1. As another participant described, a lack of fundraising capacity can limit access to capacity building opportunities:

Very few organizations are able to reach out to them for financial support, because we do not have that kind of capacity. So, if I particularly say for my organization, and our partner organization with our capacity, how to engage with the private sector organizations, how to get the money from the bilateral donors, how to mobilize resources, from the multilateral donors, we always look towards the AI NGOs to develop their own programs, and then they share with us their resources. (ASA_03_KI)

See Section 8.6 for further discussion on the intersection of limited availability of capacity strengthening and funding as a barrier to accessing opportunities.

Some found that, while funding is available, the inconsistent nature of short-term grant-based funding caused challenges for continuity and sustainability:

The funding is not that consistent, it will only come at the second period. For, example...funding will come towards such programs...for leadership perhaps when there is an election and afterwards it is not there...and the majority of people living with disability, even becoming a leader. (ESA_05_KI)

Another respondent described the situation similarly:

There is not quality funding and other issues and make up the institutional support there are only short-term projects and like two or three months projects and between the gifts are coming, the organizations are sitting without funding and how they can manage the manage their core staff offices and other things are not manageable without any institutional support or support from the donors. (ASA_04_KI)

Beyond capacity strengthening, participants highlighted the precarity which this type of can cause for an organisation: “If a donor leaves today we have no institutional funding we have no

money to pay for rent, or the generator and we will not be able to pay the core staff.” (WCA_02-01_DD). Participants indicated that long term funding would address some of these challenges:

Most resources are spent on training. Donors will ask the organisation based on their organisational assessment what areas need strengthening and then allocate money for training, additionally a lot of resources are allocated to project and programme support. So, there is little funding for systematic long-term capacity development plan for organisations. You will find organisations having to plan to get unrestricted funding to achieve their own sustainability, which is not a bad thing but it is very challenging for local organisations as their resources are already stretched thin. (WCA_04_KI)

Participants cited creative coping mechanisms to deal with funding challenges, such as instituting peer-learning regimes within their organisations, pivoting to cheaper digital training (but less effective; see Section 6.2), and writing funding for capacity strengthening into project proposals:

Funding has reduced so much that it is challenging to do capacity strengthening. What we do is try to leverage the existing programmes to try and pass on the necessary information. For example in the annual general meeting, we spend 2 hours on an issue that we feel is urgent for the sector. Of course, COVID-19 helped us to appreciate the fact that the virtual space is less costly and gives an opportunity for learning. I think I mentioned when we do other projects we integrate capacity building within to take advantage of the little resources that are available. (ESA_02_KI)

Despite the advantages of digital spaces, limitations and difficulties inherent in deploying digital solutions meant online capacity strengthening cannot be considered a incomplete solution to funding-related challenges. As one participant explained:

“Most capacity building trainings need a lot of money, and many organizations do not have that kind of source to support their teams in general. So it has to do with it. The free online courses do not speak in deep, with someone who needs that type of training. So if it's for entry levels, it would be perfect, but someone who is the expert person, is digging deep, it wouldn't help him.” (MEE_02_KI)

For further discussion on the barriers related to digital capacity strengthening solutions, see Section 8.10.

Some participants described going to great lengths to access capacity building opportunities, including cutting staff salaries to cover conferences.

Actually, for now we do not have any funding for the capacity building mostly the organization has benefited with other peoples' projects, for instance, when UNICEF hold a capacity building session they invite us and we can access it, or when the Tropical Biodiversity Association capacity building, which is a project that is financed by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. So, we as [an organisation] we do not have, but ... if we had long-term projects, we could budget for them. There are universities that are having some tailored courses where staff can easily participate and because there is a cost, we find it hard to participate. And one of the approaches we are using is participating in the international conferences, where there is experience sharing in November. myself and two other staff were in Glasgow for the COP26 where it was also like a capacity building where we could share and learn from others. But in all of this we had to squeeze a limited budget or cut down on staff remuneration, which we all agree on, so we can cover such costs which we do not have provisions for. If we had a long-term project we could have an element of capacity building and in the short term it is not possible, they do not accept short-term proposals with a session on capacity building. (WCA_01-01_DD)

8.6: Barriers Related to a Lack of Opportunities

A lack of availability of opportunities was frequently cited by survey respondents as a barrier to technical expertise capacity strengthening (41 / 236, or 17%) and leadership capacity strengthening (31 / 236, or 13%). Interview participants similarly highlighted how a generalised lack of capacity strengthening opportunities presents a barrier: "Right now we don't have any opportunities for strengthening. What we've had has been circumstantial" (LAC_01_KI). Another respondent stated, "We haven't really had any opportunities, but we would like to have them in order to strengthen what we already know with new knowledge, and be able to project ourselves into the future" (LAC_05_KI).

Participants pointed to specific gaps in the types of capacity strengthening opportunities available. One participant explained that "on humanitarian issues we haven't received any [training]" (LAC_05_KI). Another stated,

In [our region] particularly, we need human rights expertise, because there are many things happening in our department caused partly by the lack of knowledge about the armed conflict and about the ways to look for help, assistance and intervention. (LAC_02_KI)

Leadership strengthening opportunities in particular were frequently cited as not being available: “Everything is more centred on technical skills, more than leadership skills. There are no funds directed specially to that, or I haven’t identified them” (LAC_01-03_DD). Another stated, “We don’t have a lot of trainings for soft skills, such as critical thinking or leadership” (MEE_01-01_DD). Another participant described the lack of diverse types of training types, such as peer learning for leaders:

Many leaders understand what leadership is about and the different leadership styles; many have gone through training but the challenge is the application and another challenge at the executive level is loneliness because there are few programs that bring executive directors together to share not only their success but their challenges enabling them to learn from each other. I have only seen one programme called [organisation name], but should we wait until people are about to exit. (WCA_04_KI)

Similarly, some participants expressed that while capacity strengthening opportunities exist, they may be donor-driven and often not appropriate to the needs in a given context:

Capacity strengthening funding has reduced drastically, a lot of funds are going to [trainings on] interventions such as water and sanitation, GBV; in fact, between this year and last year I have gone for 6 capacity building programs on GBV, and I do not need it and the funders keep bringing it. When you look at UNFP, it is GBV; when you look at all these organisations, it is GBV. I have never heard of capacity strengthening for child protection, no one wants to remember them. I have been working in the orphanage for a long time and we have 300 children in my state that I have been working with, all the interventions I have done with them I google since there is no capacity strengthening to support this, and whatever is coming I would know about it because of my leadership position in NGOs. (WCA_05_KI)

Another participant spoke of how there may be a lack of opportunities targeted at an appropriate level for their staff:

A lot of the skills that we need cannot be learned from trainings by other NGOs. Usually, the trainers are not qualified enough to deliver 20% to 30% of the actual material. And sometimes the trainees have more knowledge than the trainers. (MEE_04_KI)

A lack of opportunities was often reported to interact with limited funding to exacerbate challenges of access. As one participant described simply, “The opportunities and funding for

trainings are limited" (MEE_01-03_DD). Some explained that access to more funds could help counter the lack of opportunities available in their area:

Regionally and nationally, I am not aware of any for now ... Locally, there are institutions that do trainings like [a local capacity strengthening organisation], but you have to pay. So CSOs cannot afford to take their management or staff. Regionally there are others in [our country], which offer such trainings but you have to have finances to be able to do these courses. (ESA_07_KI)

Another stated how lack of funding to access sufficient capacity strengthening can lead to a capacity gap within an organisation:

Right now we don't have any opportunities for strengthening. What we've had has been circumstantial. The foundation's director, me, has been working with very little. The only funds that we've received are from selling our courses. Also the volunteers want to work but we can't give them the technical and technological training. We need to be given the means, constant training and funding programs. (LAC_01_KI)

Some participants described how lack of information on or awareness of capacity strengthening opportunities was a barrier in their regions. One participant stated:

Inside the organizations I work with? No, it's not. For the capacity building opportunities, I hunt them for myself, I have to grab them like that. Because I know how important it is for me, because I am well aware that the work environment is very fast [inaudible] and I need to keep up with new trends. And I need to be up to date with everything that happens around me, especially now I'm combining between working in the humanitarian field and business. So I need to be able to follow up with this new progress. So I do, and I know that a lot of people would love to have that mentality or know how to seek that progress or how to find training opportunities, but they don't do. They don't know how. And it's not common that they would find a post on social media that would guide them through this. I know a lot of people who are struggling with this. (MEE_01_KI)

Another responded very simply when asked about their awareness of capacity strengthening opportunities in their region:

Interviewer: Ok, so, you said that there is awareness of avenues for capacity building, when you think of it regionally, apart from HLA are there any avenues that you are aware of?

ESA_05_KI: No.

Interviewer: Okay, you are not aware of any avenues where CSOs get [capacity strengthening]?

ESA_05_KI: No.

In some contexts, participants described a lack of appropriate capacity strengthening opportunities for individuals in different roles within their organisations. This was particularly prevalent in the Middle East, where one described a need for more human rights and advocacy training opportunities:

In our reality, people with technical expertise, such as report writing, proposal writing, networking are favoured by the donors. Unfortunately, these people with technical expertise don't always have the traits of civil society workers [advocates and human rights defenders]. (MEE_01-03_DD)

Another explained how opportunities might be poorly targeted, or when few opportunities are made available they go to privileged individuals within the organisation: "Sometimes the training comes only for managers so it's not equal. Other times there is only one spot for the whole organization. However, we try to share the knowledge within our organization" (MEE_01-01_DD). The respondent concluded simply, "some trainings are too advanced for some employees" (MEE_01-01_DD).

Sometimes, the internal hierarchy of the organisation itself could function as a barrier:

One of my responsibilities was working in the middle between the upper management and the field staff. Sometimes the field staff come to me and just complain about certain gaps that's hindering their performance and the upper management are not aware of that. And actually, it happens, they're not aware ... And sometimes the upper management don't want to face that reality, because it would cost them extra. They don't have these resources, and they don't have plans to cover these gaps. So it's better to ignore it, or just pretend it's not happening, and it will go away. (MEE_01_KI)

When asked about barriers to accessing leadership capacity strengthening, another explained: "the management itself might be a barrier, or let's say, the HR department or the staff, all trainings, the recruitment itself, if you are recruiting the right person in the right place. So it's all connected together" (MEE_02_01_DD).

8.7: Barriers Related to a Lack of Access

Accessibility of existing opportunities, such as geographic distance to the location of a training or not being invited to take part in existing capacity strengthening opportunity, was another commonly cited barrier to technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities (41 / 236, or 17%) and leadership capacity strengthening (31 / 236, or 13%).

This lack of access is often related to urban/rural divides. More opportunities were frequently found in larger urban centres where INGOs are located, leaving rural areas underserved, as one participant described:

Some areas have more opportunities than others. For example, [in] the centre of the country, [a large urban centre] has more opportunities than the north. You could find 100 programs there but nothing here. Also, [another large city] and [a third large city] have more attention because most NGOs like to have an office in these areas. (MEE_01-03_DD)

This could lead to particular challenges among rural-based organisations, whose experience could lag behind urban-based organisations: “In these rural areas, the organizations’ working style is very old (you feel like it’s from the 60s) and the teams do not have any technical expertise” (MEE_03_KI). The participant went on to say:

Unfortunately, people [in rural areas] lack the education and training on how to plan for a project, write proposals, implement projects, identify the targeted beneficiaries, communicate with donors and stakeholders. For these shortcomings, I blame the second type of organizations that are located in [local cities]. These organizations are like a network, you need to have connections in order to work with them. One of the reasons is security. After the current government took over, NGOs in the big cities started to keep the jobs within a certain network. (MEE_03_KI)

Similarly, language was cited as a barrier to accessing existing capacity strengthening opportunities within regions. As one interviewee summarised, “We have a lot of opportunities but one issue that we face is the language. Sometimes the same person goes to several trainings because of the language, while others don’t go because they won’t understand English” (MEE_01-01_DD). Another participant described how the challenge of language localisation intersects with digital training:

So we need to change, even the videos are available. But they are not many. So Hindi or Tamil or Telugu or whatever I mean, we need to do that. A lot needs to be done in this area. So my sense is that this whole capacity building

requires restructuring and innovative ways of designing programs using blending these new platforms with the previous ways of in person training and follow ups that will help. So I think we need to really put a lot of energy into redesigning capacity. (ASA_01_DD)

Even when participants are able to understand a second language such as English, they may not be fully fluent, impacting the effectiveness of peer learning and classroom interaction: “language becomes a barrier for people, who may speak English, may be able to listen, but then the interaction won't be the same or then they won't want to participate because they would struggle” (GBL_01_KI).

Note that language is a major factor in localisation efforts; see Section 9 for a full examination of themes of localisation that were raised in this study, and Section 9.1 for a review of how language and localisation interact.

8.8: Barriers Related to Staff Capacity

While not frequently cited in survey responses, interviewees occasionally referred to their personal capacity limits when considering whether to take on or complete capacity strengthening opportunities. One participant discussed the challenge of committing to long courses: “I want to sign in a course, and then I find that long term commitment. Just it kills it for me, for example, [trial off] Weekly, by seven hours, for a couple six months. No, I just can't, like it's not a master's degree. I can't be part of it. [laughter]” (MEE_02_KI). Another explained:

I do not know If this can be termed as a weakness. Sometimes you may gather staff to do the training, some other colleagues may be busy with their project activities and may not want to participate, they may want to attend the project activities. Secondly, some may attend the training for the incentives such as refreshments, and we as an organization are donor driven and donors do not give us funding for institutional support for capacity building. (WCA_02-01_DD)

Time commitments are increasingly a challenge in digital spaces, where more training opportunities are available, and quality can be more variable. Fatigue from sitting in front of a computer can also impact effectiveness. One participant linked barriers related to personal capacity with the difficulties of online education: “Face to face trainings and observing face to face is much better than online ones” [For online trainings] I just keep going, pressing Next. I want to reach the last. I swear. [laughter] I don't like to read” (MEE_02_01_DD).

