



Partner Survey: 2023



Figure 1 VSO Areas of Programming with Partners

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Executive Summary

In 2022, VSO run the first of what has become an annual partnership survey. The survey aims to obtain feedback from partners on their experience of working with VSO and areas where the partnership approach can be improved. The 2023 survey was sent to 164 partner organisations, 62 (38%) responded. Most partners (55%) who responded are based in Africa, 36% in Asia, 5% in the Middle East and 4% in other locations including Europe. Most (44%) partner organisations are community based organisations, 20% are international non-profit organisations, 18% government bodies. Other partners include academic institutions and private companies. The collaboration with VSO was in more than one practice area, with 40% of partners indicating they worked with VSO in Education and Livelihoods.

Most partners indicated that their partnership experience has been positive, 57% rated 5 out of 5, 32% rated at 4 out of 5 (1 being lowest and 5 highest). No partners rated their experience at 1/5. Reasons for the increased positive sentiments include respectful and collaborative approach from VSO; volunteers who provide support; technical support from VSO; and perceived sustainability of interventions. However, it was noted that more partners rated their experience at 2 or 3 out of 5 (total of 13%) in 2023, compared to 8% in 2022, indicative of a need to maintain mutually beneficial relationships. Lack of responsiveness, red tape around funds disbursement and poor communication contributed to the low scores and are areas that need improvement. Overall,

- 95% of partners would recommend VSO as a partner.
- 87% indicated the partnership with VSO helped them deliver on their mandate
- 90% indicated VSO valued their work
- 59% indicated the partnership had made their organisation stronger
- 63% indicated the partnership had made VSO stronger

Most partners indicated close alignment to VSO Core values of Collaboration, Inclusion, Integrity and Knowledge as most rated their level of alignment at 4 and 5. Similar levels of alignment were noted with the VSO volunteering for development pathways of Accountability, Engagement, Inclusion, Policy and Advocacy, Resilience, Safeguarding and Volunteering. However, notable reductions in extent of alignment were noted in Accountability, Engagement and Resilience, most partners rated 4 out of 5 instead of 5 out of 5 when compared to 2022 results. This points to areas where integration of core approaches can be strengthened.

Most collaboration was around provision of technical/capacity building (56%) and financial (55%) support, as well as with co-delivery (47%) and co-design (42%) of projects. Some aspects which make partnership with VSO different include deployment of technically skilled and eager volunteers to support on the ground implementation; collaborative approach to project design and implementation; strong networks; frequent support visits to project sites and willingness to address challenges. The lobbying and advocacy work done by VSO as well as involvement of community and volunteers were also recognised as unique factors.

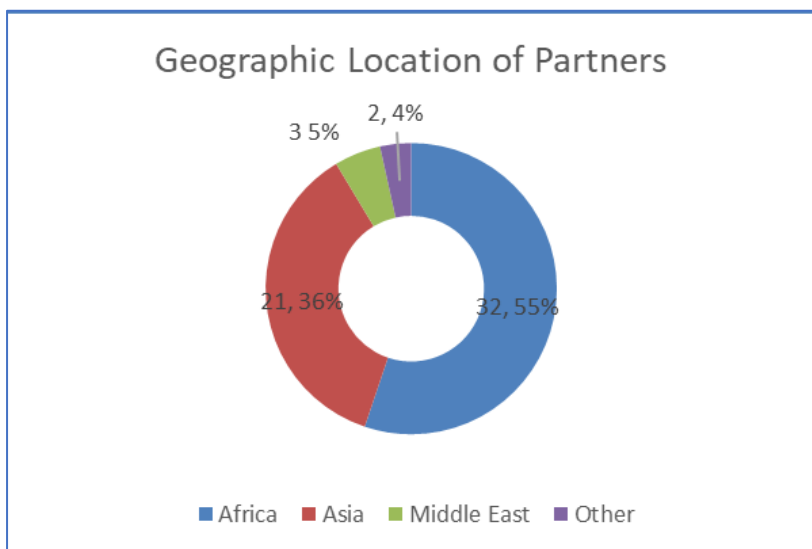
Some areas of improvement suggested by partners were to strengthen partners' (55%) and staff capacity (48%), joint strategic/decision making (48%) as well as timely disbursement of funds. Additional suggestions were made for greater inclusion and improved communication.

Overall, partnership with VSO has been satisfactory and is valued, but there are indications that more needs to be done to make the relationships mutually beneficial.

