Crises will happen: get ready

Philanthropy has a role beyond relief in dealing with crises

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Organised philanthropy has a number of changes to make in its response to crisis

Swiss cultural historian, Jacob Burckhardt, was very specific: a crisis is a crisis when something is definitively changed as a result of it. The natural human tendency, on the other hand, is to want to get back to how things were - rebuild houses, repair infrastructure, replant the crops, etc. The old normal, not the new normal is what people instinctively want and many might feel that Burckhardt’s rather high bar belittles their suffering in the meantime.

Maybe in a way he has a point, though. Maybe one of the things that should change as a result of the increasing and increasingly severe crises the world is undergoing is the response of organised philanthropy. The following articles are full of suggestions as to what form such changes might take. A few things stand out.

One is that crises or disasters don’t just happen. Given the intelligence, you can often see them coming and, if you can’t prevent them, you can mitigate their effects. The second thing, given the fact they don’t just come out of the blue, is to be prepared in advance. While it’s hard, as one contributor points out, not ‘to prioritise response over recovery’, another speaks of adding preparation to the classic three-stage model of intervention: immediate relief, medium-term response and support, and long-term reconstruction.

A third thing is that communities and local organisations are at the heart of any response. They need support to build their resilience and capacity to recover, yet, as our guest editor Patricia McIlreavy points out, ‘funds continue to go predominantly to international actors, especially in complex humanitarian emergencies and large-scale disasters’.

And a fourth thing: some crises seem to be more ‘fundable’ than others. Partly, this is a function of newsworthiness. This or that disaster captures the attention of the media. Donations follow, not just from institutional philanthropy, but as a spontaneous outburst of compassion from people around the world. However, when the crisis moves off the front page, the attention of philanthropy is apt to wane, too. But there may also be other factors at work. The crisis in Ukraine has, as one contributor remarks, become the ‘best funded response globally’, while an impending famine in Somalia has gone largely unnoticed. Maybe it’s easier to feel compassion for those who are nearer, or who are most like us, or in cases where there seem to be more identifiable heroes and villains, or maybe a crisis has to strike before it is taken seriously - which takes us back to the need for preparedness.

None of this is intended to sell short the praiseworthy work donors of all kinds do in response to a crisis. The real point is that institutional philanthropy doesn’t have to behave reflexively. It can inform itself in advance, it can prepare, it can support local communities and it can assess need and act according to judgement removed from geopolitics on the one hand, or preference and prejudice on the other. In short, it can set an example for others to follow.

WHEN IS A CRISIS A CRISIS?

It is the time for those who seek to help those most affected by disasters to discard the barriers and silos we have built around ourselves.
"We are the ones we have been waiting for."
Current narratives about how to practise philanthropy in the wake of crises are undermining both the effectiveness and the credibility of the sector in doing so. Time to flip those narratives.

In his opening remarks at the 77th United Nations General Assembly in September, UN secretary-general António Guterres warned, ‘Our world is in peril and paralysed. Divides are growing deeper. Inequalities are growing wider.’ He added: ‘We have a duty to act. And yet we are gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction. The international community is not ready or willing to tackle the big dramatic challenges of our age. These crises threaten the very future of humanity and the fate of our planet.’

Sobering words indeed and words that resonate. We are living in a time unlike any other. Social disruptions occurring worldwide – growing economic disparities, protests calling for an end to inequities and the rise of populism – are just a few of the concerns. In addition, the scale and frequency of natural hazards is increasing; complex emergencies are forcing record numbers of people from their homes, and the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the severe risk that infectious diseases carry for all countries. We also know that climate change will result in additional economic, social and political pressures. For those whom society has already made vulnerable, inequities will be exacerbated.

While unprecedented times of overlapping crises, insufficient funds and increasing demands threaten to overwhelm us, it is also a time of opportunity. It is the time for those who seek to help those most affected by disasters to discard the barriers and silos we have built around ourselves. Time to celebrate tearing down systems of oppression rather than a community’s resilience to those systems. And time to practise the lessons we’ve been taught time and again, that centring affected people is critical to effective grantmaking.

Collaborate through common values
Decades ago, when I first started in the humanitarian sector, a friend who worked for the US Agency for International Development advised me to be cautious, that the path of humanitarianism was one of ‘instant gratification’ altruism. While cutting, it was an astute observation, for that simple phrase questioned the centring of self that occurs in the disaster relief and humanitarian spheres, a centring that is evidenced through mandate-driven assessments of affected population’s needs, the speed at which programmes are designed and even as an undercurrent for donors’ and non-profits’ marketing and branding.

While I may not have recognised it as such at the time, I quickly learned that within her advice was also the undercurrent of an insult often repeated. Be it conflict in Ukraine, floods in Pakistan, famine in Somalia or hurricanes in Florida, the world still looks to humanitarian and disaster professionals to be the first in, portraying these workers and their efforts as simplistically heroic, a perception fuelled not only by the media but, at times, by the non-profits doing the work themselves. While the sector has changed much since my first forays in humanitarian work, this narrative has not.

With all respect to my colleagues operating in some of the hardest imaginable conditions, I believe this perception dismisses the sector’s professionalism, elevating bravery over skill, dedication and experience. Additionally, it has allowed donors to continue prioritising response over recovery and for our peers working in development, peacebuilding and democracy to be dismissive of the role we all share in aiding communities on their path to sustainable development.

55 million
The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimates 55 million people are currently internally displaced.
This experience taught me that some inherently resist simplicity in messaging. And yet, to mean what we say and say what we mean is often what we require. Two examples of this are our narrative around resilient communities and sustainable programmes.

I struggle with the framing of resilience. Rather than resilient, should not our desire be for people to be self-empowered and have dignity and choice over their future? Does not celebrating their resilience amid systems that continue to disempower and beat them down risk dismissing the root cause, the structural inequities holding them back? Instead of seeking resilient communities, we should encourage thriving communities. We should support them in their journey to greater preparedness for, mitigation of, and recovery from crises. In this, we will join with communities in choosing hope over despair at what may come.

Sustainability is another double-edged term; on the one hand, it implies the ownership of the affected people or grantee partners of the future of the intervention. However, it also includes an expectation from the donor that a project or non-profit is static, unaltered by circumstance and future-focused. The search for the perfect project or partner that can promise sustainability excludes the many worthwhile interventions that may not have longevity but offer innovation or possibly even learning from failure. In
stepping back from the search for sustainability, we may surprise ourselves with what we discover to be transformative.

**Cede leadership space**
The calls for localisation – in leadership, programme design and direct funding – are not new. Local is defined as increasing direct funding to local humanitarian actors, investing in the capacity of local actors and their access to coordination mechanisms, and creating space for local leadership. The evidence for the benefits of locally-led action is indisputable: local organisations have a greater understanding of context, culture and affected communities. They are thus better placed to understand their needs and develop innovative solutions. Despite promises made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and through the ongoing Grand Bargain process to increase funding to local actors and hold a ‘participation revolution’, many donors remain hesitant. Funds continue to go predominantly to international actors, especially in complex humanitarian emergencies and large-scale disasters.