Another dimension of staff capacity was the high turnover of staff and volunteers. Participants noted that, when volunteers or staff were trained, they were often able to move on to larger organisations that could afford higher stipends or salaries. While a success for the trainee, this caused serious challenges for some organisations:

*We should be building sustainable capacity so that they will be able to sustain themselves, one of the challenges we have is that when they send their volunteers to go for the free capacity building opportunities, the next opportunity they get they leave the organization because the organization is unable to contain them and pay for the stay. So, staff turnover becomes the order of the day, and that is because financial sustainability is a great challenge, we need to make sure the capacity building is linked with sustainable capacity programs to enable the personnel to stay...
(WCA_01_DD)*

8.9: Barriers due to Societal Structure

Societal or structural issues were commonly cited as barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities (40 / 236, or 17%). In particular, the external barriers identified pertained to societal barriers, structural barriers, and context-specific barriers related to issues of security and protection (frequently associated with persecution at societal and/or state levels), regional instability and conflict, and broader societal equality, diversity and inclusivity barriers. While the reporting of societal barriers in survey responses was highly regionalised, participants in all regions described society-wide challenges which prevented or limited access to capacity strengthening opportunities. As expected, the specific types of societal barriers varied dramatically between regions.

Participants described the challenge of fostering good governance and effective, people-centred coordination among organisations in their region, such as one respondent in Latin America:

*[T]here is a lack of governance in the cities with the most migration flows, so they end up abandoning everyone: the ones who arrived, the ones who were already there. There is a lack of coordination. There is no governance, no articulation among the different entities, there is a fight between political leaders to see who gets more points in certain activities or disputes. What that does is great harm to base organizations, to the population, to the country.
(LAC_01-01_DD)*

Another described a similar scenario in their country in Asia:

But in civil society, we don't have that ability to come together very quickly. I mean, there are networks, but the ability to come together and speak in one language, these are these other stakeholders that would require a sectoral leadership. And it's I'm not talking about a single person, but I'm saying that that leadership ecosystem has to be nurtured. It's going beyond organization, and to enable 1000s of organizations to operate on their own terms with autonomy with their own vision, as opposed to, you know, being prey to the other sectors' preferences, of course, you need to respond to that. But you must have your own standing. So, some investment, or I'd say not some, I mean, greater amount of resources, time and intellectual things has to be invested in building a sectoral leadership. So, I'm sort of, you know, a kind of strong advocate of sectoral leadership, as opposed to only organization leadership. (ASA_01_KI)

Other commonly cited barriers related to support from government for local organisations; in some contexts, local civil society activity can be seen as undermining state authority or acting contrary to state interests. As one participant described: “Many leaders I know of small organizations that are not supported by the government are usually monitored and sometimes harassed by the authorities. Thus, security is an issue here for humanitarian leaders and workers” (MEE_03_KI). Another participant described a similar political landscape in their country:

[About 20 years ago] the government of [our country] decided and asked some of the international donors, particularly some of the bilateral donors, to end their bilateral cooperation. And ... decided to work with four or five bilateral agencies other than the multilateral organizations like the World Bank, UN agencies. So, in a way it started affecting the resourcing of the NGOs. ... [the government] has become more critical and more critical towards the civil society sector. And particularly those organizations which have been promoting human rights promoting democracy. Those who have been advocating for policy changes ... And a variety of regulatory instruments have been used to control the civil society organizations. So, in a nutshell, the legal and regulatory environment have become much more regressive. (ASA_01_KI)

Participants also mentioned regional violence and insecurity as a barrier to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities.

I can say that there is a lot of shrinking of the civic space, we have the southern and northern part of [the country], when you think of [the armed group there], all the international players have evacuated. The civil society in the southern

part has moved. There is nothing like [a local training organisation], it no longer is there. It is difficult for us to access all these opportunities again, there is no more capacity strengthening. What they want us to train on is just a little sub-granting, anti-corruption and this is not what we are interested in, then they give you a small grant and off they go. There is no sustainability plan, nothing. The capacity building I got, such opportunities are very rare, and most people I know were not able to get it. (WCA_05_KI)

Notably, the research team elected not to pursue interviews in countries where there was concern that participants' statements could put them at risk, for example in Syria and Afghanistan. As such, these barriers were underreported in interviews.

In some regions, society-wide discrimination regarding gender and other intersectional identifiers led to challenges in accessing capacity-strengthening opportunities. One participant explained:

Challenges such as culture have affected leadership because most leaders take culture into consideration into their objectives, goals, job titles, job descriptions of any employee or volunteer of the organization. So culture is a big challenge that causes conflict; in working environments everywhere; in our culture women cannot lead; in our culture women cannot employee, or be HR officers, or administrative managers, or financial managers; in our culture decisions cannot be made by women; and in our culture organization led by women are not recognized or given the attention that they need. (ESA_07_KI)

Another explained how women are excluded from important informal work activities because of social norms:

After meetings ... the men go and drink beer and the women go home, and they negotiate and continue the conversation at the bar over the beer and then the next day they go back in the meeting and jointly present their views while the women are clueless because they were home. (ESA_06_KI)

The cultural diversity present in some regions and countries was at times cited as both an opportunity and a challenge when engaging in capacity-strengthening opportunities. For example, one participant stated:

There is a need for heterogeneous capacity strengthening. You cannot give people from different areas, different education levels, different sectors the same capacity training. When we look at diversity we have to look at how we can incorporate this within organisations. (WCA_05_KI)

Another expanded on the opportunities and challenges arising from diverse societies:

Looking at the challenge of diversity, diversity is good but it is also challenging. When you talk of diversity you are talking about bringing people from different backgrounds and different cultures to work in a certain place and the areas where they have been brought to work in also has its own culture. So it is difficult to make the learnings and way of doings from different cultures to blend, some people are very nonchalant when it comes learning, some people learn better when it is physical, others when it is physical, and others through videos. So, it is difficult to ensure everyone is learning at the same level and there is no formula that has been put in place to ensure this happens. This is my own take on diversity and capacity strengthening. (WCA_02-02_DD)

8.10: Barriers due to Digital Access and Technological Infrastructure

After COVID-19, these become virtual and no one wants to return to in-person. It is a cause for concern because pre-COVID we had moved ten steps forward but now we have moved twelve steps backward. The truth is that face-to-face is better than virtual, even if virtual is cheaper. When we talk face-to-face you get a better outcome and action, while, it is virtual once the meeting is done no one wants to follow up on what has been discussed and you have to keep pushing and in the process waste a lot of resources to get things moving. It is very frustrating. (WCA_05_KI)

Online or digital capacity strengthening opportunities represent both an opportunity and a risk with respect to accessing capacity strengthening. Digital solutions can be globally scaled for very little cost, allowing for cheaper, more flexible trainings reaching more participants than would have seemed conceivable even ten years ago. The restrictions and risks involved in face-to-face gatherings due to COVID-19 has only accelerated this pivot to digital solutions.

However, these seemingly universal benefits are not accessible to many potential participants, and an increasingly universal pivot to digital capacity strengthening solutions is leaving many people behind. It is important to be aware of this limitation, as digital solutions are also often monitored and evaluated digitally: this approach closes channels for those who have been excluded to offer their feedback, effectively rendering them invisible or unseeable to MEAL mechanisms. In addressing technical and leadership capacity gaps (See Section 5.1 for a full discussion of digital capacity needs), respondents acknowledged the need to improve digital

skills among development practitioners in digital communication, the use of accounting softwares, leveraging on social media to showcase, impact and create visibility.

It should be noted that the requirement that participants engage with this study via digital methods was a key limitation of this research plan (See Section 2.4 for a detailed discussion). As such, barriers discussed here may not be representative of all barriers related to digital access which exist in digitally underserved regions. In addition, the barriers which were captured by the study and presented here are likely under-reported.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is inherently a significant barrier to improving any technological and computer related skills as well as advancing internet competency. This barrier is exacerbated by and impossible to address without adequate access to technological resources and infrastructure. Barriers to accessing online deliveries of capacity strengthening initiatives of course contribute to increasing the capacity gap between those who require support in developing digital literacy skills and those with higher level of digital literacies, who are able to access trainings, continue to develop skills and strengthen capacities, and have access to online resources, networking, and funding opportunities.

Many participants spoke of this growing digital divide. When asked about their greatest challenge to accessing training, one participant stated simply “Technology and computing” (LAC_01-02_DD). Another explained, “most of the training is online, and for me if you want someone to learn something especially in the African countries, we are not good in technology, so we can be distracted by other things someone can be in the meeting but may not be there physically and you expect them to learn?” (WCA_02-01_DD). Another explained that:

Technology would be a barrier ... a lot of the local NGOs in the country - and I actually it was like that, I work with NGOs in [several countries in the region] - and all had the same issue. Local organizations are not equipped with the right knowledge about current technology. So that would be a barrier. Because if you're trying to work with them using Google Sheets, they don't know how to use it. Sometimes they don't know how to use Zoom. So you need to give them a short tutorial, about the technology you're using, that will be used during this training. And then they become equipped with the knowledge and start going through the training, but still it's a barrier at the beginning. (MEE_01_KI)

Taken together, these responses describe a negative feedback inherent in limited access to digital capacity building: in order to access digital capacity building opportunities, participants must first be given digital literacy training. This initial training must also be accessible.

Participants indicated that digital literacy, technology and internet competency are related to EDI as many groups with lower overall literacy and education levels and socio-economic status experience this barrier more significantly. One participant explained: “Obviously the older they are, the more they struggle. Nonetheless, I think the petition from them is always that they hope someday there is a course that can help us get a better sense of all this: social media, technology use” (LAC_05_KI). Another participant described how “rural and remote areas don’t have internet access, if it’s not that they buy their pin and use it for a few moments to be able to communicate. It’s very hard to access these opportunities” (LAC_02_KI).

ICT Infrastructure

Participants also indicated that the digital barriers to accessing capacity strengthening were not only about gaps in existing capacities but also about the presence of the required digital infrastructure in workplaces and communities. Some respondents pointed to limited internet access; persistent unstable internet connectivity; and limited access to computers and ICT equipment and tools. As one participant explained, “Some of the CBOs may not have access to internet, I think if it is possible to consider partners who can cascade these trainings to CBOs who do not have access to these kind of trainings” (WCA_02-01_DD).

In addition to shared infrastructure such as internet connectivity, respondents shared the need for increased access to modern technology, innovative machinery and the need to harness skills of civil society in appreciating technology advancements like coding to advance their work. As one participant described, the need for physical technology was a corequisite for digital capacity strengthening: “What do we need? Good cameras for the volunteers, computers for editing, training in documentaring” (LAC_01_KI).

In particular, the research team had direct experience with ICT gap when interacting with research participants in more remote areas of Southern and Western Africa. Respondents in these regions had a more difficult time accessing the internet than their counterparts in other regions. This impacted data collection methodologies, as participants struggled to secure stable connections to participate in interviews, as this example illustrates:

Interviewer: what are some of the challenges surrounding women in leadership? ... Can you hear us?

ESA_05_KI: Hello, I am sorry about that. My network is misbehaving, kindly repeat the question.

Interviewer: [repeats the question].

ESA_05_KI: Yes, the fact that I am a woman...the major challenge is our work and our feminine duty...it is not balancing well, there is always a feminine....(INAUDIBLE)..is to important...to find...how..this is the biggest hinderance in civil society... (INAUDIBLE)

Interviewer: I am just trying to catch what you said, the network is bad.

The cost of metered data connections was also a factor in conducting interviews with participants. Some Interviews suffered from continuous interruptions and took double the time allocated. These challenges led the research team to implement innovations such as carrying out asynchronous voice interviews via WhatsApp voice notes.

Participants discussed the impact of this restriction on their daily work. For example: “I think what we talked about earlier on internet connectivity issues determines a lot, the more quality the connectivity it eases communication. I mean for any kind of departmental activity communication is key. It is important that we look into the internet issue” (ESA_04_KI). Participants also indicated that this challenge does not just impede their regular work but also opportunities for digital capacity strengthening: “Not all the staff of an organisation have [unimpeded] access to learning, because some are stationed in the areas where there is no internet access [for] learning opportunities” (ESA_02_DD).

Where ICT infrastructure was present but limited, respondents talked of the expense of data connections as restricting availability:

We have many organisations that are unable even to cover running costs, I am talking of admin, let alone overhead costs, so you can imagine how hard it is for them to access capacity building sessions. Some of the courses are online and are payable and others are free, and they do not have the internet, and so the challenges are enormous in most organisations. (WCA_01_DD)

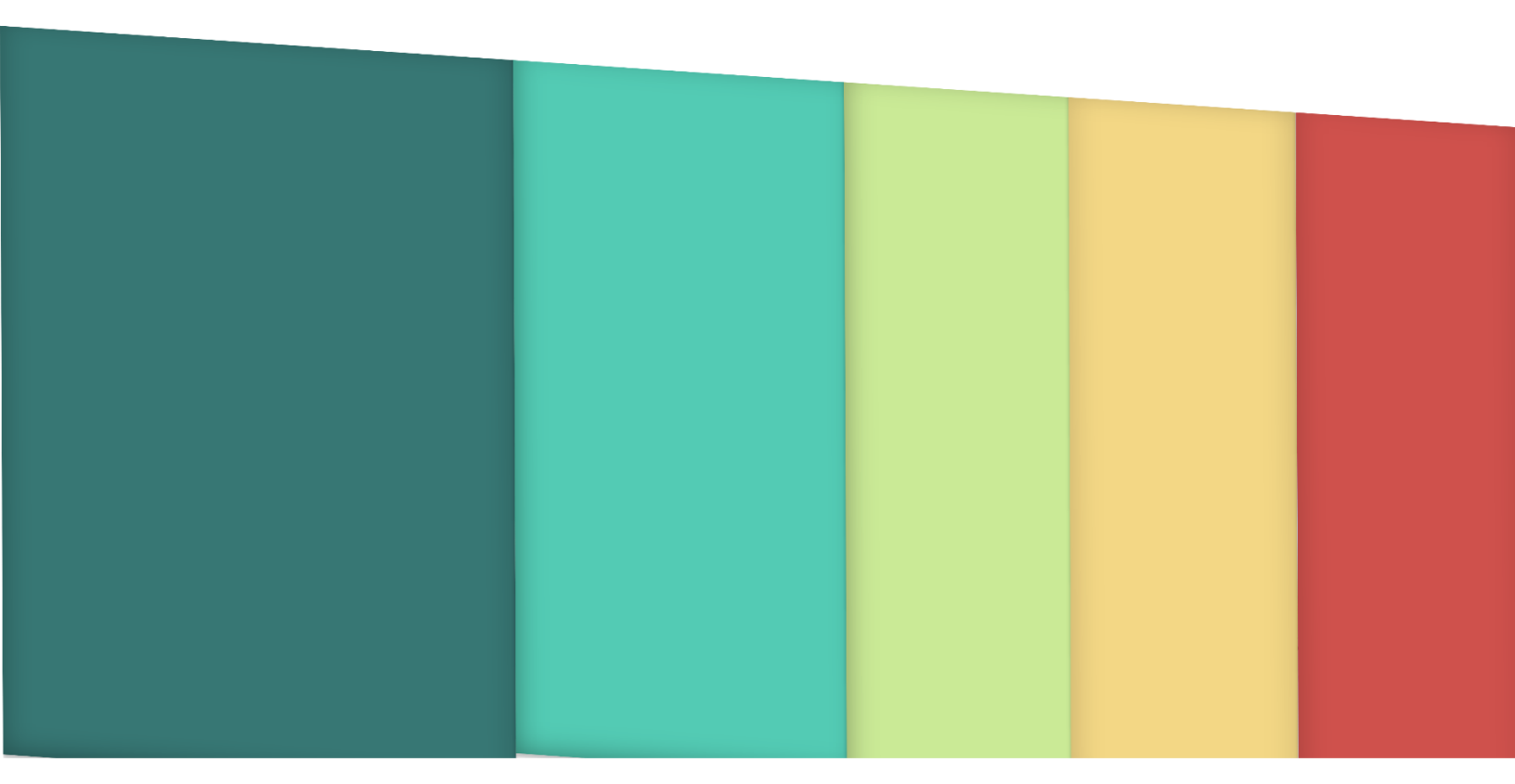
A global training provider described the difficulties that some of their attendees had in attending online sessions: “joining a workshop or a webinar uses a lot of bandwidth or costs, so can you provide a dongle or things that we don't have the budget for or had not planned on? So yeah, there's still people who are left behind in that way” (GBL_01_KI).

