WEAVING WELLNESS RESILIENCE

THE CASE FOR EAST AFRICA

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Ford Foundation

INUKA
Ni Sisi!

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Foreword

In an era where the pursuit of wellness has become not just a trend but a necessity, understanding its nuances and intrigues is paramount. Today, stressors abound and the pressures of modern life can often feel overwhelming and thus the quest for wellness has emerged as a guiding light for many. From physical health to mental health, from emotional balance to spiritual nourishment, the pursuit of wellness encompasses a myriad of aspects that collectively contribute to a fulfilling and enriching life.

This study represents a culmination of rigorous research, insightful analysis, and exploration into what it truly means to be well in today's society. Drawing upon a diverse range of perspectives, methodologies, and expertise, our aim has been to paint a comprehensive picture of wellness that resonates with civic catalysts from all walks of life.

I encourage you to approach it with an open mind and a willingness to engage with the complexities of well-being. Whether you are a seasoned practitioner, a curious enthusiast, or simply someone seeking guidance on their own wellness journey, may this study serve as a beacon of knowledge, inspiration, and empowerment.

Above all, may it remind us that the pursuit of wellness is not just a destination, but a lifelong journey—one that requires patience, dedication, and above all, self-compassion. Inuka Kenya is proposing to offer civil actors spaces, places, and processes to relax, heal, reflect, and learn. This report is a first step towards achieving this. May it inspire us to start the journey of embracing the full spectrum of our humanity, and to cultivate a life that is not just filled with health and happiness, but with meaning and purpose.

Warmly,

John Githongo
Chief Executive Officer
Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi!

Acknowledgement

Abbreviations

LHRC   Legal and Human Rights

ICESR   International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

ACHPR   African Charter on Human and People's Rights

WHO   World Health Organisation

CSO   Civil Society Organisation

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

ED   Executive Director

HRD   Human Rights Defender

Background and Introduction

Background

The wellness project arises from the work of the Weaving Resilience Initiative, which is a coming together of Global South organisations (South America, Africa, Middle East, and Southern Asia), convened by the Ford Foundation to develop mechanisms for civil society resilience under three thematic pillars; institutional reslience, strategic relevance, holistic well-being. There are four areas (hubs) that are the focus of this convening. These are Financial Resilience, Protection, Wellness and Digital Resilience.

Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi! is the Wellness Hub in Eastern Africa and it proposes to establish the Tulia Sanctuary for civic catalysts in East Africa. Tulia is inspired by the conviction that Kenya and by extension the Eastern Africa region needs a sanctuary for those citizens who have dedicated their lives to pursuing the public interest, often at great cost to themselves and their families.

Article 12(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) allows everyone to enjoy the highest attainable physical and mental health standards. Similarly, Article 16 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) states, "Every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health."

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as *"the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"*[1] World Health Organization defines wellness as *"the optimal state of health of individuals and groups"*[2] WHO further states that wellness has two cardinal concerns, which are the achievement of individuals' fullest potential physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually, and economically, and carrying out individuals' expectations in the family, community, place of worship, workplace, and other settings. Health and wellness relate in the sense that health is a state of being, while on the other hand, wellness is a state of actively living a lifestyle that helps to attain health.[3]

The civil actors in the Region (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) have been instrumental in bringing about robust citizen activism; sadly they continue to endure trauma resilience from their activism even decades later. The range of resources, opportunities, and spaces available to them to meet their needs has also changed considerably. In the past, civic catalysts have come under all manner of attacks, putting their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health at risk to the point of endangering their very lives. Some have endured detention and imprisonment, and even been forced into exile. Others have found themselves ostracized by society, maligned, discredited, bankrupted, and/or forced to undergo punitive legal suits, all to punish them and thus deter them (and others) from doing this work.

1. The preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19–22 1946
2. World Health Organization. Health Promotion Glossary Update. 2006. Available at https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/about/HPR%20Glossary_New%20Terms.pdf
3. Stoewen DL. Health and wellness. The Canadian Veterinary Journal. 2015 Sept 56(9):983-984

Why does wellness matter?

Wellness is an essential conversation because most organizations and individuals work under challenging circumstances, and the only time people get to rest is when they are/get arrested. The situation is dire for women civil actors who have additional family responsibilities and rarely get time to take a break for self-care, collective care, wellness, and healing. Social movements must find ways of safeguarding and centering mental and emotional well-being. Wellness matters because of the following:

- Systemic neglect of the wellness and well-being of civil actors has severe impacts on the quality of life, health, productivity, and effectiveness of civil actors
- Civic actor wellness is linked to building a thriving, sustainable, and impactful civil society that contributes to the development of the country
- Wellness enables civil actors to develop resilience, tools, and capacity to overcome personal, and environmental challenges in their important work including self-accountability care, workplace wellness, and vital functional outcomes (participation in family, work, community, and society)

Introduction to the study

This report captures the consolidated and aggregated findings and recommendations of three country-specific baseline surveys [4] conducted in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in October and November 2023 on wellness and wellness needs of Civic Actors.

The survey was conducted by Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi! in Kenya, the Legal and Human Rights Center (LHRC) in Tanzania, and the Uganda National NGO Forum in Uganda. The survey captured civil actors' vulnerabilities, the status of wellness services provision, and existing legal, Policy, and social frameworks. Civic actors are categorized as: Civic Catalysts - Leaders and influencers in building, facilitating, and sustaining civil movements; Civil Veterans - Retired or retiring Civil Activists who invested a significant part of their lives in this work; Civil Supporters - Invested actors seeking to offer support and partnership; and Civil Activists - Active and visible in Civil movement work, with a substantial presence.

Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi! Ltd is implementing the Wellness program to offer space, place, and processes to civil actors to relax, heal, reflect, learn, and invest. Civic actors have come under all manner of attack, putting their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health at risk to the point of endangering their very lives. This report responds to the need to harmonize understanding, approaches, tools, and methodologies across the three implementing partners of the program.

This baseline survey comes at the diagnostic phase of the wellness program and will bring out the core and priority wellness issues and actionable insights as well as improve organizational performance and create impact. It will assist Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi! in carving out Wellness opportunities that apply to Regional (East Africa),

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4. The country-specific baseline surveys are availabe at nisisikenya.org/our-work/wellness-hub/wellness-resources

National (Country and context-specific), and organizational (CSOs) contexts. It will enable the development of objective, fact-based wellness performance indicators and ways to improve civil actors' lives, while also fueling healthier, stronger civil organizations.

The purpose of the survey was to gain an understanding of the region's civil actors' situation regarding wellness; and have a shared understanding of the concept of wellness and what this means for individuals, for organizations as well as a collective (Wellness Hub). The objectives of the surveys were:

- To gain an in-depth understanding of the wellness needs of the civil actors
- Examine vulnerabilities in exposure to risks, norms, and values.
- To investigate the status of wellness services provision to civil actors.
- To interrogate the existing frameworks for wellness (legal, policy, social)

113 respondents were interviewed (100 in Kenya, 13 in Tanzania, and 19 in Uganda).

This survey used a mixed approach which involved quantitative and qualitative methods. A review of the literature was conducted to collect secondary data that helped to understand the programme context as well development of the data collection tools. Secondary data helped in triangulating survey findings with those of previous relevant studies.

