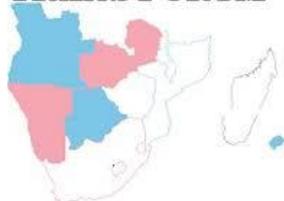


SOUTHERN AFRICA TRANS FORUM COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY

2020

A desktop survey into the experiences of Southern African LGBTI advocacy groups during the 2020 COVID-19 viral pandemic, assessing challenges to programmes and advocacy work across the region.

**SOUTHERN AFRICA
TRANS FORUM**



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SATF COVID-19 Impact Survey

Introduction

Southern Africa Trans Forum (SATF) is an emerging movement of organisations advocating for the human rights of trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse persons, [Annex 1]. SATF member-organisations differ in terms of country context, size, age, human and financial resources, skill sets, focus areas and access to the internet.

SATF members are based in Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Background

Across the globe, the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic include the loss of thousands of lives, shrinking economies, loss of jobs and disruptions to daily life. The disease has proven to be non-discriminatory as it attacks people from all backgrounds, but as has been witnessed in countries that are characterised by inequalities, like South Africa, the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised have experienced the worst effects of the disease.

To varying degrees, the African continent still criminalises LGBTI people. The conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation is also prevalent, hence the denial and resistance of human rights of trans, gender non-binary and diverse people. South Africa provides constitutional protection for LGBTI rights, but societal attitudes and understandings of trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse people are lagging. Hence many much-needed services for trans and gender-diverse people are not readily available.

In many African countries, and the world, trans and diverse people's struggles include lack of legal gender recognition, lack of access to primary and gender affirming healthcare, lack of access to jobs, lack of family support and widespread homelessness. This has relegated this community to the bottom rung of society. Limited funding for the organisations in the region working to combat these issues is the other challenge faced by the trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse community. Given these vulnerabilities, it is expected that this community cannot escape the devastation of COVID-19.

Even under such difficult circumstances, trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse people continue to fight against their erasure, and through various advocacy strategies they are making inroads towards the realisation of their human rights.

To fight the spread of COVID-19, governments of African countries where SATF member-organisations are based imposed measures such as social distancing, prohibitions of gatherings, curfews, lockdowns and restrictions of movement; where people can only move around to

access essential services or go to work provided they prove they are essential service providers. These measures are enforced through police street patrols and road blocks. In the media there have been reports of police heavy-handedness against people who break lockdown regulations, and in South Africa there have been a number of notable fatalities at the hands of the police and the army.

This situation is most likely to affect the work and activities of SATF member-organisations, as many of them do not have essential service-provider status. Under these restrictions, self-employed trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse people, especially the marginalised - like sex-workers - will be seriously affected by the movement restrictions as they will not be able to generate income.

Given the lack of legal gender recognition legislation across much of the region, many trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse people do not have identity documents that reflect their true gender. This makes them vulnerable to discrimination when it comes to accessing governments' social relief such as shelters for the homeless and victims of gender-based violence, food parcels and monetary relief grants.

Based on the aforementioned realities of the trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse community, SATF, in partnership with Frontline AIDS, developed a survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on its' member-organisations.

Limitations

This initial survey focuses on the current situation and did not deal significantly with programme adjustments.

Methodology

Managers and Directors of organisations acted as the respondents to the survey, which was conducted online. The survey is confidential, and even though respondents had to provide their organisations' biographical details, for security reasons the particulars of the individual respondents do not form part of this report. The survey questions focused on respondents' context and living conditions, work stress, funding challenges, access to healthcare, and accessibility to physical infrastructure (internet, desks, electricity, and computers). Some countries had more than one organisation participating in this survey, and some organisations had more than one respondent. The survey incorporates a mixture of question types: multiple-choice, open-ended and scale. **Table 1** is the list of the member-organisations which responded to the survey.

Table 1: Survey respondents

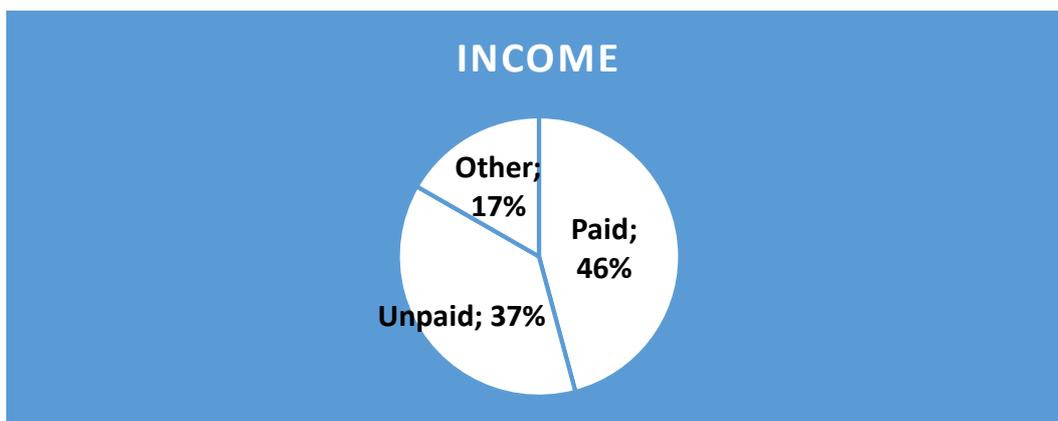
	Organisation	Country
1.	Trans Wellness Project	South Africa
2.	Health Empowerment Association for Transgenders	Tanzania
3.	Health Empowerment Rights	Botswana
4.	LGBTI Sey	Seychelles
5.	Wings to Transcend	Namibia
6.	Gender DynamiX	South Africa
7.	Lesbian Intersex Transgender and other Extensions	Malawi
8.	Pathfinder	Mozambique
9.	TIAMON	Namibia
10.	Trans* and Intersex Rising	Zimbabwe
11.	The People's Matrix Association (6)	Lesotho
12.	Matimba	South Africa
13.	Iranti	South Africa
14.	Tanzania Trans Initiative	Tanzania
15.	Trans Research Education Advocacy and Training	Zimbabwe
16.	Transgender and Intersex Africa	South Africa
17.	Phelisanang Bophelong	Lesotho
18.	TransSmart	Zimbabwe
19.	TransSwati	eSwatini (Swaziland)

Results and analysis

This section represents the feedback of respondents to the survey.

