

HIDDEN CRISIS

Burnout-Related Experiences Among Development Practitioners Working In
Nigeria

An Exploratory Research Report



by

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Understanding the working conditions, organisational practices and support needs that shape practitioners' experiences of development work.

About This Report

Hidden Crisis: Burnout-Related Experiences Among Development Practitioners Working in Nigeria presents findings from an exploratory study of self-reported experiences, working conditions, organisational practices and coping strategies among 62 development practitioners working in Nigeria.

The report is intended to inform discussion and practical action among development organisations, practitioners and funders. It does not provide a nationally representative estimate of burnout among development practitioners.

Important Note on Interpretation

The study is cross-sectional, self-reported and exploratory. Participants were recruited primarily through the researcher's WhatsApp contacts and development-sector groups. The findings describe the experiences reported by the 62 respondents included in the Nigeria-focused analysis; they should not be generalised to all development practitioners in Nigeria.

The survey was not a validated clinical burnout diagnostic instrument and did not measure all dimensions required for a complete burnout assessment. The findings are therefore presented as burnout-related experiences and indicators, not as a clinical diagnosis or a national prevalence estimate. The study does not establish cause and effect.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Development organisations depend on practitioners who can respond to community needs, manage complex programmes and deliver results under pressure. Yet the working conditions that enable practitioners to perform this work sustainably deserve greater attention. When workloads, limited resources and emotional demands are not matched by adequate support, both staff well-being and organisational sustainability become important concerns.

This exploratory study examines self-reported burnout-related experiences, working conditions, organisational practices, coping strategies and support needs among 62 development practitioners working in Nigeria. The sample comprises 45 women (73%) and 17 men (27%). Three non-Nigerian submissions were excluded from the Nigeria-focused analysis.

The findings provide a snapshot of the experiences of these respondents. The sample is not nationally representative, the survey is not a validated clinical burnout diagnostic instrument, and the results do not establish cause-and-effect relationships. The report therefore examines burnout-related experiences and individual indicators rather than estimating the prevalence of clinical burnout.

Key Findings

- **Emotional exhaustion:** Fifty-four of the 62 respondents (87%) reported feeling emotionally drained after work sometimes, often or always. Of these, 21 (34% of all respondents) reported feeling this way often or always.
- **Staff retention concerns:** Thirty respondents (48%) had considered leaving their roles because of work-related stress or burnout. This raises questions about the sustainability of working conditions, although it does not establish that respondents subsequently left their jobs.
- **Workload pressures:** Twenty-four respondents (39%) described their workload as either not manageable or only sometimes manageable. Although 49 respondents (79%) reported having clear job descriptions, role clarity does not necessarily mean that workloads, deadlines and competing responsibilities are realistic.
- **Work-life balance:** Forty-eight respondents (77%) rated their organisations' work-life balance practices as either somewhat effective or not effective. This suggests a gap between the presence of workplace practices and respondents' perceptions of how well those practices support them.
- **Reported contributors:** Among the 61 respondents who answered the question about contributors to burnout-related experiences, the most frequently selected factors were heavy workload (37/61, 61%), lack of resources (32/61, 52%), emotional demands (29/61, 48%) and inadequate compensation (28/61, 46%). Respondents could select more than one factor; these results reflect their perceptions and do not independently establish causation.

Commitment and pressure also featured in respondents' accounts of development work. Forty-five of 61 respondents (74%) selected passion for the cause as a motivation for continuing in the sector, while 38

(62%) selected responsibility to the community and 27 (44%) selected fear of disappointing colleagues or leadership. These responses reflect different motivations and pressures and should not be treated as a single measure.

Interpretation and Implications

Taken together, the findings point to a need to examine staff well-being as both a practitioner concern and an organisational responsibility. Commitment to a cause is an important feature of development work, but commitment alone cannot substitute for adequate staffing, realistic workloads, sufficient resources, supportive leadership and opportunities for rest and recovery.

The findings also highlight the distinction between having a workplace policy or practice and ensuring that staff experience it as accessible and effective. Organisational responses should therefore look beyond whether policies exist to consider how they are communicated, implemented and experienced in everyday work.

The study does not establish which interventions will be most effective. However, the reported experiences and respondents' suggestions provide a practical basis for organisational reflection, targeted improvements and further research.

Priorities for Action

- **Organisational leaders and boards:** Review workloads, staffing levels, deadlines and role expectations. Create regular opportunities for staff to raise concerns and treat well-being as part of organisational management rather than solely an individual responsibility.
- **Managers and HR personnel:** Strengthen supervision, communication, role clarity and access to support. Review whether leave, flexible working arrangements and other well-being practices are known, accessible and effective in practice.
- **Funders and development partners:** Consider how funding arrangements, delivery expectations, reporting requirements and project timelines affect organisations' capacity to support staff. Encourage realistic planning and adequate provision for the people required to deliver funded programmes.
- **Practitioners:** Use available support, communicate workload concerns where it is safe to do so, and seek appropriate help when work-related stress becomes difficult to manage. Individual coping strategies should complement—not replace—organisational action.
- **Researchers and sector networks:** Build a stronger evidence base through larger and more diverse samples, clearer measurement approaches and further investigation of how working conditions and organisational practices relate to staff well-being and retention.

Conclusion

This study does not claim to represent every development practitioner working in Nigeria. It documents the self-reported experiences of 62 participants and identifies issues that warrant attention: emotional exhaustion, difficult workloads, concerns about leaving, perceived weaknesses in work-life balance practices and resource pressures.

The findings provide a starting point for discussion and practical action, as well as a case for further research into the working conditions of people who deliver development programmes.

Central message: Sustainable development work depends on sustainable working conditions.

Key terms and concepts

- **Burnout:** The World Health Organization describes burnout in International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by exhaustion, increased mental distance from or cynicism about one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. Burnout is not classified as a medical condition in ICD-11.
- **Burnout-related experiences:** In this report, this term refers to respondents' self-reported experiences associated with work-related strain, including emotional exhaustion, detachment, workload difficulties and perceived effects on work and personal life. It is used because the survey did not provide a complete validated measure for diagnosing or estimating the prevalence of burnout.
- **Emotional exhaustion:** A reported feeling of being emotionally drained after work. This report examines how frequently respondents experienced this feeling.
- **Exploratory study:** A study designed to examine an issue and identify patterns, experiences or questions for further investigation. This study provides an initial account of burnout-related experiences among the 62 respondents; it is not designed to estimate national prevalence or establish cause and effect.
- **Organisational support:** The policies, practices and working arrangements through which an organisation supports staff wellbeing. Examples include flexible working arrangements, clear communication, supportive leadership, access to mental-health resources and opportunities for rest.
- **Work-life balance:** The extent to which work demands and arrangements allow individuals to meet responsibilities and maintain wellbeing outside work. In this study, findings about work-life balance reflect respondents' ratings of their organisations' practices.
- **Self-care:** Activities and practices individuals use to support their physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing, including rest, exercise, taking time off and seeking support. Individual self-care should complement, rather than replace, organisational responsibility for reasonable working conditions.
- **Development practitioners:** For this study, people working in Nigeria's development sector, including those involved in programme delivery, management, advocacy, community engagement and related organisational functions.
- **Organisational responsibility:** The responsibility of organisations to consider how workload, staffing, leadership, working arrangements, available resources and staff support affect employees' working conditions and wellbeing. In this report, it emphasises that individual coping practices should complement, rather than replace, appropriate organisational action.
- **Work-related stress:** Pressure or strain experienced in connection with work demands, responsibilities and working conditions. In this report, it refers to respondents' reported work

pressures and should not be treated as a clinical diagnosis or proof that any single factor caused burnout-related experiences.

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Introduction and methodology

This exploratory, cross-sectional study examines self-reported burnout-related experiences, working conditions, coping practices and organisational support among development practitioners working in Nigeria. The primary analysis uses the Nigeria-only dataset, comprising 62 respondents after three submissions from outside Nigeria were excluded. The sample includes 45 women (73%) and 17 men (27%).

Participants were recruited primarily through the researcher's WhatsApp contacts and development-sector groups. This network-based recruitment approach provided access to practitioners across different organisational settings but may have favoured people who were connected to these networks, had access to the survey and were willing and able to participate. The sample is therefore not nationally representative, and the findings should not be generalised to all development practitioners in Nigeria.

Data collection took place between 16 January and 14 February 2025. During this period, the survey gathered self-reported information from development practitioners working in Nigeria about their work-related experiences, working conditions, organisational practices, coping strategies and support needs.

The analysis is primarily descriptive, using response frequencies and percentages to identify patterns in participants' reported experiences. Percentages are rounded to whole numbers, and counts and denominators are reported alongside percentages. Where responses are missing, the valid number of responses to the relevant question is used. For multiple-response questions, participants could select more than one option, so percentages may exceed 100%. Gender comparisons are descriptive and should be interpreted cautiously, particularly given the unequal numbers of women and men in the sample.

Quotations included in this report are presented without respondents' names or direct personal identifiers. They are used to illustrate participants' reported experiences and perspectives, while protecting their privacy.

The questionnaire captures individual experiences associated with work-related stress and burnout, including emotional exhaustion and detachment. However, the dataset does not provide a complete validated measure of burnout. The findings are therefore presented as item-level indicators of burnout-related experiences rather than a clinical diagnosis, validated burnout score or estimate of burnout prevalence. The cross-sectional, self-reported design also means that the study cannot establish cause-and-effect relationships.

The findings offer exploratory insights into the experiences of the participating practitioners. They are intended to inform reflection, organisational learning and future research on staff well-being and sustainable working conditions in Nigeria's development sector.

Characteristic	Count	% of 62
Women	45	73%
Men	17	27%
Senior leadership incl. Finance Manager	36	58%
Mid-level management	16	26%
Administrative/support staff	7	11%
Field worker/project officer	3	5%

Context: Working in Nigeria's development and civil society sector

Development work in Nigeria takes place across a diverse ecosystem: community-based organisations, local and national NGOs, humanitarian and service-delivery organisations, advocacy groups, professional civil society networks and international organisations. Their size, funding models, locations and working practices vary considerably. It is therefore important not to treat the sector as one uniform workplace. Nevertheless, recent assessments of Nigerian civil society point to recurring structural pressures, including difficult access to sustained funding, competition for grants, compliance demands and gaps in organisational systems. The Nigeria Country Focus Report¹ describes funding opportunities as highly competitive and often difficult for grassroots organisations to access, while noting that project-based and restricted funding can limit autonomy and long-term planning.

These conditions matter for staff wellbeing because the work to be delivered may be more stable or ambitious than the resources available to deliver it. In smaller or resource-constrained organisations, the same staff member may have to manage activities, write reports, support fundraising, coordinate partners, communicate results and respond to urgent field needs. This is a plausible sector-specific mechanism, not a finding that applies to every NGO; the present survey can identify reported workload and resource pressures but cannot establish how common each organisational arrangement is across Nigeria.

A second contextual issue is how people enter and learn development work. Commitment to a cause, such as gender equality, peacebuilding, disability inclusion, humanitarian response or community development can motivate people to join and remain in the sector. However, commitment is not the same as professional preparation. Some practitioners may acquire specialist and management skills through practical assignments, peer learning, mentoring, donor-funded training and learning by doing, rather than through a structured professional pathway. Nigerian civil society capacity-development initiatives explicitly use coaching, mentoring and learning-by-doing to strengthen areas such as fundraising,

¹ Hivos / EU SEE. (2025). Nigeria country focus report. <https://eusee.hivos.org/document/nigeria-country-focus-report/>

programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and financial management.²³ This supports the relevance of on-the-job learning, although it does not establish that most practitioners enter the sector without formal training.

The combination of a strong mission commitment, varied routes into the profession, uneven access to structured development, and resource constraints creates an important question for the present study: when practitioners care deeply about the work but have to learn multiple roles while meeting demanding delivery expectations, what support do they receive to make that work sustainable? The survey does not directly measure motivation for entering the sector or prior professional training, so this context is used to frame the discussion and identify a gap for future research, not to explain respondents' experiences by assumption.

Comparative nonprofit research provides a useful, carefully bounded perspective. A qualitative study of 25 paid nonprofit employees in Belgium and South Africa, identified meaningful work, fulfilment in tasks and a caring work environment as relevant to employee engagement and retention.⁴ This supports considering mission commitment alongside the quality of the workplace; it does not establish why all Nigerian development practitioners enter the sector or show that commitment causes burnout-related experiences.

For this report, evidence about career entry and retention is included only to contextualise respondents' reported commitment and work-related strain. The survey did not ask why respondents originally entered development work and did not track actual job exits. We therefore do not infer career-entry motivations or reasons for leaving from the commitment items.

The wider civil society employment context also deserves attention. Research on labour protection in civil society workspaces across Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal highlights concerns such as employment insecurity, short-term contracts and limited social protection.⁵ These issues may shape staff retention and wellbeing, but they should be presented as sector-level concerns from adjacent evidence, not as conditions directly measured for every respondent in this survey.

How this context informs the present study

This context helps locate the survey within the realities of development work without romanticising passion or portraying all NGOs as under-resourced. Mission commitment can be a source of meaning and resilience, but it should not be treated as an unlimited resource that compensates for inadequate staffing, unclear roles, weak supervision or insufficient recovery time. Organisations and funders have a role in making sure that the skills, systems and resources required for good work are developed alongside the expectations placed on practitioners.

² Development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC). (n.d.). NGO capacity building. <https://drpcngr.org/ngo-capacity-building/>

³ PIND Foundation. (2018). Annual report 2018: Organisational and service delivery capacity development of CSOs and BMOs. <https://2018report.pindfoundation.org/content/>

⁴ Renard, M., & Snelgar, R. J. (2016). The engagement and retention of non-profit employees in Belgium and South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), a795. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v14i1.795>

⁵ South Saharan Social Development Organization. (n.d.). Labour protection in civil society workspaces: A working report for the West Africa region. <https://southsaharan.org/research/labour/>

Nigerian Social Expectations, Work Culture and Opportunities for Recovery

The working conditions of development practitioners cannot be understood entirely through formal job descriptions, organisational policies or contracted working hours. Work takes place within wider social and economic circumstances that influence how people allocate their time, meet family responsibilities, respond to authority and seek support when they are struggling. These circumstances vary by gender, age, household composition, income, location, disability, religion, organisational setting and individual experience. It would therefore be misleading to speak of a single Nigerian culture or a uniform Nigerian workplace.

