

Bridging the Gap

**Insights into the Support Ecosystem for Rural
Impacting Enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa**



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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on rural enterprise development, driven by their significant role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through job creation and poverty reduction. Despite their importance, rural businesses face numerous challenges, such as poor infrastructure and limited access to finance and markets, hindering their progress.

ESOs are pivotal in supporting the growth of entrepreneurs, offering a wide range of services ranging from business planning to investment readiness.

In 2022, Village Capital and Small Foundation partnered to conduct research on ESOs supporting RIEs in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Our goal was to deepen the understanding of this critical yet under-explored enterprise segment, the support that's working, and where we can strengthen support to improve outcomes.

Ecosystem building is core to Village Capital's work in Africa. Since 2009, Village Capital has supported over 1,600 startups that have raised over USD 5B in investment capital. It has made more than 150 investments through its various affiliated funds, including Vilcap Investments, which has invested in 110 peer-selected companies. Village Capital's 150 African startup alumni have gone on to raise over USD 330M in follow-on financing to scale their impact businesses. Village Capital's ecosystem building programs focus on supporting community-led ESOs in the region to better improve their effectiveness and access to financial, social, and human capital, thereby expanding opportunities for both ESOs and creating a more enabling environment for the entrepreneurs they support.

Founded in 2007, Small Foundation collaborates with those creating the environment for rural-impacting MSMEs to succeed and deliver opportunities at scale. In particular, working with intermediaries that increase the availability of the finance, social and human capital, knowledge, technology, and markets required by a thriving and commercially viable MSMEs ecosystem.

For this initiative, Village Capital and Small Foundation drew upon their shared experience in ecosystem building, supporting ESOs and partners in addressing gaps in the RIEs ecosystem across sub-Saharan Africa. For the purpose of this report, we co-defined RIEs as MSMEs that engage positively in commerce in rural areas, improving access to goods, services, and/or markets. The project looked to understand three core considerations:

1. The current landscape of ESOs supporting rural impacting enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa;
2. Explore the financial sustainability and the scaling potential of effective ESO models;
3. Identify which ESOs and support services were making the biggest impact for rural impacting enterprises.

The information provided in this report is predominantly based upon:

- Preliminary high-level analysis of data collected and compiled from 359 ESOs identified as working with RIEs in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Application data from 188 ESOs looking to participate in the Rural Enterprise Ecosystem - Africa program.
- From the 188 applications, 19 ESOs were selected to join the program using an Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic Tool co-developed by Small Foundation and Village Capital. The selected ESOs provided in-depth insights at the ESO level and a dataset of over 180 RIEs they worked with during a period of nine months.



Scope and Methodology

The research began with a preliminary high-level analysis of data collected and compiled from 359 ESOs that were identified to work within the RIEs Ecosystem. This initial dataset enabled us to form a clear picture of the RIEs support ecosystem in sub-Saharan Africa and co-design a diagnostic tool integrating the learnings of Small Foundation. This self-awareness tool is designed to guide ESOs to understand the current state of their organisations better, assess their progress and identify key milestones to build a financially sustainable organisation that delivers impact to entrepreneurs and effectively contributes to nurturing the ecosystem. This work was also influenced by Argidius' Foundation SCALE framework, with whom Village Capital partnered in 2020 on an ecosystem-building project aimed at scaling ESOs in Uganda and later in 2022 in Colombia.

		Team and Governance	Problem and Vision	Value Proposition	Services and Programs	Impact and Collaboration	Financial Sustainability	Operations	Scale	Sources of Funding
Market Leader	9	Our team has industry and ecosystem experts and leaders.	Our approach is validated and we are an ecosystem amplifier.	Enterprises achieve great success	Enterprises achieve great success	Ecosystem is deeply engaged in our work and see their success aligned with our success. We are the partner of choice.	We have a minimum of 2x revenue growth over multiple years and are profitable	We are a leader at delivering high quality offerings and set best practices.	We are delivering our services across multiple markets or customer segments	Sustainable
Growth	8	Our leadership has proven ability to support growing team	We're leader in the market in solving this problem	We have solid partnerships with a range of stakeholders for pipeline referral and graduation of enterprises	Our services and program are handling significant growth	We have systems-level data and a track record of 10+ years	We have a path to profitability.	We consistently set new KPIs to improve quality and efficiency of our services	Brand established. Top tier partnerships for distribution, marketing, and growth.	Large systems level change funding (Development Agency etc)
Performing	7	We are attracting top tier talent to our organisation with the skills to deliver on our ambitious vision.	Our vision is proving attainable in a major market	We have a high volume of high-quality inbound requests for services/applications.	We can deliver our solution at scale without reducing effectiveness or efficiency	Inbound interest from large strategics and top tier partnerships within ecosystem.	Our business model is validated.	We consistently deliver high quality offering.	Growth in our customer base is accelerating more quickly	Future revenue streams identified and validated
Demonstrating Path to Sustainability	6	We have sales, management and technical ability to support a growing team. Responsibility for fundraising/sales is shared by dedicated team members & leadership	Our vision is being realized with evidence of strategy implementation.	We have validated that what we do is of significant enough size, with enough players and relevance to ensure long term sustainability.	Businesses we support achieve growth and desired outcomes	We work with key strategic partners to service our ecosystem collaboratively, efficiently and effectively. Mentors/advisors are high quality & return.	We have sustained operations for the last few years.	We have a clear methodology to assess productivity and efficiency.	We are operating beyond our initial market and can sustain our core operations	Multiple Revenue Channels Renewals by existing Partners for larger amounts
Proving Impact and Commercially Viable	5	We have a strategy. Our team is committed to measuring customer feedback and delivering results.	We have evidence we are solving our customers' problems.	Our target entrepreneurs love the program/services. Our targeted businesses are segmented and serviced with different offerings.	We are developing a suite of services and programs to build on our first validated offering.	We have established a system to collect and review data regularly to inform our decisions	Our financial model has been validated. We have diverse revenue channels and funding mix.	Implementation of change is based on data-driven insights.	We know our core competencies and our unit economics are tipping into positive	Pilot Grant Funding Some revenue generated from paying participants or corporates
Validating the Market and Potential of Solution	4	We understand how our target entrepreneur operates, have strong industry contacts, at least one person responsible for sales/fundraising. We retain our team.	We clearly target and fit within the continuum of support	The value of our offering is clear to prospective enterprises	Our offering is validated and fully functional	We continuously adapt to improve our offering	We do not depend on a single source of revenue. We have a track record of earned revenue.	We consistently deliver high quality offering. We understand program/service development costs and how to build high quality cost-effective programs.	We have a clear strategy to scale to multiple markets	
Solidifying the Value Proposition	3	We have the technical ability to develop and deliver high quality services. We clearly understand our ecosystem and the cost structures in our industry	We can clearly articulate our value proposition to entrepreneurs and it is complementary to the ecosystem.	We have validated that our target market exists and that our services support improved business outcomes	We've improved our offering based on feedback	Value proposition clearly leads to positive outcomes for businesses	We have a financial model with cost and revenue projections articulated.	Our organisation design and roles are suited to business objectives.	We have piloted different models for scale	
Setting the Vision	2	Our team has senior members with entrepreneurship experience and a deep understanding of our target entrepreneurs' challenges	We have a vision for how to solve the problem and have reasonable plans to execute it.	We select the right entrepreneurs that fit our services and understand their needs.	We have run a few pilots and can show they solve a specific problem.	We collect data and use data to refine our offering	We have a basic financial model.	We have a plan for how to design the organisation and manage processes.	We have evidence that multiple markets experience this problem	R&D Grants
Establishing the Organization	1	We have a strong founding team	We have identified specific and important problems.	We have a hypothesis for our target entrepreneur - the specific type of business whose problem we are solving.	Our team has the ability to design and execute solution	We have identified key performance indicators (KPIs) that we will measure	We know how we can make money and have the outline of a model.	The organisation is legally registered and has the right to operate	We have identified multiple possible markets or segments	
		Team and Governance	Problem and Vision	Value Proposition	Services and Programs	Impact and Collaboration	Financial Sustainability	Operations	Scale	Sources of Funding



A summary of the nine assessment levels and what they generally mean in regard to organisational maturity of ESOs:

	Level	Description
1	Establishing the Organisation	Ready-set-go. The right people are starting the organisation and they have a compelling hypothesis.
2	Setting the Vision	It will be hard, but it's possible. The organisation is on the way and setting up for success.
3	Solidifying the Value Proposition	They know what the customer wants and how to deliver it.
4	Validating the Market and Potential of Solution	They understand who their customer is, how they operate and how to reach them. They have evidence their solution is adding value and that a large enough number of people require their solution to create systems-change.
5	Proving Impact and Commercially Viable	They are beginning to show impact related to their work, beyond outputs and through to outcomes. They have a track record of capturing feedback and adapting programming based on insights. They understand the primary commercial levers in their business and consider this in their decision-making and strategy.
6	Demonstrating Path to Sustainability	They have proven they can deliver value, impact is tied to the solution and they can generate revenue. At this stage, they are beginning to map their impact to increased funding. They have diversified their income streams to fund internal operations and de-risk models. They are realistic about their annual fundraising targets.
7	Performing	Programs and services can be delivered efficiently and effectively. Their team is staying on and they are attracting new top talent. They are set up to respond to challenges and to innovate in future program/service offerings. Other organisations and funders are approaching them proactively.
8	Growth	They can deliver impact at scale and evidence of systems-level change within their market. Their operations and model can carry new growth opportunities.
9	A Market Leader	They are recognised as leaders within their market and they collaborate well with other ecosystem partners. Ecosystem stakeholders see their success aligned with the organisations success. They are navigating new innovative growth opportunities.

An open call for applications was hosted on small-foundation.abaca.app, where ESOs were invited to assess themselves using the diagnostic tool and answer a series of questions. The application process focused on understanding the structure, operations and unique role of ESOs in supporting RIEs in sub-Saharan Africa. During this phase, we attracted 188 applications of diverse organisations playing different roles in the ecosystem. After analysing the applications we shortlisted 40 ESOs to form the semi-finalists and 19 ESOs were selected as our Research Partners. We assessed both the application questions and the abaca self-assessments to intentionally select a diverse cohort of ESOs that play different roles across the ecosystem using the following criteria:

Representative Sample Criteria	Description
1. Target Client	Who is the primary target client (sector, stage, etc.) and how this relates to product offering, service delivery type, impact potential, and financial sustainability potential. I.e., high-growth startups, livelihood sustaining businesses, etc.
2. Geography	Broad representation of countries across SSA, as much as possible.
3. Funding Model	Revenue sources and funding models (including grant reliance). With a consideration for this both retrospectively and prospectively, to know how ESOs are considering this in their long-term vision. I.e., nonprofit, hybrid and for-profit.
4. Services and Programmes	Types of services and programmes being provided by ESOs with particular focus given to the effectiveness and quality of delivery. I.e., acceleration and incubation, advisory, market linkages, etc.
5. Degree to which RIEs targeted	Substantive targeting of RIEs integrated into the business model such that it will continue to have a rural element to its activities.

Note: Additional consideration was given towards ESOs with a track record of innovation in service delivery models of ESOs and their promising potential for impact.

With our Research Partners we set out to seek in-depth insights at both the ESO-level and build a comprehensive dataset of RIEs they worked with during this period to help understand the effectiveness of their services. During the nine-month research period the selected ESO partners:

- Assessed their own maturity levels using the customised Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic Tool alongside support from Village Capital in what are known as level-set sessions. These are designed to challenge the organisations self-assessments, including their assumptions and evidence to establish an accurate baseline and simulate the type of due diligence a funding partner would conduct on an ESO.
- Completed an ESO survey to understand their current financial position, operating costs and rural enterprise programs, including what services and programs they offer, over what period and expected outcomes.

- Collected RIE-level baseline and end-line data across the following metrics: Nature of the business; Job creation; Capital Raised; Revenue Generation; Operational Expenses; EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization).
- A stipend was provided to ESOs to facilitate the data collection from RIEs during the research period. Village Capital was available for support over the nine-month period and facilitated periodic group check-ins to assess the progress of the data collection.
- Village Capital provided specialized training to ESOs on benchmarking the enterprises they support using our [VIRAL framework](#) available on the abaca.app platform.

Venture Investment Readiness Awareness Levels

	Level	Description
1	Founding Team	The company has a founding team in place, with at least two differentiated skill sets and has an initial vision of the problem it is solving and how it will solve it.
2	Setting the Vision	The Company has identified a large, solvable problem and a vision for solving it.
3	Value Proposition	The company has compelling evidence that customers will pay for its solution and that it solves the problem better than competitors.
4	Validating an Investable Market	The company has evidence that it is solving a problem for a large enough market to build an investable business.
5	Profitable Business Model	A company has strong evidence it can make money - and enough of it - to be a profitable business by solving this problem with its solution.
6	Moving Beyond Early Adopters	The company has validated through sales (beyond just early adopters) that its product is exceptional and delights customers.
7	Product-Market Fit	The company has validated that it can achieve unit economics that meets or exceeds the industry in its target market.
8	Scaling Up	The company has validated that it is selling to multiple markets and growing its customer base month-on-month.
9	Exit in Sight	The company is growing fast with exit in sight and is well-positioned to provide investors with healthy ROI.

