



An Assessment of Nongovernmental Organisations in the OECS and wider Caribbean

Conducted on behalf of the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality

Introduction	2
Mapping the field: Nongovernmental organisations in the Caribbean	2
Caricom and Civil Society Organisations in the Caribbean	5
Legislative Framework	6
NGO Referral List & Survey of Needs	8
Methodology	9
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	10
Respondent Demographics	10
Main Area(s) of Focus	11
Registration Status	11
A Case in Point: The Road to Registration for an OECS NGO	13
The Requisites	13
Limitations/Challenges	14
The importance of being registered	15
Major Concerns of the NGO Community in the region	17
What NGOs Want	18
Funding	18
Movement Building	19
Technical support	19
Conclusion: Possible Avenues for Support	20
APPENDIX	22
NGO Referral Information Online Database	22



Introduction

Caribbean civil society, or the third sector, has become a crucial component of supporting regional livelihoods and social causes. From the late 1980s, CSOs in Barbados and the OECS have risen, declined, and made a resurgence in response to socio-economic concerns, state interventions and funding from within and outside of the region (Lewis 1994; Bowen 2013; Hinds-Harrison 2014). Despite their importance to responding to the needs of vulnerable populations, NGOs are often unsupported or rely on precarious funding in order to do their work. Additionally, reliable, up-to-date databases of organisations serving in the region are few and far between, despite volunteers' best efforts. This document seeks to map the needs of contemporary NGOs serving in the region. This research was conducted at an important time in the region's history: during the advent and rise of COVID-19 cases in the Caribbean. As a result, this work captures both the emerging and longstanding needs of nongovernmental organisations, and the implications for these entities if their concerns remain unaddressed in a changing funding environment.

Mapping the field: Nongovernmental organisations in the Caribbean

Defining civil society has been a conflicted and difficult task to undertake. However, scholars focusing on the Caribbean context have been able to offer up some suggestions on the use of this term in the region. Kristina Hinds-Harrison (2014) posits that, "one of the simplest ways to understand civil society in its contemporary use is as a public sphere of interaction and activity which is (mostly) separate from both the state and the economy/market" (p. 10). This 'third sector', Gregg Bowen (2013) adds, "consists of nonprofit, nongovernmental, and voluntary organizations (p. 83). Therefore, those engaging in CSO work do not aspire for political power, and are not primarily



driven by hopes of personal profit. Harrison also notes that CSOs “do not aim to violate the rights of others operating within civil society” (ibid, p. 11).

Furthermore, Hinds-Harrison points out that there are varied social movements which constitute civil society, such as “women’s movements, labour movements, pan-African movements, antiapartheid movements and environmentalist movements (ibid, p. 12). These organizations have engaged in activism or raised the profile of important issues including disaster relief, healthcare, environmental protection, human rights, poverty alleviation and sexual and reproductive health and rights (Bowen 2013). This organising may or may not lead to the establishment of formal entities which are registered with the state. As a result, it may be hard to quantify the number of active organisations in the region. However, registration within umbrella organisations can provide a good gauge of the number of entities working in the region. According to data from the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), there are two umbrella bodies which represent more than 400 CSOs in the Caribbean: The Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy (REDLAD), which is “a nonprofit platform with close to 100 members and more than 300 allies among civil society organizations, networks, activists and other social actors in Latin America and the Caribbean, that work for the strengthening of the democratic system, the defence of human rights and the social cohesion of Latin American citizens” (AGNA 2019, p.4) and The Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), which is described “as a coalition of Caribbean non-governmental organizations” (ibid, p.5). CPDC represents and advocates on behalf of 17 organisations for small farmers, women, youth, Indigenous People, rural populations and faith-based organisations across CARICOM. CPDC also has strong networking partnerships with organisations of persons with disabilities, artisans, micro entrepreneurs, human rights, and workers (www.cpdngo.org). Furthermore, special interest organisations may be members of umbrella entities outside of those identified. For instance, there are regional alliances for HIV/AIDS (Caribbean HIV/AIDS Partnership), people living with disabilities (Disabled Peoples’ International’s Caribbean



chapter) as well as Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex persons (CariFlags and the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality - ECADE).

