

# Small movements, big change

A report on The Movements  
Trust 2025 survey



# Contents

	Page
Introduction from our Executive Director	1.
Key Findings	2.
Executive summary	3.
Introduction to the Survey	6.
Who are the movements and what do they do?	7.
Movement values – how movements work	12.
–Confrontation versus collaboration	
–Scale philosophy: depth versus breadth	
–Registration philosophy: formal versus informal	
Why movements emerge: the innovation imperative	15.
–Authentic community voice and lived experience leadership	
–Rapid responsiveness and structural flexibility	
–Case study 1 Autosafety Uganda	
–Explicit political freedom without institutional constraints	
–Case Study 2 Patriotic Millionaires	
–System disruption rather than service delivery	
The question of impact: small scale, big ambition	21.
–Case Study 3 Climate Justice Africa	
What movements are proudest of	25.
The challenges movements face	27.
–The funding gap	
The access economy: how funding really works	29.
–Barriers beyond money	
–Case Study 4 The Resilience Project	
–Burnout	
–Political and systemic barriers	
–Growth tensions and mission preservation	
The role of The Movements Trust	36.
–Greater fundraising success	
–Wide reach	
–Fewer barriers	
–Future services wishlist	
The path forward: practical recommendations for funders	40.
Summing up	43.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, green, blue, purple) arranged in a circular pattern, suggesting movement or a group of people.

# Introduction from our Executive Director

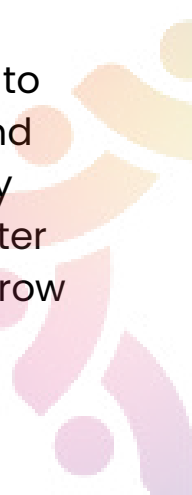
---

The Movements Trust registered as a charity in 2021 and started operating as a fiscal sponsor and regranter in 2022. As one of the only dedicated 'charity sponsors' in the UK, our service has attracted growing interest from movements, organisers and activists, and the donors who want to support them (both foundation and individuals).

When we first developed the survey in March 2025, we had 124 movements in our 'movement family', and we are grateful to the movements that responded to the survey and let us learn more about their experiences.

At the time of publication of this report, as 2025 draws to a close, our movement family has grown to over 200, and is expanding into every region in the world - evidence of the amazing organising and activism taking place in society today, meeting an ever growing set of challenges.

Our next survey will reap even more detailed insights, and we plan to rerun this survey regularly in future as we grow. By doing so we hope to create an expanding evidence base that will give us a fascinating and inspiring insight into movement organising and experience. Hopefully this evidence base will also help others, as it will help us, develop better services, and in particular more accessible funding models to help grow this critical part of society.

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, purple) arranged in a circular pattern, suggesting movement or a group of people.

# Key Findings

---

- Survey of 57 movements supported by The Movements Trust (TMT), showing the unique strengths and systemic challenges of grassroots movements globally.
- Movements are small, flexible, and community-led, often filling gaps left by traditional charities and NGOs.
- Despite their proven impact, they face a profound funding and access crisis.

## key findings

- Why movements form: Over half emerged because existing institutions don't address their goals or do so ineffectively.
- Distinctive advantages:
  - a. Authentic community voice and lived experience leadership.
  - b. Rapid responsiveness and flexibility.
  - c. Political freedom unconstrained by charity regulations.
  - d. Focus on systemic change, not service delivery.
- Typical size: 0–20 decision-makers, but often hundreds of supporters.
- Scope: Over one-third work on global issues despite minimal resources.

## impact examples

- Policy win: Patriotic Millionaires UK helped abolish non-dom tax status.
- Grassroots innovation: Autosafety Uganda trained 1,500 informal mechanics and shaped national regulation.
- Continental advocacy: Climate Justice Africa trained African youth to influence UN climate policy.
- Wellbeing innovation: The Resilience Project built peer-support networks for climate leaders.

## core challenges

- Funding dominates: 80%+ cite it as their main obstacle.
  - Movements are excluded by relationship-based funding systems privileging social capital and Global North connections.
  - They face a “capacity trap” – small teams managing multiple micro-grants.
  - Many rely on unpaid labour, leading to burnout and sustainability issues.
- Political hostility and civic space restrictions limit progress in several countries.
- Growth tension: Scaling while maintaining community authenticity is difficult.

# Executive Summary

This survey of 57 movements registered with The Movements Trust shows organisations that have unique advantages in fighting for social change.

Compared to existing institutions (such as charities, NGOs), movements are less constrained, more flexible, and better able to focus on depth and substance over numbers.

They have an authentic voice, grounded in community and typically led by those with lived experience of the issue they are working on.

They fill vital gaps left by existing institutions and can have dramatic impact. Despite these unique advantages, movements have some fundamental challenges to be addressed, especially when it comes to funding.

Over half the movements told us they formed because existing organisations don't work on their chosen objectives – or don't do so effectively.

This is sometimes about the **'what'** – there are specific issues movements want to address that others are not addressing. And it is sometimes about the **'how'** – movements offering perspectives and approaches that mainstream organisations don't.

Movements offer four distinctive capabilities: authentic grassroots experience and voice, explicit political freedom without institutional constraints, rapid responsiveness without bureaucratic processes, and a desire for systemic change more than service delivery.

As one movement put it:

“ ———  
| “We don't just seek inclusion,  
| we fight for justice.”

Movements are typically small – nearly all have **20 or fewer people involved in financial decisions**, but nonetheless demonstrate remarkable impact.

They've achieved policy victories such as the abolition of 'non-dom status' in the UK (removing tax exemptions for foreign earnings and raising over £2bn a year for the UK government); trained over 1,500 informal mechanics in Uganda to reduce road deaths and injuries and improve air quality; trained and positioned, on budgets of less than £25,000, African spokespeople to advocate in global climate negotiations; and created "life-changing" experiences for young climate leaders to help sustain and nurture them for long term campaigning.

However, movements face a profound funding crisis. When asked about their biggest challenges, nearly all movements talked about funding problems.

Being supported by The Movements Trust helps with this but more is needed. And of course money itself is a big part of this but the problem also goes deeper.

The current system systematically excludes those it claims to support through relationship-based access that privileges existing social capital.

As one movement puts it, the only thing that helped them secure funding was "Getting our foot in the door, we were locked outside for most of our existence..."

Movements often don't fit restrictive funding criteria.

Moreover, movements experience the "**capacity trap**" of the workload of managing multiple small grants with small teams; some suffer **burnout** from long term unpaid volunteering, and others face **political hostility** to their work.

No wonder that movements take pride in survival itself – many are surprised at "still being here" despite the structural barriers – and in "doing things differently" from other organisations.

They continue because, as one movement put it, their proudest achievement is "spreading hope."

The Movements Trust plays a crucial role in supporting movements sustainably.

For funders, there are important messages in what movements are saying. We know that funders are cautious about funding these sorts of groups even though they recognise the key role they play in social change.

In a 2024 survey of funders asking about their attitudes to funding campaigning and activism, they identified four key barriers:

- Risk – how will funding affect my organisation?
- Impact – does campaigning and activism make a difference?
- Practicalities – how can I fund individual campaigners or informal groups?
- Knowledge – how do I find the right campaigners to fund?

The Movements Trust is well positioned to address these barriers. The organisation brings an understanding of who movements are and how they campaign, they provide a practical way for funders to support movements in a way that reduces funders' direct risk, and they help tell the stories that demonstrate how effective movements can be.

Supporting movements requires some adaptation of funders' traditional approaches: prioritising relationship-first engagement with grantees over lengthy paperwork and reporting, long-term flexible support over project grants, and trust in community leadership over traditional accountability.

With this better support, sustained over time, movements are positioned to achieve exceptional impact for the communities they serve.

# Introduction to the Survey

---

In March 2025, The Movements Trust invited the 124 movements registered with them to complete an online survey.

The survey, which will be repeated biennially, was designed to better understand the constituency of movements, the issues they work on, and the unique role they play, including their theory of change and how they measure their impact.

The survey also asked about challenges movements face, particularly around funding, and what has helped them to address this challenge. The full set of questions is in the Appendix.

57 movements (just under half) responded to the survey. This report summarises the key survey findings, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

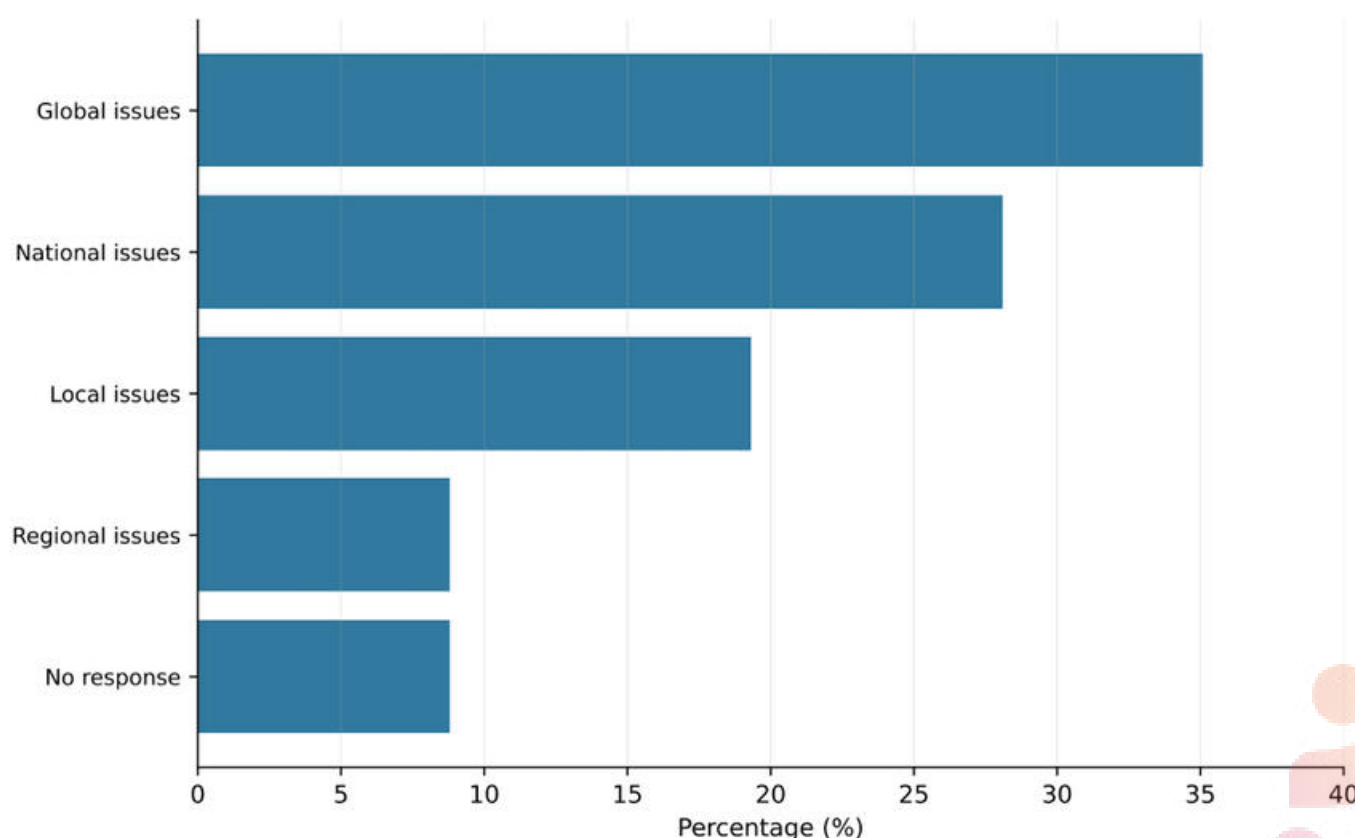
For the quantitative data, we mostly present findings as summary charts with explanation.

