c&e Advisory

Corporate–Non-profit Partnerships Barometer 2025

Weathering the Storm:

Strategic Partnerships Are Helping Corporates and Non-profit Organisations to Navigate Headwinds

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Introduction

Welcome!

Welcome to the 2025 edition of the C&E Corporate-Non-Profit Partnerships Barometer – the 16th in our unique annual series of practitioner-led studies.

This report draws on the experience of 130 leading corporate and non-profit respondents who completed our confidential annual survey during July. The survey was supplemented by discussions and interviews with corporate and non-profit practitioners to provide qualitative insights.

The Barometer series offers continuing insight into the ways in which the corporate – non-profit partnering landscape is evolving. Each year's findings build on previous years' data to deepen understanding of drivers, changing practices and likely future developments in cross-sector partnering and its growing impact on society.

The 2025 Barometer arrives at a time of considerable geopolitical turbulence. Political changes, ongoing conflicts, and a cost-of-living challenges are just some of the factors contributing to heightened uncertainty. Alongside these developments, scrutiny of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments has intensified, particularly in the US, prompting some organisations to reassess how they position and communicate their efforts. Meanwhile, reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) are adding pressure, especially for non-profits, fuelling concern about the sustainability of social and environmental impact initiatives and the resources available to support them.

> “ In this shifting context, cross-sector partnerships remain a critical tool "

In this shifting context, cross-sector partnerships remain a critical mechanism for impactful change.

This year’s Barometer explores how practitioners are responding to external pressures, holding firm, adapting strategies, and in some cases, increasing collaboration to mitigate funding gaps and safeguard delivery. The report also looks at how ESG commitments are evolving, how use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is beginning to shape partnership practice, and where both corporates and non-profits see the greatest opportunities and risks over the mid-term. The aim is to offer practical insight grounded in the lived experience of partnership professionals navigating real-world complexity.

As ever, we are grateful to all our respondents and contributors for sharing their unique and valuable perspectives and experiences.

We hope this 2025 edition of the C&E Corporate-Non-Profit Partnerships Barometer helps to inform and enhance their and your understanding, investment decisions and practice.

As usual, we welcome your comments and suggestions via: www.candeadvisory.com/barometer or **admin@candeadvisory.com**

Manny Amadi, MVO
CEO, C&E Advisory

Headline Findings

Why partner?

Reputation and credibility remain the top reason corporates engage with non-profits, with 92% citing it as their primary driver. Innovation (67%) has once again surpassed long-term stability & impact (61%), reflecting a continued shift in strategic priorities. In contrast, access to knowledge has declined in perceived importance, falling to 56%, down 11% from last year.

For non-profits, access to funding remains the key motivator, with 88%. Stating this as their lead reason for partnering. Long-term stability & impact (67%) innovation (63%) and access to people & contacts (63%) follow, suggesting a broader and more strategic view of partnership potential.

Partnering practice and effectiveness

The trend towards deeper, problem-solving partnerships continues, with 54% of corporates and 43% of non-profits reporting active engagement in such collaborations. A further 47% of non-profits and 19% of corporates aspire to engage in such partnerships.

There is overwhelming agreement that partnerships help corporates to improve understanding of their social and environmental issues, with 97% of corporates and 94% of non-profits in alignment.

There is also strong agreement (68% of corporate and 61% of non-profit respondents agree) that cross-sector partnering has helped businesses to change their practices for the better. This is an important finding about the value of cross-sector collaboration, but we find this year a 10% decline in in the proportion of businesses acknowledging that their organisations have changed behaviour for the better, owing to cross-sector partnering.

Non-profits: holistic ESG frameworks and plans

This year's findings highlight a growing disconnect in perceptions of non-profits' commitment to and framing of their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) efforts. While 71% of non-profit respondents report that their organisations have holistic ESG frameworks in place, only 40% of corporates agree - down 21% from last year. Moreover, dissent among corporates has risen to 17%, marking a 14% increase and suggesting deeper misalignment in expectations and communication on this topic.

The Stars

The most admired corporate – non-profit partnerships and partners

This year, the multilateral partnership between **Tesco, Cancer Research UK, British Heart Foundation and Diabetes UK has once again been named the Most Admired**, securing 6.9% of the vote in an unprompted poll of sector leaders. Now in its third consecutive year at the top, the partnership is recognised for its long-term commitment to health awareness and fundraising.

The Sky Bet–British Heart Foundation partnership was voted runner-up, reflecting strong appreciation for its national reach and public engagement. The Tesco–WWF and HSBC–Shelter partnerships followed closely, jointly taking third place.

Special Topics

Navigating emerging pressures on ESG commitments

Despite heightened political scrutiny, particularly in the US, most organisations are holding firm in their commitment to ESG / Responsible Business. Just over half of corporates (51%) and non-profits (46%) report no change in their commitment to the agenda. Significantly, 43% of corporates and 44% of non-profit respondents report that their organisations have strengthened their commitments in response to the growing political rhetoric on this topic. Only 6% of corporate respondents report any reductions.

Instead, many organisations are adjusting how they communicate on ESG or Responsible Business-related matters - reframing their language or softening tone without changing intent. This suggests s a degree of resilience, with organisations refining their approach rather than stepping back.

Continuity of partnership engagement in a changing political climate

The role of ESG in shaping partnerships appears intact, with 75% of corporates and 54% of non-profits reporting no change in their cross-sector partnership engagement levels. Encouragingly, 22% of corporates and 37% of non-profits say they are increasing their cross-sector collaboration. Only a small minority report decreasing their efforts. These trends indicate that while approaches may be adapting, the strategic commitment to partnering remains broadly consistent.

The impact of ODA cuts on ESG delivery and strategic partnering

Unsurprisingly, reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) by various governments are creating pressure, particularly for non-profits. Around 28% of non-profits and 24% of corporates report negative impacts on their ESG efforts.

Nearly one in five non-profits (17%) describe the impact as significantly negative, with some citing cancelled programmes or structural changes. For corporates, the effects are largely indirect, with several noting increased strain on their non-profit partners.

The impact of ODA reductions on cross-sector partnership investment

Despite these constraints, most organisations have not reduced their investment in partnerships. 94% of corporates and 64% of non-profits report no change,. Meanwhile, 25% of non-profits say they are now investing more in cross-sector collaboration. The figures suggest a cautious but proactive pivot towards partnerships to offset funding gaps and maintain delivery.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, is beginning to gain traction in cross-sector partnerships, though it remains in the early stages of integration. While only 18% of corporates and 3% of non-profits say AI plays a significant role in their most important partnerships, this marks a notable increase from last year.

Moderate adoption is also rising, with 32% of corporates and 29% of non-profits reporting some use. Shifts in perception are particularly striking: the share of corporates saying AI 'hardly featured' or 'did not feature at all' in their partnerships has dropped significantly, suggesting growing openness to its use.

While corporate adoption has clearly accelerated year on year, uptake among non-profits remains more limited, reflecting a different pace of engagement and contrasting with the more enthusiastic uptake seen among corporate partners.

Looking ahead, expectations for the role of AI across various dimensions of the partnering process have grown significantly. Most respondents now anticipate AI playing an important or very important role in research (93%), partnership impact and reporting (82%), programme delivery (75%), partner selection (69%), and policy and advocacy (67%) in the coming three years. These figures represent notable increases across all categories compared to last year. Although full integration is still some way off, the data suggests a clear shift from caution to growing confidence in AI's potential to strengthen cross-sector collaboration.

Trends, Prospects & Anticipated Developments in Partnerships

Medium-term prospects for corporate-non-profit partnering

Cross-sector partnerships are expected to grow in importance, particularly among non-profits. This year, 84% of non-profits and 69% of corporates predict that partnerships will become more or much more important over the next three years. Among non-profits, there is a clear rise in sentiment, with more now expecting partnerships to be much more important and fewer anticipating only moderate growth in importance. Corporate expectations are positive but less pronounced. Just 23% expect significant growth, while 46% foresee a moderate rise. Overall, confidence in the future importance of collaboration remains strong, though there appears to be greater nuance in the levels of enthusiasm indicated by corporate respondents.

Drivers of change

The main drivers behind the likely future importance of cross-sector collaboration remain reputational for corporates and financial for non-profits. Brand credibility is cited by 89% of corporates, followed by pressure to demonstrate societal impact, selected by 71%. Together, these show that partnerships are increasingly viewed as part of Responsible Business strategy.

For non-profits, the need for funding is still paramount, cited by 88%. Many also see value in leveraging complementary strengths, with 74% of non-profits and 53% of corporates in agreement, although this view has declined among corporates. Internal stakeholder pressure and government interest are also on the rise, especially among corporates. The data suggest a dual dynamic: reputation and responsibility for corporates, and funding and alignment for non-profits. Pressure on corporates to demonstrate societal consideration within business practices remains a key driver.

The outlook for investments in cross-sector partnerships over the mid-term

Investment in cross-sector partnerships is expected to grow, though more cautiously than in previous years. 67% of corporates and 78% of non-profits anticipate an increase in their investment levels over the next three years. However, just 17% of corporates and 8% of non-profits expect a significant rise. A larger group now predicts modest growth, with 50% of corporates and 70% of non-profits expecting a moderate increase. Meanwhile, 31% of corporates and 16% of non-profits foresee no change in investment levels. While ambition has slightly shifted, there is strong optimism that investment in partnerships will continue to grow in the period ahead.

Part 1: Why and How Companies & Non-Profits Partner

1.1 Why Partner?

For corporates, reputation and credibility are the main motivators, whilst for non-profits, funds, long-term stability and innovation are key

Survey data clearly shows that for corporates, enhancing reputation and credibility remains the foremost motivation for entering into partnerships with non-profits, with 92% indicating the importance of this consideration. Innovation, and long-term stability & impact also continue to be significant motives, with figures at 67% and 61% respectively (and innovation having overtaken 'long-term stability and impact' as the second most important driver of partnerships). Access to knowledge has notably decreased in importance, now valued by 56% of corporates, marking a 11% decrease from last year.

On the other hand, non-profits prioritise access to funds as their primary motive, with 88% considering it crucial. Long-term stability and innovation follow at 67% and 63%, respectively. Interestingly, access to people and contacts and access to knowledge are also important factors for non-profits, with 63% and 47%, respectively.

Overall, while the core motivations for partnerships remain consistent, shifts in specific areas highlight evolving priorities and the dynamic nature of corporate-non-profit collaborations.

Q&A

"Why does your organisation engage in corporate-non-profit partnerships?"

