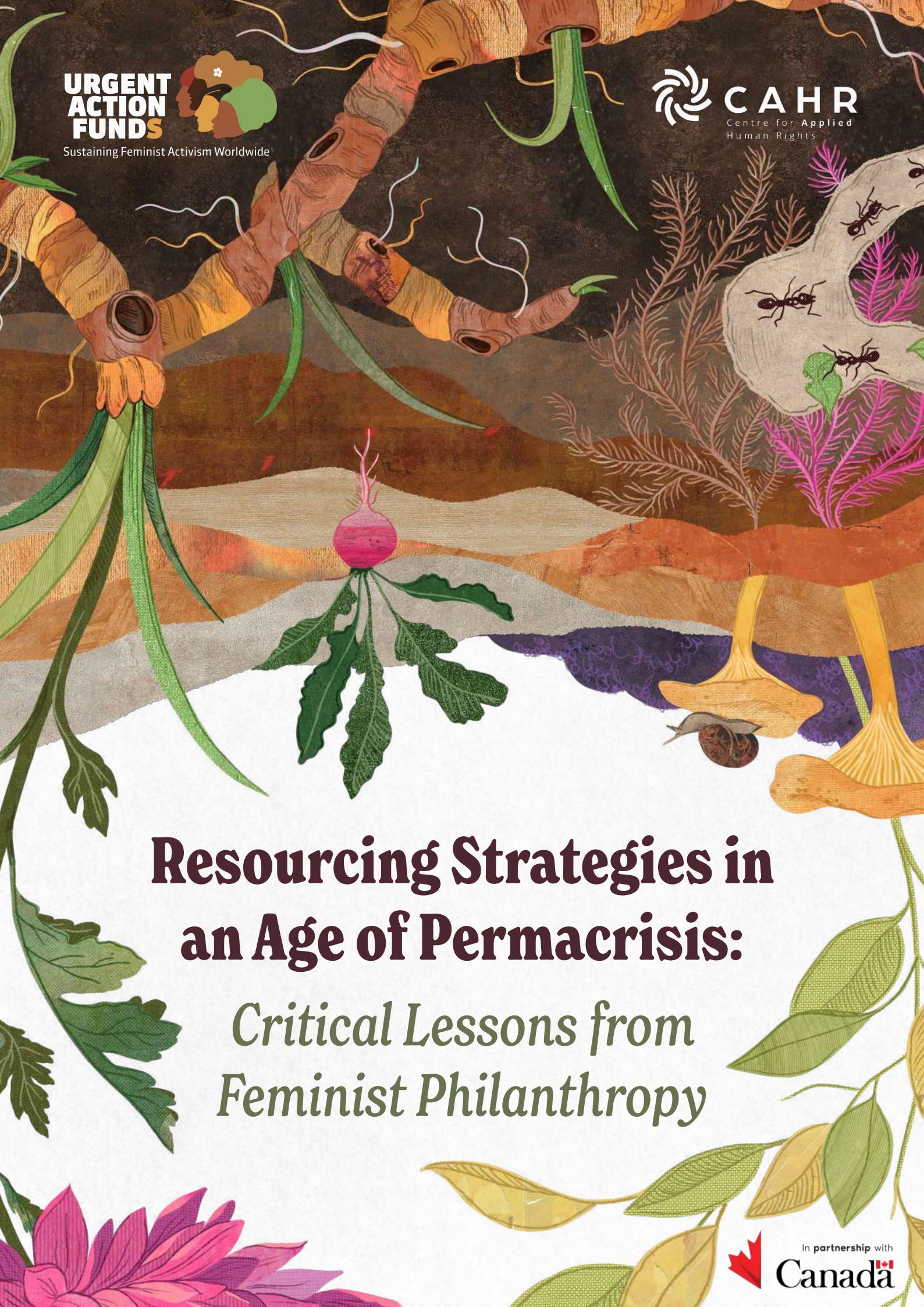


URGENT ACTION FUNDS
Sustaining Feminist Activism Worldwide

CAHR
Centre for Applied Human Rights

Resourcing Strategies in an Age of Permacrisis:

Critical Lessons from Feminist Philanthropy

In partnership with Canada

Credits

Lead Author: Dr Lucy Martin

Research supervisor: Professor Paul Gready

Feedback focal group: Jean Kemitare, Johnny Tohme, Masa Amir, Celia Turner, Ava Danlog, Erix Cortés, Sofía Alessio-Robles, Setaita Lomani, Sheila Tanaka and Delta Ndou

Design and illustration: Mrinalini Godara @mrinartmo

Copyediting: Tallulah Lines

Translation from English to Spanish: Beatriz Canal

Translation from English to Portuguese: Traudaz

Translation from Engligh to French: Gaëlle Le Gauyer

Research undertaken by the **Centre for Applied Human Rights**, University of York (UK).

Research commissioned by the **Urgent Action Sister Funds**.

Ethics approval for the research was granted by the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee at the University of York.

About the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR)

CAHR is an activist centre based at the University of York. CAHR places people, notably human rights defenders, at the core of their work. CAHR's research, knowledge exchange, teaching, protection, and advocacy activities are anchored in real-world human rights and humanitarian challenges and opportunities. As such, CAHR thinks politically and uses socio-legal, interdisciplinary, and participatory methodologies to protect human rights and activism.

york.ac.uk/cahr/

About the Urgent Action Sister Funds

The Urgent Action Sister Funds are a global consortium of Feminist Funds that provide rapid and responsive support for women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders in moments of need, sustaining feminist activism by supporting the resistance and resilience of frontline defenders. The Urgent Action Sister Funds represent the only global consortium of regionally-rooted Feminist Funds that provide rapid response support to women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders.

urgentactionsisterfunds.org/

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the generosity of the Urgent Action Sister Funds. The Urgent Action Sister Funds not only provided the financial resourcing for this study but also the knowledge, insight, and critical reflection that made this work possible. We are grateful to Ndana Bofu-Tawamba, Vinita Sahasranaman, Virisila Buadromo, Terry de Vries, Sofía Marcía, and Kate Kroeger (the leadership of the Urgent Action Sister Funds) whose conversations over several years led to this work, and who shared resources between the Funds to make this project a reality.

The ideas contained here are a piece of collective sensemaking. The research owes a substantial debt to the guidance that was provided by the research supervisor, Professor Paul Gready, and the feedback focal group who provided support for the duration of the project. As such, particular thanks go to the members of the feedback focal group: Jean Kemitare, Johnny Tohme, Masa Amir, Celia Turner, Ava Danlog, Erix Cortés, Sofía Alessio-Robles, Setaita Lomani, Sheila Tanaka, and Delta Ndou.

This research would not have been possible without the staff, board members and advisors of the Urgent Action Sister Funds who shared their experiences and knowledge through interviews. These interviews were made possible by three interpreters – Beatriz Canal, Wanjiku Mwotia, and Sarah Reimann.

The research has also been shaped by wider conversations and feedback. As such, we are grateful to the UNESCO Chair and HRD (human rights defenders) hub advisory board, and staff of the Urgent Action Sister Funds who participated in virtual and in-person validation sessions for this research and commented on draft research outputs. We are particularly grateful to Megan Daigle (of the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute) for her in-depth feedback on initial drafts.

Design note

This report examines crisis as an outcome of historical and ongoing oppression, while highlighting how feminist movements respond through continuous infrastructural work that enables survival, care, and resistance. We use an inverted plant system as our visual metaphor, representing feminist movements as living ecosystems that grow and adapt within a larger biome.

Like feminist organising, root systems operate largely out of sight. Underground, they continuously adapt to shifting conditions, storing nutrients, redistributing resources, and sustaining life above the surface. To foreground this foundational labour, we intentionally inverted the plant system within the visual narrative. By placing the roots above and the visible growth below, we subvert familiar hierarchies and reinforce the decentralised, non-linear nature of feminist movements and resourcing.

As the eye moves downward — from earthy tones into lighter, sun-kissed hues — the visual language traces how feminist resourcing grows, branches, and adapts over time. The inversion echoes the book's central insight: what sustains movements is not always what is most visible or measurable, but the deep, collective systems that hold them.

Contents

Core Terminology 1

Introduction: A world in permacrisis 5

1. Effectively resourcing complex and compounding crises 12

1.1 The politics of crisis 13

1.2 Three strategies for intersectional resourcing 20

2. Scaling grassroots solutions to crisis 27

2.1 The concentration of power and resources 28

2.2 Models and strategies for "*multi-solving*" 34

3. Resourcing "*the politics of living*" 46

3.1 Limitations of "*the perpetual present*" 47

3.2 Three resourcing strategies to truly sustain us 53

Conclusion: Feminist philanthropy, towards the horizon 64

A model for feminist crisis resourcing 65

Key recommendations 68

References 72

Appendix 83

Core Terminology

- **Collective care:**

  An anti-oppressive political framework that moves us towards healing and liberation through embracing a breadth of diverse practices that integrate holistic approaches to wellbeing, grounded in ancestral and community knowledge. See the appendix (Box 1 and Table 1) for an overview of the defining characteristics of collective care.

- **Continuum of crisis:**

  An understanding of crisis as a continuum, whereby the punctures that we see (what is typically thought of as crisis) are recognised, not as discrete events, but as grounded in long-term processes that create conditions of precarity.

- **Crisis:**

  A continuum, involving punctures which are embedded within, arise from, and exacerbate intersecting and enduring systems of oppression. These systems of oppression include, but are not limited to, capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Crises are inherently political, and intersectional.

- **Feminist Funds:**

  "Public fundraising Foundations that work to realize the power of grassroots women, girls, trans, non-binary and intersex movements around the world by providing them with sustained financial and other resources to realize their vision of social justice" (Prospera, 2025, para. 1). This report focuses on a global consortium of four Feminist Funds - the Urgent Action Sister Funds.

- **Feminist movements:**

  Collective efforts, led by women, trans, and non-binary activists, to dismantle oppressive systems and build more just and equitable futures that centre care for people and planet.

- ## Flexible resourcing:

  Resourcing that is specifically designed to address a multiplicity of structural barriers that prevent marginalised communities' access to funds, reflected (for example) in broad eligibility criteria, use of a range of communication methods, and commitments to disability justice and language justice. Flexible resourcing rejects a 'one size fits all' approach. Flexible resourcing starts by building an understanding of an individual's or group's context and needs, with communication methods, grant processes, and (in some situations) grantmaking mandates and restrictions adapted in response to these. Flexible resourcing offers unrestricted funding – non-project funding that can be used to address a range of foundational needs.

- ## Foreign aid:

  Foreign aid is an umbrella term that refers to money, services, or goods that one State/country provides to another. It includes aid directed at different purposes, including humanitarian aid (targeted at relief efforts in response to disasters and emergencies) and Official Development Assistance (targeted at economic development and welfare, broadly defined). These forms of aid can be delivered as either bilateral aid (where aid is an arrangement between two States) or multilateral aid (where the money transferred comes from more than one government, often transferred via an international institution such as a United Nations agency).

- ## Holistic grantmaking:

  Grantmaking that is focused on meeting the holistic needs that arise when living in, and responding to, crisis. Holistic grantmaking is characterised by an openness to resourcing a wide range of forms of crisis infrastructures, including: survival infrastructures, safety infrastructures, care and healing infrastructures, solidarity and connection infrastructures, digital infrastructures, documentation and knowledge infrastructures, planetary infrastructures, and imagination infrastructures.



- ## Humanitarian Response:

  Humanitarian Response (in capitals) is used to refer to humanitarian action – *"the active provision of aid designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and restore and promote human dignity in the wake of disasters and during large-scale emergencies"* (Pringle and Hunt, 2015, para. 1). With capitals, Humanitarian Response is closely tied to International Humanitarian Law and grounded in four key principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (UNHCR, 2025). The primary actors in Humanitarian Response include UN agencies (such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the World Food Programme), INGOs (such as Médecins Sans Frontières, CARE International, and Oxfam), and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the world's largest humanitarian network). These organisations then work with various regional, national, and local actors. In contrast, **communal humanitarian response (in lower case)** is used to refer to an alternative form of humanitarian action. Like Humanitarian Response, communal humanitarian action involves *"the active provision of aid designed to save lives, alleviate suffering...in the wake of disasters and during large-scale emergencies."* Yet, its aims are broader than Humanitarian Response. As opposed to striving to *"*restore and promote dignity*"* it seeks to foster a just and liberatory future (Pringle and Hunt, 2022, para. 1). Communal humanitarian response is grounded in specific community needs and is focused on delivering contextualised and pluralised responses to humanitarian crises. In contrast to being grounded in 'neutrality', communal humanitarian response centres equity and justice. Communal humanitarian response is delivered outside of formal institutions – by individuals, groups, and movements who are themselves directly affected by the crises they are responding to.

- ## Movement-led resourcing:

  A strength-based approach that nurtures sustainable movements through providing financial and non-financial resourcing to uplift, support, and amplify movements' pre-existing strategies, knowledge, and skills. At the heart of this framework is a commitment to orientate models, frameworks, cultures, and everyday decision-making around communities' (as opposed to donors') needs. See the appendix (box 2) for an overview of key features of movement-led resourcing.

- ## Multidimensional intersectionality:

  An expansive framework for understanding the wholeness of individual, community, and planetary experiences, building on Crenshaw's (1989) theorising. Multidimensional intersectionality is a framework for recognising and responding to how structural oppressions, and individual and contextual factors shape, and are exacerbated by, crisis and crisis resourcing.

- ## Philanthropy:

  An umbrella term referring to the voluntary transfer of resources by individuals, communities, private organisations (including corporations), or foundations. Philanthropy refers to the transfer of resources to a multiplicity of actors, with a wide range of motivations – from forms of intra-community resourcing, to reparative approaches which centre social justice, to charitable distributions with the intent of 'doing good'.

- **Reciprocal relationships grounded in care and trust:**

  Reciprocal relationships seek to break down conventional donor-grantee relationships – building connections between people in their wholeness. Reciprocal relationships strive to break down hierarchical dynamics, stressing mutual learning and exchange towards shared agendas. Within these relationships, care and trust are actively practiced and nurtured over time.

- **Resourcing:**

  Resourcing refers to the provision of resources. These resources can be financial (e.g., grants) or non-financial (e.g., nurturing connections or expressing solidarity). Resourcing encompasses both the provision of direct resources and the wider access to resources this entails; for example, knowledge or a connection may be shared directly which, in turn, enables a group to access resources from a peer-donor. Although the forms of resourcing discussed in this report focus on resourcing within the context of philanthropy and foreign aid, it is recognised that resourcing takes multiple forms. Resourcing can occur within or between communities, involve one-way processes or mutual exchange, and involve the provision of both tangible and intangible resources.

- **Rhizomic resourcing:**

  The resourcing of a diverse multiplicity of movement actors, whilst nurturing connections across this multiplicity. Rhizomic resourcing includes resourcing across three interwoven levels of infrastructure, considering the need to resource: 1. movement activists; 2. groups and organisations, and; 3. movements. Rhizomic resourcing stresses movements' autonomy to respond in ways that they know are effective and relevant to their local context, following a strategy of *"multi-solving"* (Mease, 2022, para. 2).

- **"*The politics of living*" (Feldman, 2012, para. 1):**

  A recognition that people strive, not just to survive and exist, but to live in ways that have meaning and value. Applied to resourcing, this highlights the need for resourcing to look beyond how to keep people alive, instead considering what people need to truly sustain themselves and their communities.