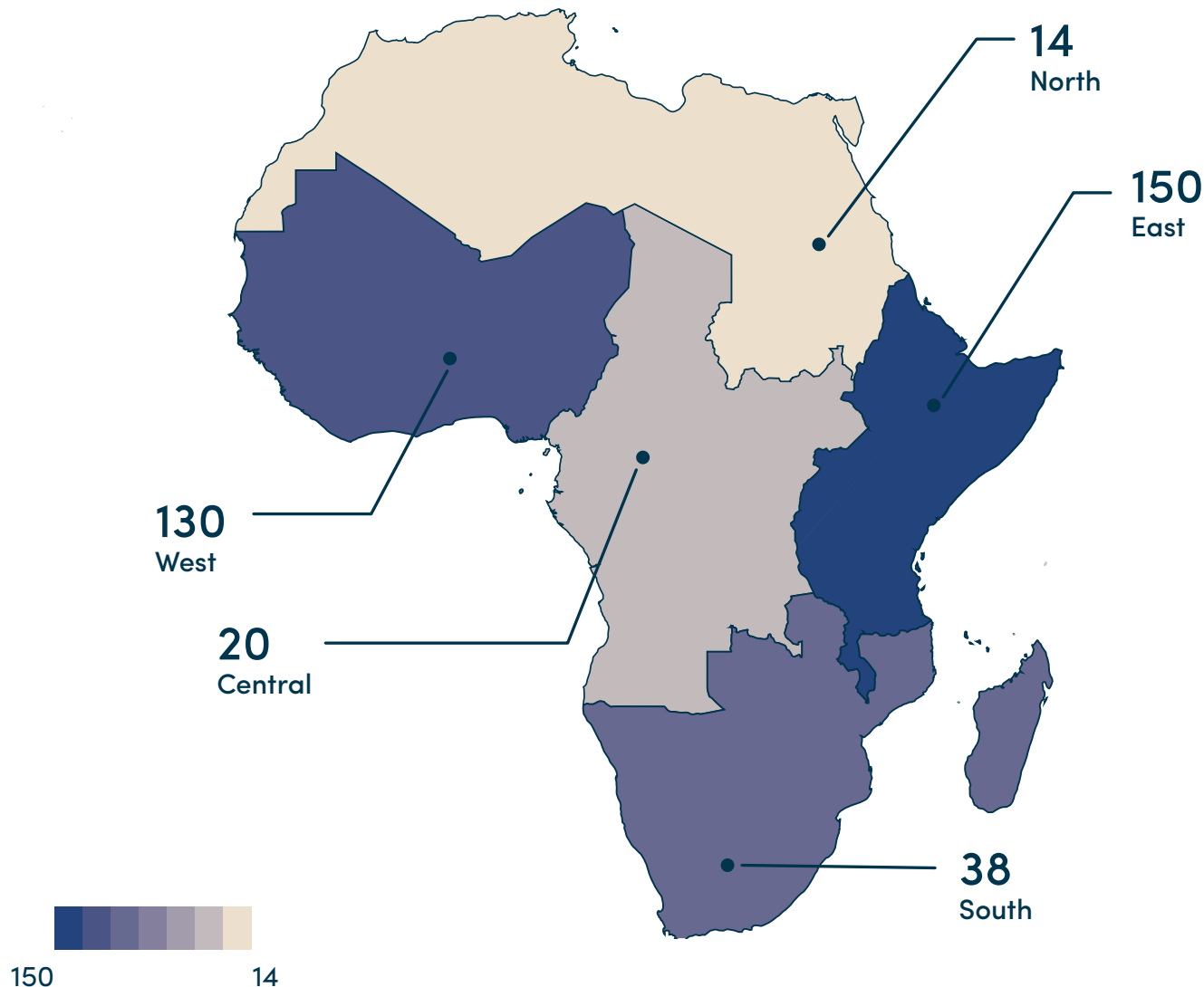
Landscape Analysis and Application Data

This section focuses on the ESOs actively supporting RIEs in SSA. The landscaping and application phase of the project consisted of:

- Preliminary high-level analysis of data collected and compiled from 359 ESOs identified as working with RIEs in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Application data from 188 ESOs looking to participate in the Rural Enterprise Ecosystem - Africa program. This application data included an Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic Tool co-developed by Small Foundation and Village Capital.

Landscape Analysis

The landscaping phase drew on Village Capital and Small Foundation internal databases and desktop research which built on other efforts already made in the market such as the SAFIN Network.¹

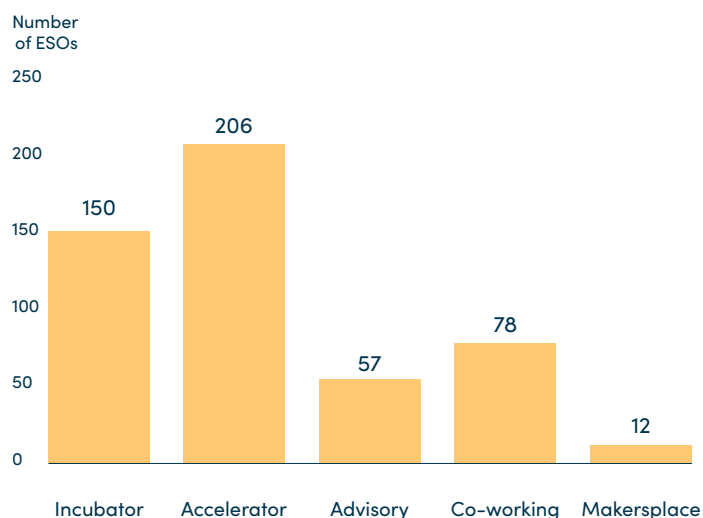


4 Enterprise Support Organizations a Lever of Sustainable Agribusiness Ecosystems in Africa.

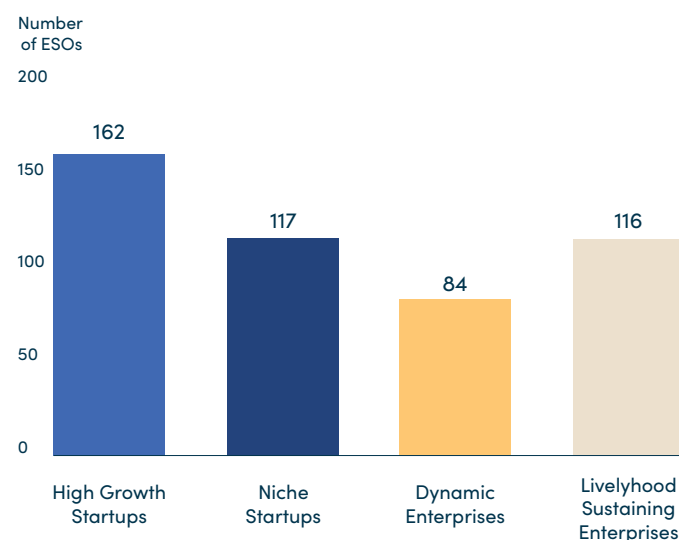
From our initial landscaping assessing 359 ESOs in the ecosystem, we observed:

- 42% and 36% of ESOs operate in East and West Africa respectively;
- Most ESOs offer more than one type of service, however, the vast majority 57% and 41% provide acceleration and incubation support, respectively;
- Most ESOs work with businesses from all segments, but the segment with the most support services is high-growth startups, which has been considered to correlate to the popularity of acceleration and incubation services.

Overview of TA Type

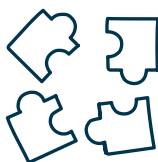


Overview of Segments²



Application Data

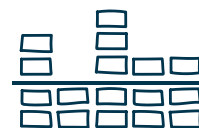
As mentioned, a call for applications to participate in the Rural Enterprise Ecosystem - Africa program produced a dataset of 188 ESOs which included completion of the ESOs Diagnostic Tool. The main overarching finding was that the majority of the ESOs are offering a wide variety of services to meet the varied needs of RIEs. ESOs are doing so with limited capital and resources of their own, which has been observed consistently throughout the landscaping, application and research phases of this project. This report dives deeper into three key findings during the application phase:



The diversity among the ESOs ecosystem supporting RIEs



Challenges relating to the financial sustainability of ESOs



The maturity level of ESOs

From this phase, our key findings are:



ESOs targeting RIEs are typically small scale serving a relatively small volume of RIEs. Over 46% stated at least half of their annual enterprises supported can be considered rural impacting, yet most of them support less than 25 RIEs annually.



The majority of ESOs have small operations with 80% having annual operating budgets under USD 500K and only 2% over USD 2M.

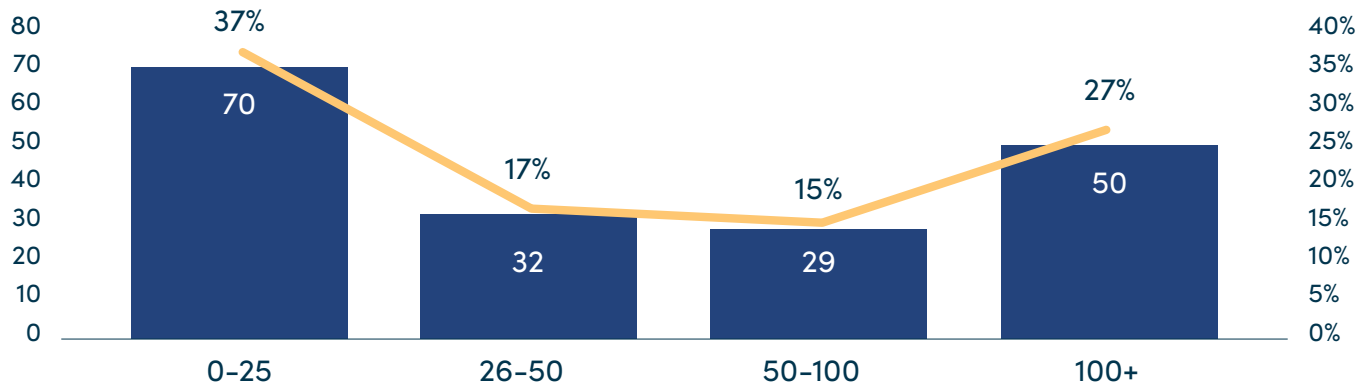


No single funding model dominated: 36% of organizations were nonprofit, 24% were for-profit, and 40% were hybrid.



Diverse Support Landscape

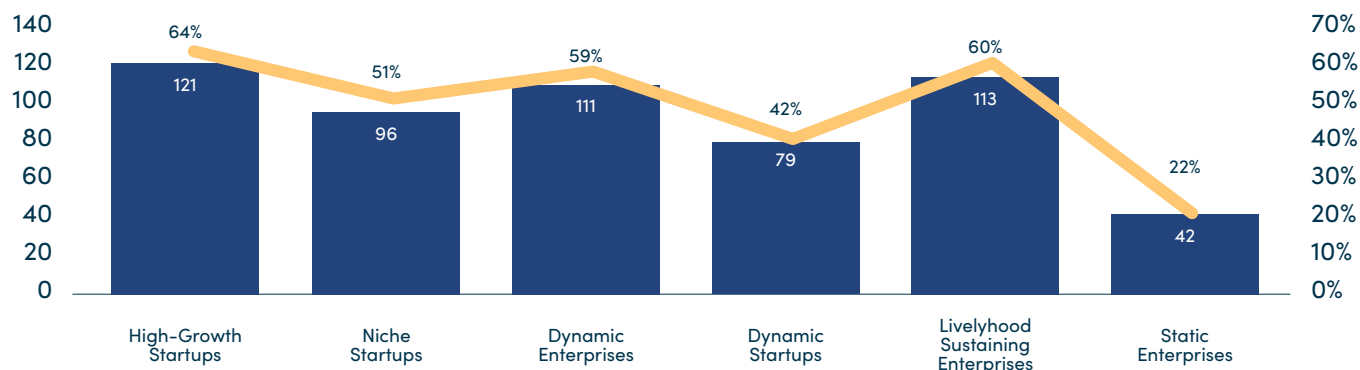
Enterprises Served Annually



The data shows that most ESOs support less than 25 RIEs annually, yet at the same time over 46% state at least half of their annual enterprises supported can be considered rural impacting. There was however a notable diversity in the target clients, services delivered and service delivery models of ESOs within the dataset.

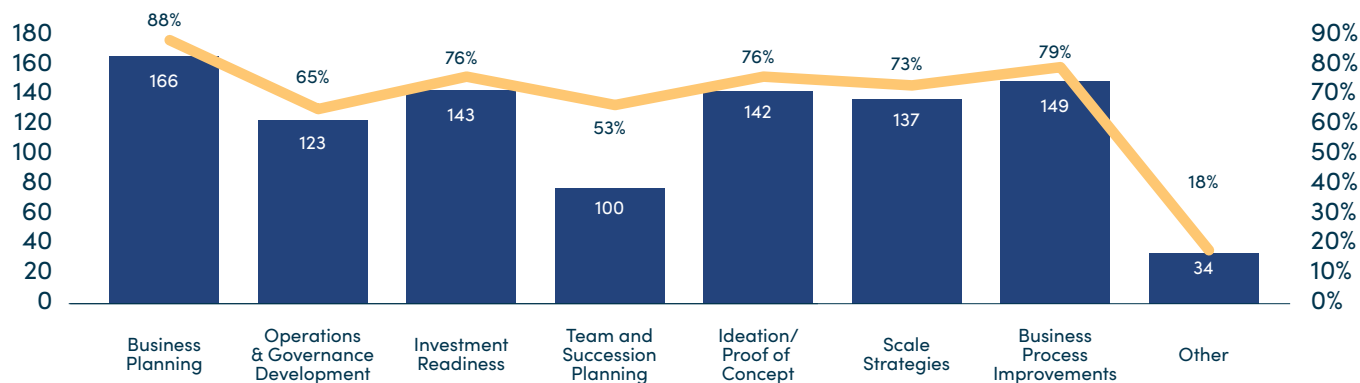
- Whilst ESOs still predominantly target high-growth startups, the application phase showed more diversity in target client types, such as diversifying enterprises and livelihood-sustaining enterprises, which are often more prevalent in rural communities. The varied nature of supported enterprises, from high-growth to livelihood sustaining, suggests a challenging balancing act for ESOs in how they build their teams and products/services to cater to multiple segments and is a positive signal of the sector maturing and not treating all segments as the same.

Target Client - Type



- ESOs supporting RIEs predominantly offer a range of business development services, including business planning, operations and governance development, investment readiness, and business process improvement.