Staff salaries

Staff sustainability seems to be a challenge for the SATF as not all member-organisations are in a position offer salaries to staff members. On the question of the respondents' income, 46% respondents indicated that they are in a paid job, while 37% are doing the work on voluntary basis, and the remaining 11% receive some form of financial support.

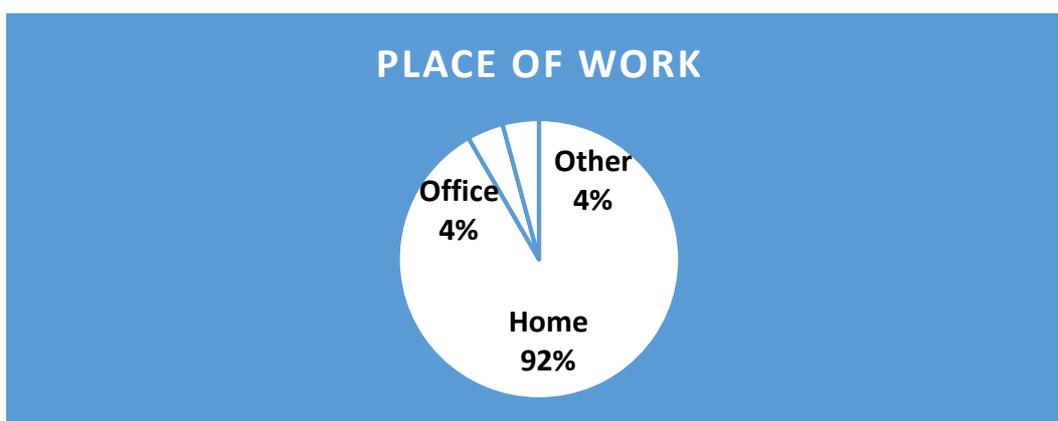


Depending on how long lockdown is sustained and how long it takes for organisations to pick up in funding again, we might see a partial or total collapse of the movement in the region, potentially setting activism back by up to a decade.

Given the lack of employment opportunities for trans people, and the impact of COVID-19 on economies, this poses both a personal risk, as well as a risk to sustaining the movement.

Access to office

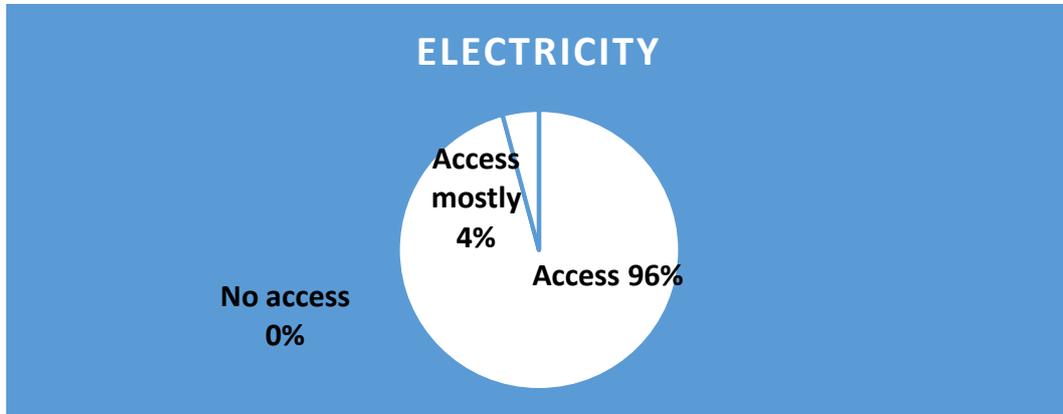
Having an office allows for easy access and interaction between colleagues. It also allows space to interface with stakeholders. Furthermore, offices provide work infrastructure: meeting spaces, photocopiers, telephones, etc. In many cases they become a sort of second home for trans and gender-diverse persons whose families are not supportive of their gender identity.



With offices not being accessible due to lockdowns, organisations will need to create systems for working virtually. For instance, activities such as support groups will be possible only if beneficiaries have the necessary gadgets and data, or if the organisations are able to make provisions for online access. In the survey, 92% of respondents now work from home, 4% (1 person) has access to an office, and the other one person accesses an office for half a day at a time.

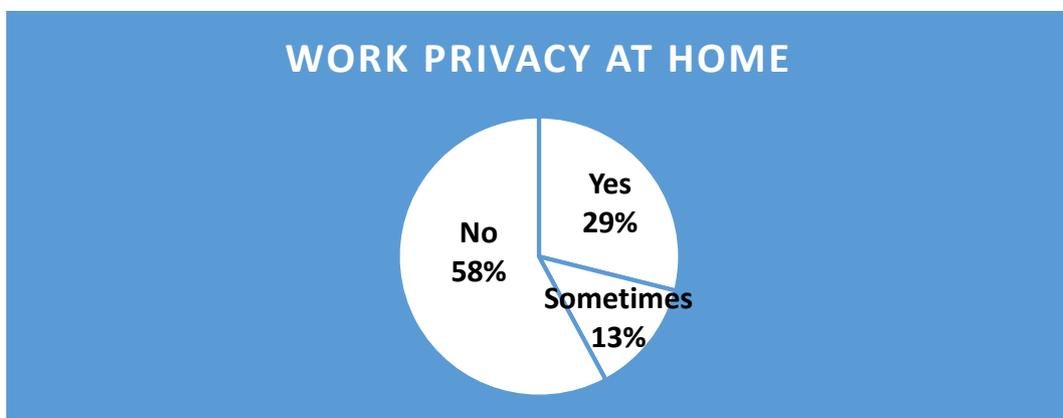
Access to electricity

With lockdown, many industries and businesses are closed, hence there is more electricity available for residential consumption. With more people working from home, their home electricity bills will go up. Employers might have to contribute towards these electricity costs to ensure workers are still able to do the work; especially those workers with limited or no income. In the survey, electricity access of one respondent was not considered very reliable.



