

# *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Canada's Foreign Aid Sector*

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## About the Research Team

**Dr. Andrea Paras**, the project's Primary Investigator, has over 15 years of experience conducting research on humanitarian organisations. Her recent book *Moral Obligations and Sovereignty in International Relations* (Paras, 2019) examines the history of humanitarianism from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present. She has also published research on how Canadian faith-based development NGOs position themselves in relation to public institutions, and how they navigate the distinction between missions and development. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Guelph.

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**Asa Coleman**, a research assistant on the project, is pursuing his MA degree in Political Science at the University of Guelph. His area of specialization is International Development, with his research focusing on the Indigenous experience in Canada.

**Jenine Otto**, a research assistant on the project, is an International Development undergraduate student specializing in Environment and Development with a minor in Geography. Throughout her time at the University of Guelph, she held Undergraduate Research Assistant positions, and completed independent research courses in human geographies. She is looking forward to pursuing a master's degree related to climate change adaptation and resilience in the near future.

## Summary

The main objective of this research is to investigate the impacts and implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for Canadian humanitarian and development organisations. Working with their partners around the world, Canadian humanitarian and development organisations play crucial roles in supporting public health, climate action, poverty alleviation, human rights, gender equality, food security, and education, amongst other issues. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted how Canadian organisations deliver these services and engage with their global partners. Additionally, the economic costs of the pandemic, with massive projected financial and job losses, threaten to undermine the future viability of the sector. Even more concerning is the negative impact this will have on the vulnerable communities in the Global South with whom Canadian organisations work, who also now face additional challenges in responding to the pandemic. The report includes four main sections and two appendices (Appendix 1: Timeline and Appendix 2: List of research participants).

The first main section provides an overview of Canada's foreign aid sector both prior to the pandemic and after its onset. The first sub-section focuses on Canada's ODA commitments; the relationship between Global Affairs Canada and Canadian NGO; Canada's history of inconsistent aid priorities; and the Feminist International Assistance Policy. The second sub-section reviews how the Canadian aid sector has responded to the pandemic, including the collective efforts of Canadian Civil Society Organisations as well as the Government of Canada's official response. The third sub-section summarises existing research about how the pandemic has impacted aid sectors outside of Canada, including survey findings from ACAPS, Bond, and Devex, to provide further context to our study.

The second main section of this report summarises the research methodology, which utilised a survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey was designed, distributed and analysed on the Qualtrics platform. Its 59 questions were divided into three sections: the first section collected background information about the organizations being surveyed; the second section examined how the pandemic had impacted them; and the third section collected information about how organisations responded to these challenges. We distributed the survey via direct email invitations to one representative within each organisation and collected one survey response per organisation July 8 -31, 2020. In total, we issued 745 survey invitations and received 151 survey responses, amounting to a response rate of 20.3%. After the completion of the survey, we conducted thirteen follow-up interviews with

key informants from Canadian humanitarian and development organisations between August 1 and September 11, 2020.

The third section of the report - the most substantive - discusses the research findings and is divided into three major sub-sections. The first sub-section summarises the background information that was collected from respondents. This information provides a snapshot of Canadian humanitarian and development organisations at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The information was used to identify a number of organisational characteristics that are relevant for understanding the pandemic's impact on the sector. Most importantly, we collected information about annual budget to determine organisational size, which we used to disaggregate our findings related to challenges and response strategies. Other background data we collected included information about:

- Primary sources of funding;
- International federations versus solely headquartered in Canada;
- Thematic areas of work;
- Geographic areas of work;
- Faith-based organisations;
- Extent of engagement with local partners;
- Use of volunteers.

The second sub-section of the "Research Findings" section identifies the most significant challenges and impacts experienced by Canadian humanitarian and development organisations as a result of the pandemic. This was the focus of the second section of the survey and was a dominant theme in follow-up interviews. The most significant impacts and challenges were related to:

- Loss of funding;
- Suspension of program delivery;
- Impacts on the workforce;
- Impacts on volunteers;
- Amplification of pre-existing issues.

The third sub-section of the "Research Findings" section identifies the strategies employed by Canadian humanitarian and development organisations in response to the pandemic. This was the focus of the third section of the survey and was an important theme in follow-up interviews. The most significant response strategies were related to:

- New fundraising strategies;
- Feminist and gender-based pandemic response;
- Localisation;
- Digital strategies;
- Strategies for staff support, retention and hiring.

The fourth and final main section of the report concludes with a discussion about the implications of our findings for re-envisioning the future of Canada's foreign aid sector. The pandemic provides an opportunity for Canada's foreign aid sector to collectively evaluate its shortcomings and restructure itself to create more accountable and just ways of operating. Our research provides a starting place for thinking about how to prioritise needs and make necessary changes within the sector. The discussion identifies five specific areas as starting places for this conversation: 1) the need to maintain funding that addresses pre-existing development issues in addition to Covid-19 response; 2) the need to provide targeted support for Small and Medium Organisations (SMOs); 3) the need to prioritise and provide targeted support for gender-based pandemic response; 4) the need to structure funding regulations to better support localisation and the empowerment of local partners; and 5) the need to support equitable digital innovation.

## *Background and Literature Review*

### ***The Pre-Pandemic Context in Canada's Foreign Aid sector***

This section summarises several key issues and critiques related to Canada's foreign aid sector in recent decades. The pre-pandemic context of the sector is discussed to provide an overview of the sector at the onset of the pandemic and identify pre-existing vulnerabilities. As we discuss in our research findings below, the pandemic has amplified pre-existing issues, which is why it is important to outline the basic features of this context in order to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the sector. This section will focus on four features of the pre-pandemic context: 1) Canada's ODA commitments; 2) the relationship between Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Canadian development and humanitarian NGOs; 3) Canada's aid priorities; and 4) the Feminist International Assistance Policy.

### ***Canada's ODA Commitments***

Despite numerous calls to increase foreign aid commitments, Canadian Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has consistently fallen well below the United Nation's target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI). Fluctuating between different political party leaderships from 1985 to 2015, the ODA/GNI ratio varied from 0.30 to 0.47, dropping to 0.26 in 2016 under the Trudeau government (Brown, 2018). In 2019, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) criticized the federal budget for keeping ODA at the same level of 0.26% of GNI through 2023-2024 (CCIC, 2019). In their written submission for the 2021 pre-budget consultations, CCIC, the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWACH) and the Canadian Coalition on Climate Change and Development (C4D) called for the federal government to double its ODA from \$6.2 to \$12.4 billion, which would put Canada on track for a 0.7 ODA/GNI ratio by 2030. The written submission also cited the need for Canadian leadership on the global stage, given how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities (CCIC, CanWACH & C4D, 2020).

### ***The Evolving Relationship between GAC and NGOs***

Several pre-existing dynamics exist between Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Canadian NGOs. On the one hand, many NGOs – large organisations in particular – have received significant amounts of funding from the federal government, as well as GAC and its institutional predecessors (Black & Tiessen, 2007; Corrigan-Brown & Ho, 2019). On the other hand, this reliance on government funding has raised concerns about NGO autonomy



(Black, 2016), project ownership (Black & Tiessen, 2007), as well as the politicisation of NGO funding and the way it fostered a competitive element between organisations (Brown, 2016). The federal government has increasingly linked funding opportunities to its own policy priorities, leading to a perception of increased government control (Brown, 2016). Prior to 2010, NGOs and their partners in the Global South could submit proposals to CIDA in partnership based on their expertise. After 2010, NGOs were required to wait for a call for proposals on projects based on government priorities. This has also led to a feeling of competition between NGOs as well as a sense of unpredictability (Brown, 2016).

One notable change during this period was the abolition of CIDA in 2013 and the transfer of its functions to the newly created Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) in 2013, which was later renamed “Global Affairs Canada” by the subsequent Liberal government (Brown, 2016; Essex & Carmichael, 2017). While some argue that CIDA was a “relatively autonomous state agency until the 2013 amalgamation” (Essex & Carmichael, 2017, 270), others point out how there has been a long history of bureaucratic power struggles between the agency and other branches of government (Pratt, 1998; Black, 2016). According to the Conservative government that initiated the merger, CIDA was abolished for the sake of efficiency and policy coherence (Brown, 2016). Nevertheless, there continues to be a concern that the institutional change has led less to policy coherence than it has to the marginalisation of international development priorities by successive governments.

### ***Inconsistent Aid Priorities***

Over the past two decades, a number of scholars have criticized Canadian foreign policy for inconsistent aid commitments and policy approaches (Black & Tiessen, 2007; Brown, 2016, 2018; Gulrajani, 2014; Tiessen, 2019). Canadian political scientist Stephen Brown has criticized both Conservative and Liberal governments for their instrumentalization of foreign aid, whereby foreign aid initiatives are based more on domestic electoral considerations rather than aid effectiveness (Brown, 2016; 2018). As a result, NGOs in the sector often have to shift their priorities to match those of the day's government, which results in inconsistent aid priorities over time. As Nilima Gulrajani (2014) points out, the domestic political environment has impacted Canada's level of commitment to international aid priorities and therefore the overall effectiveness of its aid programs.

### ***Gender and the Feminist International Assistance Policy***

Gender has played a central role in Canadian foreign aid policy both under Harper's previous Conservative government and Trudeau's current Liberal government. However, even here, these policies have not been consistent. The Conservative Harper government was lauded

for its commitment in 2010 to provide \$3.5 billion to the Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (Brown, 2016). However, Canadian political scientists Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi criticized Harper's government for an ambiguous and even contradictory approach to gender equality, pointing out that women and children were instrumentalized for other foreign policy aims (Tiessen & Baranyi, 2017). For instance, gender equality was essentially removed from Canadian foreign policy in 2009 when the Conservative government advised CIDA to use the term "equality between women and men" as opposed to "gender equality" (Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). Elected in 2015, Trudeau's Liberal government attempted to distinguish itself from its predecessor by centering its foreign aid on a re-branded Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), which included \$300 million in support to the newly launched Equality Fund in 2019. However, scholars have criticized FIAP for being a change in name but not in substantive practice (Brown, 2018), and have argued that it needs to adopt a more transformational approach (Tiessen, 2019).

### ***Canada's Foreign Aid Sector Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic***

We are not aware of any research that has been published to date on how the pandemic has impacted the Canadian foreign aid sector as a whole, so one of the primary objectives of this report is to fill that gap. However, there have been collective efforts by members of the foreign aid sector to engage with the government and the public about the impact of the pandemic on Canadian NGOs, as well as efforts to advocate for higher levels of government support for Civil Society Organisations. Several Canadian coalitions and organisations have published open letters and reports illustrating the current needs of the sector. The following section will provide an overview of these efforts by summarising how Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the sector have collectively responded to the pandemic, as well as the Canadian government's efforts to support the sector. This will provide further context for the research findings that we discuss below.

### ***Collective CSO Responses to the Pandemic***

As early as March 11<sup>th</sup>, Imagine Canada had identified the potential for major economic disruption to Canada's charitable sector, and its CEO and President Bruce MacDonald's letter on that date called on the federal government to ensure that its economic supports did not preclude assistance to charities and non-profits (Imagine Canada, 2020a). On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the CCIC and four partner coalitions sent an open "Letter on COVID-19 and the International Cooperation Sector" to International Development Minister Karina Gould. On behalf of more than 180 organisations, the letter cited the need for international cooperation in the global pandemic response and called on the Canadian government to implement feminist and

human-rights-based approaches in its efforts. The letter emphasised how the pandemic presents an opportunity for the sector to “reshape mindsets and language around the value and spirit of development cooperation.” Potential challenges for organisations during the pandemic were also highlighted, including severed connections between Canadian organisations and in-country partners, shifts away from vital programming toward health concerns, and the abandonment of international cooperation and assistance (CCIC, 2020). Additionally, in July, CanWaCH published information regarding pandemic impacts on organisations in Canada, in “100 Days of a Pandemic: Canada’s Evidence-Driven Global Response”. From March to June 2020, CanWaCH collected and reported information from 55 organisations and institutions. The report provided an overview early in the pandemic on the situation, the experiences of organisations, as well as data-related priority areas, challenges, and recommendations moving forward (CanWaCH, 2020).

