

TOGETHER معاً  
WE ARE نحن  
GOOD بخير

هيئة المساهمات المجتمعية - معاً  
Authority of Social Contribution – Ma'an



# Abu Dhabi COVID-19 Relief Efforts

Symbolizing the Principles  
of Human Fraternity

Response Report 2020



WBT  
WORLD BUSINESS TIMES

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# Introduction

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has been responsible for the biggest shock to the global economy since the Second World War. Lockdowns and the resulting slump in consumer spending brought about a global labour market implosion during which the equivalent of nearly 500 million full-time jobs disappeared almost overnight.

Factories closed down and countries sealed their borders: world trade took a massive hit. However, a deeper economic catastrophe has been avoided, thanks to unprecedented economic and financial stimulus from central banks as well as unparalleled government aid to workers, struggling businesses and the most affected sectors.

Since the World Health Organization's announcement of the global pandemic in March 2020, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi has mobilized its resources, capabilities and community to fight against and provide relief from COVID-19. The Emirate mandated a government agency, the Authority of Social Contribution (Ma'an), to coordinate these actions on its behalf and to channel philanthropic efforts from government entities, the private sector and individual citizens.

In March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, Ma'an launched its flagship "Together We Are Good" (TWAG) programme. Its objective was to channel community contributions to those most affected by the pandemic.

**The programme provided support in four key areas:**



Education



Health



Food



Basic needs

TWAG was launched as a fast-response fund to support the most vulnerable citizens and residents affected by the pandemic. By September 2020, the value of the fund had risen to an estimated 1 billion AED, which takes into account both financial and in-kind contributions.

## 1.2 Scope and Approach

### Scope

This special report highlights the generosity of the Abu Dhabi community during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides an overview of Ma'an's relief efforts and the impact of these efforts on the community, as well as a high level benchmark at the regional and international levels with similar relief efforts. The report aims specifically to showcase the proactive approach used for the TWAG programme since its inception in March 2020, and analyses lessons learned and key future considerations for the philanthropy ecosystem in the Emirate.

## Approach

This report is based on an analysis of available information and data relating to the achievements and results of the TWAG programme as provided by Ma'an. The initial analysis is followed by the benchmarking of international experience by national crisis funds in comparable countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and internationally.

The benchmarking uses a set of defined criteria to evaluate and compare the performance of the programme and to draw lessons for best practices. The countries and cases selected from the GCC are Dubai, Bahrain and Kuwait; globally, those selected are the United Kingdom, Singapore, Switzerland, Canada, Australia and Israel. These countries have been chosen for their ranking in the 2020 World Giving Index.

A literature review has also been undertaken to research and review global trends in philanthropy in light of the pandemic. This has enabled insights and success factors to be determined as well as future considerations for after the COVID-19 pandemic has ended.

## 1.3 Structure

This report is organized into four sections:

### Section One

Provides a review of the main challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of the pandemic on Abu Dhabi. It also sets out the targeted response undertaken by Ma'an, and the results achieved between February and September 2020.

### Section Two

Benchmarks, at a high level, the TWAG programme against leading crisis funds using a set of common evaluation criteria. This section also presents a snapshot of the global trends in philanthropy that are most relevant to the Abu Dhabi context.

### Section Three

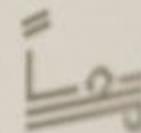
There is a synthesis of the impact of the TWAG programme.

### Section Four

Concludes with insights and future considerations for Ma'an's efforts towards building stronger connected communities and strengthening the culture and ecosystem of philanthropy in the Emirate.

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**TWAG at a Glance**

# TWAG at a Glance

## 2.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Abu Dhabi

Worldwide, the pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life, brought about devastating social and economic disruptions and presented an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems, the economy and the world of work. Countries have struggled to address the scale of the COVID-19 outbreak and its widespread effect on individuals, businesses and national economies.

The relief efforts began with central banks and governments rolling out fiscal stimulus and relief packages, as well as policy measures to mitigate the economic downturn. In the wake of COVID-19, authorities implemented an aggressive containment strategy with strict lockdowns, postponed major events, imposed social distancing measures, and undertook large-scale testing.<sup>1</sup>

For citizens and residents of Abu Dhabi, the immediate effects of the pandemic included strict lockdowns and restrictions on movement and gatherings, as authorities tried to limit the human-to-human transmission of the virus. Thousands of people were affected and lost their jobs overnight as numerous businesses found themselves having to lay off many of their workers. This meant that these workers then faced economic hardship as their incomes had been either significantly reduced or completely cut. The COVID-19 crisis has especially taken a heavy toll on low-paid workers, long considered the backbone of

the economy in Abu Dhabi. It is estimated that nearly 42% of workers were in high economic risk situations, especially workers in elementary occupations such as cleaners and construction workers (31.7%), and in the services and sales sectors (10.1%).<sup>2</sup> During the pandemic, many migrant workers found themselves stranded without the means to return home; they had limited access to financial support and, in the absence of a social safety net, found it difficult to take care of their basic needs. Without the means to earn an income during lockdowns, many were unable to feed themselves or their families. For most, no income means no food or, at best, less food and food that is less nutritious. Many accumulated debts and, without the help and support of charities, would have gone hungry as they waited for work or to be paid.

The economic impact of the pandemic—resulting in lost jobs, isolation and the closure of businesses—is also predicted to have a lasting impact on rates of depression and anxiety within the wider community.

The pandemic also took its particular toll on frontline workers. According to recent research undertaken by government hospital operator SEHA, doctors and nurses working with high-risk patients on COVID wards were the most vulnerable to mental trauma. It might take years for frontline workers to recover from the mental scars they have received from treating seriously ill patients during the coronavirus pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/879771554825521024/mpo-are.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Centre of Abu Dhabi, Statistical Yearbook 2020.

## 2.2 The TWAG Response

The Government of Abu Dhabi, like most other governments, rolled out multiple measures to support those most affected by the pandemic.

In March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, Ma'an launched its flagship "Together We Are Good" (TWAG) programme. Its objective was to channel community contributions to those most affected by the pandemic. The programme provided support in four key areas: education; health; food; and basic needs.

The TWAG programme had to be devised, set up and executed in a very short period of time. Given the rapid spread of the virus throughout the world and the unprecedented impact it was having on people's lives and livelihoods, it was imperative to redeploy internal resources to design and operate the programme quickly and efficiently. It took just a few days for dedicated staffing, systems, communications and governance structures to be put in place, so that contributions could be received, and support programmes implemented.

By end of 2020, the fund's value had risen to an estimated AED 1 billion, which includes AED 439 million raised through direct monetary contributions and the balance through in-kind contributions.

### **TWAG Symbolizes the Human Fraternity Principles**

The Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together is the resolution that acknowledges the historic meeting between His Holiness Pope Francis and the His Eminence Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyib, on the 4th of February 2019 in Abu Dhabi. The resolution recognizes the valuable contributions of people of all religions and beliefs to humanity.

The United Nations has officially designated  
**the 4th of February**  
**as the International Day of Human Fraternity.**

Ma'an's relief efforts and its overall implementation of TWAG are good examples of how a local initiative can symbolize generosity and the spirit of giving, tolerance and peaceful living in Abu Dhabi. TWAG successfully raised funds from everyone in the community (Muslims, non-Muslims and all nationalities) and all funds were distributed without discrimination based on religion, race, nationality or gender.

## Providing Vital Support for Health and Wellbeing

Through the TWAG programme, Ma'an was able to obtain and coordinate the support of a group of hotels. These hotels donated the use of their rooms for medical personnel and frontline staff (including doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers) who needed a place away from their families to self-isolate while they were on duty fighting the virus on behalf of the whole community.