Bowen's research has found that there are three main types of Civil Society Organisations in the Caribbean. These are:

- (1) Nonprofit organizations – tax-exempt organizations (including education institutions, churches, and trade unions) in which generally no owner, stockholder, or trustee shares in profits and losses;
- (2) Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – legally constituted organizations that engage mainly in service provision and advocacy, as well as professional membership associations, created without government participation; and
- (3) Community-based organizations (CBOs) – grassroots groups, including citizens associations and youth clubs, that operate within a single local community (2013 p. 82).

Additionally, of these three main types of CSOs, the researcher found that these three types of organisations tended to carry out four main functions, which are:

- (1) social services – coordination and delivery;
- (2) community building – including information sharing;
- (3) local economic development – primarily through project planning;
- (4) sustainable development (Bowen, 2013, p. 89).

While organizations' functions tended to overlap, most of them prioritised social services (ibid).



Caricom and Civil Society Organisations in the Caribbean

Over the last two decades, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has acknowledged the importance of CSOs in decision-making processes to ensure greater inclusion of various voices on matters that affect citizens. Its official support has been enshrined in documents such as the The Grand Anse Declaration, The Time for Action Report of the West Indian Commission, The Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community, The Liliendaal Statement of Principles on Forward Together, and The Rose Hall Declaration (Hinds-Harrison, 2014).

The signing of the Charter of Civil Society of the Caribbean Community on February 19th, 1997, at the Conference of Heads of Caribbean Governments Non-Governmental Organizations was a watershed moment for CSOs operating in the region. In the Charter, CSOs were included in the definition of “social partners” and stakeholders in ensuring good governance in the region. It also proposed the rights and responsibilities for citizens of member countries, including the right to take part in national and regional governance (ibid, Bowen 2013).

Despite this highly commendable first step, the Charter is yet to be incorporated into CARICOM’s juridical structure or through mainstreamed practices of engagement or institutionalised consultative mechanisms (ibid).

Legislative Framework

Although there has been greater support from the government for the third sector, there are few instances of legislation which govern CSOs in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. Legislation creates an enabling environment for CSOs to thrive, while allowing them to explore various models of funding their activities. In fact, there are few countries in CARICOM which have sought to enact NGO-specific legislation. Of these, implementation is only enforced in Belize: the Non-Governmental Organisations Act Cap. 315, 2000 and St. Kitts and Nevis -- Non-Government Organisations Act Cap. 20.59, 2009¹ and the Non-Governmental Organisation Act of 2006 in St. Lucia.

The St. Kitts legislation was modeled on Belize's legislation, which both emerged out of a CARICOM initiative to strengthen relationships between NGOs and Caribbean states². This law sets out parameters for the use of an NGOs' funds, financial reporting mechanisms and scope for profit-making activities³. As a result, NGOs operating in Barbados and other OECS countries have to resort to using pre-existing laws that provide for Friendly Societies, Benevolent Societies, Charities, and Non-Profit Companies⁴.

In Barbados, for example, NGOs fall somewhere between the Charities Act of Barbados and the Companies Act of Barbados. The former was recently amended in March 2019 to mandate that the full names, addresses and list of assets be provided. Additionally, it requires that any applicant trustee declares whether they had held any prominent position in public office or in an international organisation⁵. Furthermore, there are

¹ Caribbean Policy Development Centre, N. M. W. G. (2019, March). A Call for NGO Legislation in Barbados: White Paper Submitted to the Government of Barbados. Caribbean Policy Development Centre.

² Caribbean Philanthropy Network. (2010). *Philanthropy and Law in the Caribbean*.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Caribbean Policy Development Centre, N. M. W. G. (2019, March). A Call for NGO Legislation in Barbados: White Paper Submitted to the Government of Barbados. Caribbean Policy Development Centre.