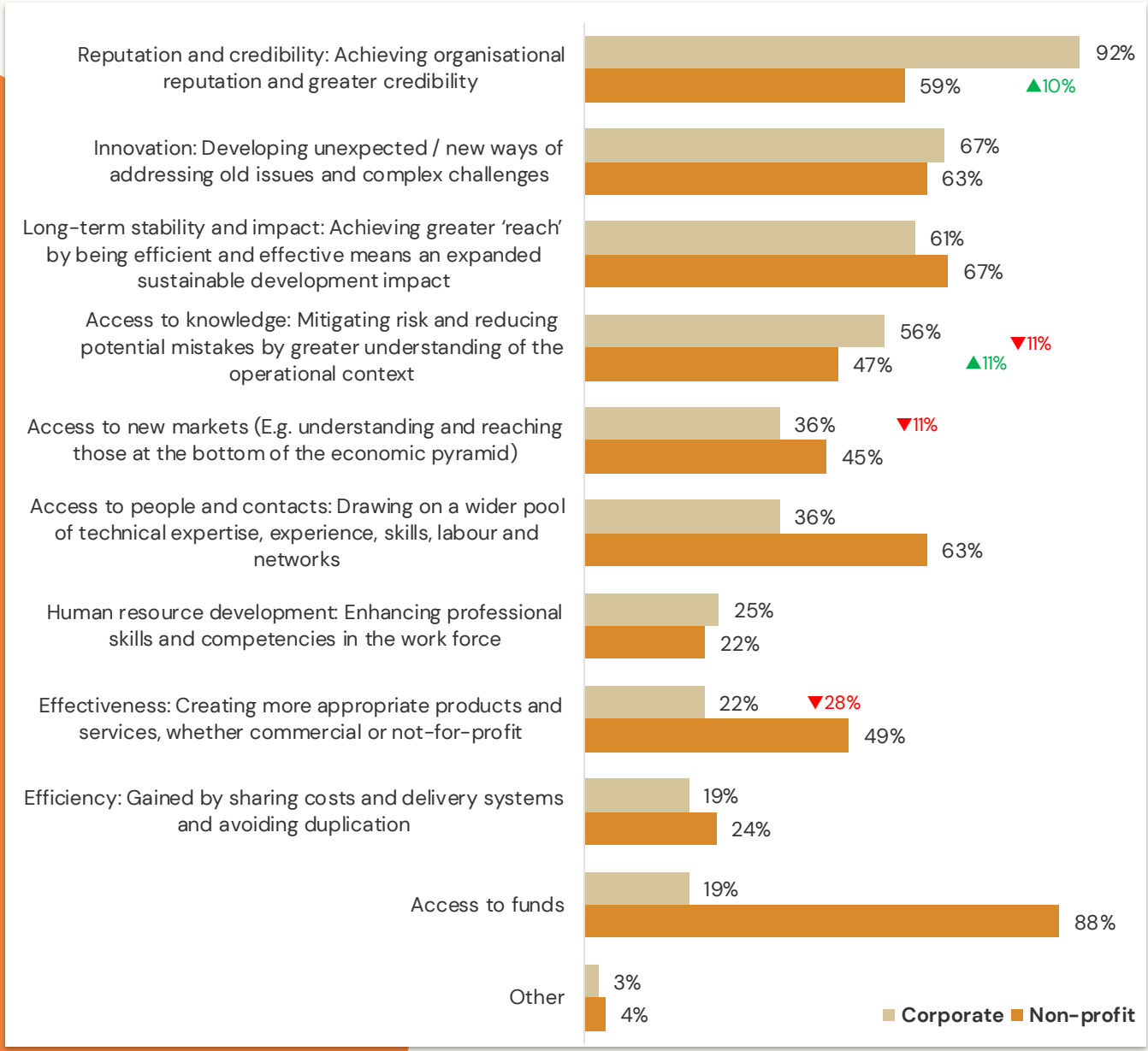

Figure 1: Why companies and non-profits engage in partnerships with each other

Q&A

"Why does your organisation engage in corporate-non-profit partnerships?"

CORPORATES

- **92%** For reputation & credibility
- **67%** For Innovation
- **61%** For long-term stability & impact

NON-PROFITS

- **88%** To bolster vital funds for impact
- **67%** For long-term stability & impact
- **63%** For access to people & contacts

Figure 2: Top Three Reasons why companies and non-profits engage in partnerships with each other

1.2
Partnering Practice & Effectiveness

Depth and role of partnerships: over half all corporates and nearly half of non-profits engaged in deeper partnerships, whilst all others aspire to this position

Previous Barometer reports have shown corporates and their non-profit partners increasingly engaged in deeper, problem-solving partnerships addressing core, mission-relevant issues. Such partnerships are characterised by their long-term, strategic approach to planning and delivery – compared to tactical partnerships which tend to be short-term in nature. The 2025 data reflects this trend, with 54% of corporates and 43% of non-profits affirming that their current partnerships align with this deeper engagement, a slight increase from previous year.

Additionally, 19% of corporates and 47% of non-profits aspire to achieve this position, indicating ongoing efforts to enhance the depth and impact of their collaborations, although this marks an over 15% decrease in efforts for corporates and over a 15% increase for non-profit partners.

Perhaps surprisingly, 14% of corporates respondents report that their organisations do not sufficiently value the type of cross-sector partnership addressing core, mission-relevant issues in ways that create value for society, representing a 9% increase from past year. In dialogue, respondents from such companies express regret for this situation and report that they are working to evolve their company's approach to align with what is now established practice elsewhere.

In summary, non-profits in 2025 continued to expand their commitment to deeper, mission-aligned partnerships, while corporate engagement plateaued (albeit at an already-high level), with a notable rise in the small minority of corporate respondents whose organisations do not sufficiently value this approach to partnering across sectors.

Q&A

“ ‘We are increasingly engaged in deeper, problem-solving partnerships designed to address core, mission-relevant or purpose-led issues in ways that create value for society, for ourselves and for our (corporate or non-profit) partners.’

… In light of the preceding statement, which of the following choices most accurately reflects your organisation’s current position?”

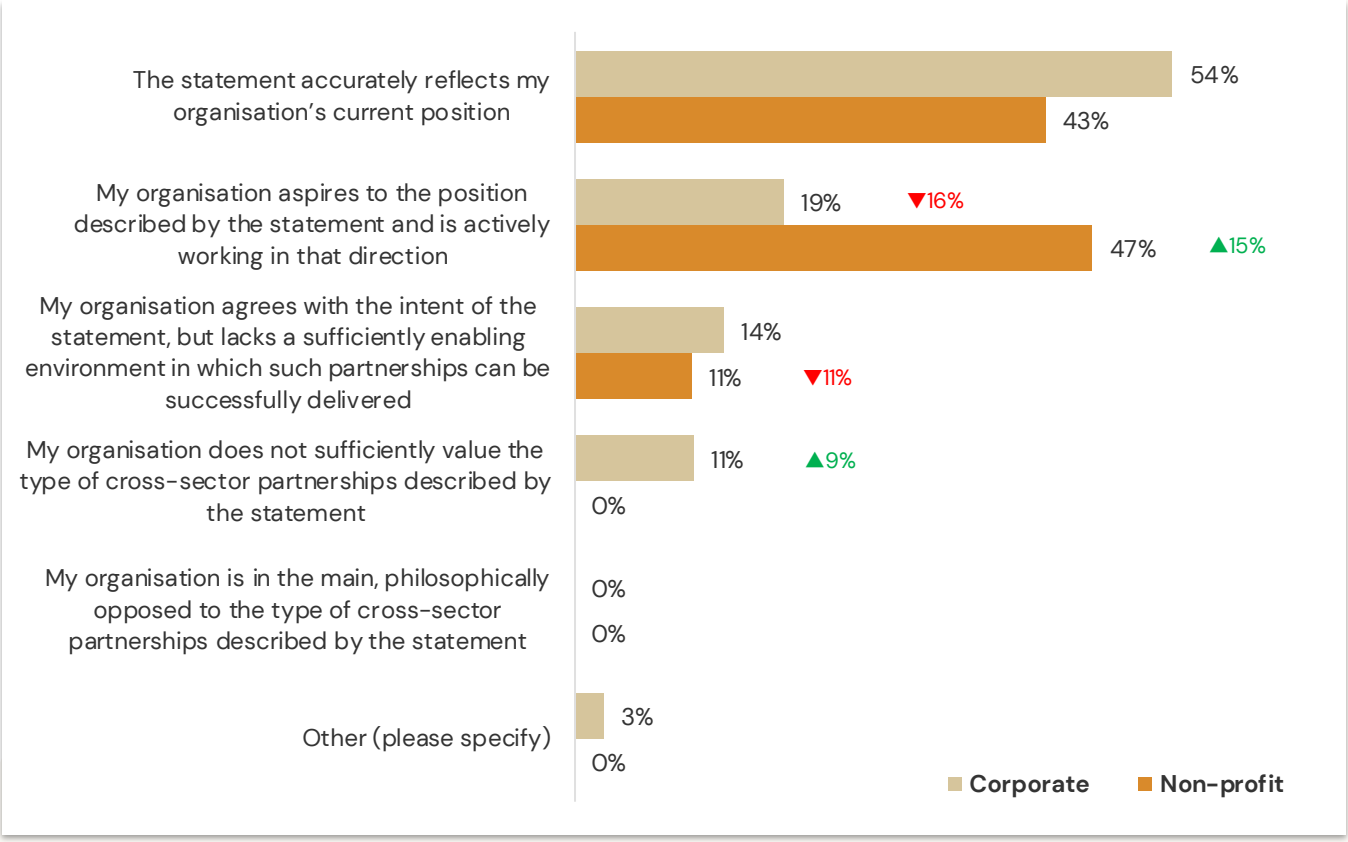

Figure 3: Engagement in deeper, problem-solving partnerships addressing core, mission-relevant or purpose-led issues in ways that create value for society

1.3 Enhancing business understanding of social and environmental issues and changing business practices for the better

Partners are confident that they have helped improve business understanding of societal issues…

There is overwhelming consensus that cross-sector partnerships have significantly enhanced corporate understanding of societal and environmental issues, with 97% of corporates and 94% of non-profits in agreement.

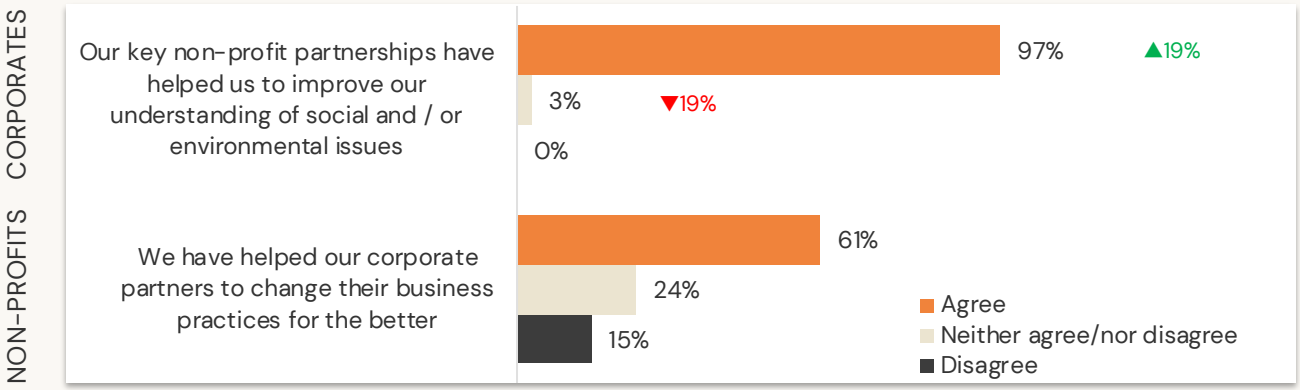

Figure 4: Extent to which partnerships have helped each other understand the issues they're facing

…And cross-sector partnering is helping to change business practices for the better.