Further highlighting the intersectional nature of barriers to accessing capacity strengthening, there was a strong distinction in the availability and affordability of technological infrastructure between urban and rural areas. As one participant described:

It is another barrier, especially when you are doing an international training and it is online with an NGO in the rural areas. I am in the city and it is much better here but this is the kind of service we get, to log into zoom I have to buy a larger megabit but it is still giving me challenges, now imagine a smaller NGO in a remote area, it will not work. (WCA_05_KI)

This often pushed participants to implement creative solutions. As another participant explained, “The geographical area needed a Wi-Fi installation, something that we could not

afford within the set term, for the only project we had at hand and this pushed us to think outside the box to mobilise resources to finance the entire thing” (ESA_04_K1).



Section 9: Localisation

Yes, [localisation is] very important. Because, again, from personal experience, I had encounters with trainers from different parts of the world, and they failed at delivering the message of their training because they weren't able to localize the background of this information. Sometimes I attend training with an American instructor. And they're applying the training from their background, their cultural background. Sometimes, if I'm attending the course with [local] participants, not everyone is familiar with American culture. (MEE_01_KI)

One is the understanding of localisation itself; most people understand it as giving up the entire space to local organisations and pushing out INGOs. I view localisation differently, I see it as the (local) people being the heart, and every other actor shaping up to meet these needs. (ESA_03_KI)

Localisation is "the positionality and experiences of local stakeholders in the production of knowledge". (Mwambari, 2019, n.p.)

Throughout the course of this study, localisation was highlighted both by research participants and in literature as a cross-cutting theme related to *capacity strengthening*, in particular with respect to supporting smaller local NGOs. Topics related to *localisation* were raised by participants when discussing terminology, capacity strengthening needs, preferred modalities of capacity strengthening, and barriers to capacity strengthening. Localisation was a central pillar of discussions related to both technical expertise and leadership capacity strengthening needs.

Respondents stated that localisation is an emerging concern among civil society actors in the humanitarian field due to an increasing awareness of power imbalances and resulting inefficiencies in response. As one participant described:

For me, localization is letting go of power from northern agencies to the global south organisations and moving most of the operations, financial decision-making, accountability, and basically decision making power to the global south. This is localization, for me, in a nutshell. (ESA_06_KI)

While a study of localisation was not a primary goal of this study, participants frequently raised localisation-related concerns when discussing capacity strengthening opportunities, needs, and barriers to access. As such, out of respect for respondents' priorities and key interests, the research team has included a summary of these discussions here. While we recognize that "letting go of power from northern agencies" is a sector-wide issue that will require

coordinated effort, we believe that this process can begin with an openness to considering alternative conceptualisations of challenges and definitions.

9.1: Language and Localisation

Before we present a discussion of participants' definitions of localisation, we must address the role that language plays in the ability to engage in this discourse. The terminology that is used in the humanitarian sector is typically created by and for international actors, with little regard for existing civil society and emergency response work already being carried out by local actors. One participant described a need for the establishment of a common understanding between CSOs and donors in order to ensure that projects are aligned in terms of needs, expectations, and outputs:

Here we don't have the same understanding or even terminology for diversity, inclusivity, and equality. That's why we need to sit together and educate each other about these topics. Also, we need to discuss these issues with the donors because they create issues when they ask us to do the job in a certain way. (MEE_01-01_DD)

In addition to challenges in terminology, some respondents pointed out that English was the primary and/or exclusive language of capacity strengthening (as well as reporting, granting, etc). This led to issues for at least some respondents in every region. The same participant from above went on to say:

Most donors use English in their training which is not the language of our country. Many times, they mention advanced terminologies that we don't understand. This affects how much we learn from these training sessions. ... Many of our employees don't know English. In the NGO world, it's always assumed that you speak English. It's different when you write a report in English or when you attend a whole technical training in English. (MEE_01-01_DD)

This sentiment was echoed by another respondent:

Sometimes language is a barrier, someone may not be brought up speaking English but they have that drive and they want to lead and do the thing for the community but because of this barrier the documents need to be translated, sometimes we use our local translators Some can speak it but not read it, so there are also literacy issues for CBOs. (WCA_02-01_DD)

When discourse is made inaccessible to the very people whom localisation efforts seek to engage, localisation bears the risk of being purely an intellectual exercise, rather than a tangible change in the way we work. As one participant explained:

There have been some discussions during the pandemic about colonialism vs. coloniality. And those intellectual lucubrations from people at NGOs who love to talk about de-coloniality which they say is not the same as decolonialism... There have been other ways of coloniality that have been happening. There are authors and authors, it's a never ending discussion. It's a trending topic, there are always different trending topics. For example, right now in [this region] the trending topic is violence against women, with everything that has been happening. Migrant human trafficking is also a trend. The last 3 years, peacebuilding was also a trend. Integral sexual education is also trying to come back. But I say: why don't we work all this together? (LAC_04_KI)

9.2: Participant Definitions of Localisation

To avoid making false assumptions of common understanding and common terminology, we solicited participants' personal definitions of the term *localisation*. In most cases, respondents referred to localisation from a perspective of building local ownership, local organizations taking lead in partnerships, and local solutions or locally owned responses to challenges being accepted and respected at the national and global levels. One participant explained that while international partnerships are essential to humanitarian response, power dynamics must be shifted to allow local organisations to lead:

We cannot achieve only as international partners, we cannot achieve only as national partners, we cannot achieve only as a government, we can only achieve through partnership. I think the lead is always a local organisation, and they can be supported by international partners. Moreover, I think that the OCHA mandate on development is to encourage partnership and move away from emergency funding all the time. The approach is to understand that we cannot achieve alone but through partnering with one another, this may be one of the ways out in this crisis. (ESA_04_KI)

Respondents distinguished various actors in localisation, stating that both international actors (INGOs, bilateral donors) and local actors (NGOs, community based organisations and thematic networks formed by national players) have a role in achieving a more localised approach. Some respondents stated that international actors' engagement in localisation is predicated on supporting local action and transferring skills and power to their local partners. Local partners' engagement in localisation, meanwhile, involves building local skills and

capacities to be in order to be recognised as equal players in the humanitarian and development fields. For example, one respondent explained:

My understanding of localisation is that we bring what is at the international level and bring it to the local level. For instance, if the international level is talking about climate change we bring it to the local context; I am viewing it in the terms of internationalisation and localisation of issues. (ESA_01_KI)

This mirrors definitions of localisation found in the literature, where localisation is described as a decentralising reorganisation of priorities and increased centralisation of local actors, in order to improve quality of response and resource access (CHS Alliance 2015; Sphere Project 2018; ICVA 2018). Localisation can also encompass a shift in the underlying systems of humanitarian action, in which local organisations take a lead role in response, local ownership of interventions increases among local organisations, and international NGOs reposition themselves towards supporting roles. Notably, in the context of localisation, this research acknowledges that local humanitarian action may not be explicitly defined or conceptualised as “humanitarian” (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002), and as such the research team has attempted to maintain open-ended definitions which do not restrict participation to organisations which self-identify as humanitarian in mandate or scope.

Respondents had varied comfort levels with the term localisation. Some respondents held understandings closely aligned with the language used by international humanitarian organizations. Others had never heard of localisation or believed that the term itself was fundamentally flawed. One respondent provided an example of an internationally-aligned definition, stating:

I think [localisation] is giving the ability to make sure these organisations drive their own agenda by giving them the responsibility to lead the projects and to co-create the projects and processes that will be undertaken; and if localisation is done properly then we will have more organisations and communities become invested in the work that is done- and the sector will be all the more vibrant and effective. (WCA_05_KI)

Another participant had never heard the specific term, but was nevertheless driven by the spirit of participatory, community driven response rather than donor driven projects:

This is the first time I am hearing about localisation, and the first thing that came to mind, is how to locate the communities you want to work with, the second idea is if you are working with communities what you want to do should come from the communities themselves and not just because you think you can obtain funding and so you select a community. (WCA_01_DD)

Other participants were more critical, prompting us to ask who localisation actually serves as a concept, and how dialogue around localisation has not translated to a real shift in power within their sector and region:

Discussions do happen but localization itself does not happen. The agenda at the end of the day is driven by the donor, we have funding on education and everyone starts working on education; we have funding for HIV/AIDs and now all the health organisations suddenly transform into HIV/AIDs organisations. For all practical reasons it is donor-driven and there is hardly any localization. (ASA_05_KI)

The global reality may indeed lie somewhere in between the lived experiences of these two participants, however, donors and international actors must take careful action to ensure that the growing discourse on localisation (and associated terms like decolonisation) translate into action, lest they maintain the existing power dynamics and systemic inequalities.

9.3: Localisation and Capacity Strengthening

Participants highlighted several perspectives regarding links between localisation and capacity strengthening activities.

One common subject raised by participants was the lack of availability of locally-specific capacity strengthening and of locally-designed capacity strengthening initiatives. Respondents noted that the focus on capacity needs and priorities is based on international rather than local priorities. A participant in Latin America described the following situation:

As an institution, once we had some workshops on project management, but we didn't understand because they had an American way, the framework was different. They tried to put in place their own processes. But I couldn't work with that. And our youths were bored, because they weren't intervening. (LAC_04_KI)

Another observed that “The information they give is very vague, they give examples that have no relation at all with reality and with what we want to learn” (LAC_01-03_DD). When asked about the localisation of capacity strengthening interventions, a participant stated,

[T]hese organisations must be locally-driven. Since the local [organisations] need the capacity building, it follows that I should be the one to define the capacity building and therefore, the capacity building should be locally-led. We have used the word capacity building a lot, they are mainly project-based

and to deliver these projects some things are required for compliance (to international funding) purposes. (ESA_03_KI)

Similarly, one participant observed that international trainers often underestimate the skill and expertise of local organisations:

They stay on the basic stuff, they don't go deeper. They explain again how to do the logical framework, and it's like... okay, I do this everyday, I don't need help in this, I need maybe what other alternatives are available in the formulation. So for example we've seen something about agile methodologies..." (LAC_01-03_DD).

Another participant observed that local organisations often have more experience than international facilitators: "A lot of trainers or INGOs come to make capacity building for local NGOs. But unfortunately, the local NGOs make the capacity building for INGOs" (MEE_04_KI). Conversely, international capacity strengthening organisations should be aware of the needs of less experienced organisations, including differing language ability:

People who work away from the [big cities] don't usually hear about training opportunities and don't even have the capacity to even apply. They're like a kid in 1st grade trying to do a 5th-grade exam. For example, if the big NGOs make a platform in Arabic and share it with the smaller NGOs, the local NGOs will definitely write and apply, they might not write in a professional way but they will still try to explain their needs. This is what should be done by the funders if they want to reach the local communities that are outside the centre and outside the dominant network. (MEE_03_KI)

Others advocated for increased adoption and appreciation of local knowledge, in particular with respect to localised models of program management and MEAL. It is observed that while local organisations may have different but effective models, their ability to negotiate or convince partners to adopt this knowledge is lacking. As one participant described:

An example of their [local] programming: they do community engagement and organising that is unmatched, they have amazing models of accountability that donors are not even comfortable with, that work well, amazing measurement models that do not subscribe to the current metrics and the like. So we try to examine what success looks like from their lens, not the donors' lens or the INGOs thing, and then we come up with a model on how to measure how this success looks like. You will find that many CBOs are not interested in M&E. They view it as a function that is played by donors and

*INGOs. They did not see it as a tool to help them achieve their goal.
(ESA_05_KI)*

Another specifically highlighted the difficulty of convincing international actors to respect local ways of knowing or understanding:

I think it is also a factor of organisations lacking negotiation skills, especially with donors. There is an organisation that works in the East African region and they do great work in education, so there was an instance where they had to write 10 different grant reports to their donors both narrative and financial, and they thought to themselves that it's not feasible. What they did was they called a meeting with all their donors with a reporting template, explaining why and how the template will help them be more efficient and less cumbersome for both them and their donors. They had the negotiation and after a couple of meetings they agreed and now the organisation only sends one report. (WCA_04_KI)

This corroborates Sosthenes & Erdilmen's (2020) argument on the need for localization "to change the humanitarian community's structures of funding, collaboration between international and local actors and the state, and myths of efficiency-based response to humanitarian emergencies which render local actors more vulnerable and less a part of decision-making processes that affect their lives directly."