A total of **1,744 frontline workers directly benefitted from TWAG**, with accommodation for 35,535 hotel nights provided to frontline workers between hospital shifts. Some hotels even offered rooms with free meals and room service.<sup>3</sup>



**1,500 N95 masks and 1,500 high-tech bio-protective hoods** were provided to frontline healthcare workers.



Special attention was also given to mental health, and **400 frontline workers were provided with emotional and mental health support** programmes.



TWAG was also able to **extend vital healthcare to 3,000 people**, who received lifesaving medical care and medicines after no longer being in a position to afford their treatments.

<sup>3</sup> Hotels that donated rooms and suites include the Millennium Group, Royal Rose, City Seasons, Park Rotana, Ayla in Al Ain and Millennium Capital Gate.



“The campaign proves that resilience, solidarity and social responsibility are all aspects instilled in members of our society, and for that we feel safe knowing we can come together as one in even the most challenging of times.”

Amal Yousif, staff nurse.



## Leaving No Child Behind: Making Sure Learning Continues

Ma'an, in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), was able to quickly support parents who had children enrolled in private schools and who, due to either a short-term loss of income or unemployment, were unable to pay school fees or afford devices such as laptops and tablets needed for distance learning.



**School fees were paid for 8,000 students** across 192 schools, including People of Determination (PODs) requiring special education needs.



In collaboration with the Abu Dhabi Digital Authority (ADDA), **more than 4,200 devices from 24 government entities were supplied** to low-income families. This enabled children to continue e-learning while their schools were closed.

## Helping the Vulnerable with Food and Basic Living Needs



The TWAG programme helped **feed 400,000 low-income individuals** across the Emirate, including 13,000 children and youth.



TWAG provided **27 million nutritious meals to expatriate workers** living in 35 accommodation complexes: 340,000 workers were provided with three meals per day.



**More than 32,000 food baskets were provided to families** who struggled under the economic impact of pandemic. Each basket provided a full month's supply of varied food items to each family.



TWAG set aside funds to **pay for 1,500 expatriate workers to fly home** and be reunited with their families.



To support basic living needs, Ma'an provided and **distributed 500,000 litres of water** in worker cities



**127,000 pieces of preventive and protective medical equipment**, half a ton of disinfectant.



**6,410 blankets** to low-income individuals and families.



# TWAG Benchmarking Scorecard

# TWAG Benchmarking Scorecard

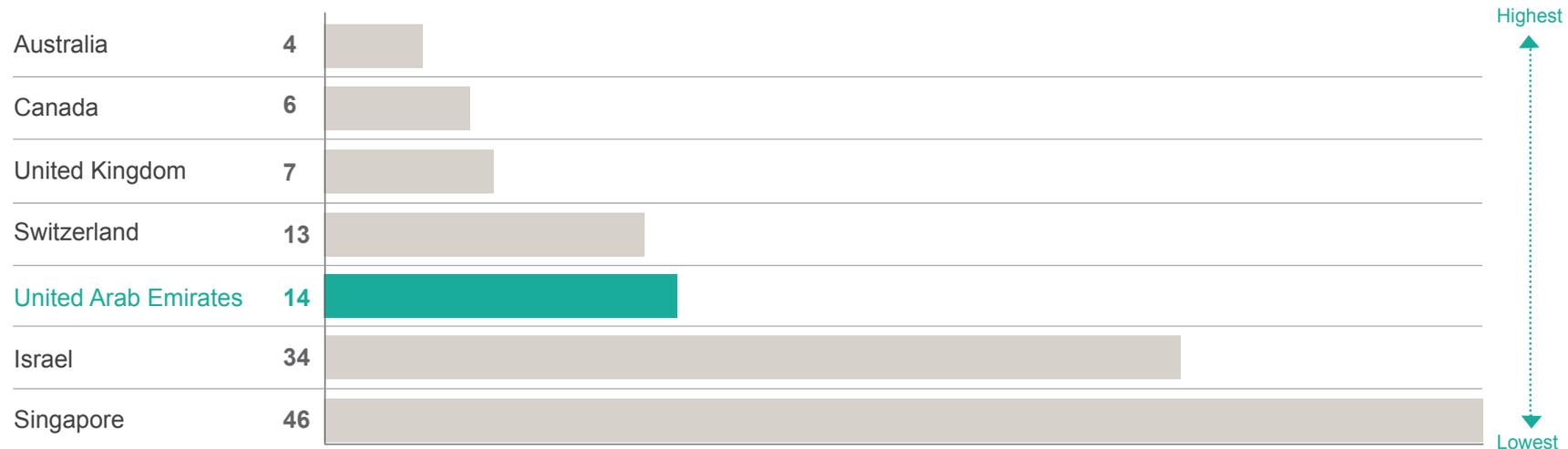
## 3.1 Benchmarking Dimensions

The benchmarking exercise aims to evaluate and compare at a high level the performance of national crisis funds that are similar to TWAG and that have been set up as a relief response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first step was to select countries from among the top-ranked countries on the World Giving Index 2020, as published by the Charities Aid Foundation in the United Kingdom (see Figure 1). The World Giving Index report is the largest survey of charitable endeavours from around the world. The information is compiled from

surveys of more than 1.3 million people in 125 countries, and a special focus is paid to various aspects of “giving behaviour”. Out of the 125 countries, the United Arab Emirates — and Abu Dhabi and Dubai by extension—are rated among the 15 most generous countries on the Index, followed by Israel (34/125) and Singapore (46/125). Bahrain and Kuwait are not ranked in the WGI but have been selected as part of the GCC context for regional comparison.