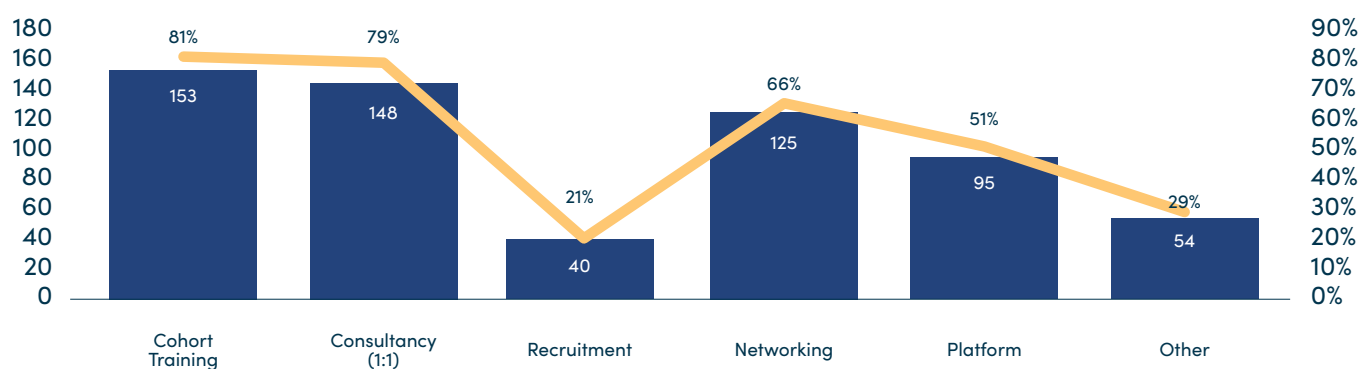
Business Development Services



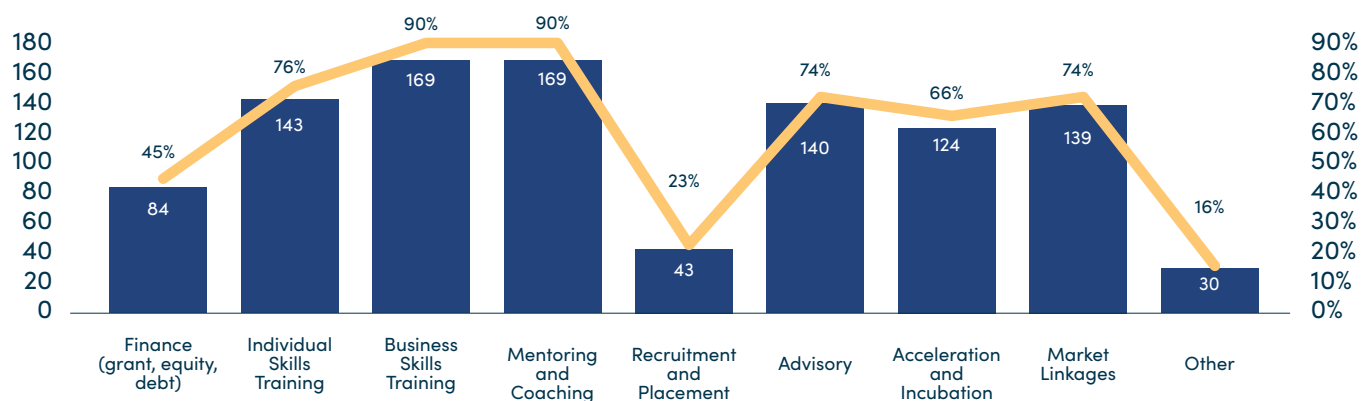


- ESOs provide these services in many ways, such as individual skills training, mentoring, coaching, advisory services, acceleration/incubation, and market linkages. Technical assistance is commonly offered through cohort training, one-to-one consultancy, and networking. The most commonly cited services were: cohort, training, 1:1 consultancy, and network development.

TA Type

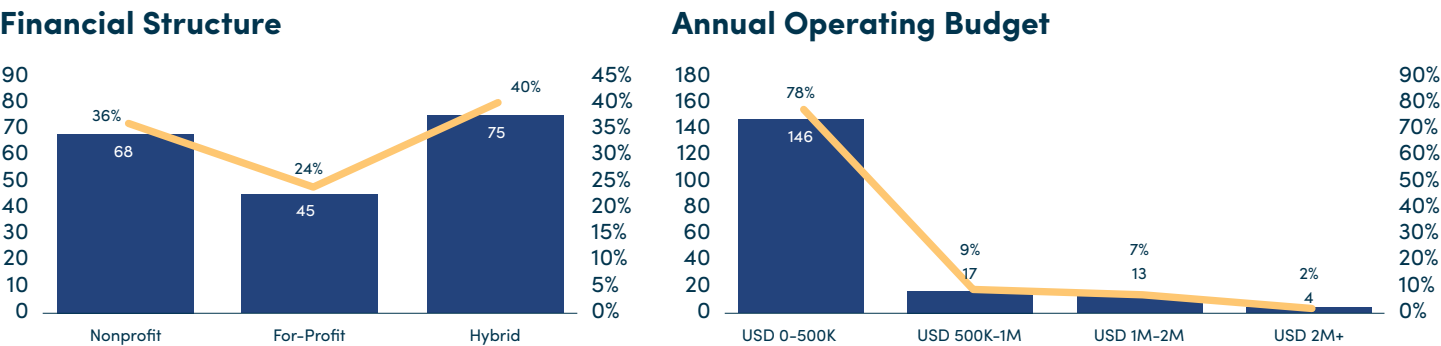


Products Provided



ESO Financial Model Distribution by Regions

78% of ESOs applicants reported an annual budget below USD 500K and only 4% reported an annual budget of over USD 2M. This highlights the financial constraints and low level of maturity of these organisations.



The majority of ESOs operate on a hybrid model, combining both for-profit and nonprofit business models. Our analysis revealed that 81% of the francophone ESOs operating in Central and West Africa run nonprofit organisations, an indicator of the funding landscape in this region. Echoing our discoveries, recent reports such as the [Développement économique et emploi en Afrique francophone](#), published by l’Université de Montréal, affirm that most ESOs in French-speaking countries operate as nonprofit organisations, posing challenges in evaluating their sustainability. Their primary emphasis lies in fulfilling social or community missions, particularly supporting entrepreneurs from under-represented backgrounds. More than 50% of ESOs revenue comes from grants, the rest comes from other sources, such as enterprise and consulting fees, which still demonstrate an underlying need for sustainability.

Region	For-Profit	Hybrid	Nonprofit
East Africa	26.6%	41.7%	32.1%
Central Africa	-	62.5%	37.5%
West Africa	22.8%	42.1%	35.1%
Southern Africa	28.6%	35.7%	37.5%

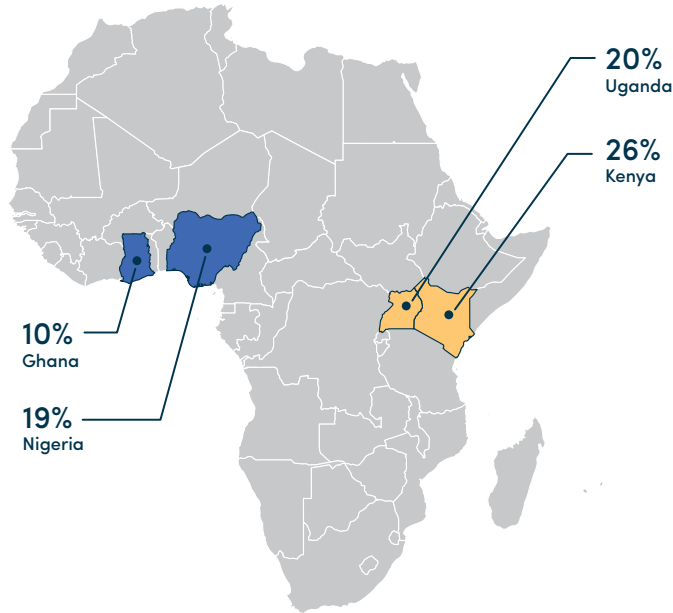
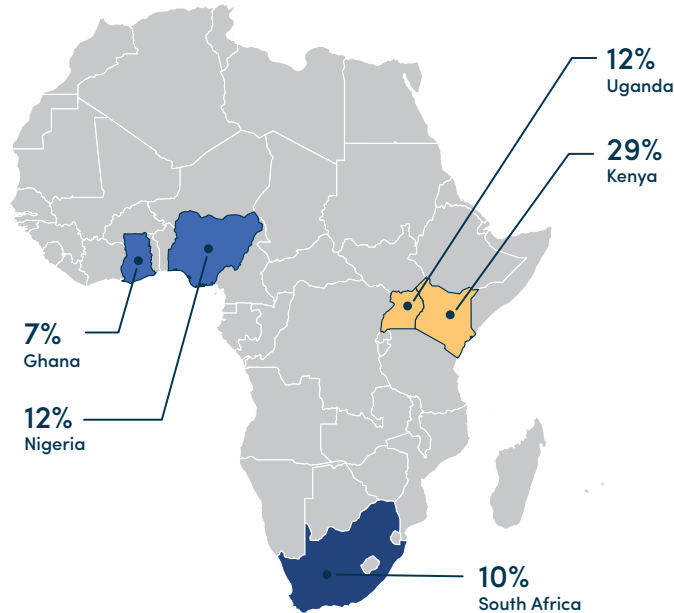


The application phase did, however, uncover a deliberate effort amongst for-profit and hybrid ESOs to enhance sustainability by diversifying revenue streams, strategically pursuing sustainability and minimizing total dependence on external funding sources by exploring alternative methods of charging the end user.

We further observed that:

Of the 24% for-profit models 70% were from:

Of the 40% hybrid models 76% were from:

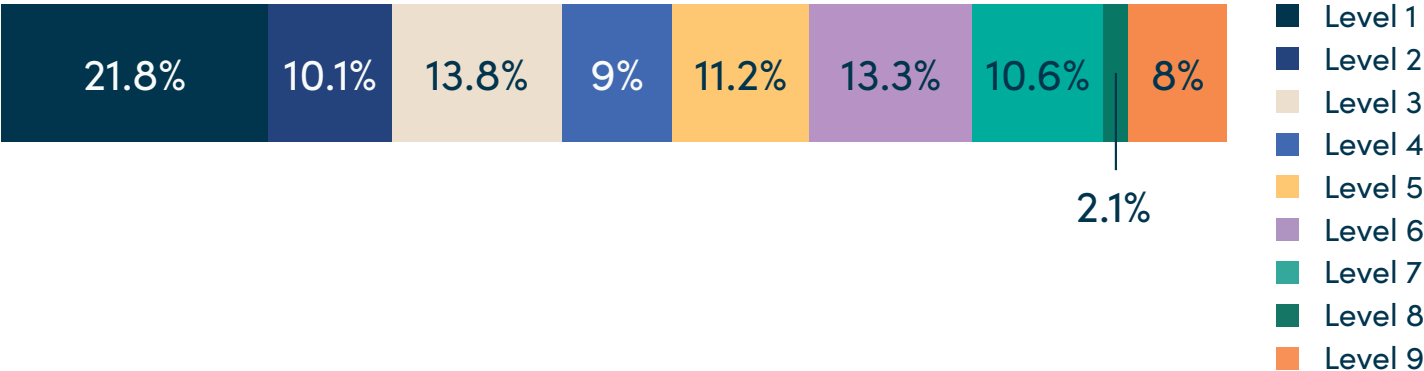


These markets have more vibrant and mature startup ecosystems compared to the other countries in the region. This data indicates that the overall market conditions for entrepreneurship are also enabling entrepreneur support services to grow towards financial sustainability.

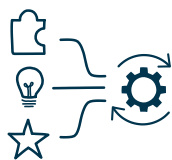
Maturity Levels of Applicant ESOs

Here’s how the ESOs scored themselves. When we look at the overall self-assessment of ESOs and how mature they are, this is what the distribution looks like:

ESO Maturity Levels



From the above chart some of the findings that stand out are:



More than 50% are below level 4, indicating that a significant percentage of the ecosystem comprises ESOs that are not as mature in their operations. Level 4 (Validating the Market and Potential of Solution) indicates that they understand who their customer are, how they operate and how to reach them. They have evidence their solution is adding value and that a large enough number of people require their solution to create systems change.



The majority of businesses are at level 1 (Establishing the Organization), defined as; organisation ready to begin operations. The right people are starting the organisation and they have a compelling hypothesis, speaking to the aforementioned point.

We went in further to look at the different categories of the diagnostic and identify general area of strengths and opportunities for growth:

Team and Governance	Problem and Vision	Value Proposition	Services and Programs	Impact and Collaboration	Commercial Viability	Operations	Scale
6.4	6.4	6.1	6.0	5.4	5.3	5.9	5.4



Financial sustainability is the least ranked category, which aligns with the challenges related to sustainability among these organisations, further discussed in the report. Scale also ranked low and one attributable factor to this is likely due to the limited available resources to these organisations.



The highest-ranked categories were Team and Governance, implying that at an average level 6 they have a growing team but have yet to attract top-tier talent to their organisation; and Problem and Vision, implying that their vision is being realized with evidence of strategy implementation but not yet proving attainable in a major market.

Despite gaps and challenges with the ecosystem, the application phase produced a diverse set of ESOs focusing support towards the varied needs of RIEs. From the pool of 188 applicants, we shortlisted 40 ESOs based on their experience and potential for impact. In-depth interviews with these shortlisted candidates allowed us to refine the selection to the final 19 ESOs (research partners) who demonstrated the most compelling service delivery models and alignment with our program goals.

Research Findings

This research project sought to better understand the needs and challenges of this diverse set of ESOs supporting RIEs in sub-Saharan Africa. We sought to identify which support services were currently making the biggest impact on RIEs and where there may be gaps. Local intermediaries are a critical driver in reaching this emerging and hard-to-reach enterprise segment, and as such, this research also sought to understand the models of the enterprise support organisations themselves, their sustainability, scale potential, and organisational needs.

We began the study by examining the operational frameworks of the ESOs selected as implementing partners. These organisations were selected due to geographical distribution, maturity of organisations, diversity of stages supported, size of organisation, and the types of support provided to startups.