9.4: Localisation, Technical Expertise, and Leadership

The correlation between technical expertise and localisation was largely typified by frustration. Many participants voiced concern that technical expertise capacity strengthening opportunities available aligned only with international priorities. As one respondent described, they have asked for capacity strengthening support in:

...understanding innovative financing, understanding climate finance, understanding climate accounting, understanding the new landscape of resource mobilisation, and the new resources that are out there that are not understood by the global south organisations. So, there is a lot to learn from the global south because the global north is not able to understand how to tap into the resources that are in the African context, or the southern context. There is a need to understand impact investors, PPPs, social enterprises and all these things as instruments that can be able to tap into. There is a lot that is out there, and I am trying to read, but it is like a jungle and I am trying to understand but I hardly have anytime to read these hours and hours of

research and who you need to connect to, to tap into this. It is a new mantra, the old mantra was applying for grants. (ESA_06_KI)

Another respondent, based in Latin America, explained that international capacity strengthening organisations should listen to the specific technical needs of different local organisations:

I think that they have to listen to the specific needs of organisations...and not act like all organisations need the same thing in issues like technical or leadership capacities. Focus on each one, it's obviously more work, but not all organisations need the same things although they are in the same country or region. (LAC_01-03_DD).

A participant in the Middle East suggested that feedback mechanisms on online courses would be helpful in achieving a more localised capacity strengthening regime:

I would love it if they would give us the chance to vote or suggest [online] courses. But they already have the courses they want. And they just send us emails to attend the courses. And that's it. But I would love to give us maybe to feel free to suggest. (MEE_02-02_DD)

One participant explained how more opportunities to receive training in localised skillsets, relevant to local contexts and local ways of knowing, would improve outcomes and decrease reliance on international funding structures:

The other area we need strengthening is resource mobilisation within the African content tapping into African wealth and African resources, tapping into the resources within ourself to serve the people we need to serve, that is tapping into the private sectors, talking to the Dangote's and the middle class, why is there so much money going to the church what about the NGO sector. Tap into all of this because there is money, why do African NGOs continue to be dependent on the outside world. With this it will lead to right-sizing because you are using the resources available, and you are in the organisation that fits your operating context, and for me this is truly a local organisation, otherwise you will always be dependent and dependence syndrome will never go away. (ESA_05_KI)

Yet another voiced a desire to see more technical capacity strengthening that would allow organisations and communities to:

...inform priorities, advocate for themselves, because that is what we want to achieve, that shift in power. Where ultimately it is communities, because it is communities who know the reality, you have lived experience, and then the member becomes the channel to strengthen the capacity of that community. So it is by shifting the way we think about localization, beyond funds, the content of our initiatives, but also, that it informs and that it's backed up by a governance structure. (GBL_01_KI).

Similarly, internal leadership and governance structures could either advance or impede technical expertise and leadership within local CSOs. Survey respondents noted that leadership needs to be enhanced in areas of leadership styles. Additionally, some respondents revealed that capacity building was a reserve for senior management thus point to how internal structures can impede organisational capacity building. Words like transparency, accountability were also telling of the state of leadership.

Taken together, it is clear that there is a global desire for more capacity strengthening opportunities in technical expertise and leadership that respond local needs to rather than conform to international priorities, misunderstandings, biases, and assumptions of what is skill-strengthening is required at the local level.

9.5: Localisation and Donor Priorities

A significant impediment to localisation reported by participants was the influence of external funding on organisational autonomy, project development, and implementation. As one respondent described a situation where local humanitarian actors are:

[o]verwhelmed with too much community work, most of the time you find the leaders deviating from their goals...We do not have leaders who can stand and say "this is what we are fighting for." We end up being persuaded by funding. They say they have 200million dollars and say this is the project you want. We find out this is what they will pursue ... If we can have a civil society that is economically sound and that is able to sustain itself, this is what we can say has been well led. There is good leadership there. (ESA_05_KI)

An interviewee from the Middle East region similarly explained the potential for externally imposed constraints on projects due to receiving international funding, and the results if the organisation prioritises their independence in project development:

So when we start our projects, there's no one come to choose from us, the choosing from youth, from our team. But if we take funds from donors, maybe we should implement what we don't need, but now we do what we need. So

it's our independence and we have independence and in our choosing to start a project, to work with our family if it's good vocabulary about our community. (MEE_04_KI)

The issue of donor-imposed conceptualisations of local priorities and needs resonated strongly with one participant from the Middle East in particular, who spoke at length about how the financial instability of CSOs inherently makes them malleable to the priorities of donors:

Many ideas from outside are being spread here because the donors impose them. Not everything we hear we should follow. The financial instability of the CSOs is what pushes them to follow some ideas that they are not convinced with. Sometimes we go in circles to make things work for the donors. Many ideas need to be rejected before the money is spent on them. (MEE_01_DD)

They went on to elaborate about how donor goals can even impede local efforts to improve the access of equity seeking groups/inclusion:

Inclusivity is not always achievable because sometimes the donor wants us to work with a specific population or in a specific geographical area, but we always try to work on it through our programs and in our organisation. For diversity, it's the same thing. (MEE_01_DD)

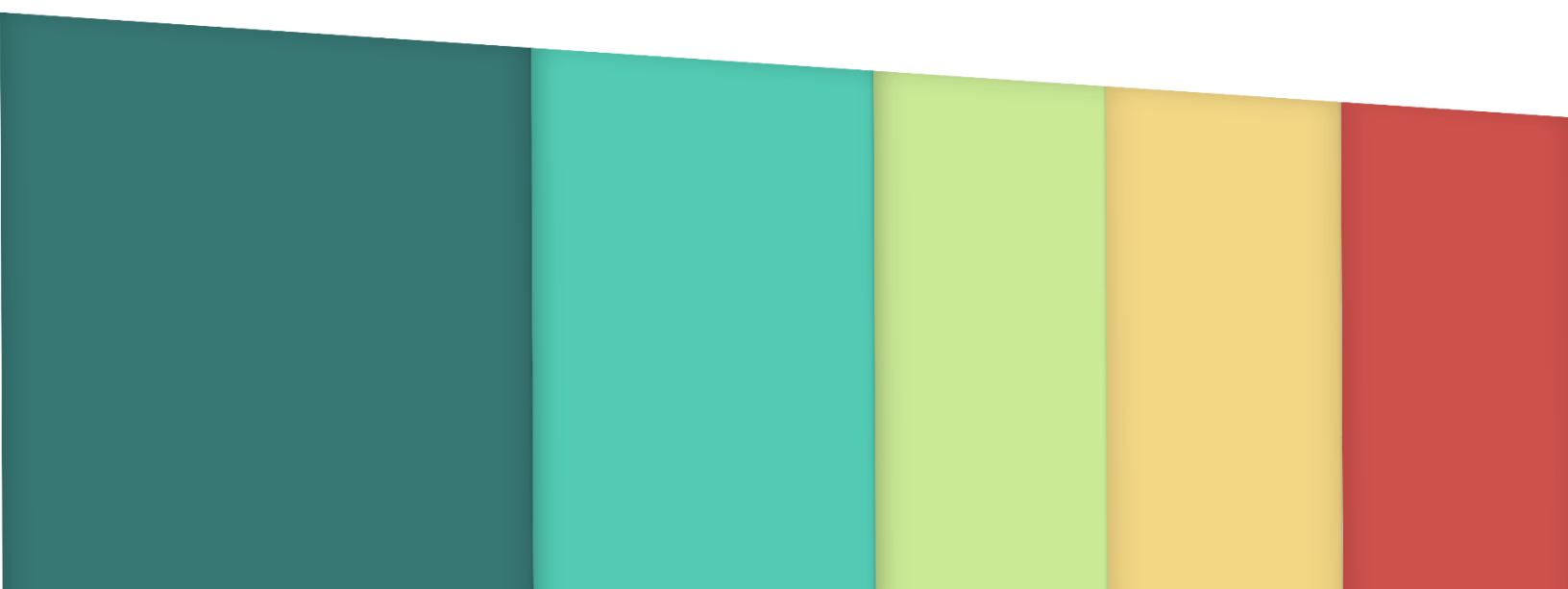
In a similar vein, participants indicated the donor priorities often overturned local priorities and capacity strengthening needs assessments. The same participant from above explicitly indicated that, in their experience, donors provide funding only for capacity strengthening opportunities that are in line with their interests and priorities. Specifically, the interviewee stated that leadership capacity strengthening opportunities were not available because they were not a donor priority: “[do we have] leadership [capacity strengthening]? no. It’s not very attractive for our donors” (MEE_01_DD).

The same interviewee further explained that donors prioritise capacity strengthening in areas related to MEAL and reporting because it is useful to them, rather than providing support in areas that are useful or needed by the local organisation:

The EU helps us with capacity strengthening because we operate some of their projects. Usually, trainings come to specific people in the organization, not to everyone, and they are based on what the donor wants, not based on the needs of the local NGO. In our organization, I think we lack communication skills, it's not a very difficult thing, but also it's not an easy thing. As a team, if we cannot communicate then we have a big problem. The donors never

trained us on such topics. While M&E is something that interests the donors, because it helps them with reporting, they always train us on it. It's important to know how, when and why trainings are taking place in any NGO. Also, they never assess our skills. Each member of the team has a different skill level. Sometimes people with beginner skills have to attend advanced sessions which is a problem. (MEE_01_DD)

It should be noted, however, that this cited frustration is in direct contrast to the strong global trend of describing a capacity strengthening need in exactly the same subjects of MEAL and reporting (as explored in Section 5.1). This highlights the challenges inherent in attributing universal localised ownership to any international initiatives. Perhaps this paradox can also be explained in part by the desire for local actors to learn these skills to better engage with the current universal international fundraising systems; with a more localised system of awarding funding, these overarching skill-strengthening needs may in fact become less universal over time.



Section 10: Regional Snapshots

10.1: Regional Snapshot - Asia

Quantitative Findings

Role and Gender - Asia				
Professional Role	Woman	Man	Other	Grand Total
(no data)		4		4
Leadership	4	36	1	41
Operational Support	3	3		6
Technical Specialist		10		10
Grand Total	7	53	1	61

Most Common Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs - Asia

Project Management	Resource Management	Capacity Building	Fundraising	Emergency / Disaster Response	Communications	Organisational Management	Technology	Good Governance	Coordination and Community Engagement
30	10	9	8	8	7	7	6	6	5
Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational	Technical	Operational	Operational	Technical	Technical	Operational

Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening - Asia

	Societal /					Organisation				
	Financial	Structural	No barriers	Availability	EDI	Accessibility	Localisation	Hierarchy	Many	Capacity
Woman	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Man	17	14	9	9	8	5	4	3	2	1
Other	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	18	14	10	9	9	5	4	3	3	2

Most Common Leadership Capacity Strengthening Needs - Asia

Team Management	Interpersonal Skills	Strategy and Planning	Management (general)	Project Management	EDI	Capacity Building	EDI (internal)	Fundraising	Emergency / Disaster Response
16	12	9	8	8	5	4	4	3	3
Leadership	Leadership	Operational	Leadership	Operational	Technical	Operational	Leadership	Operational	Technical

Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening - Asia

	Societal /					Organisation				
	Financial	EDI	Accessibility	Availability	Structural	No barriers	Localisation	Hierarchy	Capacity	
Woman	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	
Man	11	10	8	7	5	3	3	2	1	
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	11	11	9	7	6	5	3	2	1	

Qualitative Findings – Asia

Stronger **sector-wide leadership is needed to promote coordination**, both within CSO networks and with other stakeholders.

- Regional barriers to coordination include resources, capacity, and language (spoken languages as well as technical terminology).
- Establishing a common vocabulary across the sector would facilitate more efficient coordination.

Among civil society, we don't have that ability to come together very quickly. There are networks, but the ability to come together and speak in one language with other stakeholders ... that would require a sectoral leadership ... So some investment or greater amount of resources, time, and intellectual [effort] has to be invested in building a sectoral leadership. (ASA_01_KI)

Lack of sufficient funding is a common barrier to accessing quality capacity strengthening opportunities.

- Funding is reported as a barrier to both accessing external capacity strengthening initiatives as well as undertaking internal capacity strengthening initiatives.
- Free or low-cost trainings are perceived as lower quality and less specialised.

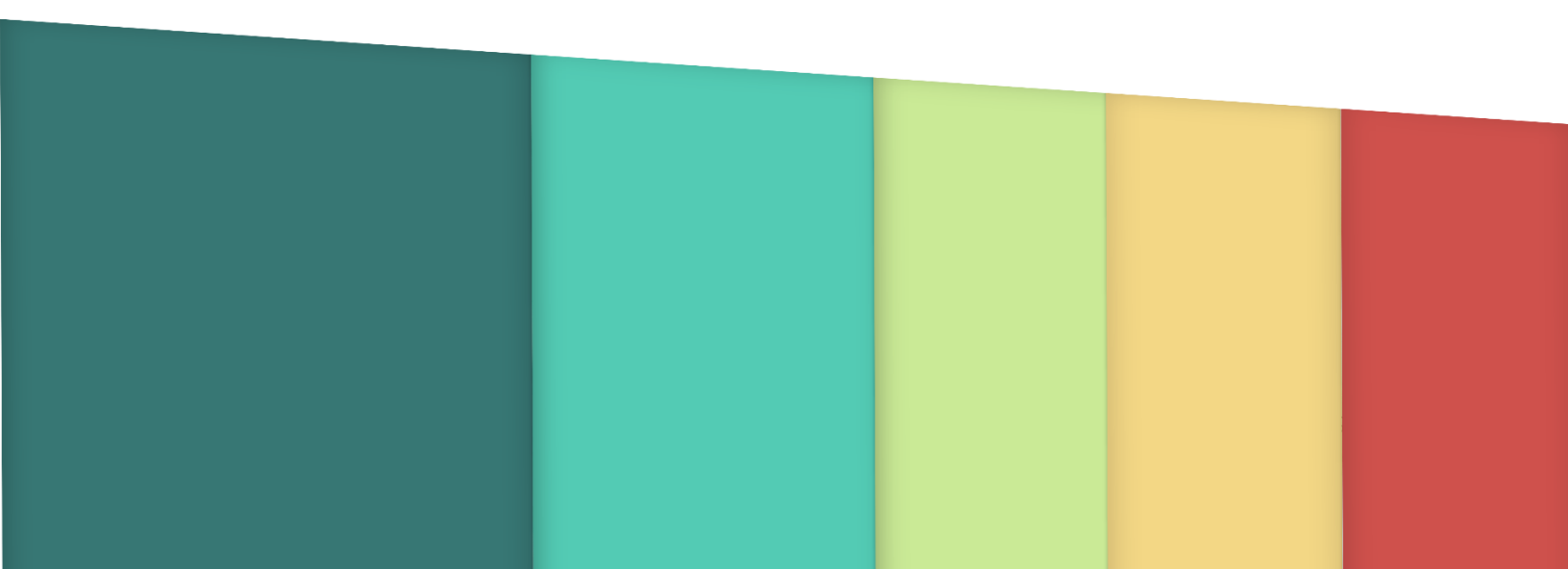
In terms of access, what tends to happen is there's a gap in resources and with a lot of these trainings, the better the training, the more high profile people that are a part of the capacity building, the more expensive it is because you have to pay your honorarium to the facilitators, and to the people who are conducting the capacity building event. There are so many CSOs who are so small, and they do such local work, they don't have [the large amount of money required] for one particular training for their staff. So they usually look for the free capacity building training, and those are usually not [as high quality]. (ASA_DD_04)

In-person learning is preferred over asynchronous online capacity strengthening initiatives.