Ease to work at work at home

With limited or no income, many respondents live in shared homes, and with family members or housemates who are also locked down. Private space to work from can thus be a challenge. This can affect workers' productivity, and for those who live in unsupportive homes it can increase anxiety and decrease safety. Private workspace at home is not available to 58% of respondents, while in homes of 29% of respondents privacy is possible, and it varies for the remaining 13% depending on external factors such as network connectivity and neighbours' noise levels.



Desk and chair

When working from home, the majority of the respondents (71%) do not have a dedicated desk and chair to work from. This might mean a person has to use furniture in common rooms or the person might have to work in less ideal spaces such as on the beds [Table 2].

Table 2: Availability of a desk and chair at home

Access to a desk and chair	Number	Percentage
No	19	79, 16
Yes	3	12.5
Sometimes	2	8.3

Description of workspace

In this section, respondents give a description of their workspace in terms of factors like access to stable electricity, their feelings regarding their own safety, compromise of confidentiality and comfortability.

Access to stable electricity

The large majority of respondents have access to stable electricity. Lack of access to stable electricity affects the minority of the respondents, and the reasons given are unaffordability and a shortage of electricity in the countries like Malawi.

“Electricity access is stable but having financial means to get electricity is a big challenge.”

“My electricity access right now is not stable as I am not able to pay my bills.”

“My electricity is prepaid so sometimes it runs out.”

Safety

As much as working from home feels safe for many respondents, it is a concern that some respondents experience heightened levels of risk in their homes. The notion that homes are safe is not always true. South Africa is a case in point as a massive increase in gender-based violence has been reported during the lockdown.

“Though I have my space, I don’t feel safe or comfortable at the moment.”

“The home space is not safe.”

Compromise of confidentiality

Given society's hostility toward and intolerance of sexual and gender minorities, confidentiality about the work, peoples' lives and identities is a priority, but working from home seems risky for the less privileged respondents [Table 3].

Table 3: Work confidentiality

At risk	Not at risk
<i>"I have to take extra care when I speak especially on issues which are strictly confidential."</i>	<i>"I stay alone and confidentiality is not compromised."</i>
<i>"... at my aunt's house this is sometimes not the case which results in me not being able to connect online for meetings."</i>	<i>"Confidentiality is very key and has to be kept all the time"</i>
<i>"It is difficult to work without compromising confidentiality as there is other people in the house"</i>	<i>"I do not compromise confidentiality"</i>
<i>"I work from the bedroom and family can walk in at anytime."</i>	
<i>"I share a room with my brother so there's no personal space"</i>	
<i>"It's my bedroom shared between me and my partner. It doesn't allow concentration, privacy and confidentiality as he may budge in anytime and also uses the same room and laptop."</i>	
<i>"the space is not private anything can get lost"</i>	
<i>"I am unable to store or read sensitive"</i>	
<i>"to see clients and or have meetings both physical and online is difficult due to noise or lack of privacy"</i>	

Comfortability

The home environments of many respondents appear not to be conducive to work, as there are often disturbances and a lack of workspace and relevant furniture. This has the potential to slow down work, demotivating the workers and compromising the quality of work [Table 4].

Table 4: Comfortability

Comfortable	Not comfortable
<p><i>"I live in an apartment with my partner, i can work without much interruption. my infrastructure allows me too."</i></p>	<p><i>"Occasionally it is noisy when someone else decides to do something like cut the grass or watch television. I sit on the bed and use a small table."</i></p>
<p><i>"I live alone so and..."</i></p>	<p><i>"Now I work from home and it is not comfortable for me because I do not live alone and the work I do requires concentration and sitting in a comfortable chair to use the computer and at home I don't have that."</i></p>
<p><i>"Although the area that I use has a table and chair I can use ..."</i></p>	<p><i>"I work from my bed."</i></p>
<p><i>"My work place is in my house , we have a room made for office work"</i></p>	<p><i>"... there are children running up and down"</i></p>
	<p><i>"but I work sitting on my bed and its tiring."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I am currently using my bedroom as is the most quiet and private space to work for me."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I work from the bedroom"</i></p>
	<p><i>"Now I work from home and it is not comfortable for me because I do not live alone the work I do requires concentration and sitting in a comfortable chair to use the computer and at home I don't have that"</i></p>
	<p><i>"I sit in my sitting room and work on my laptop on my lap."</i></p>
	<p><i>"The environment set-up is not favourable for my activism work."</i></p>

Internet

Having to work from home due to lockdowns is likely to severely affect the work of individual SATF organisations and the work of SATF as a collective. Ultimately then, trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse people on the ground will suffer the effects of these lockdowns. The survey results reveal a digital divide where some SATF member- organisations do not enjoy the same privileges when it comes to internet access. The unequal access to the internet has negative implications on communication and access to information for SATF as a collective.

On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being reliable and consistent access, and 5 being slow, interrupted and occasional access), the respondents' average internet access is 3.09. The contributing

factors to this reality include organisations' countries and financial resources, as shown by the experiences of the respondents below:

"Internet costs in Lesotho are exorbitant if you do not have access to unlimited WiFi."

"It's very rare of me to have access to the Internet [in Tanzania], I have to go use the Internet cafe nearby."

Only 30% of SATF organisations have internet budgets for individual staff members to be able to work from home, and some of these organisations only offer a limited amount of data. In those cases, staff members have to top up with their own funds when the given data is depleted.

"Our organisation is giving each staff 1G for a week. That's what we can currently afford as we do not have budget for emergency."

"There is an organisational allocation beyond which I have to source my own data."

The majority (70%) of organisations are not in a position to provide their staff with internet to work from home because of lockdowns, and individual staff members themselves carry the heavy burden of internet costs.