Document and literature reviews were carried out as reference points for justifying the study. The reviewed documents included the concept note and available studies. The review of the relevant documents shaped the sampling protocol, design of the tools, and approach to the study.

The studies were conducted and guided by ethical requirements. Specific considerations were given to ethical issues of research design, data collection, confidentiality, reporting, and storage. Participants consented freely to be included in the study and they were made aware of how they were identified and the objectives of the study.

Study challenges

Several challenges were encountered during the data-gathering processes. Key among them was the busy schedules of the target respondents hence occasioning delays in data collection. A significant number of participants outrightly refused to participate, with varying responses indicating their lack of interest in the survey and individuals who had retired expressed a lack of interest in participating in the survey, further complicating the data collection process.

The data captures the actions, perceptions, behavior, and attitudes of individual civil actors. Their knowledge and experience in wellness is vital. It also captures Civic Actors as categories/groups or influencing/part of groups (formations, movements) through aggregated data based on age, gender, experience, skills/capacity, etc. and its impact on wellness among civil actors.

This report is limited by the following:

- Lack of consistency in data tools/sets, methodology and approach in the three countries
- Different sample sizes and respondents' identification
- Different reporting templates and protocols within the organisations
- Lack of adequate data on service provision, referral pathways, and policy and legal environment/interventions

General Information

KENYA

Gender. The Kenyan survey had 67% male respondents and 33% female. Uganda had 54% male and 46% female while Tanzania had 70% male and 30% female.
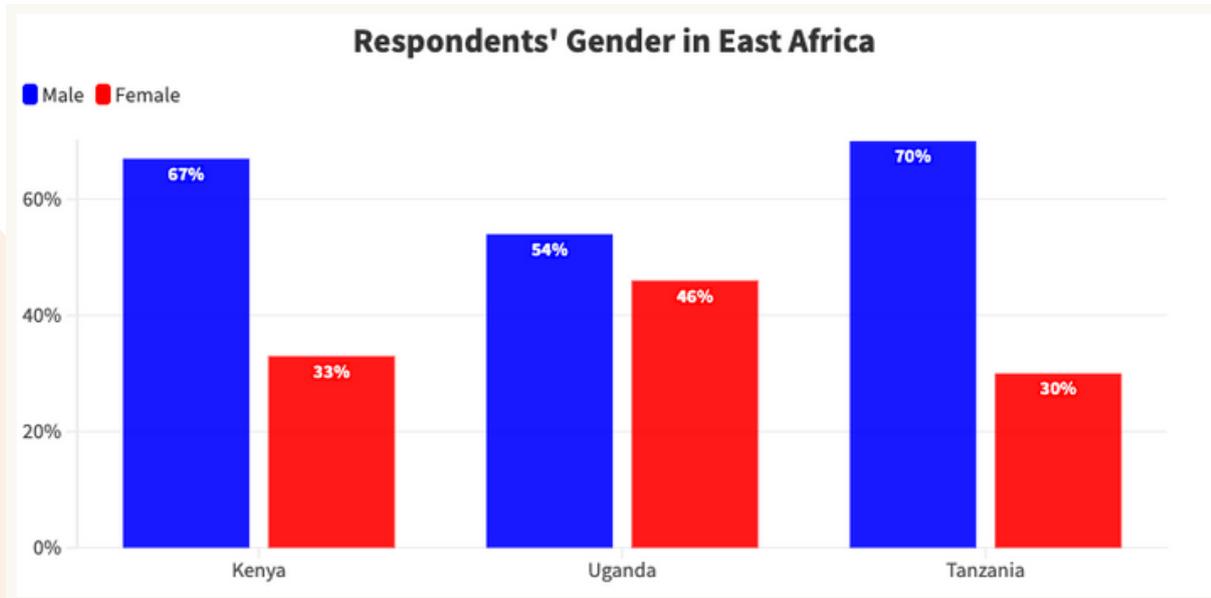
Profile of respondents. 11% were below 30 yrs while the bulk 38% were between 30-40%. 27% were 51+ yrs. In Kenya, the majority (43%) had been active in the last 5-10 years while 25% had 21+ years of experience.

Civic Work. The majority are civic catalysts, supporters, and activists who are members with over five years of experience in an informal/unregistered group, community, or network. Others are employees or volunteers in a registered organization (e.g., an NGO, university, association, charity, society, law firm, or media house). Some identified as leaders and influencers in building, facilitating, and sustaining civil movements

Respondents' Civic Work – Kenya
My civic work is done...

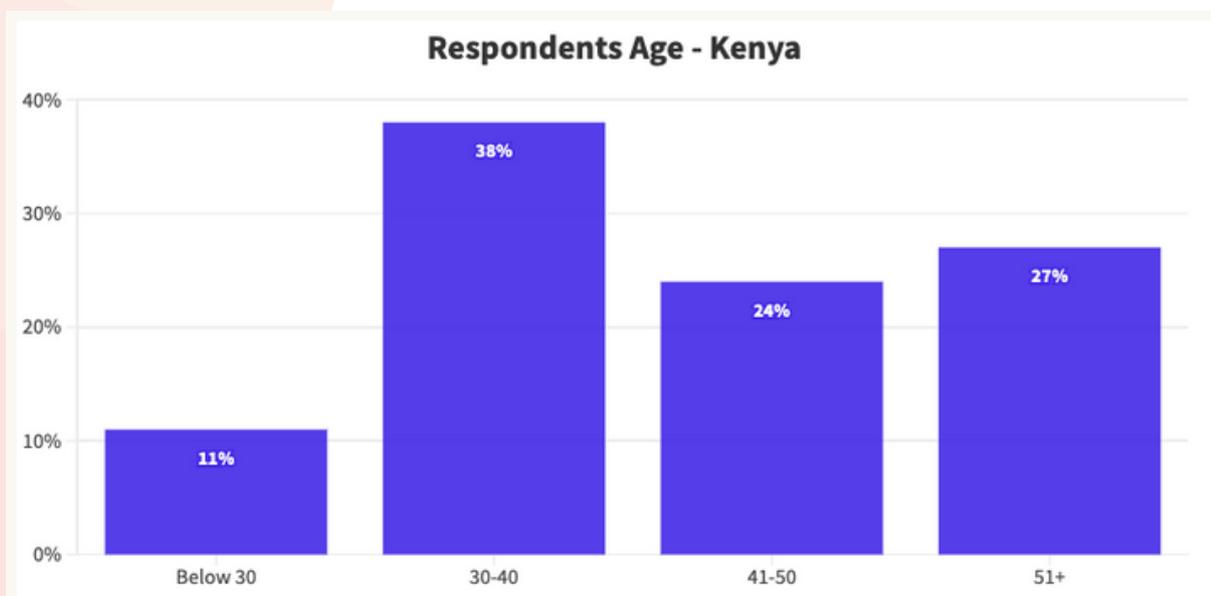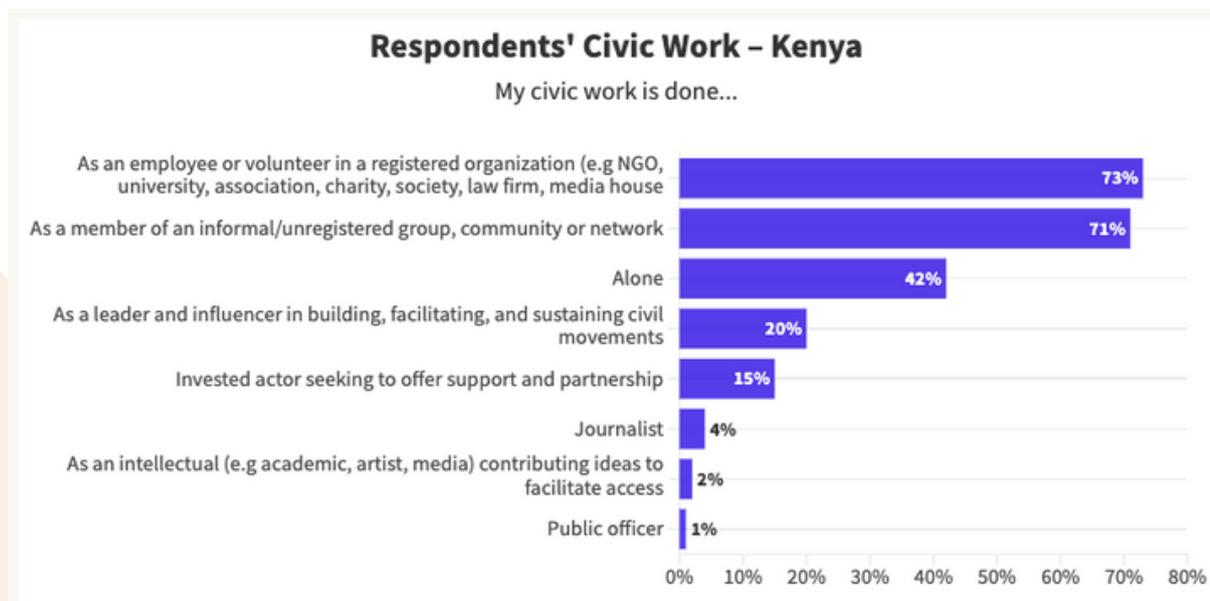|	
As an employee or volunteer in a registered organization (e.g NGO, university, association, charity, society, law firm, media house	73%
As a member of an informal/unregistered group, community or network	71%
Alone	42%
As a leader and influencer in building, facilitating, and sustaining civil movements	20%
Invested actor seeking to offer support and partnership	15%
Journalist	4%
As an intellectual (e.g academic, artist, media) contributing ideas to facilitate access	2%
Public officer	1%