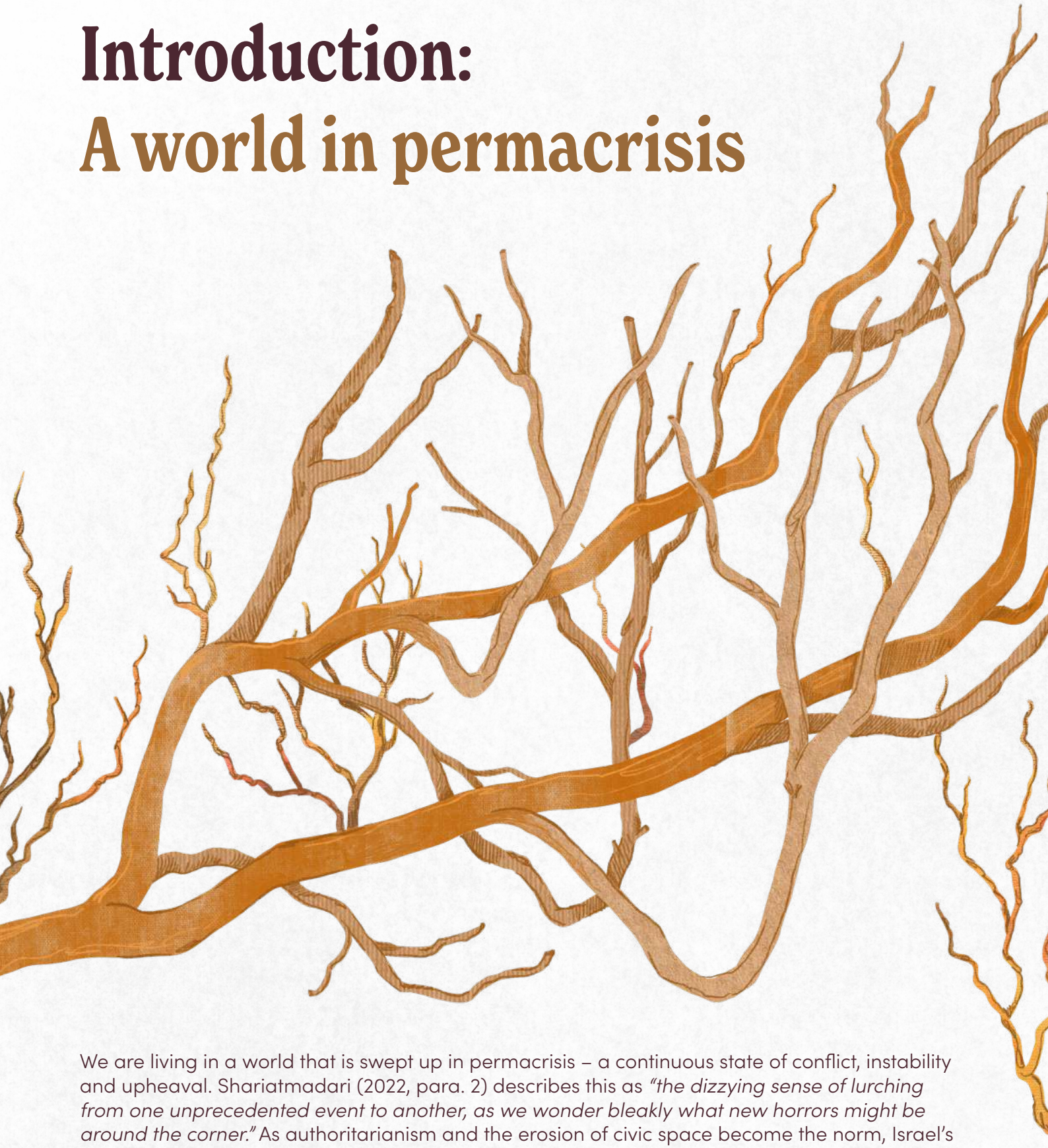
- **"*Timeplace*":**

  A recognition of the present as a moment between devolving and emergent worlds, locating *"events in time and in place, across time and across places"* (Wong, 2024, p. 18). Applied to resourcing, *"timeplace"* highlights the need for responses in the present to be informed by how this moment has been reached, while also oriented toward a reimagined future.

- **Value-led grantmaking:**

  Grantmaking that is targeted at actors because of their value alignment, but does not pre-define an issue or issue-area for grantees' work.

Introduction: A world in permacrisis



We are living in a world that is swept up in permacrisis – a continuous state of conflict, instability and upheaval. Shariatmadari (2022, para. 2) describes this as *"the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another, as we wonder bleakly what new horrors might be around the corner."* As authoritarianism and the erosion of civic space become the norm, Israel's genocide against Palestine continues, and armed conflicts rage from Ukraine to Columbia, Sudan and Syria, we are reminded that crises are pervasive. Crises are transnational and cross-regional, with little respect for countries' borders. As captured by the term polycrisis, crises are not only continuous but also intersect with, and exacerbate, one another. If we are committed to humanity, justice, and liberatory futures, how can we respond?

Scaling feminist solutions

The starting point for answering this question is to recognise that effective forms of crisis response already exist. Feminist movements are already responding to multiple forms of crisis – from challenging the erosion of civic space, to delivering humanitarian assistance to communities facing conflict (Greener, 2022; Teixeira and Motta, 2024). Multiple studies reveal that the responses delivered by feminist movements are distinct from those of INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organizations) or Global North organisations. Feminist movements are often the first responders in their local communities and work in settings external actors do not reach (Sekyiamah and Provost, 2024). Feminist movements often deliver targeted responses, reaching communities with the highest rates of mortality and morbidity in crisis settings (Greener, 2022). Due to long-standing relationships and community knowledge, feminist movements deliver responses that are contextually relevant and trusted – often addressing needs arising from intersecting crises and harms (Okech et al., 2022; Pruth and Zillén, 2023; Teixeira and Motta, 2024). Critically, feminist movements both address immediate and present needs, whilst adopting equity and justice approaches that seek to build a liberatory future (Al-Abdeh and Patel, 2019; Greener, 2022; Njeri and Daigle, 2022).

Numerous examples exist to evidence the distinct forms of crisis responses being delivered by feminist movements. Sekyiamah and Provost (2024) describe how, in Sudan, aid agencies temporarily halted or scaled back their operations in the country after civil war erupted in April 2023, due to concerns about the risks their staff faced. For example, the World Food Programme suspended its operations in Sudan for two weeks after three of its employees were killed. Yet, grassroots organisations, including women and gender non-conforming people, have continued to carry out essential work in Sudan. For example, these organisations have spearheaded the establishment of community-led 'Humanitarian Emergency Rooms' which operate at local levels and provide medical, psychosocial, and other essential services for survivors of gender-based violence.

In Afghanistan, international humanitarian actors have complied with the Taliban's directive which bans women from working for the UN (United Nations) and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). Yet, Sekyiamah and Provost (2024) outline how a women-led feminist organisation (unnamed due to risk) has continued to deliver communal humanitarian response, running two health clinics which provide free services to women and girls, and delivering food assistance to 25,000 people.

Greener (2022) examines how women and LGBTQIA+ led organisations in Ukraine and Poland have responded to the war in Ukraine. These organisations were amongst the first responders and have combined the delivery of humanitarian assistance with work to advocate for the rights of marginalised groups.

Njeri and Daigle (2022) outline how women's rights organisations in South Sudan and Kenya led communal humanitarian response during the Covid-19 pandemic. These groups were already working in their communities on forms of systematic and structural violence. During Covid-19, they used their pre-existing networks to rapidly pivot to deliver public health awareness activities, providing face masks, soap, and hand sanitiser, alongside addressing the increased rates of gender-based violence perpetrated during the pandemic.

Teixeira and Motta (2024) explain how rural feminist movements in Brazil respond simultaneously to multidimensional crises. These movements mobilise around a broad transformational agenda that seeks to address the climate crisis from the perspective of rural communities, integrating climate justice, anti-patriarchal, and anti-racist agendas. Pruth and Zillén (2023) document how women and queer rights activists are holding the line against closing civic space and anti-gender movements through a range of strategies, including community building and solidarity (using networks and peer protection strategies), legal advocacy, and adopting creative means to navigate restrictions.

As such, Mease (2022, para. 2) argues that grassroots movements provide effective solutions in the face of complex and enduring crises, using *"methods of scaling that ensure the depth and durability of impact, multi-solving across social, political, and economic challenges."* Yet just 1.2% of humanitarian funds are given directly to local or national actors (Development Initiatives, 2023). Women's rights organisations, movements, and institutions received just 0.34% of total global aid flows in 2022 (Sekyiamah and Provost, 2024). Lukomnik et al. (2024a) document that, despite the essential services trans organisations provide in crisis, most organisations globally have operating budgets of under $20,000 USD.

> ***63% of trans organisations are self-funding.***
>
> Lukomnik et al., 2024a

The resourcing of crisis, which in turn affects the nature of crisis response, is currently failing to get the basics right.

> ***The problem here is not one of solutions, rather a question of the resourcing needed to scale this work.***

Reimagining resourcing

Feminist Funds demonstrate how we can effectively scale the work of feminist movements to meet communities' needs in the present, whilst moving towards a future beyond permacrisis. Feminist Funds are *"public fundraising Foundations that work to realize the power of grassroots women, girls, trans, non-binary and intersex movements around the world"* (Prospera, 2025, para. 1).[1] One of the most interesting features of Feminist Funds is that, in the majority of cases, they have not arisen from pre-acquired wealth, but instead from the acute need to build resources to support feminist activism (Hessini, 2020).[2] As a result, Feminist Funds are experienced fundraisers who themselves navigate the philanthropic landscape to address the chronic under-resourcing of feminist movements. Feminist Funds secure funds from more traditional sources within foreign aid and philanthropy. They then reshape these resources, so they are accessible to, and effectively amplify the work of, feminist movements.

There has been next to no academic research on Feminist Funds, except for a small number of articles written by those working within, or advising, Feminist Funds (see, for example, Desalvo et al., 2023; Hessini, 2020; Habib et al., 2021). Yet, Feminist Funds subvert traditional funding models and are an essential, and growing, source of resourcing for feminist movements, highlighting their significance as political actors (Hessini, 2020). Many (although not all) Feminist Funds are members of the Prospera International Network. Collectively, on average every year, Prospera's members mobilise $120 million to advance the rights of women, girls, trans, non-binary, and intersex people across 172 countries (Prospera, 2024). For some time, Feminist Funds have been the most frequently mentioned funding source by feminist movements globally (Clark et al, 2006).

1 Despite use of the term 'Feminist Funds' within this research, it is important to recognise that many of these Funds describe themselves as Women's Funds, or use the terms 'Women's Funds' and 'Feminist Funds' interchangeably (Prospera, 2023). Within the academic literature the term 'Women's Funds' has been used to refer to a breadth of philanthropic actors working to 'benefit women'. Many of these funders adopt dominant funding modalities and, as such, are not looking to disrupt the pre-existing economic and social system (see Brilliant, 2000; Gillespie, 2019). The term Feminist Funds is used here to refer to a distinct grouping of Funds who are distinguished through their grounding in intersectional feminism, their resourcing of women, girls, trans, non-binary and intersex movements, and their concern with disrupting power within, and beyond, the philanthropic landscape. These Feminist Funds define feminist philanthropy, in theory and in practice, as a range of politicised practices (see Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, 2019; Black Feminist Fund, 2025; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2022; Global Fund for Women, 2024).

2 The story of some Feminist Funds is slightly more complex. For example, Mama Cash (2024) describes how it was founded by five lesbian feminists, one of whom had inherited a substantial sum of money. In this sense, the Fund was founded on the basis of inherited wealth but also developed on the basis of its founders' activism and connection to feminist movements.

Lessons from a rapid response grantmaker

This research explores how we can effectively scale up the solutions offered by feminist movements to respond to permacrisis, asking 'what does a feminist philanthropic crisis response look like?' To address this question, this research has principally used two research methods. First, this research integrates a critical review of the literature on crisisology and crisis resourcing to identify best practice in crisis response, and examine the current state of crisis resourcing. Second, this research develops an in-depth case study of a global consortium of Feminist Funds, the Urgent Action Sister Funds. This case study has primarily been developed through more than thirty interviews with staff, board members, and movement advisors[3] from across the regions the Urgent Action Sister Funds work.[4] Insights from these interviews have been supplemented by a review of internal documents and time spent observing the Urgent Action Sister Funds' work.[5]

The Urgent Action Sister Funds provide a particularly relevant and significant case study for developing a model of feminist philanthropic crisis response, and identifying resourcing strategies to effectively address permacrisis. The Urgent Action Sister Funds are a unique global consortium of four independent and autonomous regional Funds with a mission of providing rapid response funding to feminist (women, trans and non-binary) movements. The four regional Feminist Funds that comprise the Urgent Action Sister Funds are: Urgent Action Fund-Africa, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean, Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific, and the Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism.[6]

3 A movement advisor is a specific role within the Urgent Action Sister Funds. Broadly speaking, movement advisors act as a critical source of advice on grant applications and provide the Urgent Action Sister Funds with up-to-date knowledge of contextualised movement challenges, needs, and opportunities that guides grantmaking and wider resourcing.

4 All interviews were conducted virtually by the lead researcher (Dr Lucy Martin).

5 Two key features of the research methodology utilised here are important to highlight. First, this research deliberately embraces the holism of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity involves the integration of knowledge and practice across academic and practice-based disciplinary boundaries to address complex problems (Knapp et al., 2019). Transdisciplinarity shows up in the research through the integration of a wide range of literature that crosses disciplinary boundaries, including literature from crisisology, feminist scholarship, philanthropic studies, humanitarian studies, political geography, human rights and more. It also means the research weaves through insight from both academics and practitioners – integrating academic studies alongside 'grey literature' (such as reports and website materials from the philanthropic space and Feminist Funds), and discussing both insights from theory and practice. Second, this research is a piece of collective sensemaking where the researcher has worked alongside the Urgent Action Sister Funds' staff to cross-check and develop findings. Reflecting that power necessarily shapes research in myriad ways, this study unapologetically embraces collaboration and collectivism (Cruz and Luke, 2021; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). However, it is important to note this has been accompanied by an academic freedom whereby the researcher has maintained editorial control over the final written output.

6 The Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism covers the Middle East, Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Turkey, Central Asia, Russia, Canada, and the United States.

The Urgent Action Sister Funds have been delivering rapid response grants (RRGs) to feminist movements since the first of the four Funds was founded in 1997 – responding to activists' calls for a mechanism to allow them to respond quickly to urgent threats or opportunities. Between 2021–24, 89% of Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants were RRGs and 11% of grants were categorised as 'strategic' or 'other' (MEL core group, 2025). RRGs are typically relatively small (for amounts up to $15,000, to be spent over up to six months). Their value comes from their speed (with most disbursed in between one and ten working days),[7] their availability 365 days of the year, and their accessibility (activists can apply for grants in different ways, such as via SMS or phone, and in multiple languages) (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).[8] Although RRGs have provided an effective mechanism for responding to crisis they are not only crisis grants, as they are also available to activists outside of crises when time-urgent needs arise.

> *Between 2021-2024 alone, the Urgent Action Sister Funds have moved nearly $55 million USD, through 7,181 grants, to activists and groups in 162 countries.*

Beyond this, as explored within this report, there are many hidden features that make the Urgent Action Sister Funds unique – from the depth of their application of the concept of collective care as an integral framework for crisis response, to their willingness to take audacious risks in service of feminist movements. This report explores the central challenges of current resourcing models and presents suggestions on how to fix them, drawing on examples from the Urgent Action Sister Funds' practice.