"I am paying for it, sometimes I can't afford it."

"I purchase data which is quite expensive."

"I am currently paying for my own internet."

"We don't have any budget for this cost so either I get it myself or the Director most of the time covers the cost and assisted by board member here and there."

Staff members who cannot afford data costs must often resort to reaching out to friends and neighbours in order for the work to continue.

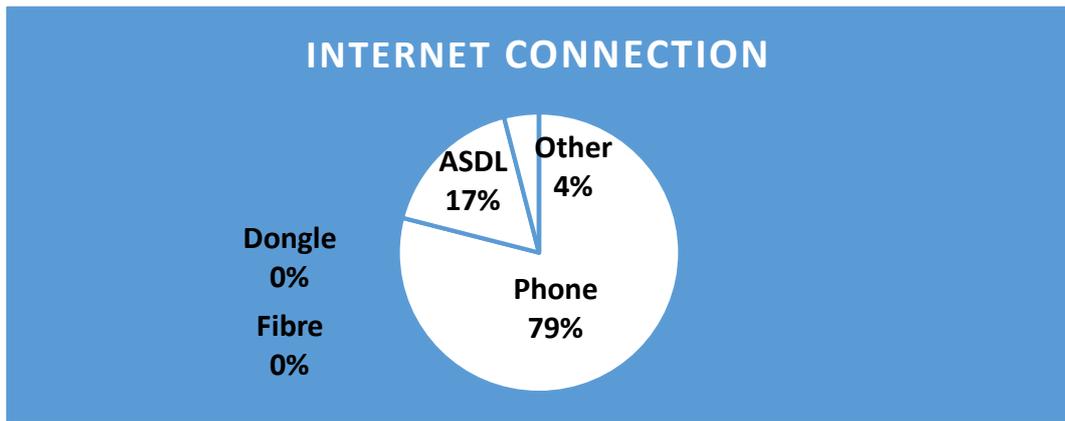
"Sometimes I use my neighbour's WiFi [if] it is available. But accessing the internet is really the biggest challenge for me right now"

"Most times we use phones to hotspot myself and also some of staff members. The costs for the data bundles are also high."

"I pay for my data and sometimes I use the family's WiFi."

"I subscribe through my phone, and it's very expensive and at times I go to the internet cafe, and at times I do use someone else's connection."

For internet connection, 79% of the respondents use phones, 17% use ASDL, and the remaining 4% use other unspecified means.



Work tools of choice

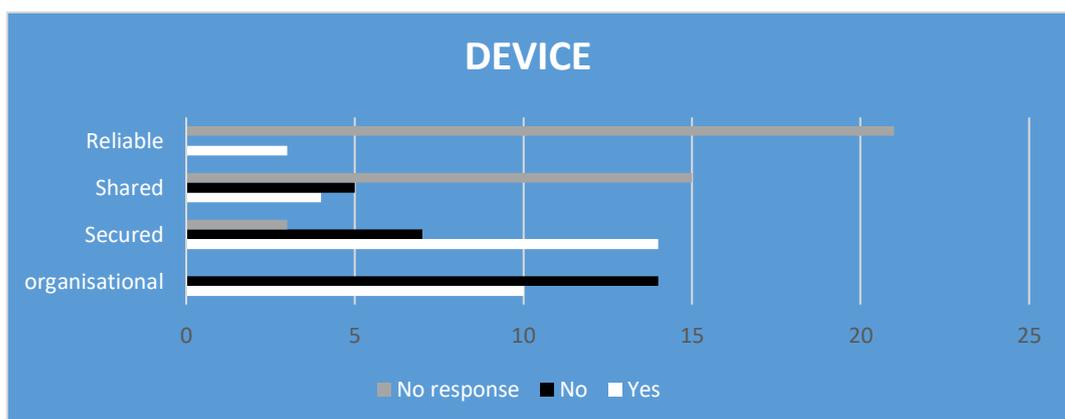
In terms of the most used tools, 66.7% of the respondents ranked smartphones as their first choice and it ranked as the second choice to the other 33.3%. The results are reversed when looking at laptop use. All respondents ranked an iPad or other form of digital tablet as a least used tool.

The fact that phones are a preferred tool as per the results above means SATF members are often able to access communication and information on the go, and this probably mitigates SATF's challenges that result from the unequal access to the internet.

Table 5: Tool of choice for work

Tools	Numbers	Percentage
Laptop computer	16	66.6
Smartphone	4	16.6
Tablet or ipad	1	4.1
Other	3	12.5

Information security



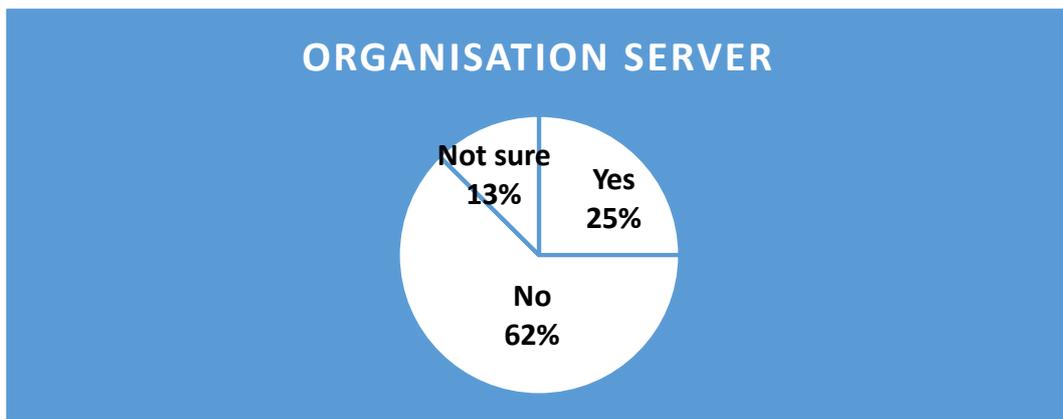
Device

Given the sensitive nature of the work of the individual organisations and that of SATF, security of information is of high importance. The security details that respondents had to provide about their devices included ownership, protection, sharing of device and reliability. There are questions that not all respondents answered.