Sometimes, the donor narrative around why (or why not) to fund local non-profits and community-based organisations undermines potential localisation successes. Donors will speak of the value of localisation as a way to save on costs – localisation is ‘cheaper’. This mindset is not a viable starting point for an equitable power-sharing relationship; donors should seek to accept the costs of programmes completed effectively, efficiently and capably, including an appropriate level of duty of care.

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**25 countries and territories with most new displacements in 2020**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict and violence</strong></td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
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**Source:** Internal Displacement Monitoring Center/Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021

tinyurl.com/idmc-report-2021
The most direct path to addressing root causes within your programming is to listen to communities and explore what they propose within your mandate or abilities. It also requires clarity in understanding how your funding can make a difference, remembering that there are others you can call upon to assist with other needs. In a crisis, how we save lives is just as important as the act of saving them.

For example, in the Center for Disaster Philanthropy’s (CDP) planned funding for Ukraine, the team decided on a thematic approach versus a traditional sectoral one to invest in long-term equitable recovery. This investment will take the form of supporting and strengthening the representation and influence of marginalised groups – older people, LGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, the Roma community, children and third-country nationals – in response and development agendas through access to improved skills, targeted evidence and coordinated advocacy, among others.

The CDP team can take this position with the confidence that other funders will support immediate relief needs, human rights, democracy or peacebuilding and the more significant infrastructural needs that will follow peace when it comes.

CDP’s funding for disasters such as the hurricanes that devastated the US east coast has the same goal – equitable recovery – though the programming will adapt and adjust to the contextual challenges faced by racialised and marginalised communities in the country. Our grantmaking will be attentive to the systemic inequities within the relief structures available to affected populations and demonstrate an openness to recovery needs, including mental health, disaster case management, legal services and shelter support.

The evidence for the benefits of locally-led action is indisputable: local organisations have a greater understanding of context, culture and affected communities.
What should endowments and foundations be prioritizing in 2023?

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A business of Marsh McLennan
Crisis and resilience

From the Alliance team
Features editor Andrew Milner
andrew@alliancemagazine.org

Below are a number of platforms and forums, public as well as philanthropic, which have made disaster relief, prevention and study their business.

The Disasters Emergency Committee

The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) brings together 15 leading UK aid charities, who specialise in different areas of disaster response, to raise funds quickly and efficiently at times of crisis overseas. Members, who include Oxfam, Care, Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee, fund the DEC’s running costs and the organisation then refunds them from money it raises in appeals. Its board comprises the CEOs of the 15 member charities, with six other independent trustees. It also has a Rapid Response Network of media and corporate partners who help publicise crises. Recent campaigns include the Pakistan Floods Appeal, the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal and the Afghanistan Crisis Appeal. Since 1996, the DEC has run 74 appeals and raised over $1.5 billion.

dec.org.uk

Center for Disaster Philanthropy

Since 2010, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) has been helping individuals, foundations and corporations increase the effectiveness of their philanthropic response to disasters and humanitarian crises. Emphasising medium- and long-term recovery and equity-focused disaster giving, it offers donors direct financial and technical support, and provides advice from professionals with deep disaster planning, response and preparedness expertise. Among its resources is a Disaster Philanthropy Playbook, a ‘collection of innovative philanthropic strategies, practices, case studies and toolkits that help communities prepare for and equitably recover from disasters’. Its funds range from the particular (Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Recovery Fund, Colorado Wildfires Recovery Fund) to the more widespread (Global Hunger Crisis Fund, Covid-19 Response Fund).

disasterphilanthropy.org

ODI/Humanitarian Practice Network

ODI is a global affairs think-tank which aims to inspire people to act on injustice and inequality. It focuses on shaping future global cooperation, advancing human rights, tackling the climate, environment and biodiversity crisis, digitalisation, and fostering a more equitable and sustainable global economic order. Bi- and multilateral funders include the UK’s DFID (the largest financial supporter), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and UN Women, the Gates and IKEA Foundations and NGOs such as Oxfam UK and the British Red Cross. Managed by the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI, the Humanitarian Practice Network provides an independent forum for policymakers, practitioners and others working in the humanitarian sector to share and disseminate information, analysis and experience.

odi.org/en
odihpn.org

disasterphilanthropy.org

The Sendai Framework

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is intended to provide UN member states with concrete actions to protect development gains from the risk of disaster. It is meant to dovetail with other 2030 Agenda agreements, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the New Urban Agenda, and ultimately the Sustainable Development Goals. Its aim is ‘the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries’. The main forum for its implementation is the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

tinyurl.com/sendai-risk-reduction
Global Giving

In addition to specialist crisis funding networks and organisations, other giving platforms play a big part in raising funds for crisis relief. Global Giving, for example, a non-profit that supports other non-profits by connecting them to donors and companies, has current campaigns on the Ukraine crisis, the East African Hunger crisis, Afghanistan and the floods in Pakistan. globalgiving.org

Climate Emergency Collaboration Group

The Climate Emergency Collaboration Group (CECG) is a pooled fund that uses its convening and philanthropic power to facilitate stronger collaboration, coordination, and campaigning from the global climate movement in pursuit of increased climate action around the UN climate talks. Based in New York, the CECG is fiscally sponsored by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. linkedin.com/company/cecg

Afghanaid

Afghanaid is a British humanitarian and development organisation which has been working in Afghanistan for nearly 40 years. Activities include building basic services, improving livelihoods and strengthening the rights of women and children. It also helps communities protect themselves and recover from natural disasters and adapt to climate change, as well as responding to humanitarian emergencies. Funding partners include the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Give2Asia and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. afghanaid.org.uk

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

As part of its global development sector of work, the Gates Foundation has a dedicated emergency response programme, which provides grants to partners to assist with three types of emergency: rapid-onset (high-impact disasters, which account for the bulk of funding – an example: Typhoon Haiyan which struck the Philippines in November 2013), complex (often violent civil conflict where national systems are disrupted – the Central African Republic) and slow-onset (such as drought and famine – Horn of Africa and the Sahel). gates-emergency-response

IKEA Foundation

Like the Gates Foundation, IKEA also has a programme dedicated to emergency response, under which it gives unrestricted emergency funding to selected partner organisations, who work mainly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These grants also enable their partners to respond to ‘unseen’ emergencies, which the media has either overlooked or forgotten. IKEA’s programme places emphasis on working with partners who understand the need to help communities prepare for disasters before they happen, and to cope before the international response arrives on the scene. ikea-emergency-response

Global Fund for Community Foundations

While it has no specific disaster grantmaking programme, the Global Fund for Community Foundations acts as a mouthpiece and showcase for community philanthropy organisations who, as this special feature points out, are at the forefront of responding to disasters and of rebuilding, both materially and morally, afterwards. Its website currently has an open letter to international donors and NGOs ‘who want to genuinely help Ukraine’ with some 140 signatories, not only from the Ukraine but globally. globalfundcommunityfoundations.org

Oxfam International

Though its aims and scope have changed, INGO Oxfam was born out of a crisis. The name ‘Oxfam’ is an abbreviation of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, founded in Britain in 1942. The group campaigned for food supplies to be sent through an allied naval blockade to starving women and children in enemy-occupied Greece during the Second World War. Its successor, Oxfam International continues, among other things, its work of disaster relief and is active in about 70 countries, with 21 member organisations of the Oxfam International confederation. www.oxfam.org

DAIP

Founded in 2006 by the Bush Administration, the Disaster Assistance Improvement Program’s (DAIP) mission is to provide disaster survivors with information, support, services, and a means to access disaster assistance through joint data-sharing efforts. Though a US federal government agency, it works with federal, tribal, state, local and private sector partners. In 2008, DAIP launched a website called DisasterAssistance.gov which allows users to find and apply for disaster assistance online as well as getting help with housing and food and nutrition needs. Disasters currently listed on the homepage include Hurricanes Ian and Fiona, and severe storms, flooding and landslides in Alaska. disasterassistance.gov
Before disaster strikes, harness the calm

Too often, funders step in only after a crisis. We can do better. It is time to look for warning signs long before the emergency and to build a culture of preparedness.