Enhancing business understanding of social and environmental issues is clearly a valuable outcome from cross-sector engagement but what effect does this have on business conduct? It is encouraging to find again that a significant majority of businesses and non-profits report that enhanced understanding of issues contributes to changes in business conduct for the better. 68% of corporate respondents believe business practices have improved due to their engagement in cross-sector partnerships. Whilst this is a decline from 78% last year, over two-thirds of corporate respondents maintain this view. Among non-profits, 61% continue to report strong benefits from such collaboration. These figures suggest generally positive perceptions across both sectors, with modest year-on-year changes.

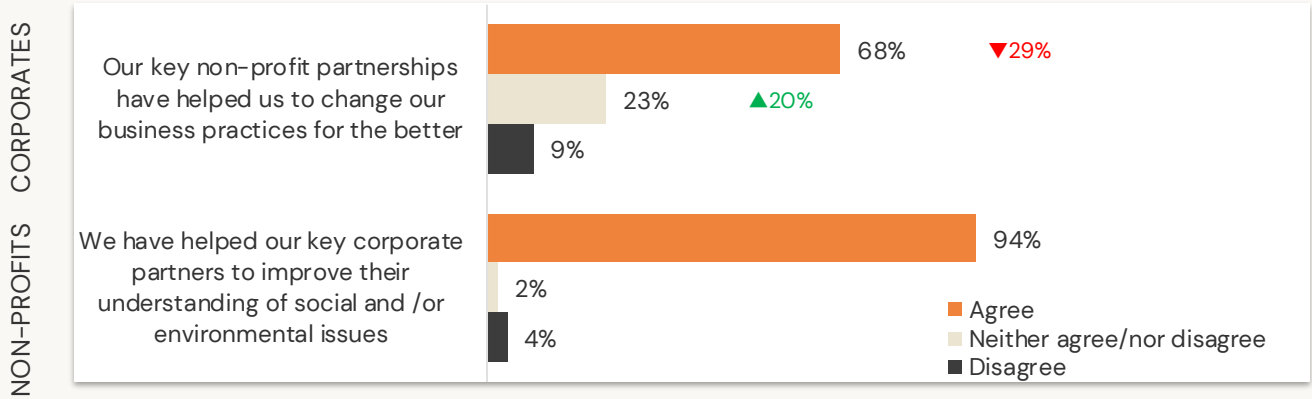

Figure 5: Extent to which partnerships help change business practices for the better

1.4 Non-profits: holistic ESG frameworks and plans

Diverging views on non-profits' approach to ESG frameworks

In seeking to establish the extent non-profits apply a holistic approach to ESG practices and the extent to which their corporate partners perceive this to be the case, this year's findings reveal a notable shift in perception among corporate partners.

Only 40% of corporates believe that their strategic non-profit partners have holistic ESG frameworks in place, a 21% decrease from last year. Meanwhile, 17% actively disagree that their strategic non-profit partners have holistic ESG/ Responsible Business frameworks/ plans in place. This marks a notable 14% increase in dissent from last year.

In contrast, 71% of non-profits report having such frameworks, a figure that remains comparatively strong.

These findings suggest a growing disconnect between how non-profits view their ESG commitments and how these efforts are perceived by corporate partners, highlighting the continued need for alignment and transparency in communicating ESG agendas.

Q&A

"Does your non-profit organisation (or your non-profit partner organisation) have a holistic environmental, social & governance framework / plan in place?"

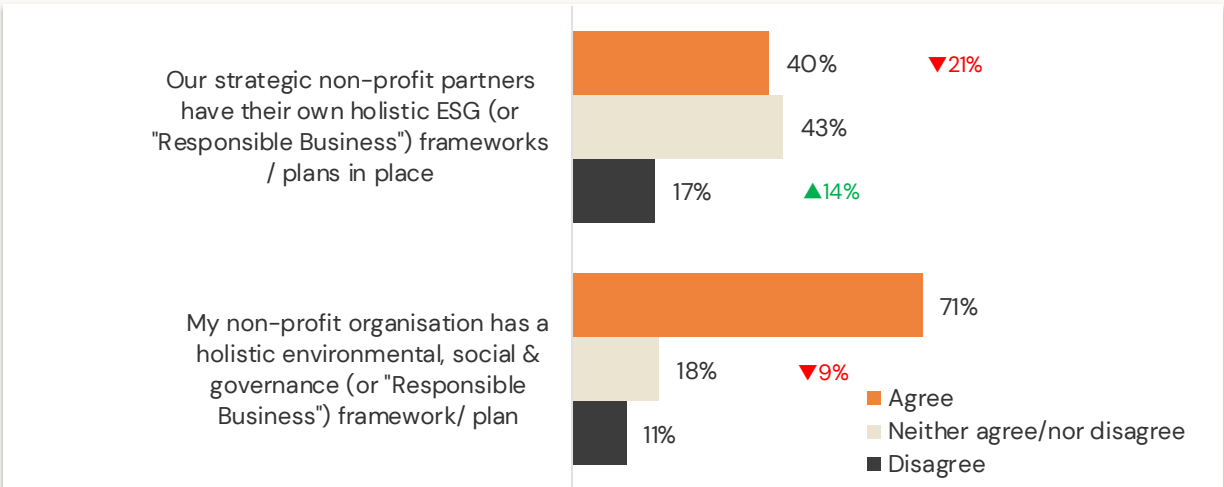

Figure 6: The extent to which non-profits have holistic ESG frameworks in place

1.5 The Stars: the most-admired corporate – non-profit partnerships & partners

The multilateral Tesco, British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Diabetes UK partnership wins the "Most Admired" accolade; followed by Sky Bet–British Heart Foundation

Once again, in an entirely unprompted, confidential exercise, Barometer survey respondents drawn from UK and internationally leading companies and non-profits were asked which other partnerships they particularly admire and why that is.

For the third consecutive year, the Tesco, Diabetes UK, Cancer Research UK, and British Heart Foundation partnership takes the top spot securing **6.9%** of the vote. The runner-up is the highly regarded Sky Bet–British Heart Foundation partnership. The Tesco–WWF and the HSBC–Shelter partnerships follow closely in joint third place.

Further explanation of the nature and scale of these popular partnerships is included included below, along with comments from respondents which typify exactly why these partnerships and organisations are most admired by their peers.

1st TESCO + CANCER RESEARCH UK + British Heart Foundation + DIABETES UK KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

In 2018, Cancer Research UK, British Heart Foundation and Diabetes UK joined forces with Tesco in what they describe as a "one of a kind" health partnership called 'Helping you to live healthier'. Since then, it has delivered health insights and interventions and raised over £34m for the charities, all with the vision of improving the nation's health.

The partnership has engaged millions of customers and Tesco staff through various health initiatives and fundraising. Through its influence and reach, over the course of the partnership Tesco has been able to build health insight and trial and evaluate behaviour change activities, giving the partners a strong basis to drive forward their joint work together into the future.

In July 2022, the partnership launched the 'Let's Talk' pharmacy e-learning programme which delivers specialist training to Tesco pharmacists and pharmacy colleagues to support their conversations with the public on cancer, heart and circulatory diseases and diabetes. After completing the training, colleagues can wear a 'Let's Talk' badge which signals to the public that they can provide support for people to help lower their risk of these serious conditions through small changes to their day-to-day routine.

Over 300 Tesco pharmacies have completed the training to date, and the partnership hopes the easily-accessible and convenient in-store locations will help more shoppers to have conversations about their health and receive support to make positive changes.

"The partnership unites three health charities and one of the UK's biggest retailers to provide rounded support and advice for the public, supporting the public to live healthier. Cancer, diabetes, and heart and circulatory diseases impact a significant proportion of the population, and the wide reach of the partnership is essential to preventing and managing these conditions. ."

"It really focuses on increasing access to health information for the general public, in innovative ways and is actively playing a role in bettering people's health."

"Long-term strategic partnership helping the nation to live healthier."

"An inspirational partnership that continues to grow from strength to strength. It shows the power of coming together in partnership to tackle some of the biggest health challenges in the UK."

"The partnership brings together 4 key organisations in addressing public health, making change at local store level as well as national influencing."

2nd

Sky Bet and the British Heart Foundation are working together to raise awareness of cardiac arrest and the importance of learning CPR through the Every Minute Matters campaign. Since launching in May, the campaign has encouraged over 147,000 people to begin CPR training using BHF's online RevivR tool, with a target of 360,000 learners over 13 months. As part of the initiative, Sky Bet has pledged to donate £1,000 to BHF for every goal scored in EFL matches on Boxing Day, with the potential to raise up to £100,000.

Additional funding supports research into inherited heart conditions and helps to place defibrillators in areas of need. The campaign has received support from fans, clubs and players, and has been shaped in part by personal experiences of those who have responded to cardiac arrests with CPR in real life.

It is striking to note how quickly this relatively new partnership has captured the attention of cross-sector partnerships professionals. Comments made by practitioners about the Sky Bet – British Heart Foundation partnership included:

"Spreading the awareness of learning CPR and turning it into action with over 300,00 football fans '

"Using the partners platform through the sponsorship of the largest football league to train new audiences in the importance of CPR''

3rd TESCO + WWF

Tesco and WWF formed a partnership in 2018 aimed at halving the environmental impact of the average UK shopping basket. The five-year collaboration focused on tackling key issues such as food waste, climate change and sustainable agriculture. Together, they developed tools to track and reduce impact and supported innovation through funding and supplier trials.

Whilst the partnership formally ended in 2023, it is testament to the impact, reach and effective communications, that it continues to resonate so strongly in the minds of partnerships professionals.

"Ambition, reach and system-level change involving multiple stakeholders"

"Important issues, competency-based collaboration extended to other major players."

3rd HSBC + SHELTER

HSBC UK and Shelter are working together to support people to build financial resilience and help break the vicious circle of homelessness.

Formed in 2023, the partnership combines fundraising with practical support, including HSBC UK's 'No Fixed Address' service, which has enabled over 4,600 people without a permanent home to open a bank account.

As this multi-year collaboration deepens, the focus has expanded to include building financial resilience in communities to prevent homelessness before it reaches crisis point. This comes at a time when rising rents, limited social housing, and increasing living costs are putting more people at risk of losing their homes.

"Because of the clear link between homelessness and financial exclusion. The fact that the partnership means things have actually changed for homeless people is impressive. .'