One relevant consideration is the relationship between paid work and unpaid domestic and care responsibilities. The National Bureau of Statistics' *Nigeria Time Use Survey 2024*⁶ provides national evidence of differences in how women and men allocate time to unpaid domestic and care work. The survey report indicates that women in the covered population spent a greater proportion of their day on these activities than men. This wider evidence is relevant because time spent on paid employment and unpaid care can compete for the hours available for rest, personal activities and recovery. It does not establish the domestic circumstances of the respondents in the present study, nor does it demonstrate that unpaid care caused their reported work-related experiences. Nevertheless, it highlights why discussions of staff wellbeing and work-life balance should consider responsibilities beyond the workplace.

Economic pressures may also influence the choices available to practitioners. Where employment income is essential to meeting household needs, employees may feel constrained in their ability to decline additional work, take leave, raise concerns about unrealistic deadlines or leave an unsustainable role. The present survey provides a relevant signal: 47% of respondents identified financial pressure or fear of losing income as a barrier to proactive self-care. This finding describes the perceptions of respondents who selected that option. It does not establish that financial pressure affected every respondent or that it is unique to Nigeria.

Workplace expectations may interact with these wider pressures. In organisations where staff are expected to demonstrate commitment through constant availability, accept repeated urgent assignments or avoid questioning senior colleagues, the practical ability to set boundaries may be limited. Conversely, respectful leadership, supportive colleagues, fair workload allocation and permission to raise concerns may help staff seek assistance before difficulties become more serious. These are possible mechanisms to examine, rather than characteristics that should be assumed to apply to all Nigerian development organisations.

The survey provides a specific reason to examine the issue of judgement and disclosure: 50% of respondents identified fear of being perceived as weak or uncommitted as a barrier to proactive prevention. In mission-driven organisations, this concern may be particularly important when dedication is highly valued and staff feel personally responsible for communities or causes. However, the finding does not identify the cultural or organisational origins of this fear. It should therefore be interpreted as evidence of a reported barrier, not as proof of a national cultural trait.

⁶ National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria Time Use Survey 2024. <https://microdata.nigerianstat.gov.ng/index.php/catalog/178/related-materials>

These considerations also point to the need to recognise the protective role that social relationships can play. Trusted colleagues, supportive supervisors, family members, friends and community networks may provide emotional and practical support. Such support can be valuable, but it should not be treated as a substitute for reasonable working conditions or professional support where needed. Informal support may also be less accessible to some individuals than others.

For this study, Nigerian social and workplace context is therefore treated as a set of relevant conditions and questions, rather than a single explanation for burnout-related experiences. The survey can document the work-related pressures and barriers reported by its participants. It cannot determine how much those experiences were shaped by social expectations, gender roles, hierarchy, economic insecurity or other cultural and institutional influences. Further research should explore these relationships directly, including how they vary between organisations and groups of practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMING

Burnout is best understood as a work-related phenomenon rather than a label for every experience of stress. The World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases description identifies three dimensions: energy depletion or exhaustion; mental distance, negativism or cynicism about work; and reduced professional efficacy.⁷ The present survey does not record a complete three-dimensional validated measure, so its findings are reported as burnout-related experiences and individual indicators, not as a prevalence estimate of burnout.

What Burnout Looks Like in Practice

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes burnout as an occupational phenomenon associated with chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Its three dimensions are exhaustion, increased mental distance from work or work-related cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy.⁸ Burnout is specifically framed in relation to the occupational context; it should not be used as a general label for every experience of stress or difficulty in life. The WHO does not classify burnout as a medical condition in ICD-11.

These dimensions can be understood more clearly by considering how they may appear in everyday working life.

Exhaustion: A practitioner may feel emotionally or physically drained after work, struggle to recover between working days, or find that routine tasks require increasing effort. In this study, emotional exhaustion was examined through respondents' reports of how frequently they felt emotionally drained after work.

⁷ World Health Organization. (2019, May 28). Burn-out an occupational phenomenon: International Classification of Diseases. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon>

⁸ WHO, *Burn-out an occupational phenomenon*. <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon>

Mental distance or cynicism: A practitioner may become increasingly detached from their work, feel indifferent about activities that previously mattered to them, or approach colleagues, partners or programme participants with growing frustration. Detachment can be difficult to recognise in a mission-driven environment, where people may feel expected to remain enthusiastic and committed.

Reduced professional efficacy: A practitioner may feel less effective, less confident in their work or less able to achieve what is expected of them. Difficulties concentrating, making decisions or completing tasks may also be reported in periods of significant work-related strain, although such difficulties can have multiple causes and do not, by themselves, establish burnout.

These dimensions are related but should not be treated as interchangeable. A person may report exhaustion without describing strong detachment from work, while another may feel increasingly disconnected from their role. A person's reported difficulty with concentration or decision-making is also not, on its own, evidence of reduced professional efficacy in the WHO sense. The present survey captures selected experiences and indicators; it does not provide a complete validated assessment of all three dimensions.

It is also important to distinguish burnout-related experiences from ordinary short-term pressure. A demanding deadline or emotionally difficult assignment does not, by itself, establish burnout. The concern is the experience of sustained, inadequately managed workplace stress and its relationship to exhaustion, distance from work and perceived professional effectiveness. Equally, an individual should not be expected to determine their own clinical or occupational status from a short self-check questionnaire.

Why burnout matters in development work

Burnout-related experiences matter not only because of their potential effects on individual wellbeing, but also because development organisations depend on staff to maintain relationships, make decisions, coordinate activities, manage resources and deliver programmes over time. When exhaustion, detachment or perceived loss of effectiveness occur alongside difficult working conditions, organisations have reason to examine whether their staffing arrangements, workload expectations and support systems are sustainable.

Development work may involve a combination of programme delivery, donor reporting, fundraising, community engagement, advocacy, partner coordination and organisational administration. Some practitioners also work on issues involving conflict, displacement, gender-based violence, disability exclusion or other forms of hardship. Depending on the role and context, these responsibilities may involve emotionally demanding encounters, competing deadlines or pressure to respond quickly to community needs. Such demands are not universal across the sector, and their effects depend partly on the resources, supervision and support available.

There may also be consequences beyond the individual employee. Persistent difficulties with workload, concentration, decision-making or retention could affect continuity of programme activities, institutional knowledge, team relationships and the consistency of engagement with communities. These are plausible organisational and programme-level implications, not outcomes directly measured by the present study. The survey did ask respondents about work-related experiences and perceived impacts, but it did not independently measure programme quality, community outcomes or the financial cost of staff turnover.

The relationship between wellbeing and organisational sustainability is particularly important in resource-constrained settings. The 2026 WACSI report, *Trapped in Fragility: An Assessment of the Civil Society Landscape in Nigeria*, describes structural challenges affecting civil society organisations, including the relationship between underfunding and limited institutional capacity.⁹ This provides relevant sector context, but it does not establish that underfunding causes burnout among the respondents in this study.

A systems perspective is therefore appropriate. Individual coping strategies may help practitioners manage difficult periods, but they cannot independently resolve chronic understaffing, unrealistic deadlines, inadequate resources or unsupportive management. Burnout prevention should be considered alongside workload design, leadership practice, staff development, access to support and the financial and operational conditions under which organisations are expected to deliver results.

Burnout across contexts and groups

The three core dimensions identified by WHO are not unique to the development sector or to Nigeria. What may differ is the combination of workplace demands, social expectations, employment conditions and resources through which these experiences emerge or are managed.

In development organisations, potentially relevant pressures include project-based funding, donor deadlines, emotionally demanding programme areas, competing responsibilities in small teams and a strong sense of responsibility to communities. Mission commitment may give work meaning and help practitioners persist through challenges. However, it may also make it harder for some individuals to step back when workloads become unsustainable. This is a plausible interpretation of the sector context, not a causal relationship established by the present survey.

Similarly, Nigerian social and economic circumstances may influence how people balance paid work with family responsibilities, respond to workplace hierarchy, disclose difficulties or seek support. These influences should be investigated rather than assumed. Nigerian development practitioners are not a homogeneous group, and their experiences may differ according to gender, seniority, type of organisation, employment security, location, disability, caring responsibilities and the nature of their work.

Gender is one important area for consideration, but it should not be used to predict an individual's experience. Differences in unpaid care responsibilities may affect opportunities for rest and recovery, while workplace roles and access to organisational support may also vary. The Nigeria Time Use Survey 2024 offers useful national context on unpaid care, but it cannot explain gender differences within this study without further respondent-level evidence.⁶

The present study can therefore explore whether reported experiences differ across the women and men in its sample, but it cannot establish that gender caused those differences or that the patterns apply to the wider development workforce. It also cannot make robust claims about groups for which the sample is small or for which relevant comparisons were not collected. Further research can investigate the experiences of field-based staff, senior managers, junior employees, volunteers, contract staff and practitioners working in particularly emotionally demanding contexts, as well as the experiences of people with disabilities and those with substantial caring responsibilities.

⁹ WACSI, *Trapped in Fragility: An Assessment of the Civil Society Landscape in Nigeria*. <https://wacsi.org/trapped-in-fragility-an-assessment-of-the-civil-society-landscape-in-nigeria-full-report/>

The analytical position adopted in this report is that burnout-related experiences should be understood through the interaction of workplace demands, organisational resources and the wider circumstances in which people work and live. This approach avoids placing responsibility solely on individual practitioners while recognising that people's experiences are varied and cannot be fully explained by a single occupational, cultural or demographic characteristic

Research on humanitarian aid workers provides a relevant, though not identical, comparison for people working in high-pressure development contexts. In a systematic review and meta-analysis, mental-health challenges among humanitarian workers were described and implications for individual wellbeing, organisational effectiveness and staff retention were discussed. Humanitarian work may involve distinctive crisis exposure and deployment conditions, so its findings should not be treated as directly interchangeable with evidence about the wider development workforce.¹⁰

Evidence from adjacent occupational settings also points to the importance of organisational conditions. A review of clinician burnout frames staff wellbeing as a systems issue, rather than solely an individual resilience problem, and identifies exhaustion, cynicism or detachment, and reduced efficacy as related dimensions.¹¹ Although healthcare differs from NGO and development work, this systems perspective is useful when interpreting findings about workload, staffing, supervision and organisational support.

Nigeria-specific evidence remains uneven for the exact population examined here. A scoping review of burnout and work stress among healthcare workers in Nigerian NGOs reports a limited evidence base focused on NGO health professionals and describes workload, resource limitations, overcommitment, understaffing and inadequate support as recurring issues.¹² Healthcare workers are an adjacent population, not a proxy for all development practitioners; the review therefore provides context rather than a direct benchmark for this survey.

A more directly sector-relevant Nigerian comparison is Anshir, Gondoaluor and Kyaave's (2026) cross-sectional survey of 132 employees in four humanitarian organisations in Maiduguri. The study examined pay satisfaction, workplace environment and turnover intention, reporting that these factors were associated with intentions to leave.¹³ This is relevant to the wider context of employment conditions, but turnover intention is not the same as burnout, actual resignation or the experience of this study's respondents. Its geographically specific humanitarian sample should not be treated as representative of the whole Nigerian development sector.

A qualitative study of paid nonprofit employees in Belgium and South Africa likewise identified meaningful work and fulfilment alongside a caring work environment as relevant to engagement and retention.⁴ Read

¹⁰ Cameron, L., McCauley, M., van den Broek, N., & McCauley, H. (2024). The occurrence of and factors associated with mental ill-health amongst humanitarian aid workers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS ONE*, 19(5), e0292107. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0292107>

¹¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). Taking action against clinician burnout: A systems approach to professional well-being. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25521>

¹² Ozumba, P. J., Anzaku, A. A., Are, R., Ejilude, O., Oche, Y., & Abiodun, P. O. (2025). Burnout and work stress among healthcare workers in non-governmental organizations in Nigeria: A scoping review. *Texila International Journal of Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.21522/TIJMD.2013.09.01.Art008>

¹³ Anshir, S. S., Gondoaluor, P. M., & Kyaave, P. N. (2026). Shall I stay or shall I go? Examining the influence of pay satisfaction and workplace environment on turnover intention among employees of humanitarian organizations in the North East-Nigeria. *Journal of Psychology and Allied Disciplines*, 6(1). <https://www.jpadfuna.com/index.php/JPAD/article/view/93>

together, these studies support examining mission commitment and organisational conditions together. They do not demonstrate that commitment causes burnout, nor do they establish that the same relationships apply to all development practitioners in Nigeria.