UGANDA

Half of the respondents 52% were below 40 years while the rest were over 41 years. The lowest age category was between 20-30 years. 19 people responded to this survey, with the highest number of respondents being male, and the majority of respondents between the ages of 31 and 40. 63% worked as CSO leaders (CEO or ED)

Respondents' Age - Uganda

Age	Percentage
20-30	11%
31-40	42%
41-50	21%
50+	26%
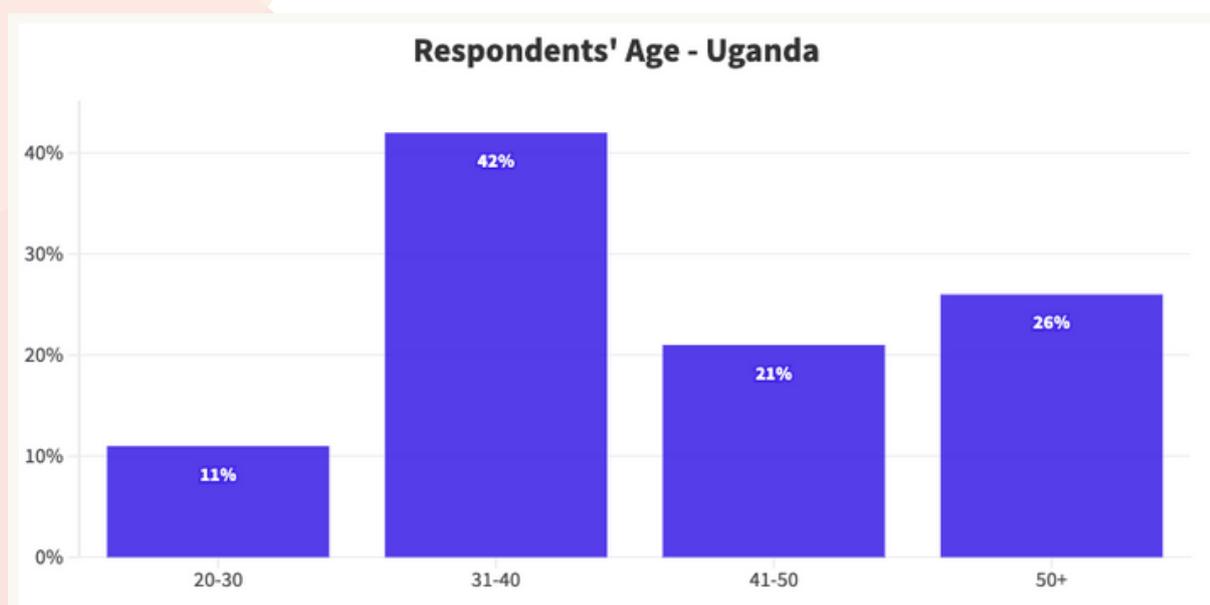
TANZANIA

The majority were aged 65+ (31% females/15% males). Below 60 years were all males. Over 50% could be described as civil veterans. Overall, most respondents fall under the category of active civic catalysts (54%) and think tanks.
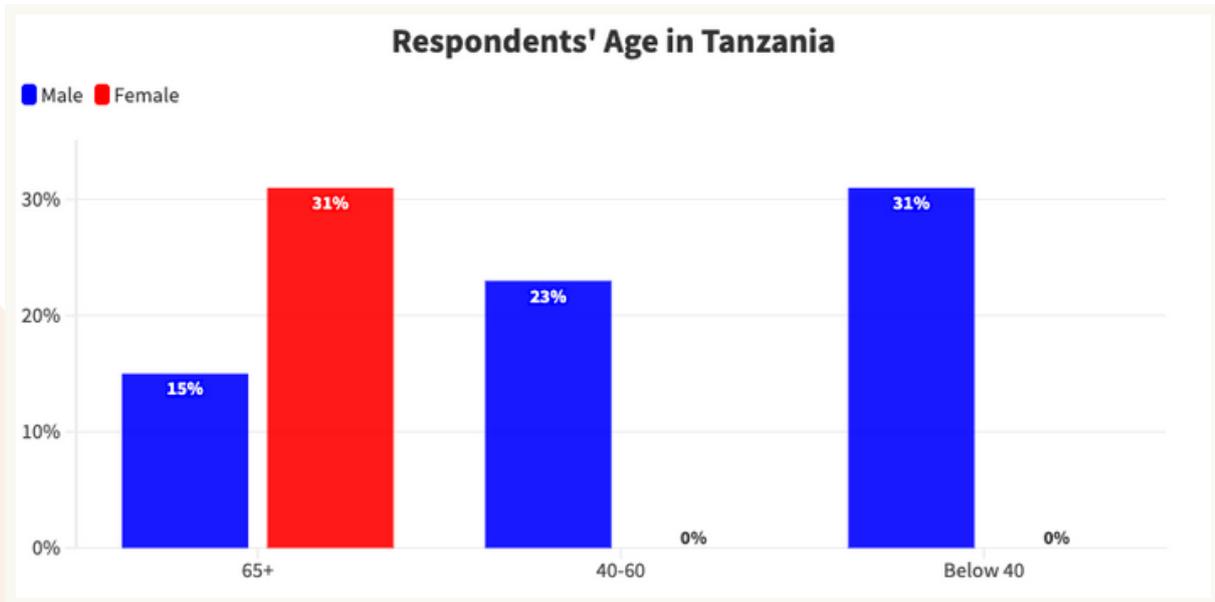
Findings

Awareness on Wellness

In Uganda, 46% of respondents agreed that wellness was a new phenomenon, corresponding with other scores that showed a low average knowledge of wellness dimensions, and again, from the heads of civil society organizations that are engaged in social justice, livelihoods, and human rights work *inter alia*, this is of concern. There was strong agreement that there is little to no knowledge about wellness in Uganda and yet well-rounded knowledge of the wellness dimensions would offer holistic harmonization of one's wellbeing.