For the qualitative data, we analyse the main findings by question and overall by theme.

We also include four case studies to describe the work of four specific movements, chosen to reflect the breadth of geographies, methods, issues and goals that movements work on.

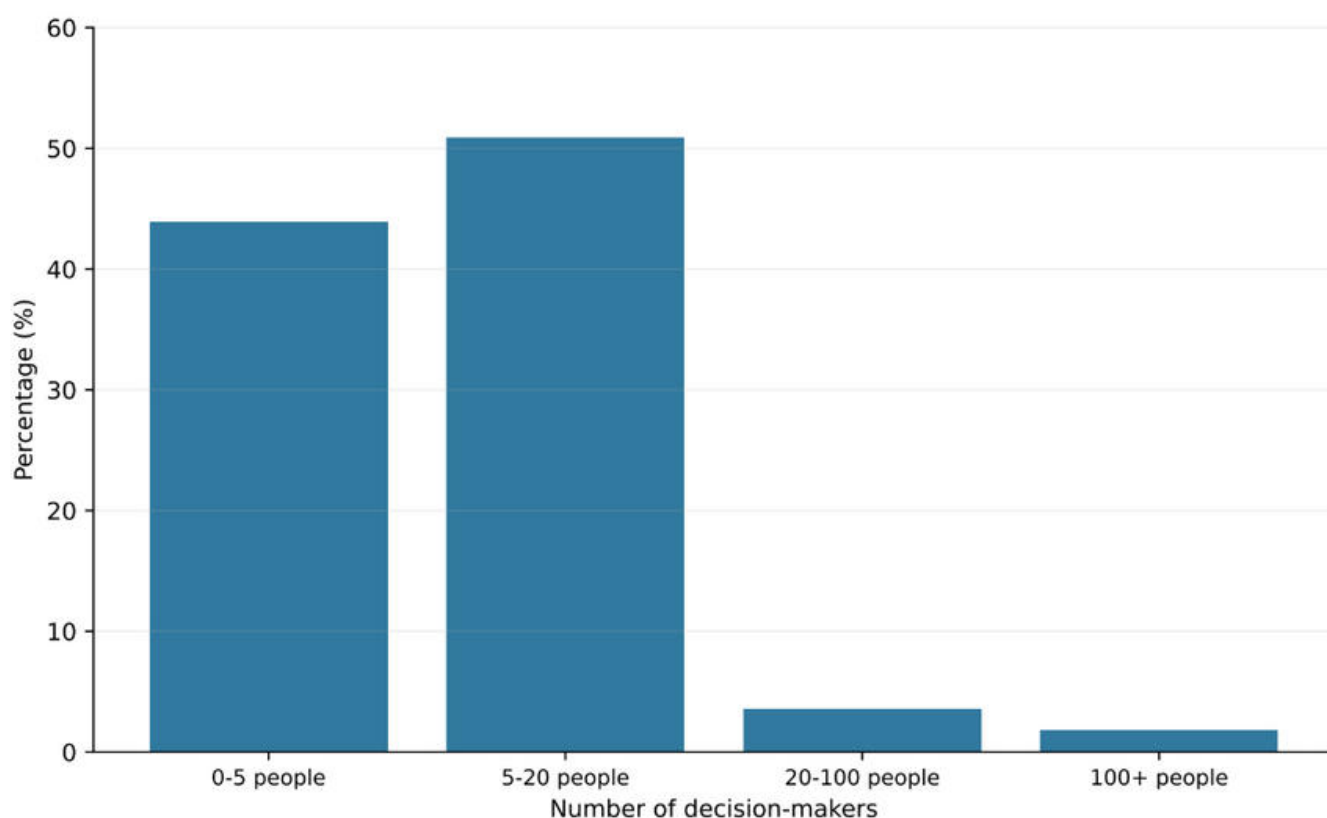
# Who are the movements and what do they do?

Movements are often led by groups typically excluded from formal power structures – refugees, indigenous communities, young people, informal workers. Their scope is ambitious relative to their size. Over a third (35.1%) work on global issues, while 28.1% focus on national issues. Only 19.3% are focused on local or regional work. Most (57.9%) have members mainly living in the same country, but many work on issues that cross borders.



*Fig 1. The scope of movements' work*

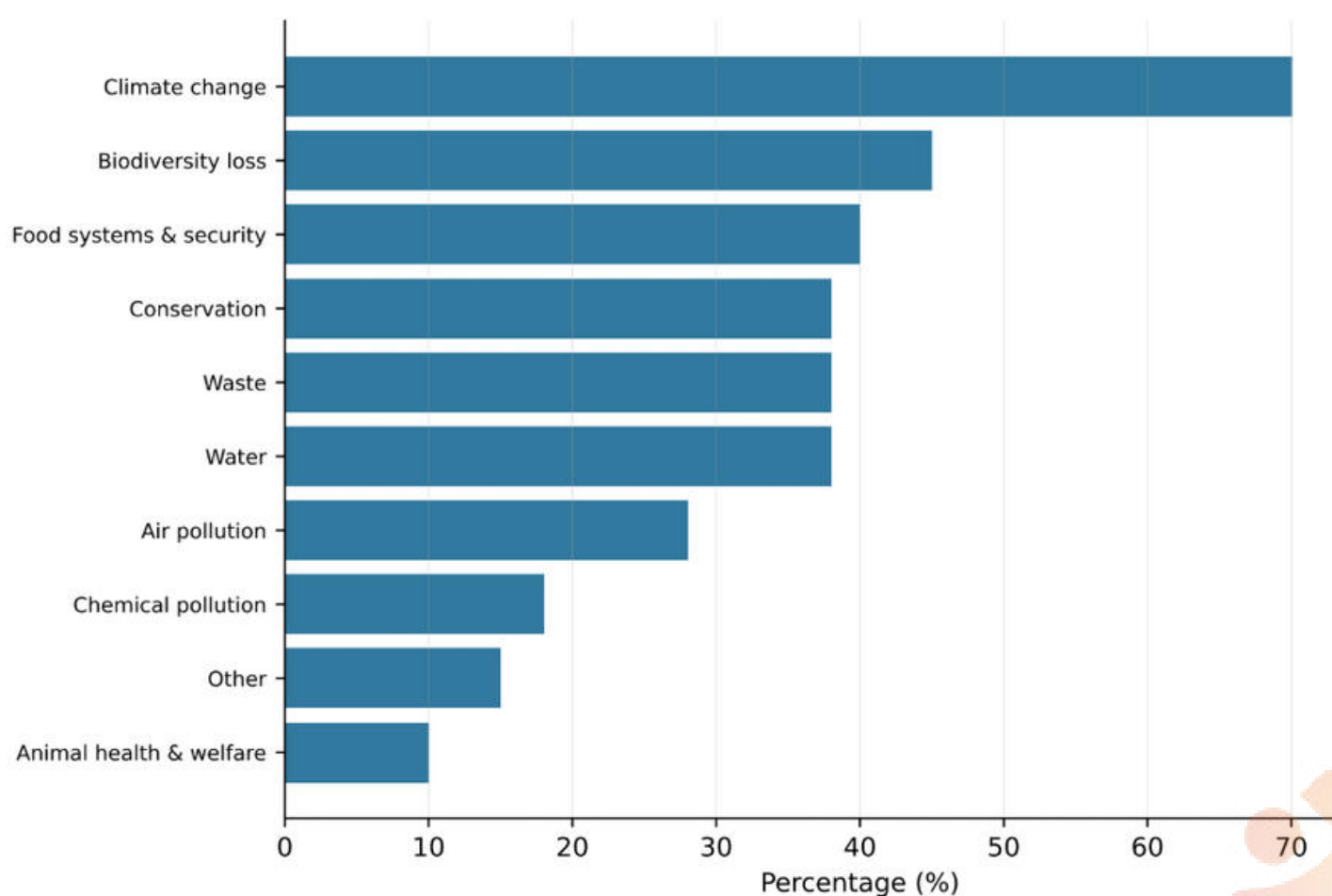
Most movements are small organisations with decision-making concentrated amongst few people. Half (50.9%) have 5–20 people involved in financial decisions, with another 43.9% having just 0–5 people.