ESOs Research Partners



To better understand the profile of ESOs supporting RIEs we utilized the Small Foundation diagnostic – an organisational assessment tool – to benchmark with the organisations their maturity overall according to nine levels and across eight categories. As with all Village Capital developed tools, higher isn't necessarily better – it's just further along, and what we seek to learn from this diagnostic is not what is good or bad but what the trends are in terms of organisational development, and in so doing where there might be support and capital gaps. In the text boxes you'll see a breakdown of the maturity levels and the categories used during these assessment sessions with ESOs Partners.

To learn more about the participating research partners, see the [“Research Partners”](#) section on pages 46–52.

Levels of ESO Maturity

	Level	Description
1	Establishing the Organisation	Ready-set-go. The right people are starting the organisation and they have a compelling hypothesis.
2	Setting the Vision	It will be hard, but it's possible. The organisation is on the way and setting up for success.
3	Solidifying the Value Proposition	They know what the customer wants and how to deliver it.
4	Validating the Market and Potential of Solution	They understand who their customer is, how they operate and how to reach them. They have evidence their solution is adding value and that a large enough number of people require their solution to create systems-change.
5	Proving Impact and Commercially Viable	They are beginning to show impact related to their work, beyond outputs and through to outcomes. They have a track record of capturing feedback and adapting programming based on insights. They understand the primary commercial levers in their business and consider this in their decision-making and strategy.
6	Demonstrating Path to Sustainability	They have proven they can deliver value, impact is tied to the solution and they can generate revenue. At this stage, they are beginning to map their impact to increased funding. They have diversified their income streams to fund internal operations and de-risk models. They are realistic about their annual fundraising targets.
7	Performing	Programs and services can be delivered efficiently and effectively. Their team is staying on and they are attracting new top talent. They are set up to respond to challenges and to innovate in future program/service offerings. Other organisations and funders are approaching them proactively.
8	Growth	They can deliver impact at scale and evidence of systems-level change within their market. Their operations and model can carry new growth opportunities.
9	A Market Leader	They are recognised as leaders within their market and they collaborate well with other ecosystem partners. Ecosystem stakeholders see their success aligned with the organisations success. They are navigating new innovative growth opportunities.

Categories of ESO Development

	Level	Description
Team and Governance	Team Design	Does the organisation have the right leadership in place? Is the leadership supported by the right team with complementary skill sets reflecting the stage and sector they focus on?
	Talent Attraction and Development	Is the organisation attracting high quality talent? Do they have a track record of growing talent? Does talent coming out of this ESO go to lead other initiatives within the ecosystem?
	Entrepreneurship Experience	Do they have members of the team with strong local entrepreneurial experience? Does the board have strong local entrepreneurial experience?
	Governance	How does the organisation make decisions? Is leadership able to defend and narrate previous decisions with strong logic? Do they have a representative board to keep leadership accountable?
	Representation	Do they have diverse representation across the organisation?
Problem and Vision	Value Proposition	Organisation has identified a specific and important problem. They can clearly justify how their solution is differentiated and adds value to the entrepreneurs they serve.
	Vision	Leadership needs to set a vision that is inspiring, demanding - yet achievable. Their vision is successful and provides high quality services at scale.
	Support Gap	Organisation has identified a gap in support that has the potential to create systems-level change and impact on rural communities. They can clearly articulate how growing their organisation will lead to significant impact.
	Stakeholder Value	Leadership and teams deeply understand the entrepreneurs they serve but also the supply chains and stakeholders they engage with.
	Strategy	Leadership has an up to date strategy that reflects how they will achieve their overall vision, with phased SMART goals reflective of their current stage.
Value Proposition	Targeted Profile	ESO value proposition is (or could be) delivered through services and programs to better support rural impacting enterprises (RIE). Team can define a specific profile of target entrepreneur(s) and has a method for selecting the right enterprises that fit their capabilities.
	Due Diligence	The ESO deeply understands the segments and value chains in which they operate. Do they have a clear due diligence process for assessing the potential of the entrepreneurs they work with? Are they considering the sectors, sub-sectors and problems within the markets they operate in when selecting enterprises to support?
	Sustainability	Do they have evidence that the pipeline is large enough and of high enough quality to be sustainable over time?
	Continuum of Support	Is their stage of support and target enterprise support fitting within a larger continuum of support? Can they clearly articulate how they fit into the broader entrepreneurship and financing ecosystem? Where have their target entrepreneurs come from - what previous support have they received? Where do the entrepreneurs go after they have been provided support by the ESO?
	Type of Enterprise	What type of enterprise (segment) does the ESO support? At what stage is the ESO best positioned to add value?
Services and Programs	Profile-product Fit	The organisation is prioritising designing services to suit specific target entrepreneurs financial and non-financial needs.
	Technical Assistance Design	Organisation uses best practice TA design, including addressing a specific problem for their entrepreneurs in each service/program and learning design focused on problem solving. They have the necessary skill sets on their team or through partners to deliver on their TA design.
	User Validation	Their proposition is being validated by strong user feedback. ESOs must prove that their services and programs provide significant value by solving a major pain point for target entrepreneurs (or through the RIE value chain).
	Understanding of the Problem	Organisation understands the needs of the enterprises they work with. Is there an opportunity for peers to learn from each other? Is there time built in for implementation of the solutions learned within the program?
Impact and Collaboration	Data Systems	Does the organisation collect relevant program and impact data? Do they ensure entrepreneurs obtain value from reporting and it right-sized for the entrepreneur to report?
	Data Driven Decision Making	Does leadership use data to make critical decisions?
	Analytics Skills	Do they have the necessary skill sets on their team or through partnerships to capture defensible and rigorous data?

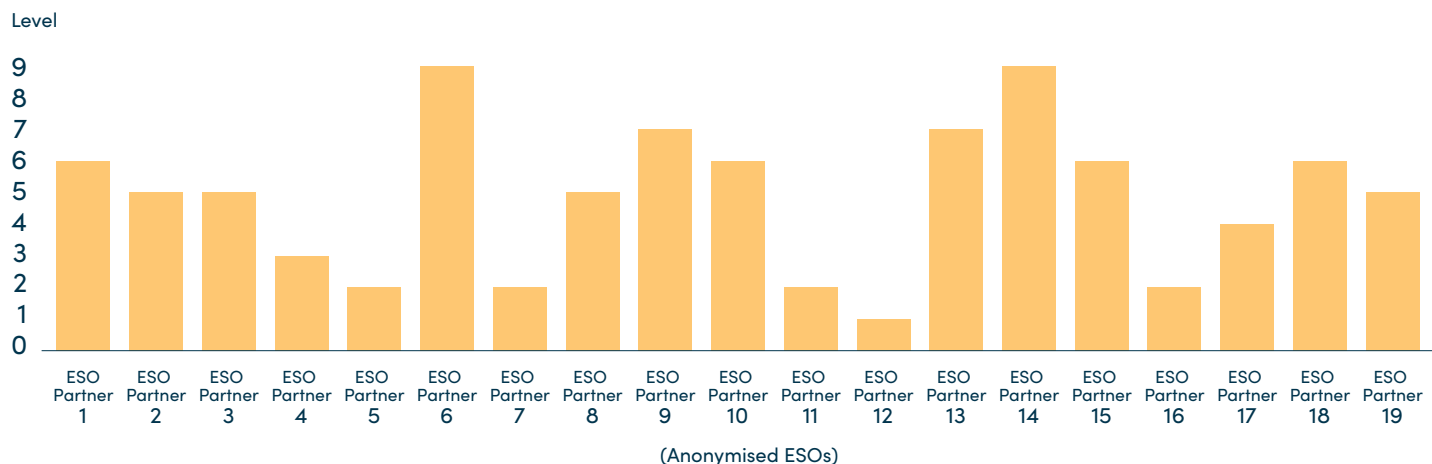
Impact and Collaboration	Research and Knowledge Building	The organisation has a track record of research, thought leadership and knowledge building that adds value to the ecosystem as a whole, not just its organisation. They regularly share their learnings with other stakeholders. What is their ability to gather feedback and learn?
	Continuous Learning and Improvement	Organisation actively seeks feedback and makes interactions on their offerings based on enterprise performance. They "look in the mirror" and apply the same learnings internally when it makes them a better organisation.
Financial Sustainability	Income Diversity	This category is about strategy and an ESOs plan for financial sustainability. Has the organisation built diversity in its partners and revenue streams or are they overly reliant on one type of funding? How much of their revenue is grant dependency vs earned revenue?
	Sustainability Framework	At what level is the organisation in the sustainability framework? There are five levels or stages: Non-commercial, Nascent, Pre-commercial, Commercial ready, and Commercial. If a nonprofit, what is their financial status in terms of net assets. If for-profit, what is their profitability?
	Earned Revenue and Expenses	Does the ESO have a track record of earned revenue? Does the organisation cover all its expenses?
	Financial Acumen	Is there financial acumen at the leadership level and an understanding of revenue drivers and costs? Do they understand how much programs and services should cost? Is there a skill set for raising capital as a specific function within the team?
	Financial Accountability	Do they hold themselves accountable to financial metrics of efficiency on the program? Are programs and projects delivered on time and within budget?
	Internal Investments	Is the organisation able to identify and fund internal strategic investment for their future success? Can they justify how internal investments are made and what outcomes these strategic decisions led to?
	Red-flag	A fund is not a business model- at least not in the short term. If the ESO is doing investment do they have a clear business case for doing so?
Operations	Scale Objectives	Does the ESO have an organisation design and roles suited to current business goals? Are they setting up the systems, processes and team to reach the next phase of their growth? Are they able to anticipate the different types of funding they will need as they SCALE?
	Continuous Improvements	Is the organisation able to capture data and make improvements to programming based on feedback? Is leadership prioritising data-driven decisions? Do they lead by example and make improvements and adaptations as they learn? Do they seek out knowledge from partners and the ecosystem to improve how they operate?
	Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness	Do the organisations have the capacity to improve efficiencies and effectiveness as it grows? Are their operational processes set up for repeatability and efficiency without reduced quality as they grow?
	Operational Acumen	Do they understand what is required as an organisation grows? Do they have a clear plan that is compelling, phased and achievable?
Scale	Markets	Are they in multiple markets? Are they reaching more clients? What is their strategy about reaching more clients? Are they thinking about unit economics or cost-effectiveness?
	Growth Potential	They are able to identify other markets that experience similar problems with a similar profile of enterprise. They have a clear method for identifying, validating and entering new markets to grow their impact.
	Collaboration Potential	This is about the RIE ecosystem, successful ecosystems are connected ecosystems. Do other ESOs and ecosystem stakeholders feel deeply engaged in this ESOs work and see their success aligned with their success? They have a track record of successful consortiums, joint startups and partnerships which demonstrate impact at scale.
	Partnerships	Are they partnering with stakeholders in the ecosystem? Are there any interesting conversations on going to facilitate this?
	End Game	What is the organisation's end game? What is the specific role that an organisation intends to play in confronting the total addressable challenge in a certain issue area?
	Scaling Strategy	There are different ways an organisation can scale: Open source, government adoption, mission achievement, sustained service, commercial adoption, and replication.

To learn more about the [Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic Tool](#), see [page 44](#).



Benchmarking ESO Partners

Using the Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic Tool, below is an anonymised ranking distribution of the selected cohort:



After normalizing the scores the highest overall level of maturity achieved among the ESOs was seven, while the lowest was one.

Team and Governance	Problem and Vision	Value Proposition	Services and Programs	Impact and Collaboration	Commercial Viability	Operations	Scale
6.8	6.6	6.7	6.6	5.5	6.1	5.9	6.4

The research partners selected for this program generally ranked higher on average than the application pool (n=188) in:

	Application Benchmark	Anonymised Partner ESO Results	Comments
Value Proposition	6.1	6.7	10% higher than application benchmark
Services and Programs	6.0	6.6	10% higher than application benchmark
Financial Sustainability	5.3	6.1	15% higher than application benchmark
Scale	5.4	6.4	19% higher than application benchmark

The ESOs that were able to reach higher levels of maturity surpassed their peer most commonly due to being more advanced on milestones related to impact and collaboration, financial sustainability, operations, and scale categories. Although the final selection of ESOs included some more mature ESOs, we focused on emerging ESOs to mirror the state of the ecosystem per the application analysis. We also selected a mixture of financial models, aiming for equal representation from nonprofits, for-profits and hybrid financial models.



The 8 research partners whose enterprises most frequently appeared in the top 30 performers for key indicators outperformed their peers in the categories of team and governance, impact and collaboration, financial sustainability, and operations.

The financial model distribution of 19 research partners:



31.6%
Nonprofit

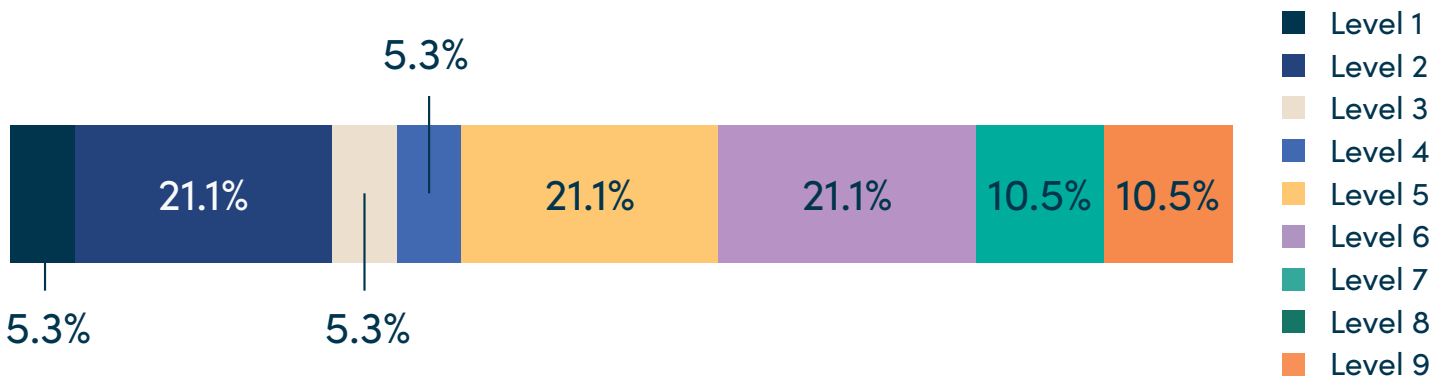


31.6%
For-Profit



36.8%
Hybrid Models

ESO Maturity Levels



There is significant reach potential with ESOs supporting RIEs and many are making significant strides in diversifying revenue mix. However, there remains a significant funding constraints with many of them unable to cross the USD 500K annual revenue threshold despite being in operation for many years and demonstrating impact.

