

2026 SKOLL WORLD FORUM

CAN PHILANTHROPY FUND BOTH CRISIS RESPONSE AND LONG-TERM CHANGE?

The competition between crisis response and long term support is real, but it's not accidental. It's something that has been produced by how philanthropy is structured.

Both crisis response and long-term funding speak more to the language used by philanthropy to describe for itself the contexts under which philanthropic structures function, more than they are an actual depiction and description of what is being experienced 'on the ground'. Often what determines a crisis is the level of urgency decided by an external force that perceives what it deems to be an acute, sharp burst of violence. But the levels and kinds of violence that catch the attention of the public discourse are not borne in the moment of occupying a public stage nor do they disappear when public attention inevitably wanes. So while this question [crisis response vs long term funding] is a structural one - it is also discursive.

What we see is that funding does show up in moments of crisis, but often in ways that are reactive and short term, and very often not really in response to actual needs. At the same time, the long term work of movements remains chronically underfunded.

We know that crises are inevitable. We know that the climate crisis is real and we know which countries and regions are most susceptible to climate disasters [and that it will get worse]. We know that some countries / regions are subject to resource exploitation and political violence, and yet we wait for the "crisis" to hit to actually start resourcing.

We also know that emergency funding is drawn within political and racial parameters - not all crises and emergencies are created equal.

We end up in a cycle: we are expected to respond to increasingly complex and overlapping crises without the sustained resources needed to build preparedness and prevent harm in the first place.

The issue is not whether philanthropy can fund both crisis response and long-term change, it's that most funding systems are not designed to do both at the same time. The shift needs to happen structurally, not only strategically.

If we continue to think in terms of individual or ad hoc grants, this tension will persist.

Intermediary and collaborative funds are designed to do exactly this, but they can't be the only ones doing it.

Essentially movements need to be able to decide how to respond in real time, without having to navigate restrictive funding conditions – the burden of proof falls on racialised communities and often, the most underfunded.

So the question is not whether philanthropy should choose between urgency and sustainability. It's whether philanthropy is willing to fund in a way that recognises that both are necessary and that both are indeed possible.

In practice: what does it take to fund both immediate response and long term infrastructure?

- It takes flexible capital that is not tied to outputs and timelines
- It takes multiple year commitments, so that movements are not constantly shifting between survival mode and strategic work
- It takes mechanisms that can move resources quickly, especially to actors who are often excluded from traditional philanthropy
- It takes willingness and commitment from funders to **(1)** trust that those closest to the issues are best placed to respond and **(2)** tip the odds – in this case the money – in their favor. The reality is that many philanthropic practices are still rooted in reinforcing power structures rather than working towards shifting this power.

Ultimately crisis response and long-term change are not separate, they are deeply interconnected. And resilience, as loaded as that term has been, is not built in the moment of crisis. It is built over time, through sustained investment in movements and infrastructure. When that investment is missing, we see repeated crises yes, but also deeper and more entrenched inequalities.