Since the start of 2021, a broad spectrum of emergencies has immediately and indelibly affected human rights. Today’s crises range from violent conflict to democratic decline to natural disasters – or a combination of all three.

At Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN), we see authoritarianism, inequality and oppression compounding these complex crises around the world.

These same factors often limit philanthropy’s ability to deliver resources to those most affected in crisis and those most vulnerable to the long-term ramifications. We take seriously the critique that funders often arrive in the aftermath, stay for the short term, and lack strategies to address either root causes or coordinate across sectors.

The role of funders, particularly human rights funders, came to a head in the wake of the government collapse in Afghanistan. Even as funders quickly sought to coordinate resources, honest conversations about our limitations emerged. Together, HRFN and Peace and Security Funders Group hosted a core group of funders across human rights, peace and security, and social justice philanthropy to collectively envision what preparedness could mean. From December 2021 to March 2022, we led a three-part workshop in our Chronicles of Crises Foretold: How funders can prepare, respond, and build resilience in human rights crises, which engaged experts from fields outside our sector, from crisis mapping to humanitarian aid to the military. HRFN also launched a community of practice to begin the hard work of collaboration and coordination.

Crises also do not emerge overnight. The warning signs are there long before the states of emergency.

This article offers insights from our learning journey and suggests key learnings and points of engagement for the field for the year ahead. Through this work, we aim to build a culture of preparedness that can meet the intersecting crises defining our current moment.

Complex but predictable

The first finding from our learning journey is that crisis events are not isolated or unique. They are characteristic of a world in which only 3 per cent of the world’s population lives in countries where civic space is defined as ‘fully open’, where the climate crisis will shape our natural world, and where struggles for democracy and liberation will continue to be met with backlash. Crises also do not emerge overnight. The warning signs are there long before the states of emergency.
We also see that crises follow different patterns and can overlap or exacerbate one another. Adapting work by Funders Initiative for Civil Society and others, we focused on several intersecting types of crisis: armed conflict and instability; crises of democracy (growing authoritarianism, capture of democratic institutions, crackdowns on voting rights and increasing insecurity for human rights defenders); and the worsening climate crisis and natural disasters.

‘Because we don’t see others preparing...’
Philanthropy must normalise preparedness. As Steven Eberlein shared in our learning journey: ‘We do not prepare because we do not see others preparing’.

Preparedness is multi-staged and encompasses forecasting, scenario planning, rehearsing and after-action learning. It requires horizon scanning and acquiring a very good understanding of the threats. Funder preparedness also means more systematic engagement with early warning systems – or creating new ones. Combining technical expertise with local experience is one of the most powerful tools for forecasting and scenario planning. Other tactics include embedding the regular review of context in grantmaking strategy development and specifically engaging grantees in the regular review and analysis of context shifts.

While tools are important, preparedness is a culture. Seeing those we know, respect and work with prepare is the greatest predictor of our own preparedness. This is both harrowing and hopeful as we imagine mobilising a critical mass of funders to normalise and enact preparedness in their institutions and in their grantmaking.

Plan, train, rehearse, repeat
One of the most resonant but challenging learnings from the workshops was a recommendation from a military expert to ‘plan, train, rehearse, then repeat’ so that when the crisis happens, it is not an emergency, but an exercise.

Preparedness is multi-staged and encompasses forecasting, scenario planning, rehearsing and after-action learning. It requires horizon scanning and acquiring a very good understanding of the threats.

When participants reflected on the lack of institutional capacity or support for this, he responded: ‘We run drills as a solo individual all the time. You do not need anyone else to run a drill. All you need is a checklist.’

Naming and navigating obstacles
We recognise that a preparedness frame runs counter to a lot of what foundations do on a daily basis, which revolves around certainty. In our conversations, participants named the following obstacles:

Challenge the culture of giving:
Participants acknowledged that it is hard to get donors to fund preparedness or prevention. Crisis motivates giving and action, and as time goes by, interest wanes and people move on to the next crisis.
Liberate ourselves from traditional metrics: As one participant put it: ‘We know that we regret it when disaster strikes and that the outcome is worse because we were not prepared; yet we cannot measure it or prove it in advance.’

Cut through red tape: One speaker shared a few examples of creatively getting around restrictions and red tape in humanitarian aid budgets – such as air-dropping boxed water when purchasing bottles of water was prohibited. Grantmakers should ask: ‘Are we creating unnecessary hurdles for grantees? Are there concrete ways to get around red tape?’

Coordinating as an ecosystem
As crises have exponentially increased in complexity, integrated funding solutions are ever-more important. Coordination across sectors is vital. For instance, in Ukraine, we have seen moments of hope when humanitarian funding is overlaid with feminist grantmaking to LGBTQI people and women facing increased violence. This kind of ecosystem approach is fundamental in a crisis. It is also sadly rare.

As grantmakers work to build and sustain infrastructure, both through grants and funder organising, participants offered these specific suggestions and ways of working in partnership:
• Conduct a mapping of who is doing what, specific roles and what is needed to strengthen capacity.
• Instead of thinking about how we can implement within our own organisations, think about how to coordinate as a community.
• Focus on how we can connect and share resources, including information amongst ourselves.
• A collective commitment to learning and constant evolution (from sharing experiences, failures and lessons learned) is needed to better position ourselves for the next crisis.

In order to maximise impact, funders should also be clear how they can or will fund in crisis. Across the sector, we need to fund preparedness, capacity building and rapid response – all of these are critical pillars. But we can’t all do it all. We must get clear on where we fit and how this can complement the whole.

This ecosystem approach is also temporal: who is able to fund before, during and long after a crisis? We must move away from short-term pivots to long-term integrated understanding of how human rights and peace and security funders can support civil society long before and long after the spotlight is shone on a particular area.

Don’t just respond – prepare
What next? Human rights and peace and security funders have laid some important groundwork to deliver resources to those on the frontlines of crisis. We are now being challenged not to turn away from unfolding disasters and to prepare rather than simply respond.

To bridge from learning to action, over the course of 2023, HRFN will facilitate monthly salons for funders to hold conversations focused on critical and concrete topics, such as how to conduct after-action assessments, shifting resources as crises emerge, how much to pivot and how much to stay the course, and how to move money in a crisis or when banking systems are down.