In May 2020, Imagine Canada released a report (Lasby, 2020) regarding the pandemic’s impact on Canadian charities. The report outlines how Canadian charities have adapted to the crisis, as well as some of the negative repercussions the pandemic is having on their operations. While the Imagine Canada report describes the experiences of Canadian charities overall – and not development and humanitarian NGOs in particular – it is one of the only available studies to date to take stock of the pandemic’s impact on Canadian civil society organisations. For this reason, a summary of its main findings provides some additional useful context for our research:

- Demand and capacity has both increased and decreased for different charities.
- Innovation is essential to organisations’ pandemic responses. Over half of the surveyed charities have moved their programs online, and 42% have initiated new programs.
- Charities are facing revenue decreases, and organisations have decreased the number of paid staff members through temporary and permanent layoffs.
- Engagement and availability of volunteers have become a challenge.
- 45% of charities think that their financial situation will worsen in three to six months, while 8% think it will improve.
- 20% of charities think that their current level of operations will continue for 3 to 6 months, and 25% believe they will continue for 6 to 12 months.
- The pandemic’s negative implications have exceeded those of the 2008-2009 economic crisis.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, CCIC, CanWaCH, and C4D released a joint submission ahead of the 2021 budget, with the context of the pandemic at the forefront of their concerns. Together, these coalitions include 156 development and humanitarian organisations. The submission expressed the need for additional international support from the Government Canada, pointing out that Canada’s funding for the global pandemic response made up less than 1%

of its total COVID-19 assistance spending (CCIC, CanWaCH & C4D, 2020). Among other recommendations, it called on the federal government to:

- Double ODA to \$12.4 billion over the next five years;
- Increase Canada's international assistance envelope with a new \$2 billion for urgent pandemic responses, totalling 1% of Canada's domestic pandemic response;
- Prioritize the most marginalized people by allocating half of the bilateral assistance to fragile contexts, as well as least developed and low-income countries;
- Commit to a consistent feminist foreign policy focusing on an equitable recovery; and
- Shift the charitable sector away from "direction and control" and toward "resource accountability" to strengthen the country's international assistance.

### **Government Covid-19 Funding and Support**

In response to the pandemic, the federal government has allocated various pockets of funding towards its global pandemic response. More specifically, the federal government's monetary response started on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, with the allocation of \$2 million to the World Health Organization (Government of Canada, 2020b). In March, the government announced \$50 million to assist vulnerable nations, with \$8 million of this funding directed toward partners including the WHO, the Pan-American Health Organization, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Global Affairs Canada, 2020a). In April, \$159.5 million, including the previously allocated \$50 million, was distributed to support international responses to the pandemic (Global Affairs Canada, 2020c). In May, Canada, and several other countries, joined the Coronavirus Global Response initiated by President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. This collaboration aims to address the accessibility of COVID-19 vaccination, treatment, and testing, and collect over \$8 billion USD as a start to support the global COVID-19 response (European Union, 2020; PMO, 2020). As of May 4<sup>th</sup>, the Government of Canada had allocated more than \$850 million CAD toward initiatives that support this target, including assistance for COVID-19 research and vaccine development (PMO, 2020). In the same month, in response to yearly humanitarian appeals, \$306 million in government funding was announced. Of this funding, \$177.5 million was allocated to United Nations humanitarian agencies including the WHO; \$75 million was allocated to twenty-two NGOs, including CARE Canada and Doctors Without Borders; and \$53.5 million was allocated to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Global Affairs Canada, 2020b).

Domestically, the Liberal government has not provided specific financial supports to Canadian international development NGOs. Rather, charitable organisations have been able to access the same wage subsidy programs as private sector organisations if they are

determined eligible. For instance, the federal government provided eligible organisations, such as charities, with access to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Canada Emergency Response Benefit Temporary Wage Subsidy for Employers, Canada Emergency Business Account, Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance, Emergency Community Support Fund for community-based organisations providing essential services, and other such emergency financial assistance initiatives (Imagine Canada, 2020b). Provincial government responses included various assistance initiatives for organisations and businesses, including the charitable sector as well. However, NGOs have expressed concerns about several barriers to accessing these emergency responses supports. For such subsidies and emergency financial supports, NGOs must meet the standards of eligibility, which, as some of our respondents indicated, has proved challenging to some. A survey of small businesses carried out by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) in April 2020 found that 37% of those surveyed said CEWS would not be helpful for them, while 21% were uncertain, and 29% stated it would help. Of the 37%, there were concerns regarding the eligibility criteria, including the difficulty of reversing layoffs, organisations' ability to prove a 30% decrease in revenue, and the wage support not being adequate to retain jobs (CFIB, 2020).

In September 2020, Imagine Canada summarised the changes made to CEWS and how these changes have broadened the eligibility for applicants, including NGOs (Imagine Canada, 2020c). They include revenue decrease- dependent subsidy rates, an expansion of eligibility to organisations with less than a 30% revenue decrease, an expansion of eligibility to organisations with a >50% revenue decline in the last three months, and several other modifications to the support program (Government of Canada, 2020a; Imagine Canada, 2020c).

### ***The Impact of the Pandemic on Foreign Aid Sectors Outside of Canada***

Several organisations outside of Canada have conducted research to understand the impact of the pandemic on humanitarian and development NGOs. While the findings of these surveys are not specific to the Canadian sector, it is helpful to summarise the results of this work to situate the challenges faced by the Canadian foreign aid sector within a broader global context. These international surveys can provide an important indicator of shared pandemic stressors, common or divergent response strategies, and how the global international development sector is responding overall.

ACAPS, a non-profit project of a consortium of three NGOs,<sup>1</sup> developed a COVID-19 Analytical Framework (ACAPS, 2020a) and several surveys to identify the impacts of the pandemic on the development sector globally. ACAPS' Quick Impact Survey, conducted in April 2020, was used to rapidly identify the early impacts of the pandemic on humanitarian operations (ACAPS, 2020b). The survey was delivered to organisations internationally and focused on the effects of government responses on operations, as well as measures taken to protect workers and others. The survey found that, in the early stages of the pandemic, organisations had already identified a need to adapt and pivot their operations to ensure their survival; that humanitarian workers in some countries have experienced negative repercussions (such as experiences of physical violence); and that organisations were integrating lessons learned from previous epidemics (ACAPS, 2020b).

Other research conducted during the spring of 2020 identified how the pandemic has endangered the future existence of many NGOs. In May, a survey conducted by Bond (a UK-based network for international development organisations) received responses from 116 of its member organisations and found that:

- Without increased funding, 50 of the organisations surveyed would not make it past six months. This number increased from 34 to 50 between March and May;
- 53% of respondents reported that they had already reduced programming, or planned to;
- Organisations decreased their staffing costs through redundancies (10%), temporary pay reductions (28%), frozen recruitment (58%), or staff furloughs (54%)
- Of the 40 organisations at risk for closure, 25 (63%) were small organisations, and 17 (43%) were medium.
- 70% of respondents reported that they expected the crisis to impact their finances;
- Faith-based organisations identified unique challenges related to their fundraising campaigns around religious holidays (Lent and Ramadan). (Bond, 2020)

Devex, a media outlet reporting on the development sector internationally, has published several articles based on a series of COVID-19 Trends Tracker surveys. One survey published in May 2020, received responses from over 580 development professionals in 162 countries, and highlighted the unequal impacts experienced by development organisations from the Global South (Smith & Chadwick, 2020b). A total of 60% of respondents were concerned their organisation would not survive the pandemic. This concern was more frequently expressed by respondents from organisations in Africa and the Middle East, than those in North America and Europe. The same survey reported that 54% of respondents in Africa and 53% of respondents in Asia had either lost their job or knew someone who had. Despite

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<sup>1</sup> The consortium includes the Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, and Mercy Corps.

these challenges for professionals and organisations in the Global South, research from Devex has also identified how the pandemic has increased the responsibilities of local aid organisations. A survey of 593 development workers (Smith & Chadwick, 2020c) found that 51% of development professionals reported increasing dependence on local professionals by international NGOs. However, there are concerns that commensurate levels of support do not accompany these increased levels of responsibility.

An additional Devex Trends Tracker, carried out from July 27<sup>th</sup> to August 10<sup>th</sup>, surveyed a total of 650 development workers in 113 countries (Smith & Chadwick, 2020a). The findings suggest a continuation of the trends identified above:

- 59% of participants had either lost their job due to the pandemic or knew someone who had;
- 46% of respondents reported a loss of funding for their organisation (compared with 37% in April 2020);
- 17% of respondents' organisations had decreased employee salaries, and 34% reported that hiring had been stopped or reduced.

To summarise, these studies provide a helpful snapshot of how the pandemic has impacted development and humanitarian NGOs globally. Overall, the largest challenges are related to declines in funding, employment precarity, and capacity gaps between organisations from the Global North and the Global South. While these surveys provide valuable information about how NGOs around the world are experiencing the pandemic, a limitation is that they do not disaggregate the findings according to national contexts. Our research findings below fill this gap by identifying the pandemic's impacts on Canadian humanitarian and development NGOs.

## Methodology

Our research employed a mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative approach, employing a survey followed up by semi-structured interviews.

The survey was designed, distributed and analysed on the Qualtrics platform. Its questions were divided into three thematic areas: 1) Background; 2) Impacts and Challenges; and 3) Strategies and Responses. Our goal was to collect background information about the organisations being surveyed, examine how the pandemic had impacted them, and identify how organisations responded to these challenges. The questions went through several rounds of revisions within the research team to ensure clarity and appropriate scope. The survey was then piloted with three individuals working for NGOs within the sector and minor revisions to the survey questions were made based on their feedback.

The survey was distributed to 745 Canadian humanitarian and development organisations. Although there is no centralised database for Canadian humanitarian and development organisations, this number of organisations is consistent with other recent research that has calculated the number of organisations in the sector.<sup>2</sup> Our original dataset of organisations was created by the research team from a combination of online sources. We first identified the signatories of the open letter sent by CCIC to Minister Karina Gould on April 3, 2020. The selection was expanded to include members of the Canadian Association of International Development Professionals (CAIDP) and the Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health (CanWaCH). To ensure participation from faith-based NGOs, we included organisations listed as members of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities. Finally, the research team identified other relevant organisations using Canadian Revenue Agency's searchable database of Canadian charities.

Where possible, we distributed the survey via direct email invitations to one representative within each organisation. When we could not locate the specific email address of an individual, we sent the survey invitation to the organisation's general email address. Our invitation requested that the recipient complete the survey on behalf of the organisation or forward the invitation to a different organisational representative who was better placed to answer the questions. We collected one survey response per organisation. Collection of responses began on July 8<sup>th</sup> and ended on July 31<sup>st</sup>, with some incomplete surveys submitted

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<sup>2</sup> John-Michael Davis has compiled a database of Canadian development NGOs using the Canada Revenue Agency's T3010 Registered Charity Information Return filings and organizational websites. According to his count, as of July 2018 the sector is comprised of 844 Canadian international development NGOs (Davis, 2019). More recently, Davis used the same method to identify a smaller subset Canadian grassroots international development organisations, and identified a dataset of 607 smaller, privately funded, and volunteer-based organisations (Davis, 2020). Our dataset of 745 organisations is consistent with Davis' numbers.



shortly after the deadline. A reminder email was sent out one week prior to the deadline to encourage participation. In total, we received 151 survey responses, amounting to a response rate of 20.3%. Survey responses were analysed within the Qualtrics platform using the program's analytical features, which mainly included the "Reports" and "Crosstabs" functions.