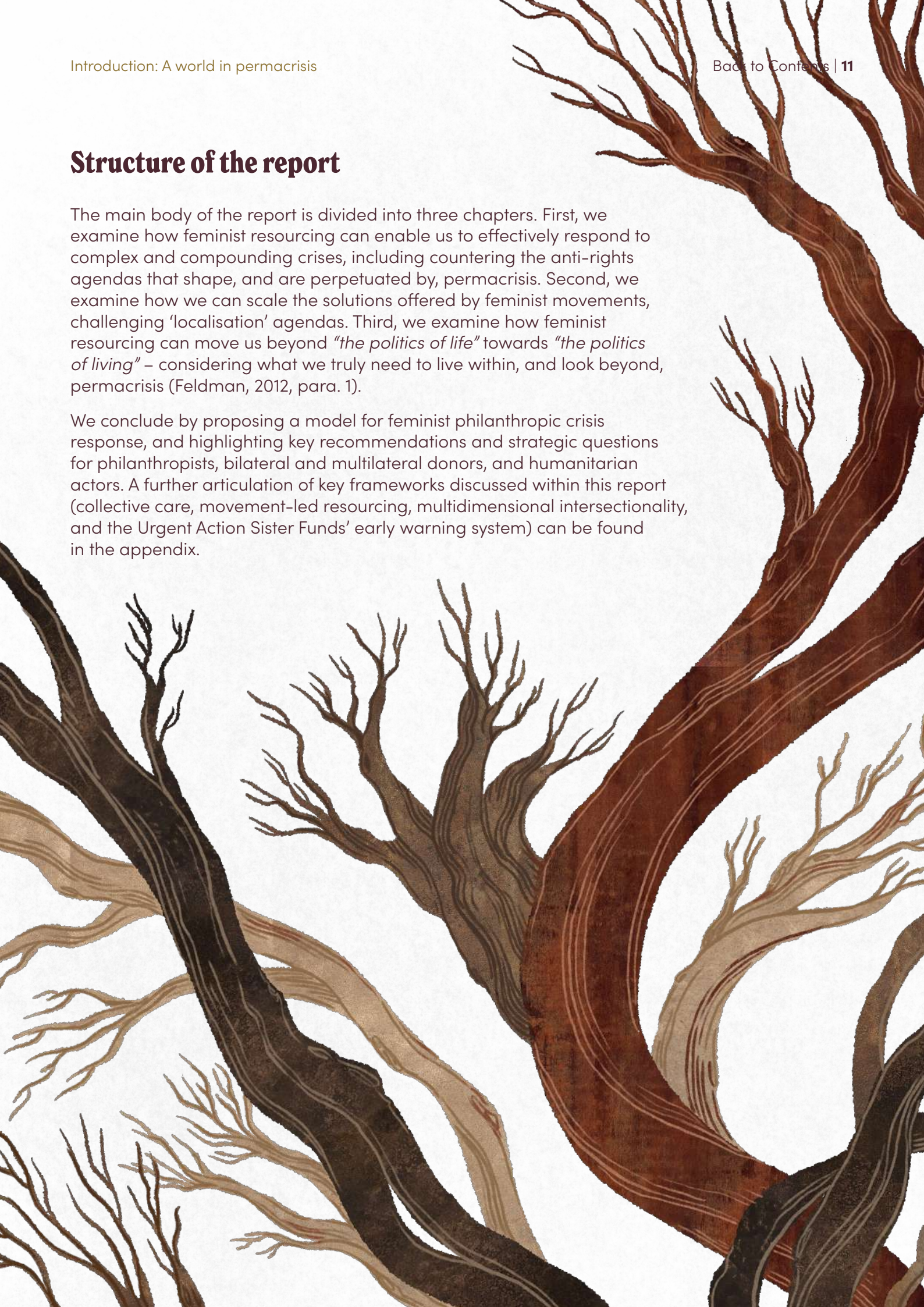
7 Although the Urgent Action Sister Funds always aim to disburse funds from RRG at speed, it is important to note that the length of time it takes to move money is dependent on restrictions, which are proving increasingly challenging to navigate in the context of eroding civic space.

8 Collectively these languages are Arabic, English, Fijian, Filipino, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Khmer, Nepali, Pidjin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, and Thai (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).

Structure of the report

The main body of the report is divided into three chapters. First, we examine how feminist resourcing can enable us to effectively respond to complex and compounding crises, including countering the anti-rights agendas that shape, and are perpetuated by, permacrisis. Second, we examine how we can scale the solutions offered by feminist movements, challenging 'localisation' agendas. Third, we examine how feminist resourcing can move us beyond *"the politics of life"* towards *"the politics of living"* – considering what we truly need to live within, and look beyond, permacrisis (Feldman, 2012, para. 1).

We conclude by proposing a model for feminist philanthropic crisis response, and highlighting key recommendations and strategic questions for philanthropists, bilateral and multilateral donors, and humanitarian actors. A further articulation of key frameworks discussed within this report (collective care, movement-led resourcing, multidimensional intersectionality, and the Urgent Action Sister Funds' early warning system) can be found in the appendix.





01.
Effectively resourcing complex and compounding crises

1.1 The politics of crisis

There is ample evidence that crises are deeply political. Despite common descriptors of crisis that point to 'natural' or apolitical causes (such as the terms 'natural disaster' or 'humanitarian crisis'), many scholars observe that crises arise from political decision-making (Ayyash, 2024; Kaiser et al., 2025). Consider, for example, political decisions to prioritise fossil fuels over planetary wellbeing, or conflicts as manifestations of political power struggles.

Rooted in structural oppressions

Many academics trace crises to deeply rooted structural oppressions. For example, scholars have traced the climate crisis (that is unfurling through extreme weather events) to the extraction, violence, domination, and exploitation that characterises capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal structures (Erickson, 2018; McEwan, 2021; Spring, 2025). Hurlbert et al. (2024) trace the ongoing water crisis facing Indigenous communities in Canada to settler colonialism, including the way that colonisation has undermined Indigenous knowledge and matriarchal governance structures. Ayyash (2024, para. 1) grounds Israel's *"genocidal violences of land theft"* in *"colonial racial capitalism."* For example, Ayyash (2024) highlights how land theft appealed to the British Empire and traces how the United States' involvement is interconnected with economic interests. Kaiser et al. (2025, para. 1) conclude that we cannot understand polycrisis without examining the *"durable and interlocking effects of capitalist, patriarchal and (neo-)colonial power."*

Manifestations of politics

As well as crises arising from political structures, interests and decision-making, McConnell (2020, para. 1) argues that *"one should recognize and accept that complex and contested crisis language and definitions are in themselves manifestations of politics in political societies."* In this sense, crises can be understood, at least partially, as constructed – framed to direct the nature of crisis response. For example, crisis language can be used to assert the level of priority we should give to an issue or to misdirect attention from the true causes of harm (Pursiainen, 2022).

Eroding rights and civic space

One striking way that States have utilised crises is in opposition to equity and justice agendas. The Covid-19 pandemic provides particularly clear evidence to show how governments use crises to justify the erosion of civic space and to further erode the rights of marginalised groups.

> *For example, during Covid-19, the Hungarian government used the "distraction" of the pandemic to end the legal gender recognition of transgender people.*
>
> Hayes and Joshi, 2019, p. 16

In Poland, the government took advantage of Covid-19 restrictions to pass a Bill to stop access to abortion (Eşençay, 2020). In Uganda, the pandemic was used to justify unnecessary and disproportionate force by authorities, the arrests of opposition politicians, and the imprisonment of LGBTQIA+ activists (ActionAid, 2021). In El Salvador, Covid-19 was used by the authorities as justification for large-scale military mobilisation, with more than 50% of the countries' troops involved in the national Covid response. The military, supported by government decrees, carried out massive arrests and detentions during the pandemic with a lack of meaningful democratic oversight – resulting in widespread human rights violations that disproportionately impacted marginalised groups (Acacio et al., 2022). Civic Futures (2025, para. 61) explain how States often use crises to claim that the *"threats facing us are so severe and those who may threaten us are so many and so unpredictable, that only hard security measures can keep us safe – even at the expense of human rights and civic space."*

There are equally plentiful examples of States utilising crises in opposition to equity and justice agendas beyond Covid-19. In post-conflict Lebanon, for example, McClearn et al. (2023) explain how the Government scapegoated LGBTQIA+ and refugee people for sectarian divides, failing governance, and economic collapse, with this scapegoating resulting in LGBTQIA+ and refugee groups facing increased risks to their security.

Perpetuating pre-existing inequalities

As is evident from the examples above, crises intersect with, and amplify, pre-existing fault lines and inequalities. Whilst wealthy nations emit the brunt of greenhouse gases, it is Pacific Islanders whose very existence is at stake (Enari and Jamerson, 2021). Whilst the Ebola pandemic in Central and West Africa affected whole communities, the burden of care fell disproportionately to women meaning women were more likely to be exposed and die (Onyeneho et al., 2023).

There are numerous examples of the intersections between structural harms and acute crises within the academic literature. Hines (2007) documents how, during the 2004 Tsunami (which struck countries along the Indian Ocean rim) three times more women than men died, due in part to patriarchal norms that left many women unable to swim. Chacko and Chakraborty (2024) document how transgender people in India face an enduring lack of access to inadequate housing, in part shaped by a lack of documents and unemployment affecting transgender peoples' ability to rent. The scholars document how these long-term structural harms intersect with the climate crisis - with a lack of adequate housing leading to the transgender community being disproportionately affected by extreme weather events. Rodríguez Rondón (2020) and Sekalala et al. (2020) describe the impact of the 'pico y género' rule, implemented in Colombia and Panama respectively, during Covid-19. The rule stipulated set days men versus women could leave their home to buy food and medication. The rule exacerbated the everyday violence transgender women and non-binary people face by increasing stigma and exclusion, resulting in multiple reports of police harassment and violence.

> ***The promise and hope of a distinction between the 'everyday/ordinary', and 'emergency/disaster', "was only ever available to certain valued lives."***
>
> Anderson et al., 2019, para. 4

For certain communities who experience compound forms of discrimination, as well as the impacts of polycrisis, risks are particularly acute. For example, Hersi and Kabachwezi (2022) document the experiences of disability justice activists in Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan, revealing how they are shaped by systematic discrimination (perpetuated due to activists' disabilities and wider intersecting identities), the disproportionate impact conflict has on people with disabilities, and the erosion of civic space which has resulted in attacks on activists due to their human rights work.

Where powerful actors utilise crises to construct harmful narratives based around identity politics this perpetuates pre-existing inequalities (Thornton, 2021). For example, Leigh (2024, para. 1) describes how anti-trans movements in the US have constructed "transness as a threat to reproductive ability and therefore as a threat to national, societal and/or racial reproduction." In another example, Buonfino (2004) and Hagelund (2020) explore how identity politics, fostered through anti-rights perspectives and powerful interests, have led to the securitisation of immigration across Europe. Constructions of a 'migrant' and 'refugee crisis' that threatens nation States is then, in turn, used to justify dehumanising rhetoric and policies towards migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

Learning 1: *Centre equity and justice*

There is compelling evidence that crises are inherently political, rooted in structural oppressions, and used by States to perpetuate inequalities, erode civic space, and advance anti-rights agendas. Despite this, donors and humanitarian actors prefer 'neutral' and 'apolitical' responses.

There continues to be a pervasive belief that neutrality is foundational to all forms of Humanitarian Response. Neutrality has been used to argue for what humanitarians should/should not do, to invoke claims to legitimacy, to try to facilitate access to deliver aid, and to ensure the delivery of aid across the lines of conflict. Relatedly, Humanitarian Response has sought to align itself with 'needs-based' approaches which have been constructed in contrast to 'rights-based' approaches. This is an attempt to claim Humanitarian Response as an apolitical response that should be focused on acute, surface-level needs (Barbelet, 2019). The principle of neutrality in Humanitarian Response means that resourcing of crisis response can be predicated on organisations adhering to this principle.[9] Yet, the political roots and co-option of crises by powerholders means that this cannot be the only, or even the predominant, form of crisis response or crisis resourcing.

9 In a striking example, following accusations by Israel in January 2024 that UNWRA had violated principles of neutrality, 16 Member State donors suspended or paused funding – amounting to a funding reduction of c. $450 million USD (UNWRA, 2024).

Illustrating this point through an examination of Myanmar, Kamal and Fujimatsu (2024, p. 10), describe a *"neutrality trap"* whereby the Myanmar military junta has taken advantage of the state-centric approach to delivering humanitarian assistance to weaponise aid for its own political and tactical advantage. Kamal and Fujimatsu (2024) describe a perversity whereby the military junta, who are responsible for the humanitarian crisis, are given the power to shape humanitarian access. Kamal and Fujimatsu (2024, p. 12) point to similar lessons in Gaza, Syria and Sudan where neutrality has *"trapped humanitarians into playing roles that are possibly prolonging the war, propping up systems of injustice and overall suffering of the people."* As such, Slim (2020, paras 8 and 15) argues there is a role for a greater diversity of actors and approaches in crisis response, meaning we must embrace both *"neutral humanitarianism"* and *"activist humanitarianism"* (what Kamal and Fujimatsu (2024, p. 7) describe as *"resistance humanitarianism"*). In *"activist humanitarianism"*, actors take an explicit moral position in the face of injustice, violence, and genocide. This is exactly the form of communal humanitarian response feminist movements deliver.

Beyond Humanitarian Response, many philanthropic funders also prefer 'apolitical' work. Giving for 'natural disasters' consistently vastly exceeds giving for 'complex humanitarian emergencies' (Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2022). Funding for Palestinian NGOs offers a striking example of the fact that, despite some donors stepping up in response to the current genocide, crisis response that is deemed too political risks becoming de-funded. Amnesty International (2023) has documented how several European countries (including Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, as well as the European Commission) have taken measures to suspend or restrict their funding to Palestinian civil society organisations on the basis of unfounded allegations that funding has been diverted to 'terrorist organisations' or used for 'incitement to hatred and violence'. There is further evidence that organisations have had their funding pulled for speaking out.

> ***At least $8 million USD of funding withdrawn from pro-Palestinian groups by US philanthropy from October 2024-February 2025.***
>
> Asaad and Vilkomerson, 2025

In part, this reluctance to fund equity and justice approaches is shaped by risk aversion, with both foreign aid actors and philanthropists often making decisions based on a cautionary approach to the perceived reputational and fiduciary risks to their institutions (Barbelet, 2019; Eddens and Kroeger, 2022).

Learning 2: *Adopt intersectional resourcing*

As well as there being ample evidence that crises are political, it is well established that crises fall unevenly and exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, identities intersect so that particular communities face compound harms, and crises intersect with one another. Yet, most funders do not adopt an intersectional lens. The Human Rights Funders Network (2022) has documented how resourcing is often siloed, with most human rights grants only addressing one population or issue-area. For example, despite the intersections between the climate crisis, the erosion of civic space, and social inequality, just 5% of environmental grants also address access to justice.

Conversely to what we would expect if resourcing was being aligned to the level of need, where communities face intersecting crises and harms they receive less funding. In climate finance, for example, Development Initiatives (2023) has documented how countries in protracted crises receive less funding than more stable countries due to donor concerns around complexity and risk. Looking at patterns of gender-related funding amongst Foundations, OECD netFWD's (2019, p. 28) report identifies that "Foundations are more inclined to work in more stable environments."