⁵ <https://barbadostoday.bb/2019/04/10/new-steps-to-register-charities/>

moves to create NGO-specific legislation for the island, although no timeline for completion has been given⁶.

Funding and Sources of Income

In 2018, the Caribbean Policy Development Centre released an issue paper⁷ on the state of the funding environment for CARIFORUM countries. The document, titled: Caribbean NGO Trends - The Funding Environment in the Caribbean, proves instructive in articulating the funding needs and challenges of NGOs in the region, and is therefore useful in mapping the macro operating structures. Seventy-one (71) respondents, representing six of the seven countries targeted in the Equality and Justice Alliance (EJA) project responded to the survey. These were: Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines and St Lucia.

The results of the survey indicated that 60 percent stated, to varying degrees, that raising money for their organisations was difficult for them. Furthermore, over half of the respondents reported that their annual budget was under USD\$20 000, which overwhelmingly was not enough to cover their activities. As for the source of their funds, NGO managers and directors largely indicated that their organisations were self-reliant or received money from international donors or fundraising events. Just over 10 percent earned funding from consultancies or corporate and private donations. To make up the shortfall, those operating in the third sector depended mainly on social entrepreneurship (45%), crowdfunding or Global Giving campaigns. Funding mainly came from the Caribbean (63%), followed by North America (16%) and Europe (14%). External factors for the lack of funding opportunities were deemed to be due to the lack of awareness of opportunities, low capacity in the sector, as well as the fact that the region was a low priority for international aid. The report also suggests that there is a

https://www.barbadosparliament.com/uploads/bill_resolution/be64e1e4f3e514aa2eeb1ac76c654c11.pdf

⁶ New NGO legislation coming. (2019, May 1). Retrieved January 1, 2020, from

<https://barbadostoday.bb/2019/05/01/new-ngo-legislation-coming/>

⁷ Thompson, Z. (n.d.). Caribbean NGO Trends Report Issue 2: The Funding Environment in the Caribbean.



major concern with aid flows into the region, based on priority areas which may exclude the Caribbean. Additionally, the region is deemed to be a middle income earning area, meaning there would be no need for donor funding.

NGO Referral List & Survey of Needs

Initially, the main purpose of the NGO Mapping and the creation of a referral list was to attempt a comprehensive list of civil society organisations, with a particular focus on those working in the following areas:

- LGBTQI issues
- Disability rights
- HIV and AIDS
- Planned Parenthood
- Youth
- Mental Health
- Legal Aid

As the novel coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) reached the region's shores in March 2020, the mapping and referral exercise became an even more important document for tracking existing support mechanisms in the Caribbean. The assessment was also concerned with the state of registration among civil society in project countries and the wider region, and the barriers they faced in being recognised by the state.



Methodology

The assessment and referral were completed using a single survey instrument created on Wufoo using ECADE's official account. The survey comprised thirteen (13) questions, which collated identifying information about the organisation, registration/incorporation status and the contemporary issues facing the NGOs operating in their country.

The draft instrument was shown to partners during a presentation at a regional civil society convening on March 6, 2020 in St. Lucia. Those in attendance gave vital feedback on the survey which was then incorporated into the final version. The survey was released at the end of March, 2020 and was open for responses until the end of June, 2020. This expanded window for responses was to allow organisations a chance to reply in light of increased demands on time and resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, some of the civil society organisations in target countries were running their own rapid response surveys to assess emerging needs.

The survey was promoted via the WhatsApp group of EJA participants, personal email correspondence, email blasts and social media posts (example in Appendix II). According to Wufoo's analytics, social media links and direct links were the most popular clickthrough methods for those accessing the survey.