Survey respondents were asked if they would be interested in participating in a follow-interview with the investigators. Due to the short timeframe of this research, it was not possible to interview all 95 respondents who indicated their availability. The research team identified a cross-selection of interview participants that would provide a diversity of perspectives, including representatives from SMOs and large organisations, and some faith-based organisations. We also selected interview participants based on their survey responses, for instance, if they had indicated their organisation had experienced severe funding losses or had significantly restructured their programs. We conducted thirteen interviews with key informants from Canadian humanitarian and development organisations between August 1 and September 11, 2020. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then uploaded into NVivo for coding. To ensure consistency in coding, one research assistant was trained to code the interviews using both deductive and emergent coding methods. Deductive codes were established based on survey questions, while emergent coding was used to identify other salient themes. The survey included six open-ended questions, and these qualitative answers were also analysed and coded in NVivo by the same research assistant.

# Research Findings

## 1. BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

The first section of the survey collected organisational background information from respondents. Collectively, this information provides a snapshot of Canadian humanitarian and development organisations at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This information was used to identify a number of organisational characteristics that are relevant for understanding the pandemic's impact on the sector. Most importantly, we collected information about annual budget to determine organisational size, which we used to disaggregate our findings related to challenges and response strategies. Other background data we collected included information about:

- Annual budget and organisational size;
- Primary sources of funding;
- Whether the organisation is an international federation or is solely headquartered in Canada;
- Thematic areas of work;
- Geographic areas of work
- Whether the organisation identified as faith-based;
- Extent of engagement with local partners;
- Use of volunteers.

### **Annual Budget and Organisational Size**

The survey provided a several budget brackets (ranging from <\$50,000 to >\$100 million) and requested respondents to identify their organisation's annual budget according to these categories. During the analysis, we used this information to classify organisations as either a Small or Medium Organisation (SMO), or a large organisation. SMOs were categorised as organisations with an annual budget less than \$10 million. Large organisations were categorised as organisations with an annual budget greater than \$10 million. After bucketing the organisations into these two categories, we requested Schedule 2 data from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to confirm the accuracy of our categorisations. Additionally, we used the Schedule 2 data from the CRA to confirm that none of the organisations that we had

classified as SMOs had overseas expenditures in excess of \$2 million.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 summarises the breakdown of our respondents by size.

Organisation Size	# of Respondents (% of respondents) <sup>4</sup>
SMOs (<\$10 million)	128 (84.8%)
Large organisations (>\$10 million)	21 (13.9%)

**TABLE 1: Number of respondents by size**

### Primary Sources of Funding

***Our findings indicate that, overall, organisations rely on personal donations more than any other funding source by a wide margin.***

The majority of organisations who responded to our survey rely on personal charitable donations to the organisation as a primary source of funding, with 123 (82.6%) organisations claiming this as a funding source.<sup>5</sup> The variance between SMOs and large organisations was minimal, with 82.8% (n=106) of SMOs and 81% (n=17) of large organisations indicating personal donations as a source of funding. Of these organisations, 82.1% (n=87) of SMOs and 88.2% (n=15) of large organisations indicated they were “Very Reliant” on personal charitable donations.<sup>6</sup>

The next most prevalent funding source was that received from philanthropic foundations, which was identified as a funding source for 82 (55%) respondents. This was followed by corporate donations (42.3%; n= 63)) and funding from Global Affairs Canada (34.2%; n=51). Other less significant categories included: other federal government (19.5%; n=29), provincial governments (20.1%; n=30), Multilateral donors (10.1%; n=15), Internal transfers (8.1%; n=12), and staff raising their salaries through their own individual

<sup>3</sup> This method of categorisation is consistent with that used by the Spur Change Program, which is an initiative of the Inter-Council Network that aims to support the effectiveness of Canadian SMOs. The Spur Change Program defines an SMO as an organisation with annual revenue less than \$10 million and overseas expenditures of less than \$2 million. We consulted with the Director of the Spur Change Program, Andréanne Martel, to confirm that our mode of classification was consistent with that used in the broader sector and are grateful for her insights on this matter.

<sup>4</sup> Two respondents declined to provide information about their organisation’s annual budget, so for this category the n=149.

<sup>5</sup> Two respondents declined to provide information about their organisation’s annual budget, so for this category the n=149.

<sup>6</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate whether their organisations were “Very Reliant,” “Somewhat Reliant,” or “Less Reliant” on various funding sources.

fundraising (6%; n=9). A number of respondents (28.9%; n=43) indicated that they received funding from “Other” sources, which included, for example, other national governments, fundraising events, unions, bilateral organisations, existing asset bases of the foundation, or rental income.

***SMOs are more likely to rely on funding from philanthropic organisations in comparison to large organisations, while large organisations are more likely to rely on funding from Global Affairs Canada in comparison to SMOs.***

We also identified some relevant differences between SMOs and large organisations, which suggest that large organisations have a more diverse portfolio of funding sources compared with SMOs. Philanthropic foundations were identified as a funding source for 53.1% (n=68) of SMOs and 66.7% (n=14) of large organisations. A greater proportion of SMOs (41.2%; n=28) indicated they were “Very Reliant” on philanthropic foundations compared with large organisations (14.3%; n=2). Conversely, large organisations were more likely to receive funding from Global Affairs Canada (76.2%; n=16) compared with SMOs (27.3%; n=35), which is unsurprising given that large organisations simply have greater capacity and experience with putting together proposals to GAC. Of the organisations that received GAC funding, 81.3% (n=13) of large organisations indicated that they were “Very Reliant” on this funding source compared with 60% (n=21) of SMOs. Large organisations (42.9%; n=9) were more likely to receive funding from multilateral donors compared with SMOs (4.7%; n=6), although the majority of large organisations to do so (n=5) indicated they were only “Somewhat Reliant” on multilateral funding. Corporate donations were identified as a source of funding for 39.8% (n=51) of SMOs and 57.1% (n=12) of large organisations, but the majority of these organisations indicated that they were only “Somewhat Reliant” on this funding source.

### ***International Federation vs. Solely Headquartered in Canada***

We collected information about whether our respondents belonged to organisations that were part of an international federation, or if they were Canadian organisations solely headquartered in Canada. This information was used to compare how international federations were impacted by the pandemic compared with solely Canadian-based organisations, as well as whether this organisational characteristic had any impact on response strategies. We will discuss these findings in the sections below.

The majority (72.3%; n=109) of our survey respondents indicated that their organisations were solely headquartered in Canada, with 27.3% (n=41) identifying themselves as belonging to an international federation. We also found that international federations were more likely to receive GAC funding (51.2%; n=21) compared with organisations solely

headquartered in Canada (28.4%; n=31). This is likely a by-product of the relatively greater size of organisations that are part of an international federation (and therefore their capacity to submit funding proposals to GAC): only 23.4% (n=30) of SMOs indicated they were part of an international federation compared with 52.4% (n=11) of large organisations.

### **Thematic Areas of Work**

#### ***Education and gender equality are the most frequently cited thematic areas of work for Canadian NGOs.***

The survey asked respondents to identify their thematic areas of work over the past five years. Across all respondents, education and gender equality were the thematic areas most frequently cited as areas of work: 91 (60.3%) organisations identified themselves as delivering programs in the area of education and 90 (59.6%) in gender equality programming. Table 2 below summarises the thematic areas of work identified by respondents and provides a snapshot of the thematic distribution of effort across Canadian NGOs.

Interestingly, SMOs take on the majority of education programming, with 61.7% of SMOs (n=79) indicating education as one of their program delivery areas, while 47.6% of large organisations (n=10) deliver services in this area. Notably, education emerged as the main thematic area where SMOs engaged more frequently in service delivery in comparison to large organisations.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, 81% of large organisations (n=17) engage in gender equality programming, while only 54.7% of SMOs (n=70) do so. A possible explanation for this difference is that large organisations, who are more likely to receive GAC funding, are required to include gender dimensions in their proposals due to FIAP guidelines. Or quite simply, large organisations may simply have more capacity in this thematic area than SMOs. The difference is even more significant when it comes to programs related to maternal and children's health, with 76.2% large organisations (n=16) engaged in such work compared to 31.3% SMOs (n=40). Large organisations (61.9%; n=13) are also more frequently engaged in disaster relief and humanitarian assistance compared with SMOs (21.1%; n=27).

In other words, across all the provided options aside from education, large organisations appear to be involved in a wider variety of program areas. This is likely due both to their

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<sup>7</sup> Our data also indicated that SMOs (12.5%; n=16) provide slightly more service delivery in the area of disability than large organisations (9.5%; n=2), but since the percentage gap and sample size is significantly smaller in this area of service delivery, it is not possible to make any claims about whether SMOs work more in this area than large organisations.

capacity and funding, which allows them to take on more projects related to a wider selection of issues.

Thematic Area	# of Respondents
Education	91
Gender equality	90
Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)	64
Food security and agriculture	62
Maternal and children's health care	60
Environment and sustainable development	57
Nutrition	50
Economic development	49
Public health advocacy and/or education	43
Disaster relief and humanitarian assistance	42
Human rights protection or promotion	39
Childcare / children's rights	38
Other (please specify):	37
Strengthening democracy and good governance	30
Refugee and migrant support	28
Climate change advocacy and solutions	27
Business development	23
Mental health and/or disability advocacy	21
Disability	19
Infectious Disease	18
Non-communicable diseases	9

**TABLE 2: Summary of organisations' thematic areas of work**

### **Geographic Areas of Work**

The survey asked respondents to identify their geographic areas of work over the past five years. Similar to the question above about thematic areas of work, the answers provide a snapshot about the geographic distribution of effort across Canadian humanitarian and development NGOs. Respondents identified Sub-Saharan Africa as the most common geographic area of work (67.5%; n=102), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (55%; n=83) and North America (35.8%; n=54). South and Southeast Asia were tied at 44 (29.1%) respondents. Even fewer respondents indicated that they work in the Middle East

and North Africa (20.5%; n=31), Central Asia (13.9%; n=21), Europe (12.46n=19), East Asia (11.3%; n=17), or Oceania (6%; n=9).

### **Faith-based Organisations**

***Faith-based organisations (FBOs) in particular are heavily reliant on personal donations as a source of funding, as well as have a less diverse funding portfolio compared with non-FBOs.***

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) comprised 23.2% of respondents (n=35). Notably, there was a slightly higher percentage of large organisations that identified as FBOs (33.3%; n=7) compared with 22.2% (n=28) of SMOs. For the most part, the FBOs who responded to our survey identified as faith-based relief and development organisations (68.6%; n=24) followed by hybrid faith-based organisations (n=9, 25.7%), which we defined as an organisation that engages in both development and missionary work (defined as religious teaching). Missionary organisations were the least numerous of our FBO respondents (n=2, 5.7%), likely because they explicitly do not identify development as within the scope of their work so did not see the need to respond to the survey. It is important to note that our data cannot be interpreted as providing an accurate depiction of the number of FBOs in Canada or the number of FBOs working on development issues. Nevertheless, collecting information about FBOs makes it possible to identify whether this segment of the Canadian NGO sector has experienced any unique challenges in comparison with non-religious NGOs, as well as identify if they have employed any unique response strategies.