> ***Only 38% of Foundations' gender-allocated giving went to conflict-affected and fragile States.***
>
> OECD netFWD, 2019, p. 28

The lack of an intersectional lens means that the communities most affected by crises, and facing compound harms, are often the most under-resourced (Davies, 2022; Flegal et al., 2019; Lukomnik et al., 2024a, 2024b; Morley and Silver, 2024). Eyakuze (2023), for example, identifies that a mere 0.005%–0.018% of global Foundation dollars annually go to support the rights of Black LGBTIQ people. Saleh and Sood (2020), in an examination of global LBQ funding from 2018, highlight that 40% of LBQ groups had annual budgets of less than $5,000 USD, with most external funding received being short-term and restricted.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows that recent cuts to foreign aid are having a disproportionate impact on women and LGBTQIA+ groups. UN Women (2025) has documented that globally, due to funding reductions, 90% of local women-led groups in crisis settings have had their operations affected, with half expected to shut down within six months.

> ***90% of women-led groups in crisis settings have been affected by recent cuts to foreign aid.***
>
> UN Women, 2025

ERA (2025) has recorded that, in the Western Balkans and Turkey, USAID cuts alone have resulted in a reduction in programme activities in 73% of organisations working on LGBTQIA+ rights. Of these groups, 60% have already had to close a specific project, giving *"a clear indication that critical work has halted"* (ERA, 2025, p. 4). In turn, funding cuts are being weaponised to target civil society through narrative claims that work on women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and democratisation is illegitimate or not needed (ERA, 2025).

1.2 Three strategies for intersectional resourcing

Strategy 1: *Provide targeted, value-led grantmaking*

The Urgent Action Sister Funds demonstrate how an intersectional, equity and justice lens can be used to increase the effectiveness of crisis resourcing. The Urgent Action Sister Funds offer value-led grantmaking, meaning they focus their resourcing on feminist movements explicitly because of their commitment to equity and justice. Rejecting the *"salad bar"* approach, interviewees described how the Urgent Action Sister Funds' RRGs have *"an openness to many things"* (Leiper O'Malley, 2024; Vu-Lee, 2018, para. 17). Obianwu (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants are *"really unique"* because they are *"issue agnostic."* The Urgent Action Sister Funds do place limits around their eligibility criteria, but RRGs can be used for feminist movements to respond across crisis typologies. As Amir (2024) explains, *"I don't think that there is any crisis [that affects women, trans and non-binary people] that would fall beyond our mandate."* Sahasranaman (2024) describes that most grantmakers, even those funding intersectionally, have a *"bias"* towards a particular area. In contrast, Sahasranaman (2024) describes that the Urgent Action Sister Funds' value-led approach gives their grantmaking a distinct *"diverse canvas."*

By avoiding being prescriptive about the issue-areas their grantees work on, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking is open to the way crises intersect with one another, as well as the way crises intersect with and exacerbate pre-existing structural harms. Tedla (2024) speaks to how this openness enables the Urgent Action Sister Funds to respond to the priorities for activists, which are not always priorities that one might have anticipated. For example, Tedla (2024) explains that, during Covid-19, African feminists identified teen pregnancy as a priority issue for the communities they were working with.

The Urgent Action Sister Funds combine value-led grantmaking with a highly targeted approach. Although the Urgent Action Sister Funds focus their resourcing on feminist movements, they prioritise resources further by accounting for the multiplicity of intersections that create structural barriers to accessing external funding. For example, Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific, although noting the way that the crisis in Afghanistan in 2020/21 impacted all women, recognised the need for a focused response for trans women and ethnic minorities from the Hazara community who were even less visible and at greater risk (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). Similarly, during Covid-19, Urgent Action Fund-Africa placed an emphasis on documenting the challenges faced by women living with disabilities, whilst Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean responded to the *"invisibilised"* crisis faced by sex workers (Navarrete, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).

> ***In 2023, of the Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activisms' grants for Palestine, Ukraine, Syria, and Turkey, 29% were for people with disabilities, 20% were for transgender people, 19% were for refugees, and 10% were for Roma communities. In 2023, of the populations supported through Urgent Action Fund-Africa's (2023) grants, 10% were incarcerated women, 10% were rural women, and 7% were sex workers.***
>
> Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism, 2023

Significantly, when targeting resources, the Urgent Action Sister Funds adopt an intersectional lens that looks beyond population markers to consider wider structural barriers that impede feminist movements' access to external resourcing. As one movement advisor describes, when she fled Sudan in exile, the Urgent Action Sister Funds provided her with a grant when *"it was very tough for us to find any donors"*. The interviewee explained:

> ***"It [Urgent Action Fund-Africa] was very essential because it was the only accessible fund for the small organisations...working from exile, not registered, having issues with bank accounts...and working also under a complicated security situation."***
>
> Anonymous 2, 2024

In fact, over a third of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants go to unregistered groups and individuals (MEL core group, 2025).

> ***In 2024, 84% of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking supported activists living in countries with significantly constrained civic space. 25% of grantmaking in 2024 was in countries categorised as 'closed.'***
>
> MEL core group, 2025

Whereas best practice in intersectional grantmaking is often seen to involve offering grants across multiple populations or issue-areas (see Human Rights Funders Network, 2022), the Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach sets a higher bar in two respects. First, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' value-led grantmaking points to the need to be less prescriptive and more open to the different intersections that arise during crises, thereby facilitating work that is congruent to communities' lived realities. Second, the Urgent Action Sister Funds point to the need to look beyond two or three intersecting identities to target resources, instead accounting for how a multiplicity of structural barriers intersect, particularly for movements situated in the Global South. As such, the Urgent Action Sister Funds build on Crenshaw's (1989) work on intersectionality (which is focused on how systems of oppression intersect to create compound and distinct experiences of discrimination) to propose a more expansive approach that I term 'multidimensional intersectionality'. Multidimensional intersectionality seeks to understand the wholeness of individual, community, and planetary experiences by recognising a multiplicity of intersections, alongside specific individual and contextual factors (see table 2 in the appendix for a more in-depth articulation of this framework).

Strategy 2: *Deliver flexible resourcing*

One of the key barriers to scaling the work of feminist movements (as well as the work of other grassroots actors) is an expectation that applicants and grantees need to fit donors' pre-defined frameworks. For example, a group may be required to formally register or find international references to meet donors' concerns with managing their institutional risk. In contrast, the Urgent Action Sister Funds adopt a movement-led approach, recognising that donors need to shift their frameworks, and increase their capacity, to effectively resource movements. One key aspect of this approach is flexible resourcing that is responsive to communities' contextualised needs. Flexible resourcing is critical to the Urgent Action Sister Funds' ability to reach the communities most impacted by crises, as well as ensure that resourcing supports movements to address intersecting crises and harms.

Flexible resourcing speaks to the nature of grants provided. The Urgent Action Sister Funds provide flexible grants which are targeted to enable feminist movements to respond to *"time-urgent"*, *"extreme"*, and *"unanticipated"* opportunities or threats (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). These grants are, in the spirit of unrestricted funding, flexible in responding to whatever activists need to address their immediate needs (Marcía, 2024; Mulugeta, 2024; Werunga, 2024). As the Urgent Action Sister Funds (2024) explain:

> ***As we respond to each unique case and context, RRGs will look different. For example, protection, security, and well-being grants can be used to support physical, digital, psycho-social, medical, self-care and collective care needs of defenders, their families, and communities...we do not impose an agenda.***

Equally, grants are flexible in that grantees can use them differently to how they were originally intended (Anonymous 2, 2024). Sahasranaman (2024) explains that *"there is a lot of flexibility built in...there is a fair amount of freedom on informing us [the Urgent Action Sister Funds] post facto if they [grantees] use their funds differently."*

However, flexible resourcing speaks to far more than the resultant funds. As previously mentioned, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants are flexible in their eligibility criteria, recognising how standard donor practices create structural barriers for feminist movements responding to crisis. As a result, the Urgent Action Sister Funds enable applications from unregistered groups, groups without international sponsorship, from individuals (embedded within movements), and from activists in exile. Flexibility is also built into the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking processes. Importantly, flexibility is understood here as allowing for a plurality of needs. The Urgent Action Sister Funds collectively make RRGs in fifteen unique languages (and are always evaluating the necessity to add more), have revamped their online platforms to reach activists with disabilities, and use whatever channel works best for an activist to apply and communicate. Recognising risks, preferences, and constraints of crisis contexts the Urgent Action Sister Funds use communication methods including SMS, phone calls, emails, websites, and letters (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).

This speaks to a critical aspect of how the Urgent Action Sister Funds understand flexibility. That flexibility necessitates being responsive to what works for a particular activist or group, and within a particular context. Although flexibility is built into processes it also involves the Urgent Action Sister Funds moving themselves to meet movements' needs. Sometimes this is on a one-to-one basis. For example, Tedla (2024) describes how, although the Urgent Action Sister Funds typically request a written grant report, they facilitate other forms of reporting back from an activist fleeing from their home. Similarly, Gualberto (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean would not expect receipts from an activist in a rural community in Brazil with no transportation services, whereas their expectations may be different from a registered group in a big city.

Equally, the Urgent Action Sister Funds are responsive to emergent needs. Historically, the Urgent Action Sister Funds explain that they *"did not traditionally support humanitarian needs"* (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). Yet, multiple interviewees talked about how Covid, Ebola, and the climate crisis have resulted in a shifting of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach. The Urgent Action Sister Funds now play a role in resourcing feminist movements responding to humanitarian crises and will sometimes provide grants for the basic needs of movements and their communities (Kemitare, 2024; Mulugeta, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). For example, Amir (2024) describes how the Ebola crisis resulted in Urgent Action Fund-Africa providing grants for practical items that they would not typically resource, explaining *"we had a conversation that right now what is strategic is for women to have things to literally to wear - they need gloves, they need soap, and they need masks."* Interviewees explain that they would loosen their grant criteria to be even more flexible when survival is at stake (recognising survival is both political and strategic in enabling activism to continue), when threats are movement-wide (i.e. larger scale), and when groups and civil society are nascent (Cruz, 2024; Maskay, 2024; Menon, 2024; Obianwu, 2024; Werunga, 2024).

> ***The [feminist response crisis] focus is not on the rules but the focus is on context and people.***
>
> Menon, 2024

This offers a radical challenge to prevailing Western understandings of flexibility as unrestricted funding that gives grantees scope to pivot. Instead, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' flexible resourcing approach speaks to the need to consider which actors are excluded from accessing resourcing due to criteria, processes, and communication methods. It also calls for an understanding of flexibility, not as a prefixed process, but as a responsiveness to the contextualised and shifting challenges movements face when responding to crisis. This points to the fact that effective resourcing to address permacrisis is not simply a question of donor strategy, but also one of embedding flexibility and responsiveness within donor cultures.

Strategy 3: *Take audacious risks*

Another critical reason the Urgent Action Sister Funds are effective at resourcing feminist movements is that they challenge donor orthodoxy around risk. Typically, donors are focused on a *"cautious approach"* to managing their institutional risks (Eddens and Kroeger, 2022, para. 4). In contrast, for the Urgent Action Sister Funds, a feminist movement-led approach means recognising that activists are the ones facing the greatest risks. For the Urgent Action Sister Funds, resourcing equity and justice responses and addressing the erosion of civic space, means *"accepting the inevitability of risk"* (Eddens and Kroeger, 2022, para. 3). This means putting into perspective the reputational and fiduciary risks that donors face by recognising that activists face greater levels of risk, which tend to constitute direct personal harm, as opposed to harm where the primary risk is to the institution.

This willingness to hold institutional risks in service of movements is particularly evident in the way that the Urgent Action Sister Funds move funds rapidly to communities that other donors are not reaching. The Urgent Action Sister Funds find ways to transfer grants that prioritise getting money to where it is needed even in the face of sanctions, communication breakdowns, or banking systems collapse (Gorani, 2024). This is particularly critical in this moment given *"closing civic space, restrictive financial regulations and the rise of authoritarianism"* (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024, p. 14). The starting point for the Urgent Action Sister Funds is a determination to move the money where it is needed, and to develop solutions to do so.

> *[The finance team in Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific] will figure out a way to do it, and we will find a way to take on the risk without jeopardizing the whole of the institution.*
>
> Leiper O'Malley, 2024

This has meant that the Urgent Action Sister Funds have challenged orthodox grantmaking processes. Leiper O'Malley (2024) described how Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific, for example, used an informal banking mechanism to deliver RRGs in Afghanistan, despite the fact that most funders would not use this mechanism, considering it to be *"too opaque or individual."* Interviewees shared a range of creative workarounds used by the Urgent Action Sister Funds, including fiscal sponsorship, transferring funds via Western Union, and partnering with regional networks who then can find ways to send money on to local activists and groups (Anonymous 6, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).[11]

11 Interviewees shared a far wider range of strategies than those listed here, which cannot be publicly shared due to risk (Anonymous 2, 2024; Anonymous 3, 2024).

Menon (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds' audacity is accompanied by processes of deeply listening to movements so that the Urgent Action Sister Funds can understand the barriers in place and identify work-arounds:

"When banks were shut we were still moving money into the hands of defenders...when there is a typhoon happening marginalised women were still able to access some form of care...so it's about figuring out ways and it's about listening. And I think audacity lies in being able to create those collaborations."

Menon (2024) describes that the transfer of funds in the face of risks is as a relational act - one of *"collaborations"*. The Urgent Action Sister Funds bring a knowledge of financial systems, regulations, and what has worked elsewhere, but listening to movements is key - movements bring the contextual knowledge of their situation, including risks, meaning they know which potential solutions have practical relevance.

This speaks to the need for donors to reconceptualise risk to effectively resource equity and justice actors and deliver intersectional resourcing that targets communities who are most acutely affected by crises. It speaks to the fact that delivering rapid response grantmaking necessitates a culture, and people, that centre a determination to do this work, are solutions-focused, creative, audacious, and collaborate with movements to identify what works.



02.
Scaling grassroots solutions to crisis

2.1 The concentration of power and resources



A one-actor, one-problem space

The terms 'crisis' and 'emergency' are often used interchangeably within the crisisology literature, reflecting that we often assume crises necessitate an urgency of decision-making and response (McConnell, 2020; Pursiainen, 2022). Smith (2019) warns of a *"tyranny of the urgent"* in crisis response, whereby a sense of urgency drives narrow, single-issue, single-actor 'solutions'.[12]

For example, Smith (2019) explores how a tyranny of the urgent manifested during Zika outbreaks in South and Central America, and Ebola outbreaks in West and Central Africa (between 2013-16). Smith (2019) highlights how gender was central to women's experiences during the Zika and Ebola outbreaks. Yet, a narrow and hegemonic understanding of urgency was used to justify global public health responses that dismissed the gendered nature of harms, in favour of addressing immediate biomedical needs. This resulted, for example, in inattention to women's lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, and lack of legal rights to abortion, which left women vulnerable to exposure to Zika when pregnant. In turn, this resulted in women, predominantly from lower socioeconomic groups living in remote areas, with an increased burden of care for children born with congenital syndromes. In another example, highlighting how crises are often used to narrow the actors involved in decision-making, McHugh et al. (2021) argue that framings of a climate emergency have been used by States to legitimise 'experts' and 'justify' the undermining of knowledge from Indigenous communities.