*Fig 2. Decision-making in movements*

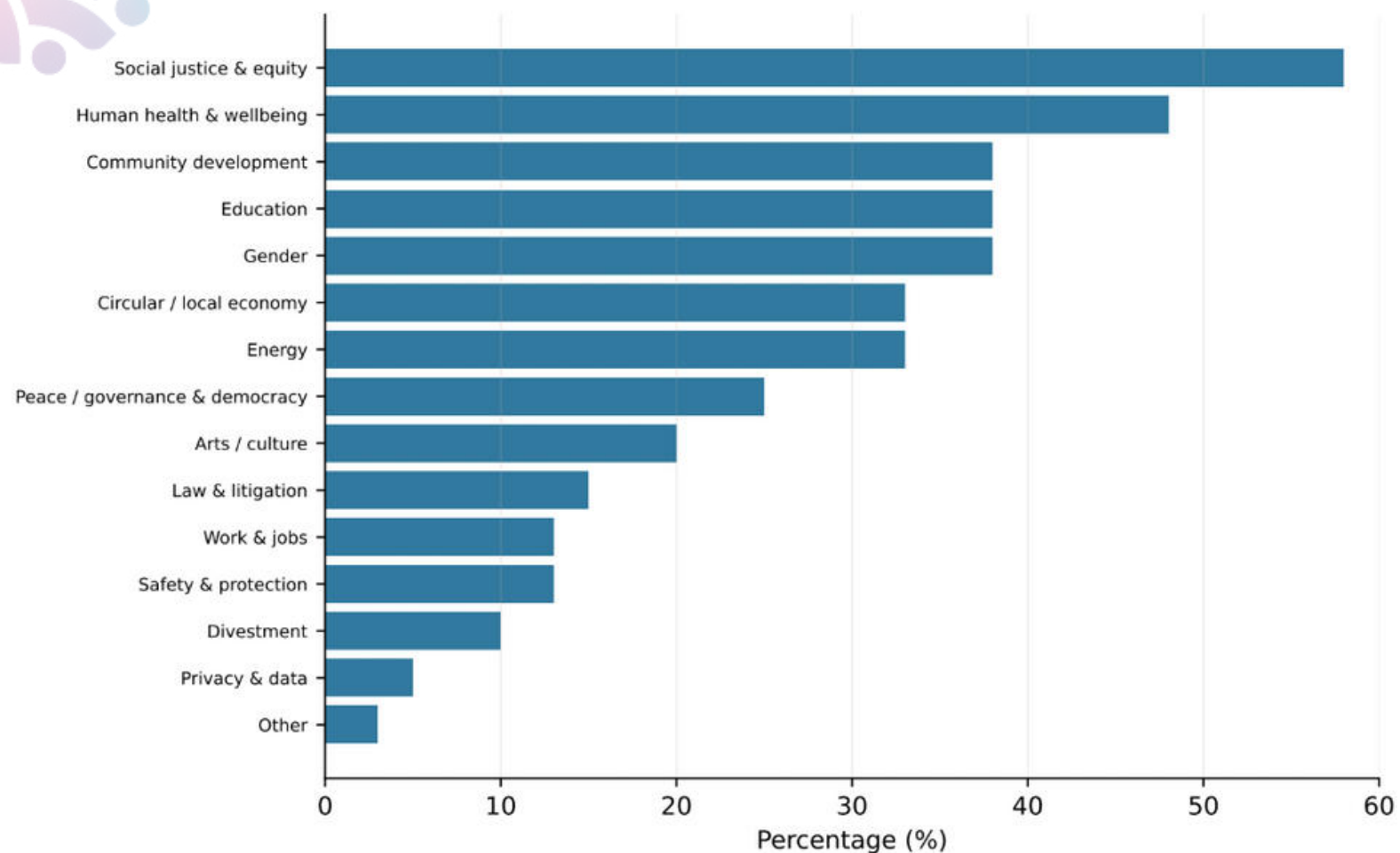
Despite these small cores, movements often have substantial reach; 47.4% have supporter networks – that is, people who receive information, donate, or sign petitions – of more than a hundred people.

The movements work across climate justice, social equality, economic transformation, and democratic participation. Environmental movements cover areas as diverse as climate justice, sustainable transport, and ecosystem restoration, while social movements address poverty, workers' rights, refugee support, and gender equality.



*Fig 3. Environmental issues movements work on*

Fig 4. Social and economic issues movements work on



Many movements work on a combination of issues – for example, connecting climate action with social justice or linking environmental protection with indigenous rights.

Movements take a range of legal forms. While many value informality, most (63.1%) use some kind of formal registration structure. The most common are Non-UK registered charity/NGO (33.3%) and Companies Limited by Guarantee (29.8%). Only 14% operate without formal registration.

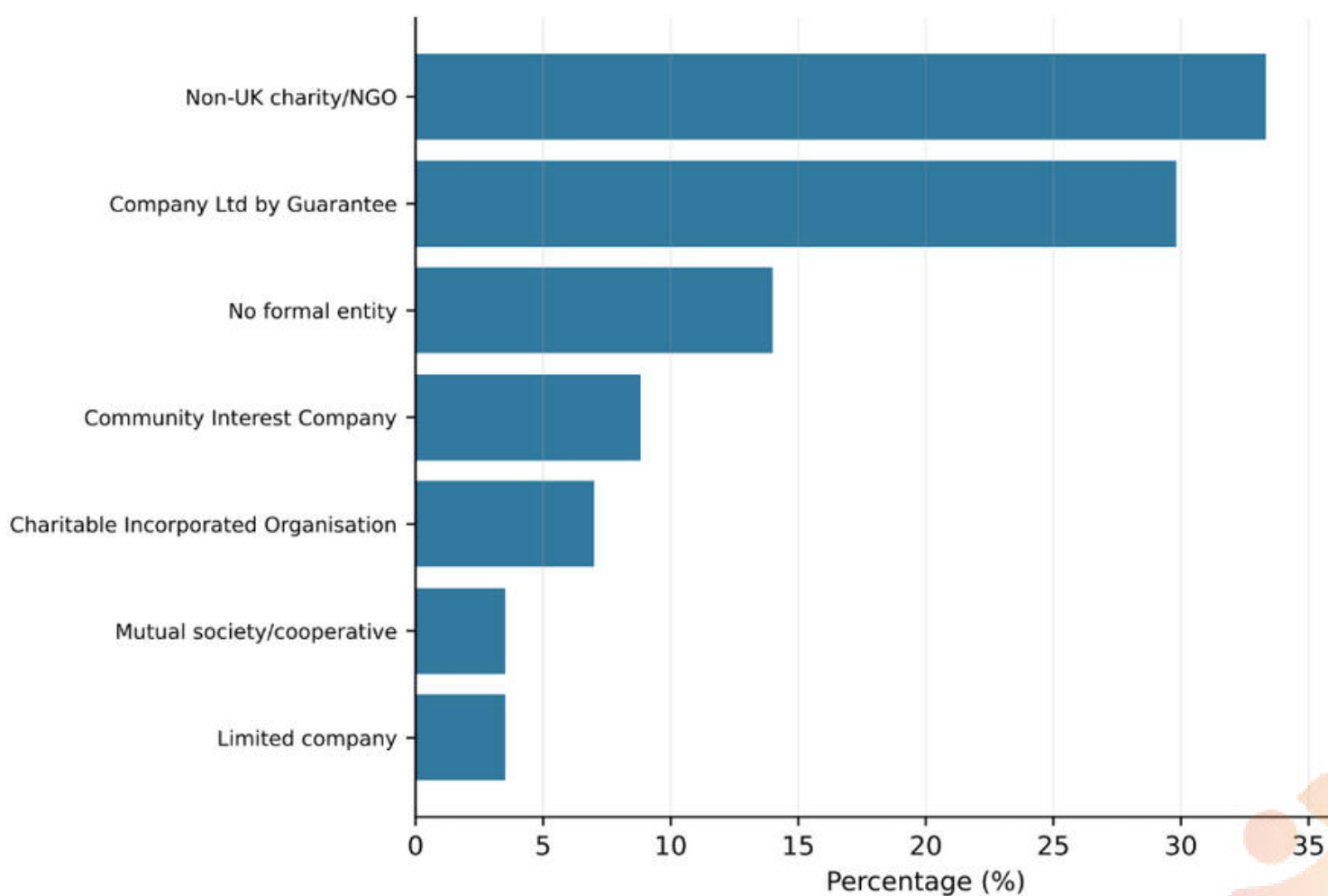


Fig 5. Movements' registration status

# Movement values – how movements work

---

What sets movements apart is not just what they do, but how they do it. When asked why their structure as a movement is important, responses consistently emphasise values-driven organising that prioritises authenticity. The Resilience Project explain their approach: "We're a registered organisation, but we operate like a movement, prioritising our community, youth groups, and young leaders as they navigate the emotional and mental toll of climate leadership. We are led and advised by our youth community, shaping our work around real needs, lived experience, and peer support. We prioritise depth over distance, people over numbers."

This philosophy of valuing deep connections with the communities they work in appears throughout the survey. Many movements reject the pressure to scale-at-all-costs that many NGOs face. Instead, they want to use all their resources, financial and personal, to support the people they are there to represent.

As one respondent put it, rather than money having to go to administrative overhead, "We get to use all available resources for the good of the movement." Another emphasised being "100 percent organised by the communities, for the communities and in the communities."

This difference in values extends to how movements position themselves politically. Unlike charities which are often constrained – or behave so – by regulatory requirements, movements can take explicitly political stances. One explained: "Charities (even the more radical ones) often have a veneer of respectability which pressures them from pushing back against the status quo." Movements are unafraid to challenge traditional power structures if they need it.

While movements surveyed share some common values, they are also an extremely varied group, with many differences in the tactics they use, in their scale, and in their relationship to formal power.

We discuss some of these differences in the following sections.

### confrontation versus collaboration

Some movements position themselves as explicitly confrontational. Mujeres por la Justicia Climática say: "We don't just seek inclusion, we fight for justice, for a redistribution of resources... While charities provide aid and governments implement policy, movements build power." Confrontation can also take a more tongue-in-cheek approach; Wild Card uses "cheeky, informal and jester-style tone... bringing in creative actions and campaigns that demand more, shifting open the Overton window for other NGOs' demands to seem more realistic."

Other movements emphasise collaborative approaches. As one says, they can "complement the power" of government rather than confronting it. Others describe their work as operating "inside the system" while maintaining movement values, – for example, one group provides impact and evaluation services to the broadcast industry while simultaneously pushing for structural change within it.

### scale philosophy: depth versus breadth

Movements also differ in the extent to which they prioritise local depth or global reach. Some intentionally stay small: "We plan to work on objectives for a fixed period of time, after that we will dissolve." Others emphasise a hyperlocal focus, like Aylluq Q'Anchaynin in Peru, which aligns their schedules for solar panel installation with "natural cycles of the indigenous community."


By contrast, movements like Zero Hour have mobilised "90,000 individuals, 1000+ organisations, and 360 councils" and describe themselves as "the largest environmental movement right now in the UK." Climate Justice Africa operates across the whole continent despite having "just 5-20 decision-makers and operating on £10,000-£25,000 annually."

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, green, blue, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

---

## registration philosophy: formal versus informal

The choice of whether to register formally sometimes reveals deeper philosophical differences. Some movements see registration as restrictive, creating "burdens of regulatory control" that limit their political voice. Others view it pragmatically – they want to register but lack capacity, or they use formal structures strategically while maintaining movement culture. And there are some who adopt novel approaches. One explained: "We have worked with lawyers to create an innovative not-for-profit cooperative structure that enfranchises the workers and the users equally... [it] is very important and upholds the values which the platform seeks to embody."

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

# Why movements emerge: the innovation imperative

---

Movements exist because formal institutions leave critical gaps. Over half of the surveyed movements (52.6%) formed because existing organisations don't work on their chosen objectives. 31.6% felt that other organisations working on their issues weren't effective enough. Survey responses reveal four distinctive capabilities that movements bring to social change work that formal institutions structurally struggle to replicate.