Introduction

In 2022, VSO conducted the first of what would become an annual partnership survey. The survey is aimed gauging how partners find the experience of collaborating with VSO. Survey result help show areas where VSO can improve as a partner organisation. This report provides a summary of the 2023 partner survey results.

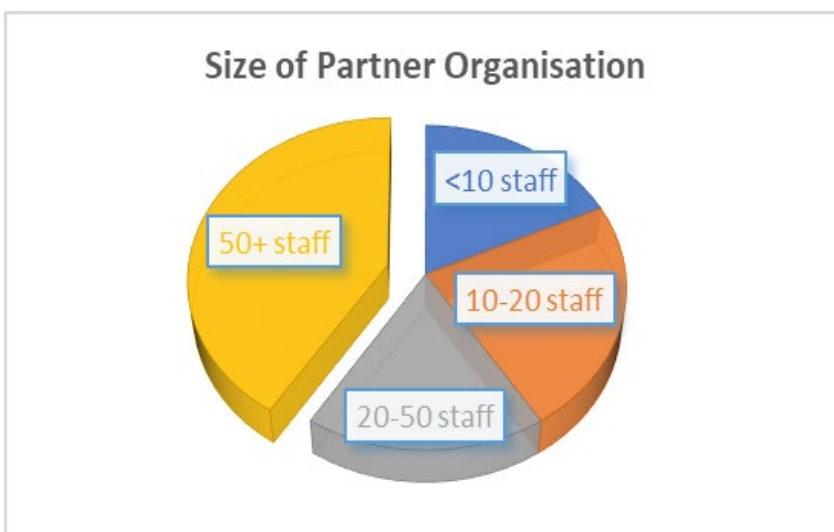
Scope of Partnerships



The survey was sent to 164 partner organisations in various countries. Responses were received from 62 partners. Most partners who responded are located in the Global South, the majority (55%) being in Africa, followed by Asia (36%). Of the two partners located in 'Other' parts of the world, one is in Europe the other did not specify their location.

Figure 2: Geographic Location of Partners

Size of partner organisations varies from small community based organisation to large entities with over 50 staff (39%), 22% of partner indicated they have 10-20 staff members, 17% had 20-50 staff, with same percentage having fewer than 10 staff members.



Majority of partners, 45% are local NGOs/CSO working at community level reflecting where most VSO operations take place, 20% were International NGOs, 18% were government bodies. Five percent (5%) of responses were from academic institutions, 6% from Other entities that include funding organisations and private companies.

Figure 3: Size of Partner Organisations

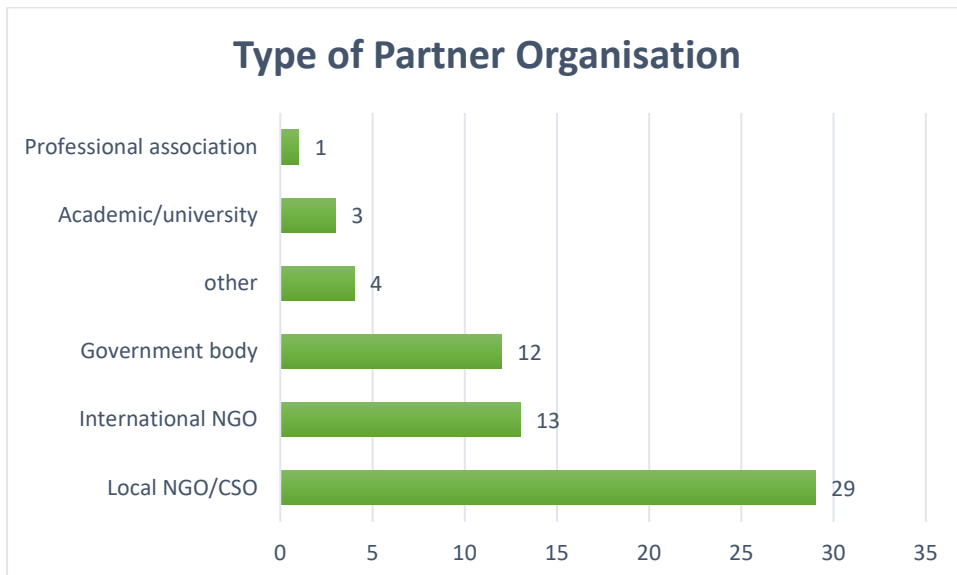


Figure 4: Type of Partner Organisation

Majority (44%) of partnerships have been in place for 2 – 4 years, 31% for more than four years and 25% for less than two years. This shows a drop in long term partnerships compared to the 2022 results which had 40% of partnerships in place for 5 years or more. Most partnerships (81%) are on projects currently being implemented, 11% are with organisation that VSO worked with on projects which have since ended, 8% are collaborative efforts on funding proposals. Thematic and Practice areas covered by the partnerships are reflected below.