- In situations where online capacity strengthening is the only available option, synchronous delivery and direct interaction with an experienced facilitator, mentor, or coach is preferred.

*Online training is not effective in my point of view, because you are here and the other person could be roaming around somewhere. How do you show what deliverables you're having? You can't show that. So the training that I developed didn't have any slides or any written material as well. It was very interactive. We were giving [participants] certain situations like, if this happens, then what will you do? How will you deal with this kind of situation?
(ASA_02_DD)*

Interview participants in the Asia region included 4F/6M, working for 3 CSOs, 3 regional initiatives, and 2 centres in India, Philippines, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.



10.2: Regional Snapshot - Eastern and Southern Africa

Quantitative Findings

Role and Gender - East or Southern Africa				
Professional Role	Woman	Man	Prefer not to say	Grand Total
(no data)	1	2	1	4
Leadership	6	23		29
Operational Support	2	10		12
Technical Specialist	6	13		19
Grand Total	15	48	1	64

Most Common Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs - East or Southern Africa

Project Management	Resource Management	Protection	Fundraising	Capacity Building	Good Governance	Technology	EDI	Development	Team Management
26	14	14	9	8	7	6	5	5	4
Operational	Operational	Technical	Operational	Operational	Technical	Technical	Technical	Technical	Leadership

Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening - East or Southern Africa

	Societal /			No access		Organisation				
	Accessibility	Structural	(general)	Availability	EDI	Hierarchy	Financial	No barriers	Localisation	Capacity
Woman	3	0	4	1	1	2	3	1	1	0
Man	14	12	8	10	9	8	6	7	3	3
Prefer not to say	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	17	12	12	11	10	10	9	8	4	3

Most Common Leadership Capacity Strengthening Needs - East or Southern Africa

Capacity Building	Team Management	Interpersonal Skills	Resource Management	Management (General)	Project Management	Strategy And Planning	Fundraising	Coordination And Community Engagement	Organisational Management
14	13	12	11	9	8	7	4	4	4
Operational	Leadership	Leadership	Operational	Leadership	Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational

Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening - East or Southern Africa

	EDI	Societal /			No access		Organisation		
		Accessibility	Structural	Availability	No barriers	Financial	Hierarchy	(general)	Localisation
Woman	4	1	3	0	3	1	2	2	0
Man	11	11	7	9	4	5	4	3	3
Prefer not to say	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	12	10	9	7	6	6	5	3

Qualitative Findings - ESA

Capacity strengthening initiatives focused on **leadership skills** are critically needed, especially in areas related to **team management**.

- Despite a reported need for leadership capacity strengthening, there was a lack of clarity among respondents regarding the definition of leadership. Capacity strengthening initiatives may benefit from the inclusion of a theoretical framing of various leadership approaches.
- In particular, support in transitioning from technical to management roles was reported as a capacity strengthening need.

You feel comfortable in your field because you have trained for it, but once you enter the management level, it is a different ball game altogether. You have to forget about your psychology, economics, or what have you, and you have to manage people and we are not all people managers. You learn by doing, there is a lot of self introspection that is necessary as an NGO leader ... as you are confronted with situations that you have not been confronted in the past death, fraud, good situations, celebrations, difficulties with people, sexual harassment; it is like a roller coaster going up and down and with these situations you are not really prepared for them. (ESA_05_K1)

Participants emphasized the need for contextually specific capacity strengthening that embraces local expertise and local priorities, both at the regional and sub-regional levels.

- The allocation of limited resources for capacity strengthening and the design of strengthening initiatives should be **demand-driven**, based on local priorities rather than international priorities.
- Capacity strengthening initiatives should move beyond traditional training methods to include approaches such as experiential learning, peer learning, learning exchanges, etc.

We have thousands of NGOs, powerful NGOs, yet we still have livelihood issues within the city, and we are pretending as national NGOs to be covering other areas. How is this possible when we are unable to solve the problems within the outskirts of the city. For me this is a show of a lack of capacity, the local players should be capacitated in order to feel that impact. (ESA-04_K1)

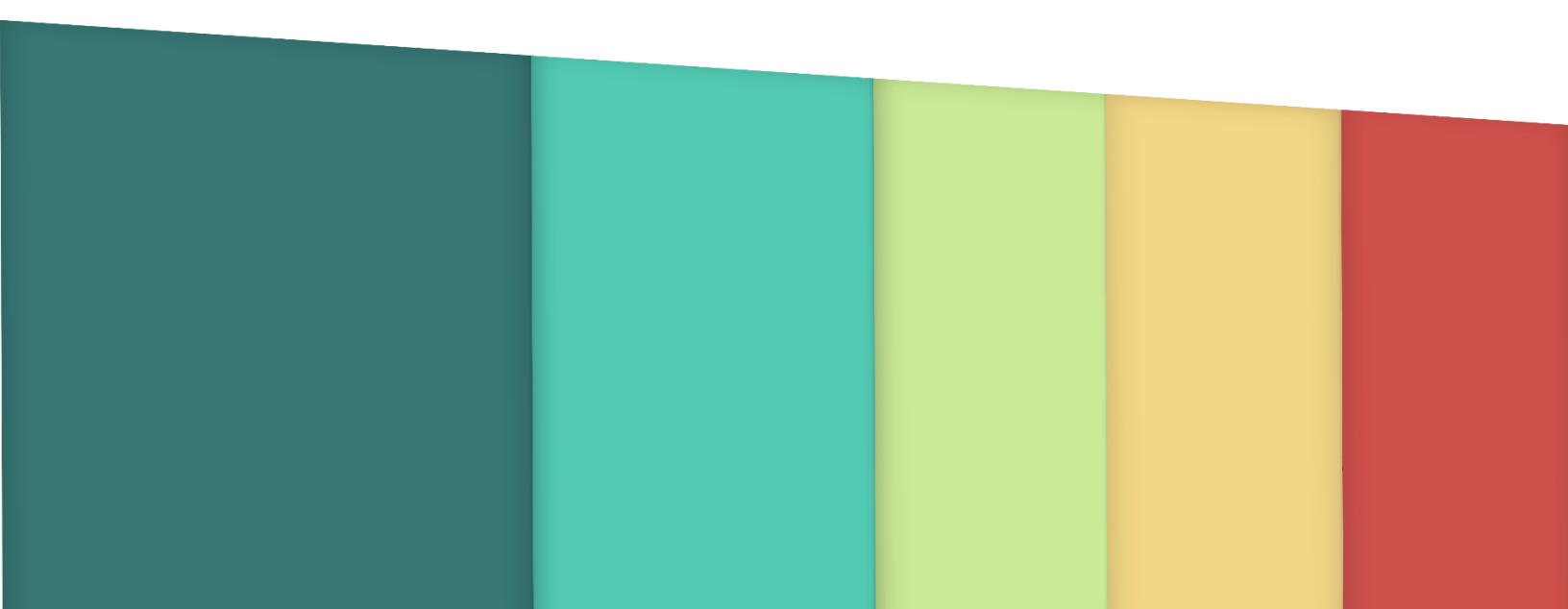
Lack of information and communications technologies (ICT) infrastructure is a significant barrier to accessing digital capacity strengthening opportunities.

- This barrier disproportionately impacts junior staff and staff living or working outside of affluent urban areas, diluting efforts to make initiatives equitable and inclusive.

The geographical area needed a Wi-Fi installation, something that we could not afford within the set term, for the only project we had at hand and this pushed us to think outside the box to mobilize resources to finance the entire thing. (ESA_04_K1)

Not all the staff of an organization ... have [unimpeded] access to learning, because some are stationed in the areas where there is no internet access [for] learning opportunities. (ESA Survey Respondent)

Interview participants in the ESA region included 7F/4M, working as directors, programme coordinators, project/programme managers, and technical officers. Participants worked for regional NGOs, CBOs, and foundations in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, South Sudan, and Eswatini.



10.3: Regional Snapshot - Latin America and Caribbean

Quantitative Findings

Role and Gender - Latin America and Caribbean			
Professional Role	Woman	Man	Grand Total
Leadership	7	6	13
Operational Support	1	1	2
Technical Specialist	2		2
Grand Total	10	7	17

Most Common Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs - Latin America or Caribbean

Project Management	Fundraising	Resource Management	Capacity Building	Technology	Development	Education	Communi- cations	Management (general)	Protection
6	6	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Operational	Operational	Operational	Operational	Technical	Technical	Technical	Operational	Leadership	Technical

Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening - Latin America or Caribbean

	No barriers	Availability	Financial	EDI	Societal / Structural	Localisation	Organisation Hierarchy	Technology	Accessibility
Woman	4	1	3	0	2	0	1	1	0
Man	1	3	0	3	0	2	1	1	1
TOTAL	5	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	1

Most Common Leadership Capacity Strengthening Needs - Latin America or Caribbean

Interpersonal Skills	Management (General)	Team Management	Resource Management	Coordination And Community Engagement	Language Skills	Strategy And Planning	EDI	EDI (Internal)	Fundraising
5	5	4	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Leadership	Leadership	Leadership	Operational	Operational	Leadership	Operational	Technical	Leadership	Operational

Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening - Latin America or Caribbean

	Accessibility	No barriers	Organisation Hierarchy	Financial	Societal / Structural	EDI	Localisation	Availability	Technology
Woman	2	2	0	1	0	1	2	1	0
Man	1	1	3	1	2	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1

Qualitative Findings - LAC

Participants **described a complex and diverse EDI landscape** featuring **many axes of intersectionality**, including diverse genders, ethnicities, languages, statuses of indigeneity, etc. This affects capacity strengthening needs and produces both opportunities and challenges for the sector..

- Interviewees reported that while members of these diverse communities were at risk of broader social discrimination, **people of diverse identities were also often well integrated into and served by CSOs.**
- Interview respondents represented the largest proportion of women- and minority-led organisations in the study. It was also the only region with more women survey respondents than men (10W/7M), including more women in leadership roles (7W/6M).

The issue of diversity and inclusion of women, black people and indigenous people happens in the daily practice, it doesn't work by only having a nice discussion ... and in reality having the organization's leaders all men and only one woman just to say she's there. ... it needs to happen, it shouldn't stay in the theoretical discussion. We need for example, in the issue of training, to bring other references different from the European men, etc. We need women who speak in the economic sector, we need black people who speak in the third sector, that is the first step, to look for new referents. The second issue is to challenge machismo, racism, homophobia everyday, and that can be achieved with leadership education bringing concrete and real examples of what is actually happening. (LAC_02-01_DD)

Women respondents highlighted the positive impact of capacity strengthening initiatives that **identified them as potential leaders.**

- Respondents referred to different experiences of leadership capacity strengthening such as conferences and network organisations that provided **opportunities to publicly communicate their expertise** and **represent organisations** as leaders.

One program I participated in ... helped me identify that I was a leader. I'd never had a leadership program, so it was good training ... it's been very interesting, to be able to uncover my skills, the networking I've been able to do, having new scenarios to tell my story, understanding that telling the story, speaking ... It's been more like a process of empowerment and finding those

spaces. Being able to participate at a conference, a panel, etc, opens you up, to prove yourself, you start to advance in that process until you develop the skill and become empowered. I had the opportunity there to show my leadership. (LAC_02_KI)

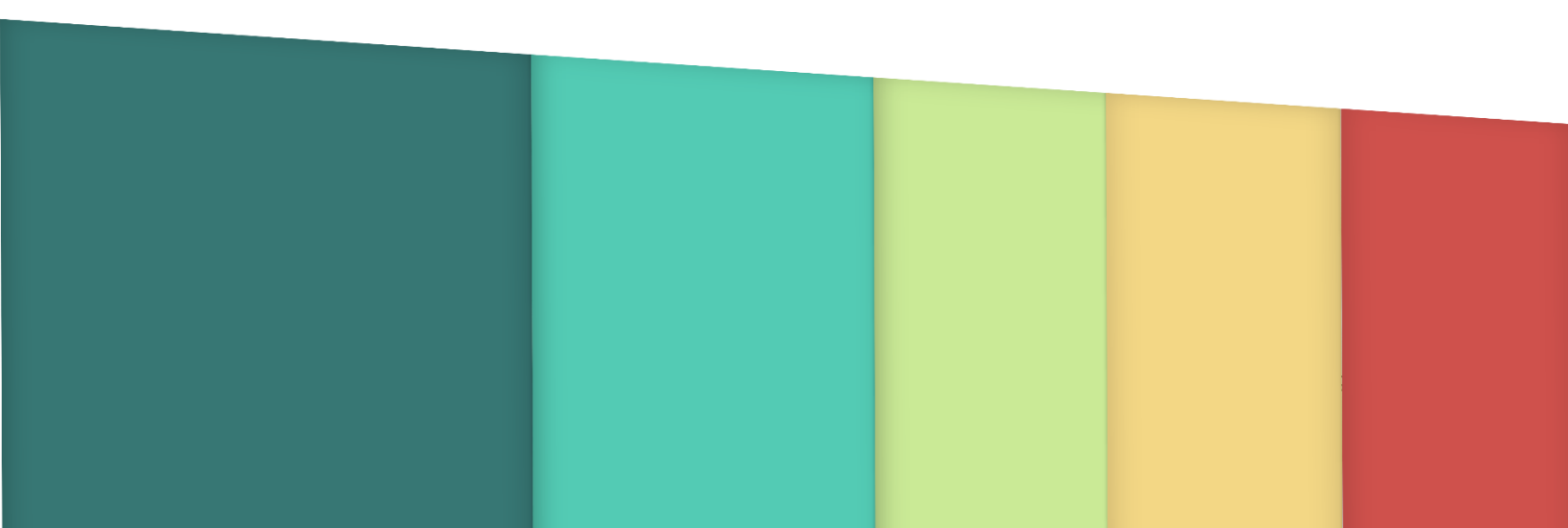
Improving staff and volunteer computer skills, access to technology, and broader ICT infrastructure was identified as a significant capacity strengthening need and as a barrier to capacity strengthening, especially in the context of COVID-19.