## authentic community voice and lived experience leadership

Movements consistently emphasise that they are led by those directly affected by the issues they address. Autosafety Uganda noted: "We are rooted in the informal communities where most transport-related risks actually emerge; places often overlooked by charities and unreachable by government programs. Unlike traditional organisations, we work from within, not for communities." [See case study 1]

This isn't just about consultation, but about where genuine decision-making power lies. As an Indigenous women's movement explained:

“


*"We are women from Indigenous communities, who know better than anyone the reality our communities and families are experiencing, as we live day to day trying to solve the problems of our communities."*

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, green, blue, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

### rapid responsiveness and structural flexibility

Movements emphasise their ability to adapt quickly without the need for lengthy, bureaucratic approval processes. One explained: "We are able to adapt and drive change solely for the purpose of that change, we do not need to maintain our organisation or align with political interests, we can be independent, authentic and focus on the work."

This agility is particularly valuable in rapidly changing contexts. A screen sector movement noted: "The screen sector we are trying to affect is ever-changing, set in its ways and undergoing constant budget cuts... Being a movement helps us do exactly that – to adjust quickly and grab opportunities to progress fast."

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

## Case Study 1

# Autosafety Uganda | Grassroots Innovation at Scale

"Making Africa's road transport safer and cleaner by training informal mechanics, promoting climate-friendly mobility in communities"

Operating where formal institutions cannot reach, Autosafety Uganda works within Uganda's informal transport sector, training roadside mechanics who service 85% of the country's vehicles but are typically excluded from formal programs.



What makes them distinctive is they don't work for communities but from within them, co-creating solutions with those most affected. This approach builds trust and ensures the relevance of solutions needed for lasting behaviour change – and in settings that external actors struggle to access.

They have trained over 1,500 informal mechanics in emission-reducing repair techniques and reached 3,000+ community members. Their real-world emissions data is now informing Uganda's vehicle maintenance regulations, showing how grassroots work can drive systemic policy change. Their funding is diversified, and demonstrates that community-rooted innovation can attract both private and state support, despite the fact that "there's a gap between donor interest in clean transport and support for the informal sector that drives it."

## explicit political freedom without institutional constraints

Unlike registered charities, movements can take explicitly political stances and engage more fearlessly in advocacy.

“ —  
|  
"We can be more politically  
challenging without being  
hamstrung by fears of losing  
charitable registration."

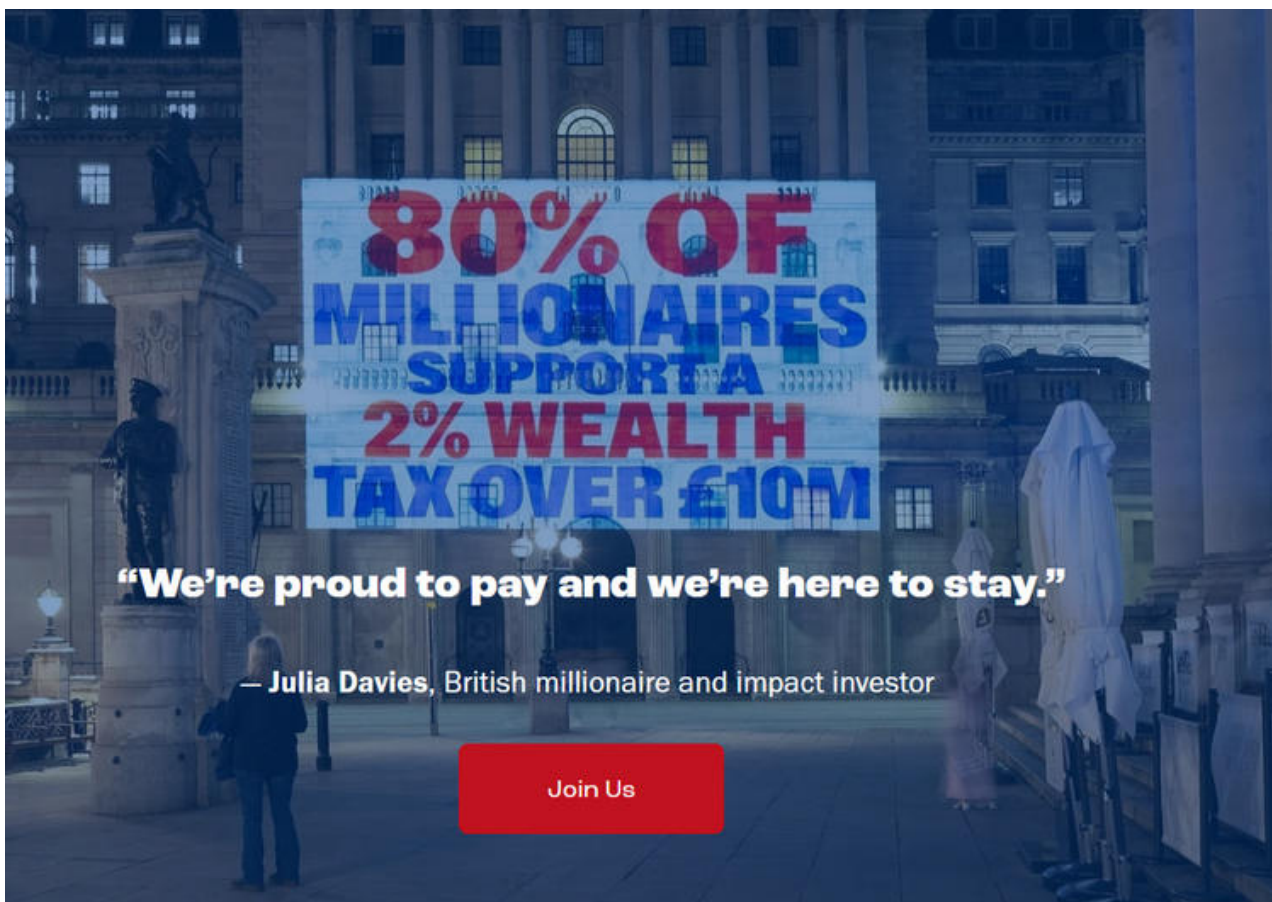
This political freedom allows movements to challenge power structures directly. And groups run by specific and even surprising constituencies of people can also exploit new channels of communication. Patriotic Millionaires UK demonstrated that bringing wealthy voices to advocate for wealth taxes creates "a counter narrative to the argument from the source," something that more traditional advocacy organisations cannot match. [See case study 2]

## Case Study 2

# Patriotic Millionaires UK | Definitive Policy Impact

To use the unusual voice of wealth to advocate for a wealth tax"

This nonpartisan network of British millionaires show how movements can achieve concrete policy victories by bringing authentic, unexpected voices to critical issues. With just 4 people making key decisions and over 85 members, they've proven that small, focused movements can drive significant change.



Patriotic Millionaires UK succeeds by bringing "a counter narrative to the argument from the source" – wealthy individuals advocating for wealth taxes creates an undeniable moral authority that traditional advocacy cannot match. They played a pivotal role in achieving the abolition of non-dom status, demonstrating measurable policy success. Their creative tactics, including Brexit-style buses showing weekly revenue lost without wealth taxes, secured media attention and recruited decision-makers' support.

### system disruption rather than service delivery

Rather than working within existing systems, movements often actively challenge and seek to rebuild them. As circular fashion organisation, 2ndish explains, "We don't just offer services - we redefine what is desirable, valuable, and normal in fashion." This system-changing approach distinguishes movements from many other more established organisations whose emphasis is on service provision.