Financial Sustainability and Scale Potential of ESOs Partners



Average annual operating budget is USD 273K, two partners had operating budgets above USD 400K.



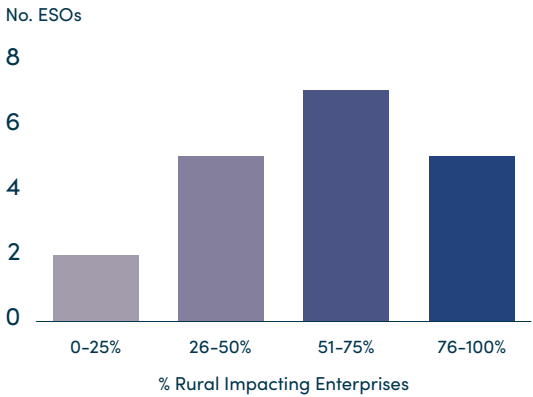
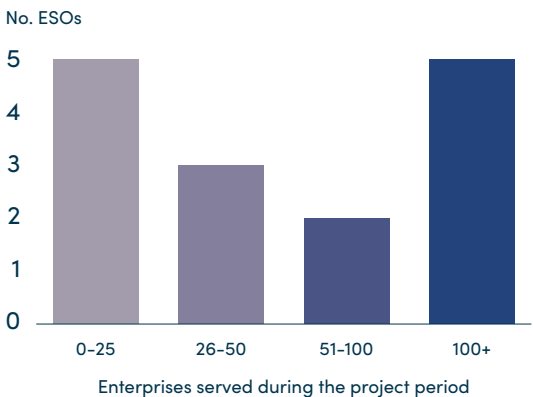
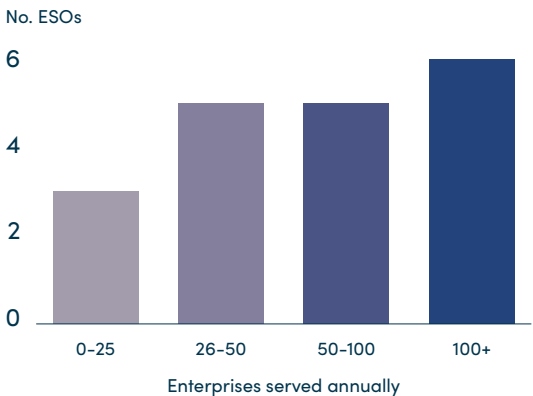
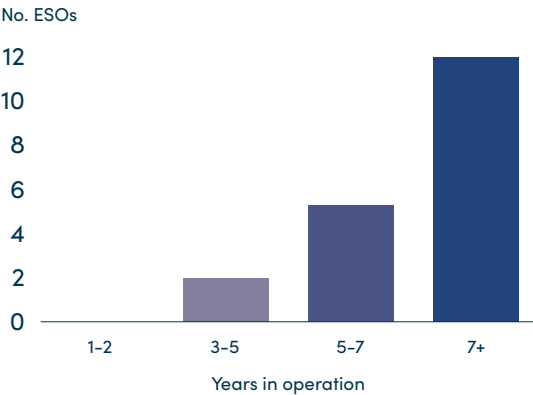
Typically, six research partners reported serving over 100 entrepreneurs per year, five served 50-100, five served 25-50 and three served 0-25 annually.



East and West Africa have the highest concentration of ESOs reflected in the application pool and selection sample, with the top three being Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda.



All partners generated a mix of revenue. Half of the partners receive the majority of their funding from grants (50%+), the average was 43% grant-funded and four partners took no grants.



All organisations have been operating for at least three years with over half operating for more than seven years.



During the research period, the 19 research partners served over 19,099 enterprises, of which they reported 79% were rural impacting. Four ESO partners served 17,800 of those enterprises (93%), the majority of which were focused on rural farmers. Although this represents a positive indicator in terms of ESOs scale and reach, this demographic was particularly difficult to capture data from.



22% of the total income (including grants) generated by participants was enterprise fees. Six organisations generate no revenue from enterprise fees. 35% of total income (including grants) generated by participants were consulting fees, three organisations generated no revenue from consulting fees.

Anonymised ESO Partner Data

	Employees (FTE)	Employees (Part-time)	Legal Structure	Annual Enterprise Clients	Revenue (2022)	Grant Income % (2022)	Enterprise Fees % (2022)	Consulting Fees	Operating Budget	Net Income
ESO 1	50	25	Hybrid	100 +	\$1,356,557	11%	84%	3%	\$850,000	\$212,639
ESO 2	29	40	Nonprofit	100 +	\$867,537.50	99%	0%	0%	\$744,284	\$123,094
ESO 3	10	4	Hybrid	100 +	\$492,500	60%	30%	80%	\$369,375	\$123,125
ESO 4	9	20	Nonprofit	26-50	\$350,000	71%	29%	NA	\$350,000	\$50,000
ESO 5	9	1	Nonprofit	100 +	\$385,000	78%	0%	21%	\$350,000	-
ESO 6	35	15	Nonprofit	100 +	NA	100%	0	NA	\$330,192	\$0
ESO 7	21	5	For-profit	100 +	\$288,222	NA	1%	100%	\$302,241	-\$14,019
ESO 8	20	3	Nonprofit	50-100	\$350,000	86%	11%	3%	\$300,000	\$50,000
ESO 9	16	2	For-profit	100 +	NA	65%	8%	25%	\$205,260	\$9,041
ESO 10	30	15	For-profit	100 +	\$127,840	0%	30%	50%	\$156,604	\$67,113
ESO 11	7	0	For-profit	0 - 25	\$211,095	76%	0%	100%	\$149,692	\$221,965
ESO 12	6	4	For-profit	100 +	\$60,000	0%	60%	40%	\$90,000	\$40,000
ESO 13	7	12	Hybrid	26-50	\$87,817	12%	11%	44%	\$69,236	\$12,982
ESO 14	10	2	For-profit	26-50	\$90,355	10%	48%	13%	\$45,325	\$5,383
ESO 15	5	4	Hybrid	26-50	\$60,000	80%	15%	5%	\$35,000	\$5,000
ESO 16	5	3	Nonprofit	26-50	\$10,000	0%	0	0%	\$15,000	\$5,000
Averages	17	10			\$297,645	50%	20%	35%	\$272,638	\$60,755

Innovative Approaches Towards Sustainability Being Taken by ESOs

RIEs Dynamics – Ability vs. Willingness

In the subsequent section, we will delve deeper into the enterprise-level data. However, of particular relevance to this section reflecting on the ESO sustainability and effectiveness of ESOs services, we found a positive correlation between some of the highest-performing organisations – based on the enterprise-level outcomes – and charging enterprises a fee. The top performing organisations in absolute terms based on their support services impact on enterprises' performance for jobs, EBITDA, revenue, and capital raised – and the practice of charging enterprises a fee. Five out of the eight top-performing organisations attribute some of their revenue to enterprise fees. These fees range from approximately 8% to 84% of their total revenue.

This aligns with the recommendations outlined in the SCALE by Argidius³, which indicates that charging fees not only helps BDS providers select the right startups and candidates for their programs, but also leads to increased engagement, improved job creation, and higher return on investment.

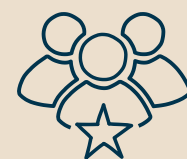
The limited ability and willingness of enterprises to pay have also resulted in innovative approaches to this challenge further detailed below. As reported by the ESOs, the distribution of enterprises willing and able to pay across the RIEs dataset is as shown:



Category 1. Willing but Not Able to Pay: 60% of respondents indicate that RIEs express a willingness to pay for support but face constraints in their financial capacity. This suggests a genuine interest in the value of the support offered, but economic limitations hinder their ability to meet financial obligations.



Category 2. Able but Not Willing to Pay: 27% of responses suggest that there are cases where RIEs possess the financial means but may not be inclined to pay for the support. This could stem from various factors, such as a perception of unaffordability, lack of perceived value, or alternative means of obtaining support.



5/8

top-performing organisations attribute some of their revenue to enterprise fees.

These fees range from approximately 8% to 84% of their total revenue.



Category 3. Willing and Able to Pay: 13% of responses indicate that there are RIEs both willing and able to pay for the support provided by ESOs. This segment may recognize the value of the support and have the financial capacity to invest in their enterprise development.

Common Characteristics of RIEs That Are Willing and Able to Pay

When closely looking at the typical profile of organisations willing and able to pay for ESOs support, here are some common traits:

- **Business Maturity:** Many of the RIEs able to pay have been in operation for at least 3-5 years, indicating a level of business maturity.
- **Sector Focus:** Agriculture emerged as a prominent sector, along with niche areas like environmental sustainability, financial services, and agro-processing. The sectors highlighted are dominant sectors in the rural economy.
- **Growth Stage (what we defined as growth stage):** Most of these enterprises are often in the growth stage, having moved beyond the initial startup phase, demonstrating stability and potential for expansion.
- **Revenue Generation:** They typically engage in activities that generate revenue between USD 150K and USD 500K.

Innovative Approaches Towards Sustainability Being Taken By ESOs

Amongst our selected research partners we are seeing increased innovation in approaches towards sustainability as highlighted below:



Bundling Services

Offering bundling services by combining services like financial advisory and fundraising services to provide value at discounted rates.

Benefit to ESOs: For ESOs, bundling services increases revenue by offering package deals and simplifies operations, allowing them to serve more startups efficiently. ESOs generate increased revenue and attract more clients through a compelling value proposition, while RIEs benefit from cost-effective and comprehensive support that accelerates their growth journey.

ESO Example: *“We make money by bundling services for SMEs to see value in the services they receive, such as financial advisory services bundled with fundraising services. This offers discounts on both services and gets them to use the services.”* Pearl Mutual, Nigeria.



Product Sales

Generating revenue through sales.

Benefit to ESOs: ESOs create value by developing platforms that not only offer startups valuable services (for a fee) but also generate revenue for the ESOs itself. This two-sided model enables the ESO to improve its sustainability by reinvesting in resources that support more startups within the ecosystem.

ESO Example: *"We make money by offering packaging materials and generate revenue from that as well as branding and quality control services. We have the Extension Quality Control Project where we equip young women and youth to become quality controllers to support entrepreneurs in communities at affordable fees. This makes product certification easy as it is a huge challenge for RIEs."* CWEN, Uganda.

"We operate a state-of-the-art rice processing mill that utilizes cutting-edge technology to produce high-quality rice products. We are a rice processing facility and work with our entrepreneurs to off-take rice from them. We produce white rice and also a variety of specialty rice products." El-kanis, Nigeria



Training, Consultancy, Acceleration, and Post-program Support Fees

It's common for ESOs to charge facilitation fees for training programs and consultancy services. Additionally, entrepreneurs increasingly pay for acceleration services, as firms investing in such services demonstrate greater growth and impact. Some ESOs extend their offerings to include post-program consultancy and implementing fees over an extended duration to provide sustained support.

Benefit to ESOs: Charging fees for services not only provides a sustainable income stream but also enables ESOs to expand their offerings, attract high-caliber staff, and ultimately support a more vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

ESO Example: *"For the RIEs, we are working with the UHURU Institute of Social Development, under which we are supporting cooperatives. For these, we charge USD 600 per RIE, which is paid by the UHURU institute. For the RIEs we are supporting directly, we charge USD 200 per enterprise, and we intend to increase charges as we get to be known in the market. Our services are bespoke based on the needs of our clients. We cluster our clients in cohorts and train them based on their needs. We also offer coaching and mentorships."* Goldstone Consulting, Uganda

"Participants currently pay a fee of less than USD 100, traditionally through refundable fees. We are considering shifting this to an actual cost." Anza, Tanzania.



Success Fees

Several ESOs levy nominal fees for their Investment Readiness and Business Development Services (BDS), earning commissions from connections between enterprises and organisations/financiers.

Benefit to ESOs: Fees from capital gains, grant connections, and successful financier introductions generate revenue for ESOs. This income stream allows them to operate sustainably, reinvest in resources, and offer valuable services to startups at reduced costs, fostering a thriving ecosystem.

This approach incentivizes ESOs to make high-quality connections for ventures, leading to successful funding rounds and exits that benefit both the RIEs and the ESOs.

ESO Example: *"We implement a fee on capital raised, tied to our comprehensive services. Our model includes extensive 1:1 consultancy and professional attachment services and particularly in financial domains. This fee ranges from 1-3% of the gross amount businesses raise from funders, ensuring a fair and value-driven partnership."* Anza, Tanzania.

"We charge for investment readiness and BDS throughout the process and then they pay us when they receive funding." Smart Regional Consultants Ltd (SRC) Kenya.

"During the program, enterprises contribute a monthly fee and post-program, a small percentage is charged based on the finances secured." Tradeline Consult, Ghana.



Equity Stakes

Exploring alternative revenue models, some entities opt for a collaboration strategy, providing services at a discounted fee while securing the potential for an equity stake.

Benefit to ESOs: ESOs are being innovative tying their provision of discounted services with equity positions. This boosts the ESOs financial sustainability, allowing them to support more startups. Additionally, an equity stake fosters a stronger alignment with the startup's success, incentivizing the ESO to provide top-notch support and connections.

ESO Example: *"Agri-Frontier adopts a unique approach. They levy a fee of 50% for their services while presenting the opportunity for an equity stake to be included in their growth strategy. They offer a mentorship package priced at USD 100, primarily aimed at enterprises generating an annual revenue of USD 150K. These are enterprises that can afford to pay for the services."* Agri Frontier East Africa Limited, Kenya.