As mentioned above, 82.6% of all organisations identified personal donations as a source of funding. When disaggregating FBOs from non-FBOs, we found that 97.1% (n=34) identified personal donations as a source of funding compared with 77.2% (n=88) of non-FBOs. Even more striking is that the same 97.1% (n=34) of FBOs indicated that they were “Very Reliant” on personal donations as a funding source, compared with only 58.8% (n=67) of non-FBOs who indicated the same degree of reliance. Our findings suggest that FBOs in particular are heavily reliant on personal donations as a funding source in comparison with non-FBOs as well indicates that they have a less diverse funding portfolio. Philanthropic foundations were identified as the next most significant sources of funding for FBOs (60%; n=21), followed by corporate donations (48.6%; n=17), but for both of these funding sources, the majority of FBOs indicated that they were only “Somewhat Reliant.”

### **Engagement with Local Partners**

An important consideration to be made within the context of COVID-19 regards the extent of engagement with local partners and how programs that rely on such partnerships are impacted. In the survey, we asked questions both about the extent of engagement with local partners, as well as about the number of local partners with whom organisations worked. Of the 141 respondents who answered this question, 78.8% (n=111) stated that they work with local partners for program delivery either “Always” or “Often.” Only 11.4% (n=17) respondents indicated that they ‘never’ or ‘seldom’ worked with local partners. Respondents who had indicated that they worked with local partners either ‘Always’ or ‘Often’ were subsequently asked the approximate number of local partners with whom their organisations worked, and over 70% indicated that they used “Many” or “Several” local partners in their programs. These responses demonstrate the centrality of partnerships with local organisations in the work of Canadian NGOs.

### **Volunteers**

In addition to understanding the impact of the pandemic on permanent employees within the sector (we discuss these findings below), we also wanted to understand its impact on volunteers. These are personnel who often make significant contributions to NGOs in daily operations or service delivery, but whose labour may be overlooked since they do not appear on payroll. Nevertheless, funding revenue, for instance from GAC or from fundraising efforts, is sometimes linked to the use of volunteers, so it is important to understand the extent to which the pandemic has impacted the ability of organisations who rely on volunteers to work with them.

The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they belonged to a volunteer-sending organisation. Just under half of our respondents (43.7.9%; n=66) indicated that their organisation sends volunteers, with the majority (69.7%; n=46) employing short-term volunteers (<one year). This was followed by student internships (42.4%; n=28) and long-term volunteers (21.2%; n=14).



## 2. CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS

After collecting the background information summarised in the previous section, the first major thematic focus of our research was to identify the most significant challenges and impacts experienced by Canadian humanitarian and development organisations as a result of the pandemic. This was the focus of the second section of the survey and was also a dominant theme in follow-up interviews. According to our respondents, the most significant impacts and challenges were related to:

- Loss of funding;
- Suspension of program delivery;
- Impacts on the workforce;
- Impacts on volunteers;
- Amplification of pre-existing issues.

### Loss of Funding

#### *“2020 looks bad, but 2021 looks worse.” (P8)*

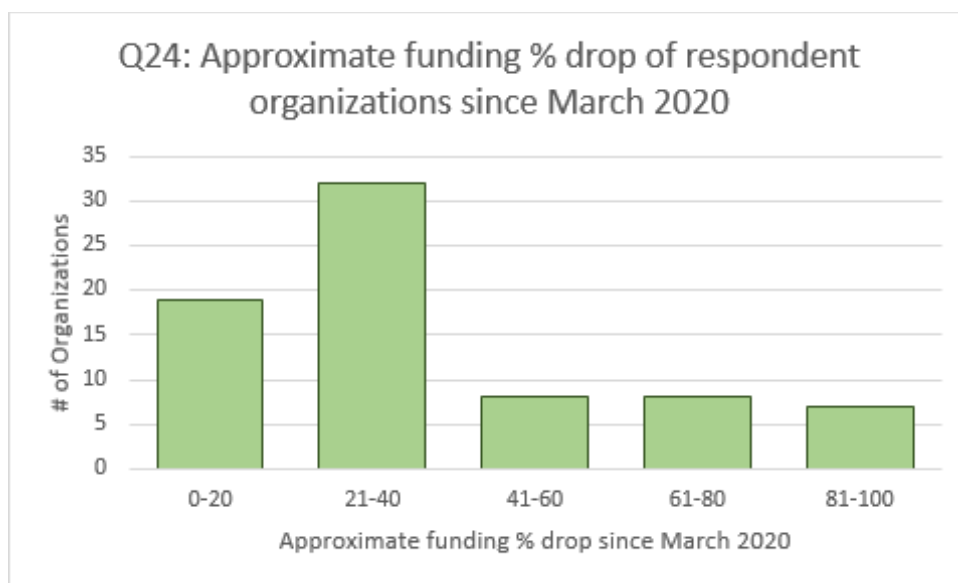
Our findings suggest that financial loss within the sector since March 2020 has already been significant. Of the 146 respondents who chose to answer the survey's question about whether their organisation had experienced a decline in funding since March 2020, 60.1% (n=89) indicated a loss.<sup>8</sup> The rate of loss was consistent between SMOs and large organisations with only 3.1% variance between the two categories. The average decline in funding across all organisations was 26.4%, with the greatest number of organisations experiencing a loss between 21-40% (n=32) (see Figure 1 below). It is important to note the limitations of our data related to funding losses. In follow-up interviews, some respondents clarified that the percentage decline they had identified in the answer to this survey question was based on their projected losses for the entire 2020 fiscal year (P1; P8)<sup>9</sup>, while others specified that the number they provided was for a fiscal quarter (P2). Some organisations

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<sup>8</sup> This number is on a similar scale with the 70% of respondents in the May 2020 Bond survey who indicated that they expected to experience financial losses (Bond, 2020). It is greater, however, than the 46% who reported funding losses in the Devex Trends Tracker that surveyed respondents in 113 countries from July 27<sup>th</sup> to August 10 (Smith and Chadwick, 2020a).

<sup>9</sup> In order to encourage candid responses during our interviews, we kept anonymous the identities of the thirteen organisations who participated in follow-up interviews. Interview participants will be identified only through these codes: Participant 1(P1), Participant 2, (P2), etc.

indicated that they typically receive most of their revenue in the last couple months of the fiscal year, which has created barriers to being able to qualify for the federal wage subsidy.<sup>10</sup> Other respondents (P6, P13) indicated that the number they provided in our survey about their decline in funding does not adequately capture the extent of loss they are experiencing, since it does not include various forms of in-kind support (such as volunteer labour) that ceased at the onset of the pandemic. Furthermore, many respondents indicated that the true extent of financial loss will not be understood until closer to the end of fiscal year. Nevertheless, there was broad consensus across our participants that the losses will have a major long-term impact. As one survey respondent summarised: “The pandemic has exacerbated an already challenging operating environment for some charitable organizations. The full impact of COVID-19 on organizations like ours is unknown and will likely present itself in 1-5 years.”



**FIGURE 1: Approximate % drop in funding since**

Notwithstanding these limitations, our data is still useful as it provides an approximation of the financial losses faced by Canadian humanitarian and development NGOs.

<sup>10</sup> For example: “Our revenue stream from fundraising efforts tends to be heavily weighted to the latter part of the year (55% of revenue in the last quarter; 70% of revenue in the last four months of the year). Thus, we have had trouble qualifying for federal government wage subsidy, which requires demonstrating a 30% reduction in revenue. We will likely show a 30% drop, but will only see it later in the year.” Anonymous survey respondent.

*“We rely on personal donations and many cannot support our work as they did pre-Covid because of job loss and shifting priorities.”*

Our findings also provide a snapshot of the funding sources that are of greatest concern. As mentioned in the background section above, 82.6% (n=123) of respondents indicated that they relied upon personal charitable donations with 68.5% (n=102) indicated that they were “Very Reliant” on this funding source. As we expected, charitable donations were also the most frequently reported source of funding decline across the board, unsurprising given the extent of unemployment across the country as a result of the pandemic. The variance between SMOs and large organisations was negligible, with 42.2% (n=54) of SMOs and 38.1% (n=8) reporting a loss from this source. Moreover, of the 102 organisations who indicated they were “Very Reliant” on personal donations as a funding source, 52.9% (n=46) of SMOs and 46.7% (n=7) indicated a loss from this source. In other words, these losses are particularly damaging for organisations who are “Very Reliant” on personal donations as a source of funding, although the ability of an organisation to withstand these financial challenges may ultimately depend on the diversity of its funding sources. As we discuss in the background section above, our findings suggest that SMOs have a less diverse portfolio of funding sources compared with large organisations, which is one of the reasons that SMOs may ultimately be more negatively impacted by these financial losses in the long-term.

Funding Source	Average across all organisations	SMOs	Large Organisations
<b>Global Affairs Canada (GAC)</b>	6.7%	4.7%	19.0%
<b>Other federal government</b>	3.4%	3.1%	4.8%
<b>Provincial governments</b>	6.7%	7.0%	4.8%
<b>Personal charitable donations to the organisation</b>	41.6%	42.2%	38.1%
<b>Corporate donations</b>	20.8%	19.5%	28.6%
<b>Philanthropic foundations</b>	10.7%	11.7%	4.8%
<b>Multilateral donors</b>	1.3%	0.0%	9.5%
<b>Other sources of loss</b>	12.8%	14.1%	4.8%

**TABLE 3: Sources of funding loss**

As table 2 above shows, declines in funding from corporate donations and from philanthropic foundations are the next most significant sources of loss, although these are not as extensive as losses from personal donations. As discussed in the previous section, large organisations were more likely to receive funding from corporate donations (although the majority of these organisations were only “Somewhat Reliant” on this as a funding

source), so it is not surprising that large organisations have also been more impacted by losses from this funding source. SMOs, on the other hand, were more likely to be “Very Reliant” on funding from philanthropic foundations, so again it is not surprising that they appear to be marginally more impacted by this source of loss compared with large organisations. Again, however, given that SMOs generally appear to have a less diverse portfolio of funding sources than large organisations, any decline in funding may have a relatively higher impact.

Losses from GAC funding disproportionately impacted large organisations (19%; n=4) compared with SMOs (4.7%; n=6), another unsurprising finding given that large organisations were more likely to identify GAC as a funding source. Interview participants specified these losses are mainly related to programs that had already been approved to receive GAC funding on a cost-share basis, but whose implementation was suspended or cancelled due pandemic-related interruptions. In such cases, organisations are unable to receive GAC funding because they cannot implement their project as it was proposed, despite the fact that they still have to manage fixed administrative costs whether or not a program actually gets implemented (P2, P8). Although there have been no announced funding cuts from GAC, a number of interview participants expressed concerns about the future of GAC funding. As one survey participant wrote: “We have ongoing and confirmed funding arrangements with GAC and various foundations. Once these are over (in 2021-22), we will not have the donation revenues to continue without more GAC funding and the calls for proposals are not coming anytime soon.”

Finally, one striking finding is that FBOs appear to have been more impacted by declines in funding compared to non-FBOs. A higher percentage of FBOs (71.4%; n=25) reported a decline in funding compared with 57.3% (n=63) of non-FBOs. Furthermore, 48.6% (n=17) of FBOs reported a decline in funding from personal donations compared with 39.5% (n=45) of non-FBOs. This finding is significant because, as discussed in the section above, an extremely high percentage of FBOs (97.1%) indicated that they were “Very Reliant” on personal donations as a funding source compared with non-FBOs. Corporate donations were the next most significant source of decline in funding for FBOs, with 20% (n=7) of FBOs reporting losses from this source, but this was on par with the loss reported by 21.1% of non-FBOs. A significant number of FBOs (22.9%; n=8) also reported losses from “Other funding sources,” which included donations from church congregations, community groups, volunteers and rental revenues. The extent of these losses, combined with the fact that FBOs also have a much less diverse funding portfolio compared with non-FBOs, suggests that this segment of the sector may be more negatively impacted by funding losses in the long-term.