Comprehensive knowledge about wellness among civil actors was also low in Tanzania. Out of the respondents, 30% demonstrated an overview knowledge of understanding, 40% had partial knowledge and 30% had a limited knowledge on well-being. Major concerns of civil actors were safety and security (state repression), financial (poor livelihoods, no pensions, and job insecurity), and social (stigma, lack of family support, ostracized)

Civil Actors' Knowledge of Wellness – Tanzania

Comprehensive Knowledge 0%
Partial Knowledge 30%
Overview Knowledge 30%
Limited Knowledge 40%
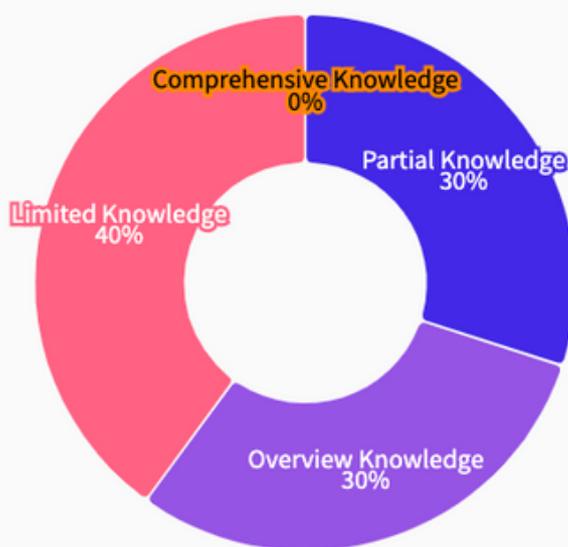
Wellness and Civic Activism

Wellness for civil actors is affected by a myriad of issues. In Kenya, respondents focused on issues like income, the cost of living, and the economy as having the greatest impact on their wellness. This suggests that the most critical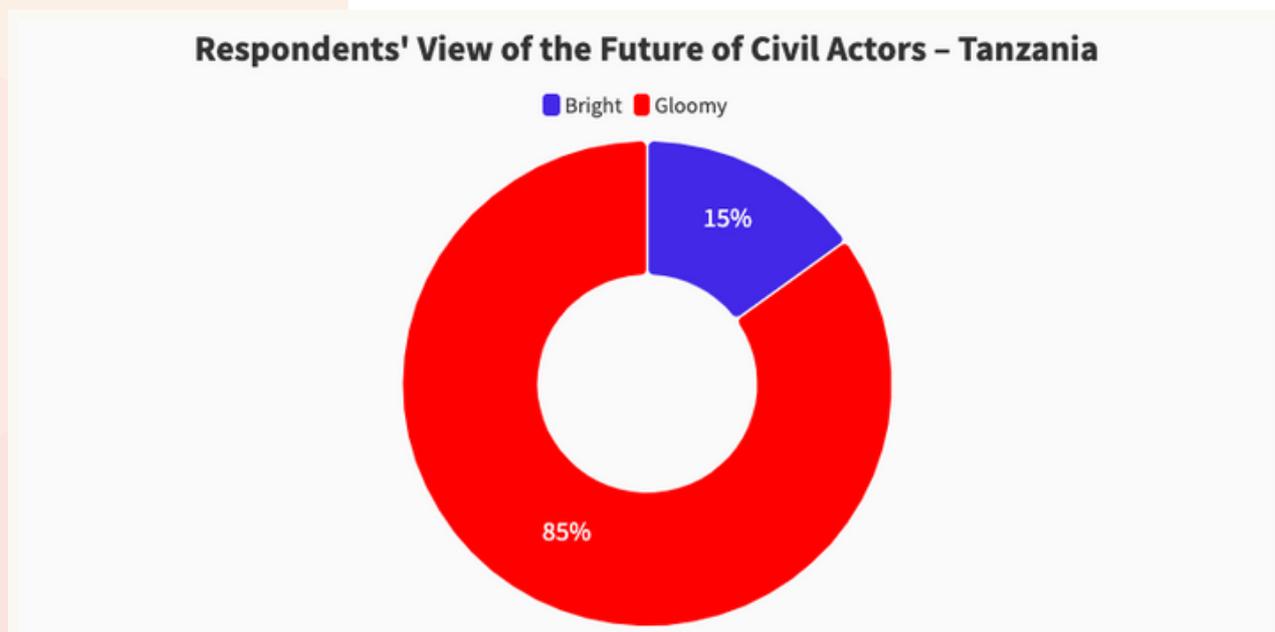 challenges that need to be confronted to improve their well-being revolve around "bread and butter" issues like job creation, lowering the cost of living, and dealing with corruption. Many of the respondents in the key informant interviews noted the weak economy has led to a lack of jobs and they could not fulfill primary goals such as paying children's school fees and rent.

"The economy is not favoring the common citizen, and now the community is looking at people like us for help." [5] *– Respondent Kenya*

In Tanzania, respondents were asked about their views regarding the future of activism and what can be done to strengthen the civil space movement. The majority (85%) of the participants were of the view that the future of activism is in dilemma due to disadvantageous changes in legislation or inadequate implementation of laws; hurdles to accessing financial resources and ensuring their sustainability; difficulties in accessing decision-makers and feeding into law and policymaking; and attacks on and harassment of human rights defenders. Those who argued that the future is bright (15%) were of the view that the current regime is providing and enabling environment for activists to exercise their work and there is a revival of the spirit for the young generation to wake up and defend their rights.