Digital Marketplace

We have also seen ESOs running and others exploring the establishment of marketplaces and collecting monthly or commission fees. This involves selling the products of RIEs online, both locally and internationally, and creating investment opportunities for young agripreneurs with investment opportunities to address the need for more finance for innovative agribusiness ideas.

Benefit to ESOs: This model benefits both the ESO (through revenue streams) and RIEs (by expanding their reach and sales potential). The ESO can further attract investment for innovative agricultural ventures, fostering a vibrant ecosystem and addressing funding gaps for young agripreneurs.

ESO Example: *"We partnered up with young individuals who supported the development of the digital marketplace which is now up and running. This is accessible to all our paid members and we currently have over 80 members. We also have entrepreneurs in the community who have created a market where other women can join."* Community Women Enterprise Network, Uganda

Enterprise Level Outcomes

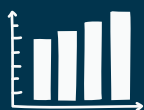
A key goal of this research was to identify what support is effective and what gaps exist for rural-impacting enterprises. To this end, in addition to assessing trends among support organisations, ESOs also self-reported enterprise-level data on 165 enterprises, including baseline data (before receiving ESOs services) and end-line data (after receiving nine months of support services). We tracked four key enterprise-level indicators (revenue growth, job creation, capital raised, and EBITDA⁴ growth).⁵



359 ESOs landscape



19 ESO Research Partners



165

Data collected on Rural Impacting Enterprises (RIEs)



USD ~39M

Total revenue generated by supported RIEs in 2023



~1770

Full-time employees across all supported rural impacting enterprises



USD ~65M

Total capital raised across all enterprises



33% increase in revenue



221 new jobs created



72% raised external financing

USD 69K

average capital raised post support

Additionally, we collected qualitative data on the support provided by the ESOs and the milestones achieved by these enterprises during the support period. In the following section, we will explore the data from the 165 enterprises, comparing the support they received with their enterprise-level indicators.

Below is an overview of the average figures of the 165 sample size of RIEs that received support:

	Average Revenue	Average Jobs	Access to Finance ⁶	EBITDA
2022	USD 191,265.10	9.45	USD 55,693.80	USD 60,744.91
2023	USD 254,188.08	10.79	USD 69,032.56	USD 92,732.80
Total avg. change between 2022 - 2023	USD 62,922.98	1.35	USD 13,338.75	USD 31,987.89
% change	33%	14%	31%	24%

Top Performers

Defining Top Performance in Impact

In this section, we analyzed trends among the top 30 rural impacting enterprises, examining their absolute and relative changes during the support period using four indicators to attribute the impact of support services. Additionally, we analyzed the entire dataset in the subsequent section.

We identified the top 30 enterprises based on absolute and relative changes for each indicator to account for the difference in market maturity and stage of enterprise supported by ESOs. Kenyan and Nigerian enterprises led in absolute terms, while Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania showed significant relative growth percentages.

Determining what makes an ESO a top performer is complex. All research partners had enterprises in the top 30 for at least one indicator. We approach this from two perspectives:

1. **Multiple Indicators:** We analyzed how many enterprises appeared in the top 30 across multiple indicators, assuming that more appearances indicate a more profound impact. We found that 38 enterprises (23% of the sample) experienced top-tier impact change in more than two indicators, with four ESOs accounting for 74% of these enterprises.
2. **Single Indicator:** This approach considers ESOs specializing in specific areas, recognizing strong performance in one indicator. We found 95 enterprises (57% of the sample) showed top-tier improvements in at least one indicator.

Top Performer Trends

Ultimately, we concluded that organisational excellence is demonstrated by consistently high performance across multiple indicators and organisations excelling in a single indicator (top 3 impact for that indicator). As demonstrated in the below tables, organisations excelling in multiple indicators do indeed perform higher than the average.

	Average Revenue	Average Jobs	Access to Finance ⁷	EBITDA
Total avg. change between 2022 – 2023 Full sample	USD 62,922.98	1.35	USD 13,338.75	USD 31,987.89
Average % change Full sample	33%	14%	31%	24%
Total average change between 2022-2023 Top Four ESOs (multiple indicators)	USD 218,901.06	1.9	USD 151,765.53	USD 100,911.40
Average % change Top Four ESOs (multiple indicators)	65%	19%	58%	142%

When considering indicators separately (wherein some of the high performers are only performing in this indicator) – the outsized impact is clear with all top performers in each indicator contributing to 70% of the absolute value of those indicators in the year of support, and significantly higher than average yoy increases – ranging from 32% for jobs to 141% EBITDA.



Top Job Impact

Three ESOs, supported
80 enterprises
Created 173 new jobs
78% of new jobs
32% y-o-y increase



Top Revenue Impact

Six ESOs, supported
100 enterprises
Generated USD ~33M
revenue
84% of 2023 revenue
64% y-o-y increase



Top EBITDA Impact

Five ESOs, supported
82 enterprises
Generated USD ~10M
EBITDA
74% of 2023 EBITDA
141% y-o-y increase



Top Capital Raised Impact⁸

Four ESOs
75 enterprises
Raised USD ~7.7M
78% of 2023 capital
raised
80% y-o-y increase

This research – although within the aforementioned data and sample limitations – ultimately seeks to help ecosystem actors – from ESO practitioners, to financiers, to donor partners to engage more meaningfully in supporting ecosystems for rural impacting enterprises. As such, we sought to understand what organisational attributes of these high-performing ESOs may have contributed to the outsized impact. Once again, there is no one-size-fits-all answer, there are however some interesting trends:



- The eight research partners whose enterprises most frequently appeared in the top 30 performers for key indicators outperformed their peers in the categories of team and governance, impact and collaboration, financial sustainability, and operations.



- We found a positive correlation between some of the highest-performing organisations and the practice of charging enterprises a fee. Five of the eight top-performing organisations attribute some of their revenue to enterprise fees. These fees range from approximately 8% to 84% of their total revenue.



- Within the top performers, the majority have developed a value proposition and unique competitive advantage to service rural-impacting enterprises. Examples include: explicit efforts to improve farmer income, improve supply chains, leverage large farmer networks, provide specialised and affordable agricultural advisory services, and set up operations in rural and marginalised counties.



- For six of the eight top performers, investment readiness was the most common primary business development service provided.




Analysis of Support Services Correlation to Impact

In order to understand which support services provided correlated to positive impact across the key indicators we coded the 165 rural impacting enterprises data based on the support they reported to have received during the support period of working with the ESO.

Codes Support Services	Category	Areas of Support
Business Development	The business development support category encompasses everything that would traditionally come under the capacity development and business development services.	Leadership skill development, pitch development, business process improvements, ideation and proof of concept, growth plan, process improvement, business planning, team management systems, governance, standard operating procedures, operations, scale strategies, risk management, adopting new practices (sector specific), talent acquisition, product development, strategy, and compliance.
Financing	The financing category covers support services primary aimed to improve the enterprises access to finance / investment readiness.	Access to financing and investment readiness support, accounts management, developing financial statements, financial modelling, financial advice, sourcing funders, asset financing, and working capital financing.
Marketing	The marketing category covers support services primarily aimed at improving marketing.	Branding, marketing, and positioning.
Market Access	The market access category encompasses activities aimed primarily at market penetration and customer acquisition.	Market linkages, access to wider market, reaching new customers, how to reach large addressable market, market research and value chain analysis, new market penetration, and expanded customer base.
Bespoke/Undefined	In instances where rural impacting enterprises did not specify the support they received.	

Revenue Growth


48.39% of RIEs experienced an increase in revenue, with an additional 4.52% remaining stable and 47.10% experiencing a decline. Kenyan and Nigerian enterprises led the way with revenue growth of 122% and 45%, respectively.




In the more nascent ecosystems, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania:

69% of supported enterprises had **revenue of less than USD 25K in 2022**

On average, they almost **doubled their revenue**.



Average in 2022
USD 4K



Growth in 2023
USD 7K



Comparatively, larger enterprises in Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania:

31% of supported enterprises with **revenue in excess of USD 25K**

representing a **47% decline in revenue**.

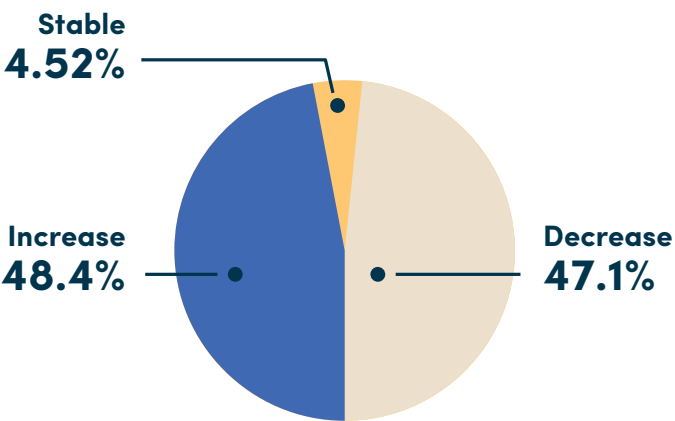


Average in 2022
USD 254K



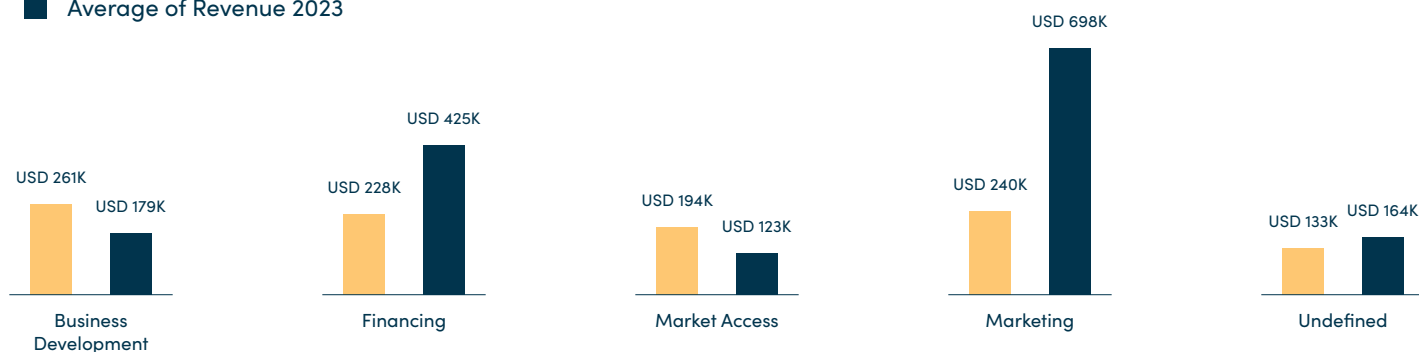
Decline in 2023
USD 134K

The majority of enterprises in this latter category followed traditional business models with strong growth profiles, such as cooperatives, manufacturing, and product development, suggesting a potential gap in enterprise support for diversifying enterprises and dynamic ventures. The comparison of support received and revenue growth reveals that enterprises that received marketing support and financing support experienced significant revenue increases, with impacts of 190% and 82%, respectively. This means that enterprises receiving marketing support nearly doubled their revenue growth compared to their peers, and they achieved 1.2 times more growth when provided with access to financing.



■ Average of Revenue 2022

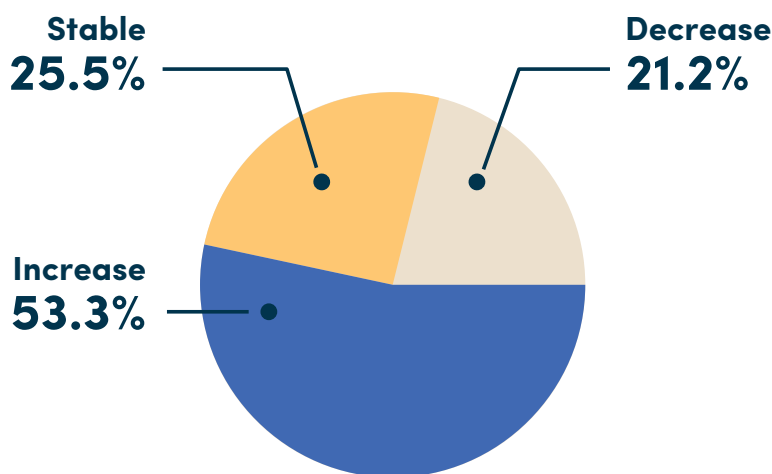
■ Average of Revenue 2023



Country/Program	Cases	Sum of Revenue 22	Sum of Revenue 23	Impact
Business Development	29	USD 6,518,775	USD 4,302,205	-34.00%
Financing	43	USD 9,580,798	USD 17,425,410	81.88%
Undefined	65	USD 8,362,727	USD 10,332,791	23.56%
Market Access	21	USD 4,075,874	USD 2,451,086	-39.86%
Marketing	7	USD 1,681,712	USD 4,887,661	190.64%
Grand Total	165	USD 30,219,886	USD 39,399,152	30.37%

Job Creation

Over 50% of RIEs experienced an increase in full-time employees, with an additional 25% remaining stable and 21% experienced a decline in number of jobs.



Once again we see that marketing support - activities to support promoting and selling services and products - has a substantial impact on employment.