A collective commitment to learning and constant evolution (from sharing experiences, failures and lessons learned) is needed to better position ourselves for the next crisis.

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Above: Wildfires in Argentina.
and what is needed to make the response as quick and as humane as possible. I could give some examples of work that’s going on with Hurricanes Ian and Fiona. The other thing I’d say – and this is especially where CDP shines – is that long-term recovery is underfunded and we are trying to use our voice and our funding to emphasise filling those gaps, which of course, will lead into future preparedness and resilience efforts.

**RW:** Please do give those examples of Ian and Fiona.

**AD:** My first big grant when I joined Google.org in 2019 was to an NPO called GiveDirectly that provides direct cash transfers to vulnerable populations, and coupled with that grant we provided a team of Google.org Fellows – I can share more about what the Fellowship is later. We sent four employees to sit with GiveDirectly for six months to build a data mapping platform called Delphi. Basically, it’s a map using publicly available socio-economic vulnerability data. It’s an open-source system that you can easily overlay other data systems on and there’s a research team at Google called SKAI that has been working to create disaster damage detection models, to which you can feed satellite and aerial imagery and see what buildings have been damaged in a disaster. Hurricanes Fiona and Ian are the first time that the Delphi tool has been used in response to an actual disaster. The information it feeds us can speed up that first wave of response. For instance, GiveDirectly works with an organisation called Propel S that powers an app where you can put a banner for those in the hardest hit counties and say: are you interested in receiving a seven-hundred-dollar financial payment to support your recovery? And you have a verified base of folks who are socio-economically vulnerable and have been hardest hit to whom you can get cash out in a matter of days as opposed to weeks, and it sometimes takes traditional aid that long to even get there, especially in areas that are hard to reach.

**RW:** What’s Google’s strategy regarding different crises impacting the globe? How does Google.org determine what events you fund and with which organisations you partner?

**AD:** Honestly, I wish we could respond to everything, but unfortunately we have limited resources, so it’s really about how we use them effectively and strategically. Regardless of the disaster, our reacting quickly, effectively and collaboratively is the best way to help as many people as possible. Crisis has been a key focus area for Google.org for years and I’d be remiss not to say that we also work closely with Google’s broader crisis product and engineering teams. I mentioned the SKAI research team earlier, but there’s a big group of folks at Google on the dot.com side that are working to make sure frontline organisations have the information that they need and for consumers who are in harm’s way so that they know how to contact hotlines or find the resources that they need to protect themselves.
From the philanthropic side, as you know, one of the key partnerships, if not the key partnership is with the Center for Disaster Philanthropy in terms of informing us what disasters are happening where and when, and the depth of research that you do helps us determine whether or not we will draw down grant funding and open up employee campaigns that we will match.

There are several criteria involved in our making a decision, but the two that rise to the top are magnitude and response capability. On magnitude, it’s to try and be as objective as possible and make sure that we’re marshalling our resources to disasters that are likely to be catastrophic, and response capabilities is a way we try to inject equity into the decision-making. If a particular nation state or the aid environment – and this is also where the research that CDP provides us is helpful – is not one that can support a large response, it’s a better reason for us to step up in a bigger way. One thing that we’d love to do, as I mentioned that we did with GiveDirectly, is really push the anticipatory action agenda which is, from our perspective, leveraging data and technology to better anticipate disasters and then unlocking better informed early action. There’s a lot that we and other organisations can do to beef up that capacity. So, on the one hand, when disasters hit we want to make sure that we are responding effectively and quickly, but before a disaster happens, we want to move the entire sector forward with our resourcing, which includes our talent that can be brought to bear to help organisations that are trying to build these predictive models.

**RW:** As you know from our work together, at CDP, we prioritise both medium- and long-term recovery as well as localisation, supporting local organisations and local leadership. How does that play into Google.org’s giving strategy?

**AD:** It’s essential. For the grantmaking that Google.org does, equity is often at the core, and part and parcel of being equitable grantmakers is supporting as locally as possible. It means that you’re supporting community-based organisations that are part of the fabric of communities, and will be there long after the immediate response organisations, so supporting them is critical to help communities not only get back on their feet faster, but be more resilient to future disasters especially in climate disaster-prone areas. So, that’s central. We don’t have the answers – organisations that are closest to the problem, that means frontline community-based organisations are also proximate to the solution so the more that we can get behind those organisations and fund their solutions, the greater the impact that we’re having, and the more resilient we’re making communities.

**RW:** Do you see any common themes emerging within what Google.org giving does in terms of making a difference over time for affected communities?

**AD:** Some of the notes I hit on resilience are key. I think some other key things are sustainability and access. For the first, we never want to create dependence on us so part of the work we do is ensure that the capacity at the organisation is such that anything that we are funding can sustain after we’ve supported it. And then expanding access, whether it’s access to the digital economy or access to humanitarian resources, is also central. That ties into this local funding angle. We want to make sure that there’s that local representative ownership to drive these initiatives forward and those are the ones that know best how to expand access to those that truly need it.

**RW:** That for me is where our partnership is so important, because the funding that you provide to us quickly, we can deploy slowly to support local leadership and long-term recovery. Giving visibility on the funds early on is incredibly helpful from a planning perspective about where we can dive in and help the community. How does Google’s broader philanthropic giving help communities develop their resilience and mitigate the impacts of systemic inequalities and recurring disasters?

**AD:** We’re very much interested in how to improve the status quo. Whether that’s some of the economic opportunity stuff our team does or crisis or sustainability efforts, we measure how much better a community is able to withstand a disaster. How much more quickly is an organisation able to get aid out the door? The more that we are helping people receive what they need effectively, efficiently and broadly and the more those things can be sustained, the more resilient a community. For some of the economic opportunity work our team funds, you’re helping communities that have been traditionally overlooked gain access to jobs in the digital economy. It’s not just about getting them into jobs, it’s about getting them into jobs that pay more and that wage differential is incredibly helpful to make a community’s or a family’s finances more resilient to future shocks.

Long-term recovery is underfunded and we are trying to use our voice and our funding to emphasise filling those gaps, which of course, will lead into future preparedness and resilience efforts.
RW: Can you name the different disaster events that Google has funded through CDP just this year?
AD: Most recently, earthquake in China, some flooding in India and Bangladesh. Help me out here...
RW: Earthquake in Afghanistan, floods in north-eastern Brazil...
AD: Flooding in Pakistan...
RW: The mudslides in South Africa, fire relief in South Korea, flooding in Australia, wildfires in Argentina, mudslide in Brazil, then the volcano in Tonga and then other, more Brazil flooding. That was just 2022 and that’s just international. Domestically, Ian and Fiona, Jackson, Mississippi, flooding in Kentucky, wildfires in New Mexico and Texas. So you are covering a lot of ground and when you said, ‘I wish we could do more’, I just need to acknowledge that that’s pretty amazing.

