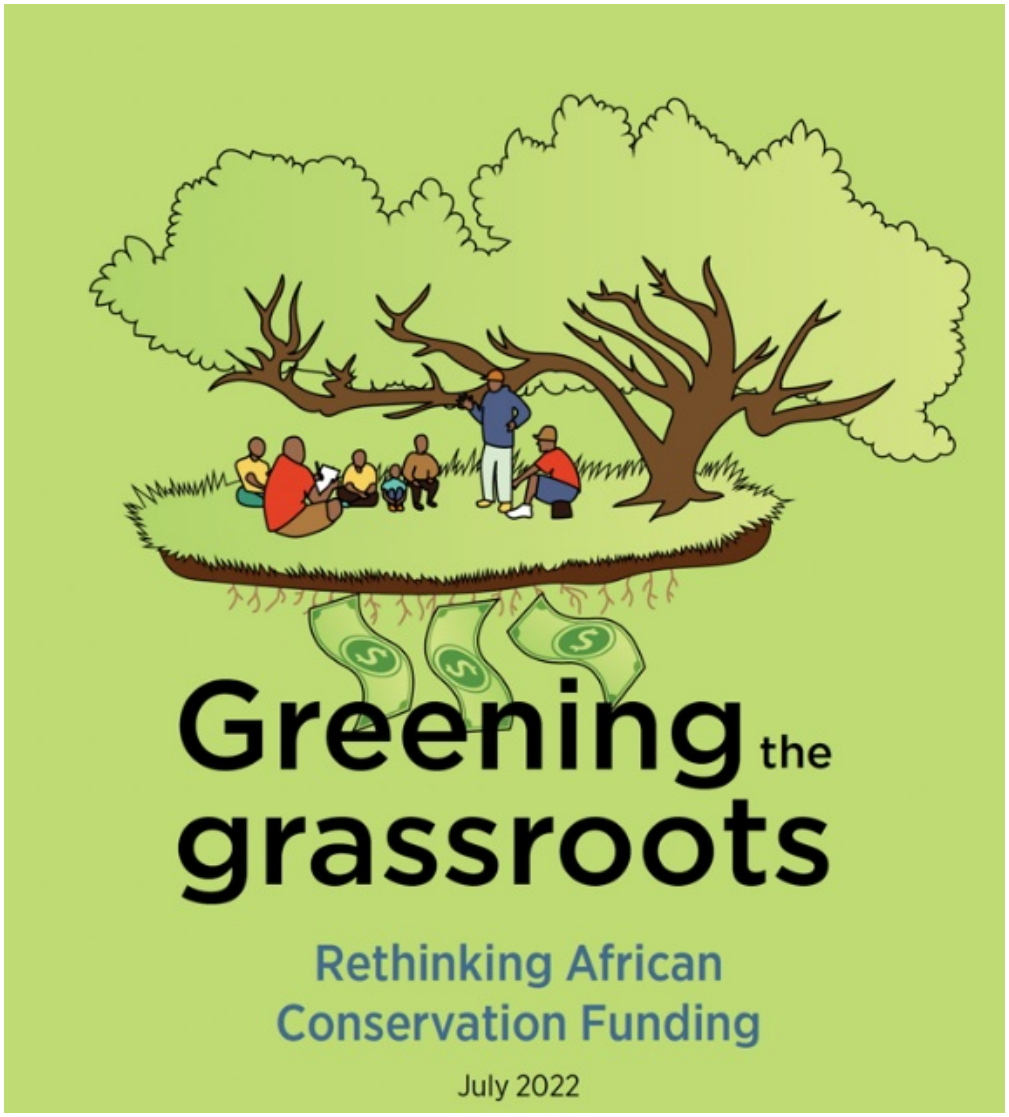
Fred Nelson, CEO of Maliasili that co-authored the study

KIGALI: Local conservation organizations in Africa keep struggling to increase their impact because of inbuilt barriers and challenges in how they are funded, according to new study released Thursday

In a report released on the sidelines of the first Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) currently taking place in Kigali, Rwanda,

Maliasili and Synchronicity Earth, two charity international organizations engaged in accelerating community-based conservation through local organizations observed that complex donor rules and reporting needs shut out smaller organizations in Africa
Making finance simpler and more just will boost conservation impact Indigenous Peoples and local community groups who get get less than 1% climate funds, the report said.



The new study show that global conservation finance is set up, with complex requirements

The new findings show that smaller, African-led groups working directly with local communities are increasingly recognized as key to securing indigenous and community land rights, improving rural livelihoods, conserving nature, and addressing climate change.

Yet they are hamstrung by the way global conservation finance is set up, with complex requirements, climate finance experts stress the need to focus on short-term projects not long-term running costs, and a preference to fund a few larger intermediary international organizations over many smaller ones.

It said that globally Indigenous Peoples and local community organizations receive less than 1% of all climate funding. African entities receive only 5% to 10% of private philanthropic funding invested in all of Africa.

Need to improve funding practices

Commenting on the new report, Fred Nelson, CEO of Maliasili, said: “We cannot hope to address conservation and environmental challenges in Africa today if we can’t get the right kind of investment to the most talented and effective organizations in the field.”
“Conservationists need to come together to improve funding practices, partnerships between funders, international organizations and local groups, and develop more effective and efficient funding mechanisms,” he said.

The new 40-page study, Greening the Grassroots: Rethinking African Conservation Funding, features interviews with close to 50 African local and grassroots conservation, climate, and environment organizations, and their funders.

Whereas African organizations said their partnerships with larger international organizations working in the same space were often strained, and inequitable in terms of the distributions of resources, funders and donors acknowledged on their part that there was a need to improve how they support grassroots groups and identified a number of barriers they face to making that happen.

For example, the study suggests a series of approaches to overcome the barriers and challenges African grassroots conservation organizations face in securing appropriate funding.

These include such as improving funding policies and practices and providing more core or unrestricted support, and longer-term finance.

In addition, make funding processes easier and more accessible, including simplifying applications and reporting requirements, it said
In the meanwhile, the study also pointed out that some African organizations have raised racial bias as a factor in funding, describing a perception that white conservation leaders in Africa have preferential access to funding in a way that limits many African organizations.

Building relationship and trust

Talking about his experience, Alda Salomão, Senior Legal Advisor at Centro Terra Viva in Mozambique, told the report authors that donors generally impose strict limitations on payments for administration costs, including personnel payments but over 70% of our work involves professional and intellectual skills.

“Therefore, if you are not paying for administration costs, you are cutting off the legs and hands that you need to implement the work,”Alda said.

Speaking in the same vein, Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, founder and CEO of Conservation Through Public Health in Uganda, said: “Funders must listen to their potential grantees and understand their needs and priorities. Grants that are top-down are not sustainable and impactful.”

For their part, funders and donors agreed there was a need to improve how they support grassroots groups and identified a number of barriers they face to making that happen.

These included a lack of capacity to collect quality data for grant reporting requirements and the difficulties finding and building relationships with many new organizations, it said.

Roshan Paul, the report’s lead author, said: “Having led a local organization myself, I’ve personally encountered the challenges that many African CSOs face with regard to accessing funding. Funders have heard the clarion call to provide more funding to African-led organizations. I hope this report helps to unlock new ways to do so.”

Climate experts stress the need to increase direct funding of African grassroots groups rather than giving money to large ‘middlemen’ international NGOs who then pass it on to smaller organizations.

Build better relationships between donors and grassroots organizations to increase trust and so each better understands the other’s needs, and accepts more risk, the report said. (END)