> ***Emergency governance is a "one problem-space"*** *whereby crises are approached through a narrowly defined scope that protects the current order and neglects structural injustices.*
>
> Anderson et al. (2019, para. 5)

12 Although Smith (2019) explores the tyranny of the urgent in relation to the specificity of the Zika and Ebola outbreaks, the term is generally applicable to the narrowing of agendas, and decision-making actors, that often occurs during crisis.

What is stark from the literature on the tyranny of the urgent is the way that a narrowing of actors and scope opens space for false solutions. For example, CLIMA Fund et al. (2023, p. 14) point to the fact that proposed 'solutions' to the climate crisis are often false. These 'solutions' play into legitimate concerns about the urgency of the climate crisis. Yet they separate climate justice from social justice, premising the idea that *"technology will save us"* (treating life as a machine that can be *"hacked, re-designed, or re-engineered"*). As a result, they leave the pre-existing economic and political order, that lies at the root of the climate crisis, untouched. Ultimately, these false solutions distract from, or undermine, genuine community-led solutions to permacrisis. As such, the emergency frame facilitates power-holders' use of crises in service of anti-rights agendas and a perpetuation of the status quo.

Learning 3: *Reject a tyranny of the urgent*

The arguments above make a compelling case for pausing, or slowing things down, whenever possible (Wong, 2024). This points to the importance of developing clarity around the speed of response required in different scenarios. Taking responses to the climate crisis, for example, then an extreme weather event or threats to the life of an environmental defender can require a response in a matter of hours or days. Yet, other aspects of the crisis, such as the slow build-up of toxic pollution, are less about rapidity and more about ongoing prioritisation (Ahmann, 2018; Davies, 2022). Even when rapidity is required, the tyranny of the urgent points to a need to ensure decision-making involves experts by lived experience, and that responses are holistic and look beyond the present moment.

Undermining local actors

Ensuring solutions are driven by those who are closest to the problems we seek to address is an effective way to counter false solutions. As is well documented, grassroots movements, including feminist movements, work to address the causes and drivers of permacrisis, work intersectionally, and offer contextually relevant forms of response that contrast with the false solutions discussed above (Teixeira and Motta, 2024; CLIMA Fund et al., 2023). Yet, one of the most striking features of both foreign aid and philanthropic funding during crisis is donors' clear preference for directly funding INGOs and/or organisations in the Global North. Sekyiamah and Provost (2024) note that, reflecting a consistent trend, in 2022 the leading channel for humanitarian assistance was multilateral organisations, primarily UN agencies. Just 2% of funding for humanitarian assistance went to NGOs and civil society based in so-called 'developing countries'. Reflecting similar findings, the 2023 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report identified that:

> ***Just 1.2% of humanitarian funds from donor countries were given directly to "local or national actors" in 'developing countries'.***
>
> Development Initiatives (2023, p. 16)[13]

This issue of top-down resourcing is not confined to flows of humanitarian aid, but a pattern that is also evident in philanthropic giving. The Human Rights Funders Network (2020, p. 3) highlight a *"trust gap"* in direct funding that continues to reinforce global disparities and reproduce colonial harms. In 2020, whereas 99% of grant dollars for the Global North went to organisations based in the Global North, just 58% of funds designated for the Global South and East were granted to organisations based there.

Academics have identified four key factors shaping the lack of direct resourcing going to local actors. First, restrictions on funding flows can play a role. Restrictions depend on context but can include: grantees needing prior permission to receive foreign funds, foreign funds needing to be rooted through government entities, caps and taxation on foreign funding, and/or complicated reporting and registration requirements.

13 Although these figures don't show us how much funding is given to local actors via intermediaries (due to a lack of transparency around funding flows), surveys of local actors highlight they are chronically underresourced. For example, data shared at the AWID Forum 2024 in Bangkok showed that the medium annual income for feminist organisations globally in 2024 was just $22,000 USD. This was before the latest round of foreign aid cuts.

Yet, the Council on Foundations and Foundation Center (2018), examining data flowing from US Foundations to a given country, found no correlation between levels of funding and restrictions on cross-border funding flows - offering evidence that these restrictions are a minor factor.

Second, Layode et al. (2021), specifically examining disparities between international organisations and African NGOs, identify three forms of bias that drive a lack of trust in local organisations and leaders. These are: familiarity bias (where philanthropists fund those they know and are familiar with), racial bias, and cultural bias (such as Western definitions of professionalism and a preference for English language speaking organisations). These biases also feed into perceptions of capacity and risk. Barbelet (2019) points to the fact that a lack of capacity is often cited as a reason for the inability to directly resource local actors. However, in this context, capacity is a shorthand for the ability of an organisation to conform to set Western standards which are seen to manage a donor's reputational or fiduciary risks (Lever et al., 2020).

Third, relating to the discussions in the previous chapter, local actors are sidelined due to preferences for 'neutrality'. Even though we would expect contextualised knowledge to be seen as a central requirement of crisis response, Belloni (2007) argues that a lack of contextualised knowledge (such as the use of international staff) is seen to positively bolster 'neutrality.' As such, it is the strengths associated with local actors - their embeddedness, levels of local knowledge, and community trust – which mean donors can deem their work as inherently too 'political' to resource.

Fourth, Lever et al. (2020) point to legitimate donor concerns that resourcing smaller and local organisations is more resource intensive. As such, it involves donors prioritising the increased resources required for this work – from investing in language justice, to increasing the size of staff teams to facilitate the distribution of a greater number of smaller grants.

Roepstorff (2020) and Layode et al. (2021) rightly point out that the lack of investment in local actors is a self-perpetuating cycle. Funding flows themselves serve to reinforce the perception that local actors are *"less capable, less trustworthy, and less accountable than their international counterparts"* (Layode et al., 2021, p. 14). Since funding is kept low, local organisations are unable to jump through the multiple hoops requested by donors to prove capacity and reduce donors' perceptions of risk.

The problem with localisation

The sidelining of local actors in crisis response has resulted in cross-sector calls for a 'localisation' of crisis response (Belloni, 2007; Roepstorff, 2020[14]).[15] Although calls for 'localisation' arise from legitimate criticisms around funding flows, as well as the way that Humanitarian Response has sidelined local actors, the term is highly problematic for three reasons. First, the term originates from a need to 'correct' top-down models and suggests that localisation is something that needs to be created from the outside, rather than recognising that local work is already happening (Baguios et al., 2021). Mulder (2023, para. 1) describes this as *"the paradox of externally driven localism."*

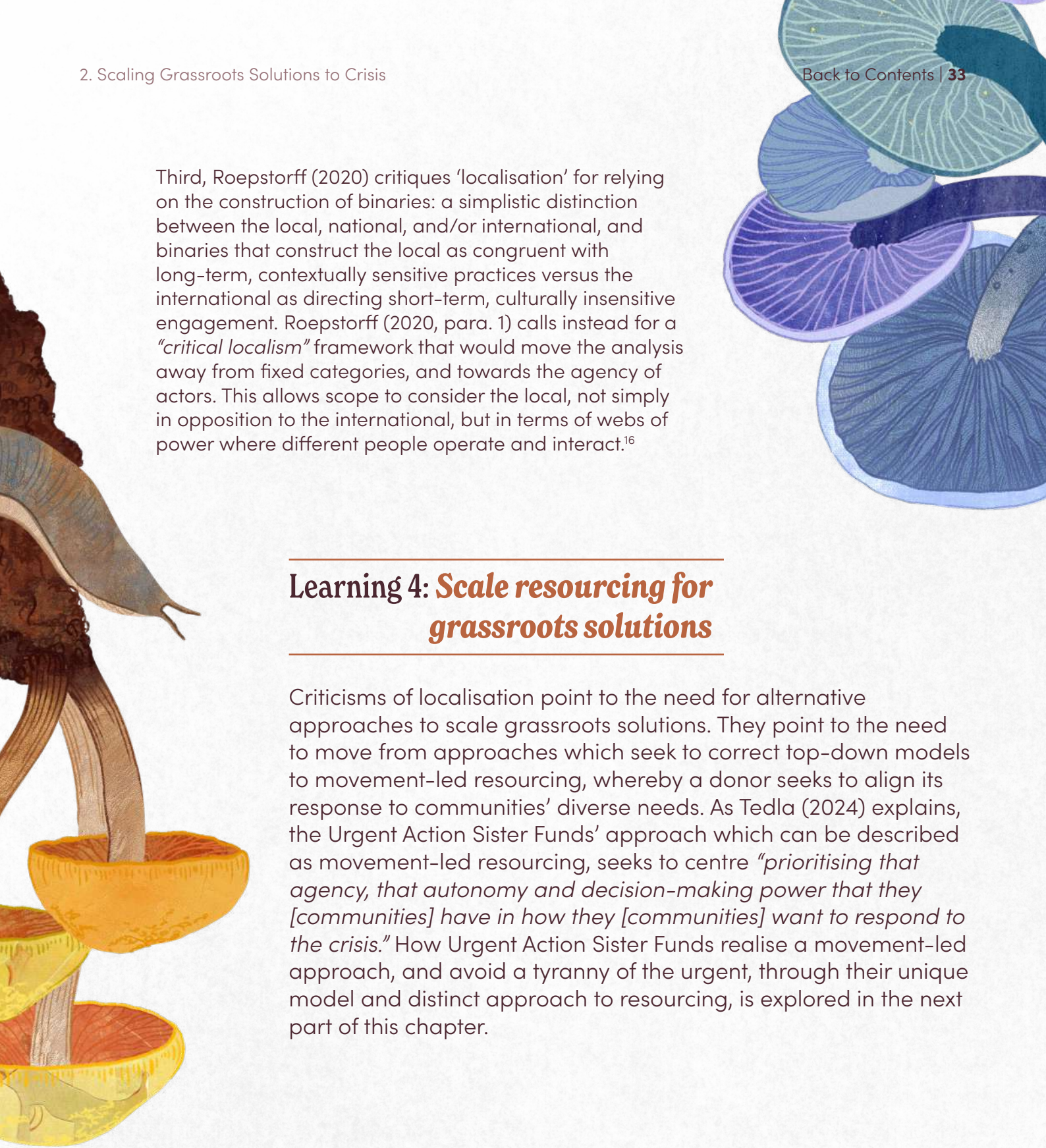
Second, academics have documented that localisation has not led to meaningful shifts in power. For example, Khoury and Scott (2024) document how, in Syria, international humanitarian actors relied on local actors to deliver aid - considering this localising aid response - without shifting any authority and power to local actors.

> ***A key risk is that 'localisation', rather than redistributing power, is seen as the end goal.***
>
> Baguios et al. (2021, p. 3)

We can draw these specific insights across to resourcing, pointing to the fact that resourcing cannot simply mean an increased trickle-down of funds to local actors, whilst maintaining their subordination within the resourcing ecosystem, including through their vulnerability to funding whims.

14 It is worth noting that Belloni (2007) and Roepstorff (2020) both argue for a shift in power within Humanitarian Response but are critical of the current localisation agenda.

15 This critique formed the basis of 'the Grand Bargain' in 2016 – an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who committed to improve Humanitarian Response, including through localisation.



Third, Roepstorff (2020) critiques 'localisation' for relying on the construction of binaries: a simplistic distinction between the local, national, and/or international, and binaries that construct the local as congruent with long-term, contextually sensitive practices versus the international as directing short-term, culturally insensitive engagement. Roepstorff (2020, para. 1) calls instead for a *"critical localism"* framework that would move the analysis away from fixed categories, and towards the agency of actors. This allows scope to consider the local, not simply in opposition to the international, but in terms of webs of power where different people operate and interact.[16]

Learning 4: *Scale resourcing for grassroots solutions*

Criticisms of localisation point to the need for alternative approaches to scale grassroots solutions. They point to the need to move from approaches which seek to correct top-down models to movement-led resourcing, whereby a donor seeks to align its response to communities' diverse needs. As Tedla (2024) explains, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach which can be described as movement-led resourcing, seeks to centre *"prioritising that agency, that autonomy and decision-making power that they [communities] have in how they [communities] want to respond to the crisis."* How Urgent Action Sister Funds realise a movement-led approach, and avoid a tyranny of the urgent, through their unique model and distinct approach to resourcing, is explored in the next part of this chapter.

16 There is a body of wider literature that warns against an 'uncritical localisms' framework. For example, Monbiot (2003) warns about the way that localism has been misappropriated (through proposals which advocate that everything that can be produced locally, should be produced locally) to disadvantage the poor through trade. Latimer (2023) explores how localism can produce both good and regrettable outcomes, warning that localism can be used to privilege only a small section of the local community (those most aligned with hegemonic positions), and that localism can become driven by ideology over evidence. Vey and Storring (2022) point to the fact that local actions are not enough, arguing that city, state, and federal government agencies are needed to connect hyperlocal institutions to long-term and large-scale strategies and programmes. This literature makes a clear argument that attention must be paid to co-option, power, inclusion, evidence, and the role of a wider collection of 'non-local' actors within localisation agendas.

2.2 Models and strategies for "*multi-solving*"[17]

Strategy 4: *Embrace participatory models for speed and scale*

The Urgent Action Sister Funds' unique model plays an important role in the Funds' capacity to effectively amplify pre-existing solutions offered by feminist movements. The Urgent Action Sister Funds' (2024, p. 5) explain, *"while most funders are global, regional, or national, the Urgent Action Sister Funds are unique in being both rooted in our regions and part of a unified global network."* The Urgent Action Sister Funds are four independent, regional Feminist Funds, which come together as a global consortium.

Movement-led

The regionally-rooted and autonomous nature of each of the Urgent Action Sister Funds is recognised by interviewees as decentralising power in philanthropy, bringing resources closer to movements (Gorani, 2024). This closeness recognises that *"folks closest to the problems and experiencing crises often have the most comprehensive and innovative solutions"* (Mulugeta, 2024). Importantly, each Urgent Action Sister Fund can act with autonomy, responding to the *"fact that these regions or continents are unique and diverse"* (Werunga, 2024). Under shared collective concepts, values, and models, each regional Fund identifies their own priority areas, grantmaking programmes, language, and frameworks.[18] How subversive this model is in the philanthropic context where power is overwhelmingly centred in the Global North cannot be overstated. Alpizar (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean is *"the only regional Feminist Fund"* in Latin America. Critically, this is not an attempt to localise within a top-down model, rather, it represents a decentralisation of power that has been inherent since the Urgent Action Sister Funds' inception.

17 Mease (2022, para. 2).

18 For example, the Urgent Action Sister Funds all centre collective care. However, the Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean embraces the concept of collective care with a particularly strong emphasis on the interconnections with the planetary ecosystem, and Body-Territory, whereas Urgent Action Fund-Africa stresses a framing of healing justice over collective care for addressing shared concerns around injustice, burnout, trauma, sustainability and regeneration.

> ***The Urgent Action Sister Funds are "locally mandated and locally driven" as their "power is centered at the local communities that we are part of."***
>
> Buadromo, 2024

Buadromo (2024) explains that this is connected to the Urgent Action Sister Funds' autonomous nature, origin and mandate, but also the identities and lived experiences of staff:

"We're part of the region. Many of us are activists in our own countries...we are also seeing ourselves or our team members are also seeing themselves having the same repercussions that activists are having."