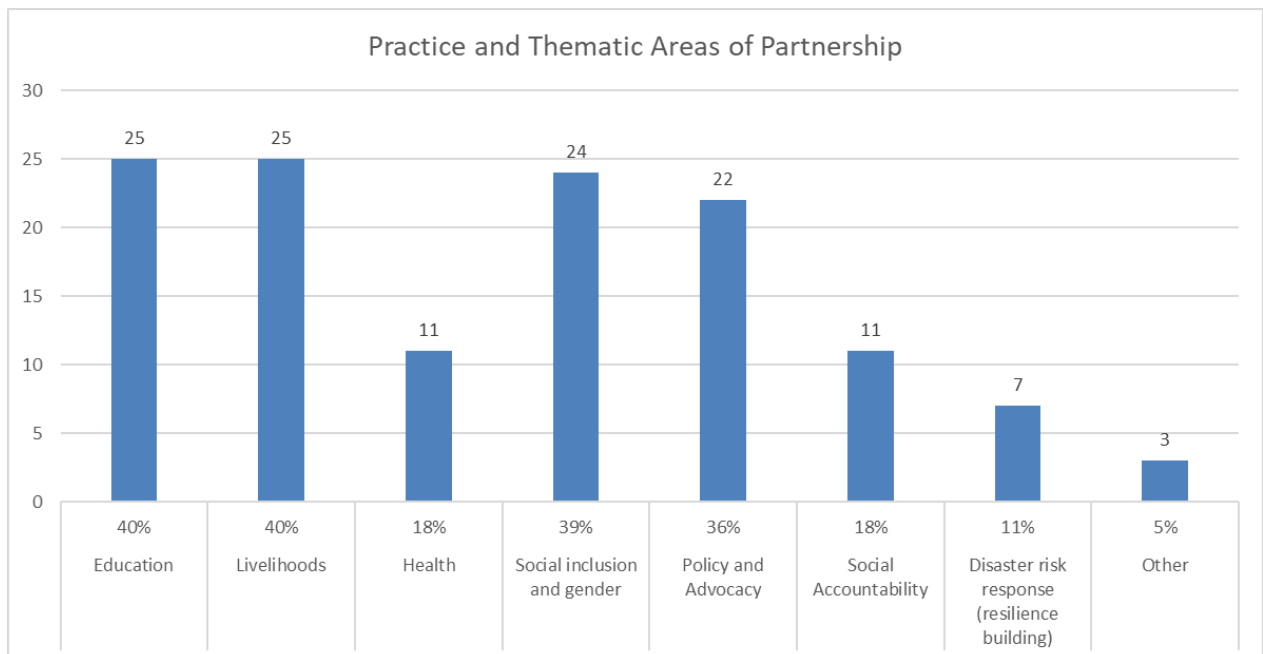


Figure 5: Areas in Which Partners Work with VSO

This question asked respondents to select all the areas that apply to their organisations, about 50% of partners indicated that with work with VSO in at least one area, the remaining 50% in two or more practice or thematic areas. For the three partners who also indicated Other, their additional areas of collaboration are Research, Child Protection and Social Protection. Collaboration with VSO was mostly in Education (40%) and Livelihoods (40%), 18% were active in Health. Other key areas of focus were Social inclusion and Gender (39%) and Policy and Advocacy (36%).

Partner Experience of Working with VSO

Partners were asked to rate their experience of working with VSO on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being mostly negative and 5 being mostly positive. Majority 35 (56%) rated their experience as a 5, indicating that their experience has been mostly positive. Additionally, 20 (32%) rated their experience as a 4, indicating that it has been generally positive. No partners rated the experience at the lowest level of 1. The overall level of satisfaction shows an improvement from 2022 as more partners (57%) scored their level of satisfaction with the partnership as 5 out of 5 in 2023 compared to 54% in 2022. However, 2023 results show slightly more partners scoring 3 and 2 out of 5 in 2023 (total of 13%) compared to 2022 (total of 8%) indicating a need for stronger efforts to maintain mutually beneficial partnerships.