Shifting back into macro thinking, how does Google.org collaborate with other funders to advance awareness of the current disaster climate and recovery needs?
AD: We hear from other funders who are interested in creating a crisis programme. We’ll lend our expertise and best practices, and of course, always acknowledge that we don’t know it all, please talk to others, talk to CDP. More than anything, openness and humility is important. Whether it’s sharing the network of great organisations that we work with or being open to participating in events to expand our knowledge and our network. In an environment that is changing constantly, the nerd in me is always: who’s doing what, where, when? What’s on the cutting edge that can make us better funders, better philanthropists?

RW: Again, I want to acknowledge the role that you have in long-term funding. You awarded funding for us for Pakistan in August and we are just now deploying those funds and you gave us the time and space to make sure that those medium- and long-term needs had really been covered. We’re very appreciative of that.
AD: That’s always the name of the game for us – how can we be catalytic, but also, can we leverage our speed, our voice, our funding to then catalyse others? We’re much better working collaboratively than trying to do anything in silos.

RW: When do you reach out to other funders for information or collaboration?
AD: Regularly. Even in California, we have an informal group that meets pretty frequently, but we have an active slack channel that we’ll just tap and say: are you aware of this disaster? Are you doing anything, are you mobilising resources? I’m an avid subscriber to newsletters to just keep myself up to date. And as I mentioned earlier, we really benefit from having a product team at Google that is creating these crisis alerting products because we receive those outputs which helps put disasters on our radar.

RW: How do you get Google employees excited about the work of the dot.org side of the house?
AD: Part culture and part programme, I’d say. From the genesis of the company, it’s been a philosophy to enable and empower employees to work on projects that they’re passionate about. From the Google.org programming side, we’ve been working to second employees full-time, and we have this pro bono programme called the Google.org Fellowship Programme that enables employees to work up to six months alongside non-profits that are trying to build and use technology to address social problems. It’s a couple of years old and it came from what we were hearing from employees and from the non-profits we support. They’d often say, ‘we want to do more with technology, it can be hard to find and retain the software engineers or product managers, or UX (user experience) researchers that you have in abundance; can you help us out?’ On the employee side, they’d...
The only way we’re going to ensure that inequalities do not continue to skyrocket after disasters is by centring equity in the planning, in the preparation, in the mitigation, in the response.

RW: Here at CDP when we talk to other corporations about employee engagement, it’s often about employees digging out a home after a disaster event. We try and point out that they have so many lawyers and so many actuarial professionals, so many accountants... and in a disaster recovery, those professions and skills are critically important. The fact that you have a programme for matching skilled volunteerism is awesome. How do you wish philanthropy would think about and prioritise disasters and humanitarian crises?

AD: Don’t wait until disasters hit to fund. Fund preparedness efforts, fund mitigation efforts, fund adaptation efforts. And don’t forget about long-term recovery and local leadership. Let’s make sure that funding really provides what’s needed in communities. And I think the last thing I’d say is centre equity and centre people. The more you’re doing that, the better the outcomes in the long run.

RW: Could you unpack your comment about centring equity?

AD: I’ll speak just from the US. After most major natural disasters, inequality skyrockets because a lot of the programming and funding supports landowners and property owners, they are insured, etc. And it’s not just a class thing, it’s a race thing and the communities that bear the brunt of these disasters are also ones that are living in areas that are more disaster-prone, and that’s not a coincidence with the history of redlining in this country. The only way we’re going to ensure that inequalities do not continue to skyrocket after disasters is by centring equity in the planning, in the preparation, in the mitigation, in the response. Whether it’s harder or not is irrelevant. You have to put the effort in to make sure that equity is the north star of the grantmaking in disaster settings. Finally, we love to collaborate. No organisation has a monopoly over good ideas, and for the sake of the world, we need to share what is and what isn’t working.

Above: Flooding in eastern Kentucky.
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Empowering Afghans in the depth of a crisis

But barely six months later, disaster looms again.

To say that this effort was not nearly enough, is not to criticise its achievement, which was vital and must be congratulated. In the desire to do better for Afghanistan, it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis it has faced. The economic collapse has been unprecedented: the UN predicts that 97 per cent of the country will slide into extreme poverty this year – some 34 million people – an increase of almost 50 per cent since August 2021.

Although the humanitarian effort has saved many millions of lives, it cannot rescue the country from the economic catastrophe and its long-term impacts, putting Afghanistan at continued risk. As UNDP says, a decade of Afghan economic growth has been wiped out in just 12 months.

And yet – once again – Afghans have showed their resilience. As the EU’s deputy head of Mission, Raffaella Iodice, noted at the UNHRC executive committee meetings in October, Afghans have achieved so much in the past year. They deserve our admiration, and our support.

**Fostering resilience**

It has become a cliché to speak of Afghan resilience, so deep and lasting have been the crises faced since 1979. Their dogged determination to survive has been honed over decades and regularly renewed, but in that spirit of resilience lies the country’s future.

August 2021 was a traumatic political break for many, but it merely intensified the consequences of an extreme environmental and human predicament that has been growing for several years. Afghanistan has suffered from debilitating droughts since 2010, with rare years of respite. This year’s affected 25 of 34 provinces. With planting seasons already disrupted by the government’s collapse, even those yields were down 20 per cent. In recent years, more people have been displaced by climate stress than by conflict.

Covid has amplified other trends. Health systems, already largely inadequate, have struggled with the facilities, equipment, and material needed. Rampant malnutrition magnifies the effects of respiratory viruses, putting vulnerable groups at even greater risk. Education has been fundamentally disrupted: most Afghan children have attended just three months of school in the past two years. For girls of secondary age, that will soon be three.
Although security has improved since the de facto authorities took Kabul, the fundamental drivers of fragility remain and are intensifying: deep and deepening poverty; greater competition for scarce resources like water, land, and livestock; ongoing ethnic and tribal tension. Underpinning and exacerbating all of this is the additional stress put on people and places by climate change through environmental disruption and natural disasters. No matter what authorities are in place, these daunting challenges will remain.

Investing in Afghan communities
But there is another constant in Afghan society that we should not underestimate – and must not neglect. The Afghan people. It is more important than ever that we invest in them and their capacity to find their own answers to the challenges facing them and their communities.

Most Afghan children have attended just three months of school in the past two years. For girls of secondary age, that will soon be three.
For almost three decades, the Aga Khan Foundation has been helping Afghan communities come together to address their own priorities. Beginning in the 1990s, we started our work providing humanitarian relief and emergency education in some of the most isolated areas on the Afghan-Tajik border, in Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakshan. Very quickly, we established longer-range development programmes, understanding that we must be a permanent partner for Afghan progress. That led us to build large programmes in health and education, agriculture and market development, financial inclusion and empowerment, small infrastructure and natural resource management. At the root of everything we do – now directly in eight provinces, and with partners in 14 – are community groups of all kinds: savings groups (primarily women’s), water users’ associations, farmer groups, community development councils. All these are themselves interwoven in dialogue with more traditional community structures, such as shuras and networks of elders.

In the past two decades, we worked with the international community and alongside dozens of other partners to develop these community institutions in a deliberate, strategic way. Well-known programmes included the National Solidarity Programme and the Citizen’s Charter, but many others drew on and strengthened these local structures. These community institutions, anchored in local areas, still exist. They form a strategic foundation for deep, sub-national work that could continue to transform Afghan lives and empower people.