In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with a respondent with the most recent experience of trying to have an NGO registered. The interview was held over WhatsApp and lasted for thirty-three (33) minutes. The interview was then transcribed by the researcher, and sent to the interviewee for confirmation of details.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Respondent Demographics

The survey garnered twenty-five (25) participants from twelve (12) Caribbean countries, as follows:

- Barbados
- St. Vincent and the Grenadines
- St. Lucia
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Grenada
- Jamaica
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Dominica
- St. Kitts and Nevis
- United States Virgin Islands
- Suriname
- Cayman Islands

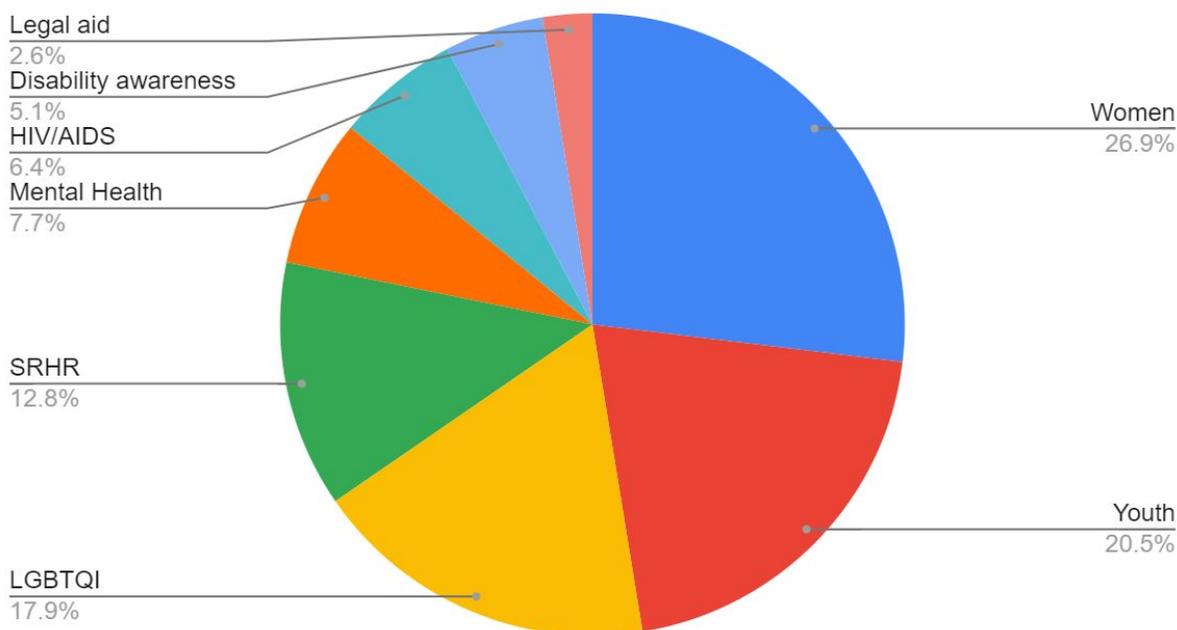
Three respondents were operating in multiple countries within and outside of the Caribbean.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago tied for the highest response rates (four respondents each), with Barbados and St. Lucia also recording strong responses (three respondents each).

Main Area(s) of Focus

Many of the participating organisations indicated a number of overlapping areas of focus. High on the agenda were women (26.9%), youth (20.5%) and the LGBTQI community (17.9%) . A further breakdown of major areas of focus are outlined below:

Main area(s) of focus

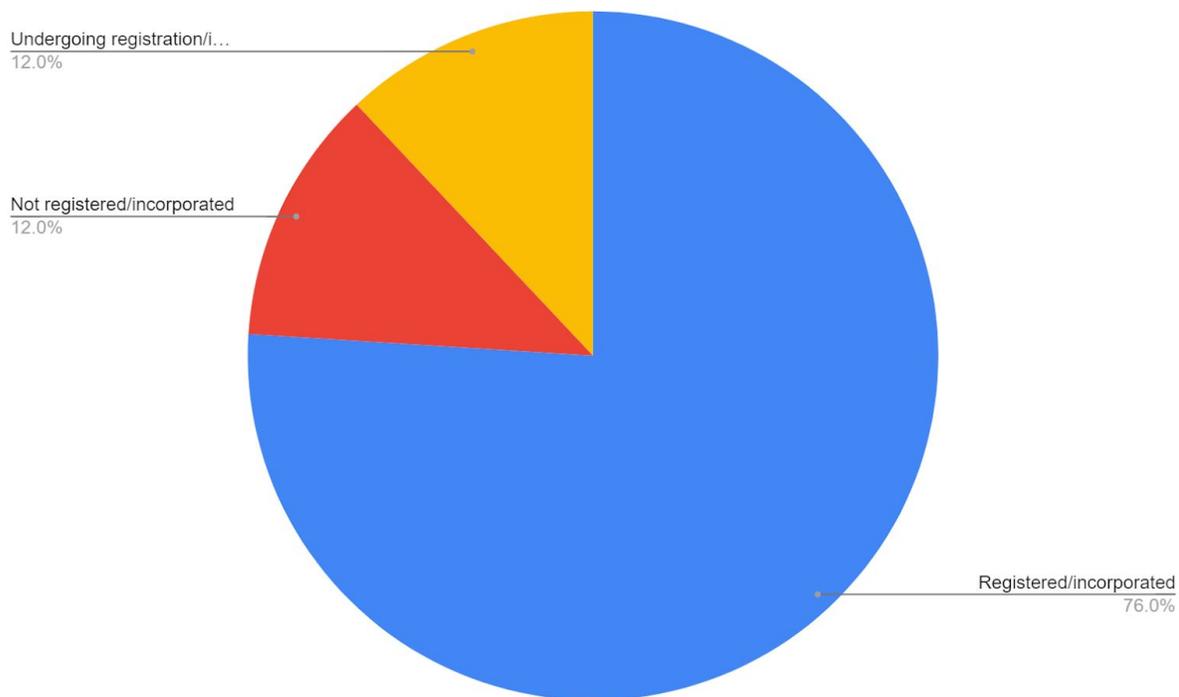


These target areas and communities are supported through such as human rights advocacy and outreach, counselling and psycho-social support, research, training, the provision of emergency shelter and hosting events.

Registration Status

Nineteen (19) of the twenty-five (25) organisations captured by the survey were either registered or incorporated. While some civil society groups had been registered as early as the 1960s, there was a marked increase in registration and incorporations from 2010. In addition, the average time between establishment and formal registration spanned from two to five years.

Three organisations were not registered, citing reasons such as the lack of internal capacity (staff/volunteers/a board of directors) to undertake the process, lack of financial support to pay for registration or incorporation and not seeing the need to register. Three NGOs were in the process of registration at the time of filling out the survey.



A Case in Point: The Road to Registration for an OECS NGO

In 2018, a human rights organisation operating in the OECS made the decision to re-engage its legal partners to be formally registered by the state. While there is no NGO-specific legislation in the country, company registration legislation allows for non-profit entities to be registered. A manager for the organisation outlined the steps that needed to be taken, as well as the challenges faced in completing the process, which are shared below. While these steps may not be the same for every country in the OECS or wider Caribbean, this in-depth example provides a snapshot of the general requirements for establishing an entity, which can provide significant insight and key takeaways for others who may be desirous of establishing an NGO in the space.

The Requisites

The director of the organisation stated that there are two essential components to the registration process on the island. These are the personnel to officially register the organisation, the requisite documents such as the legal letters and a Constitution, and a legal representative to prepare and submit the documents.

Personnel: In-country laws mandate that the organisation must have four executive members; these are: a President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. An entity with four directors is also allowed. The signatures of these four executives must be signed on an official letter, which goes to the Ministry of National Security, however, these names are not included on the certificate.

“Having your name on the letter does not entitle you to anything; it just states that you are the persons coming forward to have this organisation registered,” the director stated.