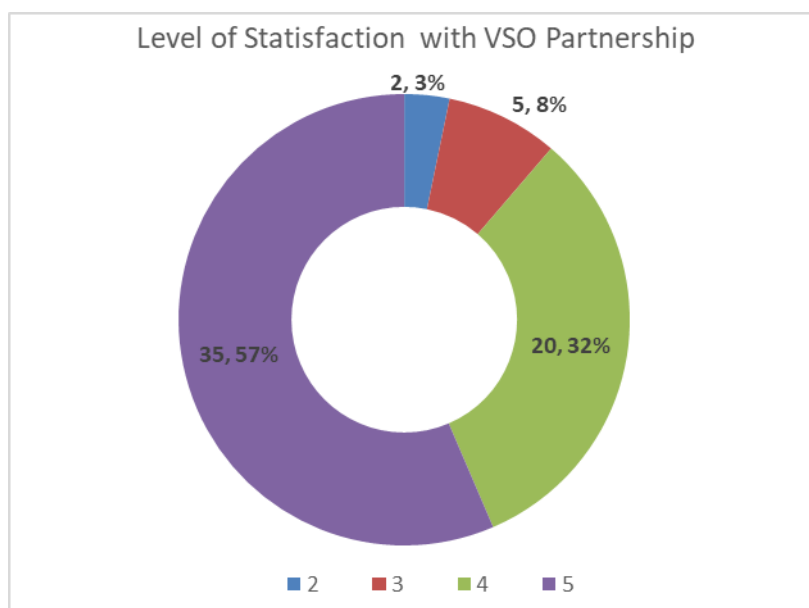


Figure 6: Level of Satisfaction with VSO Partnership

Reasons stated for the positive scores of 4 and 5 include

- Good collaborative relationships with VSO honouring their commitments to partners
- VSO is considered to be respectful, collaborative and easy to work with, and is receptive to other ideas on how to work
- Volunteers who are willing to provide support and who are valued by VSO
- Adaptive programming by VSO
- Technical support from VSO
- Implemented projects are sustainable

Partners who rated their experience at 3 and 2 indicated it was due to

- Lack of responsiveness from VSO to enable timely project delivery
- Inadequate funding and red tape around funds disbursement
- Inadequate communication and engagement

The low satisfaction scores given indication of areas where improvements need to be made. Overall, **94% of partners would recommend VSO as a partner**. Three partners did not provide a response to this question, one partner indicated they would not recommend VSO due to slow disbursements (red tape) and no funds for approved project activities.