Since August, AKF has remained in close contact with these communities in the 74 districts where we are present, working directly with and through them to ensure that local Afghans have a voice in the humanitarian choices affecting them. They are also playing an active role delivering assistance to their neighbours and families, strengthening their solidarity against many shocks.

A wider response from the international community
It is vital that the international community does much, much more work through them in order to strengthen these platforms for Afghan engagement.

Having enumerated the many challenges and the fundamental drivers of Afghanistan’s fragility, it should be evident that a narrow response focused entirely on humanitarian assistance cannot be maintained.

inaugurating the first rotation in what threatens to become a permanent and endemic cycle of humanitarian emergencies and appeals. Afghanistan deserves better than this – and it has the capacity to react differently, whatever authorities sit in Kabul.

To do this, the international community must begin thinking beyond six-month periods, beyond the fear of immediate famines, to address the needs of the next winter, now. This would mean much more attention to livelihoods, helping people and families generate incomes and purchasing power, and more allocation to agricultural livelihoods in particular – these are especially critical in a country where 70 per cent of households are in rural areas. It would also require more attention to seed supplies and delivery; to the health and safety of livestock, on which so many depend; and to helping small businesses and entrepreneurs navigate Afghanistan’s trifecta: the sanctions-banking-liquidity crisis, which has collapsed the economy.

While the challenges to Afghanistan’s banks, its central bank, and its currency are each complicated and controversial, there is a need for greater urgency in addressing them – from all sides. Only a functioning economy can pull Afghanistan out of a permanent cycle of crisis and dependence.

Afghans have shown themselves capable over two decades (and more). We must do more to restore the tools they need to make their own way.

Above: A farmer works the fields in Takhar.
Many people experience crises as both victims and bringers of relief. Here is a personal testimony of that experience.

Where for many, anniversaries, graduations, elections, important birthdays, and family moments stand as markers of many of life’s important stages, for me, crises have bookended every decade. Many of us have a relationship with crisis, and for me it began at the age of six, between the start of war and my father’s death. I like to think the former was easier to survive than walking through this world without my father. When the announcement reached us of my father’s passing, we were many miles away without the opportunity to bury him ourselves. He died parenting, hiding his boys from the touch of war and leaving behind a home, his girls and youngest daughter, me.

It was the early 1990s in Somaliland, during the peak of the civil war, when my family was torn apart, separated into a kind of complex sports defensive lineup; dad with the six boys so he could protect them from the draft, mom with the girls, all of us on the run. It would be years until we reunited, changed by the months-long journey of living in separate refugee camps, cut off from loved ones, millions of people displaced and thousands more killed. Stories abound of the dark companions of war for those who survive it: of loss, death, trauma, shock, grief and violence. Take for example my grandmother, ayeeyo; a woman in her late 80s and a brilliant craftswoman. At a young age she taught herself how to sew, stitching fabrics and garments out of curtains left in abandoned homes.

‘Ayeeyo, kaaley, dunta igaale cirbada’ she’d ask me in a weary voice. I took pride in how quickly I could thread the needle for her each time she asked for my help. I will always remember my ayeeyo for her faith and enduring belief in excellence. Several days before we were separated, she told us about herself how to sew, stitching fabrics and garments out of curtains left in the aakhira. She told the dream through a song:

Dharaarta eebe hortii lajogo
(When we are all gathered at God’s plain)
Malago keeno boogaagta buuxda
(And the angels bring our full records)
Nebi qaado shafeecadisiisa
(And the intercessor intercedes)
Ninkii habaabey sowmuu ku hooogin
(Hasn’t the unprepared one truly lost?)

Crises do not only happen in the personal realm, they occur in professional spaces, too. Twice I was the head of a country programme in Somalia, the first Somali woman in such a leadership position. Early on I learned that organisations were attuned to male and western leadership styles. Some of my earliest efforts were spent battling old memories of the organisations and their past leadership, to orient them to change towards equity. I often pushed against the status quo and those in power benefiting from it.

I noticed early on in my engagements with white donors and those entrenched in the old systems of power that they bore a patina of racism and required constant validation from a Black woman like me. In one instance, I took a decision to respectfully disagree with a European donor and within days, it was heard throughout the ecosystem that my disagreement was a first, and a first to be carried out in a public way. I had other instances from men who I shared ancestral connections with who expressed in a rather backhanded way that my leadership style was ‘too outspoken and not anchored enough from my country of birth’.

During major moments of national or global mourning, to repair with enduring joy for life, and to tether unrelentingly to community is our greatest response. As a Black and visibly Muslim woman working in the Global North, I find myself also taking on new commitments to repair from the micro and macro aggressions of everyday work, and that is to truly invest in rest. In Tricia Hersey’s newest novel, Rest is Resistance, she says “our everyday behaviors and false beliefs about productivity drive us into behaving in a robotic, machine-like way. The way we hold ourselves and others to the lie of urgency is white supremacy culture and we will never be able to rest or be liberated from oppression while we are honoring and aligning with it... This work is not simply a reminder to rest but a full interruption and turning toward a rested future.”

So, how does anyone make some sense of the returning crises around us all? My successes in life and work are deeply rooted in my capacity to repair. Repair from everything that threatens my ability to love with eagerness, live meaningfully, to love with eagerness, live meaningfully, rest intentionally. I have learned that the relationship we must have with a crisis is like that which we are forced to have with grief; better you are prepared for it earlier than later. In the beginning, you must reevaluate your relationship with the world and your place and power in it. My relationship with crisis began when I was young, and I am grateful to have been her student.
To fully leverage the generosity of philanthropists across the US, an effective philanthropic response to international disasters depends on making long-term, meaningful commitments to build resilience in charities and communities worldwide.

Increasingly, individual donors, foundations and corporations in the US are responding to sudden needs caused by disasters and crises by opening their wallets and giving to support relief efforts. This became a strong trend during Covid-19. In a CAF America-administered survey of 73 Fortune 100 and 500 companies in August 2020, 97 per cent of respondents confirmed that their philanthropic strategies shifted because of the pandemic. More recently, we have seen our donors build on their work responding to Covid to address recent climate-based disasters: relief for the flooding in Pakistan, grants for organisations combating the drought-driven food crisis in the Horn of Africa (see page 62), and most recently the devastation caused by Hurricane Ian in southeast Florida.

Overall, the strengthening of donor responses to disasters around the world has been a bold statement of our country’s philanthropic values; however, on the whole they remain reactive and remedial. In many cases the lack of preparation or strategy for disaster philanthropy leads to rushed responses that consume huge amounts of resources. And as the risk of natural disasters increases due to global warming, we cannot afford to be solely reactive in the face of imminently predictable crises. A more proactive, strategic approach is required to meet the future needs of vulnerable people around the world. This type of philanthropic planning rests on three core principles: choosing place-based grantmaking; making a long-term commitment; and investing in resilience.

**Place-based grantmaking**

The benefits of a risk-based approach to disaster philanthropy accrue at the local community level, but for this to work donors need to understand where they want their funds to make a difference. No-one – not even the world’s largest corporate funders – can save everyone affected by a disaster, but with forward-looking, intentional interventions over time even the smallest donors can have a real impact on how at-risk communities will survive emergencies. To do this, a philanthropic strategy needs to be focused on a specific community or set of communities. For corporate funders, this may be as simple as identifying the locations of offices, factories, or other places with a corporate presence.