Respondents' View of the Future of Civil Actors – Tanzania

■ Bright ■ Gloomy

15%

85%

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5. Interview with a key informant, 12 October 2023

Thus, respondents' wellness or emotional well-being regarding their life satisfaction is affected by their work and financial status, especially when they cannot meet basic needs at home. Nearly all the respondents are concerned about their mental and emotional well-being. One of the respondents said he has seen veteran civil actors depressed because they have no employment opportunities, investments, or alternative businesses. They are struggling financially, and some regret spending their prime years fighting for democracy. [6]
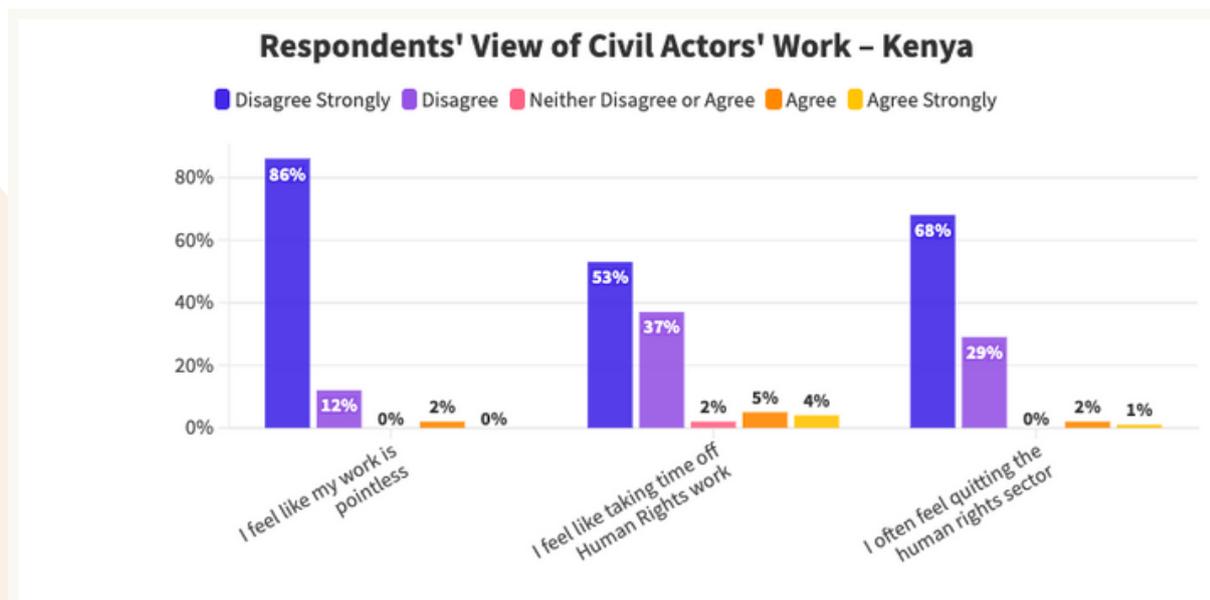
Exposure to human rights violations (whether directly or indirectly) has had adverse mental health outcomes for them or their colleagues. Despite this, most respondents in Kenya continue defending rights and civil space. They are not planning to quit anytime soon. Over 52% of respondents were 'very willing' to 'take risks' in their civil work in Kenya. Only 2% indicated willingness to exit the sector while 4% reported feeling their work is pointless.

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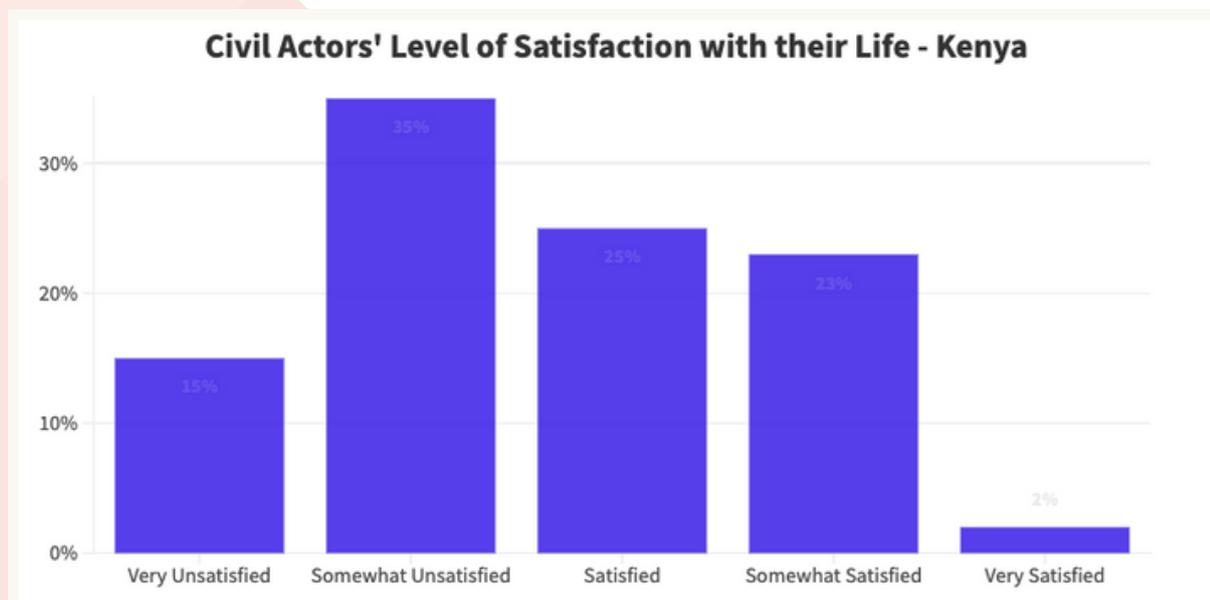
6. Interview with a key informant, 13 October 2023
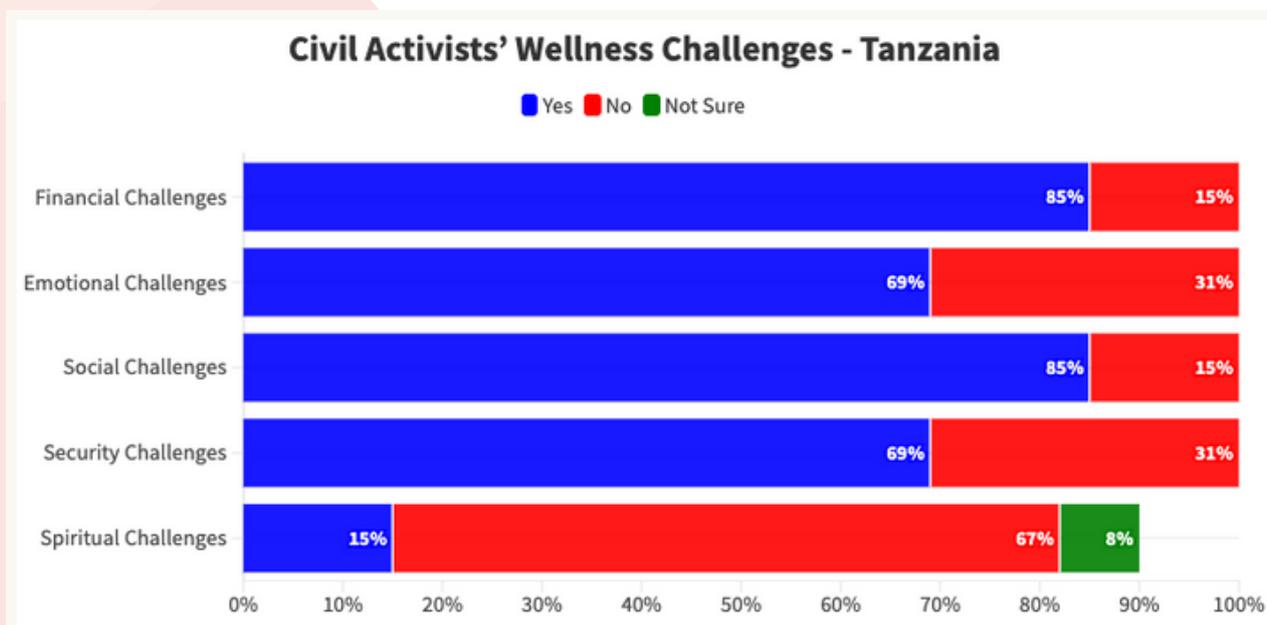
Respondents' Views on Wellness

In Uganda, 33% recorded mental wellness as a top priority, with health and physical wellness coming in second at 17% and financial wellness at 4%. Interestingly, social wellness was not a priority, possibly because it was scored high as the one they were most knowledgeable about and were pursuing. Whereas COVID-19 brought mental health more into the forefront as wellness and self-care became more popular, the expectation would be a stronger leaning toward these popular notions of wellness.