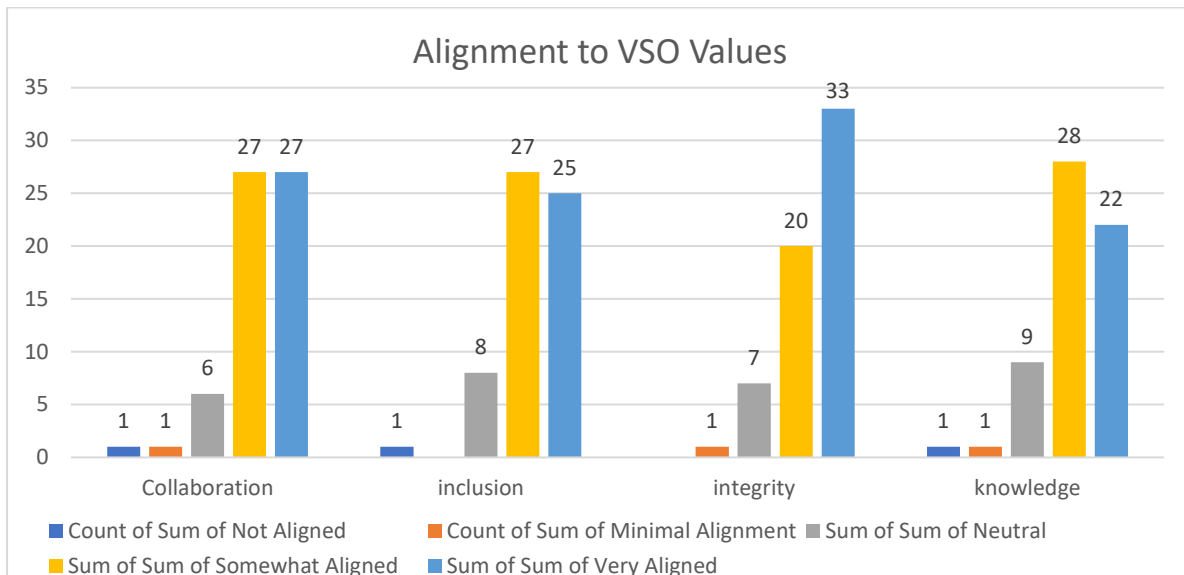


Figure 7: Alignment to VSO Values

Based on the responses provided, it seems that collaboration, knowledge, inclusion, and integrity are important factors in partnerships with VSO. Majority of respondents rated collaboration, knowledge, and inclusion as areas of close alignment (scores of 4 or 5 out of 5), indicating their high importance in partnership. In terms of integrity, most respondents rated it with a score of 4 or 5, with a majority rating it with a score of 5 out of 5, indicating the high importance of integrity in partnerships. Overall, it can be inferred that collaboration, knowledge, inclusion, and integrity are critical factors in establishing and maintaining successful partnerships with VSO. Reasons provided for low scores of 1 – 3 include need for better communication, collaboration and timely funds disbursements.

Alignment with VSO Principles

VSO principles are reflected in what are termed Volunteering for Development (VfD) pathways, these underpin how VSO works. Partners were asked to rate alignment these pathways

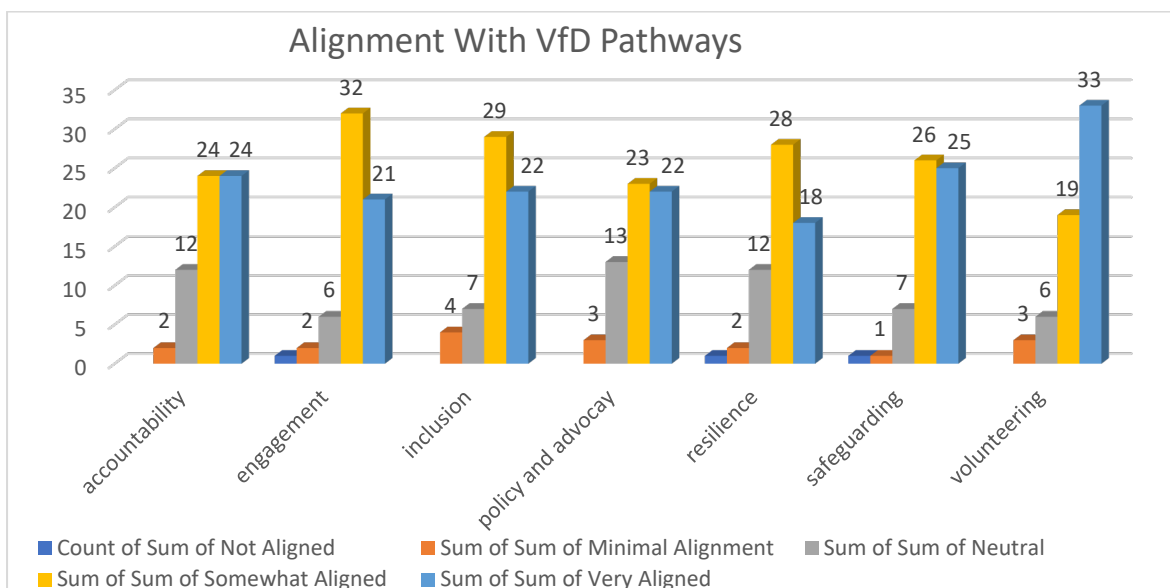


Figure 8: Alignment with VSO's VfD Pathways

When asked to about the extent to which interaction with VSO had aligned to the VfD pathways, most indicated close alignment. This was reflected in scores of 4 and 5 across all pathways. Volunteering, with 53% of partners rating it at 5, is the pathway to which most partners were aligned. There were minor indications of misalignment across all pathways, with a few partners. Reasons provided for this include need for more capacity building and need to increase efforts to ensure inclusion. When compared to the 2022 feedback, it appears Accountability, Engagement and Resilience have seen the most shift with partner alignment clustered more around the score of 4 in 2023 compared to more of them scoring 5 in 2022. These shifts indicate the need to highlight integration of volunteering for development pathways in partner engagements.