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corporate donors, their employees and the community they want to support. At the same time, mapping the risks each community faces allows funders to understand exactly how to target their grantmaking for the largest impact.

**The fourth stage – preparation**

Once beneficiary communities are identified, effective disaster response strategies call for making a long-term commitment to help them build their resilience in the face of emergencies. Often, disaster response is seen in three stages: immediate relief; medium-term response and support; and long-term reconstruction. By inserting a fourth stage to this model – preparation – before disaster strikes, not only can funders help communities survive, but they can lower the cost of the relief, response and reconstruction phases that come later.

Preparation for disasters can take many forms, but for US funders it is most important when supporting communities located in other countries. US regulations for cross-border grantmaking make it difficult to quickly approve new charity partners in disaster situations, and foreign governments have also implemented laws that can hinder short-term financial support. Preemptively building cross-border networks for disaster response makes it possible for funds to flow when, and to where, they are needed most.

**Investing in resilience**

Within this long-term mindset, donors should also consider how they can contribute to building resilience in their beneficiary communities through targeted investments in key infrastructure organisations before emergencies happen. This kind of funding, which CAF calls ‘resilience funding’, has been proven to give charities the means through which to survive. The CAF Resilience Programme is a UK initiative run by Charities Aid Foundation that made targeted grants to a group of ten charities starting in 2017, specifically to support projects and investments that built resilience into the participating organisations. When Covid-19 hit, we were able to observe how successful these interventions were at helping organisations survive. Overall, we found that CAF’s Resilience grants had funded projects that made them more flexible and adaptive, so all ten were able to continue their work through the pandemic. Investing in the resilience of charities around the world helps them carry on their work when disasters happen, which contributes to a stronger community safety net and partners that are ready to respond quickly during times of crisis.

CAF America is actively working to create the tools any US funder needs to build an effective, risk-based disaster response strategy. Our global database of vetted charities includes thousands of partners ready to jump into action, and more are added every day. With the generous support of our donors, we are actively building the networks needed for strategic, cross-border disaster grantmaking. Together, we are building the vehicles and infrastructure that will support a more sustainable, resilient future for international disaster philanthropy.
Not a crisis, an opportunity

remains unchanged. For us, at Latimpacto, the challenge lies not in migration itself but in how governments, influenced by media, are regulating it and how the migration and development nexus is misunderstood by development actors. The question is how philanthropists and impact-driven investors accompany migrants on their journey and help them prosper together within their host communities.

Despite the different economic, environmental, social and political crises in Latin America, the region offers multiple opportunities. This allows grantmakers and social investors to create long-lasting impact through innovative practices, beyond the common practices in partnership with other actors willing to deploy their capital more strategically.

Different roles for philanthropy

Apart from the basic humanity which should dictate support and sympathy for those who have been uprooted, migrants provide crucial things to their new communities. One simple example is diversity in areas such as sports, arts, dance and cuisine, offering the opportunity for new social and cultural expressions. Philanthropy can facilitate this by providing spaces where host communities and migrants can come together. This can also drive acceptance and reduce xenophobia.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, migrants have a higher concentration in economic sectors that tend to be more innovative, have a higher number of patents, increase the business start-up ecosystem and foster investment and technology linkages. Based on data from the National Bureau of Economic Research, immigrants in the US hold 43 per cent of STEM occupations, creating technological advantages for their host country. In the case of migrant women, when given the opportunities and infrastructure, the proportion of them in non-traditional and highly innovative sectors tends to grow faster than that of other demographic groups.

Migrant workers have started to fill, at least in advanced economies, the employment gaps created by the retirement of baby boomers. They are also often more prepared to move to find work. Guaramo Ecosistema Migrante is a social organisation in Argentina supporting and connecting Venezuelan migrants with opportunities around the country, especially in the interior. This service connects migrants with decent jobs and lowers the transaction costs for employers looking to find a specialised workforce prepared to move to their places of operation. Philanthropy can contribute to supporting migrants’ training, so they are prepared to fill employment gaps in their host countries and it can also support organisations like Guaramo Ecosistema Migrante, connecting migrants with opportunities they would otherwise not be aware of.
The UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights identifies seven steps to changing this narrative: define a positive vision, identify shared values, use storytelling to humanise, put those stories in a local context, find common ground to move forward on intractable issues, always find more allies and uphold the ‘no harm’ principle. Based on this, Latimpacto believes that addressing the migrant narrative crisis involves supporting ways to gather evidence and gain traction on a more genuine and nuanced understanding of migrants as economic, social and cultural agents in their host communities. We have identified researchers in major universities and think-tanks in Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil, elaborating projects on a positive, fact-based migrant narrative. Philanthropy can support such transdisciplinary research to change, in both policy and popular perception, the fear and suspicion with which migrants are viewed.

As a multi-actor and multi-capital network, Latimpacto has the expertise to convene these conversations and facilitate action. We aim to nudge philanthropy, investment, and the business sector to reframe the narrative and support initiatives that can unlock the incredible potential of people from different backgrounds coming together towards a dignified and secure future.

Far left and above: Impact Minds conference, Colombia.
Above left: Mind the Environment activity.

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Focusing on migrant women
Latimpacto has chosen to support the economic inclusion of migrants, especially those from a more disadvantaged background, and through initiatives where host communities actively participate and work hand in hand with migrants. In 2023, we aim to launch a Migrant Women Microgrant Fund for women entrepreneurs who lead or co-lead businesses with a large migrant workforce, with small grants (from $1,000-2,000) for capital expenditures to grow or digitally transform their business. This will be a pilot designed to be easily replicable to encourage its spread.

Latimpacto has decided to focus on migrant women for several reasons. The most important is that research and access to support for the economic development of migrant women tends to be overlooked in Latin America. While 30 or 40 years ago, women used to migrate accompanied by their husbands or partners, nowadays, women migrate on their own, as heads of households, bringing with them the responsibility to continue caring for their family in their home country. Migrant women are also much more likely than their male counterparts to fall prey to illegal activities. With this in mind, creating safe spaces for economic, social, cultural, and family growth is of utmost importance.

Changing the narrative
But while helping provide opportunities for integration and improving the living and political conditions of the countries of origin are challenges for philanthropy to tackle, the bigger question, perhaps, is how philanthropy can help change a migration narrative built on fear, insecurity, ignorance, and populism that tends to affect specific communities and deflect lawmakers and policymakers in different countries.
Founded in 1995, Tewa is the only women’s fund in Nepal. We raise money primarily from individual Nepalis to make grants to women’s organisations all over the country. In the past 26 years, Tewa has made over 900 grants to 581 grantee groups in 72 of the 77 districts of Nepal.

Overlapping crises
The ten-year armed conflict that ran between 1996 and 2006 revealed a great need for a women’s organisation. Among the many economic and social problems created by the upheaval was the breakdown of women’s agency, owing to instability and insecurity. Tewa continued to provide grants and keep essential work alive and during those years dedicated 20 per cent of its grants to peacebuilding work.