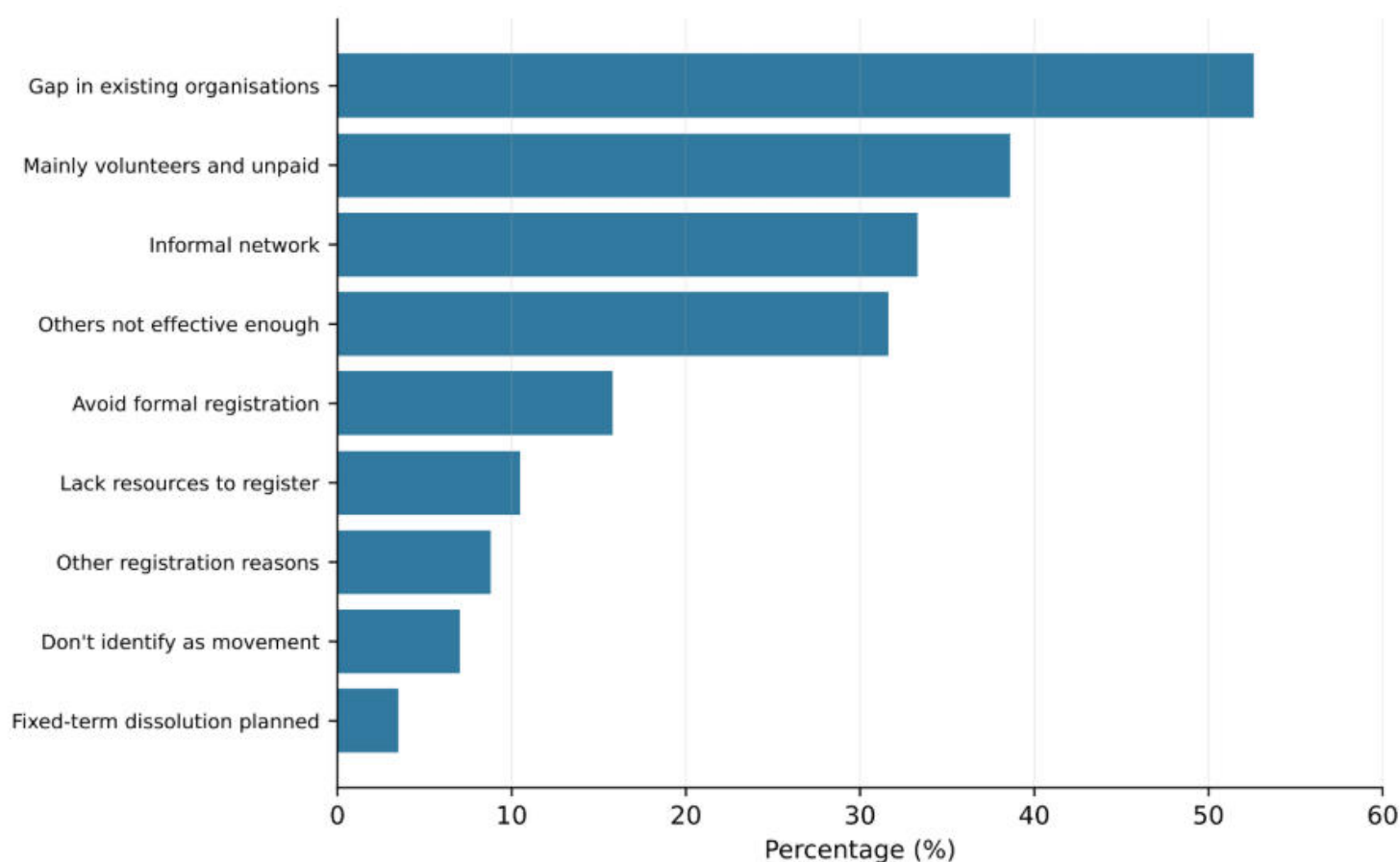
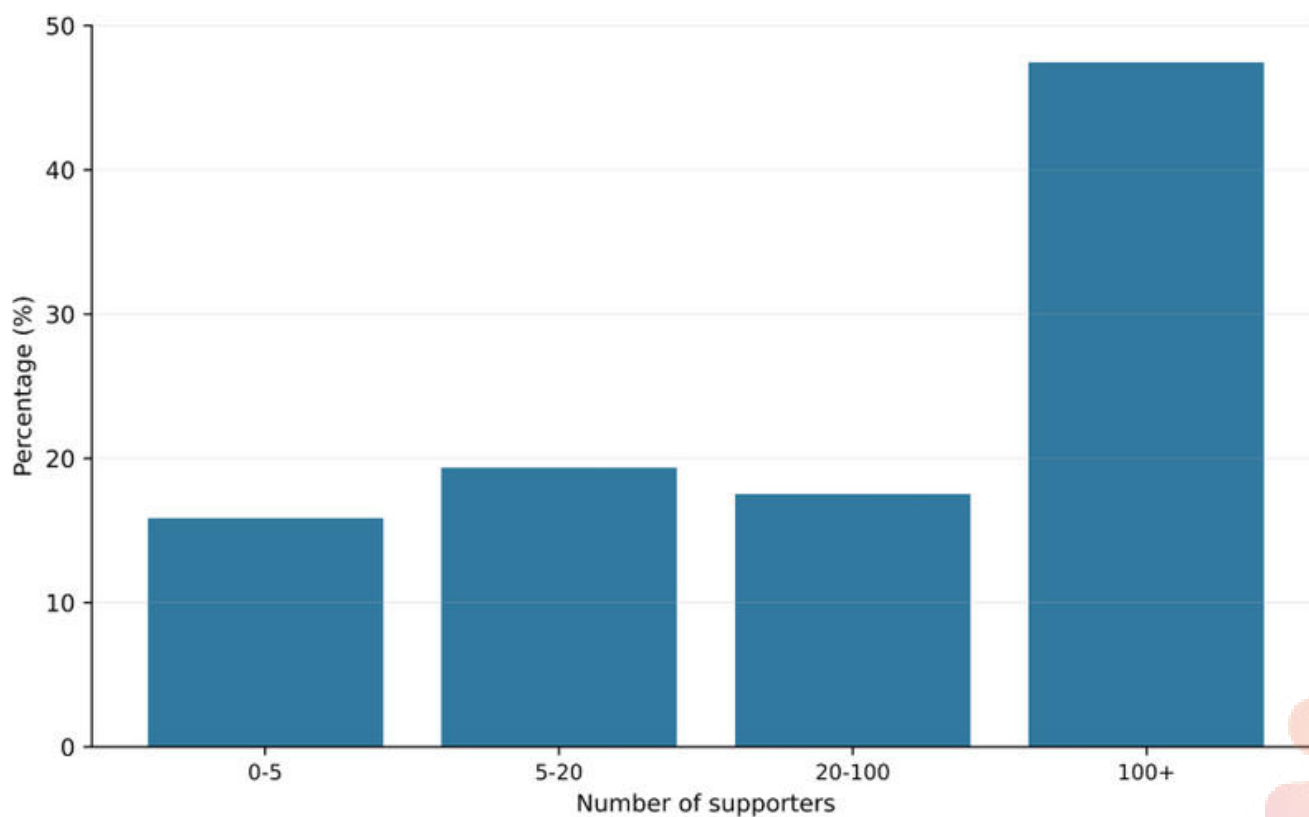


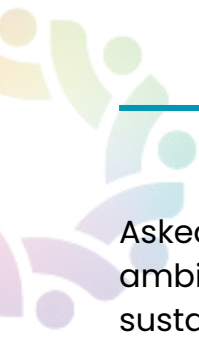
Fig 6. Why organisations define themselves as movements

# The question of impact: small scale, big ambition

A key takeaway from the survey is that many movements are very small organisations tackling very large-scale challenges. While the vast majority (94.7%) have 20 or fewer people involved in financial decision-making, nearly half (47.4%) have supporter networks of 100+ people. This is a different model of power from the sometimes top-heavy structures of traditional organisations. The concentration of decision-making reflects movement values, with a focus on deep relationship-building and community ownership which requires the sort of intensive, personal engagement hard to scale through traditional organisations.



*Fig 7. The size of movements' supporter bases.*

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, green, blue, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

Asked about their movement's goals, groups were not afraid to declare bold ambitions; Urunji Child-Care Trust seek to "end extreme poverty in Malawi through sustainable means"; Mt Kenya Network Forum aim to "advance climate justice, environmental sustainability, and community rights", and Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly seek to "have a just society that respect women and girls and a nation that prioritise the protection of mother earth, the people than profits".

This sort of ambition drives movements to tackle root causes rather than symptoms, but also risks setting unrealistic expectations, with the danger of disappointment and burnout.

The most sustainable movements balance big visions with incremental approaches, setting directional goals that guide long-term work while celebrating meaningful progress at community level.

Many movements indeed describe this sort of approach: The Green Environment and Climate Change Initiative "trained over 200 students in upcycling, environmental art, and building solar energy systems" and "established and nursed 8,000 indigenous seedlings... restoring 5 hectares of the Nkachu-Ituku Forest Reserve."

The Citizens Network for Community Development Zambia provided "climate education and 3 boreholes" for an area with 20,000 settlers whose "closest source of clean water was 10km from their village." Zero Hour mobilised support from "190 cross-party MPs" for their Climate and Nature Bill. The Resilience Project reported profound individual transformation for participants of their programmes.

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

### Case Study 3

## Yanayi Haki Afrqiya (Climate Justice Africa) | Continent-wide Reach, Focused Impact



""Advancing equitable climate resilience across Africa by empowering vulnerable communities through inclusive policy advocacy and rights-based adaptation strategies"

Despite having just 5-20 decision-makers and operating on £10,000-£25,000 annually, this organisation punches well above its weight, positioning African voices in global climate policy spaces. Their work bridges grassroots communities with global policy processes. Their distinct approach centres frontline African voices in international climate negotiations, ensuring those most affected by climate change help to shape the solutions.

They have trained 10 African youth in UNFCCC processes, creating a pipeline of informed advocates who can represent continental perspectives in global forums where such voices are typically absent.

With modest funding exclusively from trusts/foundations, they demonstrate how movements can achieve continental influence through strategic capacity building and policy engagement, showing funders the multiplier effect of investing in grassroots policy advocacy.

In terms of measurement of impact, movements vary hugely.

Some are rigorous evaluators, using pre/post intervention measures, and even working with professional university researchers to help with objective assessment of their work.

Some are 'counters' who measure their work using simple, tangible outputs (trees planted, people trained, items distributed etc).

Others adopt more narrative approaches, using qualitative testimonials, observations of behaviour change and community feedback.

Others lean on recognition, such as awards or favourable media coverage, to show them they are doing the right thing.

Of course, impact measurement also varies depending on the timeframes movements are working on: direct service deliverers expect more immediate and concrete outcomes than those working on cultural shifts and policy changes at the national level.

Overall, the survey gives a strong sense of a wide range of movements making a dramatic impact on diverse issues all around the world

Some say they need help with impact measurement and indeed they might benefit from articulating specific, measurable goals that they can track over time to monitor progress. Simple, regular short surveys from TMT could potentially help with that.

# What movements are proudest of

Sources of pride for movements suggest different success metrics than traditional institutions. Rather than focusing primarily on scale, growth, or institutional recognition, movements emphasise survival, authentic relationships, and staying true to their goals and their communities.

Rather than focusing primarily on scale, growth, or institutional recognition, movements emphasise survival, authentic relationships, and staying true to their goals and their communities.

Many movements celebrate simply continuing to exist in hostile environments. One noted: "Still being here 10 years after we started!" Another observed: "That we exist to be honest! So many barriers to even get here!" This pride in persistence reflects the precarious nature of movement work.

The Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly exemplified this resilience: "We have been existing from 2011 even when there is no funds we volunteer to provide solidarity amongst ourselves." This mutual aid approach allows movements to continue their work even without external funding, though it limits their potential scale and sustainability.

Movements consistently celebrate maintaining their principles despite pressure to compromise. Aylluq Q'Anchaynin in Peru noted:

“ ———  
| *"We are the proudest of staying true to what we determined was most important from the start: making the community an integral part of the entire process."*

Many movements emphasise "doing things differently" as their primary source of pride. "We are proud that communities always talk about how we do things differently from other organisations. It shows that we are on the right track." This suggests movements see their distinct approach – not just different outcomes – as their core value.

Despite small budgets, movements also celebrate tangible achievements as a source of pride. Green Environment and Climate Change Initiative noted: "Through the feedback from youth, students, teachers and communities we work with, we are proud of the work we do." Citizens Network for Community Development Zambia highlighted "Project provided climate education and 3 boreholes" for an area with 20,000 settlers.

Movements take particular pride in transformation for those they serve and the wider culture.

The Resilience Project: "100% of past participants felt resilient (2022), 89% felt empowered to lead (2022), and 100% described our programme as 'life-changing' (2023)."

These outcomes reflect movements' focus on deep, personal change rather than surface-level engagement. 2ndish celebrated community building: "Parents and children come together to choose secondhand instead of new. Members say they now buy less and value more... People who didn't see themselves as activists now feel part of something bigger."

This cultural transformation – changing how people see themselves and their relationship to consumption – exemplifies movement impact that goes beyond traditional service delivery.

# The challenges movements face

---

Funding dominates as the overwhelming challenge, with almost all movements mentioning funding challenges at some point in the survey. 'Funding' appeared in over 80% of responses as either the primary or secondary challenge movements face. Movements also face capacity constraints, political hostility, and the tension between growth and staying true to their values. We will discuss those shortly, but first, we will zoom in on some key questions about funding, which include dimensions beyond simply needing more money.

## the funding gap

The survey shows a fundamental mismatch between how movements work and how funding systems operate.

While movements need long-term, flexible, operational support for relationship-building and community involvement, funders typically offer short-term, project-specific, restricted grants with heavy reporting requirements.