Area of Partnership with VSO

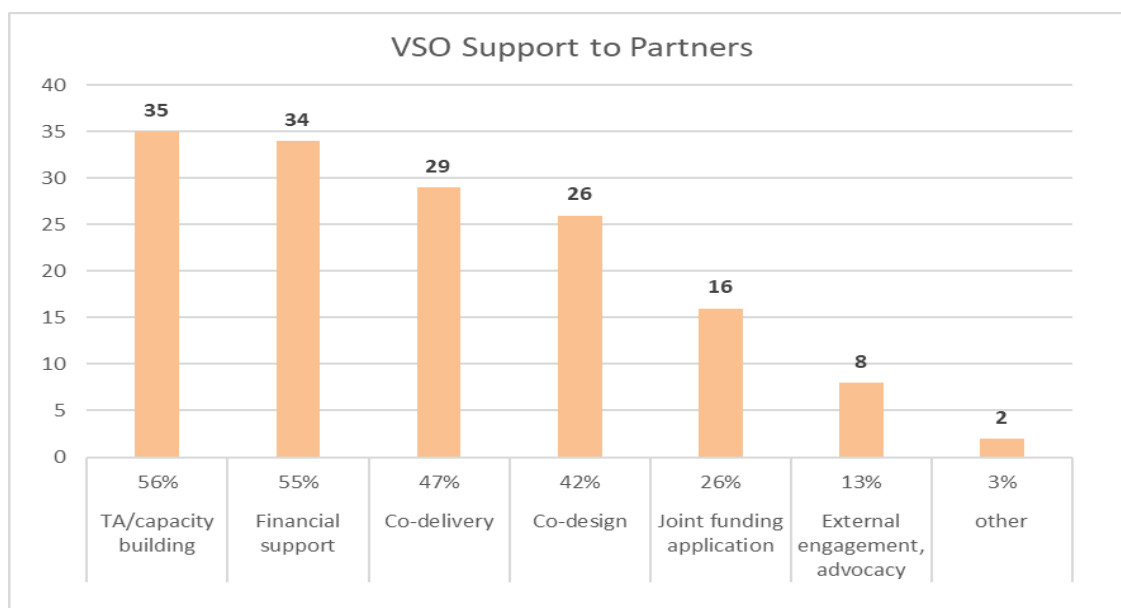


Figure 9: Areas of VSO Support to Partners

The most frequently reported type of support to partners were technical assistance/capacity building support (57%) and financial support (55%). Other types of support were co-delivery of projects (47%), co-designing of projects (42%), and joint funding applications (26%). Engagement and advocacy support was mentioned by a smaller percentage of partners (13%). In a way this reflects the drop in level of alignment in these areas reflected in survey results (Figure 8). Comparatively, the top four areas of partnership in the 2022 survey were Technical support capacity building (63%), Volunteer support (59%), Financial support (46%) and Co-design/Co-delivery of projects (45%).

Overall, the survey results suggest that VSO is a valuable partner to their partner organizations, providing a range of support services that include financial, technical, and capacity building support, as well as co-designing and co-delivery of projects. These types of support can be instrumental in helping partner organizations achieve their goals and deliver impact in their respective fields.