The graph above reflects security issues related to the respondents' devices, namely laptops and smartphones. The results show that 40% of the devices are organisational and the other 60% are personal devices. Phones make up the majority of personal devices. The majority (58%) of the devices are protected with antivirus software, 29% are not, and there was no response from 13% of the respondents. Results show that 20% of the respondents disclosed they share devices, usually with family members and colleagues. Only 12.5% of respondents answered the question posed on whether or not their devices were reliable.

Server

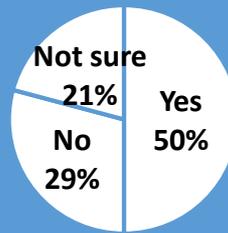
The graph below indicates the percentage of organisations which have a server on which to store their work and data. The majority of respondents indicated that their organisations do not use any kind of joint-server (62%), with only 25% having a server and the remaining 13% being unsure.



Information securely stored

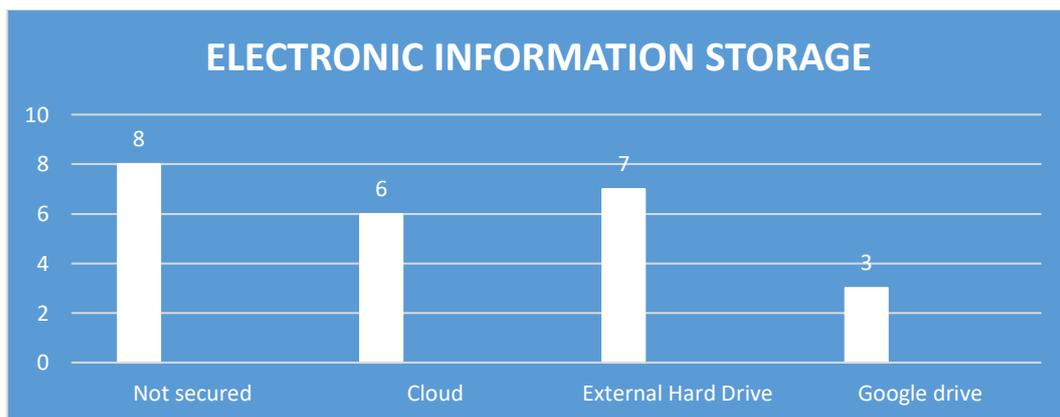
Half of respondents believe their organisational information to be secure, with the remainder not feeling that they have adequate digital security, or being unsure.

INFORMATION STORED CENTRALLY AND SECURED



Back-up system

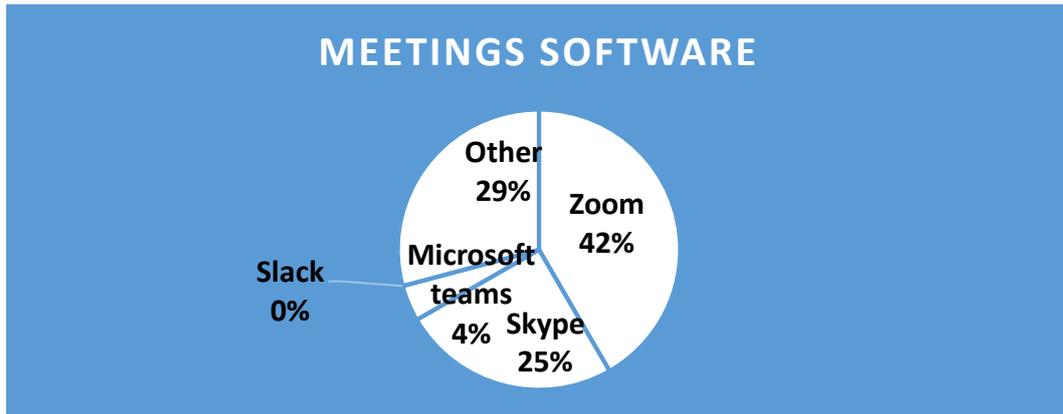
It appears member-organisations' information security measures are determined by the varied understandings of what information security is all about, the kind of work organisations do and financial resources available to them. Within SATF, on one end, there are organisations that have considerable security for their information and on the other end, there are organisations which are vulnerable as their information is not secured. Hard copies and other materials are stored in lockable rooms in the organisations' offices. The graph below is a representation of different strategies used by the organisations for storing digital copies of their documents and work.



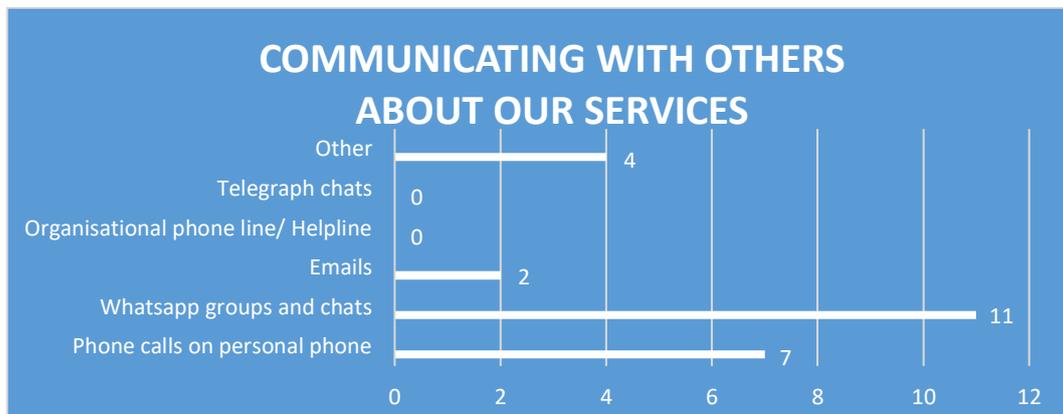
Results reveal a potentially high security threat, as 33% of member-organisations' information is not protected. This calls for SATF and the individual organisations to invest in this area of work.