Most movements struggle to secure even modest funding. When asked about their greatest challenges, funding dominated responses, with phrases like "securing sustainable funding," "lack of enough resources," and "intermittent funding." One movement noted: "We have applied for grants, reached finalist stage but didn't get [it]. And no reason was provided."

The capacity required to manage multiple small grants creates additional burdens. One respondent described "the capacity trap" – movements spend enormous energy managing multiple small grants instead of doing their work, while lacking resources for the infrastructure that would make them more fundable.

The funding data shows differences in securing funding across sources.

Trust and foundation funding performs better at higher levels (35.1% of movements raised £25,000+) compared to individual donations, where most movements (66.7%) raised less than £10,000.

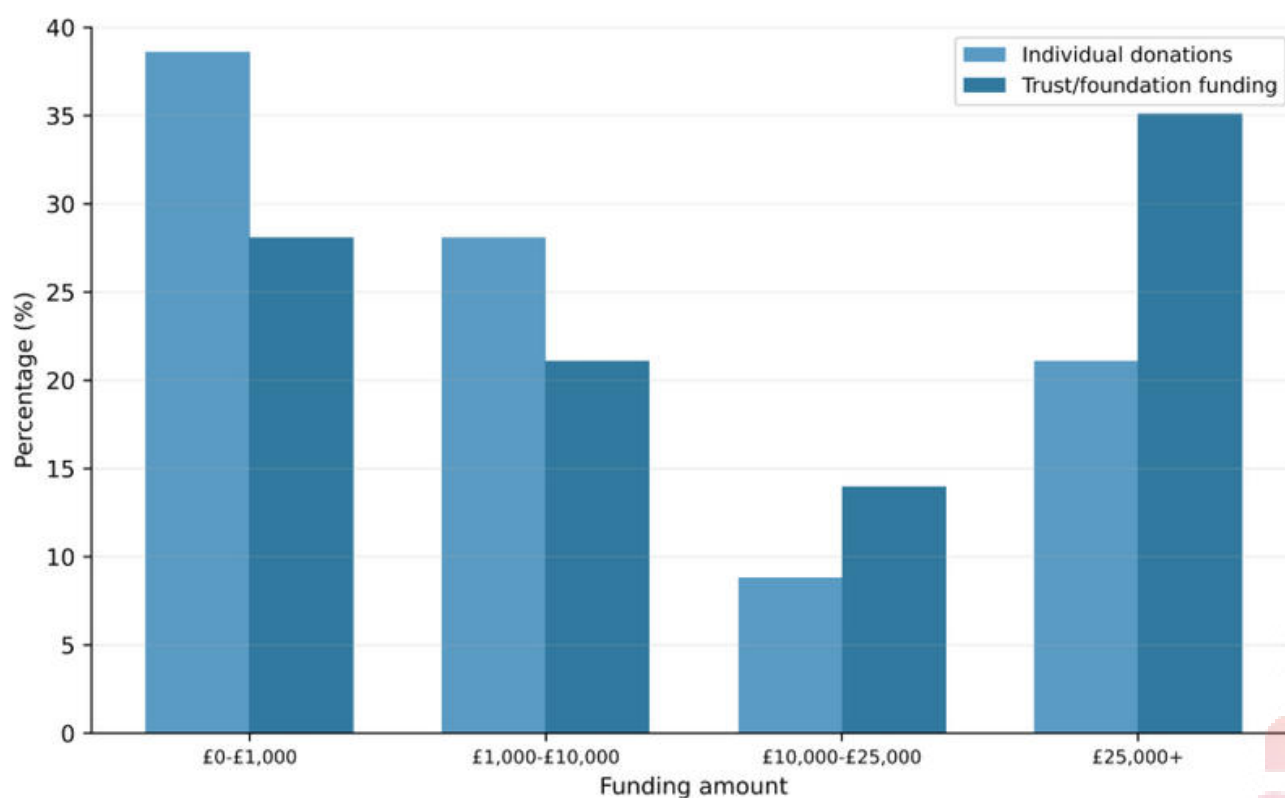


Fig 8. Where movement funding comes from (data from last 12 months)

# The access economy: how funding really works

When asked what helped them access funding, movements pointed to a relationship-based rather than meritocratic system.

Some common themes were:

- Personal connections and networking – "Knowing people personally, introductions from trusted sources"
- Direct engagement – "One-on-one meetings with funders, face-to-face relationship building"
- Peer support – "Recommendations from other movements, coalition building"

Funding success seems to depend heavily on pre-existing social capital – English language skills, international networks, personal connections with funders, and capacity for relationship building.

Many movements understand this. One respondent observed: "Getting your foot in the door is often the hardest part – once you have that initial relationship, other opportunities tend to follow."

Exclusion is particularly acute for Global South movements. Beyond language and platform barriers, one movement noted: "As it is known, it is hard for African movements to raise funds online given that most of such fundraising platforms do not permit so, and so have to have global north counterparts to help with the fundraising."

This creates a catch-22 where the most marginalised movements – those led by refugees, indigenous communities, informal workers – are often least equipped to access the relationship-based funding ecosystem that privileges existing connections and social capital.

## Barriers beyond money

Questions about fundraising barriers brought to light challenges that go beyond simply needing more funding. Often movements don't have the capacity, experience or knowledge to apply for grants, their work does not fit overly restrictive grant criteria and when they do apply, they are often turned down and don't know why.

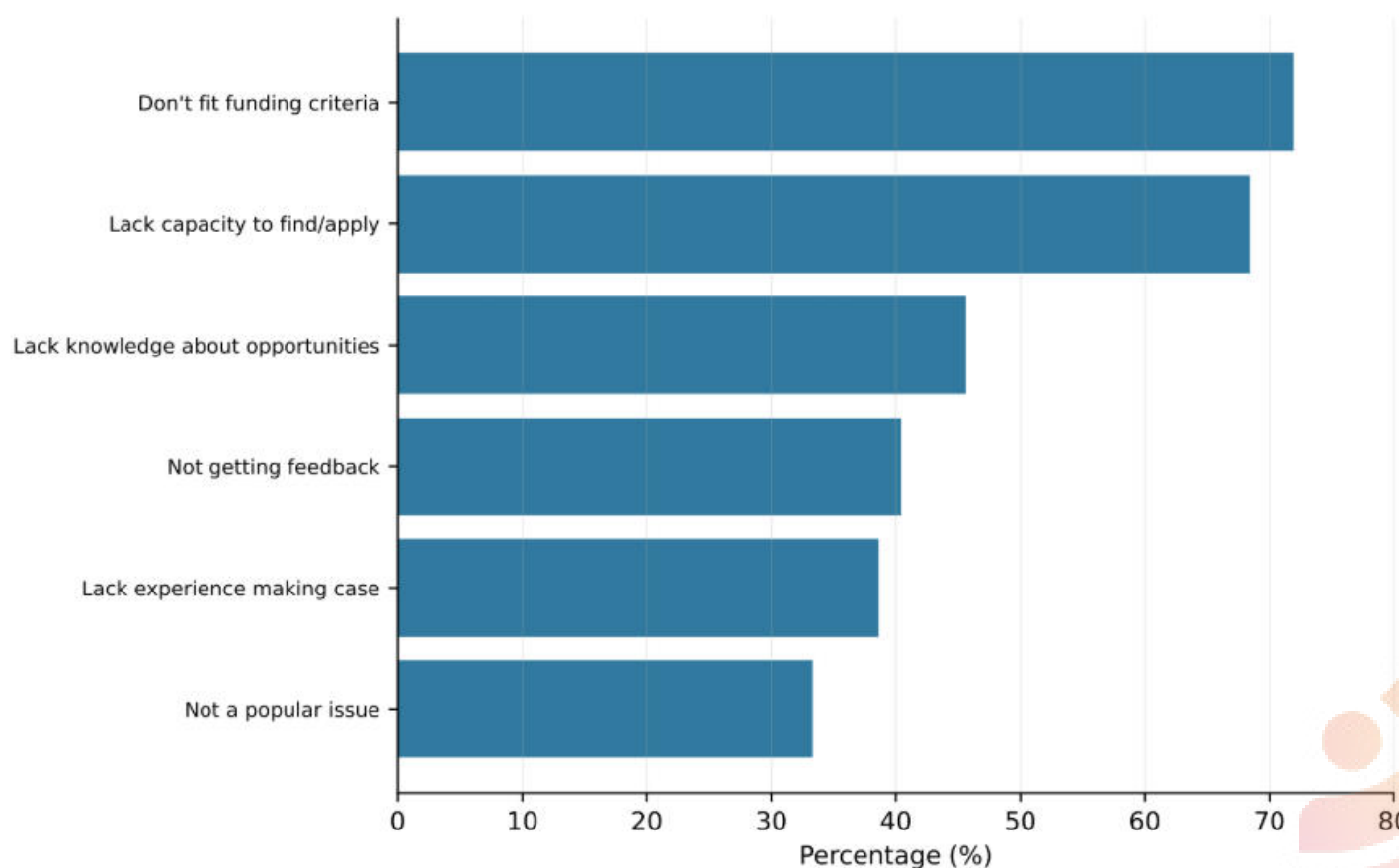


Fig 9. Barriers to fundraising



---

These barriers compound each other.


While movements spend enormous energy applying for, or managing multiple small grants, they are not building infrastructure in a way that would make them more fundable.

Many movements understand they need professional-level capacity but lack resources to access it individually. One noted:

“ —  
| *"Right now, we have a major capacity issue to manage donor relations and cultivate new relationships, as well as apply to more grants, and larger grants... I am hiring a development director using my personal savings."*

The mismatch between movement needs and funder offerings is profound.

Movements repeatedly mentioned wanting "multi-year (like 5–10 years) funds that ensures sustainability" but finding only short-term, project-specific grants that don't cover core operational costs or fair compensation for community leaders.



## Case Study 4

# The Resilience Project | Community-Led Innovation


Fortifying a generation of climate leaders through peer-support addressing climate anxiety, mental health, and resilience"

Founded in 2020 by youth activist Katie Hodgetts, this Community Interest Company fills a crucial gap left by larger organisations: providing peer-led mental health support for young climate activists, backed by research from Imperial College London and Stanford University.



Truly community-designed and led by the people they serve, their "depth over distance, people over numbers" approach prioritises long-term resilience over short-term metrics, creating sustainable climate leadership.

Participants report transformative experiences: "Never before have I been in a space that felt so validating and safe" and "I now feel ready to help others and enable them to grow and build community." By 2026, they aim to reach 12,000 youth globally through trained peer facilitators.

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, green, blue, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

---


The sustainability challenge is acute. Many describe managing "intermittent funding" and struggling with "short-term grants" that don't cover operational costs.

One movement notes, "The greatest challenge we face is securing sustainable funding to expand and sustain our efforts... limited financial resources restrict our ability to scale our initiatives, organise large campaigns and strengthen our network."