### Global Ranking of Selected Countries on the World Giving Index 2020

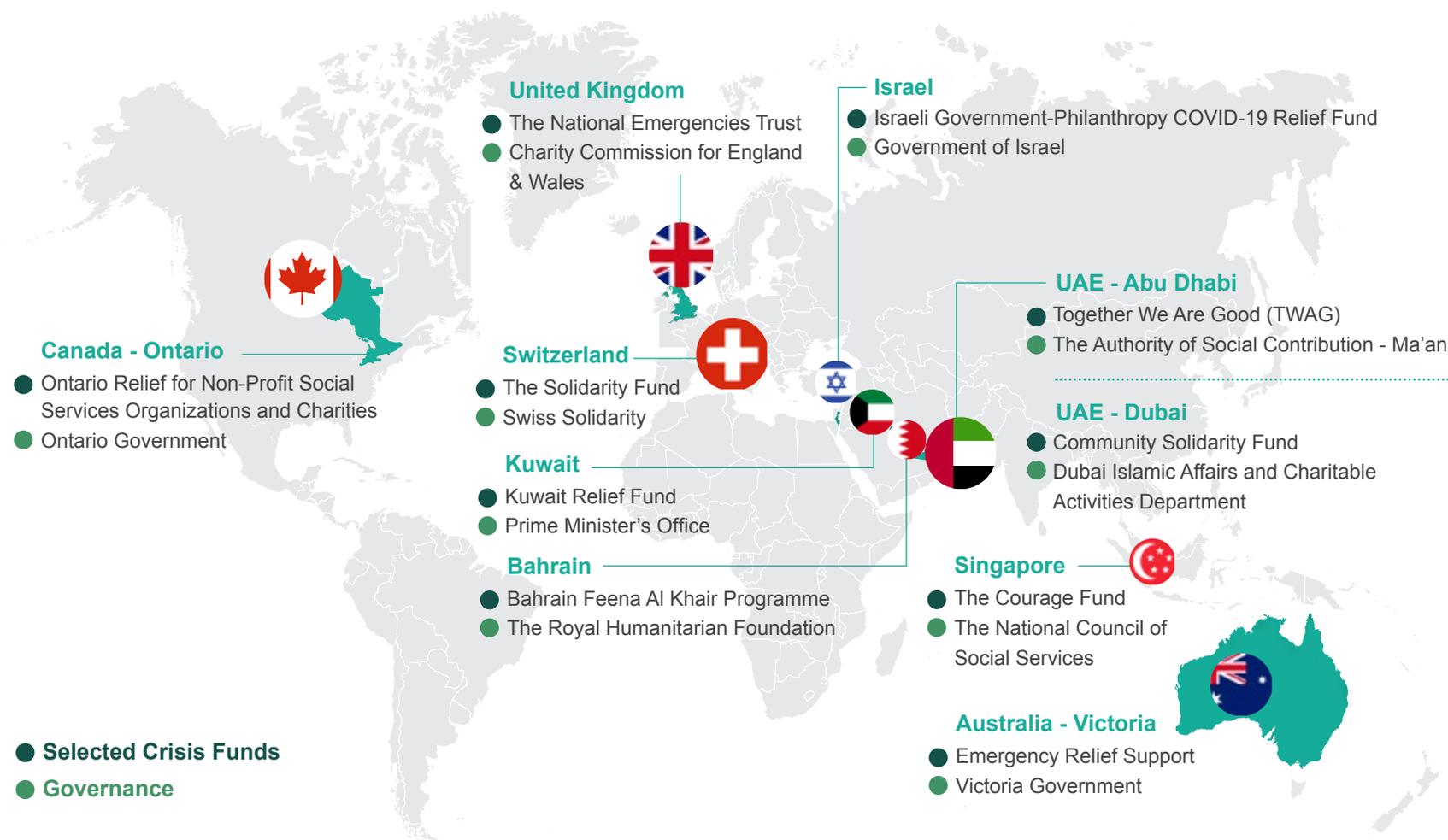
**Figure 1.** Data Source: The World Giving Index 2020 Ranking of 125 Countries.



Note: Bahrain and Kuwait were not ranked in the WGI.

The second step was to choose crisis funds in the selected countries that were similar to TWAG in the following ways: they were government established; they were dedicated to providing emergency relief for the COVID-19 pandemic; they focused on social relief; and they targeted similar areas to those supported by TWAG (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Selected Countries and Crisis Funds.



The third step was to identify a set of five benchmarking dimensions that would enable the selected crisis funds to be evaluated and compared (Figure 3). As with any research and comparative analysis relating to the international crisis, analysing funds poses a number of challenges and limitations. First, there is a major gap in data and information available and published on the various websites; in most cases, the information available is incomplete. Another limitation is that most of the selected funds and programmes have not yet produced or published online their detailed financial statements and results. The

majority of the COVID-19 relief crisis funds and programmes selected were launched in 2020; therefore, there is a lack of financial data and results. There are also considerable differences and variations across country contexts; legal status and definitions of the philanthropic institutions; cultural concepts; and the state and coverage of national social safety nets – considered a key driver to how the various crisis funds select and prioritize their areas of intervention. This makes it difficult to compare similar sectors and areas of relief across the selected countries.

**Figure 3.** Selected Benchmarking Dimensions.



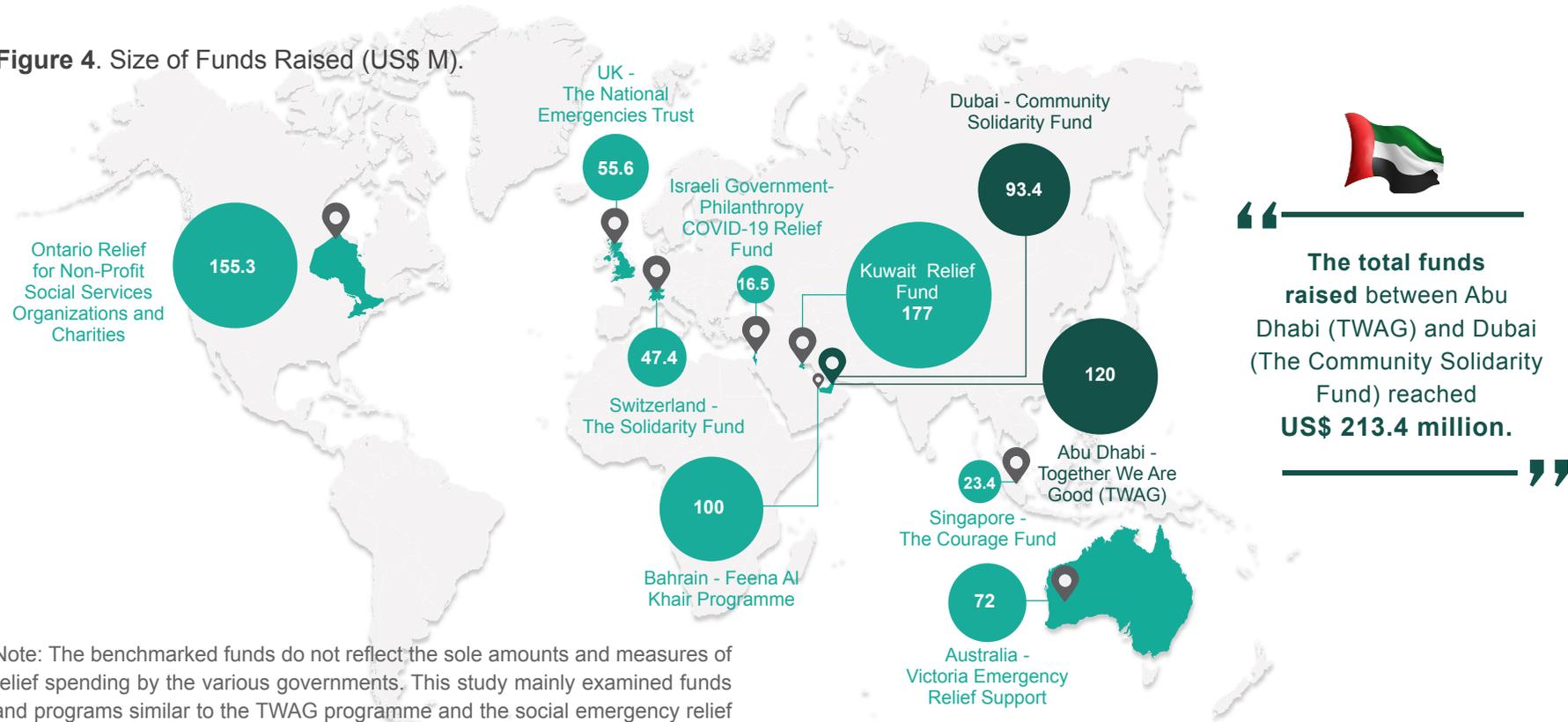
## 3.2 Benchmarking Results

### Scale of Funds

Within the first eight months of operations, TWAG successfully raised funds totalling US\$ 120 million (M), which placed it in the top three after Kuwait (US\$ 177M) and Ontario, Canada (US\$ 155M). With regard to the average funds raised per capita (see Figure 6), TWAG ranks second after Bahrain (whose citizens gave an average of US\$ 56 per person) and equal with Kuwait (US\$ 41). The TWAG score is almost eight times that of Switzerland (US\$ 5)

and Singapore (US\$ 4). One insight into these scores is that Abu Dhabi — like most selected GCC cases—has a significant culture of giving in the community, which is strongly grounded in the cultural and Islamic traditions of giving and the practice of “Sadaqa”, which means “voluntary charity” and contributions to those in need. Ma’an was particularly successful in leveraging the generosity of the community throughout its fundraising efforts.