""Great alignment and focus on mutually relevant problem solving for the homeless"

Most Admired Partnerships

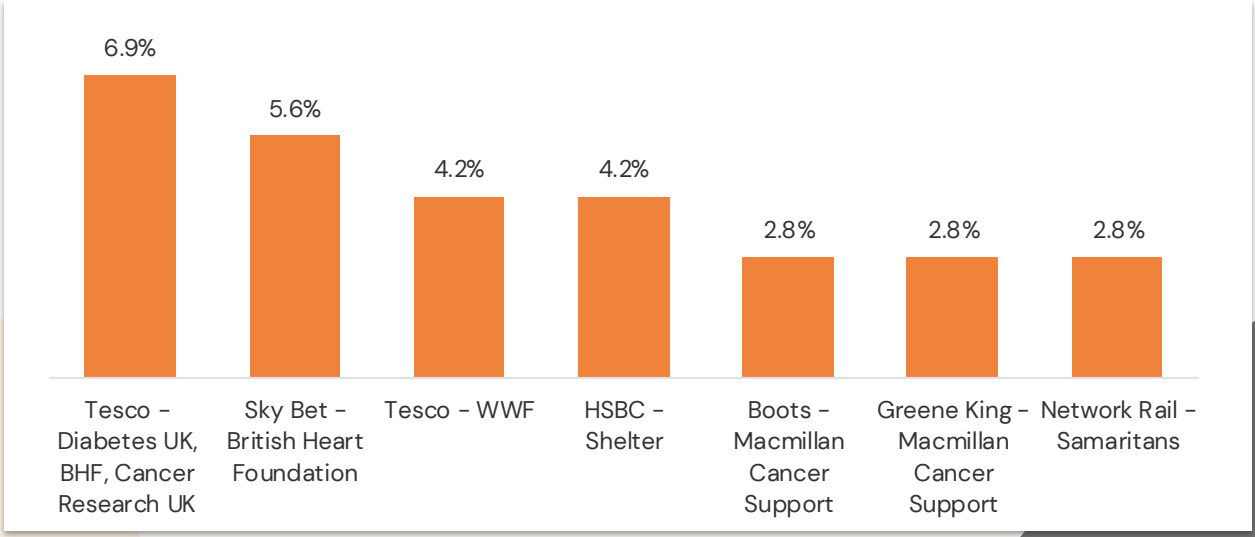

Figure 7: Most Admired Corporate– Non-profit Partnerships

Most Admired Partners

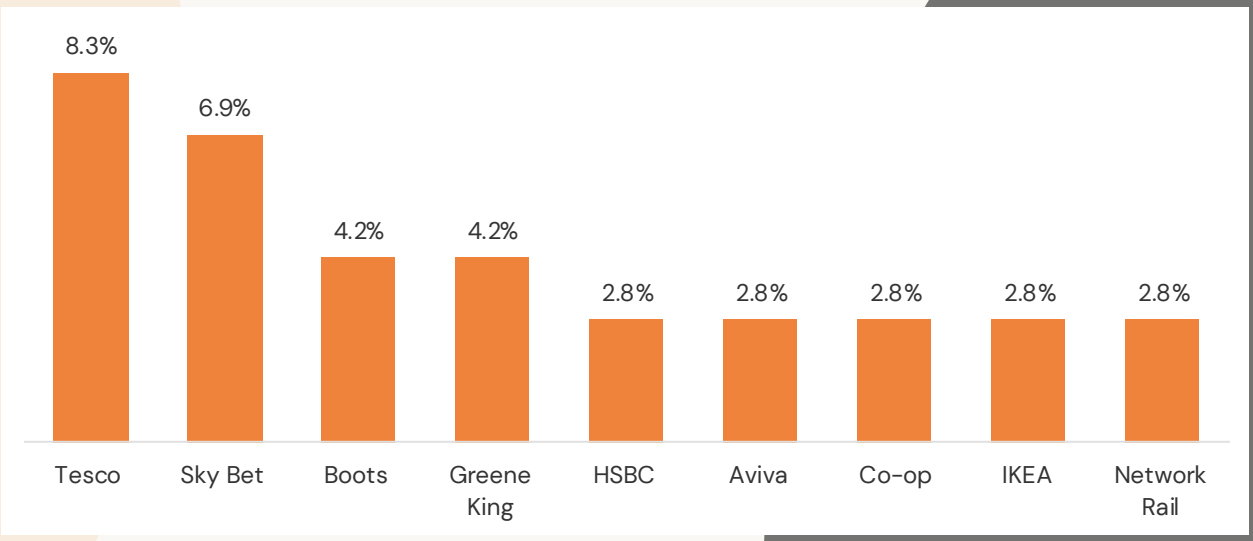

Figure 8: Most Admired Partners, Corporates

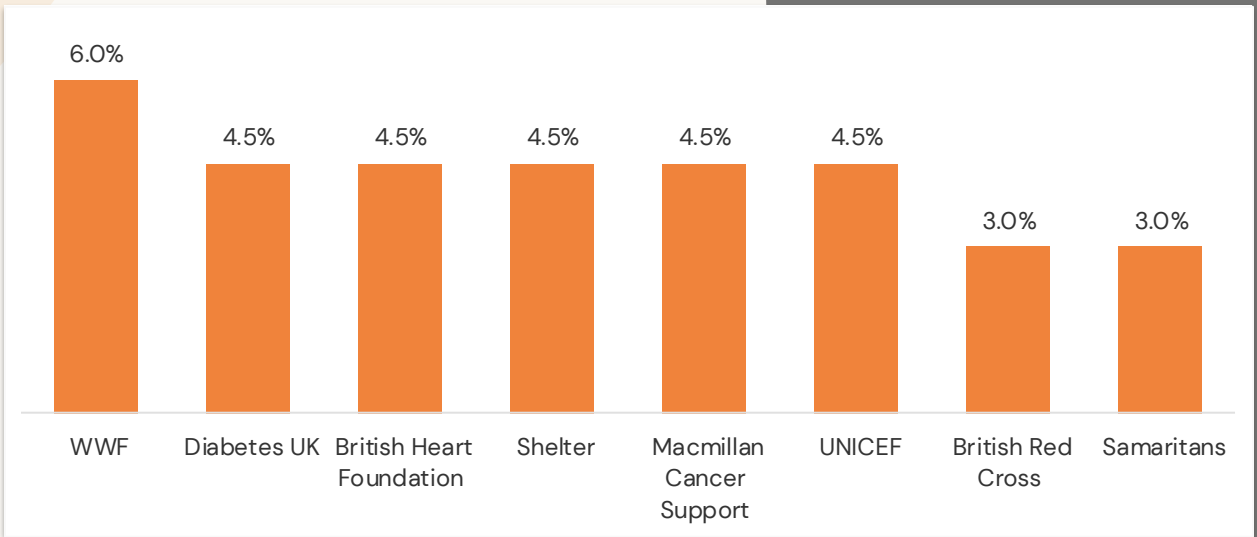

Figure 9: Most Admired Partners, Non-profits

Part 2: Special Topics

2.1 Navigating the push-back on the ESG Agenda

Despite political rhetoric, most corporates and non-profit organisations are holding firm or even strengthening their ESG and partnership commitments

Amidst intensifying political scrutiny and cultural resistance against ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles and practices, particularly in the United States but also, elsewhere, organisations across sectors appear largely undeterred in their commitment to advancing their ESG or Responsible Business driven practices.

A small minority (6%) of corporate respondents report that their organisations have reduced or significantly reduced their commitment to ESG principles and practices. As one such respondent candidly put it: [The pushback on ESG has led to a] *"Change in strategy away from renewable, push out of interim target*, [and] *simplified and reduced sustainability aims and objectives.'*

However, this is an outlier view which is very much an exception, rather than the rule. As shown in Figure 10, over half of corporate (51%) and nearly half of non-profit (46%) respondents reported that their organisations had made no notable changes to their ESG principles and practices.

Significantly, 43% of corporate and 44% of non-profit respondents report that their organisations have actively enhanced their ESG principles and practices in response to the pushback or growing rhetoric on ESG / Responsible Business. This is a notable finding which underscores the importance of this agenda for companies and non-profits.

Qualitative feedback reinforces this picture of resilience, with subtle recalibrations. One corporate respondent captured the overall sentiment, stating: *'It caused us to think harder about what's important to our company and stakeholders. We're doing more, more quietly and with amended language.'*

Q&A

"It is widely reported that (catalysed by changes in the US) there is significant and growing pushback against ESG principles and practices, with businesses scaling back sustainability pledges and diversity initiatives in response to political and economic pressures. To what extent (if any) has your organisation amended your ESG policies or practices in response to such external pressures?"

With regards to ESG principles and practices... my organisation has/ will...:

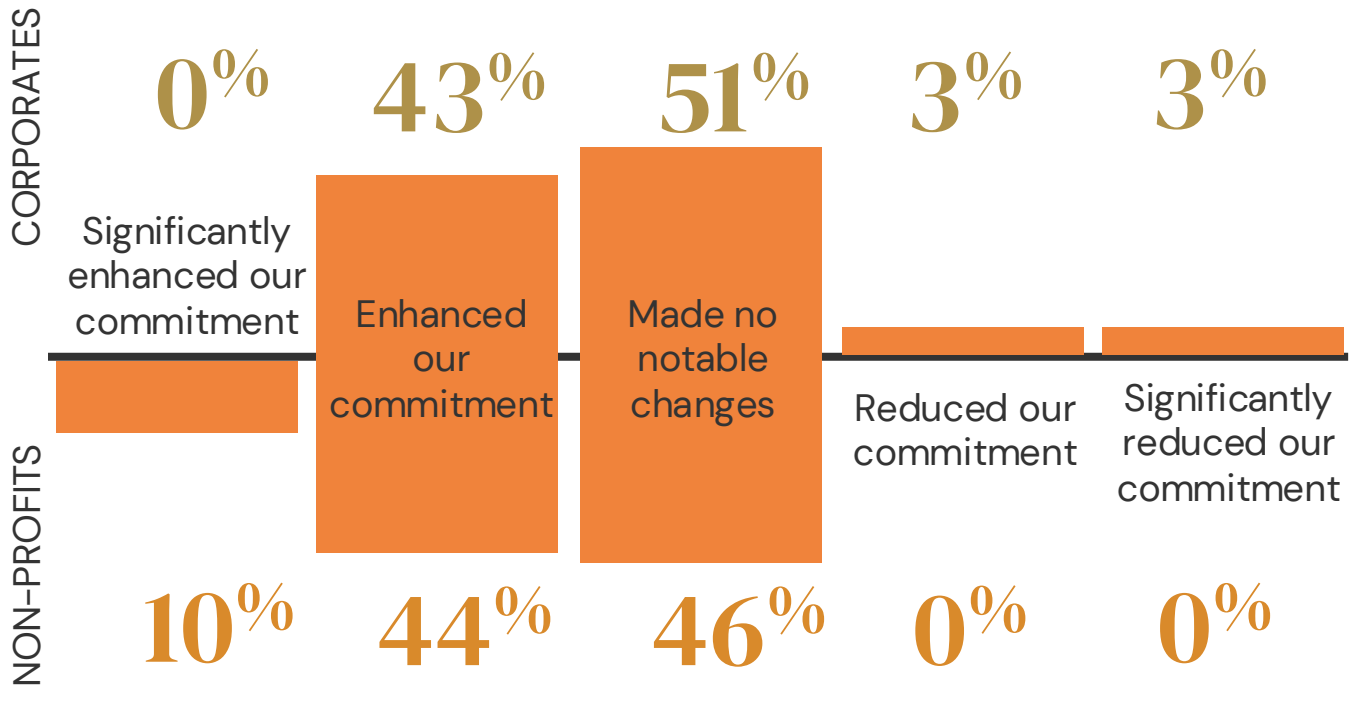

Figure 10: The impact of ESG pushback on ESG commitments

Another corporate respondent reported: "*possible changes to language and tone of voice, but with the same level of commitment [to ESG/ Responsible Business]"*. These quotes are illustrative of the approach being taken by many international corporations and brands.