Comparative insights from other sectors and contexts

Evidence from other sectors helps identify possible common mechanisms without assuming that occupations are interchangeable. A 2024 global systematic review and meta-analysis of 109 studies of healthcare professionals found associations between burnout and workplace bullying, job stress, poor communication and low job satisfaction.¹⁴ Supportive work environments and adequate staffing were identified among protective factors. These findings are relevant to this study because respondents also identified heavy workload, limited resources, inadequate compensation and leadership support as important concerns. The comparison is about recurring workplace conditions, not about assuming that development professionals experience the same level or prevalence of burnout as healthcare workers.¹⁵

A report on clinician burnout makes a related argument: burnout cannot be addressed through individual coping alone and requires attention to work design, organisational culture, leadership and the wider system.¹¹ This is a useful contrast with approaches that focus only on resilience or self-care. In the present survey, practitioners reported using strategies such as time off and exercise, but also described barriers including lack of time, fear of being seen as weak or uncommitted, and financial pressure. The comparison suggests that personal coping and organisational responsibility should be considered together.¹¹

Education provides another useful comparison. Reviews of teacher wellbeing and burnout identify work pressure, difficult interpersonal relationships, organisational climate and access to professional and social resources as relevant factors.¹⁶ A systematic review of longitudinal studies found that workload and workplace context, including unclear goals, limited autonomy, poor leadership and social isolation, could contribute to teacher exhaustion.¹⁷ These parallels are relevant to development organisations where staff may work across multiple responsibilities and coordinate with colleagues, partners, communities and funders. However, teaching has its own distinctive demands, so these studies are used as comparative context rather than direct evidence about Nigerian civil society workers.¹⁸

Humanitarian aid work is the closest of these comparisons, although it is still not synonymous with the wider development sector. Cameron and colleagues' systematic review and meta-analysis included nine studies with 3,619 humanitarian aid workers and found that reported mental-health outcomes varied substantially across studies and measures. The authors also highlighted potential implications for staff wellbeing, organisational effectiveness and retention. This supports taking wellbeing seriously in

¹⁴ Occupational Risk Factors for Burnout Syndrome Among Healthcare Professionals: A Global Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. (2024). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(12), 1583. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21121583>

¹⁵ Occupational Risk Factors for Burnout Syndrome Among Healthcare Professionals: A Global Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11675210/>

¹⁶ Factors Associated with Teacher Wellbeing: A Meta-Analysis. (2024). *Educational Psychology Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-024-09886-x>

¹⁷ Determinants of Burnout among Teachers: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies. (2022). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(9), 5776. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9104901/>

¹⁸ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9104901/> and <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-024-09886-x>

demanding aid settings, but the variation between studies is also a warning against making simple prevalence comparisons with this survey.¹⁰

Across these sectors, the strongest common thread is not a single universal burnout rate. It is the recurring importance of the relationship between job demands and the resources available to meet them: workload and staffing, role clarity and autonomy, leadership and communication, fair treatment, and opportunities for recovery. A key distinction for development professionals is the combination of mission-driven work, funding uncertainty and accountability to communities, partners and donors. The current study includes respondents' reports of mission and community responsibility, but it does not directly measure whether these factors caused or intensified strain. They should therefore be discussed as contextual features to investigate, not as proven causes.

The cited studies use different occupations, countries, samples and measurement tools. Their prevalence estimates should not be placed side by side as if they were directly comparable. In this report, cross-sector literature is used to compare themes and possible organisational mechanisms, while the survey results remain descriptive of the 62 respondents.

Taken together, the literature provides an analytical frame for examining burnout-related experiences in relation to work demands, available resources, organisational practices and opportunities for recovery. It also highlights the importance of considering mission commitment alongside working conditions, without assuming that commitment causes burnout or compensates for inadequate organisational support. This study applies that perspective descriptively, using respondents' reported experiences and open-ended comments to identify patterns and questions for further investigation. It does not establish causal relationships or estimate burnout prevalence across Nigeria's development sector.

Evidence limitation: The literature reviewed largely concerns humanitarian workers, clinicians and NGO healthcare workers rather than a representative sample of Nigeria's wider development sector. These studies provide useful context for interpreting the findings, but they do not validate this survey's estimates or establish that the same patterns apply across occupations.

SECTION 1: SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

1.1 Introduction

Before exploring burnout-related experiences, it is important to understand who participated in the study. Development practitioners work in different roles, organisations and circumstances. A programme manager overseeing multiple projects may experience different pressures from a field officer working directly with communities or an administrative colleague supporting programme delivery. Their experiences are all important to understanding the demands of development work.

This section presents the profile of the 62 respondents included in the Nigeria-focused analysis, covering their age, gender, organisational background, professional roles, years of experience and employment status. It also explains how participants were recruited and what this means for interpreting the findings.

Respondent Profile at a Glance

Characteristic	Profile	Number	Percentage
Age	45–54 years	23	37%
Gender	Female	45	73%
Country of work	Nigeria	62	100%
Organisation type	Local NGO	39	63%
Professional role	Senior leadership	36	58%
Professional experience	More than 10 years	40	65%
Employment status	Full-time	49	79%
Total sample	All eligible respondents	62	100%

This table highlights the largest category within each characteristic, rather than listing every category. Participants were recruited primarily through the researcher’s WhatsApp contacts, and development-sector groups. The sample is exploratory and should not be considered representative of all development practitioners in Nigeria.

1.2 Age profile

The respondents were predominantly experienced adults, with the largest age group between 45 and 54 years.

Age group	Number	Percentage
Under 25	0	0%
25–34	7	11%
35–44	14	23%
45–54	23	37%
55 and above	18	29%
Total	62	100%

More than six in ten respondents (66%) were aged 45 or above. A further 23% were between 35 and 44, while 11% were aged 25–34. No respondent was under 25.

This age profile provides a useful perspective on burnout-related experiences among established professionals, many of whom may have spent years navigating organisational demands, managing teams and delivering programmes. However, the absence of respondents under 25 means the study offers little insight into the experiences of the youngest entrants to the development workforce.

1.3 Gender profile

Women made up almost three-quarters of the sample.

Gender	Number	Percentage
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Female	45	73%
Male	17	27%
Total	62	100%

The participation of both women and men allows the report to explore their experiences, while recognising that the two groups are unevenly represented. Findings for smaller groups should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

Gender is also relevant to the wider conversation about burnout because development practitioners may be balancing demanding professional responsibilities with family, community and other personal commitments. These pressures should not be assumed to affect everyone in the same way, and the survey findings are used to examine reported experiences rather than presume the causes of any differences.

1.4 Country of work and recruitment

The study was designed to focus on development practitioners working in Nigeria. Participants were recruited primarily through the researcher's WhatsApp contacts and development-sector groups. Responses from outside Nigeria were excluded from the final analysis to maintain the intended geographical scope.

Recruitment through existing professional networks provided a practical way to reach people working in the development sector. However, it may also have influenced who participated. Practitioners connected to these networks, active on WhatsApp and willing to complete the survey may have been more likely to take part than those outside the networks or with limited time to respond.

The final sample therefore reflects the experiences of the 62 eligible respondents, rather than a representative cross-section of the entire Nigerian development workforce. The findings should be understood as exploratory insights into the experiences of this group.

1.5 Types of organisations represented

Respondents worked across different organisational settings, although local NGOs accounted for the largest share.

Organisation type	Number	Percentage
Local NGO	39	63%
International NGO	14	23%
Donor agency	2	3%
Social enterprise	1	2%
Other organisational descriptions	5	8%
Not stated	1	2%
Total	62	100%

The other organisational descriptions included a national NGO, a public-sector agricultural organisation, a government partner, a finance and management services consultancy, and a development consulting organisation.

The strong representation of local NGOs is particularly relevant to interpreting the findings. Such organisations may operate with limited financial and human resources while responding to substantial community needs and donor expectations. International NGOs and other development actors may face different combinations of pressures, depending on their structures, funding arrangements and responsibilities.

These organisational differences provide useful context, but the sample sizes do not support broad conclusions about burnout in each type of organisation.

1.6 Professional roles

The sample included practitioners at different levels of responsibility, with senior leadership the most represented group.

Role category	Number	Percentage
Senior leadership	36	58%
Mid-level management	16	26%
Administrative/support staff	7	11%
Field workers/project officers	3	5%
Total	62	100%

Senior leadership and mid-level management together accounted for 84% of respondents. These practitioners may be responsible for organisational decision-making, staff supervision, resource mobilisation, programme quality and delivery against commitments.

Their experiences can help illuminate the pressures associated with carrying responsibility for both organisational performance and people management. At the same time, administrative/support staff and field workers/project officers were represented by smaller numbers. Their experiences may not be fully captured by the overall findings, even though their contributions are essential to the functioning of development organisations.

1.7 Years of professional experience

Most respondents had worked in the sector for more than a decade.

Years of experience	Number	Percentage
Less than 2 years	1	2%
2–5 years	11	18%
6–10 years	10	16%
More than 10 years	40	65%

Total	62	100%
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Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) had more than ten years of professional experience. Another 16% had between six and ten years of experience, while 19% had five years or less.

This is an important feature of the sample. The findings are substantially informed by people who have spent considerable time in professional roles. Their experiences may offer insights into the cumulative demands of development work, including the sustained responsibility of delivering programmes, managing relationships and working within organisational constraints.

However, length of service should not be taken as evidence that someone has experienced burnout, nor should experienced practitioners be assumed to cope better or worse than their less experienced colleagues. Those questions must be considered against the responses on work conditions and burnout-related experiences.

1.8 Employment status

Most respondents were employed full-time.

Employment status	Number	Percentage
Full-time	49	79%
Part-time	4	7%
Contract	4	7%
Volunteer	5	8%
Total	62	100%

Full-time employees accounted for 79% of the sample. The remaining respondents were volunteers, part-time employees or contract workers.

This matters because the demands and security associated with different employment arrangements may vary. Full-time practitioners may face sustained workloads and ongoing organisational responsibilities, while contract workers and volunteers may experience different pressures linked to funding continuity, income or the boundaries of their roles. These are possible contextual considerations, not conclusions established by the sample profile alone.

1.9 What does the sample profile tell us?

Three key features stand out.

- The sample is highly experienced. Almost two-thirds of respondents had more than ten years of professional experience, and the largest age group was 45–54 years. The findings therefore provide insight into the experiences of established practitioners represented in this study, while not necessarily reflecting those of less experienced workers or the wider development workforce.

- Women and senior professionals are strongly represented. Women accounted for 73% of respondents, while senior leadership and mid-level management together accounted for 84%. The findings should be interpreted with this composition in mind, particularly when considering whether the experiences reported reflect those of the wider workforce.
- Local NGOs form the largest organisational group. Their strong representation gives the study particular relevance to practitioners working in local civil society organisations, although the findings cannot be assumed to represent all local NGOs or the sector as a whole.

Taken together, these characteristics establish the context for the findings that follow. They also reinforce why burnout should be understood in relation to people's roles, responsibilities and working environments rather than treated solely as an individual challenge.

1.10 Section conclusion

The 62 respondents bring substantial professional experience to this exploratory study. Their responses offer a valuable starting point for examining the pressures development practitioners face, the support available to them and the consequences of sustained work-related strain.

However, the recruitment approach, the concentration of respondents in particular professional groups and the small overall sample limit how far the findings can be generalised. The following sections therefore focus on what these participants reported, using their responses to identify patterns and raise questions about how development organisations can better support the people behind their missions.

SECTION 2

WORKING UNDER PRESSURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR: WORK ENVIRONMENT AND BURNOUT-RELATED EXPERIENCES

2.1 Introduction

Development work is often driven by a strong sense of purpose. Practitioners work to improve lives, strengthen communities, influence policy and respond to urgent needs. Yet behind the programmes, proposals, reports and community commitments are people who must manage workloads, meet deadlines, work with limited resources and navigate the emotional demands of their roles.

When these demands accumulate without sufficient time, resources or support, the work can become difficult to sustain. This section examines what the 62 respondents reported about their working hours, job clarity, emotional exhaustion, workload management, organisational support, detachment from work and thoughts of leaving their roles.

One practitioner's advice highlights the importance of setting realistic boundaries and distinguishing genuine emergencies from routine work:

"Not everything is an emergency. Pace your work."

Female, Mid-level management, 6-10 years' work experience.

The findings are based on self-reported experiences. They provide a snapshot of this group of practitioners rather than a national estimate of burnout in Nigeria.

The findings below provide a snapshot of respondents' working conditions, burnout-related experiences and perceived workplace pressures, highlighting key patterns that emerge across the survey.

Key Findings at a Glance

Indicator	Key finding	What it tells us
Working hours	30/62 (48%) worked more than 40 hours per week	Extended working hours were common in the sample.
Job clarity	49/62 (79%) reported clear job descriptions	Most understood their formal roles, although clarity does not guarantee a manageable workload.
Emotional exhaustion	54/62 (87%) felt emotionally drained sometimes, often or always	Emotional exhaustion was widely reported.
Workload	24/62 (39%) said their workload was sometimes or not manageable	A substantial group struggled to manage their workload consistently.
Organisational support	36/61 (59%) reported support was available only sometimes or not at all	Consistent support may be a concern.

Detachment	26/62 (42%) felt detached or indifferent sometimes, often or always	Some respondents reported reduced emotional connection with work.
Considered leaving	30/62 (48%) had considered leaving due to work-related stress or burnout	Work-related strain may pose a retention concern.
Leading reported contributor	37/61 (61%) selected heavy workload	Workload was the most frequently identified contributor.
Other major contributors	Lack of resources: 32/61 (52%); emotional demands: 29/61 (48%); compensation: 28/61 (46%)	Respondents identified several overlapping workplace pressures.

Interpretation note: Multiple responses were permitted for the contributor question. The findings describe this sample and should not be interpreted as nationally representative estimates or proof of cause and effect.

2.2 How long are development practitioners working?

Almost half of the respondents reported working more than 40 hours a week.

Weekly working hours	Number	Percentage
Less than 30 hours	7	11%
30–40 hours	25	40%
41–50 hours	16	26%
More than 50 hours	14	23%
Total	62	100%

Noteworthy is that thirty respondents (48%) reported working more than the standard 40 hours per week. These figures are important because working time is not always limited to the hours formally recorded. For some development practitioners, the working day may extend into evenings and weekends through proposal deadlines, donor reporting, urgent programme issues, travel or communication with colleagues and partners. However, the survey does not establish which of these activities contributed to the hours reported by individual respondents.

The figures do not, by themselves, show that everyone working long hours is experiencing burnout. They do, however, raise a practical question for organisations: are workloads and deadlines being planned around realistic working hours, or does delivery depend on staff regularly giving more time than expected?

2.3 Do practitioners understand what is expected of them?

Most respondents said their job descriptions were clear, although some reported uncertainty.