### Suspension of Program Delivery

***Education, gender equality and environmental sustainability are the thematic areas most affected by program suspensions.***

The survey asked respondents whether their organisation have had to temporarily or permanently suspend program delivery as a result of the pandemic, and to identify the thematic areas of these suspended program. Out of the 151 surveys we received, 39.7% (n=60) of respondents indicated that they have had to temporarily suspend program delivery.<sup>11</sup> This impact was experienced fairly consistently across organisations of different size, with 39.8% (n=51) of SMOs and 42.9% (n=9) of large organisations having to temporarily suspend their programs. Nevertheless, there were some other key differences between SMOs and large organisations. A much greater percentage of SMOs (43.8%; n=56) indicated that they have had to reduce their budget for program delivery compared with large organisations (14.3%; n=3). Of the 60 organisations that indicated they have had to suspend program delivery, SMOs (51.7%; n=27) were slightly more likely to indicate 'several' or 'many' program suspensions, compared with large organisations (44.4%; n=4), although the smaller sample size makes it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions in this regard. Only 4 organisations out of our entire sample (3 SMOs and 1 large organisation) indicated that they had to permanently shut down any of their programs program delivery. While many of our survey and interview participants expressed fears about future permanent program and NGO closures, so far it appears that these effects have not been widely experienced in the short-term, but it will be important for future research to continue to track these impacts.

Respondents were asked to identify the main reasons for temporary program suspensions. Public health concerns and government restrictions were cited by 22% of respondents as the most frequent reasons for program suspension, followed by travel restrictions (19.7%) and inability to work with local partners (16.2%). Significantly, only 8.7% of respondents cited declines in funding as a reason for program suspension.

As discussed in the previous background section, education and gender equality were the thematic areas most frequently cited as areas of work: 91 (60.3%) organisations identified themselves as delivering programs in the area of education and 90 (59.6%) in gender equality programming. It is therefore notable that, of the 60 organisations who reported temporary program suspensions, education was by far the largest thematic area impacted with 53.3% (n=32) of organisations reporting that they had suspended education programs.

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<sup>11</sup> This number is significant, although less than the 53% who responded affirmatively to the same question in the May 2020 Bond survey cited above.

Gender equality and environmental sustainability-related programs were tied at second place with 31.7% (n=19) of organisations reporting program suspensions in these areas.

There were some indications of differential impacts between SMOs and large organisations with 54.9% (n=28) of SMOs and 44.4% (n=4) of large organisations suspending education programs. However, there was no difference between SMOs and large organisations with regards to the suspension of gender and environmental-related programs: in both areas, 31.4% (n=16) of SMOs and 33.3% (n=3) of large organisations reported suspensions. However, as identified in the background section above, given the fact that SMOs are much more focused on education programs than large organisations, education-related program suspensions will have a much more significant impact on SMOs compared with large organisations in the long-term – particularly if the program suspensions also entail a loss of funding.

The prevalence of suspensions in the thematic areas of education and gender equality in particular could be attributed to the fact that they are also the most common thematic areas of work. However, it is equally important to note that the pandemic has had a particularly damaging impact in these areas. As we have seen around the world, education is next-to-impossible in classroom settings without the risk of disease transmission among students and teachers. Likewise, many have already noted the gendered impacts of the pandemic (ACAPS, 2020c; CARE, 2020; MSF, 2020), which includes increasing rates of domestic violence against women (Richter, 2020) as well as higher rates of unemployment amongst women (Deschamps, 2020). Women have also taken on more caretaking and domestic responsibilities even if both partners are working from home (Lieberman, 2020; Power, 2020). From this perspective, the prevalence of program suspensions in the area of gender equality is particularly concerning. In other words, our data suggests that the pandemic has had a “double impact” on education and gender equality: it has both damaged historical progress that has been made in these areas as well as negatively impacted the ability of NGOs to address these issues.

### Impacts on the Workforce

***“We’ve been doing our best to keep our staff. Trying hard not to reduce hours and lose staff... but, in the medium and long term, the uncertainty of when programming will happen again, it’s hard to determine – it’s a concern to keep staff, particularly here in Canada.” (P12)***

Out of the 151 organisations surveyed, 18.5% (n=28) indicated that they had temporarily laid off staff, with the majority of the layoffs occurring for Canadian staff (n=22) as opposed to local staff (n=6). In addition, a smaller number (10.6%; n=17) indicated that they had to permanently lay off staff members. This is a relatively small sample size, so it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions. With this caveat in mind, our data suggests that large organisations have experienced a greater occurrence of temporary layoffs, with 38.1% (n=8) of large organisations reporting the need to do so compared with 15.7% (n=20) of SMOs. Likewise, a greater proportion of large organisations report that they have made “Several” layoffs compared with SMOs, while more SMOs indicate that they have made “Very few” or “Few” layoffs compared with large organisations. Again, the small sample size makes it impossible to draw any firm conclusions about these labour trends, so future research is needed to confirm these trends. Nevertheless, one speculation is that large organisations with high numbers of staff can continue to temporarily function with lower staff numbers, while SMOs, who often only have a handful (or less) of people on payroll don’t have the same flexibility. One interview participant specified that they made more layoffs in Canada than in their local offices abroad as they wanted to prioritise the continuation of their ongoing programs (P10). It is also important to keep in mind that organisations still do not know the long-term financial impact of the pandemic, so it is possible – and even likely – that a greater number of temporary or permanent layoffs will occur as the extent of funding loss becomes more clear in the medium to long term.

Aside from temporary and permanent layoffs, survey and interview participants indicated that the greatest impacts on the workforce were related to the potential for burnout and maintaining staff morale. As one interview participant observed: “We’re in danger of burning people out – it is hard to adapt all of the time, with no business as usual” (P1). Interview participants referred to Zoom fatigue (P8), maintaining mental health (P10), and keeping staff engaged despite the challenges (P10). While NGO staff are generally used to working in the context of humanitarian crises where there is a high risk of burnout, one interview participant observed that “this is for an unprecedented period of time and a huge scale across all countries” (P2). Finally, many survey and interview participants reported an increase in workload since the onset of the pandemic, an impact that further exacerbates the risk of burnout, mental health crises, and poor morale.

An important theme that emerged from both the qualitative responses in the survey and the interviews were the gendered impacts of the pandemic within the workforce. Respondents pointed to the increased care-giving responsibilities that have resulted from the pandemic, particularly for women, and linked this directly to fact that the majority of staff within their organisation were women (P3). One interview participant described how their organisation had responded to these gendered workplace dynamics:

*We are a female- dominated organisation; we were conscious of that to figure out what kind of leaves people could access for parenting. We implemented a digital silence policy, so not using digital means after 6:30pm. We implemented two extended long weekends (adding an additional day to give a 4-day rest) to give core rest. We put in place a coffee hour related to wellness. (P8)*

Some respondents expressed concerns that, in the long-term, job losses will disproportionately affect women, given the gendered nature of the sector and how many organisations are dominated by female staff. Our research did not collect information related to the gender identity of staff experiencing temporary or permanent layoffs, but these observations point to an important area for future research.

**“This is a gendered sector and job losses here will likely differentially impact women. In addition, contraction of the sector will contract other forms of diversity. For example, seniority in collective agreements, when employed in layoffs, tends to decrease diversity.”**

### **Impacts on volunteers**

As noted in the background section above, just under half of our respondents (n=66) indicated that their organisation sends volunteers, with the majority employing short-term volunteers (<one year). Given the multiple restrictions imposed by the pandemic, we were not surprised to find that these NGOs reported a significant impact on their ability to work with volunteers. Volunteer-sending organisations have had to completely reconfigure themselves, with only two organisations indicating that the pandemic has had no effect on their ability to work with volunteers. Of the remaining 64 organisations, 51.6% (n=33) postponed volunteer placements, while 48.4% (n=31) cancelled their volunteer placement for the time. Nevertheless, approximately a quarter (26.6%; n=17) of these organisations reported that they had redesigned their programs to enable volunteers to work remotely.



A number of challenges have arisen in relation to the pandemic's impact on volunteers. While a shift to using volunteers in online-program provision has been noted among some respondents, others noted the logistical challenges of pivoting their volunteer programs online as well as keeping volunteers engaged while working remotely. One respondent observed that, although their organisation had continued to work with volunteers in-person with social distancing measures in place, this had resulted in a greater workload for staff supervisors who had to manage volunteers over an extended number of hours. Some respondents from smaller organisations noted that some people in senior leadership roles work on a volunteer basis. For these individuals, increased care duties or health concerns have forced people to step away from their organisational responsibilities. Respondents from volunteer-reliant organisations expressed concerns about the long-term impact of the pandemic on their ability to both recruit volunteers as well as the ability of their local partners to host volunteers. For instance, an interview respondent from an organisation that offers student internships and placement expressed concerns that ongoing health and financial concerns, as well as travel restrictions, would put severe limitations on their ability to work with volunteers. Even though this organisation has moved some of its volunteer programs online, the participant was worried that it would be difficult to re-start many of its in-person programs in the future given the loss of knowledge and continuity that is essential for many of its programs (P3.) Finally, as mentioned in the section above on declines in funding, the inability of organisations to work with volunteers may also entail financial losses, as some organisations receive GAC funding that is contingent on hiring volunteers while other organisations rely on volunteers as part of their fundraising strategy. In short, the pandemic has had significant effects on the ability of organisations to work with volunteers, and it will be important for future research to understand both the short and long-term impacts.

### ***Amplification of pre-existing issues***

***The pandemic has amplified pre-existing concerns related to funding, development issues, and public engagement.***

A pervasive theme within both the qualitative survey responses and the interviews was how the pandemic has served to amplify pre-existing issues or problems within the sector. While these issues are not entirely new, they have taken on new significance or scale as result of the pandemic. They include concerns related to the flexibility of GAC and CRA funding regulations, the pandemic's impact on pre-existing development issues, and the public's engagement in international development issues.

Although not directly related to funding losses, participants expressed other concerns related to the flexibility of both GAC and Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) regulations in relation to funding. In the current context, NGOs have had to find creative ways to adapt their programs in response to Covid-19 restrictions, but sometimes their ability to pivot has been impeded, for instance, by GAC restrictions related to cost-share programs or CRA regulations about who can qualify as a designated donee. Additionally, in a remote-work context where it is impossible to perform monitoring and evaluation in-person, it is more complicated and burdensome to ensure financial compliance with local partners. As one interview participant described:

*We have a large financial team in Canada. Those people are constantly on the road, but now they can't be on the road.... You need to ensure that basic bookkeeping is kept up. [There are] few digital systems at the front lines. The places we work are very far off, even with improved computer access. Ebola was a lesson to learn from. The worry is (but nothing has happened) that this could be an issue when people are looking at COVID responses thus far. Financial compliancy is critical. (P10)*

In other words, a concern for organisations who receive GAC funding is that the rigid regulations on how that funding can be used impedes their ability to respond creatively to the pandemic. Some respondents observed a lack of consistency within GAC, for instance, more flexibility in some policy areas compared with others (P2) or some program officers providing more flexible interpretations of policy compared with their colleagues. Some of these complaints relate to pre-existing tensions between the GAC and NGOs (some of which we describe in the literature review above), but the pandemic has served to amplify these issues.