"We lack both technical and financial capacities to implement wellness programs We have never implemented any wellness programs" – Respondent Uganda

In Uganda, respondents stated that they needed more awareness (28%) on social wellness followed by physical, mental, and financial (24% each) and 24% had general awareness/exposure. 63% also report that dealing with money causes stress and 56% admit that lack of money distracts them at work. 80% worry about their financial situation. These further strain the overall well-being of the staff and may translate into increased insecurity, low morale, low motivation, poor concentration, and poor performance.

In Tanzania, the majority (84%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the activism journey had negatively affected their well-being, and 15% stated that the journey had positively impacted their wellbeing. Respondents' negative impacts were aligned with physical wellness (personal security), emotional well-being (financial and tenure insecurity), psycho-social well-being (immediate family members), and spiritual wellness. During their work as civil actors, they were accused of treason, imprisoned, tortured, side-lined, and isolated from their families.

"We have formed a network of Sauti ya Wananchi which is very effective and supportive on matters of our security concerns' – Respondent Tanzania

Civil Activists' Wellness Challenges - Tanzania

Yes | No | Not Sure

Challenge	Yes	No	Not Sure
Financial Challenges	85%	15%	
Emotional Challenges	69%	31%	
Social Challenges	85%	15%	
Security Challenges	69%	31%	
Spiritual Challenges	15%	67%	8%

In Kenya, the mental health and well-being of civil actors have been severely impacted. Respondents spoke about the challenges of living with pervasive fear and anxiety, their inability to sleep, their feelings of powerlessness in the face of oppression, of feeling 'numb' or emotionless, of living in panic, of being in constant 'fight mode'; and of their fatigue, despair, desperation, and isolation.
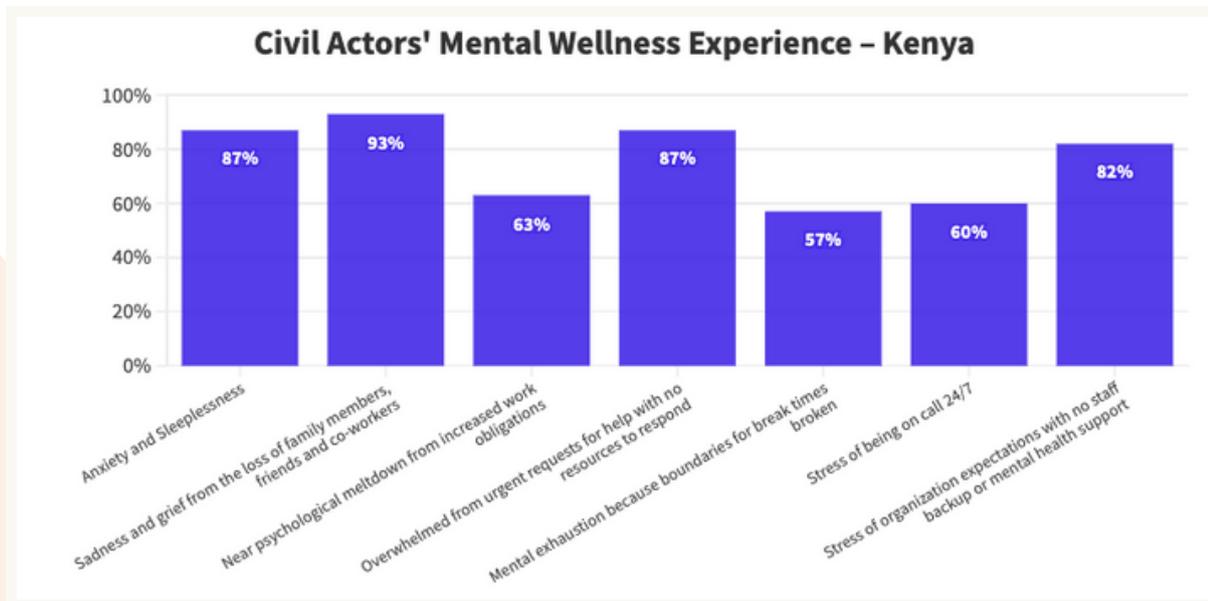
In Uganda, 41% of respondents recorded average levels of stress on a typical day, with 70% noting satisfaction with their lives. Sleep is an important indicator of mental well-being. Respondents reported 100% sleeping between six to eight hours a day. More than 80% report not having trouble falling asleep.
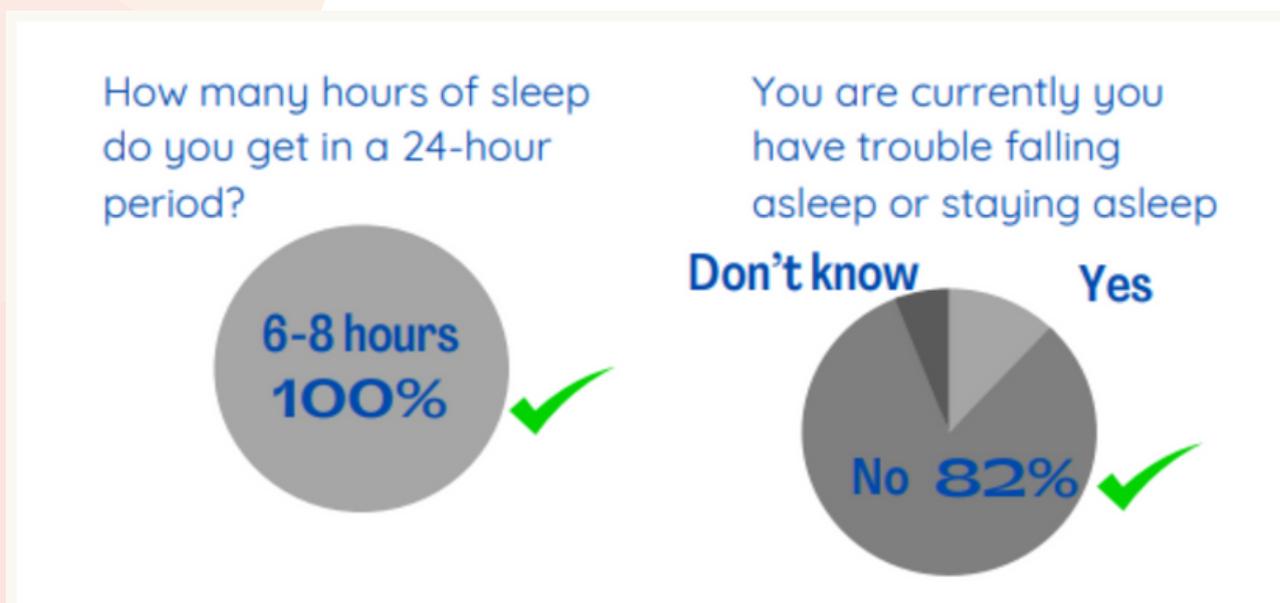
Wellness Needs

Participants expressed wellness needs and concerns across all the dimensions of wellness. This is in recognition that all the dimensions of wellness are interrelated and interdependent. The illustration below, reflecting the responses from respondents from Tanzania, illustrates this connection and the impact of civil actors' work and environment on wellness and well-being.