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	49	79%
Somewhat	10	16%

No	3	5%
Total	62	100%

Nearly four in five respondents (49/62; 79%) said their job descriptions were clear. However, 13 respondents (21%) said their job descriptions were only somewhat clear or not clear.

Clear job descriptions can help people understand their responsibilities, priorities and boundaries. But a written job description does not necessarily mean that day-to-day expectations are manageable. Staff may understand their roles perfectly well and still face competing priorities, unrealistic deadlines or responsibilities that expand without additional resources.

The findings therefore suggest that clarity matters, but it should be considered alongside workload and the practical support available to staff.

2.4 Emotional exhaustion: how often do people feel drained after work?

Emotional exhaustion was one of the clearest signals in the survey.

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Never	1	2%
Rarely	7	11%
Sometimes	33	53%
Often	17	27%
Always	4	7%
Total	62	100%

Fifty-four respondents (87%) reported feeling emotionally drained after work sometimes, often or always. More than one-third 21 respondents (34%) said this happened often or always.

Only 8 respondents (13%) said they never or rarely experienced this feeling. This is a notable finding. Feeling tired after a demanding day is not unusual, particularly in work involving difficult decisions, community needs and competing deadlines. The concern is when emotional exhaustion becomes a frequent feature of working life rather than an occasional response to an unusually demanding period.

For development practitioners, the emotional demands of work may include listening to distressing experiences, responding to conflict, supporting vulnerable communities, managing staff concerns or carrying responsibility for programmes whose outcomes matter deeply to others. Not every respondent will have experienced these particular pressures, but they illustrate why exhaustion in this sector cannot always be understood as a question of time management alone.

The finding does not mean that 87% of respondents have a clinical burnout condition. It means that 87% reported feeling emotionally drained after work at least sometimes, using the survey's response categories. This distinction is important when interpreting the results.

2.5 Is the workload manageable?

Although most respondents said their workload was manageable, a substantial minority reported difficulty managing it consistently.

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes, manageable	38	61%
Sometimes manageable	13	21%
No, not manageable	11	18%
Total	62	100%

Twenty-four respondents (39%) said their workload was either sometimes manageable or not manageable. Within this group, 11 respondents (18%) said their workload was not manageable at all.

The open-ended responses also pointed to staffing levels as a practical way to distribute work more realistically:

"They employ more staffs so that the work will be divided"

Male, Mid-level management, 2-5 years' work experience

This finding points to a distinction between having a workload and having a workload that can realistically be completed within the time and resources available.

Development organisations may need to deliver against donor agreements, respond to emerging community needs, prepare reports, manage budgets and coordinate partners simultaneously. When new tasks are added without reviewing existing priorities, staff can find themselves trying to meet every expectation at once.

The survey does not establish why these respondents found their workloads difficult. Nevertheless, the results suggest that workload planning deserves attention alongside individual coping strategies. Organisations may need to examine staffing levels, the number of concurrent projects, deadline-setting practices and how priorities are negotiated when demands exceed available capacity.

2.6 Do practitioners feel supported by their organisations?

Respondents gave mixed answers when asked whether their organisations provided support for work-related stress.

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	25	40%
Sometimes	28	45%
No	8	13%
No response	1	2%

Total	62	100%
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Among the 61 respondents who answered the question, 25 (41%) said their organisation provided support, 28 (46%) said support was available sometimes, and 8 (13%) said it was not available.

The largest group therefore experienced support as inconsistent rather than reliably available.

This distinction matters. Support may be offered informally by a sympathetic supervisor or colleague, or it may be built into organisational systems through manageable workloads, regular check-ins, access to counselling, flexible working arrangements and clear procedures for raising concerns. These forms of support are not interchangeable, and the survey result does not tell us which specific arrangements respondents had in mind.

For staff, inconsistent support can make it difficult to know whether they can raise concerns before pressures become overwhelming. For managers, the finding raises a practical question: is staff wellbeing treated as an ongoing responsibility, or is support mainly offered when someone reaches a crisis point?

2.7 Detachment and loss of connection with work

The survey also asked how often respondents felt detached or indifferent towards their work.

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Never	16	26%
Rarely	20	32%
Sometimes	23	37%
Often	2	3%
Always	1	2%
Total	62	100%

Twenty-six respondents (42%) reported feeling detached or indifferent towards work sometimes, often or always. Three respondents (5%) said this happened often or always.

The pattern differs from emotional exhaustion. While 87% felt emotionally drained at least sometimes, 42% reported detachment at least sometimes. This suggests that feeling emotionally depleted and feeling detached from work are not identical experiences.

A practitioner can feel exhausted while remaining deeply committed to a programme or community. Another may begin to distance themselves emotionally as a way of coping with sustained pressure. The survey cannot determine why respondents gave their answers, and occasional detachment should not automatically be interpreted as disengagement or lack of commitment.

Still, the responses invite organisations to consider not only whether staff can continue to complete their tasks, but also how they are experiencing the work and whether they have the conditions needed to remain engaged in it.

2.8 Are practitioners thinking about leaving?

Nearly half of the respondents had considered leaving their role because of work-related stress or burnout.

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	30	48%
No	32	52%
Total	62	100%

Thirty respondents (48%) said they had considered leaving because of work-related stress or burnout. Thirty-two (52%) said they had not.

Considering leaving does not necessarily mean someone will resign. It is, however, an important signal because it suggests that work-related strain has led a substantial proportion of this sample to question whether continuing in their role is sustainable.

For organisations, the implications may extend beyond recruitment costs. Where experienced practitioners leave, teams may lose institutional knowledge, relationships with communities, programme continuity and mentoring capacity. These are potential consequences, not outcomes measured directly by this question.

The result also invites a broader reflection: when committed practitioners begin to consider leaving, the response should not automatically be to encourage them to become more resilient. It is also worth examining the working conditions that may be making their roles difficult to sustain.

2.9 What do respondents identify as contributors to work-related stress and burnout-related experiences?

Respondents were asked to identify factors they believed contributed to burnout. They could select more than one option.

Reported contributor	Responses	Percentage of 61 respondents
Heavy workload	37	61%
Lack of resources	32	53%
Emotional demands of the job	29	48%
Inadequate compensation	28	46%
Limited support from leadership	18	30%
Organisational culture	15	25%

Note: Percentages use the 61 valid responses to this question. Multiple selections were allowed, so the categories overlap.

- **Heavy workload:** This was the leading concern, selected by 37 respondents (61%). This aligns with the earlier finding that 24 respondents described their workloads as sometimes or not manageable. The two results point to a need to look beyond the number of tasks assigned and consider whether deadlines, staffing and priorities are realistic.
- **Lack of resources:** More than half (32/61; 53%) selected lack of resources. When staff are expected to deliver programmes without sufficient funding, personnel, equipment or operational support, routine tasks can become more difficult and time-consuming. The survey does not identify which resources were lacking, but the response highlights resource constraints as a prominent concern.
- **Emotional demands of the job:** Nearly half (29/61; 48%) identified emotional demands as a contributor. Development work can involve responding to difficult human circumstances while maintaining professional judgement and delivering agreed results. This emotional dimension deserves attention alongside workload and operational capacity.
- **Inadequate compensation:** Twenty-eight respondents (46% of valid responses) selected inadequate compensation. This suggests that financial reward is part of the working conditions practitioners are concerned about. The survey does not measure individual salaries or compare compensation across organisations, so the result should be understood as respondents' assessment of a contributing factor rather than a measure of pay levels across the sector.
- **Leadership support and organisational culture:** Limited leadership support (18/61; 30%) and organisational culture (15/61; 25%) were also selected, though less frequently than the four leading factors. Their presence in the responses is still important: workload and resource pressures do not occur in isolation from the way work is managed, how concerns are handled and what behaviours are accepted or rewarded.

Taken together, these responses caution against treating burnout solely as an individual problem to be solved through better time management or self-care. Respondents identified several organisational and job-related conditions that may need to be addressed.

One respondent linked staffing challenges to funding constraints and the difficulty of building organisational capacity:

Engage more staff that can actually get tasks done. Scarcity of funds makes us struggle with people that under-deliver. We have never gotten flexible funding to grow the organization.

Female, Senior leadership, Over 10 years' experience

2.10 Cross-question findings

Looking across the responses reveals several important patterns.

- Emotional exhaustion was more widely reported than detachment. Fifty-four respondents (87%) felt emotionally drained at least sometimes, while 26 (42%) reported detachment or indifference at least sometimes. This distinction reminds us that a person can remain committed to their work while feeling depleted by it.

- Workload concerns sit alongside long working hours. Thirty respondents (48%) worked more than 40 hours per week, while 24 (39%) said their workload was sometimes or not manageable. These figures describe the sample as a whole; they do not, on their own, establish that the same individuals experienced both conditions.
- Nearly half had considered leaving because of work-related stress or burnout. Thirty respondents (48%) reported this, making it an important retention signal within the sample. It raises questions about what organisations can change to make demanding roles more sustainable.
- The overlap between emotional exhaustion, workload and retention concerns provides a more specific picture. Of the 21 respondents who felt emotionally drained often or always, 15 (71%) had considered leaving because of work-related stress or burnout. Of the 11 respondents who said their workload was not manageable, 9 (82%) had considered leaving. These groups overlap, so the figures should not be added together.
- Most notably, eight respondents reported both frequent emotional exhaustion (often/always) and an unmanageable workload. Six of these eight (75%) had considered leaving. Among the other 54 respondents, 24 (44%) had considered leaving. This is a descriptive difference of 30.6 percentage points. It suggests that the combination of frequent exhaustion and an unmanageable workload may be an important warning signal for retention, although the small subgroup and exploratory sample mean the finding should be interpreted cautiously; it does not establish that these conditions caused people to consider leaving.

Finally, respondents pointed to structural as well as emotional pressures. Heavy workload (61%), lack of resources (53%), emotional demands (48%) and inadequate compensation (46%) were the most frequently selected contributors among valid responses. Individual coping strategies may help practitioners manage difficult periods, but they cannot substitute for realistic workloads, adequate resources and consistent organisational support.

These patterns are descriptive. They do not establish cause and effect, and the sample cannot be treated as representative of all development practitioners in Nigeria. Their value lies in showing how different aspects of working life appear in the experiences reported by these respondents.

Pattern in the responses	Considered leaving due to work stress/burnout
Frequent emotional exhaustion (often/always)	15/21 (71%)
Workload not manageable	9/11 (82%)
Both frequent exhaustion and unmanageable workload	6/8 (75%)
All other respondents	24/54 (44%)

2.11 Section conclusion

The findings in this section present a mixed but concerning picture. Many respondents understood their roles and considered their workloads manageable, yet emotional exhaustion was common, support for work-related stress was often inconsistent, and almost half had considered leaving because of work-related stress or burnout.

The strongest message is that commitment to development work does not remove the need for sustainable working conditions. Practitioners may care deeply about the communities they serve and still struggle with excessive demands, limited resources, emotional pressure or inadequate support.

For development organisations, this creates an important opportunity for reflection. Supporting staff wellbeing requires more than encouraging individuals to cope. It also calls for attention to workload design, staffing, resource allocation, leadership practices and the organisational conditions that allow people to do meaningful work without becoming depleted by it.

The next section examines organisational culture and practices in greater detail, including the approaches organisations use to manage productivity, provide opportunities for rest and recovery, support professional development and address work-life balance.

SECTION 3

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND PRACTICES

3.1 Introduction

This section examines organisational practices that may shape staff well-being, including productivity expectations, rest and recovery, professional development, work-life balance, burnout-related policies, communication about mental health, and staff views on organisational culture and improvement. Related questions are compared to identify patterns across reported practices and perceived effectiveness.

Unless stated otherwise, percentages use all 62 respondents. Multiple-response questions allow respondents to select more than one option, so percentages may exceed 100% when added. For the professional development types question, 53 respondents provided a valid response and nine left it blank; percentages shown below use all 62 respondents for consistency and are labelled accordingly.

3.2 How organisations encourage productivity

Reported practice	Responses	% of 62
Setting clear goals and deadlines	49	79%
Regular performance evaluations	33	53%
Offering incentives/rewards	25	40%
Adequate resources/tools	22	36%
None of the above	3	5%
Write-in: capacity building/networking	1	2%
Write-in: support from management	1	2%
Write-in: mental health support	1	2%

Clear goals and deadlines were the most frequently reported productivity practice, followed by regular performance evaluations. Fewer respondents identified adequate resources and tools. This contrast raises a question about whether performance expectations are matched by sufficient staff capacity and resources; the survey does not establish that targets are unrealistic or that resources are objectively inadequate.

3.3 Rest and recovery

Reported practice	Responses	% of 62
Encouraging vacation days	39	63%
Flexible work hours	39	63%
Discouraging overtime/overwork	14	23%

Mental-health days	11	18%
None of the above	6	10%
Write-ins: shifts/working from home, days off after holiday work, pause-and-reflect days	3	5% combined

Vacation days and flexible hours were each selected by 39 respondents. Explicit efforts to discourage overtime or overwork and provision of mental-health days were less frequently reported. The pattern suggests that rest is more often represented by leave and flexibility than by clear safeguards against overwork. Having an arrangement on paper does not necessarily mean staff can use it easily or that workload allows meaningful recovery.

3.4 Professional development

Frequency of professional development (Q19)	Responses	% of 62
Yes, regularly	29	47%
Occasionally	20	32%
Rarely	10	16%
No	3	5%

Forty-nine respondents (79%) said professional development was offered regularly or occasionally; 13 (21%) said it was rare or unavailable. Fewer than half reported regular provision.

Type of opportunity (Q20)	Responses	% of all 62
Training/workshops	50	81%
Mentorship	21	34%
Career growth plans	15	24%
Funding for external courses/certifications	14	23%

Note: Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

Interpretation

Training and workshops were the most frequently reported professional development opportunity, selected by 50 respondents (81% of the full sample of 62). Mentorship was reported by 21 respondents (34%), while 15 (24%) reported career growth plans and 14 (23%) reported funding for external courses or certifications. Respondents could select more than one option.