Legal Support: A lawyer is needed to support the application, as they ensure that the bylaws and Constitution for the entity are correct. “Also, because of the nature of our work, particularly the need for confidentiality purposes, we need to make sure these documents are legally sound,” the director stated.

In addition, the letter to the Minister of National Security required legal terms which NGOs on their own would not know how to formulate, unless there was a member of the legal profession working as staff or a volunteer in the organisation.

“The lawyer then sends the letter to the Permanent Secretary which requests the right to function as an NGO, including all benefits, and the Minister certifies the request, thereby granting permission [for the establishment of the NGO].”

Limitations/Challenges

It is clear from the process as outlined that NGOs requires a significant amount of time to see the process through. As is the case throughout the world, many Caribbean NGOs rely on volunteer support, even for executive management positions. As a result, competing interests for resources (such as time, human resources) may mean that the road to registration is beset by delays.

Another potential limitation would be the lack of an enabling eco-system to provide financial support for the process. For instance, the director stated that the organisation received funding from the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE) to pay the lawyer for their services. Without the support and guidance of umbrella entities like ECADE, it would be difficult for NGOs in the current funding environment to receive grants or other forms of funding to assist with formal registration on their own.

Finally, there may be delays with personnel external to the organisation which impedes the registration process. The director spoke to the fact that the person in charge of



working at the documents in the Registry had passed away. This was compounded by the fact that the entity was also dealing with delays from the lawyer engaged to handle the registration: “Everything was moving really slow... and I don't think that the lawyer saw it as an urgent matter.”

The importance of being registered

Despite the delays and challenges faced by the human rights organisation, the team believed that the benefits of registration outweighed the challenges. These included:

1. *Being registered reduces issues of donor's doubt when providing grant funding.* Legal registration is required for opening a bank account in an entity's name. The NGO director admitted that the organisation would have lost opportunities as a result of not being official with the state. “There were also instances where we would be receiving grant funds and I had to have the money sent to my personal account. This would be a security hazard for me, as I was opening up my personal banking information to other organisations,” the director said in an interview. With transparency at the forefront of their mind, the manager implemented measures for the receipt of funds. “Whenever we received money, I would have the executive sign a letter stating they knew where the money was being held, and I would also send this to the funders so they could also see the transparency as well.”
2. *Being registered eliminates the need for financial 'middle-men'.* In order to maneuver their unregistered status, some NGOs would use more established players in the field as ‘wire organisations’ for their grant funding. This meant that the recipient NGO would have to adhere to the accounting and procedural measures being utilised by the wire organisation. As a result, delays in payments and additional costs would accrue to the detriment of the recipient entity.

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3. *Registered NGOs are able to benefit from special tax rates and other state support.* “We are able to benefit from duty-free concessions like those afforded to a registered business, for example for cars and other goods that are explicitly for the benefit of the organisation,” the director stated.
 4. *Registered NGOs may be more palatable to potential volunteers and other external stakeholders.* People may feel more comfortable knowing that the organisation they are giving back to is registered with the state, particularly for reasons of accountability.