Safety and Security

| Intimidations | arbitrary detention | Kidnaps | Limited Mobility | Limited communication of immediate threats |

Emotional Wellness (Financial Insecurity)

| Loss of Clients and immediate co workers | lack of projects/livelihood to sustain their lives after retirement | difficult in securing jobs from the public domains | Professional ban |

Social Wellness

| abandoned by family/relatives | character assasinations | intimidation of family members by state organs | limited in social gatherings absconded | children being from studies |

Intellectual Wellness

| Limited space for stimulating their intellectual faculties | lack of time management to activate mental health | Limited support from professional networks |

Physical Wellness

| lack of medical/health insurance | Limited time for physical exercise | Limited diet/denial of food | subjected to torture and harassment |

Spiritual Wellness

| Limited Time for congregations | being labeled as a confrontational and evil person against the government thus stigmatized |

Frameworks for Wellness of Civil Actors

Support for civil actor's wellness is low across all the countries surveyed. In Kenya, relatively few organizations have embedded well-being practices into their work routines. This was partly due to a lack of resources and knowledge on wellness. Workload and increasing demands and expectations take precedence over dealing with burnout among those interviewed.

Civil Actors' Barrier to Wellbeing

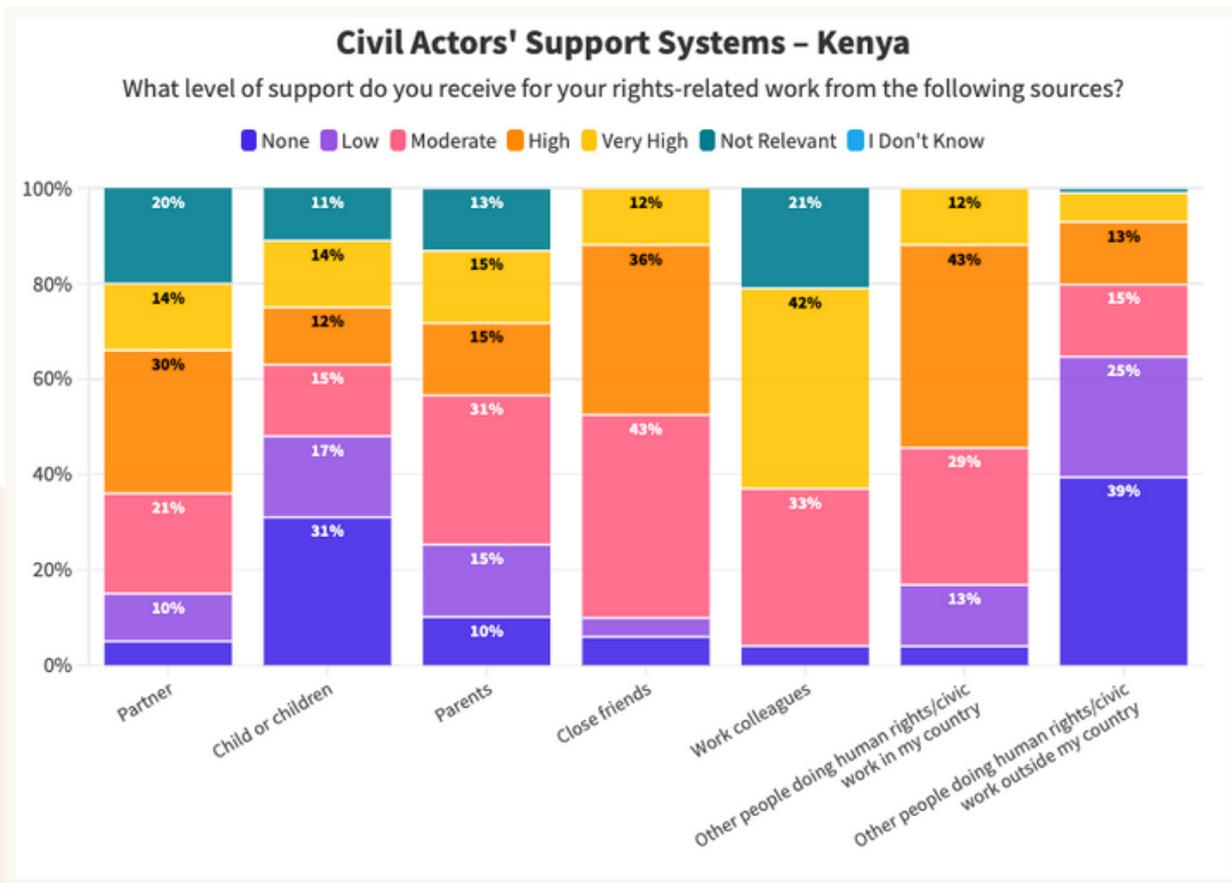Reflecting on the last five years, which of the following has been a barrier to you managing your wellbeing?