These findings suggest that training activities were more commonly reported than opportunities linked to individual career progression or externally funded learning. However, the results do not establish whether these opportunities were regular, accessible to all staff, or effective in improving skills and career prospects.

Professional development involves more than attending training. Mentorship, clear career pathways and financial support for further learning can also help staff build skills and progress in their careers. The findings therefore point to an opportunity for organisations to consider whether their approaches extend beyond training events to include more structured, ongoing staff development.

Note: Question 20 received 53 valid responses, with nine respondents leaving the question blank. Percentages in the table use all 62 respondents as the denominator for consistency.

3.5 Work-life balance

Perceived effectiveness	Responses	% of 62
Very effective	1	2%
Effective	13	21%
Somewhat effective	30	48%
Not effective	18	29%

Only 14 respondents (23%) rated work-life balance practices effective or very effective. Forty-eight (77%) rated them somewhat effective or not effective. The largest group selected “somewhat effective”.

Cross-question comparison: rest arrangements and work-life balance

Vacation days and flexible hours were each reported by 39 respondents (63%), yet 77% rated work-life balance practices as only somewhat effective or not effective. These findings are not necessarily contradictory: arrangements may exist while staff still experience difficulty balancing work and personal responsibilities. Possible explanations include workload volume, staffing, deadlines or difficulty taking leave, but the survey does not establish which explanations apply.

In Section 2, 54 respondents (87%) reported feeling emotionally drained after work at least sometimes, while 24 (39%) reported that their workload was sometimes or not manageable. Taken together, these findings warrant attention to the relationship between work demands, opportunities for recovery and perceived organisational support. However, the survey does not establish causation or show that any one factor explains respondents’ work-life balance ratings.

3.6 Policies for addressing workplace burnout

Reported position	Responses	% of 62
No policies exist	21	34%
Not aware of any policies	15	24%
Policies exist but are not effectively implemented	13	21%
Policies exist and are implemented effectively	13	21%

Thirty-six respondents (58%) either reported that no burnout-related policies existed in their organisation or were unaware of any. A further 13 respondents (21%) said policies existed but were not effectively implemented. Overall, 49 respondents (79%) did not report burnout-related policies as both present and effectively implemented.

One respondent highlighted the importance of putting preventive measures in place even where burnout had not been experienced or recognised within the organisation:

We have not had the burnout experience but we need to have burnout policy, and train staff on mental health issues, symptoms and prevention."

Female, Senior leadership, Over 10 years' experience

These categories represent different organisational challenges. A lack of policy, limited staff awareness and ineffective implementation may require different responses. The findings do not establish that organisations without a specific burnout policy lack all forms of staff-well-being or occupational-health support. They nevertheless point to areas for organisations to examine, including policy provision, visibility, accessibility and implementation.

The response categories should not be conflated: not knowing about a policy differs from its absence, and the question does not establish that an organisation lacks every form of staff-wellness or occupational-health support. The findings point to possible gaps in provision, awareness and implementation.

Cross-question comparison: policies and work-life balance

Among the 13 respondents who said burnout policies were implemented effectively, eight rated work-life balance as effective and five as somewhat effective; none rated it not effective. Among the 21 who said no policies existed, seven rated work-life balance not effective and 11 somewhat effective. Among the 13 who said policies existed but were not effectively implemented, four rated work-life balance not effective and eight somewhat effective. This pattern is consistent with a relationship between reported implementation and more positive work-life balance perceptions, but does not establish causation.

3.7 Communication about mental health and well-being

Reported level of communication	Responses	% of 62
Yes, strongly	24	39%
Somewhat	23	37%
Rarely	10	16%
No	5	8%

Forty-seven respondents (76%) reported at least some openness about mental health and well-being, but only 24 (39%) said their organisation promoted it strongly. The remaining 38 (61%) selected "somewhat", "rarely" or "no". Some openness is not necessarily the same as feeling safe to disclose difficulties or being able to access practical support.

Cross-question comparison: communication and burnout-policy implementation

Of the 13 respondents who reported effectively implemented burnout policies, 11 also reported strong mental-health communication. Strong communication was reported by five of the 21 respondents who said no policies existed and three of the 15 who were unaware of policies. This pattern suggests that formal arrangements and open communication may coexist, but the survey cannot determine direction of influence or causation.

3.8 What aspects of organisational culture contribute to staff well-being?

The open-ended question received 51 valid responses, with 11 blanks. The comments were grouped thematically; because individual responses could fit multiple themes, the themes below are not ranked by frequency.

- **Flexibility, rest and work-life balance.** Respondents mentioned flexible hours, leave, holidays, breaks and the need to maintain balance between work and personal life.
- **Supportive leadership and communication.** One-to-one meetings, management guidance, staff check-ins, open communication and opportunities to ask for help were highlighted.
- **Financial security and staff welfare.** Salary, salary reviews, loans or financial assistance, health insurance, bonuses and other welfare provisions featured in the responses.
- **Recognition and appreciation.** Incentives, rewards and appreciation were described as contributors to staff well-being.
- **Inclusion, participation and belonging.** Responses referred to gender equality, staff associations, staff forums and participation in organisational decisions.
- **Team bonding and social connection.** Retreats, social gatherings and bonding sessions were mentioned.
- **Learning and professional growth.** Training, workshops and mentorship featured as positive aspects of organisational culture.
- **Emotional support and healthy working relationships.** Respondents described respect, friendly working environments, emotional support and emotionally intelligent leadership.

Not all comments focused on organisational weaknesses. One respondent described how staff participation in decision-making could support belonging and communication:

"The organisations values staff involvement in decision making which fosters a sense of belonging and encourgaes open communication."

Female, Senior leadership, Over 10 years' experience

The responses frame staff well-being as multidimensional, extending beyond individual self-care to include leadership, material conditions, inclusion, workplace relationships and opportunities for growth. These themes broadly align with the closed-question findings on flexibility, professional development and communication. However, the importance respondents attached to these practices sits alongside the finding that 48 respondents (77%) rated their organisation's work-life balance practices as somewhat effective or not effective. This suggests that the presence of a workplace practice does not necessarily

mean staff experience it as sufficient or effective. Because the responses were analysed thematically rather than systematically ranked by frequency, the themes should be understood as a summary of the issues raised, not as a ranking of their importance across the sample.

3.9 Recommended changes to organisational practices

This open-ended question received 54 valid responses, with eight blanks. Respondents proposed changes to productivity, rest and staff development. The following themes are a qualitative synthesis, not a frequency ranking.

- **Flexible working and work-life balance.** Recommendations included hybrid or remote work where appropriate, flexible schedules, shorter working weeks, clear closing times, paid leave and reduced workloads.
- **Mental health and emotional well-being.** Respondents suggested counselling, mental-health checks, wellness days, decompression sessions and opportunities to discuss difficult experiences. One response specifically highlighted staff working on GBV-related issues.
- **Workload, staffing and role clarity.** Suggestions included recruiting competent staff, establishing clear job descriptions, distributing responsibilities fairly and setting realistic goals and timelines.
- **Compensation and staff welfare.** Respondents called for improved remuneration, financial incentives, paid leave and adequate organisational funding to support staff.
- **Training, mentorship and career progression.** Recommendations included career-oriented training, exchange programmes, continuous learning, mentorship and clear career pathways.
- **Leadership, communication and psychological safety.** Respondents called for stronger leadership support, open-door policies, emotional intelligence and the ability to raise concerns without fear of victimisation.
- **Team connection and collective reflection.** Suggestions included staff retreats, team-building activities, regular staff conversations and reviews of what is working.
- **Policies, resources and accountability.** Respondents recommended implementing staff-well-being policies, providing adequate resources, monitoring and evaluating practice, and reviewing policies regularly.
- **Fairness and organisational culture.** Responses included equal opportunities, stronger work ethics and competence, and reducing nepotism.

One respondent recommended combining flexible working arrangements with deliberate opportunities for staff to decompress, particularly those working on emotionally demanding issues:

“Hybrid work locations and flexible schedules. Intentionally sessions for decompressing especially those staff that work in addressing GBV.”

Female, Mid-management, Over 10 years’ experience

The recommendations reinforce earlier findings. Although clear goals and deadlines were widely reported, respondents also called for realistic timelines, clear job roles, adequate staffing and resources. Despite reported access to vacation days and flexible hours, respondents highlighted the need for practical flexibility, reduced workloads and clearer boundaries around working time. Calls for mental-

health support and open communication also align with the findings on limited strong communication and gaps in the reported implementation of burnout-related policies.

These recommendations reflect respondents' views; the survey did not test the effectiveness of the proposed interventions. Their feasibility and likely value will depend on organisational size, funding, staff roles and operating context. Organisations can use these findings to identify potential improvements, then assess whether changes are accessible to staff and make a meaningful difference to their working conditions.

3.10 Gender insights across organisational practices

The sample comprised 45 women (73%) and 17 men (27%). Percentages in the following tables are calculated within each gender group. These comparisons are descriptive and should be interpreted cautiously because the groups are uneven in size and may differ in role, seniority or organisational context. The findings identify patterns within this sample; they do not establish that gender caused the reported differences or demonstrate that the same patterns apply across the wider development sector.

Work-life balance

Rating	Women (n=45)	Men (n=17)
Not effective	15 (33%)	3 (18%)
Somewhat effective	21 (47%)	9 (53%)
Effective	8 (18%)	5 (29%)
Very effective	1 (2%)	0 (0%)

Combining not effective and somewhat effective ratings, 36 women (80%) and 12 men (71%) gave less positive ratings. Women more frequently selected "not effective", while men more frequently selected "effective". This is a descriptive difference, not proof of a sector-wide gender gap or its cause.

Burnout policies

Reported position	Women (n=45)	Men (n=17)
No policies exist	15 (33%)	6 (35%)
Not aware of any policies	12 (27%)	3 (18%)
Not effectively implemented	11 (24%)	2 (12%)
Implemented effectively	7 (16%)	6 (35%)

A smaller proportion of women than men reported that burnout policies were implemented effectively (16% versus 35%). Women more frequently reported being unaware of policies or perceiving implementation as ineffective, while the proportion reporting no policies was similar. The data cannot determine whether the pattern reflects policy visibility, implementation, organisational context or other factors.

Productivity and rest practices

Practice	Women (n=45)	Men (n=17)
Clear goals/deadlines	35 (78%)	14 (82%)
Regular performance evaluations	20 (44%)	13 (77%)
Incentives/rewards	18 (40%)	7 (41%)
Adequate resources/tools	16 (36%)	6 (35%)
Vacation days encouraged	29 (64%)	10 (59%)
Flexible work hours	27 (60%)	12 (71%)
Discouraging overtime/overwork	8 (18%)	6 (35%)
Mental-health days	8 (18%)	3 (18%)

The largest difference was in reported regular performance evaluations (77% of men versus 44% of women). Men also more frequently reported efforts to discourage overtime or overwork. Reports of adequate resources, incentives and mental-health days were similar. These patterns may reflect different roles or organisations and should not be interpreted as evidence of discrimination.

Mental-health communication

Level	Women (n=45)	Men (n=17)
Yes, strongly	17 (38%)	7 (41%)
Somewhat	17 (38%)	6 (35%)
Rarely	7 (16%)	3 (18%)
No	4 (9%)	1 (6%)

Strong openness was reported by 38% of women and 41% of men. The differences were relatively small, suggesting that limited strong communication is not confined to one gender in this sample.

Professional development

Frequency	Women (n=45)	Men (n=17)
Regularly	21 (47%)	8 (47%)
Occasionally	14 (31%)	6 (35%)
Rarely	9 (20%)	1 (6%)
No	1 (2%)	2 (12%)

Regular professional development was reported at almost identical rates among women and men. Women were more likely to report that opportunities were rare, while men were more likely to say none were available. Small category counts and the absence of information on the quality of opportunities warrant caution.

Gender synthesis

Three patterns merit attention: women more frequently rated work-life balance as not effective or somewhat effective; fewer women than men reported effectively implemented burnout policies; and men more frequently reported regular performance evaluations and efforts to discourage overwork. Conversely, women and men reported similar levels of adequate resources, incentives, regular professional development and strong mental-health communication. The open-ended qualitative answers have not been attributed to gender because that requires a respondent-level thematic coding by gender; the pooled comments alone cannot support such a claim.

3.11 Cross-question synthesis

Connected findings	Interpretation
Clear goals/deadlines: 79%; adequate resources/tools: 36%; explicit discouragement of overwork: 23%.	Productivity expectations are more commonly reported than explicit protections against overwork. This raises a question about the balance between delivery expectations, resources and recovery.
Vacation days and flexible hours: 63% each; work-life balance not effective/somewhat effective: 77%.	Availability of individual arrangements does not necessarily translate into a positive overall work-life balance experience.
Regular professional development: 47%; training/workshops: 81% of all respondents; career plans: 24%.	Training events are more commonly reported than structured career growth plans.
No burnout policy or unaware of one: 58%; policies not effectively implemented: 21%.	Provision, awareness and implementation are distinct challenges and require different organisational responses.
Strong mental-health communication: 39%; at least some openness: 76%.	Some communication exists in many organisations, but strong openness is not the experience of most respondents.
Open-ended responses emphasise flexibility, leadership, compensation, inclusion, training and emotional support.	Staff describe well-being as organisational and multidimensional, not solely an individual responsibility.

Taken together, the findings suggest a recurring distinction between the presence of organisational practices and whether staff experience them as sufficient and effective. The data do not show that any single practice caused or prevented burnout. They indicate areas for organisations to examine together: workload and resources; rest and working-time expectations; policy visibility and implementation; leadership and communication; and opportunities for development and fair treatment.

3.12 Section Conclusion

The findings present a mixed picture of organisational culture and practice. Respondents commonly reported clear performance expectations, vacation leave, flexible hours and access to professional development at least occasionally. Their open-ended responses also highlighted supportive leadership, recognition, inclusion, financial welfare, mental-health support and professional growth as important contributors to well-being.