The Urgent Action Sister Funds are participatory Funds, meaning they are run by staff who share identities, and lived experiences, with those they seek to resource. Each Urgent Action Sister Fund is staffed by activists who live in, or are from, their respective regions. Most staff share identities with the women and LGBTQIA+ communities the Urgent Action Sister Funds support and have their own experiences of living through crises (Alpizar, 2024; Amir, 2024; Navarrete, 2024; Tedla, 2024). As Wainaina (2024) explains, *"we are not untouched by the crises in which we are responding to. Some of us are deeply steeped in them."*

Transnational interdependence

The interdependence of the four Urgent Action Sister Funds was viewed by interviewees as being of equal importance, and key in enabling the Funds to respond to the transnational nature of crises (Navarrete, 2024). For example, this structure has enabled the Urgent Action Sister Funds to accompany activists as they have crossed borders (Navarrete, 2024; Maskay, 2024). In the early days of the Taliban seizing power in Afghanistan in 2021, when the Urgent Action Sister Funds responded to activists' requests for relocation, *"Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific and Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism coordinated closely to share contacts and information about asylum applications, visas, and flight availability"*, and connect Afghani activists to activists in Europe, Central Asia, and the US where they were arriving as refugees (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024, p. 6).

In another example, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' regional and global structure facilitates an offer of cross-geographical grantmaking and support, which enables activists to receive support when they move location and sustain activism from positions of exile. This is relevant to multiple crisis contexts. Maskay (2024) explains that after the coup in Myanmar in 2021, rapid response grant applications shifted from those received by activists in-country to those on the outskirts of Thailand or elsewhere. Similarly, over the last six years, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean has supported the work of activists from Nicaragua who have been forced into exile in neighbouring countries and even had their citizenship revoked.[19]

Equally, their cross-geographical approach has supported the Urgent Action Sister Funds to facilitate transnational connections. For example, Mulugeta (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds have created opportunities for *"US-based movements to connect with the feminist movements in the Balkans and feminist movements in Indonesia"*, providing the space for *"transnational solidarity building and movement building."*

19 This example was shared by De Vries and Cortés as a comment on a draft of this report.

Pluralising decision-making at speed

As well as revealing how organisational models can be movement-led (responding to critiques of localisation), informants from the Urgent Action Sister Funds also explain how models can avoid single-actor, single-issue solutions (associated with the tyranny of the urgent). As described above, the Urgent Action Sister Funds are participatory Funds. However, one of the key features of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' model is not just the embrace of a participatory approach, but the embrace of pluralised decision-making.

> ***The Urgent Action Sister Funds (2024) work with an extensive informal network of over 700 movement advisors.***

Movement advisors are specifically selected to ensure the network offers a plurality of perspectives in terms of movement advisors' own identities and roles, knowledge of different issue-areas, communities, and geographical localities (Kemitare, 2024; Maskay, 2024; Navarrete, 2024; Werunga, 2024). Movement advisors are also expected to be *"really well connected and part of movements"* so they bring a *"broader perspective"* (Alpizar, 2024).

Movement advisors are critical to the way the Urgent Action Sister Funds respond to crises. They offer up to date contextual knowledge of rapidly changing environments, acting as the Urgent Action Sister Funds *"eyes on the ground"* (Werunga, 2024). This is central to ensuring the Urgent Action Sister Funds are responsive. For example, during the Pakistan floods in 2022, it was Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific's movement advisors from Pakistan who let them know which groups did not fit *"into the criteria of the government"* and therefore needed alternative support. During Covid-19, it was movement advisors who alerted the Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific that trans activists were being denied government services and that Dalit groups in India could not access services and food (Maskay, 2024). Sahasranaman (2024) describes that movement advisors act as *"a critical bridge" "between the organisation and the movements we serve"* – enabling the Urgent Action Sister Funds to respond to crises with both *"depth and breadth."*

Movement advisors also play a critical role in grantmaking processes, providing a form of 'endorsement' or 'verification' for grantees, or flagging questions or concerns (Singh, 2024; Yocogan-Diano, 2024). This is a process designed to remove barriers activists often face when applying for funds, providing an alternative to requesting international references, whilst recognising the need for due diligence (Anonymous 2, 2024). Importantly, the Urgent Action Sister Funds stress the value of multiple actors informing grant-decisions, arguing that this avoids the risks of gatekeeping, as well as unilateral decision-making. As such, whilst weight is put on guidance from movement advisors, the Urgent Action Sister Funds do not lean on this perspective alone. For example, Buadromo (2024) explains that, when the Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific received a grant request from a small Pacific Island, the application was not endorsed by a movement advisor as they were not aware of this movement's work or the challenges the applicant was describing. Ultimately though, staff who came from the region reached out to their local contacts and the grant was endorsed because of the wider information gathered.

Significantly, the movement advisor network facilitates the Urgent Action Sister Funds' rapid response grantmaking, challenging the common assumption that rapidity necessitates unilateral decision-making. Where heightened speed is required the Urgent Action Sister Funds simply make adaptations to their everyday approach. To give one example, Urgent Action Fund-Africa have sped up decision-making by altering communication methods, using recorded phone calls when emails do not keep pace with time-urgent demands (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).[20]

20 In other examples, the Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific and Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism only require one endorsement from an advisor when a more time-urgent decision is required, as opposed to the standard requirement of two endorsements. Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean has an accelerated model where they will, in certain contexts, accept an application from an organisation that is already in their network without it needing to go through the movement advisor process (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024).

An early warning system

Contrary to assumptions that pluralising decision-making impedes speed, movement advisors have enabled the Urgent Action Sister Funds to respond to crises early and at speed.

> ***Long-term relationships with movement advisors enable the Urgent Action Sister Funds to "forecast and anticipate when a crisis is coming, so we can begin to prepare our responses."***
>
> Urgent Action Sister Funds (2024, p. 13)

Numerous interviewees describe that the Urgent Action Sister Funds often have information that functions as an early warning system (Buadromo, 2024; Maskay, 2024; Menon, 2024; Mulugeta, 2024; Obianwu, 2024 - see box 3 in the appendix for an overview of this early warning system). When information from movement advisors is combined with wider information (such as grant request data) and the Urgent Action Sister Funds' vantage point as a global grantmaker, this information can be interpreted *"to clock when crisis is on the horizon"* (Mulugeta, 2024).

This early warning system has enabled the Urgent Action Sister Funds to support crisis preparedness. For example, De Vries and Cortés explain how the Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean used their contextual knowledge of Nicaragua to become the first Fund to respond in early 2018 when political crisis erupted there.[21] In another example, Obianwu (2024) describes how the information held by the Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism meant it was *"very clear"* by December 2020 (more than a year prior to the start of the war) that Russia was going to invade Ukraine. As a result, the Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism were talking to activists prior to the invasion asking, *"What do you think you need? How are you getting ready?"* When the invasion happened, Obianwu (2024) explains that *"a few days later we made our first grant to Ukraine"* which was enabled by this advance planning.

21 This example was shared as a comment on a draft of this report.

Similarly, Kemitare (2024) describes that in mid-to-late 2022 Urgent Action Fund-Africa started to notice trends in Sudan whereby several grant requests were made in response to women human rights defenders being attacked and facing sexual violence. Explaining that this indicated something was coming (the armed conflict broke out in April 2023), Kemitare (2024) describes how Urgent Action Fund-Africa worked with groups to strengthen their response to gender-based violence. Similarly, early warnings in Sudan were an impetus to support Sudanese movements to build stronger internal and external connections – strengthening their ability to respond when war formally broke out.[22] In another example, Menon (2024) explained that Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific could see an economic crisis was developing in Sri Lanka, resulting in them beginning to resource feminist activists early with seeds so they could grow their own food.

The Urgent Action Sister Funds' model offers a striking example of how pluralised decision-making, that cedes power to communities impacted by crisis, can facilitate rapid response and be used to scale the work of feminist movements. This challenges a tyranny of the urgent (as associated with single-actor solutions) and critiques of localism (as top-down, failing to meaningfully cede power, and as based on a simplistic binary between the local and international).

22 These examples were provided by Menon within one of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' collective sensemaking sessions.

Strategy 5: *Deliver rhizomic resourcing*

As described above, one of the core challenges with prevailing models of crisis resourcing is a concentration of resources, preferencing large-scale single-actor responses, driven through INGOs or large Global North organisations. The Urgent Action Sister Funds reveal two alternative resourcing strategies: resourcing via small grants, and delivering rhizomic resourcing.

First, the Urgent Action Sister Funds reveal the power of relatively small grants. Between 2021–23, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' average grant size was $7,508 USD (MEL core group, 2025). Most of the grants offered by the Funds must be spent within a year, although often within even shorter timeframes. A strategy of resourcing movements with small grants can, on the surface, feel counterintuitive to the need to address the scale and challenge posed by an era of permacrisis. Yet, the size of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants bolster their rapidity and reach. RRGs fall below the threshold for certain onerous requirements that apply when moving larger funds, meaning a small grant size facilitates the Urgent Action Sister Funds' rapid response model (Obianwu, 2024; Singh, 2024; Yocogan-Diano, 2024). Numerous interviewees described that it is the speed of RRGs that gives them their value, enabling activists to respond to time-urgent opportunities or threats (Navarrete, 2024; Obianwu, 2024; Yocogan-Diano, 2024).

Equally, the size of RRGs makes them accessible to movements who otherwise can face insurmountable structural barriers to accessing external resources. The small grant size is, in part, what enables the Urgent Action Sister Funds to move their grants into countries with restricted or closed civic space.

> *Due to the reduced scrutiny on smaller grants, explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds "are able to fly under the radar."*
>
> Sahasranaman (2024)

Small grants are also more accessible to a breadth of feminist movements. Habib (2024) explains that large grants involve further *"compliance measures"* typically requiring *"formal bank accounts, with formal registration."* In contrast, Yocogan-Diano (2024) explains that the grant size offered by the Urgent Action Sister Funds means *"it's simple"*.

Critically, the speed and accessibility of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants means that they offer activists with no other recourse somewhere to turn in critical moments (Cortés, 2024; Gualberto, 2024; Singh, 2024). Alpizar (2024) asserts that the value of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' RRGs is not in *"the size of the money but the logic of how they're given and what they are for."* Assumptions of effective giving can be based on a Global North and colonial perspective that centres what works for large, formally registered organisations operating in relatively open societies. In contrast, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach provides a strong case for a donor ecosystem that embraces small grants, and their associated giving modalities, as complementary and necessary.

Second, the Urgent Action Sister Funds adopt a decolonial resourcing strategy that can be described as rhizomic resourcing. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) borrow the term 'rhizome' from botany, using it to describe how singular structures interact to form a multiplicity.[23] Predominant, Western resourcing models tend to be highly individualistic – focusing on how a single donor can bolster an organisation's capacity and impact (Menon, 2024). In contrast, rhizomic resourcing is concerned with collective capacity and collective impact.

23 Deleuze and Guattari (1980) offer rhizomic thought as a critique to traditional Western thought and psychoanalysis. Building on Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) approach, subsequent authors have applied the concept of the rhizome as a metaphor to better understand social processes. For example: Funke (2012) uses the rhizome to map processes around the Global Social Forum and its implication for the Global Left; Uzelman (2005) uses the rhizome to better understand social movements use of the media as a tool for activism, and; Viktorivna (2024) uses the rhizome as a metaphor for understanding post-modern society. This research is the first known attempt to develop a concept of rhizomic resourcing.

There are two central features of a rhizome that reflect the Urgent Action Sister Funds' resourcing approach. First, rhizomes are characterised by an embrace of both *"heterogeneity"* and *"multiplicity"* (Funke, 2012, p. 3). The Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking seeks to foster this through resourcing a diversity of actors. As Cruz (2024) articulates, the *"strategy of smaller grants"* is about nurturing *"a greater diversity of organisations."* Marcía (2024) explains that the organisations Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean supports *"are very different"* and, as a result, *"we have a diversity of actors in the field when a crisis happens"* – this includes LGBTQIA+ communities, rural women, journalists, and more. Interviewees spoke about the breadth of ways the Urgent Action Sister Funds embrace heterogeneity, including through nurturing nascent groups, embracing different forms of movement actors, and supporting grantees addressing different issue-areas, working within different geographies and communities. As a result, Obianwu (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds resourcing supports *"movement spaces to be richer."*

Second, rhizomes are characterised by a *"multi-connectivity"* – that is, *"unprecedented connections"* of different types, on different levels, and that develop through time (Funke, 2012, p. 3). Uzelman (2005, p. 17) describes that, on the surface, a rhizome can look like a single bamboo shoot. Yet, *"while on the surface each shoot appears to be an individual, related but separate from its neighbors, underground all are connected through a complex network of rootlike stems and filaments called a rhizome."* The Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking is akin to this bamboo garden. On the surface, its grants can appear separate. Yet Menon (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds' are *"slowly building a network"*.

The Urgent Action Sister Funds invests significant resources in nurturing connection and solidarity infrastructures. For example, in 2019, at the height of the revolution in Sudan, Urgent Action Fund-Africa resourced a collective care convening for feminist activists. The convening was a chance for activists to connect, to share space and experiences, heal, and bond. In another example, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean organised a convening in 2024 in response to the democratic and economic crisis in Argentina under far-right President Milei. Many activists in the country were struggling to continue their work, with the stripping back of LGBTQIA+ rights, gender affirming care, sexual and reproductive rights, and migrant rights, alongside the closing of civic space. In response to requests from activists, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean brought thirteen groups from different provinces in Argentina together to talk, strategise, and find space for respite and joy together.[24] Navarrete (2024) concludes that the Urgent Action Sister Funds act as *"a bridge to connect groups."*

24 Information about these convenings was shared informally with the researcher.

There are three strengths of rhizomic resourcing. First, rhizomic resourcing enables the Urgent Action Sister Funds to build a *"whole agenda"*, challenging single-issue responses to crisis (Marcía, 2024). Marcía (2024) explains, there is an understanding that those the Urgent Action Sister Funds resource are connected through *"a common agenda, a common fight, a common struggle"*. Yet, the Urgent Action Sister Funds emphasise the need for a plurality of actors and responses under this broad umbrella. Equally, it is important to recognise that this *"whole agenda"* enables the Urgent Action Sister Funds' non-financial resourcing – from their capacity to bring diverse actors together, to their ability to use their platform to amplify the lived experiences and needs of communities across diverse crisis contexts (Buadromo, 2024; Cruz, 2024; Gualberto, 2024; Marcía, 2024; Tanaka, 2024; Tohme, 2024; Yocogan-Diano, 2024).

Second, rhizomic resourcing respects communities' autonomy. Within the rhizome, singularities are self-organised and autonomous (Funke, 2012). The rhizomic nature of the Urgent Action Sister Funds, adopting a horizontalist ethos, means there is no expectation or desire for grantees to adopt a unified position, or converge with an overriding struggle, actor, or strategy. For example, Obianwu (2024) describes that when the Ukrainian war broke out there was a split in Ukraine's feminist peace and security movement around their priorities - whether to focus on communal humanitarian response or focus on Russian imperialism. Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism was meant to give the movement a large grant to support their work but instead supported both splits of the movement with grants.