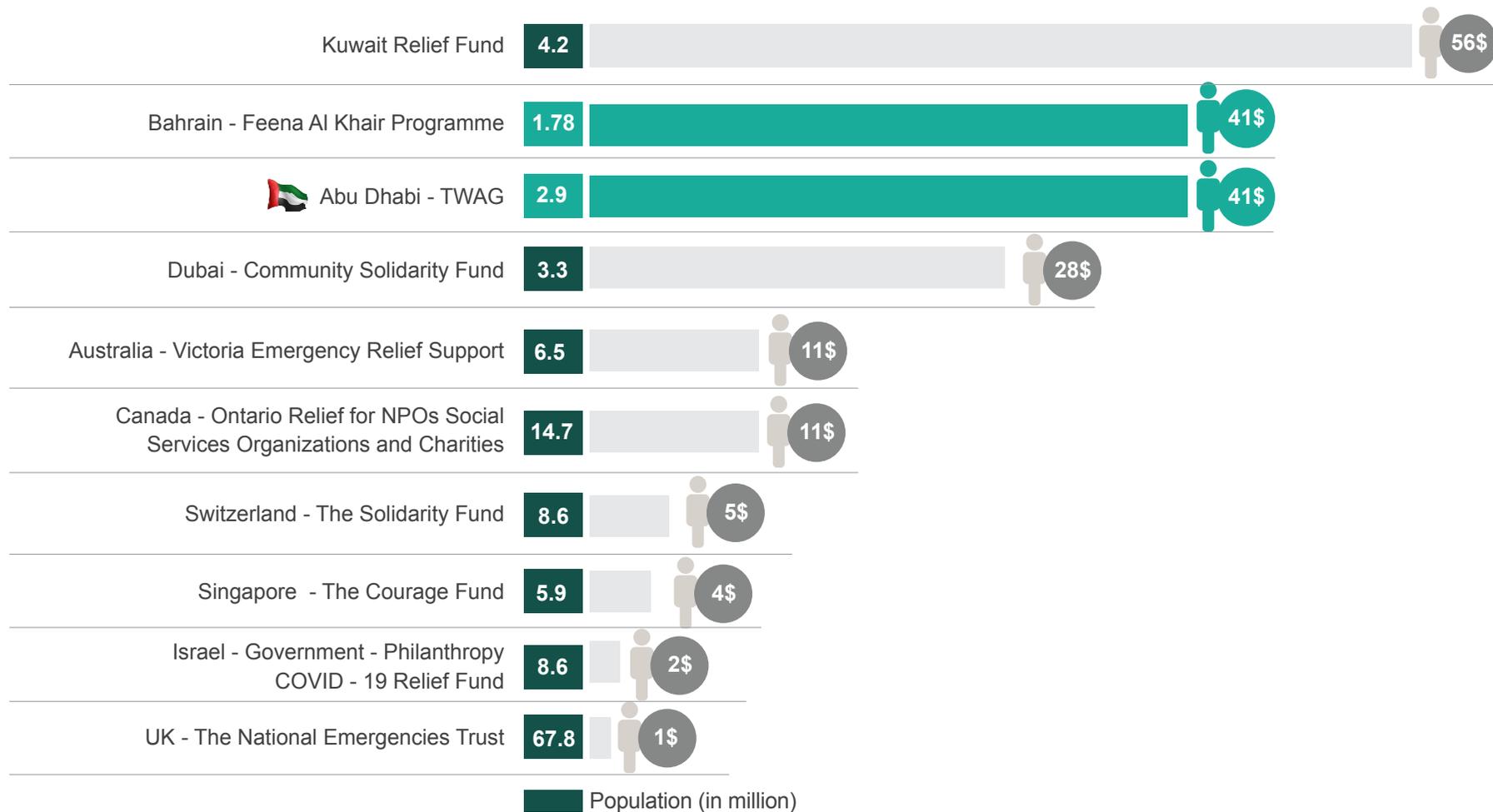
Figure 4. Size of Funds Raised (US\$ M).



“  
**The total funds raised between Abu Dhabi (TWAG) and Dubai (The Community Solidarity Fund) reached US\$ 213.4 million.**  
 ”

Note: The benchmarked funds do not reflect the sole amounts and measures of relief spending by the various governments. This study mainly examined funds and programs similar to the TWAG programme and the social emergency relief provided in comparable areas.

**Figure 5.** Average Funds Raised per Capita (US\$).



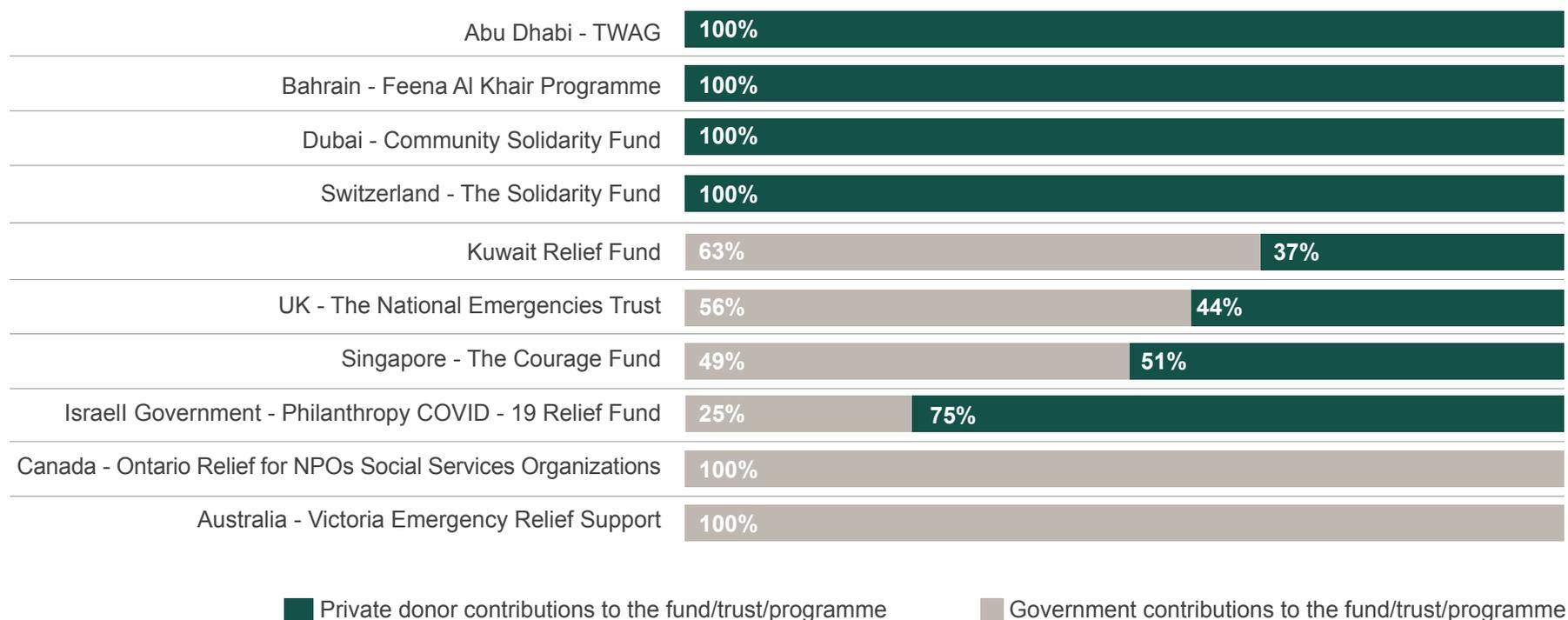
Note: The benchmarked funds do not reflect the sole amounts and measures of relief spending by the various governments. This study mainly examined funds and programs similar to the TWAG programme and the social emergency relief provided in comparable areas.