Similar sentiments are echoed across the non-profit community. While many remain steadfast, they are adapting to a polarised environment by shifting tone, rather than substance. *"We continue to prioritise these commitments... but we have adjusted how we communicate them [to avoid] scrutiny from US government entities."*

"'We have had to "soften" some language on our website to not draw any attention from US government entities with a different agenda."

Rather than diluting their approach, several non-profits report reframing the narrative to maintain momentum and ensure resonance with partners and funders: *"More talk of risk and resilience than ESG... the benefits to people and economies of environmental action"*

While one respondent stated plainly that ESG feels *'like an outdated term rather than pushback'*, another highlighted an organisational strategy of working with *the 'majority middle'* of the business world, acknowledging that progress cannot rely solely on ESG pioneers.

Corporate and non-profit sector commitment to the ESG / Responsible Business agenda remains firm (and has in some cases been further ignited), but the delivery and language is becoming more tactical, nuanced, and in some cases deliberately low-profile.

Engagement in cross-sector partnerships remains steady despite political shifts

Despite the pushback, the role of ESG in shaping cross-sector partnerships has not diminished.

As illustrated in Figure 11, the majority of organisations report that their levels of engagement remain stable. 75% of corporate and 54% of non-profit respondents say they will 'neither increase nor decrease' their cross-sector engagement in response to ESG pushback.

Cross-Sector engagement remains steady despite political shifts

However, a noteworthy minority signal an intent to increase cross-sector collaboration. 37% of non-profits and 22% of corporates report they are increasing their engagement – a sign that some view the backlash not as a deterrent, but as a prompt to act with greater purpose. As one non-profit respondent noted, they are 'increasingly finding the common connection between our core charitable mission and the ESG agenda, to ensure that our ESG goals are rooted in evidence and our broader theory of change.'

Overall, the general finding is that across the corporate and non-profit sectors whilst organisations are adjusting to the political weather, they are not reversing course. Instead, they are slightly shifting their approach: modifying language, re-aligning strategy, and reinforcing cross-sector ties.

This response to the pushbacks on the ESG / Responsible Business agenda speaks to both the power and importance of the drivers underpinning cross-sector collaborations – including reputational and funding benefits, pressure from important internal and external stakeholders, as well as evidence of the effectiveness of cross-sector partnering (see figs 15 & 16).

Q&A

"To what extent is any pushback on the ESG agenda influencing your organisation's engagement in strategic cross-sector partnering with corporates/ non-profits?"

In response to the pushback on the ESG agenda, my organisation has/ will...:

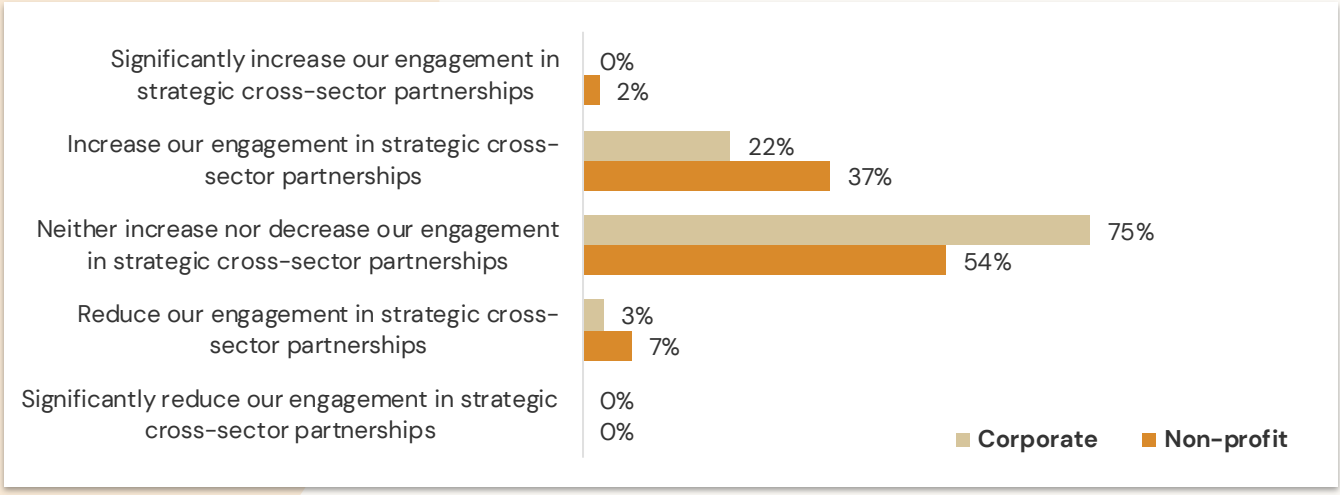

Figure 11: The impact of ESG pushback on cross-sector partnering

2.2 The impact of ODA cuts on ESG delivery and strategic partnering

Across both corporate and non-profit respondents, the reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) by several western governments (including the USA and the UK) is placing measurable strain on efforts to deliver on ESG and Responsible Business goals.

As shown in Figure 12, over a quarter (28%) of non-profits and nearly a quarter (24%) of corporates report that cuts in ODA are having a negative effect on their organisation's ability to meet their ESG or core mission objectives. Nearly a further 1 in 5 non-profits (17%) say the impact has been 'significantly negative'.

These findings are echoed in the qualitative responses, which reveal the immediate and tangible impact on programmes and operations. One non-profit respondent shared: *'It* [cuts in ODA funding] *has cut 3 major programmes, primarily on the African continent and Middle East. This accounted for 25% of our budget.'* Another reflected: *'The drop in income from ODA has already caused us to stop life-saving programmes. We are planning for a very different future.'*

Others pointed to broader organisational consequences, including major restructures and shifts in strategy. As one put it: *'Full restructure is happening at* [my organisation], *as in most UN agencies, due to severe budget cuts', while another observed a 'growing competition between non-profit organisations to access funds.'*

Q&A

"Several governments including the U.S. and U.K. have recently announced reductions in international aid funding, reflecting a broader global shift in priorities. This reduction in ODA has placed significant resource constraints on international humanitarian and development efforts."

Which of the following statements applies to your organisation?
Cutbacks in government ODA has/ will...

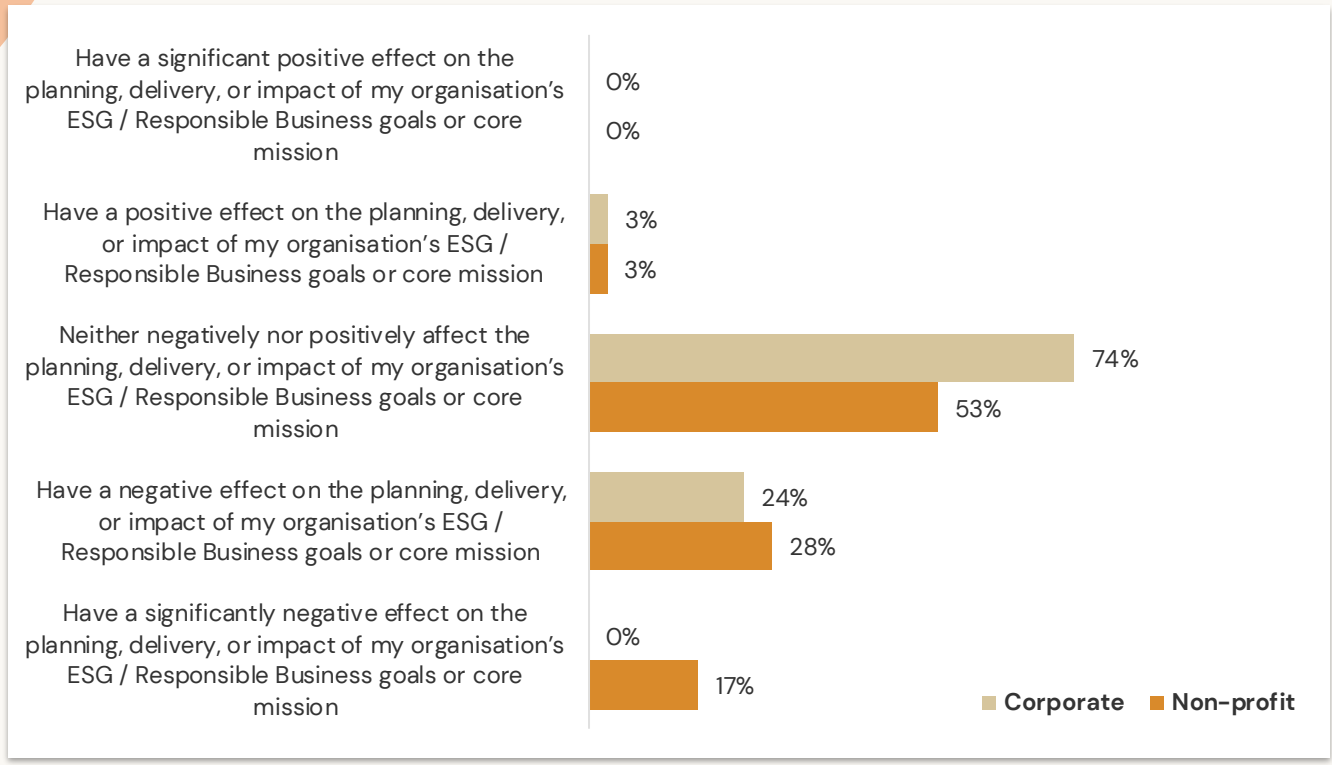

Figure 12: The impact of ODA reductions on ESG commitments

Perhaps unsurprisingly, among corporate respondents the impact appears to be less direct but still relevant. Several noted downstream consequences for their non-profit partners, such as: '*Our non-profit partners are increasingly stretched for resources and bandwidth, and our company is having to do more to fill the gaps.*' One respondent acknowledged reduced collaboration capacity, saying: '*USAID was a key partner to one of our regional de-carbonisation programmes.*'

Figure 13 suggests that this funding pressure is not yet translating into significant shifts in cross-sector partnering. Most organisations, 94% of corporates and 64% of non-profits, report neither increasing nor decreasing their investment of time, funding or other resources in strategic cross-sector collaborations.

However, 25% of non-profits have already increased their partnering investments, potentially signalling a strategic pivot, diversifying towards or enhancing collaboration in response to tightening resource constraints. As one respondent explained, '*We are looking for other ways to collaborate, improve efficiencies and diversify our funding.*' Another noted that '*the reduced funding will put more pressure on grant makers, corporate and philanthropic funders… It could result in partners requiring more specificity in their interests.*'

*Note: While many non-profit respondents did not report significant budget impacts, it is important to acknowledge that a substantial number of organisations participating in this survey are not directly involved in international development. As such, the figures may underrepresent the full extent of the impact experienced by non-profits and international agencies operating in ODA-dependent sector.

Q&A

"How (if at all) is the reduction in ODA affecting/ likely to affect the extent to which your organisation engages in strategic cross-sector partnerships?