At the same time, 77% rated work-life balance practices as only somewhat effective or not effective, and 79% did not report relevant burnout provisions as both present and effectively implemented. Only 39% reported strong organisational communication about mental health and well-being. Gender comparisons indicated less favourable work-life balance ratings and lower reported effective policy implementation among women in this sample, although these descriptive findings do not establish their causes.

For development organisations, the implication is to look beyond whether a policy or benefit exists. Leaders should consider whether staff know about it, can access it, experience it as effective and see it reflected in everyday practice. Realistic workload planning, adequate resources, meaningful rest, supportive leadership, professional development and credible policy implementation are interconnected parts of a healthy working environment.

These findings should be interpreted as insights into the experiences of the participating 62 respondents, not definitive estimates for all development practitioners in Nigeria. The questionnaire was not a clinical diagnostic assessment of burnout. Multiple-response percentages may exceed 100%, and gender comparisons are descriptive rather than causal.

SECTION 4

COPING, MOTIVATION AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

This section examines how respondents cope with work-related stress, what makes it difficult to prevent burnout, what keeps practitioners going, the support organisations offer, and the changes respondents believe are needed. It also considers the reported effects of burnout on work performance and personal life.

The section combines multiple-response questions with open-ended responses. For multiple-response questions, respondents could select more than one option, so percentages may add up to more than 100%. Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

4.1 What strategies do you personally use to cope with work-related stress?

Respondents most often identified taking time off and engaging in physical activity as coping strategies. Formal counselling or therapy was selected less frequently.

Coping strategy	Respondents	Percentage
Taking time off or vacations	36	58%
Exercise or physical activity	33	53%
Meditation or mindfulness	19	31%
Seeking support from colleagues	13	21%
Professional counselling or therapy	7	11%

- Rest and time away from work were the most frequently reported strategies. More than half of respondents selected taking time off or vacations.
- Exercise or physical activity was also common, suggesting that respondents use activities outside work to manage stress.
- Seven respondents (11%) selected professional counselling or therapy. The survey does not establish why this option was selected less often, so explanations should not be assumed from these data alone.
- These responses describe reported coping strategies, not whether the strategies were sufficient to prevent or reduce burnout.

Taken together with later findings on barriers to self-care and the effectiveness of workplace practices, the results suggest that individual coping strategies need to be considered alongside the conditions in which practitioners work.

4.2 What prevents practitioners from taking proactive steps to prevent burnout?

Respondents identified time, fear of negative judgement and financial pressure as the most frequently selected barriers.

Reported barrier	Respondents	Percentage
Lack of time to prioritise self-care	34	55%
Fear of being perceived as weak or uncommitted	31	50%
Financial pressure or fear of losing income	29	47%
Lack of awareness about burnout	27	44%
Lack of access to mental health resources	21	34%
Organisational culture discourages rest	8	13%
Other: not being deliberate about prioritising self-care	1	2%

- The leading barrier was lack of time, selected by 55% of respondents. Self-care may be difficult to prioritise when work demands compete with opportunities for rest.
- Half of respondents (50%) identified fear of being perceived as weak or uncommitted. This points to the potential influence of workplace expectations and professional reputation on whether people feel able to acknowledge their limits.
- Financial pressure was selected by 47% of respondents. For practitioners whose income or employment prospects feel uncertain, taking time off or reducing work may be difficult.
- Forty-four per cent identified lack of awareness about burnout, while 34% identified limited access to mental health resources.
- The write-in response about not being deliberate in prioritising self-care adds an individual perspective, but it was mentioned by only one respondent and should not be generalised.

Volunteer insights

The concern about being perceived as weak or uncommitted is especially relevant when considering volunteers and early-career practitioners who may hope that voluntary service will lead to paid employment, consultancy opportunities, references or other career benefits. In such circumstances, a person may feel pressure to demonstrate availability and dedication even when tired. This is a contextual interpretation informed by sector experience, not a finding directly measured by the survey. The responses do not establish how many participants were volunteers or whether they feared losing specific employment opportunities.

Overall, the barriers reported suggest that burnout prevention is not simply a matter of knowing what to do. Time, financial security, access to support and workplace expectations can affect whether practitioners feel able to act.

4.3 What motivates practitioners to continue despite work-related stress?

Respondents selected a range of reasons for continuing, including commitment to their mission, responsibility to communities, financial necessity and concern about disappointing colleagues or leaders.

Reported motivation	Respondents	Percentage
Passion for the cause or mission	45	73%
Sense of responsibility to the community served	38	61%
Fear of disappointing colleagues or leadership	27	44%
Belief that the situation will improve over time	26	42%
Financial necessity	25	40%
Other: donor requirements and deadlines	Mentioned in write-ins	Not quantified

- Passion for the cause or mission was the most frequently selected motivation, followed by a sense of responsibility to the community served. Fear of disappointing colleagues or leadership, belief that the situation would improve over time, and financial necessity were also reported.
- These findings suggest that practitioners' decisions to continue working under stressful conditions may reflect a combination of purpose, responsibility, expectations and financial considerations. However, the responses do not establish that any of these motivations causes burnout-related experiences. The findings also highlight the importance of ensuring that commitment to a mission is supported by realistic workloads, adequate resources and working conditions that allow staff to rest and recover.
- Belief that circumstances will improve (42%) and financial necessity (40%) were also common. Practitioners may continue because they hope conditions will change or because they need the income.
- One respondent explicitly mentioned donor requirements and deadlines. Another described the responsibility of an executive director to keep the organisation moving. These are useful individual perspectives, but the write-ins should not be treated as prevalence estimates.

A tension between commitment and recovery

Commitment to a mission and responsibility to communities can be powerful sources of motivation. However, when combined with financial pressure or fear of disappointing colleagues, commitment may also make it harder to step back. This is important in a sector where practitioners may feel personally responsible for services, projects and communities that depend on their work.

The survey shows what respondents selected as motivations. It does not establish that passion or responsibility caused burnout, nor does it show how these motivations affected each respondent's ability to recover.

Volunteer insights

For some volunteers, the pressure to keep going may also be linked to hopes of securing future paid employment, consultancy contracts, references or career opportunities. They may worry that declining tasks or admitting exhaustion could affect how supervisors perceive them. This is a contextual interpretation rather than a measured survey finding. It highlights why organisations that rely on volunteers should communicate honestly about recruitment prospects, define reasonable expectations and ensure that setting boundaries is not treated as a lack of commitment.

4.4 Does your organisation offer support mechanisms for employee well-being?

Respondents could select all support mechanisms that applied to their organisation.

Organisational support mechanism	Respondents	Percentage
Flexible working hours	40	65%
Clear communication and role clarity	30	48%
Team-building activities	29	47%
Mental health resources, such as counselling and workshops	27	44%
Opportunities for professional development	25	40%
None of the above	5	8%

- Flexible working hours were the most reported mechanism, selected by 65% of respondents.
- Communication and role clarity (48%) and team-building activities (47%) were also commonly reported. Organisational support can include how work is organised and how colleagues relate to one another, not only formal mental health services.
- Forty-four per cent reported mental health resources, including counselling or workshops. The survey does not establish the quality, accessibility or frequency of these services.
- Forty per cent reported professional development opportunities. These may support staff growth, but they should not be treated as a substitute for manageable workloads, adequate staffing or rest.
- Five respondents (8%) reported none of the listed mechanisms.

Provision does not necessarily mean effectiveness

These findings should be considered alongside the earlier work-life balance question, where 77% rated their organisation's practices as either somewhat effective or not effective. The questions measure different things. An organisation may offer flexible hours or team-building activities while staff still experience excessive workloads, pressure to meet deadlines or difficulty taking leave. The presence of a mechanism does not establish that it is consistently implemented, accessible to everyone or sufficient to address work-related pressures.

The distinction between having support mechanisms and creating sustainable working conditions is central to interpreting these results.

4.5 How effective are these organisational support mechanisms in addressing burnout?

Rating of organisational support	Respondents	Percentage
Somewhat effective	36	58%
Very effective	15	24%
Not effective	8	13%
Organisation does not offer these mechanisms	3	5%

- Most respondents rated the support mechanisms as at least somewhat effective. In total, 51 respondents (82%) selected somewhat effective or very effective.
- The largest group, 58%, described the mechanisms as somewhat effective. Respondents may see value in the support available while not necessarily viewing it as fully sufficient.
- Eight respondents (13%) said the mechanisms were not effective, while three (5%) said their organisation did not offer them.
- These are respondents' perceptions of effectiveness. The survey does not independently assess service quality or establish whether the mechanisms reduced burnout.

The 82% who rated support at least somewhat effective should not be interpreted as evidence that burnout is adequately addressed. The predominance of the "somewhat effective" response, together with earlier concerns about work-life balance, points to a need to understand what would make existing support more useful and reliable.

4.6 How has burnout affected work performance?

Respondents could select multiple effects. The results indicate that reported difficulties included productivity, decision-making, engagement and work quality, although some respondents said their performance had not been affected.

Reported effect on work performance	Respondents	Percentage
Decreased productivity	27	44%
Difficulty making decisions	23	37%
No effect on performance	18	29%
Reduced engagement with work	17	27%
Increased errors or mistakes	8	13%
Increased absenteeism	3	5%
Struggling to perform tasks	1	2%

One response was blank. One respondent selected "Other" without providing further details.

- Decreased productivity was the most frequently reported work-performance effect, selected by 44% of respondents.
- Difficulty making decisions was reported by 37%. In development work, decision-making can be important for project management, responding to community needs and meeting deadlines, although this survey does not measure the consequences of these difficulties.
- Reduced engagement was reported by 27%. A practitioner may continue to attend work while feeling less engaged, so productivity alone may not capture the full experience.
- Eighteen respondents (29%) said burnout had not affected their performance. Experiences varied, and the survey does not explain why these respondents selected this option.

Taken together, the responses suggest that work-related stress and burnout may affect both how much work practitioners complete and how they engage with decisions and responsibilities. These are self-reported experiences and do not prove that burnout alone caused each difficulty.

4.7 How has burnout impacted personal life?

Respondents could select multiple effects. Their answers indicate that the reported impact of burnout extended beyond the workplace into hobbies, physical well-being, sleep, emotional health and relationships.

Reported impact on personal life	Respondents	Percentage
Loss of interest in hobbies	34	55%
Physical health issues, such as fatigue and headaches	33	53%
Difficulty sleeping	31	50%
Emotional health issues, such as anxiety and depression	26	42%
Strained relationships with family or friends	24	39%
No impact on personal life	9	15%

- Loss of interest in hobbies was the most frequently selected impact, reported by 55% of respondents. This may indicate that work-related pressures can affect leisure and activities people ordinarily enjoy.
- Physical health issues were reported by 53%, and difficulty sleeping by 50%. These responses highlight concerns that extend beyond workplace performance. The survey does not establish that burnout caused the reported symptoms.
- Emotional health issues were reported by 42%, while 39% reported strained relationships with family or friends.
- Nine respondents (15%) said their personal life had not been affected. This is an important reminder that experiences varied across the sample.

Considered alongside Question 31, these responses describe effects in two areas: performance and engagement at work, and well-being and relationships outside work. They suggest that work-related stress may extend across several parts of life, although the exploratory survey does not establish causation.

4.8 What changes could organisations make to better address burnout?

The open-ended responses raised a range of practical changes. The themes below summarise the issues expressed by respondents. They are not ranked by frequency because a systematic frequency count of coded themes has not been established.

Key themes

- Recruit more staff and strengthen workforce capacity. Respondents called for expanded teams, experienced staff and fairer distribution of responsibilities. Some linked staffing difficulties to limited or unpredictable funding.
- Reduce workloads and set realistic expectations. Suggestions included realistic work plans, adequate time for tasks, better activity planning and fewer impossible deadlines.
- Clarify roles and distribute responsibilities fairly. Respondents asked for clearer job descriptions, defined responsibilities and more balanced allocation of work.
- Introduce and enforce policies that protect staff well-being. Suggestions included burnout policies, policy reviews, paid time off, annual leave and practical limits on meetings and closing times.
- Provide mental health education and support. Respondents suggested mental health checks, staff training, awareness activities, emotional support and physical wellness activities.
- Improve flexibility and opportunities for rest. Suggestions included hybrid or remote work, flexible schedules, leave, staff vacations and restorative team outings.
- Improve remuneration, recognition and staff welfare. Respondents recommended better salaries, benefits, recognition, performance-related rewards and support for vacations.
- Strengthen leadership, communication and team relationships. Suggestions included supportive management, respectful treatment, encouragement, team integration and open communication.
- Strengthen funding and organisational sustainability. Some respondents called for sustained income and flexible funding to recruit staff and maintain operations.

Insights

- Respondents were asking for changes to the way work is organised, not only additional well-being activities. Staffing, workloads, deadlines and role clarity featured prominently in their suggestions.
- Funding constraints were linked by some respondents to recruitment and retention difficulties. These comments point to a possible cycle in which limited resources constrain staffing and increase pressure on existing team members. The survey does not establish how widespread this pattern is across the sector.
- Work-life balance depends partly on leadership decisions. Leave and flexible hours may have limited value if workloads make them difficult to use or if employees fear negative consequences for stepping away.
- Respondents also called for practical and consistent action. A policy or wellness activity may have limited effect if the underlying work pressures remain unchanged.

Overall, the responses suggest that burnout prevention requires organisations to make work more sustainable, rather than relying only on individual resilience. Respondents called for adequate staffing,

realistic workloads, clear responsibilities, supportive leadership, fair compensation, rest and mental health support.

4.9 What advice would you give fellow practitioners on managing burnout?

Respondents offered advice that was often direct and personal. The themes below reflect the advice expressed in the open-ended responses and are not ranked by frequency.