## Sources of Contributions

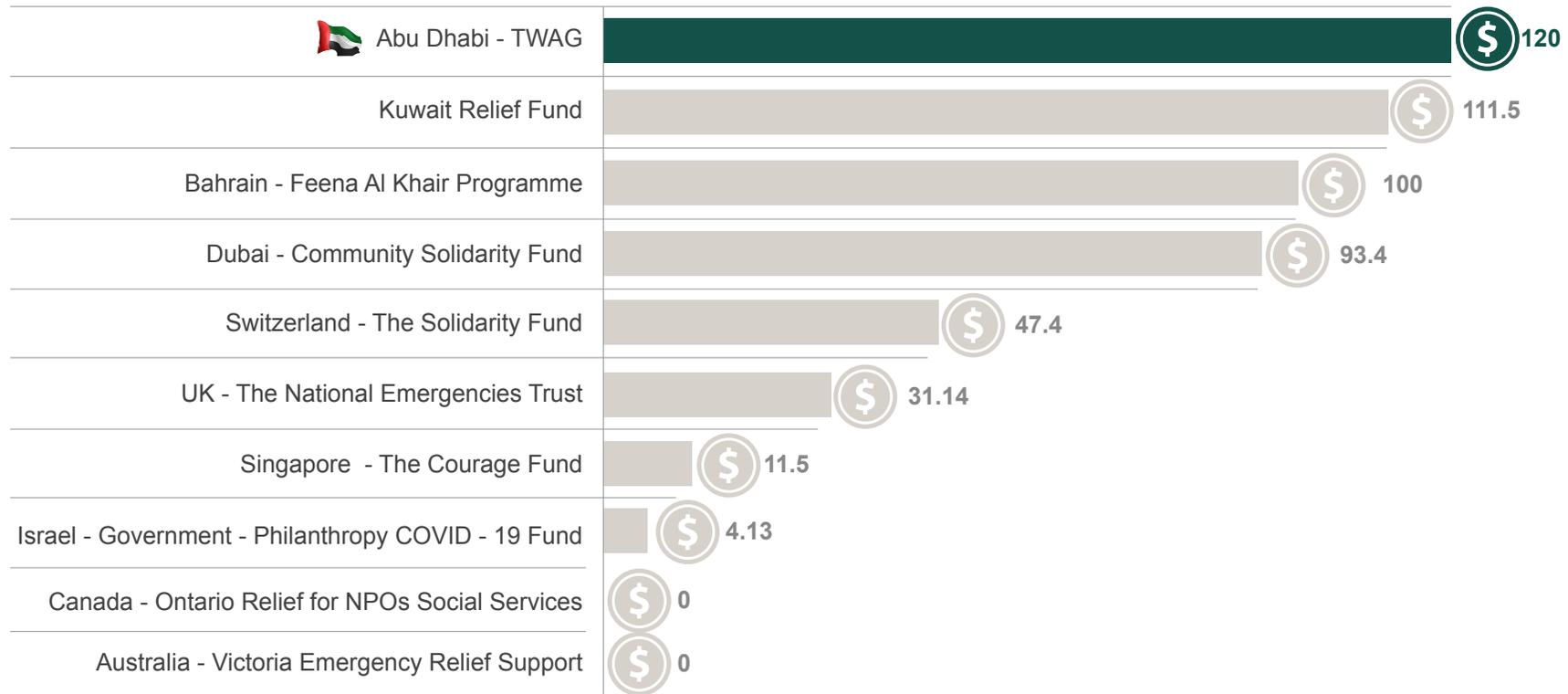
An examination of the sources of contributions in terms of the share by donor segments (i.e. government funding versus private donors or mixed-contribution from government and private donors) reveals that TWAG ranks alongside countries that have established new relief funds or programmes during the pandemic and have successfully mobilized the whole of the community for their fundraising efforts and relied entirely on private donors (100%). When considering private donor contributions

only, TWAG scored first in terms of highest funds raised (Figure 7). This is in comparison to the United Kingdom and Singapore, which established their funds in 2016 and 2003 respectively, and which leveraged a mix of government funding and private donors. Israel and Kuwait also have partial government funding (75% and 37% respectively). At the other extreme, Australia and Canada both relied 100% on government funding, most of which comes usually from taxpayers' money (Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Share of Contributions by Donor Segment (%).