Communication

Meetings



Communicating about our services



Stress

Managing stress

Some of the respondents expressed that they are currently going through stressful situations:

"Not having a good answer for now. I am currently not at my best mentally."

"I need to access electricity, internet and telephone calls full time."

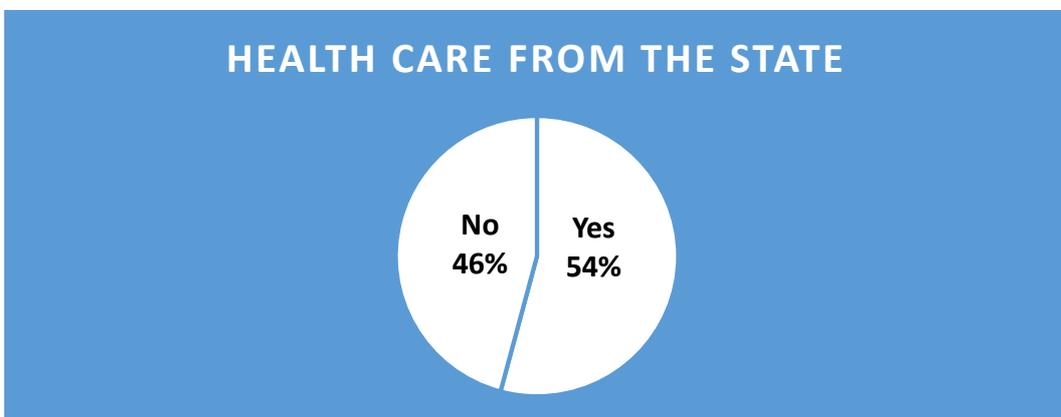
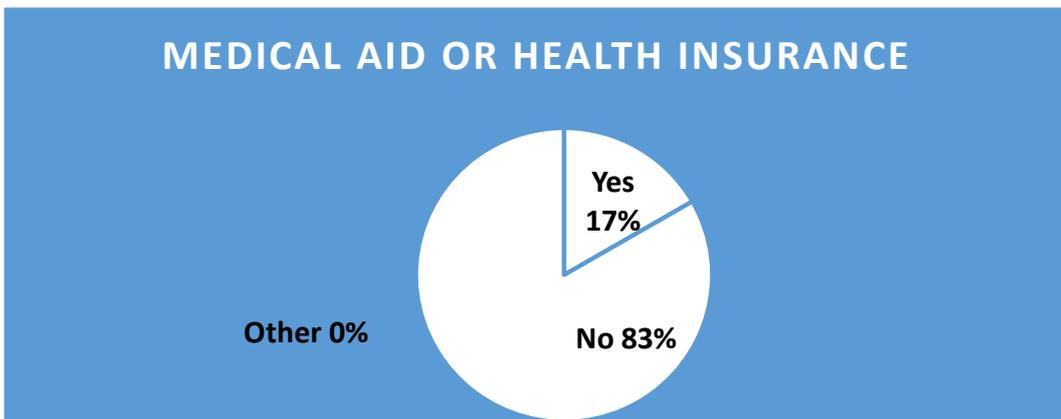
"Need money to buy airtime."

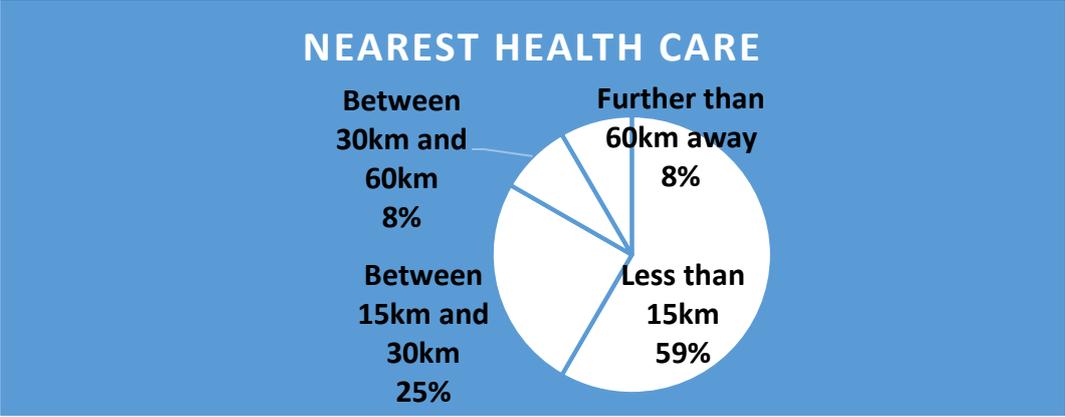
Even though stress is part of respondents' reality, individuals engage in a unique mix of activities in order to combat the stresses they face, like exercising, reading, listening to music, watching movies, reaching out to friends and family through social media, going out for a drink, yoga and meditation, and some manage stress through sharing workload with colleagues.

To ease work stress

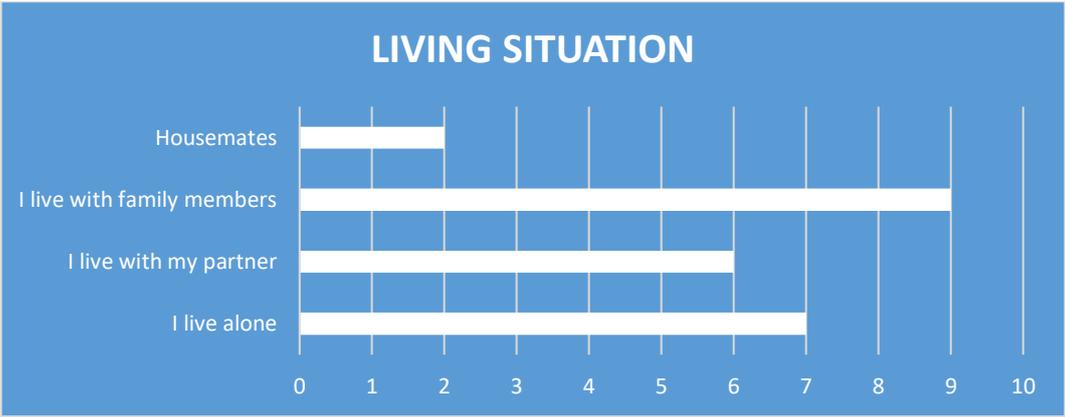
In addition to the self-care activities discussed above, respondents believe there are other practical things that can alleviate their work stress. Earlier on in this discussion, it became clear that member-organisations are not at the same developmental level. Some organisations relatively young and are still building their human and financial resources, hence their needs include core funding, stable salaries, skilled staff and work tools like laptops, data and Wi-Fi (especially in this period of lockdowns where they have to work from home). Given the situations in homes, some respondents believe getting a private space to work from and a desk and a chair would ease their work stress. Respondents also believe, during this stressful period, that gentleness within organisations, and better (less competitive) relations within the movement will contribute towards easing stress.