Reductions in ODA has led/ is leading my organisation to:

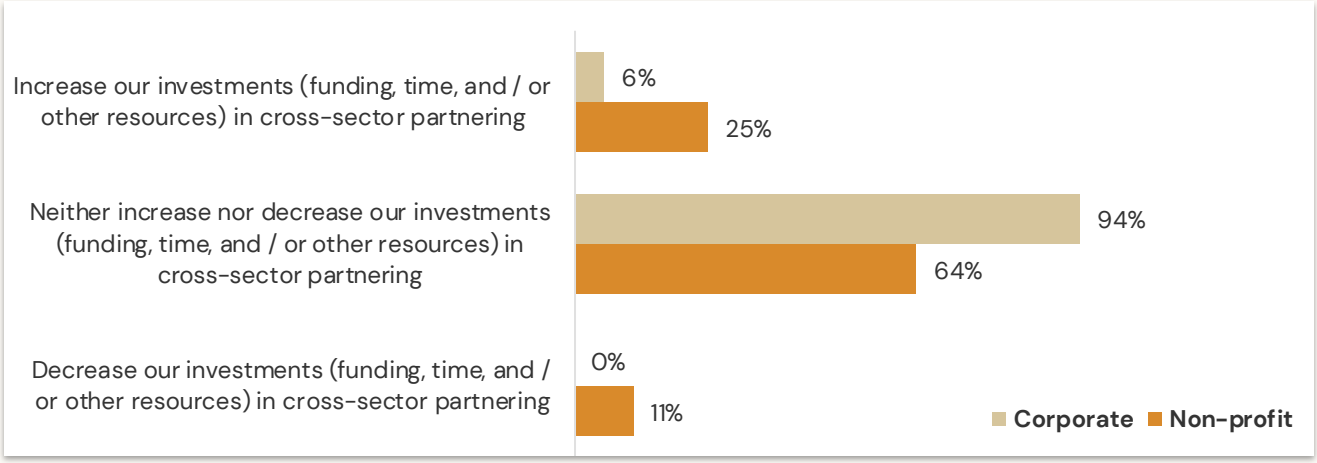

Figure 13: The impact of ODA reductions on cross-sector partnerships

2.3 Artificial Intelligence

Use of AI became more common in cross-sector partnering over the past year, particularly among corporates, though its integration into core partnership practice remains in the early stages…

AI, and particularly generative AI, continues to capture widespread attention, with growing expectations about its role in solving complex societal challenges. In response, the 2025 Barometer again explored how cross-sector partnerships are engaging with AI in practice.

Findings show that while AI is beginning to gain traction, it remains far from embedded.

However, this year's data shows meaningful shifts in the reported application of AI in cross-sector partnering in the last 12 months. While only 18% of corporates and 3% of non-profits said AI featured significantly in their most important partnerships, this marks a 15 % increase among corporates from last year.

Moderate adoption has also grown sharply, with 32% of corporates and 29% of non-profits reporting AI featured to a moderate extent, up 25 and 20%, respectively. This means that in total, exactly half (50%) of corporate respondents report that use of AI featured significantly or moderately in their most significant cross-sector partnerships over the last 12 months. This is very notable increase on the corresponding figure of just 11% reported in the 2024 edition of the Barometer report.

At the same time, the share of corporates saying AI 'hardly featured' fell by 29%, and those saying it 'did not feature at all' dropped by 24%. These significant shifts suggest a broader change in adoption. While AI is still not always routinely deployed in most partnerships, it is increasingly being recognised and integrated, particularly by corporate partners.

Nevertheless, half of all respondents said AI either hardly featured or didn't feature at all in their organisation's most significant cross-sector partnerships, underlining the still-nascent integration of AI into partnership practice. And while corporate adoption has clearly accelerated year on year, non-profits continue to lag behind, with comparatively low levels of uptake that contrast with the more ambitious outlook and growing aspirations seen among corporate partners.

Q&A

"Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) are helping to tackle a growing number of societal challenges - demonstrating technology's increasing capability to address complex issues, including those outlined in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).To what extent has use of AI featured in your organisation's most significant cross-sector partnerships over the last 12 months?"

AI has:

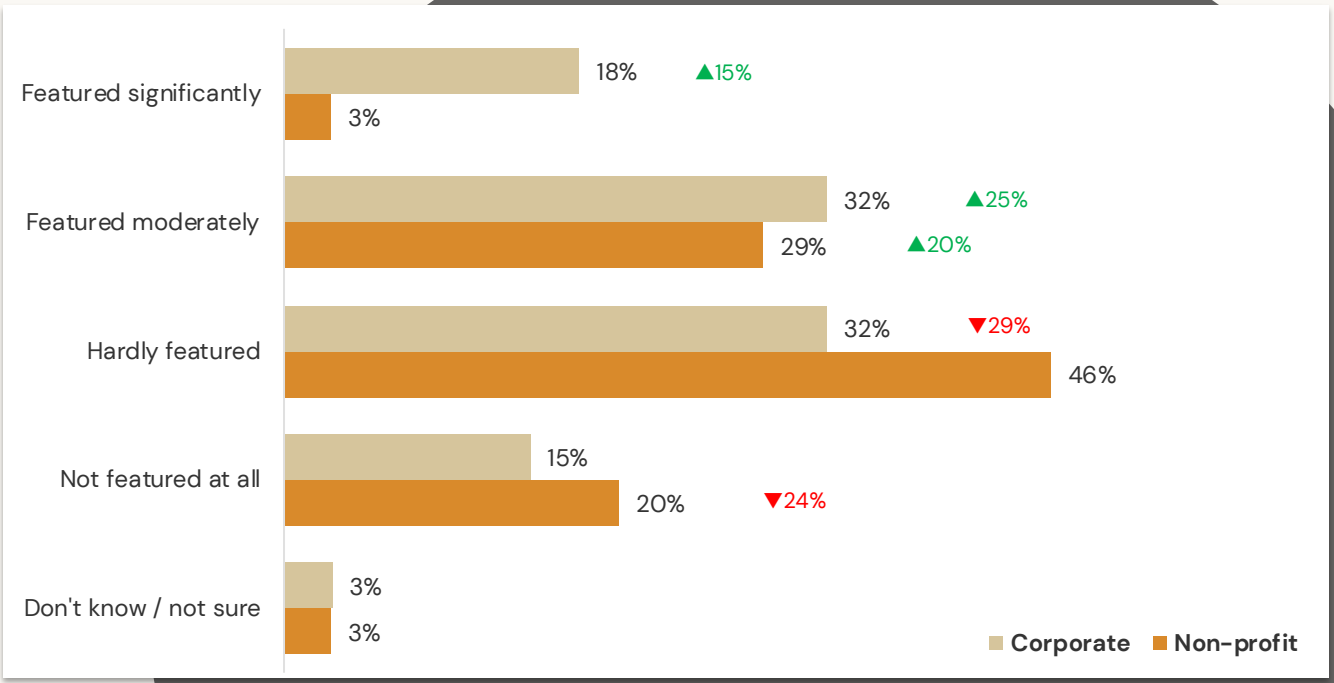

Figure 14: The role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has played in cross-sector partnerships over the last year

…And adoption of AI is predicted to grow across all dimensions of cross-sector partnering

While current use of AI in cross-sector partnerships remains relatively limited but growing, perceptions of its future role are shifting rapidly. This growing sense of AI's relevance is particularly evident when respondents were asked to consider its expected impact across key partnership dimensions.

Across all areas, a strong majority of respondents now view AI as likely to play an important or very important role: 91% for research, 81% for partnership impact and reporting, 74% for programmatic and operational delivery, 66% for policy change and advocacy, and a similarly high proportion for partner selection. These figures mark significant increases from the previous year and reflect a broadening optimism about potential use of AI in cross-sector partnerships.

At the same time, relatively few respondents now anticipate no role for AI: just 4% for partnership impact, 9% for programmatic delivery and policy change, and 12% for partner selection. However, policy change and advocacy stands out slightly, with over a third (36%) of respondents anticipating either no role or an unimportant one, suggesting more hesitation in this area.

Q&A

Overall, there has been a clear rise in the perceived future role of AI across all partnership areas compared to last year, indicating a shift from hesitation to growing optimism about the anticipated use of AI' to enhance cross-sector collaboration.

"Thinking about the following considerations, what is your expectation of the role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will play in your organisation's most significant cross-sector partnerships in the next three years?"

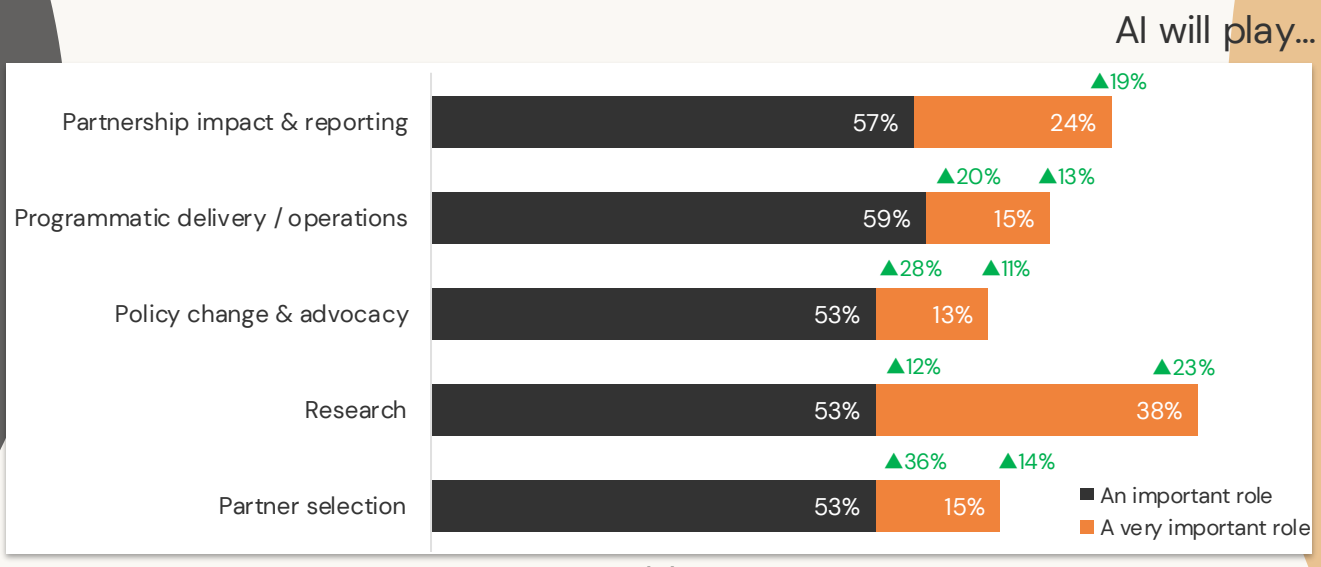

Figure 15: Expectations of the role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will play in cross-sector partnerships over the next three years

Part 3: Mid-term trends, prospects, & anticipated developments in partnerships

3.1 Likely Importance of Partnerships in the mid-term

Cross-sector partnerships will continue to grow in importance for companies and non-profits

Over the 15-year lifetime of the Barometer, corporate and non-profit professionals have consistently predicted that partnering across their sectors will grow in the years following each edition of the report. Predictions have been consistent regardless of the prevailing social or economic conditions.

This year is no exception, with 69% of corporates and 84% of non-profits anticipating that partnerships will become more – or much more – important over the next three years (*figure 16*).