Key themes

- Prioritise rest and recovery. Respondents encouraged colleagues to take time off, rest adequately, take regular breaks and make time for holidays or relaxing activities. One respondent put it simply: "REST."
- Recognise personal limits. Respondents advised colleagues to listen to their bodies, recognise signs of tiredness and avoid pushing beyond their limits.
- Protect personal well-being and relationships. Suggestions included prioritising health, spending time with family, reconnecting with hobbies, exercising, taking walks and building relationships outside work.
- Set boundaries and manage workload. Respondents recommended saying no to some tasks, negotiating leave, prioritising work, delegating where possible and avoiding treating every task as an emergency. One respondent advised: "Not everything is an emergency. Pace your work."
- Seek support and speak up. Advice included seeking professional help, communicating openly, speaking out about difficulties and using available resources.
- Recognise the need for organisational action. Respondents also recommended better staffing, reduced workloads, flexible working arrangements, shorter working hours and organisational mental health policies.
- Address financial and workplace pressures. Suggestions included improved remuneration and open discussion about financial stress.
- Build capacity and identify what works. Respondents encouraged colleagues to strengthen their coping strategies, continue learning and identify approaches suited to their circumstances.

Insights

- Rest was presented as a necessity, not a reward. Respondents encouraged colleagues to step away before exhaustion becomes overwhelming.
- Self-awareness needs to translate into action. Recognising stress is only the first step; practitioners may also need to negotiate workloads, request leave or seek assistance.
- Boundaries are a practical form of self-protection, but they may be difficult to maintain where workloads are excessive or employees fear negative consequences.
- Respondents did not place responsibility solely on individuals. They also called for changes in staffing, workload, flexibility, remuneration and organisational policy.

The advice points to a tension between commitment to the work and the need to protect personal health. Sustainable development work requires sustainable ways of working. Staff should not have to rely on personal coping strategies alone to remain well in demanding environments.

Cross-question synthesis: coping, motivation and organisational support

Across Questions 26 to 34, several connected patterns emerge.

- Individual coping is common, but barriers remain. Respondents reported taking time off and exercising, yet many also identified lack of time, fear of negative judgement and financial pressure as barriers to proactive self-care.
- Mission and responsibility can sustain practitioners. Passion for the cause and responsibility to communities were the most frequently selected motivations. These motivations may be important sources of purpose, but they should not be used to justify persistent overwork.
- Support mechanisms exist for some respondents, but provision is not the same as adequacy. Flexible hours were the most reported organisational mechanism, and most respondents rated support at least somewhat effective. However, earlier findings on work-life balance and the open-ended recommendations indicate that staff may still want more consistent, practical support.
- Reported impacts extend across work and personal life. Respondents described decreased productivity and decision-making difficulties, as well as impacts on sleep, physical health, emotional health, hobbies and relationships.
- Respondents called for organisational changes as well as individual coping. Staffing, workload management, realistic deadlines, role clarity, rest, supportive leadership and funding were recurring issues in their suggestions.

These findings should be interpreted cautiously. The study is exploratory and based on self-reported responses from 62 practitioners, recruited primarily through the researcher's WhatsApp contacts and development-sector groups. The sample is not nationally representative, and the questionnaire is not a validated clinical diagnostic tool. The results describe respondents' experiences and perceptions rather than establishing clinical burnout prevalence or causal relationships.

Section conclusion

Section 4 shows that respondents use a range of strategies to manage work-related stress, but their ability to protect their well-being may be constrained by time, financial pressure, workplace expectations and organisational capacity. Commitment to mission and community remains a powerful motivation, yet the same commitment may make it difficult for some practitioners to step back. Respondents' accounts of performance and personal-life impacts reinforce the importance of addressing burnout as both a staff well-being issue and an organisational sustainability concern.

The central message is that sustainable development work depends on sustainable working conditions. Individual coping strategies matter, but they need to be supported by adequate staffing, realistic workloads, respectful leadership, access to appropriate support and organisational practices that make rest and recovery possible.

SECTION 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion: what this study adds

This exploratory study documents burnout-related experiences among 62 development practitioners working in Nigeria. Its findings are important not because they establish the prevalence of burnout across the sector, but because they show how frequently respondents reported emotional exhaustion, workload difficulties, concerns about leaving their roles and limitations in organisational work-life balance practices. Taken together, these experiences provide a basis for examining whether the working conditions under which development programmes are delivered are sustainable for the people responsible for delivering them.

Burnout-Related Experiences as an Organisational Sustainability Concern

The finding that 54 of 62 respondents (87%) reported feeling emotionally drained after work sometimes, often or always is a prominent signal in the dataset. In addition, 30 respondents (48%) had considered leaving their roles because of work-related stress or burnout, while 24 (39%) described their workloads as either not manageable or manageable only sometimes. These results do not establish clinical burnout or show that respondents subsequently left their jobs. They nevertheless indicate that exhaustion, workload pressure and concerns about remaining in a role warrant attention from organisational leaders.

The findings are consistent with a systems perspective on staff wellbeing. Workload, staffing, resources, management practices and opportunities for recovery are not simply matters of individual preference. They form part of the conditions under which organisations expect staff to perform. Where demands remain high and support is inadequate, individual coping strategies may be insufficient to make work sustainable.

The implications may extend beyond individual wellbeing. Difficulties with concentration, decision-making, workload management and staff retention could affect programme continuity, institutional knowledge and relationships with communities and partners. These are potential implications rather than outcomes directly measured by this study. The findings should therefore be read as a reason to investigate the relationship between staff wellbeing and programme sustainability, rather than as proof that burnout has reduced development outcomes.

The Tension Between Mission Commitment and Sustainable Working Conditions

Respondents' motivations for continuing in development work provide an important part of this picture. Passion for the cause and responsibility to communities were frequently selected motivations, while fear of disappointing colleagues or leadership was also reported. These responses represent different experiences: a sense of purpose, a commitment to others and possible interpersonal pressure. They

should not be combined into a single measure or interpreted as proof that commitment causes burnout-related experiences.

Mission commitment can be a source of meaning and motivation. However, commitment should not be treated as an unlimited resource that compensates for inadequate staffing, unrealistic deadlines or insufficient support. Where practitioners feel responsible for communities whose needs remain urgent, it may be particularly difficult to disengage from work or accept that some tasks cannot be completed immediately. This is a plausible interpretation of the development-work context, not a causal relationship established by the survey.

The practical implication is that organisations should not rely on staff dedication alone to sustain programme delivery. Commitment needs to be matched by realistic expectations, appropriate resources, supportive leadership and opportunities for rest and recovery.

How Nigerian Social and Workplace Contexts May Matter

The findings also raise questions about how wider social and economic circumstances interact with organisational expectations. Nearly half of respondents identified financial pressure or fear of losing income as a barrier to proactive self-care, while half identified fear of being perceived as weak or uncommitted. These results suggest that the ability to respond to work-related strain may be constrained by concerns extending beyond workload itself.

The survey does not establish why respondents held these concerns. It cannot determine whether they arose from organisational culture, employment insecurity, family responsibilities, social expectations or a combination of factors. However, these are relevant areas for further investigation. In particular, organisational efforts to encourage staff to seek help may be less effective where employees fear negative judgement or believe that raising concerns could threaten their professional standing or income.

Wider Nigerian evidence on unpaid domestic and care work also highlights the importance of considering responsibilities outside paid employment. Such responsibilities may affect the time available for rest and recovery, but the national evidence cannot be used to infer the household circumstances of individual respondents. The present findings should therefore encourage more detailed investigation of the relationship between work demands, unpaid care and access to recovery time, rather than assumptions about the experiences of Nigerian practitioners as a group.

Gender Patterns and the Limits of Interpretation

The study also offers an initial opportunity to consider gender differences in reported experiences. Women represented 45 of the 62 respondents, compared with 17 men. The analysis identifies some differences in reported working conditions and organisational support, including less favourable work-life balance assessments among women. However, the gender patterns are not uniform across all measures.

These findings should be interpreted cautiously. The sample is small, the numbers of women and men differ, and the groups may differ in their roles, seniority, employment circumstances or organisational settings. The study cannot establish that gender caused the observed differences, nor can it establish that the patterns represent the wider Nigerian development workforce.

The findings are better treated as prompts for organisational review and further research. Organisations may wish to examine whether workload allocation, access to flexible arrangements, expectations about

availability and opportunities for rest are experienced differently by staff with different responsibilities and circumstances. Further research could explore these issues alongside unpaid care responsibilities, disability, employment security, seniority and programme area.

What This Study Contributes

The contribution of *Hidden Crisis* is to bring together practitioners' reported experiences, working conditions, organisational practices, coping strategies and support needs within a Nigerian development-sector context. It highlights the importance of examining staff wellbeing alongside the operational realities of development work, while recognising that the evidence is exploratory and cannot establish causal relationships.

The findings support a practical conclusion: staff wellbeing should be considered part of organisational sustainability. This requires more than encouraging individuals to manage stress. It requires organisations and funding partners to examine the conditions under which work is planned, resourced, supervised and delivered, and to test whether their policies and practices provide meaningful support in everyday working life.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings point to the need for a coordinated response to burnout-related experiences among development practitioners. While individual coping strategies remain important, sustainable staff wellbeing also depends on realistic workloads, adequate resources, supportive leadership and organisational practices that make rest and recovery possible. The recommendations below are intended to guide reflection and practical action by development organisations and their funding partners. They should be adapted to organisational size, resources and operating context.

- **Strengthen workload planning and staffing:** Development organisations should review workloads, staffing levels, role clarity and project timelines to identify where demands exceed available capacity. Managers should establish realistic deadlines, distribute responsibilities fairly and ensure that staff have the resources required to deliver their work. Urgent tasks should be prioritised according to genuine need rather than treating every assignment as an emergency.
- **Make rest and work-life balance practical:** Organisations should review how staff access annual leave, breaks and flexible working arrangements. Clear expectations around working hours, after-hours communication and overtime can help reduce the normalisation of excessive work. Managers should plan for staff absences and recovery time rather than allowing workloads to accumulate around individual employees. Flexible arrangements should be applied fairly and in ways that reflect the requirements of different roles.
- **Strengthen leadership support and workplace communication:** Managers and senior leaders should create working environments where staff can raise concerns about workload, stress and well-being without fear of being perceived as weak or uncommitted. Regular check-ins, clear communication about responsibilities and opportunities for staff to contribute to decisions can help organisations identify problems earlier. Leadership development should include practical skills in workload management, supportive communication and responding appropriately to staff concerns.
- **Strengthen workplace communication and psychological safety:** Organisations should make it safe for staff to raise concerns about excessive workloads, work-related stress and wellbeing without fear

of being perceived as weak or uncommitted. Managers should communicate expectations clearly, respond constructively to concerns and provide appropriate channels for staff feedback.

- **Recognise responsibilities outside the workplace:** Where operationally feasible, organisations should consider how meeting schedules, working hours, flexibility and leave arrangements affect staff with different personal and caring responsibilities. Arrangements should be applied fairly and reviewed with staff to determine whether they provide meaningful opportunities for rest and recovery.
- **Establish and implement clear staff well-being policies:** Organisations should assess whether staff well-being and burnout-related policies exist, whether employees know about them and whether the provisions are implemented consistently. Where gaps exist, organisations should develop or strengthen appropriate policies covering leave, working hours, flexible arrangements, staff support and referral to relevant mental-health services. Policies should be communicated clearly, reviewed periodically and assessed through staff feedback rather than judged solely by their existence.
- **Encourage funders to support sustainable working conditions:** Funding partners should consider how grant requirements, project timelines, reporting obligations and budget constraints affect the working conditions of implementing organisations. Where feasible, funding arrangements should allow for realistic staffing levels, appropriate staff development, reasonable delivery timelines and relevant staff wellbeing costs. Donors and implementing organisations should discuss delivery pressures openly and avoid expectations that depend on sustained overwork or unpaid additional labour.
- **Improve access to appropriate support and professional development:** Organisations should consider what forms of support are accessible and useful to staff, including peer support, confidential counselling or referral options where feasible, opportunities for professional development and structured reflection after emotionally demanding work. Support should respond to staff needs and be accessible without stigma. Professional development should also help managers and practitioners strengthen their capacity to manage demanding roles sustainably.
- **Encourage funders to support sustainable working conditions:** Funding partners should consider how grant requirements, project timelines, reporting obligations and budget constraints affect the working conditions of implementing organisations. Where feasible, funding arrangements should allow for realistic staffing levels, appropriate staff development, reasonable delivery timelines and relevant staff well-being costs. Donors and implementing organisations should discuss delivery pressures openly and avoid expectations that depend on sustained overwork or unpaid additional labour.
- **Monitor progress and learn from staff experience:** Organisations should establish proportionate ways to understand whether staff well-being measures are being implemented and whether employees find them useful. These may include confidential staff feedback, periodic workload reviews, monitoring of leave and overtime patterns, and discussions about organisational support. Findings should inform adjustments to policies and working practices. Smaller organisations with limited resources can begin with simple, regular staff conversations and targeted reviews rather than complex monitoring systems.
- **Promote individual coping alongside organisational responsibility:** Practitioners should be encouraged to recognise signs of stress, protect time for rest, maintain supportive relationships and seek assistance when needed. However, these actions should complement, not replace,

organisational responsibility for safe and sustainable working conditions. Staff should not be expected to compensate for chronic understaffing, unrealistic deadlines or inadequate support through personal resilience alone.

- Strengthen research and monitoring on staff wellbeing: Organisations should use proportionate methods to understand whether staff wellbeing measures are being implemented and whether employees find them useful. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples to investigate differences in burnout-related experiences across gender, professional role, seniority, employment security, caring responsibilities, disability and programme area. Qualitative research could also explore how workplace hierarchy, financial insecurity, social expectations and organisational culture influence whether practitioners disclose difficulties and seek support.

These recommendations reflect the experiences and suggestions reported by participants in this exploratory survey. The study did not test the effectiveness of specific interventions. Organisations should therefore adapt the recommendations to their circumstances, consult staff in deciding priorities and review progress over time to identify which approaches are practical and helpful.