> *"There's not just one way for things" or a "one size fits all" approach.*
>
> Obianwu (2024)

Equally, Funke (2012) describes that, within the rhizome, singularities are culturally and geographically rooted. This again reflects the way the Urgent Action Sister Funds seek to resource movements in a way that supports their autonomy to deliver responses that align with the specifics of their contexts. As such, rhizomic resourcing allows for Mease's (2022, para. 2) model of scaling to be applied, where scaling is not a replication of a homogenous one size fits all model, but instead embraces *"multi-solving across social, political, and economic challenges."*

Finally, rhizomic resourcing fosters more resilient forms of crisis response. Uzelman (2005, p. 17), applying the descriptor of a bamboo garden, describes that despite the appearance of a single stem of bamboo, the existence of a rhizome beneath the surface means the bamboo garden *"stubbornly resists attempts to get rid of it."* This reflects how, through fostering connections and transnational learnings, rhizomic resourcing strengthens movement responses to crisis and wider threats. Viktorivna (2024, p. 44) explains that rhizomes *"can be torn anywhere, but this...does not lead to the cessation of its growth"*. In fact, where a rhizome is torn it *"resumes, following one or another of its lines, and it is also possible to follow a new line."* Ruptures and breaks within a rhizome illustrate multiple realities of activism – activists relocating and seeking to resume their work from exile, groups being shut down by repressive States, or movements diminishing or splitting. Yet, by resourcing a multiplicity of movements, supporting *"unprecedented connections"* beneath the surface and tending to rhizomic roots, the Urgent Action Sister Funds are nurturing a rhizomic-type structure that can withstand ruptures and breaks, and reemerge in new forms (Funke, 2012, p. 3).

Despite mainstream tendencies to universalise experiences of crisis, crises manifest differently in different places, and their impacts are felt differently by different communities. The Urgent Action Sister Funds' model reflects this diversity and complexity. Through a movement-led model, small grants, and rhizomic resourcing the Urgent Action Sister Funds demonstrate how donors can cede power to communities, amplifying pre-existing pluralistic responses that recognise diverse and complex realities. As such, the Urgent Action Sister Funds represent a complementary, and arguably more effective, form of crisis resourcing than top-down, hegemonic approaches.



03.

Resourcing *"the politics of living"* [25]

25 Feldman (2012, para. 1).

3.1 Limitations of "*the perpetual present*"[26]

The dominant narrative of crisis in both academia and practice frames crises as time-bound and discrete (Schad et al., 2020). As McConnell (2020, para. 26) explains, *"a common assumption is that a crisis arrives, reaches a critical point, is managed, and eventually subsides and terminates."* This understanding of crisis seeks to delineate crises from periods of relative stability, characterising crisis as periods of high levels of uncertainty and disruption to the status quo (Callahan, 1994; McConnell, 2020). It also assumes a linearity of crisis as reflected in traditional 'crisis management cycles', which break crises down into pre-crisis, during-the-crisis, and post-crisis components - typically referring to stages of risk assessment, prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and learning (Pursiainen, 2017).

Punctures within long-term processes

Although there is some utility in the way that time-limited definitions of crisis point us to look for periods of particularly acute disruption, this understanding of crisis is limited and problematic. One reason this construction of crisis is so pervasive is that it has political expediency in maintaining the status quo, suggesting crises are unanticipated, unexpected, or arrive without warning (Markusson et al., 2014; McConnell, 2020). As Knowles (2020, para. 4) describes, discrete and time-bound constructions of crisis treat crises as if they *"float freely in history, unmoored from politics"*, without *"deep histories."* This can be used to focus attention on immediate forms of causation that are visible in the moment, drawing attention to severe weather, bursts of spectacular violence, or a new strain of virus. In turn, this legitimises a response to crisis that focuses on dealing with immediate, symptomatic impacts, rather than responses that seek to address the deeply rooted structural oppressions that result in the crises we see.

> *Crises are "long-term processes linked across time."*
>
> Knowles, 2020

26 Lough et al. (2023, p. 34).

Knowles (2020, para. 20) argues instead for an understanding of crises as 'slow disasters' – not as discrete events but as *"*long-term processes linked across time.*"* For Knowles (2020), crises cannot be understood without paying attention to the way that slow violence (a long-term process) builds towards moments of puncture. Whereas a time-bound and discrete construction of crisis would, for example, frame wildfires or droughts as the result of high temperatures, Knowles (2020) proposes a 'slow disaster methodology' that would locate these as punctures within creeping and enduring processes of environmental degradation and social inequality. The critical take-away from Knowles' (2020) slow disaster methodology is that the punctures we see (that are typically what we may think of as a crisis) are deeply embedded in, and interconnected to, harms that unfurl with persistence across time and space. As such, Knowles' (2020, para. 20) slow disaster methodology leaves scope to recognise crises as comprising of three interwoven components: 1) deep roots (as discussed in chapter 1, grounded in structural oppressions including capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism); 2) long-term, creeping processes of structural harm, and; 3) punctures (the way crises erupt in *"event time"*).

Learning 5: *Respond across the continuum of crisis*

Despite compelling arguments that crises are grounded in long-term structures and processes, prevailing models of crisis response often focus exclusively on crisis punctures (Knowles, 2020). Lough et al. (2023, p. 34) describe Humanitarian Response as focused on the *"perpetual present."* Despite acknowledging that Humanitarian Response has sought to explore more integrated approaches (such as through the humanitarian–development–peace 'triple nexus'),[27] Lough et al. (2023, p. 37) argue that Humanitarian Response remains focused on what is happening in *"the here-and-now."* This approach is shaped by a range of factors, including a focus on speed and efficiency, and the belief that Humanitarian Response should be heavily oriented to saving lives (Lough et al., 2023). This approach is equally reflected in crisis resourcing.

27 The 'triple nexus' refers to an approach in Humanitarian Response that seeks to integrate humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts into a single, integrated strategy – responding to the well-documented siloing of Humanitarian Response. Despite rhetorical commitments, Humanitarian Response has struggled to translate the 'triple nexus' into meaningful change due to long-standing disagreements around foundational principles. For example, there remains disagreement between sectors around whether peace is merely the absence of conflict (a negative peace) or should include social justice, equality, and holistic wellbeing (a positive peace) – with concerns that the latter challenges the foundational principle of 'neutrality' within Humanitarian Response (Brown et al., 2024; WeWorld, 2020).

Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (2022, p. 3) analyse data, including that from Foundations and bilateral and multilateral donors, breaking down spend into different *"disaster assistance strategies."*:

> ***90% of funds are directed to 'response and relief efforts', with just 1% of funds directed to 'resilience, risk reduction and mitigation', 1% to 'preparedness', and 2% to 'reconstruction'.***
>
> Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2022

This narrow view of crisis is also reflected in an overemphasis on short-term resourcing within philanthropy and foreign aid. The Institute for Voluntary Action Research observe that, within philanthropy, single-year grants remain common with the panacea seen as three to five year commitments (Mills et al., 2024). In contrast, VuLee (2018, 2025) argues that *"conservative funders fund not just across several years, but several DECADES. This allows their partners the stability and security to work on issues, not just survival."* This provides a clear call to action for progressive funders – to increase the length of commitments, and resource movements across the continuum of crisis.



"A crisis of burnout and wellbeing"[28]

When we recognise that crises are not discrete, rather, that they unfold over time and along continuums, it points to the need for crisis resourcing to look beyond short-term survival. Lough et al. (2023, p. 6) observe that, in protracted crises, *"aid is less and less about saving lives and more about sustaining them."* This is equally true if we consider how movements and communities are to sustain themselves in an era of permacrisis, or when intergenerational structural harms become interwoven with crisis punctures. The challenges of sustaining crisis response has long been documented. Barry and Đorđević (2007), for example, describe challenges facing women's movements that persist almost two decades on:

> ***"Many of us [activists] are tired, burnt out, depressed and angry, and many of us have gone through intense periods of crisis characterised by a breakdown in relationships, problems with our families, betrayals of trust, bitterness and deep hurt. Increasingly, we are cynical and are just 'going through the motions'."***[29]

As Obianwu (2024) describes, *"there's a crisis of burnout and wellbeing issues in movements."* Rather than alleviating this challenge, resourcing is often part of the problem. Barry and Đorđević (2007) describe how the short-term and restricted nature of funding leaves activists depleted, which negatively impacts their capacity to respond to crises well. Funding processes trap activists in an endless cycle of searching for funding sources, completing long applications for short term-funding, waiting for decisions, and then (if successful) reporting back against multiple different funder requirements (Barry and Đorđević, 2007). Put simply, this is time consuming and exhausting. As one activist from Colombia states, *"I'm not so stressed about helping women as I am about managing resources. That's what keeps me up at night!"* (quoted in Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean, 2023, p. 170).

As this example demonstrates, funding processes can undermine activists' wellbeing. This is further exacerbated by the fact that funding, if it does arrive, often fails to recognise the needs of activists as workers or people. Cruz (2024) describes that activists are living *"in a very precarious way"*. Funding often fails to consider what activists need to live - from decent salaries to healthcare. Resourcing, via both philanthropy and foreign aid, is often restricted and constrained to project costs, without funding the core costs activists need to sustain their work in the context of permacrisis (Easterly, 2010; Clerkin and Quinn, 2019; Schad et al., 2020). As Barry and Đorđević (2007, p. 12) conclude, there is a belief that *"activism is cheap."*

28 Obianwu (2024).

29 See Houldey (2021) for a discussion of burnout culture in the aid sector.

"The politics of living"[30]

It is also important to recognise that the idea of what we need to live, and to sustain ourselves, within crises is often conceived of narrowly. Feldman (2012, para. 1) argues that Humanitarian Response is concerned with the *"politics of life"* but not the "politics of living." By operating from the *"perpetual present"*, Humanitarian Response prioritises *"meeting the biological requirements of keeping people alive in the most efficient way possible"* (Lough et al., 2023, p. 6). 'Humanity' is a foundational humanitarian principle of Humanitarian Response but this is frequently understood as *"saving lives"* as opposed to "enabling human flourishing" (Lough et al., 2023, p. 14).

> *Yet, "regardless of the difficult circumstances they find themselves in, people strive not just to exist, but to live, in ways that they believe have meaning and value."*
>
> Lough et al., 2023

As Humanitarian Response is the predominant model through which resourcing flows in crisis, crisis resourcing is equally focused on *"the politics of life"* (Eyakuze, 2023; Feldman, 2012, para. 1). This is acutely evident in Barry and Đorđević's (2007) discussion of the challenges facing women's movements where activists grapple with securing resourcing to survive, let alone resourcing that meets activists' holistic needs to live well.
The right of activists to live well, and experience joy amidst their work, is morally important, but it also has practical ramifications for helping us understand what is needed to truly sustain activism.

30 Feldman (2012, para. 1).

Learning 6: *Centre collective care*[31]

For the Urgent Action Sister Funds, collective care offers a core framework for recognising what we need to sustain ourselves within permacrisis, and offers a way to move beyond permacrisis. A lack of care, which shows up through the normalisation of acts of harm, extraction, and domination over other humans and non-humans, and the planet, has driven us to permacrisis. In contrast, collective care centres nourishment, nurture, and connection. As such, care is seen to lead us to the solutions we need. The Urgent Action Sister Funds (n.d. p. 14,) describe that when we arrive at the far horizon - *"Crisis is no longer the constant. Care is."*

Collective care is distinct from self-care, mental health or psycho-social support. A collective care framework is multi-layered and political, speaking to a broad responsibility to ourselves, each other, and the planet – and viewing this responsibility as key to achieving political liberation (Cortés, 2024; Werunga, 2024). As such, collective care is not an add-on to established ways of being, rather it reimagines how we see, and are, in the world. It is concerned with exploring and addressing the root causes of trauma, harm, and violence (Nowak, 2024). Within collective care, wellbeing is viewed broadly reflecting the *"politics of living"* (Feldman, 2012, para. 1). This includes embracing planetary and spiritual wellbeing, grounded in the deep knowledge and longstanding care practices of Black and Indigenous communities (Nowak, 2024). Critically, collective care is embraced as pluralistic (Navarrete, 2024). The Urgent Action Sister Funds recognises that collective care should be shaped and determined by communities themselves, reflecting the differences and complexity of each individual's and communities' experiences

The Urgent Action Sister Funds offer resourcing strategies that embrace collective care and *"the politics of living"*, demonstrating how crisis resourcing can more effectively sustain crisis response, and communities, across the continuum of crisis (Feldman, 2012, para. 1).

31 See box 1 in the appendix for an overview of the features of collective care and table 2 for a comparison between collective care and mental health frameworks.

3.2 Three resourcing strategies to truly sustain us

Strategy 6: *Resource holistic crisis and care infrastructures*

Resourcing is often criticised for being restricted and not resourcing the core infrastructure which enables and sustains activism. This has resulted in calls, from social change actors, for unrestricted funding. Yet, from a mainstream, Western funding perspective, unrestricted funds are usually intended to cover largely pre-planned, day-to-day organisational infrastructure costs (such as salaries and rents). This does not provide scope to understand what unrestricted funding could look like in relation to resourcing movements responding to crises, including when crises mean that basic, 'everyday' needs can no longer be predicted or planned for. Although the Urgent Action Sister Funds don't explicitly label their grants as unrestricted (recognising this language as jargon), Sahasranaman (2024) explains how RRGs sit within the spirit of the definition of unrestricted funds – offering flexible resourcing of a range of crisis and care infrastructures.

Some Urgent Action Sister Funds grants support recognisable components of a rights-based response to crisis. For example, grants support safety and survival infrastructures through a range of traditional safety and security measures. Interviewees describe grants which have supported the relocation of activists, home security equipment, CCTV for offices, and paid for legal support (Anonymous 5, 2024; Mulugeta, 2024; Trinidad, 2024; Wainaina, 2024). Additionally, grants also support rights-based cultures through resourcing documentation infrastructures. For example, Kabore (2024) explains how Urgent Action Fund-Africa provided a grant to document the impact of Covid-19 on women and girls.

Other grants and forms of infrastructure resourced by the Urgent Action Sister Funds are more distinctive. First, the Urgent Action Sister Funds make a significant investment in nurturing care and healing infrastructures (Abou-Habib, 2024).

> *In fact, 55% of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants awarded in 2024 resourced collective care.*[32]
>
> MEL core group, 2025

32 Collective care is resourced through its integration within other forms of grants offered by the Urgent Action Sister Funds (such as a component of protection and security grants), or through stand-alone grants. For example, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean has recently piloted 'Caracola grants' (non-RRGs) of up to $20,000 USD, specifically focused on enabling grantees to strengthen collective care strategies (Anonymous 3, 2024).

While some grants do support psychological support or therapy, in keeping with the Urgent Action Sister Funds' conceptualisation of collective care, many grants resource less commonly supported care practices such as spiritual protection rituals of territory defenders, the reclaiming of ancestral healing rituals, physical spaces within communities for healing and respite, or grants for the reclaiming of ancestral land (Alpizar, 2024; Navarrete, 2024; Sahasranaman, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). For example, Urgent Action Fund-Africa provided a collective care and healing grant which enabled forty rural women living with the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Burkino Faso to revive traditional practices, including through medicinal plants, traditional healing rituals, and collective healing circles. These spaces allowed women to share their experiences of violence, fostering mutual care, and to explore restorative justice principles. In turn, the forty women on the project have been able to bring culturally relevant healing practices to their communities to nurture cultures of care, reconciliation, and peace (Kemitare, 2024).