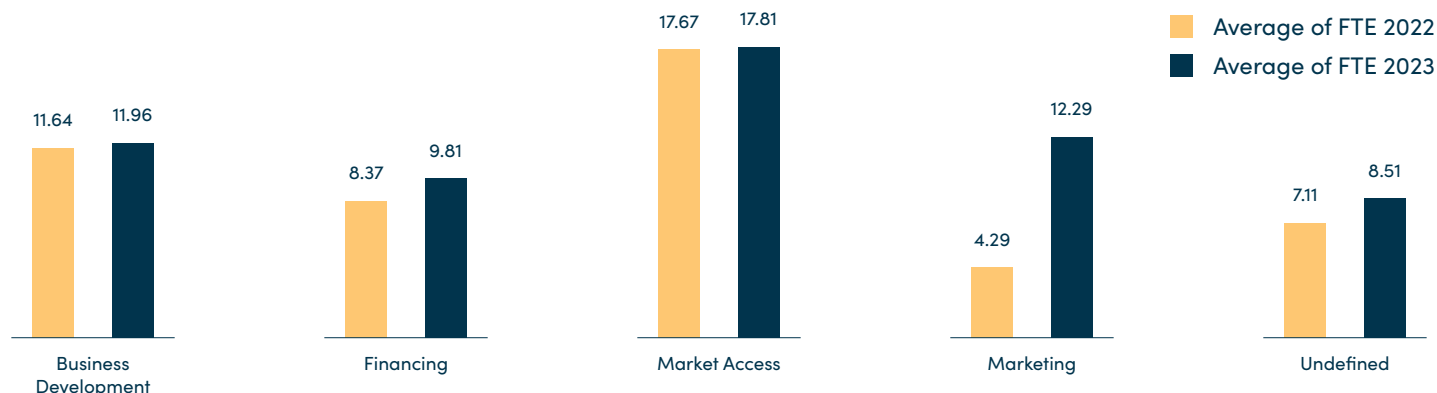
Marketing support saw the greatest impact on job creation with



56 additional jobs created in 2023.



An increase of **187%**.

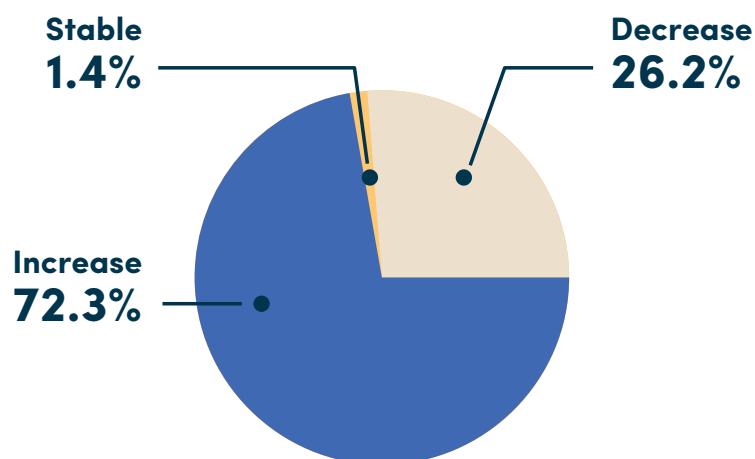


AoS	Cases	FTE 2022	FTE 2023	Impact
Business Development	29	326	335	2.76%
Financing	43	360	422	17.22%
Undefined	65	462	553	19.70%
Market Access	21	371	374	0.81%
Marketing	7	30	86	186.67%
Grand Total	165	1,549	1,770	14.27%

Access to Finance

ESOs are vital in connecting RIEs with the financial resources they need to streamline and expand operations, invest in new technologies, and improve productivity. Some of the organisations provide direct access to financing as part of their programs and others make access to finance providers a critical value proposition of their programs.

- RIEs who received ESOs support demonstrated improved access to finance, with **73% successfully raising some external financing, ranging from USD 405 - USD 5,9M**. However, 32% of enterprises that raised capital raised under USD 1K. **14% raised USD 100K plus**, which constituted 99% of the capital raised.
- Among those that raised capital, **72% increased the capital raised** compared to the previous year. **30%** raised capital, but **decreased** from the previous reporting year, and **1.42% maintained** the same amount of capital as the previous reporting period.
- The **average capital raised was USD 416K**, excluding the Nigerian Commodity Company, which received working capital financing of USD 50M the average drops to USD 69K.
- Regarding the specific services, the greatest correlation between support received and capital raised was seen within business development, marketing and access to financing.



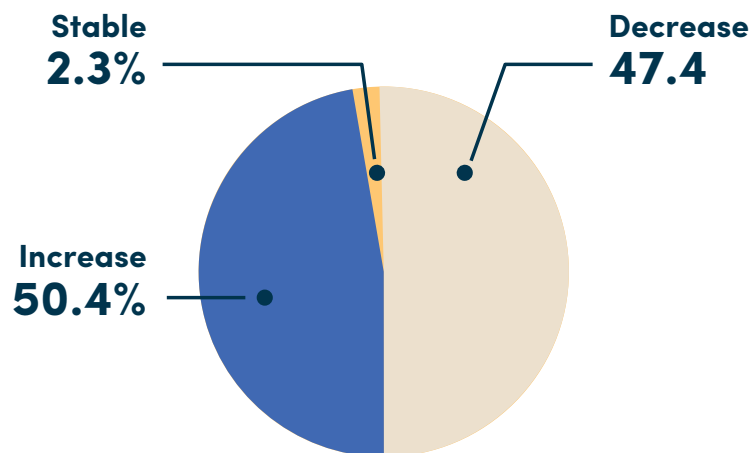


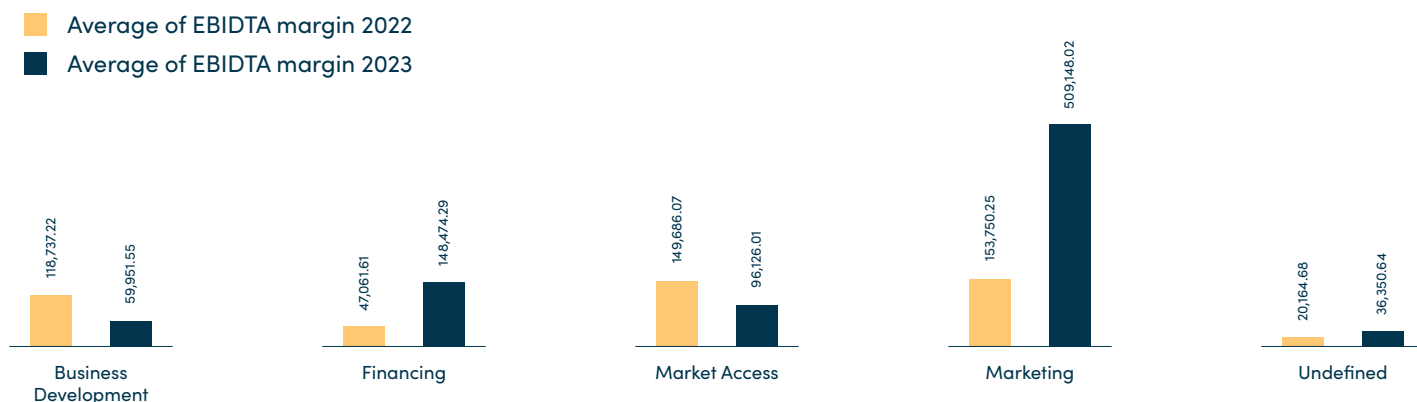
Country/Program	Cases	Sum of Capital Raised 2022	Sum of Capital Raised 2023	Impact
Business Development	29	USD 4,655,781	USD 54,947,332	1080.20%
Financing	43	USD 970,203	USD 1,769,859	82.42%
Undefined	65	USD 1,454,172	USD 1,475,815	1.49%
Market Access	21	USD 590,888	USD 229,650	-61.13%
Marketing	7	USD 515,946	USD 1,449,000	180.84%
Grand Total	165	USD 8,186,989	USD 59,871,656	631.30%

Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization (EBITDA)

The change in EBITDA during the research period is as shown below:

- Access to finance and marketing support again appear to be the stronger drivers of EBITDA performance. Indicating capital injection and improved marketing drive revenue, job creation, business efficiency, and profitability.





AoS	Cases	Sum of EBIDTA Margin 2022	Sum of EBIDTA Margin 2023	Impact
Business Development	29	USD 2,137,270	USD 1,199,031	-43.90%
Financing	43	USD 1,835,403	USD 5,790,497	215.49%
Undefined	65	USD 1,189,716	USD 2,362,792	98.60%
Market Access	21	USD 2,544,663	USD 1,826,394	-28.23%
Marketing	7	USD 615,001	USD 2,545,740	313.94%
Grand Total	165	USD 8,186,989	USD 13,724,455	64.92%

In summary, this dataset, while limited due to sample size and timeframes, demonstrates the significant positive impact of services provided by ESOs on RIEs. Despite these limitations, several insights have emerged and the gap has been identified for future research:



- Our analysis of 165 RIEs reveals overarching positive trends in revenue growth, job creation, access to finance, and EBITDA, underscoring the broad influence of ESOs support.



- Marketing and financing support showed the most substantial impact on revenue growth (190% and 88.18%, respectively) and job creation (186% and 17%, respectively). However, the effects of market access support were more complex and not immediately apparent within the nine-month timeframe of this dataset.



- 45% of ESOs offering access to financing led to 72.34% of RIEs increasing their financing post-program, highlighting the critical role of capital provision. Many ESOs are increasingly assuming the responsibility of financing RIEs due to their limited access to conventional financial providers, who often consider RIEs too early-stage and high-risk. This trend underscores the ongoing challenges RIEs face in securing finance.



- We observed a strong correlation between RIEs performance and well-developed entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in Nigeria and Kenya, where enterprises achieved notable revenue growths of 122% and 45%, respectively. This correlation suggests that a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem significantly enhances RIEs outcomes.



- Common themes within top-performing entrepreneur support organisations include organisational maturity in team and governance, impact and collaboration, financial sustainability, and operations. As well, some of the highest-performing ESOs attributing at least a portion of their revenue to enterprise fees.



- There was a high prevalence amongst top performers of prioritising investment readiness within their support services and developing unique value propositions and competitive advantages tailored to servicing rural-impacting enterprises: Explicit efforts to improve farmer income, enhanced supply chains, leveraging large engaged farmer networks, providing specialised affordable agricultural advisory services, and establishing their own operations in rural and marginalized communities.

Where an MSME impacts both rural and urban stakeholders, it qualifies as rural-impacting if such rural activities are integrated into the business model such that they will likely continue.



Research limitations and recommendations for future research include: Extended research period, the nine-month timeframe may not capture the long-term impacts of ESOs support, particularly complex support services like market access or long-term support models. The effects of market access support are more complex and not immediately apparent, indicating a need for some further investigation into long-term outcomes. Future research should also aim for a larger sample size and account for the additional administrative time of capturing data from rural impacting enterprises. There is a need to deep dive into the various segments within RIEs — stages and types of businesses — as well as explore more deeply the differences between mature and nascent ecosystems. Finally, we highly recommend a comparison between support services for RIEs and other enterprises, which was a limitation of this study.



Conclusion

Our analysis of the ESOs landscape reveals a dynamic ecosystem where ESOs provide essential support services to RIEs. However, it also underscores the critical need for a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the complexities at play. A thriving ESO ecosystem serving RIEs requires a nuanced understanding of the fundamental differences in needs and growth profiles within this segment of the market and across different geographies, while also appreciating the varying maturity levels and operational constraints of ESOs.

ESOs play a pivotal role in fostering the growth of RIEs, with the potential to deliver significant and transformative impact in rural ecosystems. To effectively scale this impact, funders and ecosystem actors must strategically support ESOs in delivering tailored services that address the specific needs of RIEs. Building on early indications from this research, tailored support services, enhanced access to purpose-suited finance, strong ecosystem development, and sustainable ESOs models are crucial. These elements will collectively contribute to substantial and sustainable improvements in rural areas, driving inclusive economic growth and resilience.

In conclusion, the success of the rural-impacting enterprise support ecosystem relies on the strategic involvement of ESOs and ecosystem stakeholders. By addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within this segment, funders and ecosystem actors can amplify the positive impact on rural communities, ensuring a more prosperous and equitable future.

Glossary

Defining Rural Impacting Enterprises (RIEs)

For the purpose of this report, Small Foundation and Village Capital co-defined RIEs as micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) that engage positively in commerce in rural areas, improving access to goods, services, and/or markets. They:



- Employ people in rural areas;



- Buy products from rural areas – predominantly agricultural products but also potentially crafts, ecotourism, nature-based solutions, etc – especially if they buy at higher or more predictable prices than the alternatives;



- Provide inputs for rural economic activities – for example, seeds, fertilizers, and technical solutions – to enhance productivity;



- Provide small-scale infrastructure for rural users – solar home solutions, bio-digesters, irrigation pumps, electric scooters, farm equipment, etc – to enhance productivity, access to markets, or quality of life;



- Enable improved availability of, or lower prices for, consumer staples – i.e., by making transport or logistics more efficient;



- Enable rural households to spread costs or risk;



- Protect the rural environment;



- Provide products or services that improve the health, education, skills, or networks of people in rural areas to improve long-term productivity, resilience, and quality of life.

Where an MSME impacts both rural and urban stakeholders, it qualifies as rural-impacting if such rural activities are integrated into the business model such that they will likely continue.

Defining Enterprise Stages

In the diverse landscape of Rural Impacting Enterprises (RIEs) in sub-Saharan Africa, understanding the stages and types of enterprises is crucial to understanding the nuance of what works and where there are gaps in the support ecosystem. Our definitions are informed by the research of leading organizations with considerable experience supporting ESOs and ventures across diverse ecosystems. ISF's analysis⁹ of the agri-SME finance sector, outlines the stages and types of enterprises as follows:

Enterprise Stages and Growth Profiles

- **Early-stage:** Limited to no revenue, unprofitable, with a high-risk profile due to unproven product/market fit. Not investment ready for traditional funding products; may access early-stage VC investment (i.e., pre-seed, seed).
- **Growth Stage:** Growing revenue but unprofitable yet due to investment in scaling business model. Elevated risk profile owing to rapid scale-up and may be investment ready for series A VC investment.
- **Mature Stage:** Growing profitability, aiming for high margins and/or volume play. A medium risk profile demonstrated model with the established customer base. Investment ready for multiple financial products and series B onward VC investment.

*Not to be confused with ESO maturity levels based on milestones within Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic Tool.