- The need for ICT infrastructure is most severe in large countries with significant rural areas and underserved remote communities.

I have many executives in the northern part of [a rural region], where they have difficulties with the internet. They don't have computers ... The same thing with community management and social media. I have been doing that and learning little by little. All this needs to be taught. (LAC_01_KI)

The projects team, which is a bit more qualified, gives the in-field team some tools. They teach them to use Excel, Word. But it is exhausting. These are qualified people, with Master's degrees, careers, who are teaching how to write an email. Communication skills are really important. It's not just about posting a picture on Instagram. (LAC_01-01_DD)

Interview participants in the LAC region included 7F/5M, working for CSOs, foundations, regional NGOs, and faith-based organisations. Participants worked as directors, volunteers, project managers, and coordinators in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala.



10.4: Regional Snapshot - Middle East and Eastern Europe

Quantitative Findings

Role and Gender - Middle East or Eastern Europe

Professional Role	Woman	Man	No Response	Grand Total
(no data)			1	1
Leadership	3	9		12
Operational Support	2	5		7
Technical Specialist	2	3		5
Grand Total	7	17	1	25

Most Common Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs - Middle East or Eastern Europe

Project Management	Fundraising	Capacity Building	Technology	Protection	EDI	Environment	Emergency / Disaster Response	Resource Management	Development
11	6	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Operational	Operational	Operational	Technical	Technical	Technical	Technical	Technical	Operational	Technical

Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening - Middle East or Eastern Europe

	Financial	Societal / Structural	No barriers	Accessibility	EDI	Availability	Localisation
Woman	1	2	2	0	1	0	1
Man	3	2	2	4	2	2	0
(no data)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	5	4	4	4	3	2	1

Most Common Leadership Capacity Strengthening Needs - Middle East or Eastern Europe

Team Management	Interpersonal Skills	Project Management	Strategy And Planning	Management (General)	EDI	Capacity Building	Emergency / Disaster Response	Resource Management
7	7	5	3	2	2	2	2	2
Leadership	Leadership	Operational	Operational	Leadership	Technical	Operational	Leadership	Operational

Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening - Middle East or Eastern Europe

	Capacity	Financial	EDI	No barriers	Accessibility	Societal / Structural	Availability	No access (general)
Woman	1	0	3	0	1	1	1	0
Man	5	4	2	3	1	1	0	1
(no data)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	5	5	3	2	2	1	1

Qualitative Findings – MEEE

Access to leadership roles is regulated by EDI issues. Gender, religion, age, and privileged social connections (i.e., *wasta*, or favouritism) were key determinants in advancing to positions of leadership.

- EDI was the most cited barrier to leadership capacity strengthening in MEEE. **43% of responding women reported EDI-related barriers** to accessing leadership training in MEEE.
- Women cited internal and interpersonal/personal barriers as well as external barriers. Women reported moving between organisations to find managers willing to offer them leadership opportunities.

It's harder for women to be in that leadership role ... for example ... one of the things that prevented [me] previously ... to be a program manager, is that [my former manager] was afraid I wouldn't be able to build relationships, because I do not drink [alcohol] ... I was almost manager, but I wouldn't get that role because they didn't like that I'm wearing the hijab. So let's say, religious beliefs sometimes can prevent you from being in a leadership role in organizations or social development in [this country]. And based on your gender as well. And it comes to 'wasta' as well. The favouritism. (MEE_02_KI)

- Capacity strengthening initiatives should **serve to identify women who are potential leaders** as well as strengthen leadership-related skills among current leaders.

I had a training before ... And I found it very informative, because I've never thought of myself as a leader before. But people told me that I'm a natural leader, and I didn't know what does that mean, I am not a leader! But people say that you have the potential of a leader. So I attended this training, and afterwards, I thought, Okay, I need to explore that track. And I would love to have more of leadership trainings in the future, which I did. (MEE_01_KI)

Non-managerial staff identified leadership skills for managers as a pressing capacity strengthening need.

- Participants described significant and distinct challenges with both local and international managers.

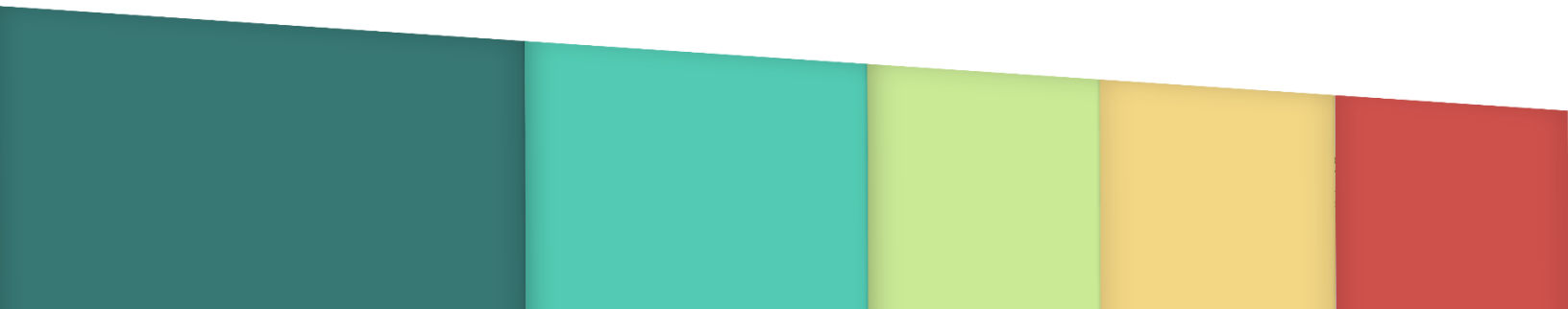
They need a foreign person to be in that [leadership] position. And then he comes with previous expectations or stereotypes in some matters. And those things start to reflect on how he leads, how he acts in his role. And it's happened to me with different organizations, and they were INGOs, as well. (MEE_02_KI)

Respondents identified the need for **more diverse methodologies of capacity strengthening**, beyond formalised training and traditional teacher-student pedagogical dynamics.

- Alternative methodologies identified by respondents included **mentorships, applied learning, and experience-based learning** as opposed to lecture-based information transfer.
- Participants also reported a preference for in-person or hybrid delivery models.

In my region in general ... interactive activities are more interesting for people than attending things through online. And most of the capacity building activities are conducted through online courses. And that makes people sometimes speed the videos for example, or skip a couple of sessions. It's not like [a training with] interaction ... I think the best approach on those things is the hybrid ... where it's expected once a month that we meet and do this activity, for example, and the rest of the course online ... So I have the flexibility, at the same time I have the interaction that I need. (MEE_02_KI)

Interview participants in the MEEE region included 7F/3M, working for CSOs, networks, national NGOs, and as consultants. Participants worked as coordinators, directors, proposal writers, project/programme managers, and technical officers in Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan.



10.5: Regional Snapshot - Western and Central Africa

Quantitative Findings

Role and Gender - West or Central Africa				
Professional Role	Woman	Man	No Response	Grand Total
(no data)		7		7
Leadership	11	24		35
Operational Support	3	7		10
Technical Specialist	2	12	1	15
Grand Total	16	50	1	67

Most Common Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening Needs - Western or Central Africa

Project Management	Protection	Resource Management	Fundraising	Technology	Good governance	Coordination and Community Engagement	CASH	Health	Team Management
32	16	14	9	9	8	7	6	6	5
Operational	Technical	Operational	Operational	Technical	Technical	Operational	Technical	Technical	Leadership

Barriers to Technical Expertise Capacity Strengthening - Western or Central Africa

	Financial	Availability	Accessibility	No barriers	No access (general)	Technology	Societal / Structural	EDI	Capacity
Woman	3	5	5	2	5	1	1	1	0
Man	10	9	9	8	4	8	6	6	5
(no data)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	14	14	14	10	9	9	8	7	6

Most Common Leadership Capacity Strengthening Needs - West or Central Africa

Interpersonal Skills	Team Management	Management (General)	Capacity Building	Resource Management	Strategy And Planning	EDI	Project EDI (Internal)	Management	Coordination And Community Engagement
17	13	11	8	6	5	5	5	4	4
Leadership	Leadership	Leadership	Operational	Operational	Operational	Technical	Leadership	Operational	Operational

Barriers to Leadership Capacity Strengthening - Western or Central Africa

	Availability	EDI	No barriers	No access (general)	Financial	Societal / Structural	Accessibility	Capacity
Woman	5	1	2	2	1	1	1	2
Man	8	8	7	5	5	4	4	2
(no data)	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	13	10	9	7	6	6	5	4

Qualitative Findings - WCA

The **availability and cost of ICT infrastructure is a serious barrier** to accessing capacity strengthening initiatives in the region.

- In many areas, internet connectivity is primarily based on cellphone data services. **High costs of cellphone data** mean that low-bandwidth solutions should be prioritised.
- 75% of survey respondents who cited technology access as a barrier were responding from the WCA region. Internet connectivity was the second most commonly reported barrier in the region.
- Internet connectivity challenges were a major difficulty for the research team in conducting remote interviews. One adaptation was to complete interviews asynchronously via WhatsApp voice messages.

Barriers to accessing capacity strengthening initiatives reported by WCA survey respondents included “mastery of the computer tools and the mastery of social networks to better communicate” and “the problem of connection in non-covered areas”.

We don't provide [capacity strengthening initiatives on] technical skills because we don't have the tools, like computers. But all of our staff and volunteers are encouraged to learn these technical skills if they can afford to pay. We would love to train our staff and volunteers if we have the tools. (WCA Survey Respondent)

Localisation was a central priority for respondents in the region, specifically with regards to locally relevant capacity strengthening, staff retention, and international actors.

- **Localisation efforts should incorporate diversity**, taking into consideration language, culture, economic differences, and other intersectional identities as well as differences in capacity needs across the region.

There is a need for heterogeneous capacity strengthening: you cannot give people from different areas, different education levels, different sectors the same capacity training. When we look at diversity we have to look at how we can incorporate this within organizations. (WCA_05_KI)

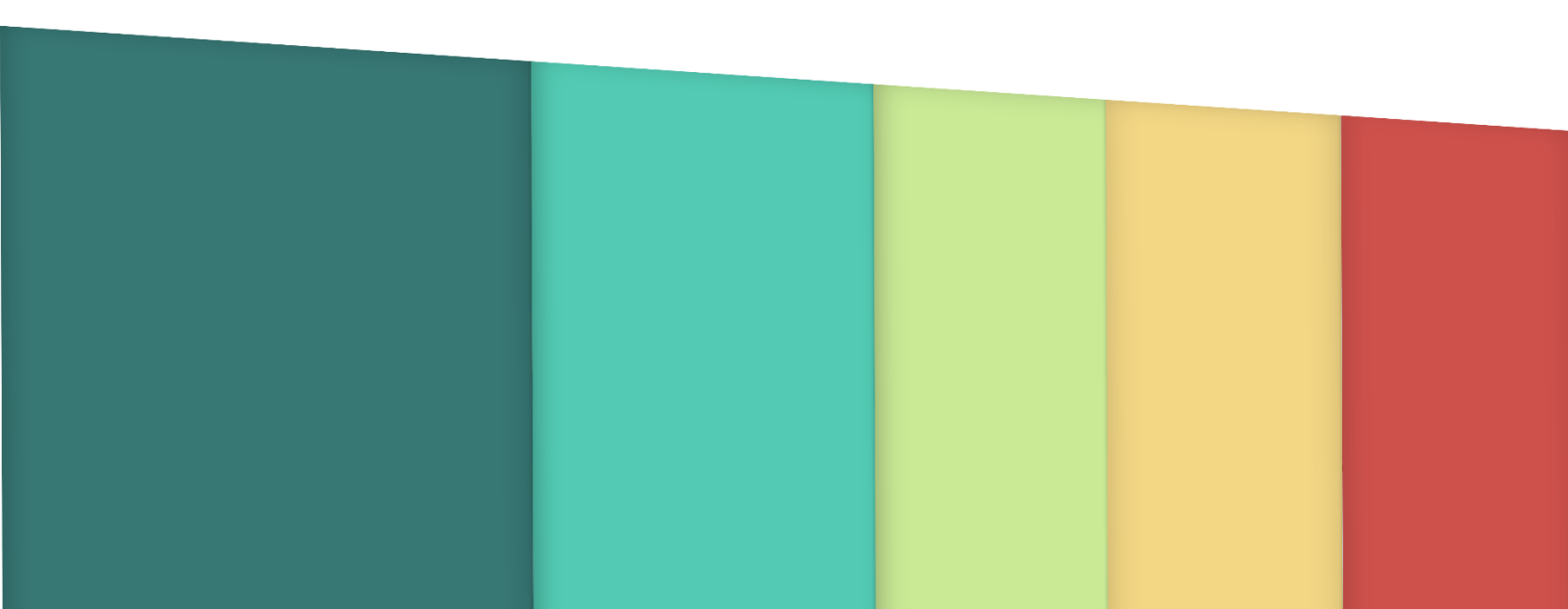
- Participants reported that **the loss of recently trained staff** to better funded INGOs was an unintended outcome of capacity strengthening interventions.

It is difficult to have experienced staff come to [stay in] national NGOs, once they get a little experience they move to international NGOs ... and these main technical issues keep recurring because those who have been trained go to INGOs. (WCA_02_DD)

- Respondents expressed **frustration at underlying colonial ideologies** that undervalue **local knowledge and capacities** and undermine the sustainability of localisation efforts.