Strengths of VSO Partnerships

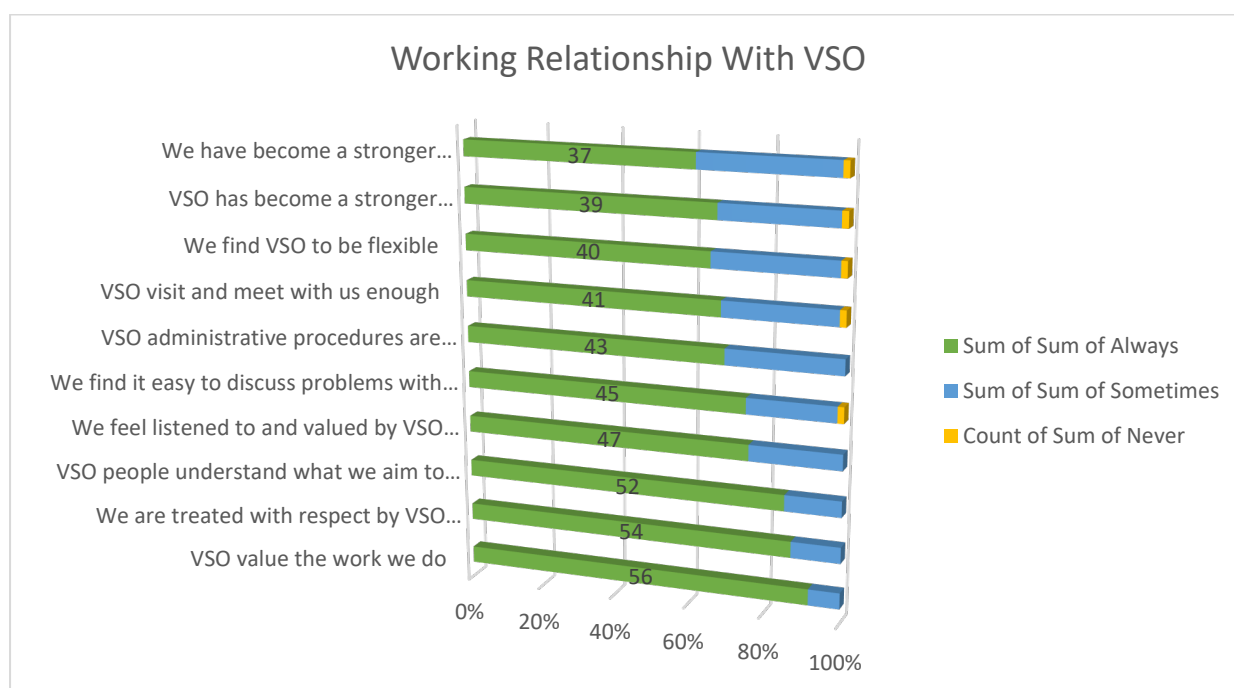


Figure 10: Working Relationship with VSO

According to the survey responses, VSO is rated positively as a partner. Majority of respondents positively rated their partnership experience a 4 (40%) or 5 (45%) out of 5. This shows some shift in overall satisfaction levels from 2022 where 39% scored their satisfaction levels at 4 and 54% at 5 out of 5.

87% of respondents, indicated that their partnership with VSO has helped them deliver on their mandate and **90% indicated that VSO valued their work**. Other areas which respondents indicated as positive include

- 73% felt valued and listened to by VSO,
- 87% were treated with respect
- 69% found administrative procedures reasonable and manageable.
- 66% that VSO has sufficient meetings with partners
- 73% found it easy to communicate with VSO staff
- 64% found VSO to be flexible
- 84% that VSO people understood what they aimed to achieve

Some partners further indicated that working with VSO had made both **their organization (59%) and VSO (63%) stronger**. Another strength mentioned was increased technical capacity due to VSO support.

Areas that have not worked well include unequal power dynamic, bottlenecks created by VSO internal structures, lack of sustainability plans, and partnerships not formally documented.

Differentiators Of VSO As A Partner

Table 1: Differentiators of VSO Partnerships

<p>Model:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-minded towards innovation • Novel approach of involving national volunteers in projects • Provides volunteers with both technical skills and attachment to partner organization • More dependent on volunteers than organizational staff • VSO strengthens the capacity of its partnering organizations.
<p>Operational:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes participatory and consultative design and implementation • Offers greater flexibility than other partners • Encourages collaboration, co-development, and cooperation • Responds readily to limitations faced by partners • Possesses strong infrastructure and networks in country, supported by head office • Committed and motivated, recognizing the value of partnership • An active partner driving real change • Conducts frequent project visits, providing support and suggesting improvements • Recognizes the importance of reporting back to partners and tracking impact • Actively listens to partners • Addresses root causes of problems in project activities
<p>Additional points raised were that VSO has a wide network and engages in important lobbying and advocacy work. Partners also appreciate the legacy built through involvement of community and national volunteers.</p>	

Suggested Improvements in VSO Partnerships

Proposed areas of improvement mentioned by partners are illustrated below. Top three suggestions were to strengthen partner organisational capacity(55%), strengthen partner staff capacity (48%) and early partner involvement in strategic decisions or development (48%).