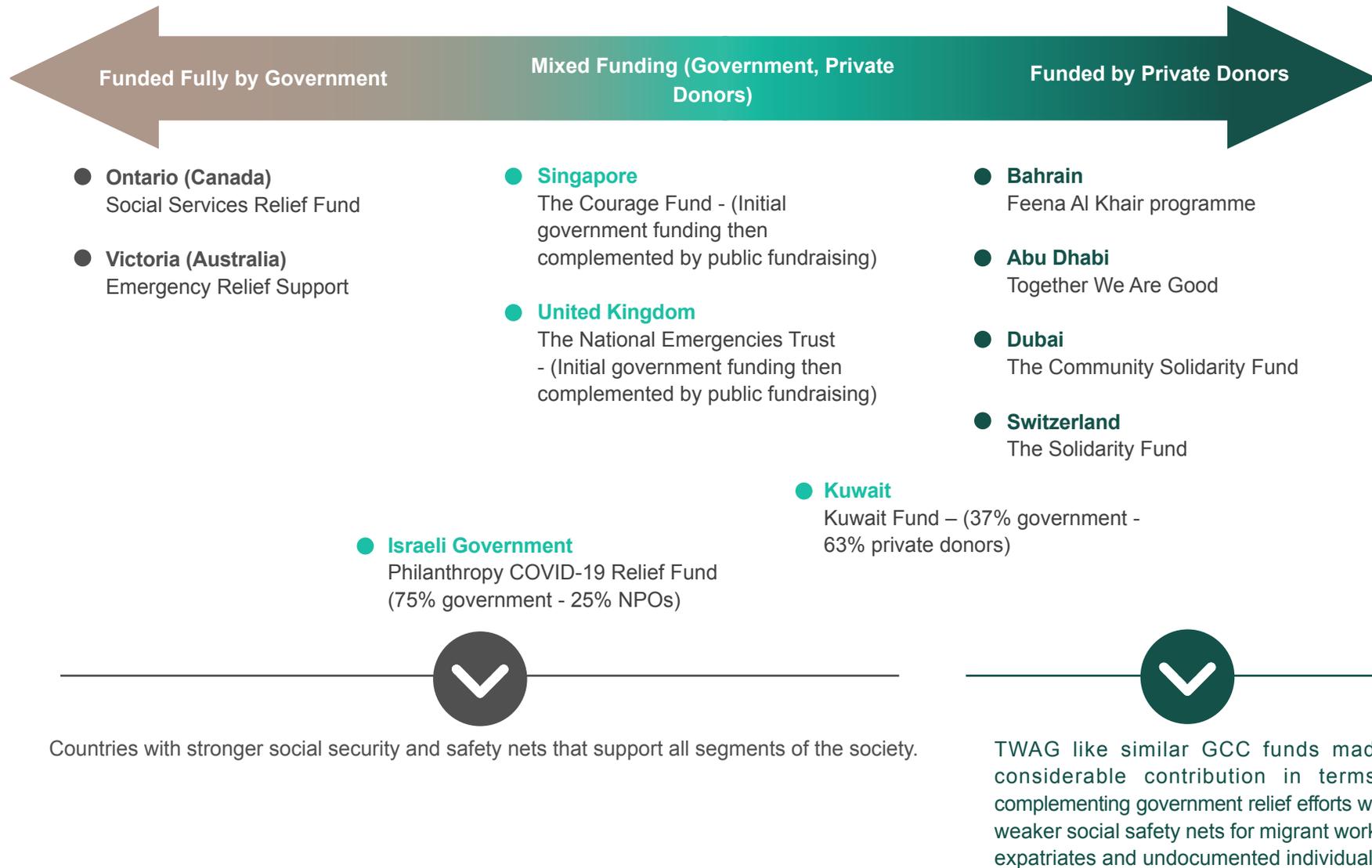


**Figure 7.** Size of Funds Raised from Private Donors (US\$ M).



Another area in which TWAG performed particularly well is in the relation between the share of contributions by donor segments and the impact of the funds on the social safety nets. Their contribution to the most vulnerable has had a huge impact, especially on those not covered by the weaker social safety nets (including migrant workers, expatriates and undocumented individuals). This is where TWAG, as well as similar funds in Dubai, Bahrain and even Switzerland, have complemented government efforts and filled a significant and emerging need. On the other hand, countries that relied entirely on government funding usually have stronger safety nets to support all segments of society (Figure 8).

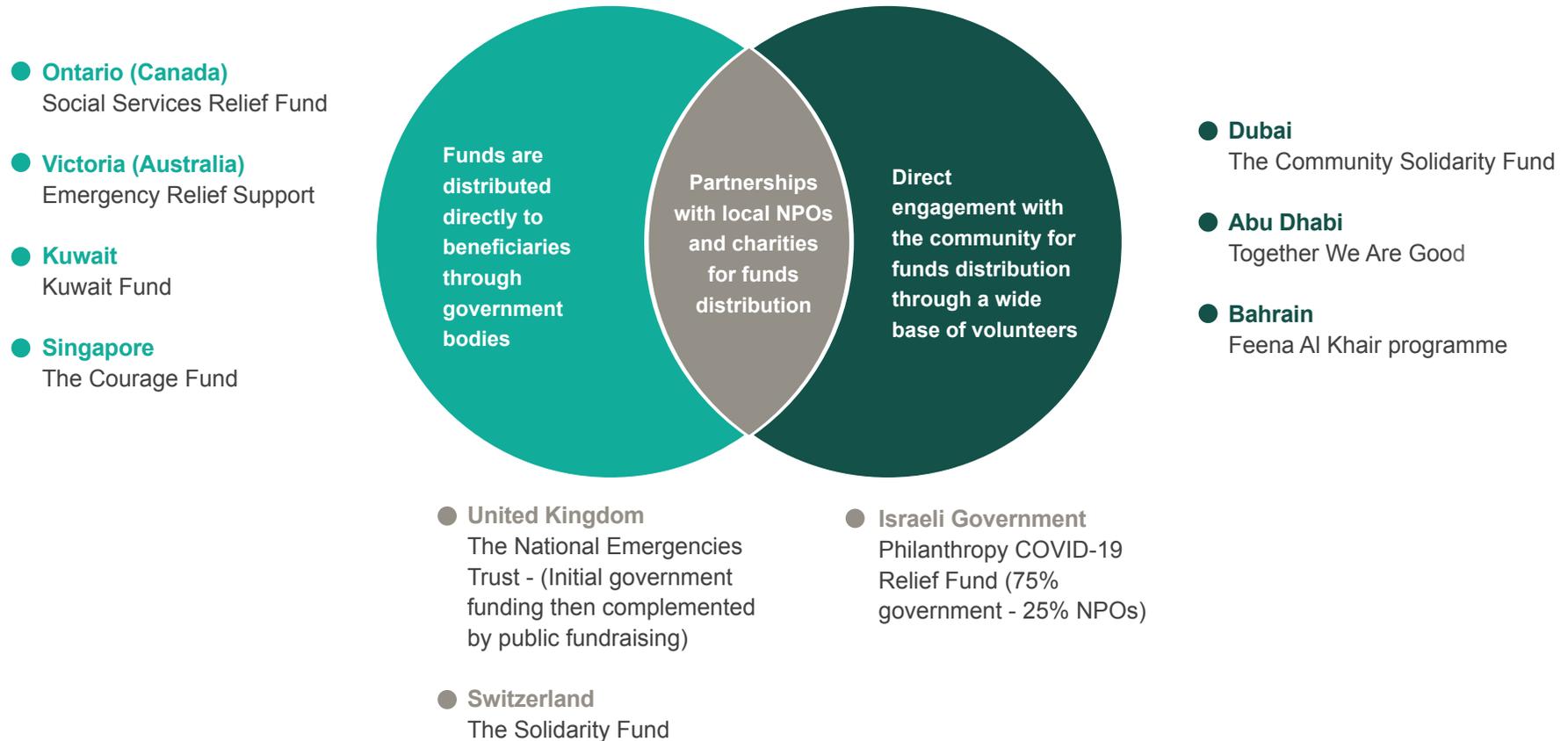
**Figure 8.** Relationship Between Share of Contributions and the Impact of Funds on Social Safety Nets.



## Community Engagement and Partnerships

The TWAG programme was successful in directly engaging with the community where it mobilized an impressive base of 6,600 registered volunteers. This was similar in terms of operating model to the Community Solidarity Fund in Dubai (16,089 volunteers) and Feena Al Khair in Bahrain. These three funds had direct engagement with the community. This is in contrast with Australia, Canada and Israel, which channelled funds to local charities or non-profit organizations without any direct engagement with the community. This operating model enabled TWAG to successfully establish itself as the trusted entity for emergency fundraising among Abu Dhabi's community (Figure 9).

**Figure 9.** Level of Engagement with the Community.



## Reach and Transparency

TWAG, along with Dubai Community Solidarity Fund and to a certain extent, Bahrain's Feena Al Khair, has made considerable efforts towards achieving higher transparency and openness around its funding sources, targeted beneficiaries and focus areas (Figure 10).

This is an approach that builds trust with donors and the general public, which is vital, as these funds rely 100% on private donors. All other countries with a more mature philanthropic ecosystem have channelled their funds directly to national non-profit organizations and charities to implement the services. The results of these countries' relief efforts will be made available later in Q1 or Q2 of 2021.

In terms of focus areas and beneficiaries, TWAG made two unique contributions compared to all other countries. First, TWAG was the only fund in the education sector to support the payment of tuition fees for students whose parents were struggling to pay as a result of the crisis. Second, TWAG was also the only fund in the health sector to support frontline workers to protect their families by providing them with accommodation in hotels.