The truth is that donors are more interested in the sustainability of the project rather than in the [civil society] organization. (WCA_04_KI)

Interview participants in the WCA region included 3F/10M, working for 7 CSOs and 1 regional initiative as directors, managers, advisors, and experts in Nigeria, Mali, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Cameroon, and Ghana.



Section 11: Conclusion and Recommendations

11.1: Conclusions of Research

Based on the combined phases of research and the analysis of data collected from survey respondents and interview participants, this study has identified several key conclusions pertaining to the capacity strengthening needs of local civil society organisations across the five HLA regions of operation. These conclusions highlight the capacity strengthening needs of CSOs in relation to barriers, terminology, and localisation.

Globally, more similarities than differences were observed among regions.

Despite highly unique and diverse contexts among and within regions, significant similarities were identified with regards to capacity strengthening needs and barriers. This unexpected finding is indicative of strong global trends among local organisations, regardless of their geographical region, and it may also indicate that capacity strengthening needs and barriers arise more from the international humanitarian system and larger socio-structural inequalities than regionally specific contextual challenges.

Terminology was a key factor in communicating with organisations and interpreting findings.

Local organisations were found to interpret key terms of the study in significantly different ways than the terminology is currently deployed by HLA. Most notably, study participants did not make clear distinctions between the thematic pillars of *Technical Expertise* and *Operational Expertise*, as defined by HLA. Similarly, participants did not indicate any differentiation between the terms *capacity strengthening*, *capacity building*, or *training*, using all three terms interchangeably. Participants also did not draw clear distinctions between the terms *civil society organisation*, *community-based organisation*, and *non-governmental organisation*. Participants did, however, demonstrate a tendency to use *local NGO* when describing their own organisation but used other terms when describing the humanitarian sector as a whole.

Participants did not always view humanitarian response a distinct from other subject areas of social good.

Local organisations tended not to view humanitarian response, development work, emergency/disaster preparedness and response, social justice, civil society, etc., as separate sectors or fields of specialisation. Instead, these different subject areas were all viewed as interrelated acts of social good. Organisations would engage in activities within any of these sectors where they felt they could effectively contribute to the betterment of society. This trend was less pronounced in countries with protracted humanitarian crises, such as countries

hosting Syrian refugees or in states with a long-standing humanitarian presence such as Afghanistan. It was more pronounced in areas where humanitarian crises were less common.

Across all regions, capacity strengthening is needed in areas of operational expertise.

When asked about areas of *technical expertise* in need of capacity strengthening, participants overwhelmingly indicated capacity strengthening needs in areas related to *operational expertise*. In particular, participants identified operational skills related to project management, resource management, and fundraising/resource mobilisation. Participants also tended to indicate that their organisations are already proficient in their technical areas of specialisation but require support in operational skills that will enable them to represent their work more effectively in order to access international funding regimes. It should also be recognised that this may change as their work evolves or scales up.

Local organisations need support in identifying and promoting new generations of leaders.

Young leaders and leaders from underrepresented groups indicated that they had difficulty in self-identifying as potential leaders, constituting a barrier for individuals in underrepresented groups to begin careers in leadership. Organisations often suffered from “Founder’s Syndrome”, which describes the difficulty in transitioning from a leadership structure centred around a single founder to more sustainable and inclusive leadership structures. Additionally, leaders were sometimes unaware of problems in their approach to leadership.

Localisation emerged as a key theme, and participants expressed frustration with the slow pace of decolonisation.

While not a central pillar of the investigation, survey respondents and interview participants frequently reported a wide range of issues relating to localisation. Respondents emphasised that localisation efforts are closely related to choices of language and terminology. Interviewees highlighted the sometimes-incorrect assumption that international and local actors are truly understanding each other: that despite using the same terminology, the meaning behind these words may be interpreted differently. Some participants questioned whether international humanitarian language is relevant to local actors. Localisation was also discussed in terms of the (in)accessibility of funding, which limits the capacity of local actors to achieve impact at scale. Participants expressed concerns that international organisations continue to dominate operational funding and, despite localisation efforts, are still not transferring power to local actors in meaningful ways. Participants also expressed frustration with the underlying colonial ideologies of the international humanitarian system, which impede progress towards localisation. Many participants spoke of the potential of mobilising local resources rather than relying on international resource mobilisation structures.

Barriers to accessing capacity strengthening are multiple and intersectional.

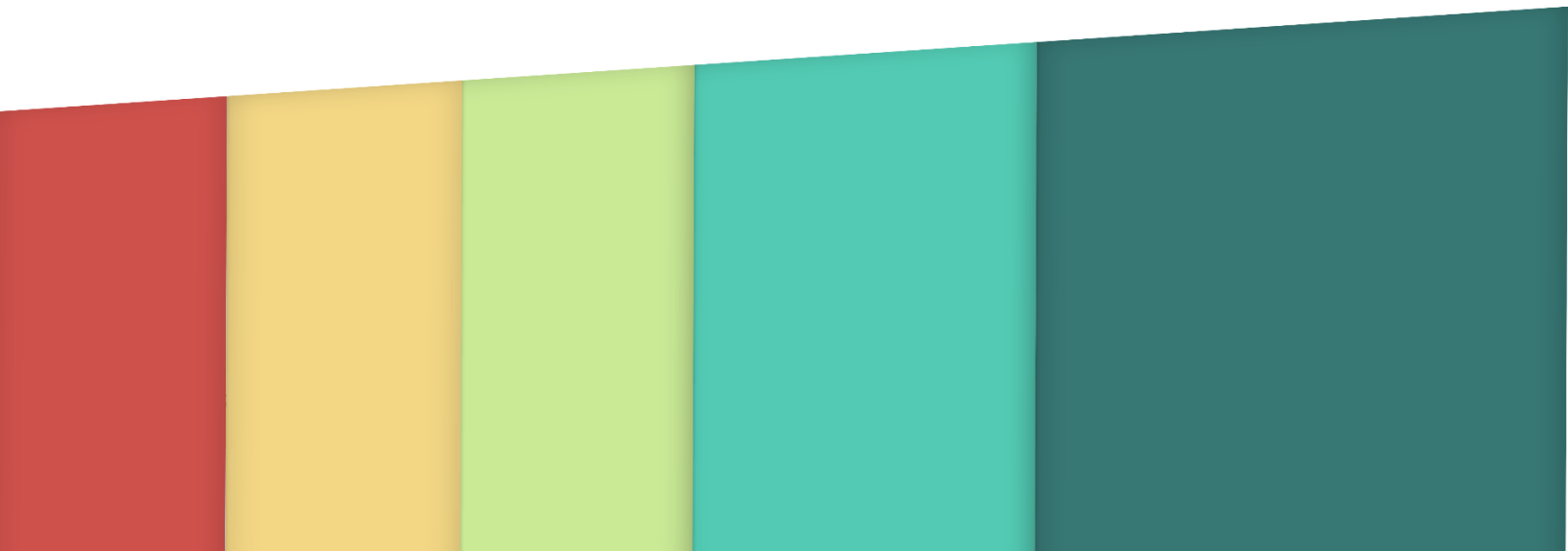
Across all regions, similar barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities were identified. These barriers were broadly intersectional, involving a large number of factors that

co-exist and mutually contribute to the generation of a capacity-strengthening landscape lacking in opportunities. In almost all cases, a lack of funding was either a contributing factor or the primary barrier to access; many barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities could be mitigated, lessened, or overcome if more global funding for skill-strengthening was made available to local actors.

Common barriers included discrimination and EDI-related challenges, including but not limited to gender-based discrimination. Other EDI barriers were related to age, disability, and ethnicity. Experiences of gender-based discrimination were described by several participants, especially in relation to career advancement. Although EDI-related barriers and discrimination were identified during the study, it is likely that they have been under-reported.

Barriers related to digital access and digital literacy were significant. Participants frequently reported a need for the prerequisite digital and technical skills necessary to access digital capacity strengthening opportunities, including computer and/or smartphone skills, and competence in online applications and platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype). Digital access was also limited by a reduced ownership of computers or smartphones, a lack of ICT infrastructure in the community or region, the costs associated with using available ICT infrastructures, and/or the costs of creating workarounds to compensate for insufficient infrastructures.

For organisations in remote rural areas, geographical and digital isolation contributed to intersectional barriers to accessing capacity strengthening opportunities. Face-to-face trainings tended to be offered only in regional hubs, requiring time, money, and transportation to access. Organisations in rural areas are also disproportionately underserved with respect to ICT infrastructure, making it difficult to access digital capacity strengthening opportunities.



11.2: Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the research team is prepared to extend several recommendations. It should be noted that this study is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of current capacity strengthening programming delivered by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy. Participants in this study represent a subsection of HLA's target audience; while additional programming that responds to the needs identified by study participants would enhance current capacity strengthening offerings, the target audience of this study should not be taken as representative of the entirety of HLA's audience. Most notably, these recommendations should not be interpreted as an indication that the current HLA programming in technical expertise is ineffective, in any way insufficient, or that it should be abandoned. Rather, these recommendations should be understood as seeking to enhance and support HLA programming to better serve local organisations as one group among HLA's large audience.

Capacity Strengthening Needs

Technical and Operational Expertise:

Globally, when asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, survey respondents identified capacity strengthening needs in the following areas of *operational expertise*:

- Project Management (105 / 236, or 45%)
 - MEAL (45 / 105, or 43%)
 - Proposal Writing (36 / 105, or 34%)
 - Project Design (16 / 105, or 15%)
 - Report Writing / Reporting (16 / 105, or 15%)
- Resource Management (45 / 236, or 19%)
- Fundraising / Resource Mobilisation (38 / 236, or 16%)

When asked about *technical expertise* capacity strengthening needs, study participants tended to refer to skills needed to improve access to international funding (e.g., to better communicate their plans and achievements to international donors). More capacity-strengthening initiatives on these topics, with an emphasis on self-representation to international humanitarian and fundraising regimes, would help to address this gap cited by local NGOs who responded to this research.

Specialised capacity strengthening initiatives that explore the intersection between *technical* and *operational expertise* related skills should be explored. In particular, given participants' emphasis on the capacities needed to better engage with international funding regimes, participants may benefit from specialised capacity strengthening opportunities which outline how global technical expertise practice and terminology interact with operational expertise, such as project management and resource mobilisation. For example, given the reported

capacity strengthening needs in project planning and management, capacity strengthening opportunities could be offered in planning and/or managing projects in specific technical areas (e.g., how to manage a WASH project, how to plan a nutrition project). Similarly, capacity strengthening could be offered that focuses on how to effectively monitor and evaluate activities in specific technical areas and to present implementation activities in modalities meaningful to international humanitarian actors and donors on reports and grant proposals. In this way, local organisations would be better equipped to employ the language and standards of international funding systems, donors, and partners. Notably, both language and funding are crucial elements for moving the localisation agenda forward, and the extent to which the onus should be placed on local organisations to adopt international language and standards is a highly complex issue that warrants further consideration and consultation. The HLA should look to develop a more holistic institutional approach to capacity strengthening (involving making funding available for holistic Local NGOs/CSOs system development).

Digital Skills:

Participants reported significant need for capacity strengthening in the technical skills required to operate in digital spaces. These included digital office skills, remote management techniques, and online or internet-related capacity strengthening. Capacity strengthening in digital skills should be prioritised, including opportunities focused on strengthening foundational skills in digital literacy and internet competence. Participants also specifically identified a need for digital skills related to using Zoom and Microsoft Office (e.g., Word and Excel).

However, access to technology, digital literacy, and internet competence should be considered in relation EDI, socio-structural inequalities, and intersectional barriers. Many groups face heightened digital barriers due to socio-economic status, access to education, and overall literacy level. Digital- and technology-related barriers are also often exacerbated for different age groups: older populations, for example, frequently experience lower levels of digital literacy and internet competency. Accordingly, capacity strengthening opportunities aimed at promoting on digital access must be themselves accessible; a key challenge to ensuring accessibility is to provide introductory courses in digital literacy offline and in-person – since, for example, someone who has difficulty accessing Zoom will struggle to attend an online training on how to use Zoom.

Leadership:

When asked about leadership capacity strengthening needs, survey respondents largely indicated areas related to interpersonal skills and team motivation. The most commonly identified capacity strengthening needs included:

- Team Management (54 / 236, or 23%)
 - Interpersonal Communication (17 / 54, or 31%)
 - Teamwork (14 / 54, or 26%)

- Teambuilding (10 / 54, or 19%)
- Goal-Setting (10 / 54, or 19%)
- Interpersonal Skills, related to management (53 / 236, or 22%)
- General, non-specific references to management (25 / 236, or 15%)

Overall, study participants tended to emphasise interpersonal and soft skills over more specialised managerial skills, such as strategic planning or strategic vision. More capacity strengthening opportunities focused on the benefits of improved workplace relationships could be an asset. Notably, participants who were not in leadership positions frequently indicated that leaders in their organisation would benefit from capacity strengthening in interpersonal skills and team motivation. Sometimes it was not clear if leaders were aware of this need; awareness campaigns and short seminars on the soft skills of management, presented such that current leaders are not made to feel vulnerable, may be helpful.

In addition, participants highlighted the need for increased support in capacity strengthening opportunities aimed at identifying potential leaders (as opposed to simply targeting existing leaders or offering leadership capacity strengthening opportunities only to established leaders). Further to this, initiatives should be specifically directed at supporting the identification and development of potential leaders who are not traditionally represented in leadership roles, such as women, youth, people with disabilities, minorities, and other marginalised groups.

Mitigating Barriers: Accessible Capacity Strengthening Programming

Hybrid or Blended Delivery Models:

Survey respondents and interviewees indicated that future capacity strengthening programmes, where possible, should be free or lost cost to attend, use locally relevant and accessible language (i.e., delivered in local languages and using local terminology), promote coordination and knowledge sharing, and be as interactive as possible. In particular, many participants favoured a hybrid approach, blending online and in-person learning. Hybrid approaches could, for example, blend digital content delivered remotely by a lead instructor with in-person peer-to-peer learning groups, where participants could meet, discuss, share insights, motivate one another, and engage in interactive activities.

Hybrid delivery models are highly effective for supporting participant learning, increasing engagement, and effectively blending different capacity strengthening modalities, such as mentorship, coaching, peer-to-peer learning, or communities of practice. Local networks and capacity strengthening providers should be engaged to deliver in-person components so as to better incorporate locally relevant curriculums, avoid reproducing existing local capacity strengthening offerings, and to support locally-led initiatives.