Respondents also expressed concerns that the pandemic has amplified pre-existing development problems, or that it may even lead to reversals in gains. One survey respondent wrote:

*"The biggest challenge for all of us who volunteer or work in the humanitarian and development sector is the many crises being faced in sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS, climate change, education, health systems and violence against women are all being exacerbated by the pandemic."*

Poverty reduction in particular was cited by several respondents as an area of concern, as the widespread economic impacts of the pandemic threaten to reverse any gains that have been made in this area. Several respondents also cited food insecurity as an issue that has been exacerbated by Covid-related disruptions to production and supply chains, in combination with severe famines and droughts particularly in parts of Africa. Finally, participants expressed concern that, with Covid-19 taking centre-stage as a global health crisis, other important issues will not be adequately addressed:

"If we change everything that we do... to focus on the pandemic, but not look to see how [our] organisation fits in the big peg of this whole situation, it will cause problems.... We need to focus, but not lose sight of [our] mandate as an organisation." (P4)

The Canadian foreign aid sector already has a history of inconsistent aid priorities (as discussed in the literature review section above), and the Covid-19 threatens to further fragment efforts to pursue a more coherent and consistent approach to international development and humanitarian aid. In the long-term, the focus on Covid-19 response to the exclusion of other important problems would likely bring negative future "domino effects" in relation to many underlying development issues.

While the survey did not ask any specific questions about public engagement in international issues, this was a major recurring theme that emerged in both the qualitative survey responses and the interviews. Canadian organisations have always faced the challenge of seeking support from a general public that does not necessarily see the value of international engagement or is more focused on domestic affairs. This has become even more the case as the Canadian public experiences the economic and health impacts of the pandemic and focuses on domestic recovery.

**"I understand people wanting to focus donations at home, and of course we must do that, but until everyone is safe, no one is safe. How do you convey this message to people, that some of their tax dollars should be headed overseas?" (P1)**

While this is a challenge that faces all NGOs across the sector, it is experienced especially acutely by organisations with "niche" focus. For instance, one interview respondent from an organisation that conducts all of its work in Bhutan described how difficult it was to fundraise even prior to the pandemic, because many people do not even know where the country is located (P12). Likewise, muscular-skeletal health was the focus of another interview respondent's organisation, who indicated that it was hard enough to attract funding and attention prior to the pandemic and feared even further declines in support (P13). As one interview participant summarised the situation:

"One of the biggest challenges right now is the fact that we all fight for the same bunch of money. I don't know how we can resolve that, but we all try to get to the same donors... and there's less and less money." (P9)

Lack of public engagement has serious implications on a number of fronts. It implies, as suggested by the quote above, that there is less funding to go around. Less public engagement on international issues also means that there is less pressure on the Canadian government

to engage internationally on humanitarian and development issues. All of these challenges were further heightened in the wake of the Me to We scandal, which some interview respondents feared would weaken the public's trust in NGOs doing international development work (P6). In other words, promoting public engagement on international issues has been a persistent ongoing challenge for Canadian NGOs working in the humanitarian and development sector, but these dynamics have been amplified and heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 3. STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES

The second major thematic focus of our research was to identify the strategies employed by Canadian humanitarian and development organisations in response to the pandemic. This was the focus of the third section of the survey and was also an important theme in follow-up interviews. According to our respondents, the most significant response strategies were related to:

- New fundraising strategies;
- Feminist and gender-based pandemic response;
- Localisation;
- Digital strategies;
- Strategies for staff support, retention and hiring.

#### ***New Fundraising Strategies***

As described above, financial losses have posed a significant challenge to Canadian humanitarian and development organisations, as 60.1% of our respondents indicating that their organisation had experienced a loss with an average drop in funding of 26.4%. These rates of loss are consistent with other surveys that have been conducted outside of Canada (Bond 2020; Smith and Chadwick, 2020a). Unsurprisingly, given these bleak financial forecasts, many respondents indicated that their organisations were focusing on new fundraising strategies in response to the pandemic.

According to our survey findings, 53.6% (n=81) of our respondents to this survey have launched new fundraising campaigns in response to the pandemic. There was a slight difference between SMOs and large organisations, with 48.4% (n=62) of SMOs launching new fundraising campaigns compared with 55% (n=11) of large organisations doing so. These new fundraising campaigns were more or less evenly split between efforts to support existing non-Covid related programs (55.6%; n=45) and efforts to support program delivery that is specifically Covid-related (58%; n=47). An insignificant number of organisations (n=5) indicated that they were fundraising for new areas of program delivery not related to Covid-19. Our data suggests that SMOs (45%; n=32) are tending to focus their fundraising efforts on their existing programs while large organisations (70%; n=7) are tending to focus their fundraising efforts on specifically Covid-related programs. Our sample size on this question is too small to make any definitive conclusions and further research on this is required. Nevertheless, this may speak to the differences in capacity between SMOs and large organisations: SMOs are simply trying to raise money to stay afloat while large organisations may have greater capacity to branch out. Interestingly, we found that a greater proportion

of international federations (63.4%; n=26) have launched new fundraising campaigns compared with only 43.1% (n=47) of Canadian-headquartered organisations. Given that large organisations are more likely to be members of international federations than SMOs, this also speaks to the capacity of large organisations to diversify their activities in times of crisis.

***“The organisation is rethinking its approach to and engagement of its stakeholder groups for fundraising purposes. This entails a new digital marketing strategy to replace more traditional fundraising events, activities, and networking opportunities.”***

In terms of changes to fundraising strategies, a number of respondents indicated that they were moving their fundraising efforts online, including events that had previously been held face-to-face. Despite these efforts, respondents reported that they these events had not made up for the financial losses they had experienced, and they expressed concern about the long-term feasibility of online fundraising, especially in an environment where organisations are competing with each other for a smaller pool of donor funds.

### ***Feminist and Gender-based Pandemic Response***

***Less than a quarter of our respondents have implanted a feminist approach in their response to the pandemic.***

As we discussed in the section above on program suspensions, many observers have highlighted the gendered impacts of the pandemic (ACAPS, 2020c; CARE, 2020; MSF, 2020), which includes increasing rates of domestic violence against women (Richter, 2020) as well as higher rates of unemployment amongst women (Deschamps, 2020). Women have also taken on more caretaking and domestic responsibilities even if both partners are working from home (Lieberman, 2020; Power, 2020). As we also mention above, our findings suggest that gender equality programs (along with education programs) have been impacted the most in terms of program suspensions. We suggest, therefore, that the pandemic has had a “double impact” on both education and gender equality: it has both damaged historical progress that has been made in these areas as well as negatively impacted the ability of NGOs to address these issues.

Given that research in the early stages of the pandemic had already highlighted its gendered repercussions – and given that Canadian foreign aid is framed by the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) – we wanted to investigate the extent to which Canadian

humanitarian and development had implemented a feminist approach in their pandemic response. We found that only 17.2% (n=26) of our respondents<sup>12</sup> have implemented a feminist approach to their pandemic response. Disaggregating by size, we found that 14.8% (n=19) of SMOs had implemented a feminist approach compared with 35% (n=7) of large organisations. Similarly, we found that 13.8% (n=15) of Canadian-headquartered organisations had implemented a feminist response compared with 26.8% (n=11) of organisations belonging to an international federation. In other words, larger organisations (both in terms of size and in terms of membership in an international federation) appear more likely to have implemented a feminist approach compared with SMOs. While further research is needed to determine the exact reasons for this, it is likely related to differential levels of capacity between SMOs and large organisations. Additionally, large organisations, who have higher rates of receiving GAC funding, are more likely to have already formally integrated gender-based approaches in their work due to the requirements for them to conform to FIAP in their GAC-funded programs. In any case, it is likely that organisations that had integrated feminist or gender-based analyses in their work prior to the pandemic have more capacity to do so within their pandemic responses. In terms of the specific feminist approaches that organisations have adopted, the majority of these organisations (76.9%; n=20) have undertaken a gender-based analysis of the organisation's pandemic-related programs and services. Significantly fewer organisations indicated that they had either fundraised for (n=5) or launched new programs related to supporting women or LGBTQ communities during the pandemic (n=4). Likewise, a relatively small number of organisations indicated that they had conducted a gender-based analysis of how the pandemic had impacted staff in Canada (n=4) or international staff (n=5).

### Localisation

***“This conversation [around localisation] is being accelerated by the physical distancing that has become mandatory.” (P2)***

As identified in the background section above, the majority of survey respondents indicated that they had significant relationships with local partner organisations, and the majority also indicated that they engaged with either “Several” or “Many” local partners for program delivery. The pandemic has impacted these partnerships in a number of ways, many of them positive according to our research participants. First, international travel restrictions have meant that local partners have taken on even greater responsibilities for program delivery,

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<sup>12</sup> Only 148 respondents answered this question, so the analysis in this section is based on that number of total responses.

as one interview participant observed: “We rely on them on them to a much greater degree now, in terms of doing the actual work on the ground” (P12). Some research participants expressed the hope that increased localisation will be a positive long-term outcome of the pandemic, as local organisations are ultimately better placed to provide services to their own communities (P8; P9; P10). Other research participants from organisations that had localised their service delivery prior to pandemic observed that their ongoing relationships with partners had not been significantly impacted by international travel restrictions, for example: “The field didn’t change for us, we’ve been using local partners for a long time” (P10; also P1). In other words, despite the significant financial and logistical challenges brought by the pandemic, research participants expressed some optimism about how it might also accelerate some positive and overdue changes within the sector related to empowering local actors.

***“We like the fact that our local partners will be in more control of the work in their own countries because expats from the global North will not be travelling there. This has the potential to be a positive shift in the pandemic - the shift towards truly empowering southern partners to lead development work - however, if there is less money to support it, the positive potential will not be reached.”***

At the same time, however, participants also identified some associated challenges with these shifts. Of course, some local partners were restricted by lockdowns, or poor internet and phone connections that reduced or prevented their ability to continue program delivery and communicate with Canadian counterparts. There were also significant concerns about the downstream impacts of funding losses on local partners in the long-term. Other concerns were related to the ability to properly conduct program evaluations and impact assessments in a remote working environment, as well as the ability to contribute to capacity building amongst local partner organisations (P10). But a more systemic challenge was identified that relates to the trend of localisation discussed above: even when organisations devolve decision-making responsibilities to local partners, the extent to which they can do so is limited by the inflexibilities of CRA regulations around “direction and control” (P11). While these CRA regulations existed prior to Covid-19, the pandemic has revealed how localisation has been hampered by strict and complex administrative requirements (P10). One interview participant lucidly captured the issue:

***“A subtle shift in [local] decision making has been done, which is good – although it comes with CRA issues. My guess is that the move to greater local partner engagement and a greater role in decision-making is inevitably going to happen. Donors are going to recognize that. If we get Global Affairs funding, we need to make it clear how and where decisions***



are being made and to keep things accountable. Those are some issues that are going to be needed to be dealt with a nuanced way." (P12)

In other words, even though respondents expressed optimism how the pandemic had highlighted the need for localisation and helped to accelerate that process to some degree, they also expressed concern that existing funding structures tend to impede localisation rather than support it.

**"Our regulations in Canada hamper us tremendously for giving funds to people. The burden of accountability, direction and control – until that changes, it'll be hard for any charity to change." (P1)**

### Digital Strategies

***"With respect to our programs, we have migrated virtually everything we used to do in person, to an online forum. With respect to external communications, absolutely all messaging had to be adapted to the COVID context and digital communications have been even further embraced."***

Similar to other workplaces, Canadian humanitarian and development organisations are restructuring their activities to take place online. It is therefore not surprising that 30.4% (n=45) of survey respondents<sup>13</sup> indicated that their organisation was making new investments in digital infrastructure in response to the pandemic. Overall, digital strategy was one of the most frequently cited themes to emerge in the analysis of the qualitative survey responses and the interviews. Many respondents noted that their organisations were pivoting to remote work arrangements (with both staff and volunteers), online fundraising and online program delivery. While most participants indicated that their use of digital technologies was in response to the restrictions of the pandemic, some speculated about the possibility of permanently adopting them, for instance, in the areas of staff and volunteer training (P3), digital evaluation tools and capacity-building (P10), or, in the case of one medically focused organisation, a telehealth program (P13).