**Figure 10.** Summary of Funds Focus Areas.

Selected Crisis Funds	 Health & Wellbeing	 Education	 Food Support	 Basic Needs Support
 Abu Dhabi - TWAG	Support frontline workers with hotel accommodation, protective equipment and mental health programs	Support struggling families with education tuition fees, tablets and laptops	Support expatriate workers and low-income individuals with food baskets provision, meals and iftar meals	Provide medical care, medicines, hand sanitizers and hygiene kits  Set aside funds to support expatriate workers to fly home
 Dubai - Community Solidarity Fund	Provide protective medical equipment to healthcare workers  Provide protective masks and to the wider population	Support struggling families with laptops for students	Support expatriate workers and low-income individuals with meals and iftar meals	Provide health check-ups to low-income individuals
 Bahrain - Feena Al Khair Programme	Information not available	Support struggling families with laptops for students	Provide meals and iftar meals	Support vulnerable groups: widows, orphans, the destitute, micro-businesses and families facing the death of loved ones and breadwinners
 Kuwait Relief Fund	Support overall government efforts - no additional details are published			
 Switzerland - The Solidarity Fund	Funds raised given to the Swiss Cross, Caritas and other NPOs and Charities			
 Singapore - The Courage Fund	Direct financial support to beneficiaries			
 UK - The National Emergencies Trust	Support national networks of NPOs and charities to carry out their services			
 Israeli Government-Philanthropy COVID-19 Relief Fund	Support national networks of NPOs and charities to carry out their services			
 Australia - Victoria Emergency Relief Support	Support people to meet basic needs such as food, medicine or shelter			
 Canada - Ontario Relief for NPOs Social Services	Support social services such as food banks, charities, shelters, emergency services and non-profits			

### 3.3 Global Trends in Donor Behaviour and Fundraising Giving Patterns

Months into the pandemic, new trends have emerged into how the economic impact has affected the way charities and non-profit organizations interact with their donors and supporters. These trends and insights usually constitute an essential element that guides philanthropy planning for fundraising. Enthuse, a fundraising, donations and events registration platform in the United Kingdom which has helped some 4,000 British charities raise more than £70 million, has identified recent trends in the latest Enthuse Donor Pulse Report. These trends provide good insights into donor behaviour and patterns of recent giving in response to the pandemic.

#### Here are the key takeaways:



**The rise of impulse donations.** The number of people donating to charity has increased (by 69%) with a preference for one-off, spur-of-the-moment donations rather than a plan to donate to a particular charity. This shows a clear indication of a willingness to help, with a special focus on what people feel most needs their support during the pandemic being the key driver to impulse giving. Enthuse data also show that while the number of people willing to give has increased, the average amount donated has gone down.



**The increase of drifting donors.** The data suggests that younger age groups are the most likely to give, yet older age groups are the most committed to giving regularly. The report suggests that behind this difference in certainty of giving is the level of commitment donors have to charities. These two trends relate to differences between one-off and recurring donors. Enthuse underscores the importance of first capitalizing on the “one-off donations” and then moving donors towards regular giving through a more structured approach.<sup>4</sup>



**The “give and forget” donor.** With the rise of digital donation channels, there has been an increase in the number of people who are unable to remember the name of the last charity to which they donated. The data showed that 33% cannot recall the name, with the younger age group having the worst level of recall. This highlights the importance of effective communications and branding, and having them front and centre in the digital world.

Additional research by Imagine Canada, a national charitable organization advocating on behalf of Canada’s charitable and non-profit sector, provided other insights into fundraising trends that are relevant to the Abu Dhabi context. The landscape of giving has changed and has moved online; in addition, the composition of those who are giving and, more importantly, who could be giving is also changing. This starts with the importance of understanding demographics and the effects of multiculturalism and shows

<sup>4</sup> Donor Pulse. Autumn 2020: impact of Covid-19 on donor behaviour - by Enthuse Intelligence.

the need to tap into this previously underrepresented donor pool. Looking inward, non-profit organizations and charities might start by strengthening their teams to mirror the diverse composition of communities, and to better approach and engage newcomers and expatriates in the longer term.

**Trust and transparency within charities** are also becoming key drivers for donors, underscoring the importance of ensuring that a charitable organization's processes, operations, activities and partnerships are transparent, so it is able to build trust with donors, increase engagement and ultimately increase the donations it receives.

**The fast pace of digitization in the sector.** While online fundraising is not new, the rate at which non-profit organizations and charities need to digitize is rapidly increasing. As a consequence, this creates an additional barrier between them and their donors. To overcome this barrier, organizations are turning to technology such as videoconferencing software and virtual auctions and marathons as innovative ways of promoting their digital-friendly initiatives.

**The need to harness the next generation of donors long-term.** This trend requires special attention be paid to the younger generation, who want to contribute to philanthropic efforts of more meaningful causes and see the sustainable impact of their contributions. This points to the next generation of donors being more selective and may drive and shape longer-term systemic interventions and causes. The final insights are taken from the Global Philanthropy Report,<sup>6</sup> global research developed by the Harvard Kennedy School, in collaboration with the Union Bank of Switzerland and the Ford Foundation, with the

aim of providing a comparative analysis of global philanthropic giving, surveying some 30,000 foundations in 38 countries to understand the magnitude, vitality and impact of global institutional philanthropy.

### The three key takeaways are:



**The education sector is a top priority worldwide** with nearly 35% of foundations focusing some of their resources on the sector. Education is seen as a key to individual opportunity and the engine of national economic prosperity. Addressing vulnerabilities and poverty also emerged as a priority where priority beneficiaries include people living in poverty, people with disabilities and elderly. Other focus areas and priorities include human services and social welfare (21%), followed by health (20%).



**The importance of alignment with government priorities** is also important for more than 50% of the foundations surveyed, as is alignment with the global sustainable development goals (SDGs). These goals focus on the quality of education, health and wellbeing, poverty elimination, decent work and economic growth.



**The recognition of the importance of collaboration and partnerships** to achieve higher impact and scale, as well as the shift towards multi-donor or public fundraising models, moving away from the conventional practice of one principal source of philanthropic capital.

<sup>5</sup> Guide to 2021 Fundraising Trends, Imagine Canada and Keela, September 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Paula D. Johnson, Global Philanthropy Report: Perspectives on the global foundation sector, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, 2018.

4



## The Impact of TWAG

# The Impact of TWAG on Social Wellbeing in Abu Dhabi



## Adaptable responsiveness

The TWAG programme was initially conceived to raise funds and channel those funds through targeted support programmes to multiple causes according to community needs. When the pandemic grew in scale and its effects on the community as a whole increased dramatically – and particularly among its most vulnerable segments – Ma’an was able to quickly mobilize, coordinate and channel aid where it was most needed. The community saw it as a trusted channel; one which could adapt to rapidly changing needs. Ma’an used the programme to channel contributions to the right place at the right time and to make a significant difference for those who needed it most.



## Flexibility

Ma’an was successful in soliciting non-financial, in-kind contributions from individuals, businesses and NGOs in the form of hotel rooms, villas and apartments, cars, meals, industrial buildings, tents, farms and land. These contributions went well beyond what Ma’an had anticipated. It also managed to increase and coordinate the distribution of these contributions.



## A whole-of-society approach is optimal

The TWAG programme demonstrated that the most efficient and optimal way to support vulnerable members of the community of Abu Dhabi is through a coordinated approach, one which brings together the relevant government entities, private sector companies, and contributing members of the community to collectively fulfil the targeted support.



## Adopting an inclusive approach that integrates all segments of society

Expatriates make up about 80 percent of the population in Abu Dhabi. There are more than 200 different nationalities, as is the case in most of the UAE. Citizens and residents alike felt the need to contribute, repaying in some way their sense of belonging, and the endless opportunities that the Emirate has provided them. Through Ma’an, the various communities came together as a single family, aligned through TWAG to provide aid to those in need, regardless of their nationality, religion, gender, location or affiliation.