Scale mismatches create additional problems. Aylluq Q'Anchaynin in Peru explained: "Many grants either do not provide enough support or offer amounts far larger than what we need."

Managing multiple grants was another very big challenge, as we must constantly keep track of payment schedules and deadlines for each one." Another says, "Right now, we have a major capacity issue to manage donor relations and cultivate new relationships, as well as apply to more grants, and larger grants. We mostly receive \$10,000 grants." Small grants require disproportionate administrative effort while providing insufficient resources for growth.

Geographic and systemic barriers compound funding difficulties. One movement observes that "There's a gap between donor interest in clean transport and support for the informal sector that drives it." Another noted the exclusion of Global South movements from online fundraising platforms, requiring "global north counterparts to help with the fundraising."

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page, consisting of several stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, purple) arranged in a circular pattern.

Though funding was the key challenge movements said they face, three other themes emerged:

### burnout

The volunteer labour model that allows movements to dedicate "all available resources for the good of the movement" also creates sustainability challenges. Multiple movements mentioned "burnout from working without being paid" and "high volunteer turnover" as ongoing issues.

One movement describes the tension, "We consider it is important we can have resources to dedicate our time and energy and live in dignity while being compensated for this work." This reflects the challenge of maintaining movement values while ensuring fair compensation for community leaders.

### political and systemic barriers

Many movements face hostile political environments that threaten their work. "Colombia is a dangerous place to do what many of us do" as feminists and environmental defenders, according to one. Another described "shrinking civic space and lack of funds" as interconnected problems.

In established democracies, movements face subtler but significant barriers. A UK movement describes the challenge of "this Labour Government's political moves to woo Reform voters and therefore backtracking on many vital climate and nature commitments." In other countries, political instability is the main problem – a Peruvian movement says that "The main challenge we face in Peru is political, economic, and social instability. There is a lot of insecurity right now."

Government resistance and institutional barriers also limit movement effectiveness. One movement described "interference from politicians and government in some activities especially activism," while another noted "breaking through resistance from established institutions" as their primary challenge.

## growth tensions and mission preservation

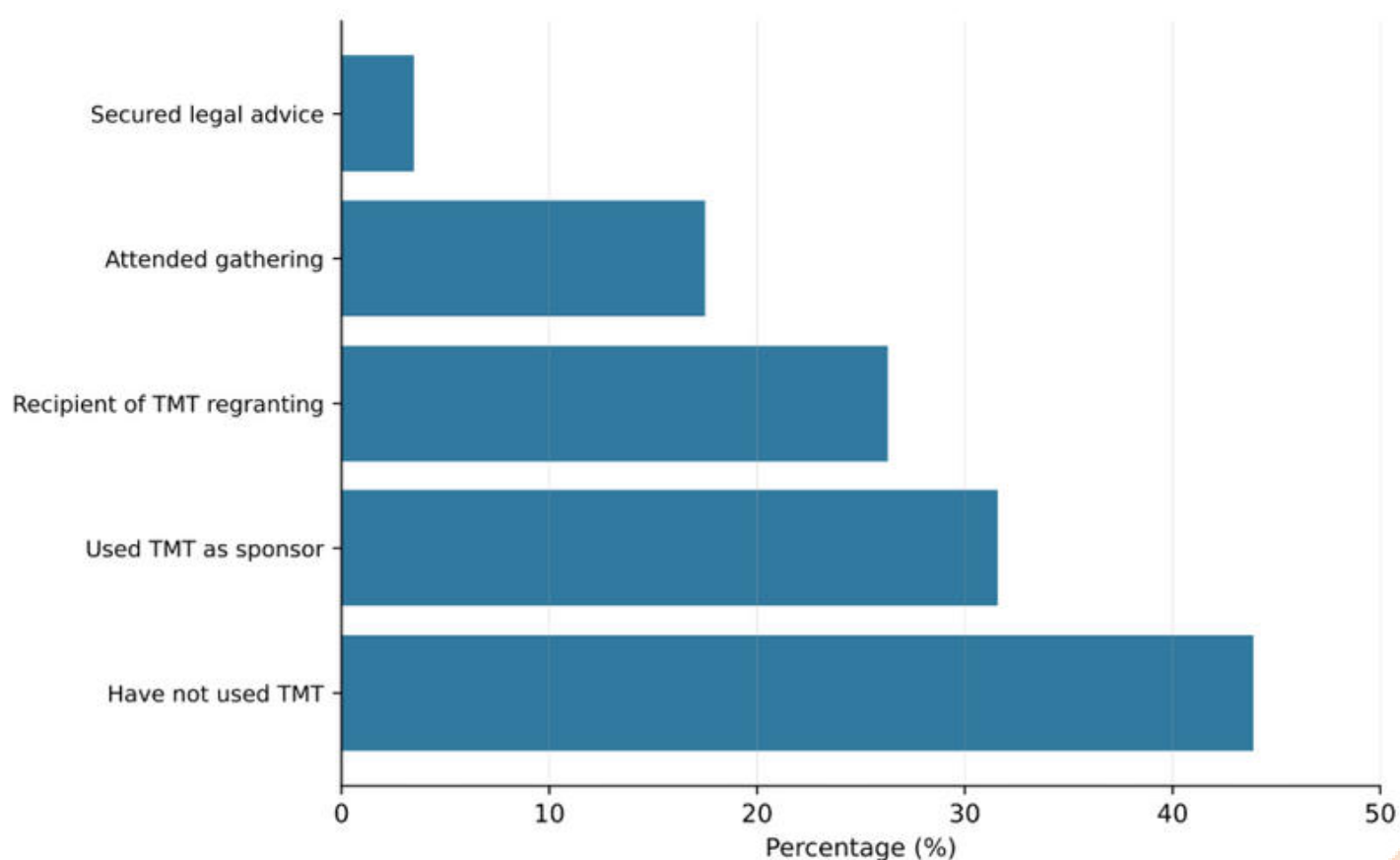
Movements face unique challenges in scaling their work while maintaining community ownership and authentic relationships.

One movement describes wanting to "tackle multiple landowners at the same time" but lacking capacity to do so. Another notes: "Bringing in enough funding to scale the idea properly" while maintaining their values-driven approach.

The London property market exemplified external constraints on movement growth: a movement to set up a community-run queer pub describes one of their biggest difficulties being "overcoming the London property market to actually find a permanent space."

# The role of The Movements Trust

Survey respondents included both movements who are already supported in some way by The Movements Trust and movements that are potential future partners. Most of those who have used TMT have used them either as a sponsor for other funding (32%) or have been a recipient of TMT regranting service (26%).



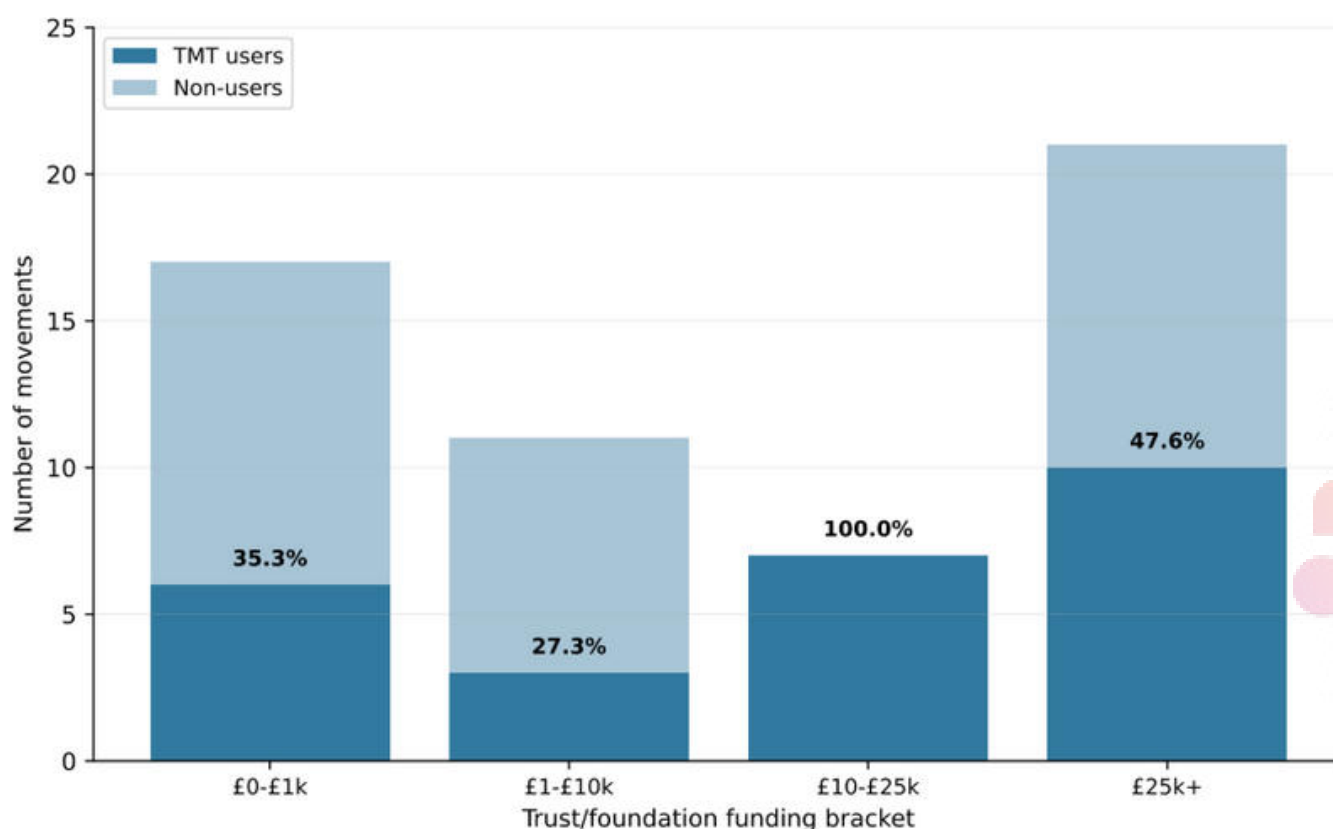
*Fig 10. TMT services used*

We compared answers between those groups that have used TMT with those who have not. Below, we discuss some of the main differences between those groups.