Among non-profits, there has been a noticeable shift in perception regarding the role of partnerships in future organisational strategy. The share of respondents expecting partnerships to become 'much more important' has increased by 13%, while those expecting them to become simply 'more important' has dropped by an equivalent 14%. This change may reflect a recalibration in how non-profits anticipate the urgency, scale or strategic value of cross-sector collaboration in meeting their long-term goals – particularly in light of the ODA-related points made in previous sections of this report.

Meanwhile, corporate views appear more cautious: 23% believe partnerships will become much more important, while 46% say they will become more important, similar to last year. However, 31% now believe the importance of partnerships will remain the same, marking a 15% increase from last year. Only 6% of non-profits and 0% of corporates foresee any decline in the importance of partnerships, underlining continued consensus around the enduring relevance of cross-sector collaboration.

Q&A

"What is your expectation of the role that partnerships will play in the corporate or non-profit agenda over the next three years?"

Would you say they are likely to become...

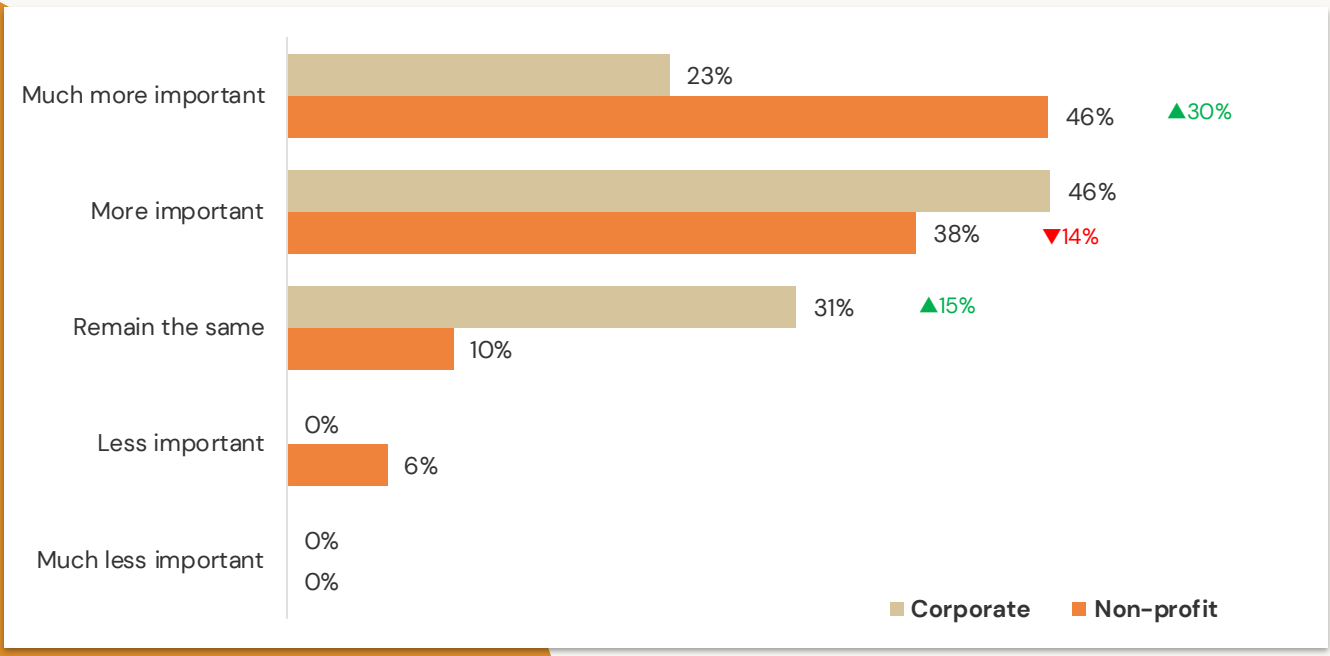

Figure 16: The future importance of corporate-non-profit partnerships

3.2 Drivers of Change

An imperative to demonstrate societal consideration and to enhance reputation for companies – and the need for funds for non-profits are the main drivers of change

When asked about the factors driving the growing importance of cross-sector partnerships over the medium term, both corporates and non-profits highlighted distinct but complementary motivations.

For corporates, the leading driver is enhancing brand reputation and credibility, cited by 89% of respondents, a 24% increase from last year.

Closely aligned is the pressure to demonstrate societal consideration in business practices, noted by 71%. These results reflect a continued focus on both reputational value and Responsible Business conduct.

By contrast, for non-profits, the dominant driver remains financial: 88% pointed to the need to raise funds in a difficult economic climate. An increasing recognition of the need to leverage each sector's complementary strengths was identified by 74% of non-profits and 53% of corporates (down 12% from last year), indicating that this rationale remains particularly important to the non-profit sector.

Other drivers include internal stakeholder pressure, cited by 47% of corporates and 30% of non-profits, and political or governmental support, which rose to 34% among corporates, up 9% from 2024.

Overall, the data reveals a dual narrative: for corporates, partnerships are increasingly linked to reputation and values alignment, while for non-profits, they are an essential response to economic realities.

Q&A

"In your view, what factors are likely to make corporate-non-profit partnerships more important in the next three years?"

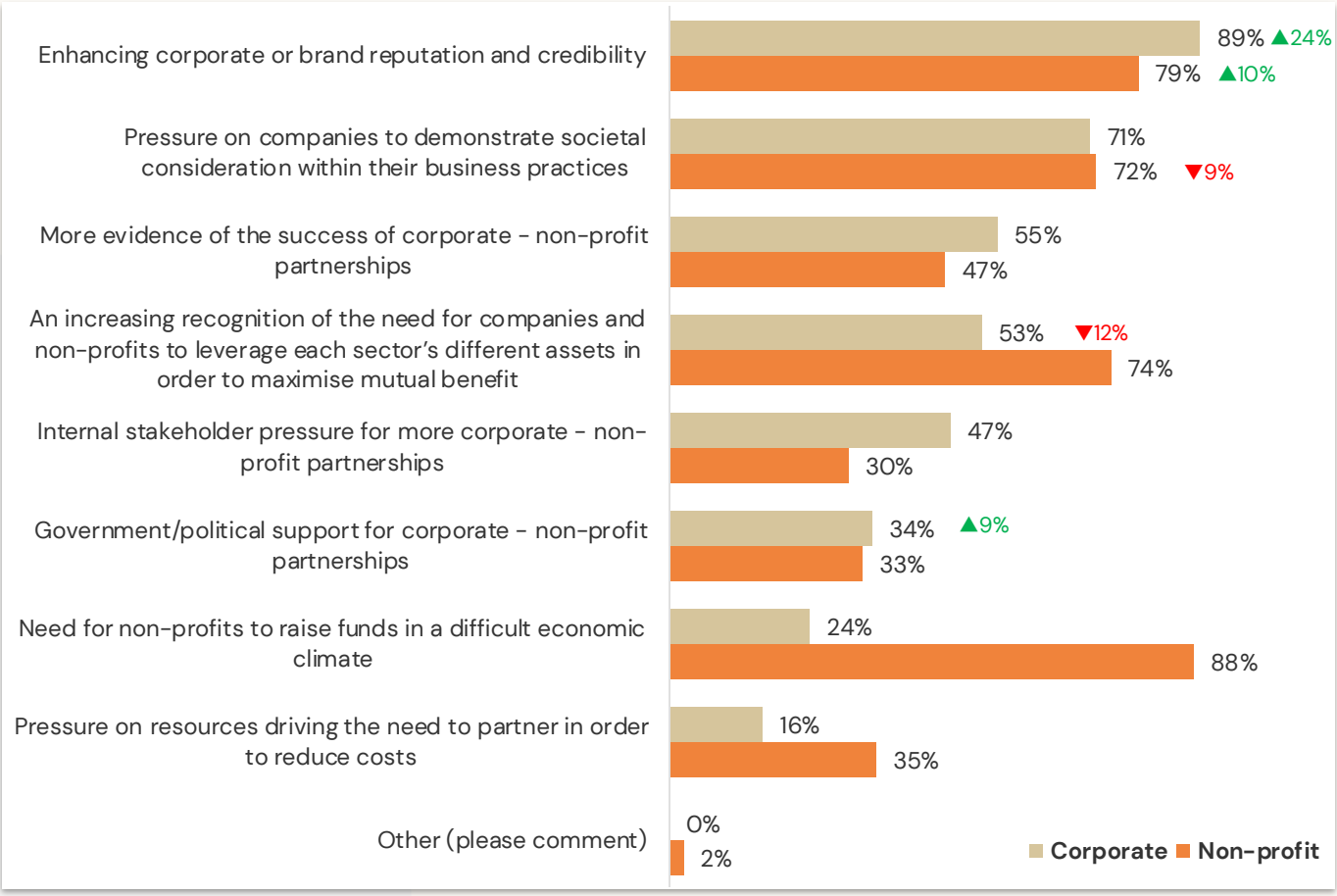

Figure 17: The reasons why partnerships may become more important over the next three years

3.3 The Outlook for Investments in Cross-Sector Partnerships over the Mid-Term

Strong consensus that investment in partnerships is set to increase in next three years

Corporate and non-profit investment in partnerships is expected to rise over the next three years. 67% of corporates and 78% of non-profits believe that investment will increase or increase significantly over this period. However, only 17% of corporates foresee their increased investments as likely to be at significant levels (a 15% drop from last year), while just 8% of non-profits anticipate making significant increases.

A larger proportion, 50% of corporates (an increase of 10 %) and 70% of non-profits, anticipate a moderate increase in investment. Meanwhile, 31% of corporates and 16% of non-profits expect no change in investment levels. A small percentage of participants, 2% of corporates and 6% of non-profits, anticipate a decrease in investment.

Whilst a significant minority of corporates expect to make stable levels of investments, the outlook remains one of cautious optimism, with a strong majority of corporate and non-profit organisations still expecting growth in cross-sector partnership investment in the coming three years.

"Is your investment [commitment, time, resources, etc] in corporate-non-profit partnerships likely to increase or decrease over the next 3 years?"

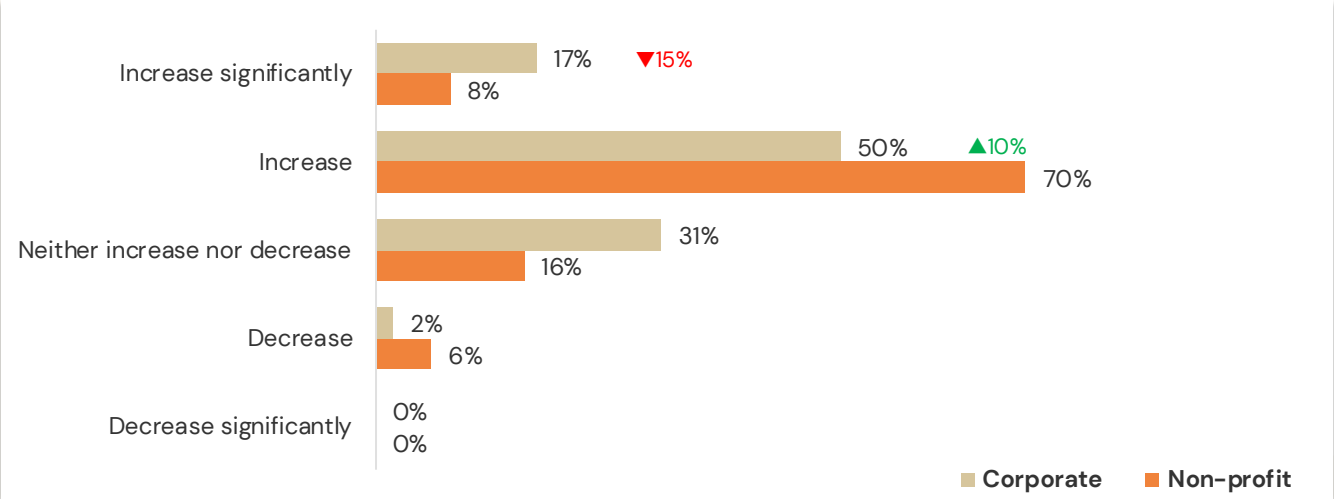

Figure 18: Future investment in partnerships

Concluding Remarks

Publication of this 2025 edition of the Barometer comes at a time of considerable geopolitical, economic and social uncertainty – all placing growing pressure on organisations across all sectors. At the same time, environmental concerns remain high on the public agenda, creating heightened expectations for corporate responsibility and delivery.