Health

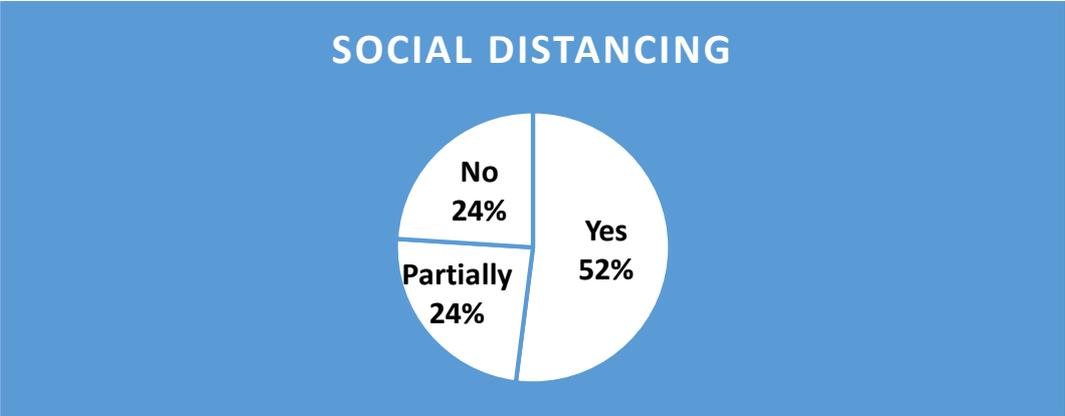




Living situation



Social distancing



Communication with donors

Currently within SATF, there are organisations which are not funded, at least not formally, hence on the question of communicating with donors about support and programmes changes due to COVID-19, half of respondents have and the other half have not. For those who have,

some were seeking emergency funding, while for others the communication was about adjustments to the programmes and terms of their contracts.

Largely, donors were helpful but there were some negative experiences where donors decided to cut grants. One respondent expressed frustration as this has caused delays in the expected funds.

“Yes and no, some donors have triggered grant cuts have been unhelpful and at best violent towards orgs.”

“There hasn't been much support. Our funds are still with the donor. We don't have any money right now even for food and essentials, haven't paid rent , can't access health or go to a pharmacy...”

Such unfortunate donor responses will potentially harm the organisations, the livelihoods of organisations' staff, and the funder-grantee relationship.

In cases where donors gave positive responses, solutions included:

- Pausing of programmes
- Different strategy to continue the programme
- Re-alignment of activities and budgets
- Adapted video report

Covid-19 impact on organisations' activities and service delivery

On scale from 1 (*no impact*) to 5 (*being devastated*), 3.87 is the respondents' average response to the impact of the pandemic on their operations and plans.

Suspended and adjusted services

The different activities that organisations do can be grouped into broad categories, like training of service providers, awareness raising, advocacy, direct services, organisational internal administration (*e.g. strategic and board meetings etc.*), research, staff and volunteer development, solidarity, emergency response and meetings (*e.g. conferences*).

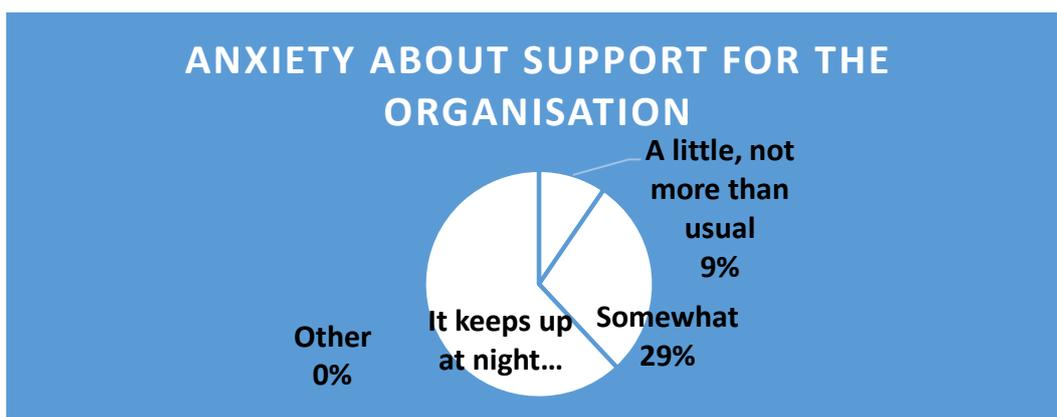
In addition to the planned activities, one respondent indicated that they had to have COVID-19 awareness sessions with their constituencies.

Where possible, respondents continued planned meetings via online platforms. The graph below is representation of the kind work that had to be suspended due to COVID-19.



With the suspension of the work, as can be seen in the graph above, services to beneficiaries are worst affected. This means beneficiaries may not receive services like counselling, testing, medicinal supplies, community services, etc. To make things worse, in some countries hospital visits are limited to medical emergencies in order to prioritise COVID-19 patients. It is important to note that where adjustments can be made, activities have moved online. However, this is likely to increase the work burden and costs of data (when staff, for the most part, are paying for this themselves).