### greater fundraising success

The survey asked movements how much they had raised from trusts and foundations in the past 12 months, with four brackets: £0-£1k, £1-£10k, £10-£25k, and £25k+. TMT-supported movements raise more from trusts and foundations: their average funding falls in the £1-10k to £10-25k range, whereas non-TMT users fall in the £0-1k to £1-10k range. The pattern is particularly striking in the £10-25k bracket; every movement in that funding range has used TMT services. This could indicate that:

- TMT's fiscal sponsorship and support services help movements access larger grants
- TMT attracts movements that are already on an upward funding trajectory
- Some combination of both



*Fig 11. Comparison of success in fundraising (in previous 12 months) from trusts and foundations for movements supported by TMT and those not currently supported*

It is interesting that the highest funded movements (£25k+) are split almost evenly between those supported by TMT and those not. This might suggest TMT is particularly valuable for movements in a mid-tier level, while the highest-funded movements may have developed independent infrastructure.

### wide reach

TMT reaches diverse movements with diverse organisational structures. Support is given to movements set up as limited companies, NGOs, charities as well as unregistered or informal movements.

### fewer barriers

TMT users report fewer funding barriers. In this question, survey respondents could choose multiple barriers they experienced, including lack of capacity to find and apply for funding, lack of knowledge about opportunities, lack of experience in making their case, and not fitting criteria for funding. TMT-supported movements cited an average of 3 such barriers, compared to non-TMT supported movements who cited an average of 4.

This suggests that TMT's fiscal sponsorship, capacity building, and network access help movements overcome common obstacles. An alternative explanation is that TMT attracts movements that are better positioned to leverage support services effectively.

Overall, TMT seems to have success in reaching the unregistered movements (62.5%) that often can't access charity-restricted funding – 62.5% of such movements are supported by TMT. It helps movements leverage more support from trusts and foundations and reduces movements' perceived barriers to funding. In short, the survey evidences that what The Movements Trust sets out to do for movements is working. Larger numbers would of course give more statistical confidence in these findings.

### future services wishlist

Movements were asked about TMT services they would like to use, but have not as yet. The chart (fig 12) shows the percentages who said they would like to access specific named services.

Movements also suggested a range of specific additional services that don't currently exist but which they would like. These include basic infrastructure support services such as accounting, grant writing, fundraising training; strategic development needs such as a funding strategy, impact measurement, and advice on organisational development, and specialised expertise services such as legal support, digital advocacy, and assistance with accessing international policy makers.

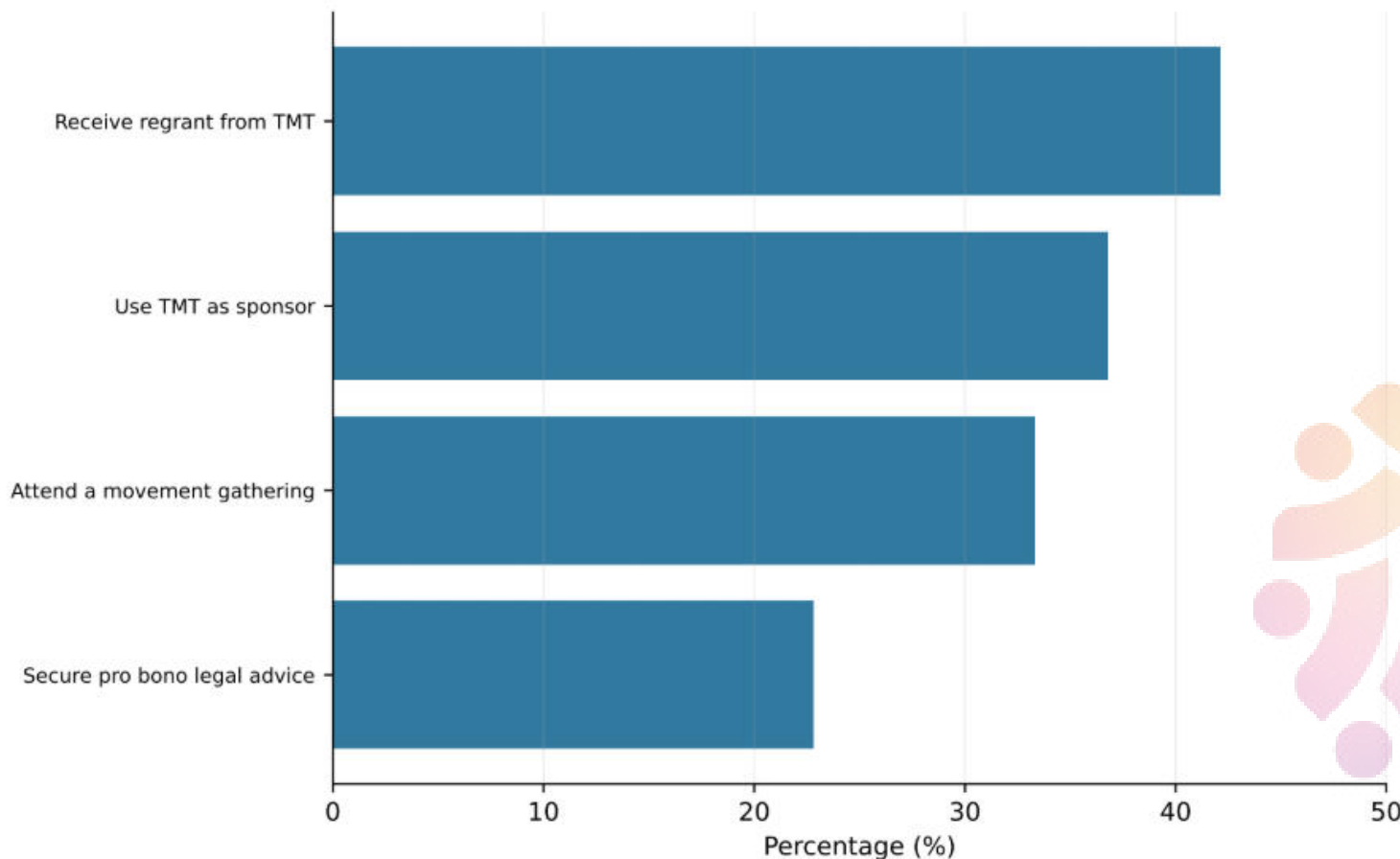


Fig 12. TMT services movements would like to access in future

# The path forward: practical recommendations for funders

---

The survey findings point toward some specific principles that could unlock movement potential while addressing current system failures. These recommendations emerge from movement experiences of what works and what doesn't in funding relationships.

Movements repeatedly emphasise that personal connections and face-to-face relationship building are more effective than traditional grant application processes.

Funders could:

- Create opportunities for movements and donors to meet and build relationships
- Increase direct engagement and one-on-one meetings over paper applications
- Use their networks to provide introductions and bridge access gaps
- Recognise that trust-building takes time but produces better outcomes

The mismatch between movement needs and typical funder offerings creates ongoing sustainability challenges.

Movements need:

- Multi-year core funding that supports relationship-building and community engagement
- Operational support for infrastructure that makes movements more effective
- Flexible funding that can adapt to changing community needs and opportunities
- Less restrictive criteria that don't force movements into predetermined project frameworks

Rather than expecting individual movements to build all necessary capacity independently, funders can support shared approaches.

Funders could encourage and support:

- Professional services that movements can access collectively (legal, accounting, digital infrastructure)
- Peer learning networks where movements share strategies and resources
- Mentoring relationships between established and emerging movements
- Skills training focused on building movement autonomy rather than dependency

The most effective movements are genuinely community-led, but this requires funders to trust community decision-making processes. This means practices such as:

- Funding movements led by those most affected by the issues they address
- Accepting that community-led work may look different from professionally managed programmes
- Measuring success using community-defined metrics alongside traditional impact measures
- Supporting movement capacity to define their own theories of change and success indicators

The current system systematically excludes movements that most need support.

Funders should actively address barriers:

- Language barriers that exclude non-English speaking movements
- Geographic barriers that limit Global South access to funding platforms
- Network barriers that favour movements with existing elite connections
- Capacity barriers that penalise movements for lacking professional infrastructure

The case studies demonstrate exceptional returns on movement investment. Patriotic Millionaires UK achieved policy change with minimal formal structure. Autosafety Uganda reached thousands and influenced national regulations. Climate Justice Africa positioned continental voices in global policy with a budget under £25,000. The Resilience Project created transformative experiences for thousands of young people.

These outcomes suggest that strategic movement funding can achieve significant social and policy returns that far exceed the financial investment. However, realising this potential requires funding approaches aligned with how movements actually work rather than how traditional organisations operate.

We know that funders are sometimes cautious about funding informal groups even though they recognise their key role.

In a 2024 survey of funders asking about their attitudes to funding campaigning and activism, four main barriers were identified to explain this mismatch:



- Risk – how will funding affect my organisation?
- Impact – does campaigning and activism make a difference?
- Practicalities – how can I fund individual campaigners or informal groups?
- Knowledge – how do I find the right campaigners to fund?

The Movements Trust is well positioned to address these barriers. The organisation brings a unique understanding of who movements are and how they campaign; their fiscal hosting offers a practical way for funders to support movements with less direct risk; and they help tell the stories that demonstrate how effective movements can be.

With better support from more funders, sustained over time, movements are positioned to achieve exceptional impact for the communities they serve.

# Summing up

---

Movements are emerging because formal institutions are failing to address critical challenges in ways that communities find effective. They offer unique advantages – authentic voices, political freedom, community ownership, systemic focus – that complement rather than compete with traditional organisational approaches.

The movements in this survey work on urgent issues from climate justice to poverty reduction to democratic participation. They create solutions from within communities rather than imposing them from outside. Their work is both necessary and promising.

The question for funders is whether they will adapt their approaches to support movement potential or continue maintaining systems that create artificial barriers. As SCCAN put it, their proudest achievement is "spreading hope." For movements doing this essential work, appropriate funding support could make that hope a reality.

*This report is based on survey responses from 57 movements supported by The Movements Trust. The analysis was carried out by [Social Change Lab](#), a non-profit research organisation that conducts empirical research on social movements, providing insights to help them be more effective.*

*The quantitative data was collected through structured questions about organisational structure, funding, and impact. The qualitative insights emerge from thematic analysis of open-ended responses about movement identity, tactics, challenges, and aspirations.*

A decorative graphic in the top left corner shows a cluster of stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, green, blue, purple) arranged in a circular, overlapping pattern.

# Small movements, big change


Dedicated to changemaking  
and changemakers everywhere.

To make a charitable donation  
to any of the movements listed  
please get in touch

[together@themovementstrust.org](mailto:together@themovementstrust.org)

*This report is based on survey responses from 57 movements supported by The Movements Trust. The analysis was carried out by [Social Change Lab](#), a non-profit research organisation that conducts empirical research on social movements, providing insights to help them be more effective.*

*The quantitative data was collected through structured questions about organisational structure, funding, and impact. The qualitative insights emerge from thematic analysis of open-ended responses about movement identity, tactics, challenges, and aspirations.*

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner shows a cluster of stylized human figures in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, purple) arranged in a circular, overlapping pattern.