Despite these challenges, this edition of the Barometer report again finds that cross-sector partnering between corporates and non-profits remains strong and resilient. The nature of these partnerships continue to evolve towards deeper, more strategic collaborative efforts that are enabling more Responsible Business practices and supporting the advancement of the mission of non-profit organisations. The Most Admired partnership between Tesco, Cancer Research UK, British Heart Foundation, & Diabetes UK and the other highly acclaimed collaborations demonstrate what can be achieved when shared purpose, strategic ambition, and sustained investment come together. In a landscape marked by competing pressures, such examples provide a compelling case for continued collaboration.

One of the more complex developments explored in this year's report is the shifting political context and narrative surrounding the ESG agenda. In several markets, particularly the US, ESG has become increasingly politicised, with some organisations facing greater scrutiny or pressure to scale back their commitments. Concurrently, reductions in Official Development Assistance are creating an added strain, especially for non-profits.

In response, many organisations have reaffirmed their commitment to ESG and Responsible Business, while adapting how they communicate and deliver on these principles and practices. ESG remains widely viewed as a helpful holistic framework for identifying and managing risk, unlocking opportunity, and projecting core organisational and brand values. The continued commitment of both corporates and non-profits signals the lasting relevance of the agenda.

For non-profits, evolving funding pressures reinforce the role of strategic partnerships in ensuring delivery. For corporates, collaboration is increasingly recognised as a mechanism that helps businesses to meet rising expectations and sustain long-term impact.

Another notable development is the increasing use of AI in cross-sector partnerships. It is fair to say that corporates are more advanced in this regard and have thrown down a challenge to their non-profit counterparts on this aspect of partnering.

Looking to the future, this Barometer has found highly encouraging prospects for cross-sector partnering. Usage of AI is likely to grow strongly, driving efficiencies and enhancing impact; partnerships between corporates and non-profits will increase in importance in the coming three years; and despite the prevailing headwinds, a substantial majority of organisations expect to increase their investments in such partnerships.

The future remains very bright for cross-sector collaboration which is likely to remain a vital force for addressing complex global challenges.

Manny Amadi, MVO

CEO, C&E Advisory

About the Barometer

Methodology

The C&E Corporate-Non-Profit Partnerships Barometer 2025 was compiled using responses to a confidential online survey of 130 leading UK-based and companies and non-profits engaged in partnerships (many of them operating globally). The survey was supplemented by discussions and interviews with corporate and non-profit participants, providing qualitative insights.

Practitioners on both sides of corporate-non-profit partnerships clearly have a keen interest in the Barometer because it allows them to have a sector-wide perspective on the evolution of the cross-sector partnering landscape and to gain a deeper understanding of the views of their counterparts.

This year's survey included a mixture of new and previously asked questions. This has allowed us to identify new challenges and opportunities in partnering, whilst simultaneously enabling accurate and effective comparison of data against previous Barometer readings.

The online survey and qualitative work took place during June & July 2025.

Sector Representation

Q&A

"Are you completing this survey on behalf of a 'not-for-profit' or a corporate organisation?"

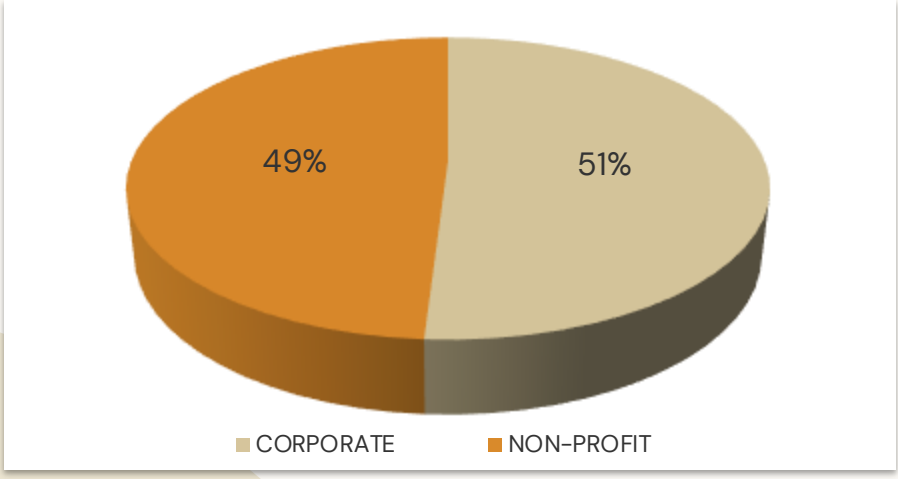

Figure 19: Sector representation

Respondents' Roles

Respondents held a diverse range of professional roles, either directly engaged in, or responsible for overseeing, corporate – non-profit partnerships at a senior level.

"What is your role?"

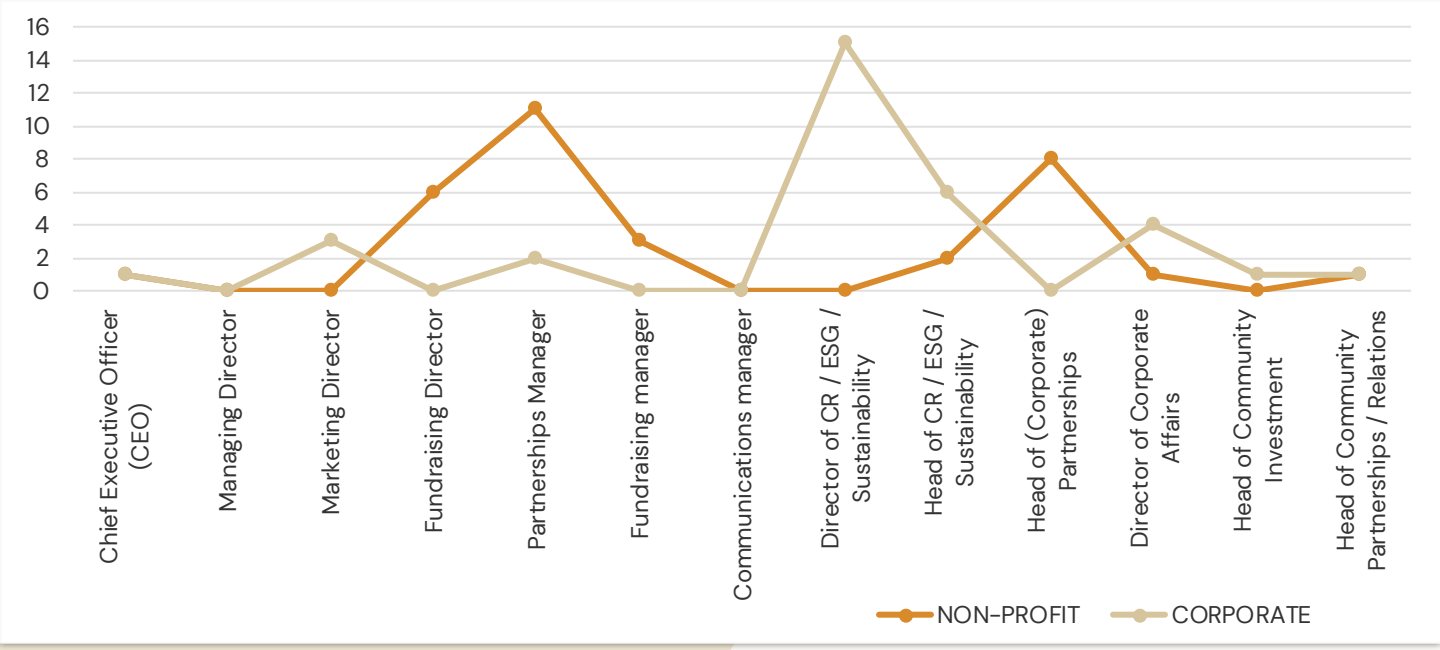

Figure 20: Respondents' roles

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A leading specialist 'business and society' consultancy, C&E Advisory works across sectors, helping purposeful organisations to thrive – by making positive social and environmental change. We work with some of the world's foremost businesses, non-profit organisations, and philanthropists. Working upstream & downstream across the Responsible Business and sustainability value chain, our practice areas cover strategy, programme design, oversight & reviews, performance measurement & reporting, high performance team development and leadership coaching.

And because today's challenges and opportunities require new ways of thinking, C&E is particularly adept at inspiring and enabling sometimes surprising cross-sector collaborations. We have advised – and continue to advise – on some of the world's leading and best-known corporate – non-profit partnerships.

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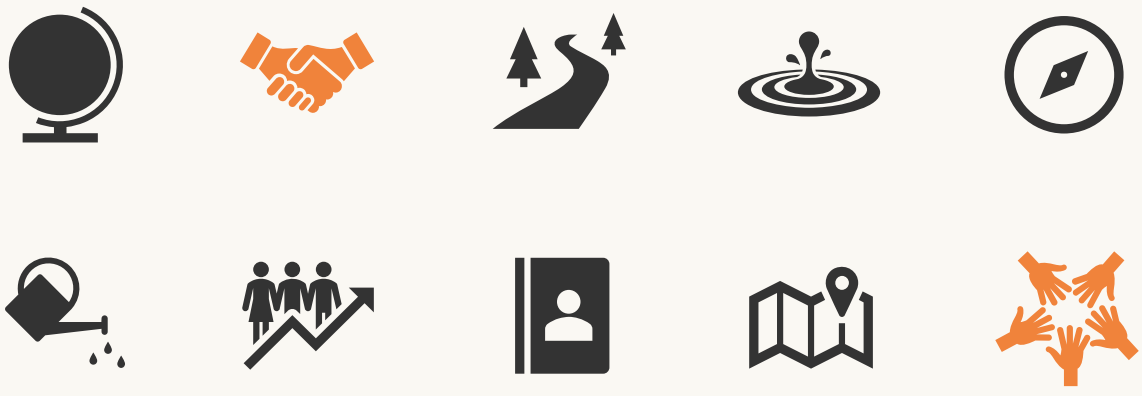

Survey Respondents

Excluding organisations wishing to remain anonymous