5.3 Conclusion

5.3 Conclusion

This exploratory study examined burnout-related experiences, working conditions, coping practices and organisational support among 62 development practitioners working in Nigeria. The findings show that emotional exhaustion was frequently reported, almost half of respondents had considered leaving their roles because of work-related stress or burnout, and many identified workload pressures, limited resources, emotional demands and inadequate compensation as contributing challenges.

The findings also highlight the relationship between individual commitment and organisational conditions. Passion for the cause and responsibility to communities were common motivations for continuing in development work, but commitment does not remove the need for realistic workloads, adequate resources, supportive leadership and opportunities for rest and recovery. Respondents' recommendations point to the importance of addressing staff wellbeing through organisational practices as well as individual coping strategies.

The findings are consistent with literature from related occupational settings that highlights the importance of working conditions, organisational support and systems-level responses to staff wellbeing. However, the studies reviewed concern different occupational groups and contexts, and their findings should not be treated as direct evidence of burnout prevalence among development practitioners in Nigeria. The present study contributes exploratory evidence about the experiences reported by its respondents and identifies issues that warrant further investigation.

These findings must be interpreted within the study's limitations. The survey was exploratory, cross-sectional and based on self-reported responses from a non-representative sample recruited primarily through the researcher's professional contacts and development-sector groups. It does not establish causal relationships, provide a national estimate of burnout or constitute a clinical assessment.

Despite these limitations, the experiences shared by participants provide a useful basis for reflection and further investigation. Development organisations and funding partners should consider how their working practices, project expectations and available resources affect staff wellbeing. Further research with broader and more diverse samples could examine these patterns across different roles, organisations and locations.

Ultimately, sustainable development work depends not only on the outcomes organisations seek to achieve, but also on whether the people delivering that work can do so under conditions that support their wellbeing. Preventing and responding to burnout-related experiences is a shared responsibility involving practitioners, organisational leaders and funding partners, rather than a burden to be left to individual resilience alone.

ANNEXES

Annex A. Methodological note and study limitations

A1. Study design and purpose

This study used an exploratory, cross-sectional survey to examine burnout-related experiences, work conditions, organisational support, coping practices and recommendations among development practitioners working in Nigeria. It was designed to document the experiences reported by participants and identify issues requiring attention from development organisations, sector leaders and funders.

The study was not designed to estimate the national prevalence of burnout, diagnose individual respondents or establish causal relationships between working conditions and wellbeing.

A2. Sample and scope

The primary analysis used the locked Nigeria-only dataset, Version 1.0, comprising 62 respondents. Three non-Nigerian submissions were excluded from the Nigeria-focused analysis as complete records.

The final sample comprised 45 women (73%) and 17 men (27%). Respondents represented different organisational settings and professional roles, including senior leadership, mid-level management, administrative and support functions, and field or project roles. Finance Manager responses were grouped with Senior Leadership for role comparisons only, while the original role responses were retained in the dataset.

Participants were recruited through the researcher's professional networks, including WhatsApp contacts and development-sector groups. The sample was therefore a non-probability, convenience-based sample. It should not be treated as representative of all development practitioners or organisations in Nigeria.

A3. Data collection and questionnaire

The questionnaire collected self-reported information on respondents' work arrangements, working hours, workload manageability, emotional exhaustion, detachment from work, organisational support, work-life balance practices, burnout-related policies, coping strategies and perceived effects on work and personal life.

It also included questions on perceived contributors to work-related strain, barriers to self-care, motivations for continuing in development work and recommendations for improving organisational practices. Optional open-ended questions provided additional context in respondents' own words.

Because responses were self-reported, findings reflect participants' perceptions and recollections at the time of the survey. They were not independently verified against organisational records or clinical assessments.

A4. Data preparation and analysis

The quantitative analysis used the Nigeria-only dataset as the source of truth. Counts and percentages were calculated using the relevant denominator for each question, taking account of missing responses.

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers, and findings are presented alongside counts and denominators wherever appropriate.

For questions allowing multiple selections, respondents could select more than one answer. The percentages for these questions may therefore add up to more than 100%.

Gender-disaggregated findings are presented descriptively. The gender groups are unequal in size, and respondents' roles and organisational contexts may differ. Differences between women's and men's responses should not be interpreted as statistically established or as evidence that gender caused a particular outcome.

Open-ended responses were reviewed thematically to identify recurring issues and practical suggestions. The analysis identified overlapping themes, including workload and staffing, rest and recovery, flexible working arrangements, organisational communication, financial resources, mental health support, professional development, and policies and accountability. The qualitative coding was analyst-assisted and exploratory; it was not independently double-coded. Theme counts should therefore be interpreted as descriptive patterns in the dataset rather than precise estimates of the prevalence of particular experiences across the sector.

A5. Interpretation of burnout-related experiences

The report uses the term burnout-related experiences to describe the work-related strain captured by the questionnaire. In particular, it reports responses to individual items on emotional exhaustion, detachment or indifference towards work, workload manageability and consideration of leaving a role because of work-related stress or burnout.

The questionnaire did not provide a complete, validated three-dimensional measure of burnout, including reduced professional efficacy. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as a clinical diagnosis or a validated estimate of burnout prevalence. For example, the finding that 54 of 62 respondents (87%) felt emotionally drained sometimes, often or always after work refers specifically to emotional exhaustion, not to the proportion of respondents clinically experiencing burnout.

A6. Study limitations

The findings should be interpreted in light of the following limitations:

- **Sample size and representativeness:** The study involved 62 respondents recruited through professional networks and development-sector groups. It cannot establish how common the reported experiences are across Nigeria's development sector.
- **Self-reported information:** Responses reflect participants' own perceptions and recollections. They were not independently verified against working-hour records, organisational policies, clinical assessments or other external evidence.
- **Cross-sectional design:** Data were collected at one point in time. The study cannot establish whether particular organisational conditions caused emotional exhaustion, whether exhaustion influenced thoughts of leaving, or how experiences change over time.
- **Measurement limitations:** The questionnaire did not use a complete validated burnout measure. Findings therefore describe specific burnout-related experiences and indicators rather than a validated burnout score or clinical diagnosis.

- **Unequal subgroup sizes:** Women represented 73% of the sample, while men represented 27%. Some professional-role groups were also small. Gender and role comparisons are descriptive and should be interpreted cautiously.
- **Open-ended response coverage:** Not all respondents answered every open-ended question. The themes reflect the people who provided written responses and may not capture the experiences of those who did not respond.
- **Qualitative interpretation:** The thematic analysis was exploratory and analyst-assisted, without independent double-coding. Themes may overlap, and the categorisation of written responses involves interpretive judgement.
- **Organisational diversity:** Development organisations vary in size, mandate, location, funding model and employment practices. The experiences reported by this sample should not be assumed to apply equally to all NGOs, humanitarian organisations or development practitioners.

A7. Implications for use of the findings

Despite these limitations, the study provides useful exploratory evidence about the experiences reported by participating development practitioners. Its value lies in identifying concerns that organisations and funders can examine, particularly workload, staffing, resources, compensation, recovery time, organisational support and the practical implementation of staff wellbeing policies.

The findings are best used to inform discussion, organisational reflection and further research. They should not be used to rank organisations, diagnose individual staff, or make unsupported claims about the prevalence or causes of burnout across Nigeria's development sector.

Future research could use a larger and more diverse sample, a validated burnout measure, follow-up interviews and longitudinal data. It could also examine how experiences vary by role, seniority, employment status, organisational type, location and caregiving responsibilities.

Annex B: Research Questionnaire

Introduction and consent

Skill Hub Consulting is conducting an exploratory study on work-related stress, burnout-related experiences, organisational practices and staff wellbeing among development practitioners. The questionnaire asks about your work experiences, organisational support, coping strategies and recommendations. Please answer based on your own experience. There are no right or wrong answers. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. Responses should be analysed confidentially and reported in aggregate or without identifying individual respondents.

Consent to participate: By proceeding with the questionnaire, you confirm that you understand the purpose of the study and agree to participate voluntarily.

☐ I agree to participate. ☐ I do not agree to participate.

Section A. About you and your work

1. What is your age group?

☐ 18–24 ☐ 25–34 ☐ 35–44 ☐ 45–54 ☐ 55 or above

2. What is your gender?

☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Prefer to self-describe: _____ ☐ Prefer not to say

3. What is your religion? (Optional)

☐ Christianity ☐ Islam ☐ Other: _____ ☐ Prefer not to say

4. What is your marital status? (Optional)

☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Other / prefer not to say: _____

5. In which country do you work?

Answer: _____

6. What type of organisation do you work with?

☐ Local NGO ☐ National NGO ☐ International NGO ☐ Donor agency ☐ Government/public service

☐ Government partner ☐ Social enterprise ☐ Development consultancy ☐ Other: _____

7. What is your role in the organisation?

☐ Senior leadership (e.g., Executive Director, Programme Director)

☐ Mid-level management (e.g., Manager, Coordinator)

☐ Field worker / Project Officer ☐ Administrative / Support Staff ☐ Finance Manager

☐ Other: _____

8. How many years of experience do you have in development work?

☐ Less than 2 years ☐ 2–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ More than 10 years

9. What is your current employment status?

☐ Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐ Contract ☐ Volunteer ☐ Other: _____

10. On average, how many hours do you work per week?

☐ Less than 30 hours ☐ 30–40 hours ☐ 41–50 hours ☐ More than 50 hours

Section B. Workload and work-related experiences

11. Do you have a clear job description and clear expectations for your role?

☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

12. How often do you feel emotionally drained after work?

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

13. Do you feel your workload is manageable?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

14. Do you feel supported by your organisation in managing work-related stress?

☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☐ No

15. How often do you feel detached or indifferent about your work?

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

16. Have you considered leaving your role because of work-related stress or burnout?

☐ Yes ☐ No

17. In your opinion, what are the main contributors to stress or burnout in your role? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Heavy workload ☐ Lack of resources ☐ Limited support from leadership

☐ Emotional demands of the job ☐ Inadequate compensation ☐ Organisational culture

☐ Other: _____

18. How does your organisation encourage productivity? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Setting clear goals and deadlines ☐ Offering incentives or rewards

☐ Regular performance evaluations ☐ Providing adequate resources and tools

☐ Capacity building and networking opportunities ☐ Other: _____ ☐ None of the above

19. How does your organisation approach rest and recovery for staff? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Encouraging the use of vacation days ☐ Flexible work hours

☐ Providing mental health days ☐ Discouraging overtime or overwork

☐ Time off after weekend/public-holiday work ☐ Running shifts or working from home

☐ Other: _____ ☐ None of the above

20. Does your organisation offer opportunities for professional development?

☐ Yes, regularly ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ No

21. If yes, what types of professional development opportunities are provided? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Training and workshops ☐ Mentorship programmes ☐ Funding for external courses or certifications

☐ Career growth plans ☐ Other: _____

22. How effective are your organisation's practices in promoting work-life balance?

☐ Very effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat effective ☐ Not effective

23. Does your organisation have clear policies for addressing workplace burnout?

☐ Yes, and they are implemented effectively

☐ Yes, but they are not effectively implemented

☐ No policies exist ☐ I am not aware of any policies

24. Does your organisation promote open communication about mental health and wellbeing?

☐ Yes, strongly ☐ Somewhat ☐ Rarely ☐ No

25. In your opinion, what aspects of your organisation's culture contribute most to staff wellbeing?

Open response: _____

26. What changes would you recommend to improve organisational practices around productivity, rest and staff development?

Open response: _____

Section C. Personal coping and barriers to prevention

27. What strategies do you personally use to cope with work-related stress? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Exercise or physical activity ☐ Meditation or mindfulness practices

☐ Seeking support from colleagues ☐ Professional counselling or therapy

☐ Taking time off or vacations ☐ Prayer or spiritual practices

☐ Other: _____ ☐ I do not currently use a coping strategy

28. Why might you or others avoid taking proactive steps to prevent burnout? (Select all that apply.)

☐ Fear of being perceived as weak or uncommitted ☐ Lack of time to prioritise self-care

- ☐ Financial pressures or fear of losing income ☐ Organisational culture discourages rest
- ☐ Lack of awareness about burnout and its impacts ☐ Lack of access to mental health resources
- ☐ Other: _____

29. What motivates you to continue working despite stress or burnout? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Passion for the cause or mission ☐ Sense of responsibility to the community served
- ☐ Financial necessity ☐ Fear of disappointing colleagues or leadership
- ☐ Belief that the situation will improve over time ☐ Donor requirements and deadlines
- ☐ Other: _____

Section D. Organisational support and perceived effects

30. Does your organisation offer any of the following support mechanisms for employee wellbeing? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Mental health resources (e.g., counselling or workshops) ☐ Flexible working hours
- ☐ Clear communication and role clarity ☐ Team-building activities
- ☐ Opportunities for professional development ☐ Other: _____ ☐ None of the above

31. How effective do you feel these organisational support mechanisms are in addressing stress or burnout?

- ☐ Very effective ☐ Somewhat effective ☐ Not effective
- ☐ My organisation does not offer these mechanisms

32. How has burnout or work-related stress affected your work performance? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Decreased productivity ☐ Difficulty making decisions ☐ Reduced engagement with work
- ☐ Increased errors or mistakes ☐ Increased absenteeism ☐ Struggling to perform tasks
- ☐ It has not affected my performance ☐ Other: _____

33. How has burnout or work-related stress affected your personal life? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Strained relationships with family or friends ☐ Loss of interest in hobbies
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping ☐ Physical health issues (e.g., fatigue or headaches)
- ☐ Emotional health issues (e.g., anxiety or depression) ☐ It has not impacted my personal life
- ☐ Other: _____

34. What changes do you think your organisation could make to better address burnout?

Open response: _____

35. What advice would you give to fellow development practitioners on managing burnout?

Open response: _____

Section E. Follow-up

36. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

☐ Yes ☐ No

37. If you would like to receive the final report or be contacted for further engagement, please provide your email address (optional).

Email: _____