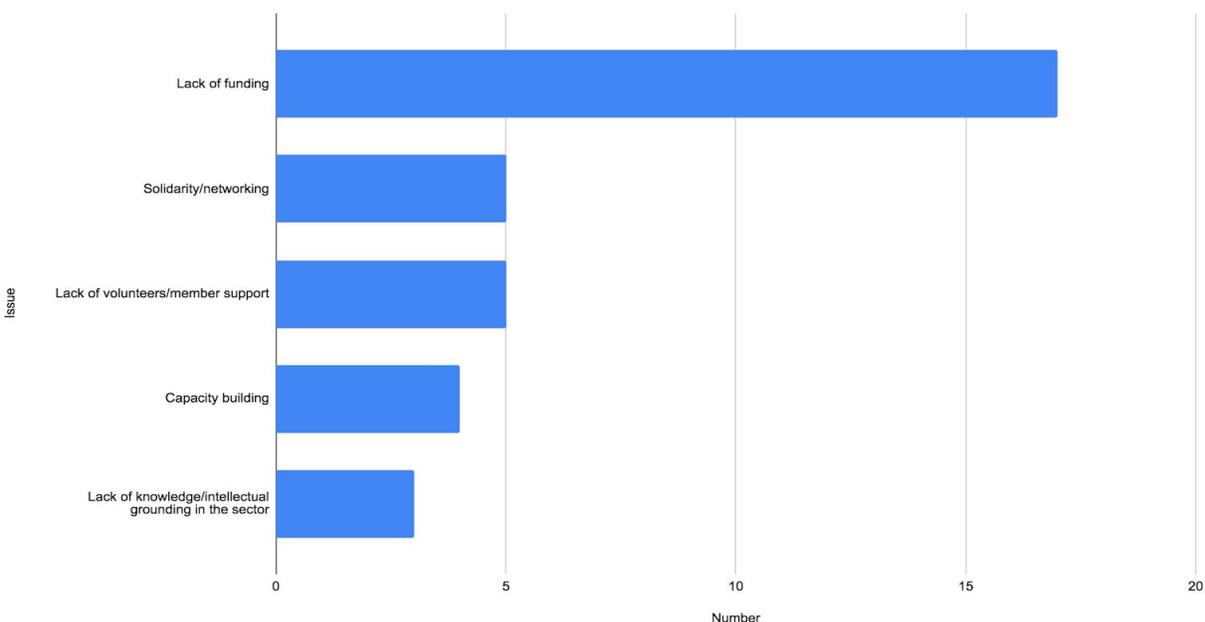
Major Concerns of the NGO Community in the region

Another main component of the survey was to capture the key concerns facing the regional NGO community. The lack of funding and financial sustainability was the biggest issue for NGOs, therefore being consistent with other surveys of NGO needs.

Overall, the five biggest priorities by respondents were:

1. Lack of funding
2. The decline of solidarity/networking in the region
3. Lack of volunteers/member support
4. Capacity building
5. Lack of knowledge/intellectual grounding in the concerns being advocated for

The major areas of concern are further broken down in the below chart.





Additionally, the survey participants highlighted the need for programmatic support to implement their initiatives; enabling laws and institutional frameworks; as well as the role of accountability, transparency and professionalism within the sector. Furthermore, some organisations emphasised the need for progressive and intersectional modes of working and sound data and documentation procedures.

What NGOs Want

The needs identified by NGOs mirrored the concerns that they shared. Therefore, the solutions solicited by the question: “How can these concerns be addressed, in your opinion?” centred on funding, movement building and technical support. These areas will be further addressed below:

1. Funding

Several respondents believe that states should provide core funding to support expenses such as office space and salaries. Others pointed to the potential possibilities of the social enterprise/entrepreneurship model. Social Entrepreneurship is been defined as the use of for-profit strategies by nonprofit organizations (Martin and Osberg, 2007). These may include the sale of goods and services, fundraising activities, support from the public sector, donor funding and corporate support as a result of a company’s Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.

Martin and Osberg state that social entrepreneurship comprises three components: it identifies a marginalised population which does not have the financial means or political sway to demand change, it identifies an opportunity in injustice, and creates a space where a better future can be realised for the marginalised, and even the wider society. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is often cited as a classic example of social enterprise at work (ibid).



Barriers to funding was also addressed by one respondent, who believed that small organisations should have ease of access to funding opportunities.

2. Movement Building

Regional cooperation and solidarity were touted as key solutions for building and sustaining social justice movements in the Caribbean. For respondents, this included shared services and data and leveraging skills through collaboration. This would require, in some participants' estimation, the need to resolve personal conflict and recognising the interconnectedness of the areas of focus that tend to fall under progressive "social justice" spaces.