### Leveraging Abu Dhabi's local social fabric and existing social networks

Ma'an quickly engaged the community and leveraged existing local networks to maximize the impact of the programme. Twenty tribes launched campaigns for donations among their members in support of TWAG programme as part of their "national responsibility". According to the Abu Dhabi Media Office, the Al Qubaisi, Al Zaabi, Al Rumaithi, Al Mheiri, Al Suwaidi Al Rashed, Al Ahbabi, Al Manaseer, Al Efari, Al Marar, Al Hassani, Al Hammadi, Al Ketbi, Al Hameli, Al Khoori, Al Kaabi, Al Ameri, Al Jneibi, Al Shamsi and Al Mazrouei tribes have all contributed to the TWAG programme.



### Complementing government efforts and filling the gaps where the social safety net is weaker

In the United Arab Emirates, and by extension in Abu Dhabi, the social safety net is primarily designed to support citizens while providing limited support to the expatriates that comprise about 80 percent of the population. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the importance of having a strong safety net to enable vulnerable individuals and struggling businesses to receive financial support. This reality made the demand on Ma'an's services and relief response even more critical as it emerges as a first of its kind in the region to tackle the most pressing societal and vulnerabilities challenges.



### Targeting those who need the most help

This meant mostly expatriate workers in sectors that had been completely shut down. These included the retail, transportation, construction and tourism sectors, as well as people who worked on commission or families in which both parents had been deprived of their income. Ma'an became the vital lifeline for direct support to those households and businesses that had been affected by the virus and helped prevent an extended economic downturn.



### Leveraging technology and the digital infrastructure as a backbone for an integrated ecosystem for societal change

Ma'an set up a digital platform and placed it at the community's disposal. The platform enabled people to send donations—small or large—via a text message, through WhatsApp, or over the phone. The platform today is the key tool driving contributions to the fund.



### Building an outstanding volunteer base

Of 6,600 people of different nationalities, ages, professions and social networks, representing government entities, existing charities, the private sector and NGOs. These volunteers are the pride of Abu Dhabi and symbolize the sense of togetherness in the community, volunteering their time and energy for the less fortunate.

**TOGETHER** معاً  
**WE ARE** نحن  
**GOOD** بخير

Looking Forward

# Looking Forward

As an organization, Ma'an is focused on developing and implementing sustainable solutions to challenges facing the community. The TWAG programme was different in that it was responding to an unforeseen, rapidly evolving crisis. Ma'an's pivotal role in addressing the crisis, and the significant success of the TWAG programme has given the agency unrivalled credibility in the community, and the ability to put together and implement support programmes even more rapidly in the future.

To overcome the intertwined health, social and economic impacts and to mitigate the economic downturn during any future crisis or a re-emergence of the coronavirus, it is essential to invest in the welfare and resilience of the community, especially the most vulnerable. This is especially true for diverse communities with a large expatriate population like Abu Dhabi.

According to the World Health Organization, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over; the threat of its resurgence will remain for the next 12 to 18 months at least. The best time to prepare for the next crisis or any resurgence of COVID-19 is now. A return to containment measures, combined with the risk of further volatility in oil prices, will increase pressure on emergency relief. Ma'an emergency relief efforts are still needed and, as such, there is a need to build on the momentum and lessons learned. The achievements of the TWAG programme mirror the community's responsiveness and resilience to rapidly changing circumstances. Ma'an is now firmly focused on implementing sustainable solutions with a social impact to a range of challenges faced by the communities in Abu Dhabi. Looking ahead, there are several critical considerations that would strengthen Ma'an's

emergency preparedness efforts. These considerations are built on lessons learned from the past crisis; in essence, once an outbreak is under control, governments and donors tend to turn their attention to other more immediate and pressing concerns. The main challenge is how to break the cycle of "panic-then-forget", which has prevented the development of effective emergency preparedness in many countries.<sup>7</sup>

## Some key considerations for the future:



### How to invest in preparedness with an “all-of-government and all-of-society approach”

To better plan for the next crisis through an innovative and sustainable funding model, including those that utilize permanent endowments. This will require a proactive approach by establishing sustainable and versatile means and tools to fund unforeseen national emergencies, such as crisis funds, that can provide immediate and ready funding of critical resources needed for rapid crisis response. These crisis funds could be funded over time (and replenished as needed) through a combination of private and public funds.

<sup>7</sup>World Health Organization, The best time to prevent the next pandemic is now: countries join voices for better emergency preparedness. 1 October 2020.

# 2



**How best to shape the philanthropy ecosystem in the Emirate to ensure future efforts are aligned in a way to maximize efficiencies**

The pandemic has demonstrated that the philanthropic sector in Abu Dhabi can quickly respond to the crisis. The challenge now is to expand and institutionalize the practices that emerged during the crisis for the work that lies ahead. This requires an evaluation of encountered challenges and potential improvement opportunities to maximize efficiencies and impact. Key enablers include rethinking and strengthening the existing operating model; governance; institutional set-up; laws and regulations; policies; advocacy and communication; performance system; and metrics for the various components of the ecosystem.

# 3



**How to build more effective and strategic partnerships and consolidate Ma'an's mandate and efforts**

This requires efforts to partner with private donors to go “further faster” and achieve more systemic impact and facilitate coordination across the various stakeholders in the Emirate. Concerted efforts will be needed to pool resources, align goals and priorities, share data, information, resources and deploy funds quickly through close collaboration to achieve the highest impact on the community in terms of scaling funds and interventions, shared resources, expertise and networks. What matters most is establishing transparency and accountability for private donors in terms of how funds are raised and disbursed, how results are achieved, and impact is measured. However, such partnerships can be challenging to create, manage and sustain.

# 4



## How to engage, manage and expand the private sector's contribution in the long term

This will require concerted efforts to engage the private sector systematically in the strategic planning process, areas of philanthropic focus, development and implementation of programmes, advocacy and communication. Most importantly, it is to create alignment and interlinkages with the private sector's various initiatives and corporate social responsibility agendas.

# 5



## How to shift from the emergency response to a more strategic approach

That supports a more sustainable operating model that is flexible enough to adapt – and yet agile enough to quickly respond to any future crisis, regardless of the type, nature and scale of the crisis. This will require a comprehensive roadmap on how funds' planning and disbursement can be conceived and split for crisis response as well as for sustainable efforts, and focus on achieving social change with higher impact. A shift is also needed to measure short-term results (number of meals and food baskets distributed) to be complemented with longer-term outcomes (impact on social vulnerability, cohesion and livelihoods).

# 6



## How to grow the volunteer base and ensure it remains ready and engaged

A good volunteer base is considered the cornerstone for leveraging community engagement. As such, it requires the development of a comprehensive strategic approach to planning volunteer programmes that defines the skills and talent needed to contribute best to Ma'an's mission; determines the types of volunteers; and describes the mechanisms to best attract, train, develop, manage, grow and retain the volunteer base over time. The most challenging part is to identify resources to support the volunteer programme, determine what volunteers will do and how they will work and integrate with existing staff.

Ma'an is currently working on expanding the various channels of contribution, which will make it easier for members of the community to contribute to the social fund and/or specific projects in the future. In addition, it is expanding its partnerships with public and private sector entities. This will broaden its reach (through collaborative approaches) on both the fundraising front and capital deployment in social projects, programmes and causes.



## **Disclaimer**

Methodology constraints and limitations: As with any research and comparative analysis relating to the international crisis, analyzing funds poses several challenges and limitations. This report's analysis and findings relied solely on the data published online by the entities leading the relief efforts across the various cases selected for the benchmark as of December 20, 2020.

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**WORLD BUSINESS TIMES**

P.O. Box 27363, Dubai, UAE

+971 4 259 8555

[info@world-businesstimes.com](mailto:info@world-businesstimes.com)

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