Growth Profile Segment

- **High-growth Ventures:** Highly innovative business models serving large addressable markets with a rapid growth trajectory, though the pace of growth is impacted by industry, market, and asset intensity. High-growth ventures are expected to scale beyond SME status.
- **Niche Ventures:** Business models creating innovative products and services that target niche markets or customer segments, such as high-end premium markets or, conversely, small customer bases at the bottom of the pyramid. Typically have steady growth over time.
- **Diversifying Enterprises:** Small family-run enterprises that have seen minimal growth but are run by an entrepreneur who wants to grow. Unlikely to see desired growth through existing enterprise, so looks to diversify into new business lines to expand growth potential.
- **Dynamic Ventures:** Enterprises in stable 'bread and butter' industries deploying established business models for producing goods and services with moderate growth paths over sustained periods of time.
- **Livelihood Sustaining Enterprises:** Small, family-run enterprises that are opportunity-driven and on the path to increased formalization. These enterprises operate to maintain an income for an individual family and have slow and steady growth as they incrementally prove their product or service through traditional models.
- **Static Enterprises:** Small, family enterprises with no ambition to grow beyond their current status. Looking to maintain current income level for family, but not to grow the business or to innovate. Typically, informal and primarily employ only family members.

Informed by Small Foundation and ISF Advisors' research¹⁰, we similarly found that ESOs provide different types of models and services while supporting RIEs. We highlight these below.

ESO Service Delivery Models

- **Individual-based:** Services provided to enterprises on an individual basis often tailored to an enterprise's needs, such as coaching/mentoring and 1-on-1 advisory.
- **Group-based:** Similar services provided to an enterprise within a group (e.g., cohorts, classrooms, webinars, in-person demonstrations).
- **Blended:** A combination of both individual and group-based models.
- **Network:** A networking group operating as an access point for enterprises to knowledge, social capital, markets, etc.
- **Platform:** A platform is a product that serves or enables other products or services to enterprises.

ESO Service Delivery Types

- **Access to Finance:** Equity, debt, and/or grant funding.
- **Business Development Services:** A wide array of business services, including both financial, strategic, and operational (i.e., business planning, operations, and governance development, investment readiness, team and succession planning, scale strategies, and business process improvements).
- **Access to Talent:** Staff recruitment and training, including leadership skills.
- **Networking:** Networking and mentoring/coaching.
- **Acceleration and Incubation:** Acceleration services in support of the growth of an enterprise, i.e., scale strategies and services focused towards the creation of an enterprise, i.e., business model support, ideation/proof of concept.
- **Market Linkages:** Any support/services towards an enterprise's ability to access a market to sell their goods and services, i.e., partnership brokerage.
- **Marketing:** The activity or business of promoting and selling products or services, including market research and advertising.

Types of Technical Assistance

- **Co-working Space:** An affordable, shared office space where entrepreneurs can work independently or collaboratively. Spaces may facilitate events or community gatherings.
- **MakerSpace/Fab Lab:** A physical space where entrepreneurs with shared interests, especially in computing or technology, can gather and share ideas and equipment.
- **Incubator:** A co-working space for early-stage companies that also offers classes and business services. Particularly effective at helping launch ideation-stage companies.
- **Accelerator:** A program that provides high-growth companies with access to mentorship, investors and other support that help them become stable, profitable businesses. Many accelerators also manage affiliate funds, which provide equity in exchange for support.
- **Business Advisory Firm:** A firm that provides specialised consulting services to growing businesses on their strategic or tactical challenges for a fee.

Small Foundation ESO Diagnostic



[Click here to start using the ESO Small Foundation diagnostic tool.](#)

Beginning with the first category Team & Governance, move the slider up to the first milestone “we have a strong founding team” - on the left you’ll see the validation criteria for this milestone “I’m at Team and Governance Level 1 if: we have a strong founding team with diversified skillsets. The team CVs and LinkedIn profiles show the founding team’s relevant skills and experience, including industry and functional expertise, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, finance or ICT” If you’ve achieved this milestone and can support it with validation criteria. Move the slider to the next milestone for this category “Our team has senior members with entrepreneurship experience and a deep understanding of our target entrepreneurs’ challenges”, the validation criteria for this milestone is again on the left hand side “I’m at Team & Governance Level 2 if: We have at least one member of our team or advisory board who has been a successful entrepreneur before. We have people on our team who have the lived experience of our target entrepreneur. We have at least one member of our senior team with a number of years of experience in the target sectors, working with entrepreneurs to solve their challenges” - if you’ve achieved this milestone - and can support with the validation criteria move the slider up again, and repeat the process until you reach a milestone you haven’t yet achieved.

When you reach 1 milestone you haven’t yet achieved, move the slider back down to the milestone you have achieved and then click. “Next Category”. Repeat this process until you’ve completed all the categories.

It’s very important to be honest. The validation criteria helps you assess whether you have truly reached a milestone. Higher isn’t necessarily better, it’s just further along and the organisations that are the most successful are those that are the most honest about their progress. Honest evaluation enables ESO leaders to identify priority areas within their organisation that need developed.

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FOUNDATION

SMALLFOUNDATION

1 Self Assessment

2 Questions

Team & Governance

Problem & Vision

Value Proposition

Services & Programs

Impact & Collaboration

Commercial viability

Operations

Scale

Your Level

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

Our team has senior members with entrepreneurship experience and...

✓ We have a strong founding team

First, we’d like to know more about how your team works.

I’m at *Team & Governance* Level 1 if:
We have a strong founding team with diversified skillsets.
The team CVs and LinkedIn profiles show the founding team’s relevant skills or experience, including industry and functional expertise, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, finance or ICT

more

VIRAL for Startups



[Click here to use Venture Investment Readiness Awareness Levels \(VIRAL\) for startups. Click join as entrepreneur.](#)

Beginning with the first category Team, move the slider up to the first milestone “we have 2+ co-founders with differentiated skill sets” - on the left you’ll see the validation criteria for this milestone “I’m at Team Level 1 if: Complete: An online lending company with an experienced credit analyst and a senior software developer. Incomplete: An online lending company with two credit analysts, one is more outgoing and will be good at sales, the other is better at strategic thinking.” If you’ve achieved this milestone and can support it with validation criteria. Move the slider to the next milestone for this category “Our team has personally experienced the problem”, the validation criteria for this milestone is again on the left hand side “I’m at Team Level 2 if: For a company developing a new irrigation system this could be: I was a farmer for 5 years and saw the need for a better irrigation system. I sold irrigation systems to farmers for 10 years and heard repeatedly that farmers wanted a better system.” - if you’ve achieved this milestone - and can support with the validation criteria move the slider up again, and repeat the process until you reach a milestone you haven’t yet achieved.

When you reach 1 milestone you haven’t yet achieved, move the slider back down to the milestone you have achieved and then click. “Next Category”. Repeat this process until you’ve completed all the categories.

It’s very important to be honest. The validation criteria helps you assess whether you have truly reached a milestone. Higher isn’t necessarily better, it’s just further along and the ventures that are the most successful are those that are the most honest about their progress. Honest evaluation enables founders to identify priority areas within their company that need developed.

abaca Home Support NEW Lists Milestone Planner T Test

This flow is available in Spanish and English. Please note that the rest of platform is in English only. [Switch to Spanish](#)

Team Problem & Vision Value Proposition Product Market Business Model Scale Investor Exit Your Level

9
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1

Our team has personally experienced the problem.

✓ We have 2+ co-founders with differentiated skills sets.


First, we'd like to know more about the team you are building

I'm at **Team** Level 1 if:


- Complete: An online lending company with an experienced credit analyst and a senior software developer.
- Incomplete: An online lending company with two credit analysts, one is more outgoing and will be good at sales, the other is better at strategic thinking.



Research Partners

Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Served	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
AGRI FRONTIER	Kenya	For-profit	An agri-investment and agri-business advisory firm specializing in helping create world-class farming and integrated agribusinesses across the value chain, focusing on frontier markets, particularly Africa since 2020	An agri-investment and agri-business advisory firm specializing in helping create world-class farming and integrated agribusinesses across the value chain, focusing on frontier markets, particularly Africa since 2020	Consultancy (1:1)	Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Recruitment and Placement, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages, Other	Undefined
	Tanzania	Hybrid	An accelerator, a network of co-working spaces, and a growth fund providing entrepreneurs with capital leases founded in 2011	High-growth ventures, Niche ventures, Dynamic ventures	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Recruitment, Networking, Other	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Recruitment and Placement, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages, Other	Financing, market access, business development and marketing



Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Serviced	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
	Nigeria	Nonprofit	A nonprofit organisation established to build and support sustainable social and economic growth in underserved communities by supporting small businesses by deploying expertise and financing to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and entrepreneurs through programs to promote inclusion and sustainable development while reducing poverty since 2021.	High-growth ventures, Dynamic ventures	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Networking, Platform	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	
	Zambia	Hybrid	Supports entrepreneurs and startups through the entrepreneurial journey, from idea generation to delivering new products to market through different programs, innovation consulting, and provision of co-working space established in 2011.	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training	Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Acceleration and Incubation	

Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Serviced	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
	Burundi	Nonprofit	The first incubator in Burundi. It primarily focuses on building entrepreneurship skills among youth and a systems-level hypothesis to build an agriculture value chain that impacts SMEs. Est. 2010	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Dynamic ventures, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Recruitment, Networking	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Recruitment and Placement, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Business planning, investment readiness, ideation/ proof of concept, Scale strategies
	Niger		The first business incubator in Niger and one of the largest in West Africa, founded in 2014.	Diversifying enterprises, Static enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Recruitment, Networking	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Recruitment and Placement, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	
	Uganda	Hybrid	A network of women entrepreneurs that aims to reinforce the capacity of their members to become more productive, gain a larger market share, and grow their businesses that has been operating since 2012.	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Networking, Platform	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Financing, Market Access, Business Development

Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Serviced	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
	Mali	Nonprofit	The first incubator and support structure for innovative entrepreneurship in Mali. Since 2015, they have supported Malians in entrepreneurship through acceleration, mentorship, and a co-working space	High-growth ventures, Niche ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Networking, Platform, Other	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Recruitment and Placement, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Finance, Business Development Services, Networking, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages
	Nigeria	Hybrid	Harness climate-smart agriculture and leverage technology to increase the production of staple food crops in Nigeria since 2012.	Diversifying enterprises, Dynamic ventures, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Networking, Platform, Other	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Undefined
	Uganda	For-profit	A multi-sectoral consulting and training firm based in Kampala, Uganda. It has provided services to clients in the NGO, impact investment, and private sectors since 2012.	High-growth ventures, Niche ventures, Dynamic ventures, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Platform, Other	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Other	Business Development, Market Access, Undefined.

Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Serviced	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
	Uganda	Nonprofit	Works with communities to accelerate the power and potential of women, girls, and youth as active leaders and social entrepreneurs who create sustainable solutions within their communities since 2013	Diversifying enterprises	Cohort Training	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Undefined
Innovation SL Creating the Future Today	Sierra Leone	For-profit	Established in 2017 and runs the Freetown Pitch Night, Innovations Axis Ltd (an incubator/ accelerator and co-working space), and is the Global Entrepreneurship Network affiliate in Sierra Leone	High-growth ventures, Niche ventures	Cohort Training, Networking, Platform	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Financing, Business Development, Market Access, Undefined.
	Kenya	Hybrid	An Agribusiness Consultancy Company established in 2016 to provide advisory services to the agricultural sector in Africa	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Niche ventures, Static enterprises Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Networking, Platform	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching	Financing, Business Development	

Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Serviced	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
	Nigeria	For-profit	Offers services in financial advisory, capital raising, and corporate training. It started operations in 2012 in Lekki, Lagos State, Nigeria	High-growth ventures	Consultancy (1:1), Other	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Financing, Business Development
	Kenya	For-profit	Founded in 2012 is a private sector company working with local and international organisations affiliated with SMEs	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Niche ventures, Dynamic ventures, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Networking, Other	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	Business Development, Financing, Marketing.
	Ghana	Hybrid	Tradeline Consult runs Finance Factory (FIFACT), a flagship program designed to ensure micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in different sectors have access to accounting and development services at their own convenience. Founded in 2020	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Niche ventures, Dynamic ventures, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Networking	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Market Linkages	Market Access, Financing

Organisation	Geography	Structure	Description	Enterprise Segments Serviced	Delivery Models	Products Provided	Support Provided to Rural Impacting Enterprises in this study
Pepea	Kenya		A regional consulting firm founded in 2016 that offers advisory and organisational development services to help businesses and organisations solve their most pressing challenges	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Niche ventures, Static enterprises, Dynamic enterprises, Livelihood sustaining enterprises	Cohort Training, Networking, Platform	Finance (grant, equity, debt), Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	
	Kenya	Hybrid	Founded in 2004, WYLDE is a strategy and entrepreneurship firm that equips and empowers entrepreneurs and their support institutions to succeed	High-growth ventures, Niche ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Livelihood sustaining enterprises, Static enterprises	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1), Other	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	
	Senegal	Nonprofit	The first Agritech hub in West Africa. Yeesal Agri Hub was created by a group of young experts in agriculture with different profiles and skills since 2016	High-growth ventures, Diversifying enterprises, Niche ventures, Dynamic ventures	Cohort Training, Consultancy (1:1)	Individual Skills Training, Business Skills Training, Mentoring and Coaching, Advisory, Acceleration and Incubation, Market Linkages	

Endnotes

- 1 [Enterprise Support Organizations a Lever of Sustainable Agribusiness Ecosystems in Africa.](#)
- 2 [Collaborative for Frontier Finance Segmentation framework.](#)
- 3 [How to Fulfill the Potential of Business Development Services using SCALE.](#)
- 4 Note: Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) is a measure of core corporate profitability. EBITDA is calculated by adding interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization expenses to net income.
- 5 It's important to note that this timeframe may not be sufficient to capture the full impact of the interventions. Additionally, the data relies on self-reported information from the ESOs.
- 6 Removed outlier \$50M working capital raised for commodity trading company.
- 7 Removed outlier \$50M working capital raised for commodity trading company.
- 8 Removed outlier \$50M working capital raised for commodity trading company.
- 9 [A Dynamic Approach to Understanding Demand in Agri-SME Finance 2022.](#)
- 10 [Effectiveness & Efficiency of Business Development Services \(BDS\) for Agri-SMEs March 2023.](#)

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