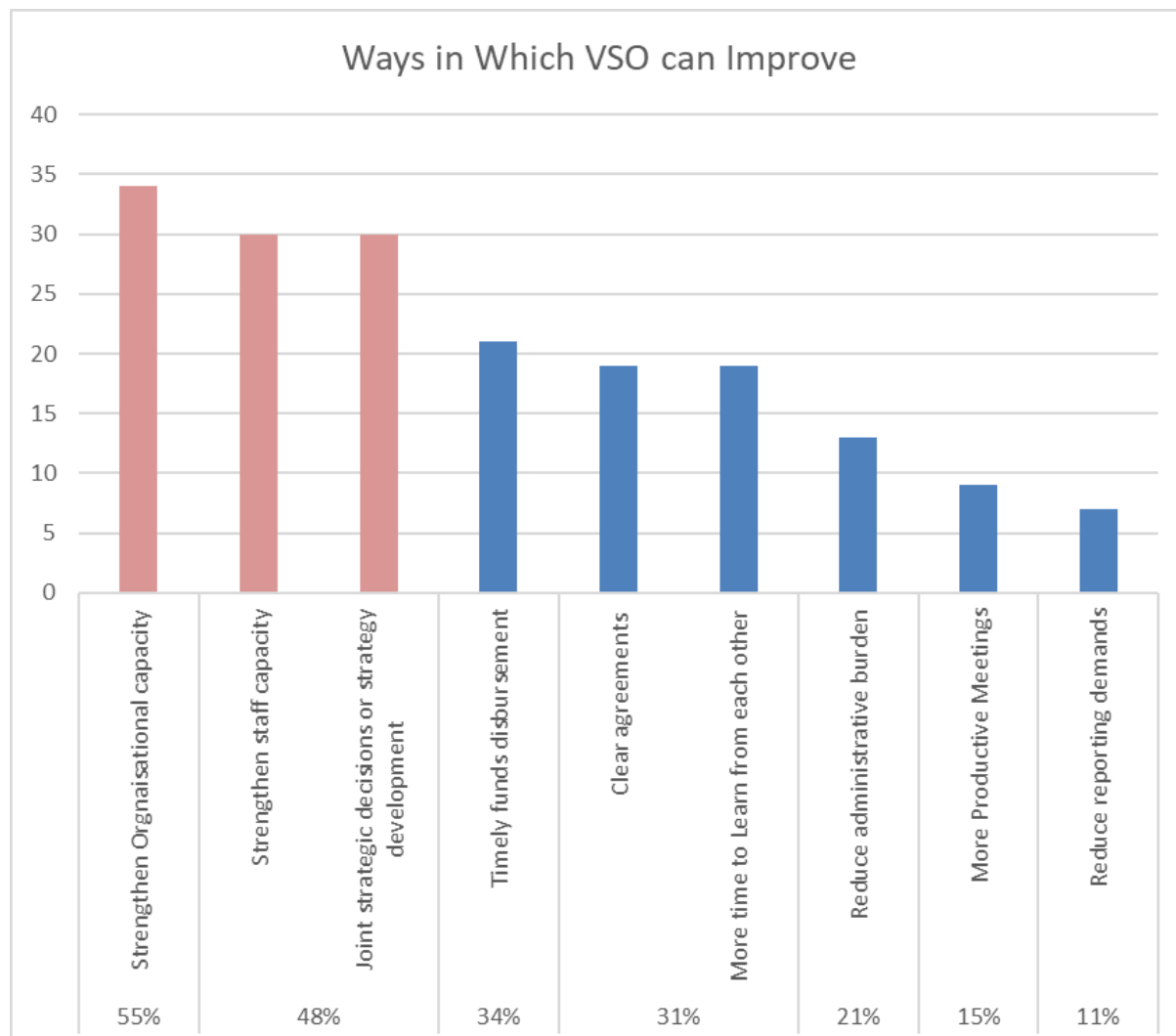


Figure 11: Areas For Improvement

Additional suggestions made are summarised in the table that follows

Improved participatory approaches

- More focus on partners capacity development
- Jointly planning for proposal
- More inclusion

Improved Communication

- More connection with implementation teams
- better structures and systems for delivery and quick decision making

- Clear and timely communication

Operational

- Invest more to strengthen technical capacity of VSO field staff to aid implementation
- More technical staff on the ground to improve quality results and reduce reliance on international volunteers who may not fit context
- Have knowledge of local dialects
- Timely engagement and execution of plans and decisions
- Less rigid global oversight on systems and protocols
- Provide funds for projects proposals

General

- Longer term partnership
- Fund long term programs to have sustainable impacts
- Adequately fund project activities to enable full implementation
- Support in reintegration

Conclusion

Based on the 2023 Partnership Survey, VSO has maintained a fairly high level of satisfaction (57% score 5/5) from partners, however there are some areas where satisfaction levels have been slightly lower compared to 2022 results as 13% scored either 3 or 2 out of 5 in 2023 compared to 8% in 2022. There are also changes in the levels of alignment to Values and pathways as more responses were clustered around 4/5 than 5/5 in 2023 compared to 2022. This indicates a need to VSO to do more to ensure mutually beneficial and valued partnerships. Key areas for improvement include availing funds for approved project activities, timely disbursements, partner capacitation, and clear communication.

Despite the shortcomings pointed out, 94% of partners would recommend VSO as a partner. The task now is for VSO to build on existing relationships for long term collaboration which will better support sustained results.

Annex 1: Partnership Survey Tool



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