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<sup>13</sup> Only 148 respondents answered this question, so the analysis in this section is based on that number of total responses.

Nevertheless, despite the focus on digital strategies, many respondents also acknowledged the challenges of using digital technologies. As discussed in the section above on fundraising strategies, respondents reported that online fundraising events had not made up for the financial losses they had experienced, and they expressed concern about the long-term feasibility of online fundraising efforts. Additionally, there were concerns about the limitations of transferring in-person programs to an online format, particularly in contexts where programs involve personal discussions related to traumatic experiences (P8). Finally, respondents expressed concern that moving their organisation's activities online would contribute to and even exacerbate a pre-existing digital divide:

We are really thinking about a Just Recovery Model, so this isn't just about building digital infrastructure. We need to also recognise the digital divide. (P8).

Digital strategies are only available to those organisations that already have a decent digital infrastructure or are capable of building one. They are more difficult to implement for those organisations without the human resources or finances to invest in these areas, and nearly impossible to implement in geographical locations that lack robust digital infrastructures. For instance, many local partner organisations work in remote areas with no computers or internet, so this would impede their ability to shift their programs online (thereby impeding the processes of localisation we discuss above). Likewise, many people living in poverty lack access to digital resources. In other words, even though NGOs are using digital technology as a means to ensure their own survival, the long-term impact of this shift may be to make their services and programs even more inaccessible to those who need them the most.

### Strategies for Staff Support and Retention

*“Everything is flexible, the schedule, the number of hours. We said at the beginning of the pandemic, if you are not able to do your full time, just write in your time in the end and you won't have to repay it in time or money after the pandemic.... We decided to decrease the number of hours of staff during the summer and pay them. When children and family are around the staff or dropping in on the Zoom meetings, we always welcome them, like ‘Oh, we see there is this person,’ we say ‘Hello’ and we pause everything to introduce the person so the staff member doesn't feel like she's disturbing the meeting. The return to work is also voluntary, so we are prescribing a voluntary two-day return to the office from next week. So that means if you can come to the job two days a week then do it.*

***"If you cannot, you don't have to tell anyone, we won't ask you any questions."***  
**(P3)**

The Covid-19 pandemic has imposed challenging work conditions for employers across the country, and Canadian humanitarian and development organisations are no exception to this. Staff support and retention strategies figured prominently in the responses of our research participants. Just under half of our research participants<sup>14</sup> (43.9%; n=65) indicated that their organisation had implemented strategies for staff retention and support. Notably, there appears to be a gap between SMOs and large organisations in this area. While 71.4% (n=15) of large organisations indicated they had implemented staff support and retention strategies, only 39.1% (n=50) SMOs indicated that they had done so. Likewise, a greater proportion of organisations that belonged to an international federation (58.5%; n=24) indicated that had implemented staff support and retention strategies compared with only 36.7% (n=40) of Canadian-headquartered organisations. Further research is required to establish why this is the case, but a plausible possibility is that large organisations simply have more capacity to offer these kinds of supports compared with SMOs.

In terms of the specific support and retention strategies offered, by far the largest was to allow staff to follow flexible work hours (n=54). This strategy was followed by applying for/receiving government support benefits (n=37), and implementing new mental health and wellness supports (n=28). Our data suggests that employees of SMOs (62%; n=31) were more likely to receive government support benefits compared with employees of large organisations (40%; n=6), while a greater proportion of large organisations (53.3%; n=8) implemented new mental health and wellness supports compared with SMOs (40%; n=20). This also speaks to the greater capacity of large organisations to provide formal in-house forms of support.

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<sup>14</sup> Only 148 respondents answered this question, so the analysis in this section is based on that number of total responses.

## Conclusion: Re-envisioning the Future of Canada's Foreign Aid Sector

*"It's time to make a big change. As CEO, I've been in this sector for 35 years, you'd think I'd have some good ideas how to do that, but I don't - and I think it'll be the young innovative thinkers who figure it out. It's not time to step aside, but time to deeply listen to those folks. It's hard when you've done your career in one way and suddenly the rug is pulled out from underneath you and you don't know how to do this anymore.... So how do we create space for those opportunities to emerge, right? How do we create space in our minds and our daily world to let those great things come forward? Because I know they will, they have to.... That to me would be a beautiful next step." (P1)*

Globally, the pandemic has been a catalyst for people to reflect on how they live their lives and what kinds of societies they want to create for themselves. This is reflected in various strands of conversations amongst Civil Society Organisations in Canada and globally about how to "build back better." Our survey and interview respondents also reflected on how the pandemic creates an opportunity for Canada's foreign aid sector to collectively evaluate its shortcomings and restructure itself to create more accountable and just ways of operating. Covid-19 has laid bare some of the underlying tensions, inconsistencies and inequities within the sector that have been hidden in plain sight. The pandemic has exposed both the importance and centrality of local partners, as well as the structural barriers within Canadian institutions to empowering them further. It has exposed the gap between rhetoric and reality when it comes to implementing gender-based policies. It has exposed how the sector is structured to promote competition amongst its members rather than cooperation. And it has exposed and amplified how global problems cannot be disentangled from each other, from climate change to poverty to gender to health, which necessitates much higher levels of collaboration at all levels of the sector.

As one of our research participants observed, the Canadian foreign aid sector "has been shaken to its core" (P1). While previously it may have been possible for organisations to proceed with their work despite misgivings about these shortcomings, the pandemic has forced NGOs to re-think everything about how they operate. Even though our respondents

expressed a great deal of fear and uncertainty about the future of Canadian humanitarian and development organisations, there was also a note of hope about the opportunity it creates. This opportunity is perhaps short-lived and is offered within a context of unprecedented global volatility, which makes it all the more important that this conversation starts now. Our research findings provide a starting place for thinking about how to prioritise needs and make changes within the sector. Here we conclude by identifying five starting places for this conversation.

First, the pandemic has amplified global challenges related to poverty, education, gender equality, food security, climate change and health. For example, the World Bank predicts that extreme global poverty is expected to rise in 2020 for the first time in over 20 years as the pandemic compounds the impact of conflict and climate change (World Bank, 2020). At the same time, the pandemic has impacted programs and services across all issue areas, which makes it difficult to disentangle Covid-19's impacts from other pressing development issues. Nevertheless, there will be significant and negative long-term consequences if funding is diverted to Covid-19 response while other important global issues are ignored. There is no question that vaccine development and PPE procurement are critical. But **any funding that is allocated to support the global pandemic response should not be diverted from existing foreign aid commitments nor should Canada's pandemic response result in lower ODA commitments, which are already far below the 0.7% target.**

Second, our research findings indicate that Small and Medium Organisations (SMOs) are particularly vulnerable to financial losses. SMOs rely heavily on personal charitable donations and have a less diverse funding portfolio than large organisations. As a result, they have been more disproportionately impacted by declines in funding from personal charitable donations. This is particularly concerning because SMOs play several crucial roles within the Canadian foreign aid sector. They add to the diversity of the sector by bringing expertise in specialised issues or geographic locations that are overlooked by larger organisations. Many SMOs are the result of grassroots international cooperation between individual donors and local partner community organisations, and it would be difficult to preserve these relationships if SMOs do not survive this crisis. Likewise, SMOs contribute to the vibrancy of Canada's civil society by providing opportunities for Canadians engage internationally. These important channels of public engagement would be lost if SMOs cease to function. In other words, the loss of Canadian SMOs would have exponential impacts for the sector as a whole beyond the closure of individual organisations. Therefore, it is essential to **provide targeted advocacy for and funding to SMOs** in order to support the organisations that are most vulnerable to financial crisis. In particular, this targeted funding should include support for education programs, which is a significant area of work of the SMOs that have been impacted by the pandemic.

Third, our research findings are particularly concerning in regard to the pandemic's impacts on gender equality and gender-based pandemic response. We found that, while gender equality is a central focus of the Canadian NGOs we surveyed, gender equality programs have experienced high rates of suspension during the pandemic. Additionally, our research found that less than a quarter of our respondents have implemented a feminist or gender-based pandemic response. In other words, the pandemic has had a "double impact" on gender equality: it has both damaged historical progress that has been made in this area as well as negatively impacted the ability of NGOs to address gender inequality. This is especially concerning in light of the pandemic's gendered impacts, which are well-documented. It is therefore imperative to **prioritise and target funding to support gender equality programs and services, including education for women and girls**. Targeted support should include capacity-building for SMOs that have not been able to include gender equality in their program portfolios. Finally, we need to understand why and how these gaps have emerged, so efforts should also be made to support further research on gender-based pandemic response.

Fourth, over the past decade consensus has been growing within the Canadian humanitarian and development sector about the need to support localisation processes in order to build more inclusive, equitable and participatory partnerships between Canadian NGOs and local organisations. While this is not a new conversation, it has become particularly salient in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, which has stimulated widespread reflection about the need to employ an anti-racist lens in order to decolonise humanitarianism and development (Faciolince, 2020; Neajai Pailey, 2019; Rejali, 2020; TNH, 2020). It is within this context that the pandemic has both exposed the need for greater cooperation between Canadian NGOs and their local partners at the same time as revealing the extent to which inflexible Canadian funding regulations impede progress and innovation in this area. It is therefore necessary to **restructure funding regulations to better support localisation and the empowerment of local partners**. This will involve complex discussions amongst multiple stakeholders, including Global Affairs Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, members of NGOs, and local partners. There is no denying that there may be multiple barriers to reaching consensus on these issues. Nevertheless, it is in the long-term interests of all stakeholders to creatively re-think financial models in a way that preserves accountability and transparency on both sides of these partnerships, builds local capacity, and ultimately strengthens international cooperation.

Fifth, digital innovation is essential for helping organisations pursue their current work during the pandemic, and it will remain essential in a post-pandemic world for reducing unnecessary travel that contributes to the climate crisis. With a potential long-term shift to remote workplaces, there is an opportunity for organisations to shift a greater portion of their revenue to program delivery and away from administrative costs such as leases and rents. There is also an opportunity to develop new digital technologies that can support

remote monitoring and evaluation, capacity-building, or staff training. At the same time, members of the sector need to be realistic about the limitations of digital technologies: not everything and everyone can or should be going digital. Digital strategies are difficult to implement for organisations without the human resources or finances to invest in these areas, and nearly impossible to implement in geographical locations that lack robust digital infrastructures. Many local partner organisations work in remote areas with limited access to computers or internet, so they would have limited ability to shift their programs online. Likewise, many people living in poverty lack access to digital resources, so would not be able to access digital programs and services. Focusing on digital technology in such contexts would run counter to the processes of local empowerment that we discuss above. In other words, even though Canadian NGOs are using digital technology as a means to ensure their own survival during the pandemic, the long-term impact of this shift may be to make their services and programs even more inaccessible. Most importantly, **digital innovation must be pursued within an equity framework and in a manner that does not exacerbate the growing digital divide.**

The Canadian foreign aid sector is at a crossroads. All members of the sector, including NGOs and private sector organisations, government policy makers and professional trade associations, need to be engaged in collaborative and productive conversations about where to go from here. Our hope is that this research acts as a starting place for moving forward by exposing both the challenges and the opportunities for the Canadian foreign aid sector to not only survive the pandemic, but to be better for it.