Funding Concerns



Covid-19 impact on the financial health of the organisations

The lockdowns have brought about a lot of uncertainty for future funding as activities are delayed. As a result, organisations will not be able to meet contractual obligations on time. Respondents are also concerned about the loss of momentum in advocacy projects.

Developing organisations that were in the process of sorting out donor requirements like financial systems and bank accounts, have had to put those processes on hold. This implies

fundraising delays for these organisations. Organisations have also missed several funding proposal deadlines.

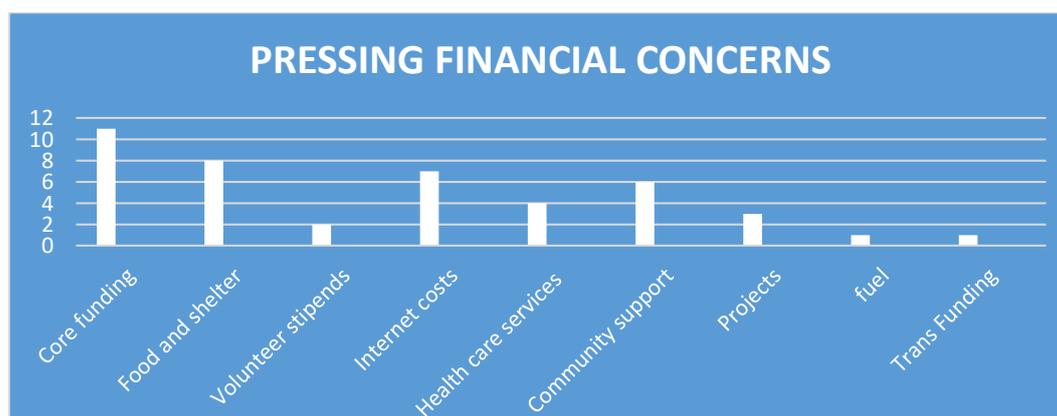
With movement restrictions, one respondent organisation is no longer able continue with its income generation project as constituencies cannot collect products from the office and sell them to the community.

Internet costs are soaring as well, as staff have to work from home, and some organisations now give online counselling services. The need for constituencies' financial support has also increased.

One donor that has permitted an organisation to use project funds for operations is a good example of donor support in this difficult time. Respondents have experienced unfortunate donor reactions like withdrawal of financial support, halting funds, donor silence and cutting of LGBTI support in order to support their own COVID-19 initiatives.

Pressing financial concerns

Twenty-two respondents answered this question, and some respondents did not provide three concerns as was required by the question. The order of importance of financial concerns is organisation specific, given organisations' unique contexts. The survey showed that some concerns are common across all of the organisations which answered the question, however. In the frequency graph below, specific but similar concerns are grouped together into broader categories.



It is common knowledge that core funding is a concern for many organisations, but organisations with multi-year contracts that cover core funding will likely find themselves under less stress than the others. The reasons for the high frequency of core funding include the possibility of losing funding, lost fundraising opportunities and budding organisations.

The second high frequency item on the graph is food and shelter. This could be a result of loss of income due to withdrawal and delays in funding tranches. It could also be a concern related

to organisations' volunteers and constituencies which cannot easily access these resources during their countries' lockdowns.

Internet costs are also a priority concern as some staff are working from home. Some activities are now conducted online and organisations try to keep in touch with their beneficiaries via digital platforms. In this very difficult time, many constituencies struggling with various aspects of lockdown or the pandemic approach their local organisations for support.

In closing, respondents reiterate the following issues which need urgent attention:

- Support for the wellbeing of frontline activists and community members
- Increasing need for mental health care
- Community support in terms of food and shelter
- Strategy to support trans youth
- Internet access

SATF Community initiatives

The discussion above has already shown that trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse communities are negatively affected by governments' measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 viral pandemic. It is for this reason that SATF collectively came up with the following initiatives to support their constituencies:

- Conduct a needs survey
- Distribution of food parcels and food vouchers
- Distribution of masks and hand sanitisers
- Provide data to enable access to online services and engagements
- Negotiations with hospitals and other healthcare providers to not drop trans health and gender-affirming care
- Transport assistance for medication pick-ups
- Sought counselling services
- Strengthening of partnerships with civil society organisations to ensure constituencies are not left out of mainstream social relief aid projects
- Setting up and maintaining online psychosocial support groups
- Rent and electricity assistance
- Tents and sleeping bags
- Provision of online COVID-19 information packages
- Financial support to trans partner organisations
- Supporting a trans woman who is stigmatised as a COVID-19 carrier
- Developing reporting tools for gender-based violence

The Southern Africa Trans Forum calls on:

- Community members to support those in need
- Funders to be flexible in offering their continued support of the trans and broader LGBTI movement
- Governments to continue providing trans healthcare and gender-affirming care
- Allies to support the movement in any way they can
- The gender sector to be inclusive

Next Steps

- Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on individual trans, gender non-binary and gender-diverse health
- Assessment on SATF e-readiness for human rights documentation



Dignity, Equality and Freedom



Annex 1: Southern Africa Trans Forum Members

Country	Organisation
Botswana	Health Empowerment Rights (HER)
eSwatini	TransSwati
Lesotho	The People's Matrix
Malawi	Lesbian Intersex Trans and other Extensions (LITE)
Mozambique	Lamda
Namibia	Wings to Transcend Namibia
Namibia	TIAMON
Seychelles	LGBTI Sey
South Africa	Iranti
South Africa	GenderDynamix
South Africa	Trans Wellness Project
South Africa	Matimba
South Africa	Transgender and Intersex Africa
Tanzania	TransTanzania
Tanzania	Health Empowerment Association for Transgenders
Zambia	Transbantu Zambia
Zimbabwe	Trans Research, Education, Advocacy and Training (TREAT)
Zimbabwe	Trans* and Intersex Rising Zimbabwe (TIRZ)
Zimbabwe	TransSmart
International	Frontline AIDS