Legend: ■ Very significant barrier ■ Not a really significant barrier ■ Rather significant barrier
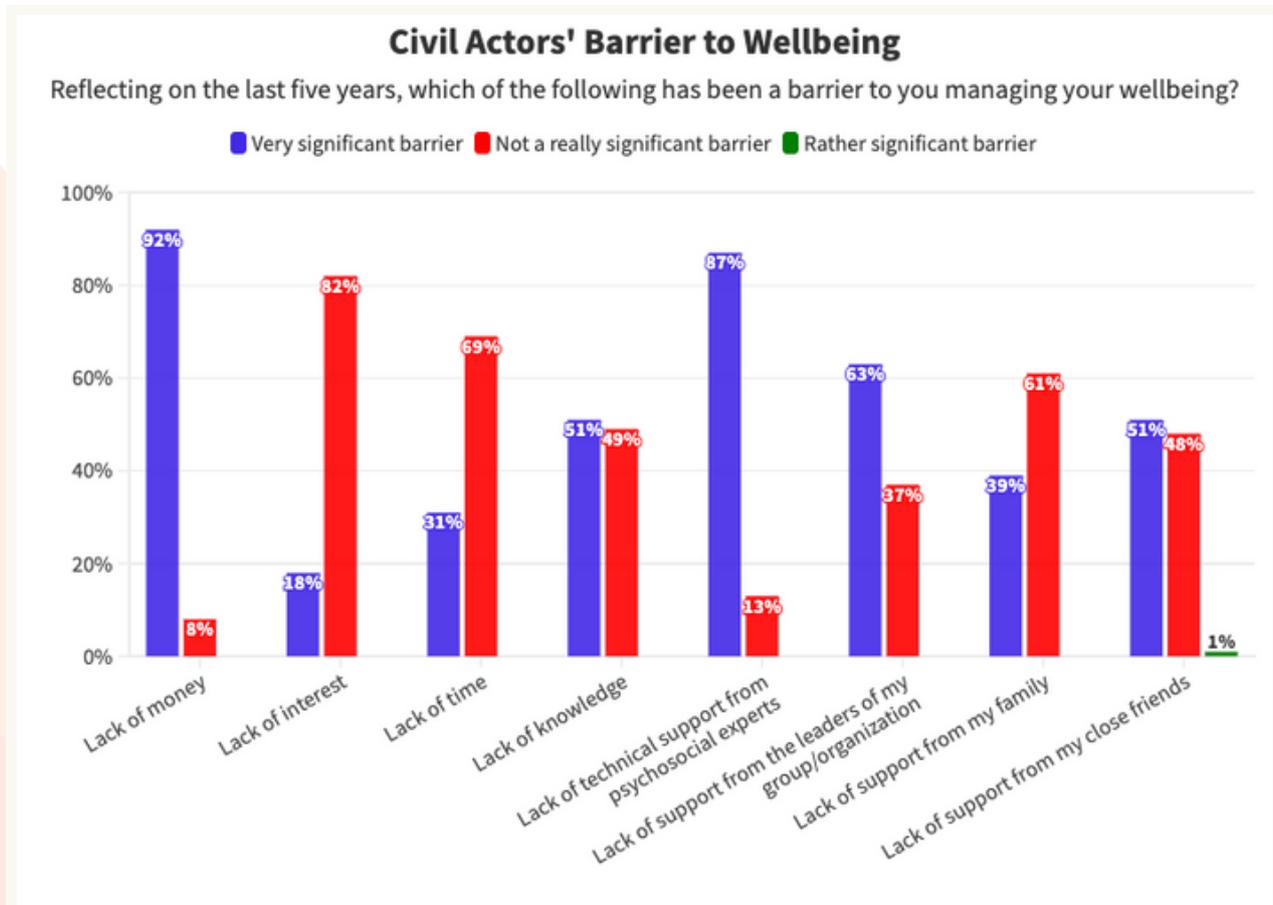
A female mental health practitioner pointed out the lack of implementation of laws and policies on mental well-being. Social networks, including groups of friends, work colleagues, and those within the civil space, provide the most assistance.

"Sometimes it is ... stressful when the organization has to lay off some staff members, and it creates anxiety, " – Respondent, Kenya

62% of the respondents noted fellow HRDs and other players in the civil space mainly support them. Respondents reported low support from family/workplace and low help-seeking behavior (32% reported seeking mental health professional help). Respondents reported fear and anxiety due to state actor repression, work-related trauma, lack of income security, workload, and high community pressure

Civil Actors' Support Systems – Kenya

What level of support do you receive for your rights-related work from the following sources?

Legend: None, Low, Moderate, High, Very High, Not Relevant, I Don't Know

Source	None	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	Not Relevant
Partner		10%	21%	30%	14%	20%
Child or children	31%	17%	15%	12%	14%	11%
Parents	10%	15%	31%	15%	15%	13%
Close friends			43%	36%	12%	
Work colleagues		33%		42%	21%	
Other people doing human rights/civic work in my country		13%	29%	43%	12%	
Other people doing human rights/civic work outside my country	39%	25%	15%	13%		

In Uganda, 67% of civil actors reported they had wellness programs of sorts including mental health support, medical cover, wellness activities, and financial literacy. In Kenya, respondents reported integration of wellness/psycho-social support into organizational programs and wellness activities including debriefs, counseling, and awareness. No data was available for Tanzania.

Kenya has the most comprehensive legal and policy environment on mental health and wellness including the Kenya Mental Health Policy (2015-2030), Mental Health Act, Mental Health Action Plan (2021-2025), and the National Guidelines on Workplace Mental Wellness.

Recommendations

The civil actors who were respondents to the survey received little or no support from formal support systems but were supported by families, colleagues, and their social networks. Others receive minimal support from civil society organizations, especially those working with human rights defenders. There is, therefore, a dire need for a well-resourced and capacitated mechanism that provides psychosocial support to civil actors in a holistic way, including prevention, well-being, and self-care.

Wellness interventions need to take into account the challenging external operating environment for civil actors. Interventions need to be promotive, preventive, and resilience-building (creating sustainable, stakeholder-owned and led systems). Financing, capacity building, and technical support are key as is developing innovative wellness models for resource-constrained contexts.

Coordinated, comprehensive, effective, appropriate, and standardized delivery of wellness and well-being care and interventions for civil actors is key for Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi! across the East African Region with greater self-care accountability for civil actors.

Specific Recommendations:

1. Continuous data collection, research, and studies on civil actors' wellness
2. Collaborative prioritization and integration of wellness and well-being activities for civil actors with a focus on mental, social, and financial wellness
3. Sustainability and resourcing of wellness programs for civil actors
4. Leveraging, replication, benchmarking, and scaling up existing formal and informal resilience and wellness initiatives to deliver
5. Capacity building, awareness, and literacy on wellness and wellbeing
6. Creation of Communities of Practice/Wellness Champions/Wellness Hubs as sustainable networks and locations for low-level preventative and promotive points of care for civil actors with clear provision for screening, referral pathways for clinical and specialized care, rehabilitation, and reintegration services and peer support
7. Specific interventions to address the wellness dimensions of workplace trauma (organizational and external), fragile livelihoods, state repression, family challenges,
8. Micro flexible grants/fellowships to Civic Veterans to support grassroots wellness initiatives to leverage their expertise and experience
9. Creation of National and Regional wellness hubs as Rest and Respite centers think tanks, and spaces for reflections, learning, and experience sharing
10. Creation of networks of mental health professionals to offer more specialized higher level support and care for civil actors with severe, chronic, and long-term mental health challenges

11. Capacity building, Training, and awareness of mental, social, and financial wellness as priority areas for civil actors
12. Integrate wellness into security and protection programs including physical and digital security, safe houses, shelters, relocation activities, training, and capacity building
13. Identify gaps in service provision and the policy and legal environment across East Africa

Suggested Priority Actions 2024-2025

1. Development of Common East African Standards, Guidelines for Wellness and well-being, as well as country and context-specific National Guidelines
2. Develop and roll out a country-specific Wellness Literacy Curriculum and Awareness campaign focusing on the 3 priority wellness areas – Mental, Social, and Financial
3. Undertake a circular benchmarking across the 3 implementing countries to identify best practices, gas, and challenges including policy, legal and service provision, and practices on mental health and wellness
4. Creation of Wellness Hubs/Communities of Practice, development of screening tools, and roll out of promotive wellness and preventative mental health programs with referral pathways
5. Development of National Wellness portals, an online wellness publication, online resources, and a helpline
6. Piloting small sub-grants/fellowships to civil veterans to undertake critical wellness interventions with civil actors on the 3 priority areas Mental, Social, and Financial Wellness
7. National Mapping of service providers and referral pathways, resources, and partners
8. Regional and National Conference of Civic actors, organizations, and allies to engender stakeholder buy-in on wellness issues
9. Formation of a task force to conceptualize the development of s sustainable and long-term wellness fund for each implementing country
10. Integrate wellness into safety and security programs and civil actor's protection systems

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that civil actors face multiple challenges that have an impact on their wellness as individuals. This also extends to their families, friends and communities. The Wellness Hub and its partners in the region has the responsibility of creating and activating urgent measures to address the needs of the people working in this sector. This report shall form the basis of curating interventions on wellness in the region.