Then, in April 2015, an earthquake with a 7.8–8.1 magnitude severely affected almost one third of Nepal. Approaching 9,000 people died, 22,000 were injured, and 3.5 million were made homeless. In many districts not a single house remained standing. Tewa’s experience in communities meant it could adapt to provide relief as well as to design and engage in long-term recovery work. In addition, owing to its credibility, Tewa promptly received an additional $700,000 internationally. After the initial relief disbursement, a two-year recovery programme was designed by mobilising grantee volunteers from unaffected districts to shadow and support affected grantee partners and their communities. The shadow volunteers provided specific household support such as clearing rubble, farming, cooking, looking after babies and the elderly, and caring for the sick, along with longer-term services including working to strengthen grantee organisations, enabling the acquisition of citizenship papers (which women do not always have), and providing ongoing para-socio-psychological support or making necessary referrals.
The effects of climate change have also increasingly impacted Nepal. Floods and landslides have not only become more frequent but more severe, displacing families and rendering them homeless. A recent example was the flooding of the Melamchi River in June last year. Again, Tewa played a significant role in bringing together women’s disaster-related networks to ensure relief support for specific vulnerable groups of people, especially women. Those with disabilities, lactating and pregnant women, the sick, and the elderly were specifically targeted to ensure that they had an immediate safety net.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Tewa was again at the forefront of providing relief and access to needed services. We also learned from our grantees that ancillary problems increased in the pandemic: domestic violence particularly and suicides sky-rocketed (more among women than men). More people also died because of reduced immunity and resilience due to unhealthy lifestyles introduced by globalisation such as the eating of processed food rather than locally grown and produced food.

The community safety net
Owing to these experiences over the years and especially learning from our work during the Covid-19 pandemic, Tewa’s founder developed the idea of a community safety net (CSN) – to be more proactive so that all are better prepared at the local level even when no outside help is available. Through strong grantee partners, the CSN has been implemented in the seven provinces of Nepal. In 2021 the UN picked up on the idea and sponsored a roll-out of the concept throughout the country. This has been a timebound project, ending in November 2022.

Safety nets had always existed in Nepali communities in the past but are breaking down or being weakened by rapidly changing contexts. They need to be rewoven and strengthened and Tewa is focusing on the following entry points in terms of priority:

1. Food security
2. Immunity, holistic health and well-being
3. Violence against women.

That said, each community can prioritise according to its own needs. For example, we are reclaiming our traditional heritage of eating home-grown, local, and seasonal food. We are also trying to grow essential herbs in our vegetable gardens to strengthen physical immunity.

At Tewa, we have had to adapt to address the effects of many crises. In doing so, we have learned how important underlying factors can be in aggravating those effects and how important it is to create resilience among communities against further shocks. We have also realised that we can only do this through the trusted relationships we have built with our grantees and which they have built with their communities. CSNs are a crucial part of the machinery. We try to help strengthen them through our network of sisters and their families in Nepal. We are trying to be a small part, a beginning of a silent revolution that can permeate our communities with abundance and holistic health, so that we too can help heal humanity and our planet.

“Tewa played a significant role in bringing together women’s disaster-related networks to ensure relief support for specific vulnerable groups of people, especially women.”

Far left: Clearing rubble in Sindhupalchok.
Left: Awaiting relief in Gorkha.
Below: Rebuilding the city of Bhaktapur.
infestation. The impact will be much worse than the 2011 famine that killed over 260,000 people in the country. If you didn’t know, it might be because this deepening catastrophe is still not making the front pages. Nor is it triggering coordinated appeals for urgent donations.

We tried to raise the alarm in June 2022, when there were already reports of one person dying every 48 seconds. Aid experts and decision-makers convened by ODI then agreed that mass starvation and death was highly likely but could be prevented by mounting a fast and targeted relief operation – which requires a large, rapid and flexible injection of funds. The response from donor governments has been sluggish. A few weeks ago, funding to the UN-led humanitarian appeal for Somalia was below 50 per cent of projected need. It has now reached two thirds, a probable result of advocacy efforts. While relief assistance has massively ramped up, it is still too little, too late.

Frustratingly, the sector has clearly not learned the lessons from the past. The massive death rate in 2010–11 was a result of the slow and inadequate response to early warning signs that failed rains would lead to famine. History almost repeated itself in 2016–17, but donors and humanitarian organisations mobilised a response just soon enough to head off mass mortality. So why has it not happened now? Finance for humanitarian response is plateauing globally, but what is available is being diverted to where the attention of the media, governments and aid organisations themselves is: Ukraine.

Donors have poured almost $3.8 billion into the humanitarian response in Ukraine and refugee-hosting countries. It is the best funded response globally, attracting almost 12 per cent of all humanitarian funding. This money has to be spent. Some donors demand that it be spent quickly. So humanitarian agencies have put a huge amount of their time and other resources into rapidly mounting operations in Ukraine and the region.

Understandably, western governments and populations are concerned about the war in Ukraine. The way the EU has granted refugees from Ukraine protection, the right to work and to access basic services and social protection should be held up as a model. However, as we wrote at the start of the crisis, humanitarian aid should be the last resort. In these mostly high-income European countries – and even in most of Ukraine – state systems function and priority should be given to sustaining their service provision. Ukraine and neighbouring countries are rightly receiving billions in budgetary and macro-economic support to do just that. International humanitarian aid is only appropriate where people cannot access those services, which in effect mostly

A lot has been written on the need to reform a humanitarian financing system that relies on a ‘begging bowl’ approach that is unpredictable and results in support according to political priorities and media headlines rather than need. Sadly, there is no real appetite for reform.
happens in areas of Ukraine that are in active conflict, occupied or have been recently liberated.

**Appeals are mounted in accordance with their likelihood of success**

Yet here we are: Ukraine is receiving more humanitarian aid than the millions of people at risk of famine in Somalia. The UN appeal for Somalia is a third of the appeal for Ukraine. Appeals for private donations to Ukraine have broken all records but have yet to be launched to raise funds – and awareness – for the Horn of Africa. Why? because appeals are mounted in accordance with their likelihood of success, which is often linked to media and public interest. This is simply not good enough and makes it hard to rebut the accusation that African lives simply matter less to those political priorities than European lives do.

"Ukraine is receiving more humanitarian aid than the millions of people at risk of famine in Somalia. The UN appeal for Somalia is a third of the appeal for Ukraine."

A lot has been written on the need to reform a humanitarian financing system that relies on a 'begging bowl' approach that is unpredictable and results in support according to political priorities and media headlines rather than need. Sadly, there is no real appetite for reform. So, we will have to endure the fact that being so clearly skewed by political and media considerations, when lives are being lost at such escalating speed.

Philanthropies could step in to help rebalance some of the inequities of the current finance landscape. But fundamentally, it is incumbent on humanitarian organisations to develop a compelling narrative to push politicians to act, journalists to engage, and to prioritise their own efforts to respond early and decisively to the famine underway in the Horn of Africa.


**48 seconds**

The frequency reported in June 2022 of someone dying from hunger in Somalia.1