Also important for movement building was the need for education on the history of movements for volunteers and the wider public, in order to "make volunteerism sexy again."

3. Technical support

Respondents saw the need for further training to support their work. One area identified was proposal writing, which in turn, would enable them to scale up their ability to win grants for their organisations. This highlights the overlapping nature of needs for NGOs operating in the region.

Conclusion: Possible Avenues for Support

From this small-scale survey, it is clear that regional NGOs overwhelmingly see the importance of being registered, and have made decided moves to ensure they have done so. Their internal actions have been buttressed by support from ECADE -- with funding from external agencies -- to provide funding for registration in 2017. However, the need for secure sources of funds, the importance of building and maintaining Caribbean alliances and the desire for additional training remain at the forefront. While the post-COVID donor landscape is still shifting, there are some actions that umbrella organisations and interested funders can support NGOs in uncertain times:

Lack of funding

As the region begins to take stock of the shifts in funding and donor support, both internally and externally, it is important to use this time to lobby, retrain and retool NGOs to seek support for their work.

Lobbying for core funding. Regional governments are faced with staggering job losses and dwindling economic prospects. It may therefore seem that now is not the opportune time to address the need for core funding from state institutions. However, as Caribbean governments become more open to the idea of transformative change and growth, an intervention from NGOs may be best heard in this current moment. This lobby could involve a coalition of local NGOs to strengthen the case.

Retraining for financial management. Training and capacity building were highlighted as areas of need for NGOs. Umbrella NGOs should consider supporting regional training initiatives in proposal writing, financial management for NGOs and non-profits as well as an introduction to social enterprise for the Caribbean. These should be free to ensure maximum uptake.



The decline of solidarity/networking in the region

Regional umbrella NGOs and organisations funding intra-regional initiatives should consider integrating solidarity actions into the implementations of their actions. Outside of workshops and training sessions, these can include cross-movement/cross-country calls to action, press statements and satellite activities such as marches or awareness campaigns. The EJA space provided a wonderful opportunity to do so.

Furthermore, there needs to be renewed action on CARICOM's Charter of Civil Society which could support a regional framework for solidarity.

Even though similar initiatives have occurred in an ad hoc way, for example the Life in Leggings marches in March 2017, these activities can also be integrated into work plans for multi-site initiatives. This also allows organisations to tap into the individual and collective strengths of their members and movements.

In addition, consideration must be given to the inclusion of mediators and counselling support to deal with interpersonal conflicts that may arise within NGO spaces. While personal clashes are inevitable, a movement which centres our most marginalised cannot afford to let progress be hampered by in-fighting.

APPENDIX

NGO Referral Information Online Database

1. What is the name of your organisation?
2. Country/ies of operation
3. Please indicate your organisation's main area of focus:

LGBTQI

Women

Disability awareness/advocacy

SRHR

National HIV/AIDS Programme

Youth

Mental Health

Legal aid

4. What other type of service(s) does your organisation provide?
5. Do you have a website? If so, please provide a link:

- 
6. Social media handles:(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
 7. Main contact person & their title
 8. In what year was your organisation started?
 9. Is your organisation registered/incorporated?
 10. If so, how long has it been registered/incorporated?
 11. If the organisation is not registered, what are some of the barriers you face in order to complete formal registration?

Lack of internal capacity (staff/volunteers/board of directors)

Lack of financial support/funding to pay for required documents, fees, etc.

Lack of a transparent, easy-to-follow registration process

Don't see the need to register

Other

12. What do you think are some of the major concerns facing the NGO community in your country?
13. How can some of these concerns be addressed, in your opinion?

APPENDIX II

Are you a Caribbean NGO?

Do you work on LGBTQI issues, disability rights, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and contraception?

We want YOU



Follow the link below to be included in the most comprehensive public database of non-profit-organisations in the Caribbean!

A Kaleidoscope Trust Equality and Justice Alliance project in collaboration with ECADE

Deadline: June 15, 2020



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