Models for delivering hybrid capacity strengthening could include:

- Utilising the Kaya platform to facilitate hybrid capacity strengthening environments.

- Creating regional learning hubs where local CSOs and NGOs have access to the internet and devices to engage in digital learning offerings.
- Providing communal tablets or smart devices with pre-downloaded educational material in regions where internet access is unavailable, limited, or expensive.
- Consider promoting peer-to-peer regional learning opportunities where CSOs could congregate to attend courses, web conferences, or other online capacity-strengthening opportunities.
- Adopting innovative delivery methods which rely on regionally extant ICT technology or conform to limitations on ICT infrastructure (e.g., radio-based learning, SMS-based learning, WhatsApp-based learning, etc).

Digital Accessibility:

Participants spoke favourably of taking advantage of digital opportunities for capacity strengthening, but digital opportunities must be fully accessible. True accessibility entails:

- sufficient digital literacy to participate meaningfully,
- access to equipment such as computers or smartphones, and
- the existence of sufficient and affordable ICT infrastructure in the community.

A negative feedback loop exists within current digital capacity strengthening systems: in order to access digital capacity strengthening opportunities, participants must first be provided with opportunities to develop basic digital literacy skills. The prerequisite capacity strengthening in digital literacy must also be accessible and will likely require an in-person learning component. Further to this, innovative solutions, such as low-data delivery methods, should be explored to better serve regions where internet access is limited.

EDI Accessibility:

Greater attention and strategic actions are needed to ensure that capacity strengthening opportunities are truly accessible to all members of society. Improving accessibility includes, but is not limited to, offering programming specifically for women and youth, especially in areas related to leadership capacity strengthening. Programming should ensure inclusivity by mitigating barriers that exclude people with disabilities or impede their full participation in both online and in-person capacity strengthening opportunities (e.g., by providing captions, offering audio description, including alt-text, communicating in multiple formats). Additionally, an in-depth understanding of local contexts is required to address regionally-specific EDI-related barriers.

Localisation:

Capacity strengthening opportunities should be localised in order to better respond to the diverse needs and priorities of local organisations and their communities. A localised approach to capacity strengthening entails: offering capacity strengthening opportunities in locally relevant subject areas; using locally relevant terminology and local languages;

respecting local ways of knowing; and employing locally relevant modalities that mitigate to local barriers. Local actors should be consulted in the selection of subject matter, and their feedback should be respected and valued. Wherever possible. Local actors should be included in the design and delivery of capacity-strengthening opportunities

Many smaller local organisations have less access to the information, technology, and professional networks that support international capacity strengthening. Consideration should be given to developing outreach and incentive strategies that are locally relevant and effective for engaging organisations with limited access. In particular, attention should be given to engaging smaller and remote/rural organisations operating at the grassroots level, and providing accessible opportunities to these groups. Smaller local organisations often lack the necessary resources to participate in capacity strengthening (e.g., budget allocation, staff availability); increased funding and other incentivising compensation may help ensure accessibility of capacity strengthening opportunities.

The language and terminology used in capacity strengthening opportunities are often oriented towards large INGOs. To advance localisation agendas, steps should be taken towards offering capacity strengthening opportunities that utilise locally relevant and locally accessible language and terminology. It should not, for example, be assumed that terminology that is common parlance or a new trend in the international humanitarian system will be readily understood by local actors, who may speak a different language or utilise different terms. Conversely, localised terminologies related to humanitarian response may already be well established, robust, and broadly understood by regional actors. It may be beneficial to provide capacity strengthening participants with definitions of international terms, relate terms to local contexts, and/or identify (and respect) local equivalents.

Opportunities: HLA's Global Positioning

Due to its positioning as a highly respected global capacity strengthening organisation with broad regional integration, HLA has an opportunity to promote locally responsive, effective programming to support local organisations to successfully connect with international donors.

Supporting Local Capacity Strengthening:

Opportunities to support local capacity strengthening include potential initiatives such as: supporting local trainers by providing them with capacity strengthening and resources, supporting potential and future trainers, and identifying candidates for Training of Trainers (ToT). By capitalising on its existing online content, HLA is well positioned to serve as a hub for localised ToT initiatives. ToT opportunities are highly effective for knowledge sharing and cascading specialised skills. ToT modalities support local capacity strengthening providers and potential providers, in particular to develop their own formal or informal hybrid delivery approaches. Additional strategies to support local capacity strengthening include partnering with local trainers and experts to deliver capacity strengthening opportunities in local

languages and empowering local trainers to adapt learning material into local languages. The benefits of partnering with and supporting local trainers are numerous, for example:

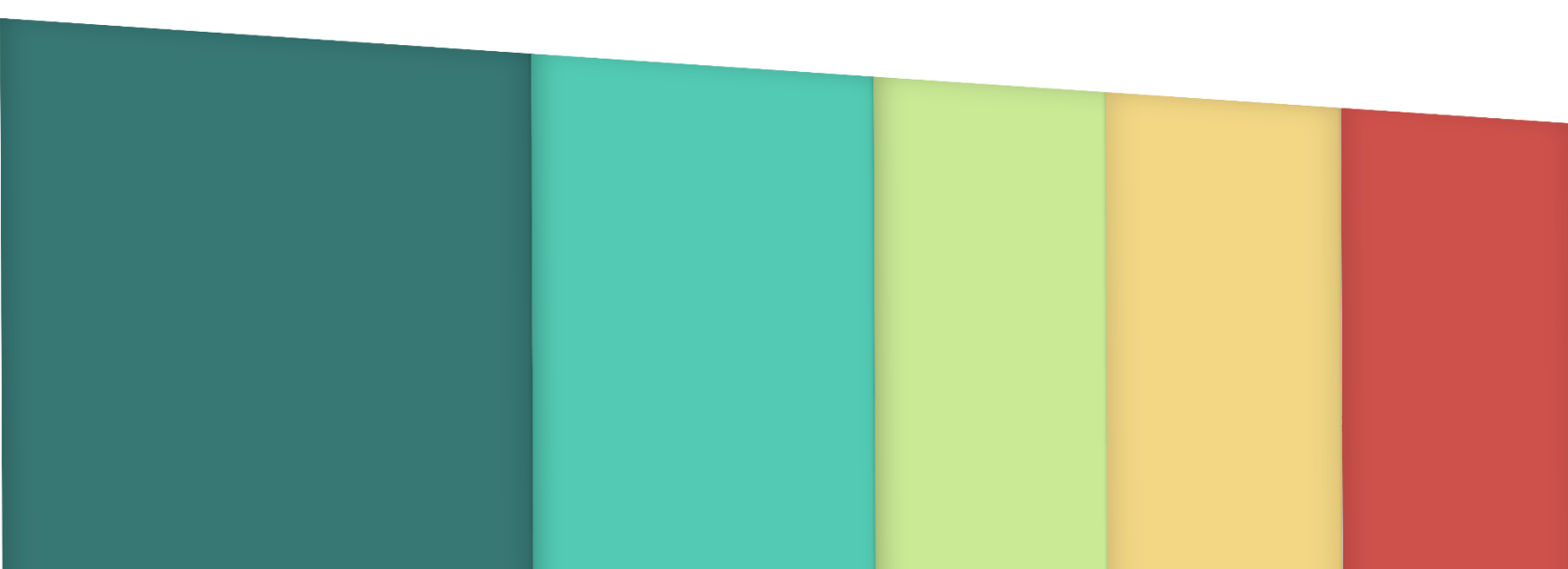
- local trainers are more likely to be fluent in local languages or have networks to outsource appropriate language support;
- local trainers will be more familiar with and have a better understanding of local capacities and needs amongst organisations as well as communities of interest;
- local trainers can provide follow-up and offer sustained and consistent support to organisations; and
- local trainers are equipped with local knowledge and cultural understanding.

Bridging Funding Between Donors and Local Actors:

In keeping with the growing consensus identified during the literature review, this study similarly found that access to funding is inexorably connected to the power transference necessary to achieve real, meaningful localisation. Many participants cited a need for resource mobilisation channels that better respect local priorities, capacities, and ways of knowing, in particular with respect to:

- locally relevant project activities and implementation;
- reporting and proposal writing which highlights local conceptualisations of humanitarian need; and
- monitoring, evaluation, assessment, and learning approaches which present outcomes in locally meaningful ways.

Because of its global reach and extensive networks, HLA is advantageously positioned to serve as a funding conduit for local organisations, applying for larger international grants to distribute and monitor as flexible sub-grants to local organisations. Increased access to unrestricted funding to local capacity strengthening organisations would help improve tuition-free or tuition-reduced access to capacity-strengthening opportunities. Similarly, funding potential trainees directly to would help increase engagement with existing capacity strengthening opportunities.



11.3: Future Research

Through the course of this study, several avenues for future research have been identified. These areas for further consideration and exploration have been determined based on their potential to augment the findings of this study in particular, contribute to a better understanding of the capacity strengthening needs of local organisations more generally, and/or provide important information about topics related to this study but beyond its scope.

Further Analysis of the Data Collected in this Research

Surveys and interviews conducted in the course of this study resulted in a large amount of data which, due to the limitations of time and the scope of the priority research questions, was not included in this study. Further reflection on the findings presented here could precipitate a targeted future iteration of analysis.

Detailed Study of Preferred Capacity Strengthening Modalities

One finding of this research was that many participants were not familiar with the vast and growing array of capacity strengthening modalities available, such as mentorship, coaching, and communities of practice. Participants typically equated *capacity strengthening* with traditional *training* in either online or face-to-face formats. This lack of familiarity with alternatives made it difficult to efficiently assess what types of modalities might be effective in reaching more participants and/or improving capacity strengthening outcomes. A more detailed examination of participants' receptivity to various capacity strengthening approaches would be beneficial for developing future programming.

In-Depth Studies of Local Contexts

In-depth contextual analyses of local regions could yield useful understandings of local capacities, needs, and opportunities. For example, HLA programming may benefit from further study of existing local capacity strengthening initiatives, including modalities used, topics covered, and effective engagement strategies. In addition, further study could be conducted on how to better respond to language-related barriers (e.g., what kind of support is needed or desired, what is feasible, what is effective). Further study of local EDI-related barriers to capacity strengthening opportunities, professional development, and/or career advancement would also be beneficial, especially in relation to leadership capacity strengthening.

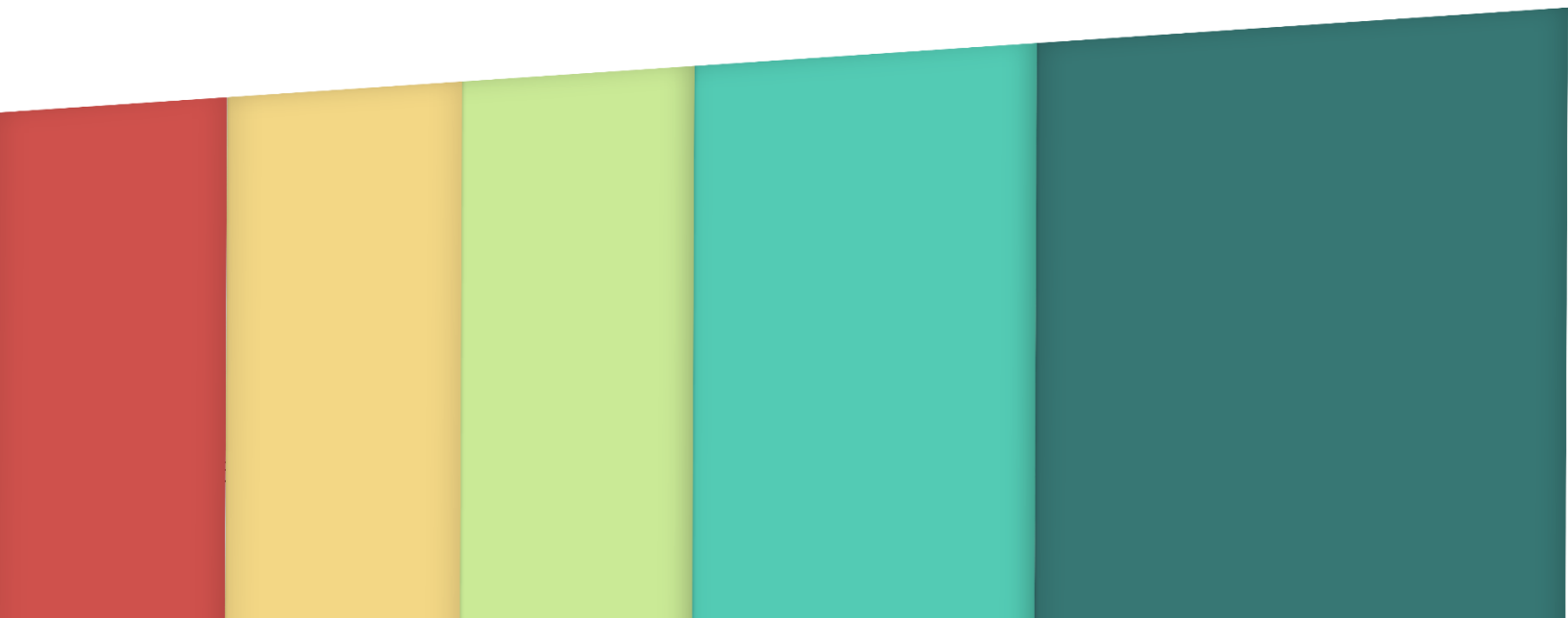
Face-to-Face Research with Local Organisations

Due to the global scale of this research, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the very high cost associated with conducting a global study in a representative number of countries across geographical regions, this research was carried out entirely remotely via digital channels. It should be understood that, as a result, many organisations and potential participants are likely to have been excluded from this study, in particular those most affected by digital barriers.

Future face-to-face research with “offline” local organisations in select countries in HLA’s regions of operation may be beneficial to assessing the extent to which this limitation has impacted findings.

Formal Definition of Internal HLA Terminology

It may be beneficial to HLA to undertake a future study into how terminology is defined and deployed internally. Many of the terms central to this study were not formally defined in available internal or public literature, and in some cases terminology was used differently by different departments. A more systematic series of interviews and consultations with HLA staff may help to formalise internal definitions of *technical expertise*, *operational expertise*, *leadership*, *civil society organisation*, and other key terms related to thematic pillars and priority areas.



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