*“On a more philosophical level, I think our sector has been shaken to its core. We will never be the same again. Black Lives Matter and anti-racism discrimination, COVID has made very visible [the] inequalities in the world and [for] any organisation who is working in poverty, the basis of your work is inequalities”. (P1)*

## Appendix 1: Timeline of Covid-19 and the Canadian Foreign Aid Sector

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the World Health Organization classified the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic. Between the start of the outbreak in December 2019 and this report's publication in October 2020, the Canadian government has responded with various announcements related to foreign aid, global response efforts, and emergency financial initiatives. The following timeline summarises the main events of this period in Canada.

### February 2020:

February 11

- The Government of Canada allocates \$2 million to the World Health Organization.

### March 2020:

March 11

- The World Health Organization classifies COVID-19 as a pandemic.
- Prime Minister Trudeau commits \$1 billion in related funding, including \$275 million in funds for research.
- The Government of Canada allocates \$50 million to aid vulnerable nations during the pandemic. Of this amount, \$8 million is directed toward experienced humanitarian partners, such as WHO, the Pan-American Health Organization, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- Imagine Canada CEO and President, Bruce MacDonald addresses a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau calling on the federal government to ensure economic supports do not preclude support for charities and non-profits.

March 15

- Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable François-



<p>March 18</p>	<p>Philippe Champagne, speaks with his colleagues in Australia, Brazil, Germany, Italy, and Republic of Korea.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister Trudeau announces \$82 billion for financial aid for Canadians and business during the pandemic.</li> <li>• Imagine Canada President and CEO, Bruce MacDonald addresses a letter to Minister of Finance Hon. Bill Morneau and President of the Treasury Board Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos detailing impacts organisations are facing during the pandemic and recommends steps for the government to take to assist organisations and their operations.</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs has individual calls with colleagues from Barbados, Japan, Saint Lucia, and the United Kingdom regarding the pandemic.</li> </ul>
<p>March 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada announces \$27 billion in new spending and \$55 billion in credit to assist families and businesses.</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs speaks with his colleagues             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ in Australia, Brazil, the European Union, Italy, Republic of Korea, and Turkey.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>March 21</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs speaks with his colleagues in Australia, Brazil, Germany, Morocco, Peru, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.</li> </ul>
<p>March 23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEO and President of Imagine Canada, Bruce MacDonald sends a follow-up letter to Prime Minister Trudeau and several Members of Parliament. The letter provides an update of the sector since the previous letter and estimates that registered charities will lose between \$9.5 and \$15.7 billion this year and makes recommendations to help the charitable sector.</li> </ul>
<p>March 25</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Canadian Government receives an open letter from more than 150 Canadian charities requesting</li> </ul>

	<p>\$10 billion for emergency stabilization fund to assist the charitable sector during the pandemic.</p>
<p>March 27</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency aid bill is passed.</li> </ul>
<p>March 30</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The federal government announces the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS).</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs speaks with his colleagues in Australia, Brazil, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Peru, Singapore, Turkey, and the United Kingdom and the European Union's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs Security Policy.</li> <li>• The Honourable Harjit Sajjan, Minister of National Defence, states that 24, 000 Canadian troops are ready to provide COVID-19 assistance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>April 2020:</b></p>	
<p>April 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CCIC and four partner coalitions present the Honourable Karina Gould, Minister of International Development with an open letter representing over 180 organisations requesting a cooperative global response as a component of Canada's pandemic response.</li> </ul>
<p>April 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of International Development, introduces \$159.5 million in support of international pandemic responses, including the \$50 million announced in March.</li> </ul>
<p>April 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada launches the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).</li> </ul>
<p>April 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs hosts the fifth call with his colleagues in Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Indonesia, Morocco, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.</li> </ul>
<p>April 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada launches the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA).</li> </ul>
<p>April 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) is implemented by the federal government.</li> </ul>
<p>April 13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.4 million Canadians are receiving emergency aid</li> </ul>

April 17	<p>funds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 (MCGC) agree on a declaration and encourage other nations to do so.</li> </ul>
April 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CanWaCH writes a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister of International Development, expressing their support for government action to date as well as recommendations for action during the pandemic.</li> <li>• Minister of International Development speaks with Director General of WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.</li> </ul>
April 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada announced \$350 million for the Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF) to assist community organisations attend to impacts of the pandemic.</li> </ul>
April 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1.1 billion is announced for vaccine testing.</li> </ul>
April 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada announces details regarding the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA).</li> </ul>
April 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs holds the seventh call with his colleagues in Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Indonesia, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.</li> </ul>
<b>May 2020:</b>	
May 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada joins the Coronavirus Global Response and has contributed \$850 million to support the initiative's objectives.</li> </ul>
May 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A statement on sexual and reproductive health and gender response during the pandemic is released by 59 countries, including Canada.</li> </ul>
May 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of International Development announces Canada's pledge of \$600 million to the third replenishment of GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance.</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs holds the eighth call with his colleagues in Australia, Germany, Indonesia, Italy,</li> </ul>

<p>May 15</p>	<p>Morocco, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Federal Government releases new regulation relating to the 10% temporary wage subsidy.</li> </ul>
<p>May 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Federal Government announces \$100 million for the Canadian Red Cross.</li> </ul>
<p>May 18</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to the annual humanitarian appeals, Minister of International Development states that Canada has allocated \$306 million in funding. \$177.5 million is allocated to United Nations humanitarian agencies, \$75 million to NGOs, and \$53.5 million to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.</li> </ul>
<p>May 19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF) applications launch.</li> </ul>
<p><b>June 2020:</b> June 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada announces that Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) will be available to more than 700 businesses active in national parks, who were previously excluded.</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs speaks with his colleagues in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States about pandemic impacts.</li> </ul>
<p>June 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs, holds the ninth call of the Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 with his colleagues in Australia, Indonesia, Morocco, Peru, Republic of Korea, and Singapore.</li> </ul>
<p>June 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The International Development Research Centre is providing funds for up to 25 associations in the Global South to assist policy-relevant research</li> </ul>

	<p>initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of National Defense, and Minister of International Development announce the Canadian Armed Forces will provide airlift support to transport medical and humanitarian supplies, in response to a United Nations request.</li> </ul>
June 15	
June 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “100 Days of a Pandemic: Canada's Evidence-Driven Global Response” report by CanWaCH is released. The report collected information from various organisations and institutions regarding the pandemic impacts they have experienced.</li> </ul>
June 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Canada announces \$93.7 million in funds for sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) to assist partner efforts supporting those in need internationally.</li> </ul>
June 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of International Development announces a \$120 million commitment to assist the Access to COVID-19 (ACT) Accelerator, with \$20 million of it for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI).</li> <li>• Canada plans to invest \$180 million to address immediate humanitarian and development impacts of the pandemic, a portion of which was committed in June 2019 by Prime Minister Trudeau.</li> </ul>
<p><b>July 2020:</b> July 17</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) changes are announced.</li> <li>• The Government of Canada announced adjustments</li> </ul>

<p><b>August 2020:</b> August 20</p>	<p>to the Employment Insurance (EI) program and new recovery benefits to assist Canadians.</p>
<p><b>September 2020:</b> September 2  September 10  September 27</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs states that on September 3<sup>rd</sup> he will be presenting at the virtual G20 Foreign Ministers' Extraordinary Meeting, which will include discussions on lessons from the pandemic and strengthening G20 coordination in pandemic response.</li> <li>• Minister of Foreign Affairs coordinates the 10th call of Ministerial Coordination Group on COVID-19 with colleagues from Australia, Brazil, Germany, Morocco, Peru, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.</li> <li>• The Government of Canada's transition from CERB to Employment Insurance program is now effective.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Research Participants

We are grateful to all of the organisations that contributed their time and effort in participating in this research. Their insights and perspectives were invaluable.

60 Million Girls	Canadian Feed the Children	Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST)
A Rocha	Canadian Hope for Africa	Centre for International Governance Innovation
Environmental Stewardship	Canadian Humanitarian Organization for International Relief	CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization)
Ability Society of Alberta O/A	Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution	Change for Children
Enterprise4Good	Canadian Network for International Surgery	Change Her World
Academics Without Borders	Canadian Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases	Chantiers jeunesse
Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights	Canadian Parliamentary Centre	Children Believe
African Canadian Continuing Education Society	CanWaCH	Christian Horizons
Aga Khan Foundation	CARE Canada	CORE International
Aléas	Casa Pueblito	Cowater International
Arm-in-Arm Volunteers	CAUSE Canada	Create Change
Avant Ministries Canada / Serving Sudan South	Centre de Coopération Internationale en Santé et Développement (CCISD)	Cuso International
Bellamy Consultants	Centre for International Studies and Cooperation	Daughters for Life
Bhutan Canada Foundation		Delta Foundation
CAFE - Canadian Aid for Education		Education, Medical Aid and Service (EMAS) Canada
Canada Africa Partnership (CAP) Network		Engineering Ministries International
Canadian Association of Midwives		Engineers Without Borders Canada
		Ethiopiaid Canada

Ethnobureaucratica	HORCO (now Hope H2O)	Medical Mercy Canada
FINCA Canada	Humanitarian Mobility International	Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada
Fonds d'entraide et de Solidarité Internationale (FESI)	Humber College, International Development Institute	Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support
Food for the Hungry	Hungry for Life	Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)
Forum of Foundations	iDE Canada	Mercy Ships Canada
Foundation for International Development Assistance	Impact Bridges Group	Mission Eurasia, Inc.
Full Soul	inasmuch	My Oral Village, Inc.
Give Kids a Chance	Insulin for Life Canada	One Child's Village: A Global Orphans Foundation
Global Friends Foundation	Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD)	Ontario Christian Gleaners
Grand Challenges Canada	International Conservation Fund of Canada	Operation Eyesight
Grandmothers Advocacy Network (GRAN)	International Development and Relief Foundation	Operation Smile Canada
Groupe d'économie solidaire du Québec (GESQ)	International Justice Mission	Operation Walk Canada
Guatemala Stove Project	IRIS Mundial	PACE Canada
Hands Across the Nations	Islamic Relief Canada	Parliamentary Centre
Heart-Links Lazos de Corazón	KAIROS	Partners In Health Canada
Hearts & Hands Foundation	Kenoli Foundation	Partners International Canada
HELP Honduras	Leprosy Relief Canada	Patricia Erb & Associates
Help Us Help	LetsStopAIDS	Plan International Canada
Hope and Healing International	Link International Ministries	PRE-EMPT
HOPE International Development Agency	Malamulele Onward	Project Services International
	Médecins du Monde	



Proteknon Foundation for Innovation and Learning	The Brandon Area Community Foundation	World Accord - International Development Agency
R. J. Burnside and Associates Limited	The Canada- International Scientific Exchange Program (CISEPO)	World Neighbours Canada
Rainbow Faith and Freedom	The Keiskamma Canada Foundation	World Spine Care
Rainbow of Hope for Children Society	The Marquis Project	
Raising the Village	The United Church of Canada	
Rayjon Share Care of Sarnia Inc.	The Wellspring Foundation for Education	
Rèseau francophone international pour la promotion de la sante (RÉFIPS) - section des Ameriques	Threefold Ministries	
Results Canada	Trans-Himalayan Aid Society	
Reverend C.F. Johnston Foundation	Ujeengo Global Community International	
Rose Charities	Unity Christian Mission	
Ruben's Shoes Society	University of Manitoba Centre for Global Public Health	
Salasan Consulting Inc.	Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees Association (VICCIR)	
Samaritan's Purse	VIDEA	
Save a Family Plan (SAFP)	Water Ambassadors Canada	
Save the Children	Water First	
SHARE Agriculture Foundation	WaterAid Canada	
SoChange Inc		
Sumar + Associates Ltd.		
Team Rubicon Canada		
Tearfund Canada		

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