Equally, many collective care grants recognise the interwoven nature of wellbeing and planetary care. In 2024, 52% of environmental and climate justice grants had a collective care component (MEL core group, 2025). As one example, the Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism provided a collective care grant for a group based in the West Bank that collects drought resistant seeds that have lived in families for generations and are indigenous to the land. The seeds are collected and passed through the community. After October 2023, this group connected with others in Cuba, who planted the same seeds as an act of solidarity. The Urgent Action Sister Funds recognise that, although integrating a strong climate justice component, the work being done by this group is equally about healing and care in the face of *"generational wounds caused by the Zionist occupation"* (Nowak, 2024). In another example, De Vries and Cortés explained how, in 2023, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America and the Caribbean organised a gathering of thirteen groups of land defenders in Merida (Mexico). The gathering provided a space for activists to share their knowledge of defending against extractivism in their territories and their understandings of collective care within the context of land defence. The gathering was named '*acuerpaFAU*', drawing on the Spanish word acuerpar which recognises the importance of bringing your presence, heart, spirit and body to accompany others during crisis.[33]

Second, the Urgent Action Sister Funds resourcing is *"multilayered"*, including through offering support for individual movement activists (as intrinsically linked to the wellbeing and capacity of wider collectives) (Tohme, 2024). In fact, between 2021–24, 35% of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants went to individuals (MEL core group, 2024). This includes providing grants to meet activists' basic needs (e.g., access to healthcare, food, warmth, and shelter).

33 This example was shared as a comment on a draft of this report.

Leiper O'Malley (2024) explains that the Urgent Action Sister Funds have *"increasingly"* paid attention to significant health crises for defenders, recognising *"they [often] don't have regular insurance or they live in places that don't provide good health care."* Interviewees described grants that have provided hormones for trans activists who have been displaced, grants to pay for abortion care, and grants for activists to receive medical attention, dental work, or retinal surgeries (Alpizar, 2024; Trinidad, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). Although these needs are often deemed as 'private' or 'personal' they are, in fact, a consequence of the lack of healthcare many individuals face due to the precarity of activism. In turn, these challenges impact on individual activists' (and therefore movements') ability to sustain themselves in, and respond effectively to, crisis.

Relatedly, the Urgent Action Sister Funds recognise that it is not possible to separate individual activists' safety, security, and wellbeing needs (and correspondingly movements' needs) from those of activists' families and communities (Cortés, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). As such, the Urgent Action Sister Funds have awarded grants to support activists to relocate alongside their families and loved ones, or to reunite (Alpizar, 2024; Maskay, 2024). In another example, the Urgent Action Sister Funds provided an activist with a grant when an immediate family member was diagnosed with cancer. The grant provided the resources for the activist, and her family member, to organise visas and travel to access the healthcare the family member needed (Anonymous 5, 2024). This support of 'individual infrastructures' for activists, to enable activists to survive, continue their work, and live well within their families and communities, provides a radical challenge to the type of resourcing foreign aid and philanthropic actors have traditionally associated with crisis response.

Third, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' resourcing is also multilayered in that it seeks to build, not just organisational but, movement infrastructures. This means the Urgent Action Sister Funds invest significant resources in fostering solidarity and connection infrastructures (as discussed in chapter 2). One important component of this resourcing is the facilitation of agendaless spaces which resource and sustain movements through providing time, space, care, connection, healing, and solidarity (Marcía, 2024). For example, the Urgent Action Sister Funds will financially resource and create spaces for acuerpamiento (Anonymous 3, 2024; Marcía, 2024; Trinidad, 2024). The concept of acuerpamiento invokes a sharing of political, emotional, and spiritual strength and energy to resist oppression. As Marcía (2024) explains, it can be about an organisation coming from Peru to Honduras just *"to support, to feel, to embody...it's like the sense of being together and holding together. You can feel that I am there for you, not only in a narrative, but I am here."* This is a clear example of the fact the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking recognises we do not simply need physical resources to respond effectively to crisis – but relational and spiritual resources too.

Feminist crisis response infrastructure

An analysis of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' model points to a need to broaden our understanding of the infrastructure required to truly sustain movements and communities in the face of permacrisis.

Eight interwoven types of crisis infrastructure should be considered:



Survival infrastructures:

Resourcing centred on activist and movement survival, such as resourcing for relocations or basic needs (food, shelter and lifesaving healthcare).



Safety infrastructures:

Resourcing to ensure that activists and their networks can operate in a way where threats are significantly reduced, or where risks are managed, such as through resourcing physical safety needs, digital safety, or wellbeing.



Care and healing infrastructures:

Resourcing to support pluralistic care and healing practices, such as the reclaiming of ancestral forms of healing knowledge or the resourcing of spaces for activists to practice and experience care.



Solidarity and connection infrastructures

Resourcing of agendaless spaces that enable relationship building, expressions of solidarity, connection, and acuerpamiento.



Digital infrastructures:

Resourcing to support the safe use of technology and digital environments so they can be used to foster connections, especially across geographies, and enhance activism by scaling up organising reach.



Documentation and knowledge infrastructures:

Resourcing of documentation, knowledge generation and exchange, including spaces to develop shared collective concepts.



Planetary infrastructures:

Resourcing that integrates environmental justice, planetary care, and respects historical connections to land, recognising that our ability to sustain ourselves is intrinsically tied to the wellbeing of the planet.



Imagination infrastructures

Resourcing of spaces to pause, to think, and to dream, allowing activists to move forward more mindfully towards boldly reimagined futures.

Three interwoven levels of crisis infrastructure should be considered:



Individual infrastructures:

Resourcing the material conditions of activists (such as healthcare), including individual activists operating outside of a formal group structure (such as from exile).



Group or organisational infrastructures:

Resourcing of groups (including unregistered groups) through both tangible resourcing (e.g., flexible grants to support groups' security needs) and intangible resourcing (e.g., feminist accompaniment – discussed below).



Movement infrastructures:

Resourcing of foundational forms of movement infrastructure (retreats, agendaless spaces, networking), alongside resourcing the core costs of both formal and informal collective organising.

Strategy 7: *Centre reciprocal relationships*

A critical, yet overlooked, form of resourcing offered by the Urgent Action Sister Funds is reciprocal relationships grounded in demonstrations of care. Feminist accompaniment is one example of this approach, although it is important to recognise that an emphasis on reciprocal relationships is embedded in everything the Urgent Action Sister Funds do. The Global Resilience Fund (2025, para. 2) describes feminist accompaniment as *"a deep relationship-building process in which the persons/collectives/groups/movements work together and communicate with each other to identify shared needs, goals, plans, and ways to support each other's struggles."* Whereas traditional capacity-building approaches are based on a deficit model (with a starting assumption that the learner needs to build their capacity), feminist accompaniment is a decolonial approach, grounded in shared agendas, and striving for a horizontal reciprocity of shared learnings. There are two critical strengths of feminist accompaniment which highlight reciprocal relationships as an essential resource.

First, as feminist accompaniment is grounded in reciprocal relationships, it is highly tailored. As there is no pre-set format, agenda, or outcomes for feminist accompaniment, the process has a fluidity and openness to it which enables conversations to be responsive to contextualised needs and specific structural barriers communities face. As the Urgent Action Sister Funds (2024, p. 9) explain, *"we listen to them [activists and movements] and learn what they need, we dialogue, and we support them to develop their own strategies to respond."* This flexibility means feminist accompaniment is highly relevant to crisis contexts as, even when time is severely limited, it can simply mean a space to briefly pause and reflect, allowing activists to move forward with more *"mindful intention"* (Nowak, 2024). Often what emerges from feminist accompaniment are intangible forms of resourcing that are overlooked within standard capacity-building approaches. Urgent Action Sister Funds staff describe, for example, translating the language used by an activist into a language and format that would resonate with a donor.[34] Equally, interviewees describe slow processes of *"deep relationship building so that we can build something more sustainable"*, such as conversations about embedding collective care within movement cultures (Nowak, 2024).

34 These were comments made by staff during a validation workshop in Bangkok in December 2024.

Second, the Urgent Action Sister Funds recognise reciprocal relationships as critical in their own right. The Urgent Action Sister Funds stress that care-based relationships mean showing care for activists as people *"working under very difficult situations"* (Navarrete, 2024).

> ***The culture of the Urgent Action Sister Funds is one where "we really care about the person behind the activist. Our relationships are beyond that of funding relationships - so we're checking in on folks."*** [35]
>
> Nowak, 2024

For example, interviewees describe chatting with, and comforting, activists via Signal (a messaging app) (Nowak, 2024). In Afghanistan, activists had access to staff phone numbers, and the team would *"sometimes be on call, or be willing to do things, at odd hours of the night"* (Leiper O'Malley, 2024).[36]

Interviewees identified that the Urgent Action Sister Funds model and culture were critical to building more reciprocal relationships with activists, given the power imbalance inherent in donor relationships. Three aspects of the Urgent Action Sister Funds work were viewed as particularly critical here. First, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' commitment to reflecting grantee identities within their teams. The shared identities, including shared languages, between activists and staff of the Urgent Action Sister Funds is viewed by interviewees as an enabler of *"a different type of trust – different from what you could build with an international donor"* (Navarrete, 2024). Second, the Urgent Action Sister Funds invest in building contextual knowledge as a care-based practice. Interviewees were clear that this involves a lot of *"invisible labour"* for the Urgent Action Sister Funds, involving *"continuous intelligence gathering and knowledge gathering"* (Anonymous 3, 2024; Abou-Habib, 2024; Nowak, 2024). This ensures resourcing is less extractive (reducing the need for activists to explain and convince), as well as being critical to ensure donors do not inadvertently put movements at risk due to a lack of contextual knowledge (Anonymous 3, 2024). Third, the Urgent Action Sister Funds are committed to internal care practices that enable staff to show up for activists, and each other, with the *"capacity for compassion"* (Leiper O'Malley, 2024).

35 Centring collective care requires a balance. On the one hand, it necessitates internal care practices, including a commitment to the Urgent Action Sister Funds' staff to nurture sustainable ways of working and a respect of personal limitations and boundaries. On the other, it demonstrates the importance of showing up for movements in deeply caring, and personal, ways.

36 We can contrast this to Humanitarian Response which has been critiqued as *"dehumanising"* (Lough et al., 2023, p. 6, 19, 28). Feldman (2012, p. 155) describes that *"humanitarianism can reduce the people it seeks to help to "mere" victims—objects of compassion, but restricted in their capacity to act as full subjects in their own right."*

Reciprocal relationships have enabled the Urgent Action Sister Funds to affect significant, and deep, changes to movement cultures and practices. For example, in Latin America, where the Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean has been centring collective care practices across their work for over a decade, activists describe a visible shift in thinking across the region. In Nicaragua, for example, interviewees explain that in 1979 when the dictatorship was ousted the rallying cry was 'Free Homeland – and Die'. In contrast, in 2018, the feminist mantra was 'Free Homeland – and Live' (Anonymous 3, 2024; Alpizar, 2024). Alpizar (2024) describes that the shift in feminist activism in Nicaragua is *"a very big shift in how we understand the value of life, our lives."* One interviewee explained how feminist accompaniment has shifted her, and other activists', paradigms of what it is to be an activist: *"I mean to sustain this fabric of life...that's something that FAU* [Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean] *has inspired us to do – to rethink or resignify how we want to see ourselves in our activism"* (Anonymous 3, 2024). In this regard the Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach calls to mind Hooks' (1999) argument that societal norms, shaped by patriarchy and capitalism, undervalue emotional connection and love. Yet Hooks (1999) argues that authentic and loving relationships are essential to healing us as individuals and collectives, as well as underpinning transformative societal change.

Strategy 8: *Embrace ecosystem responses and "timeplace"* [37]

A key learning from the academic literature is the need to respond to manifestations of crisis along a continuum. Although the Urgent Action Sister Funds deliver long-term non-financial resourcing, their RRGs are focused on *"*time-urgent*"* needs (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024, p. 17).[38] Examining how the Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach speaks to the continuum of crisis, given their rapid response grantmaking model, points to two further resourcing strategies donors can adopt to support effective responses to permacrisis.

37 Wong (2024, p. 18).

38 It is worth reiterating here that the Urgent Action Sister Funds respond to *"*time-urgent*"* needs whilst resisting the 'tyranny of the urgent' (as discussed in chapter 2).

First, the Urgent Action Sister Funds point to the need to look beyond single-donor responses to permacrisis, instead centring an effective donor ecosystem. The Urgent Action Sister Funds are clear that they *"exist in an ecosystem of other funders who are doing other things"* (Gorani, 2024). It is a gap in this ecosystem that provides the rationale for RRGs. The Urgent Action Sister Funds were founded after feminist activists at the Beijing Platform in 1995 called for a mechanism to disburse rapid grants because there was no source of funding for activists who needed to respond quickly to a threat or an opportunity (Menon, 2024; Tohme, 2024; Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). As a result, multiple interviewees stress how the provision of RRGs to feminist movements is *"distinct"* and *"unique"* within the donor ecosystem (Cortés, 2024; Cruz, 2024; Gualberto, 2024; Mulugeta, 2024; Navarrete, 2024; Singh, 2024).

The Urgent Action Sister Funds are clear that donor complementarity and coordination are required to address communities' needs along the continuum of crisis. This means they have not only orientated their own model around an ecosystem gap, but also seek to ensure that the wider ecosystem addresses communities' holistic needs. For example, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean work within a regional alliance of Women's and Feminist Funds (the *Alianza Latinoamericana de Fondos de Mujeres y Feministas*) to more effectively mobilise resources for feminist movements and to deepen links between regional feminist movements (KIT Institute, 2025). Menon (2024) explains that Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific have mapped the geography and built collaboration with other Women's Funds in the region. As a result, Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific delivers RRGs but also works collaboratively with Women's Fund Asia, Women's Fund Fiji, and the Pacific Women's Fund who offer longer-term core funding. Similarly, Kemitare (2024) describes that, in Sudan, the Black Feminist Fund delivered longer term funding but moved funds through Urgent Action Fund-Africa when movements required a rapid response.

Equally, the Urgent Action Sister Funds use their *"liminal position"* – that is, belonging to the philanthropic community whilst identifying as an activist fund – to ensure communities' needs are made visible and amplified within wider philanthropic spaces (Cortés, 2024). As multiple interviewees explained, the shared donor identity of the Urgent Action Sister Funds gives them access to spaces that are otherwise closed and highly restricted, unavailable to movements themselves (Cortés, 2024; Navarrete, 2024; Obianwu, 2024). As such, Cortés (2024) describes how the Urgent Action Sister Funds seek to *"take advantage of the privilege"* by bringing *"the voices of the organisations and movements"* the Urgent Action Sister Funds support into these spaces.

Second, it is also critical to recognise that delivering RRGs does not necessitate operating from *"the perpetual present"* (Lough et al., 2023).

> ***The Urgent Action Sister Funds' resourcing speaks to Wong's (2024, p. 18) description of "timeplace" - the way the present captures a moment between devolving and emergent worlds.***

Critically, the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grantmaking is *"time-urgent"* but it is not time-bound (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). Although RRGs can sometimes appear focused on the present, they are informed by a longer and wider field of view. Even when focused on survival, RRGs speak to structural harms because of who these grants are for (Alpizar, 2024; Anonymous 2, 2024; Anonymous 4, 2024; Tohme, 2024; Trinidad, 2024; Wainaina, 2024; Yocogan-Diano, 2024). Resourcing trans and non-binary activists, for example, subverts homophobic and heteronormative structures that seek to erase and challenge trans and non-binary activists' very right to existence (Alpizar, 2024). Equally, Obianwu (2024) explains, RRGs have a *"knock-on effect"* – enabling movements to continue bringing into reality longer-term visions that are *"focused on root causes and transformation."*[39]

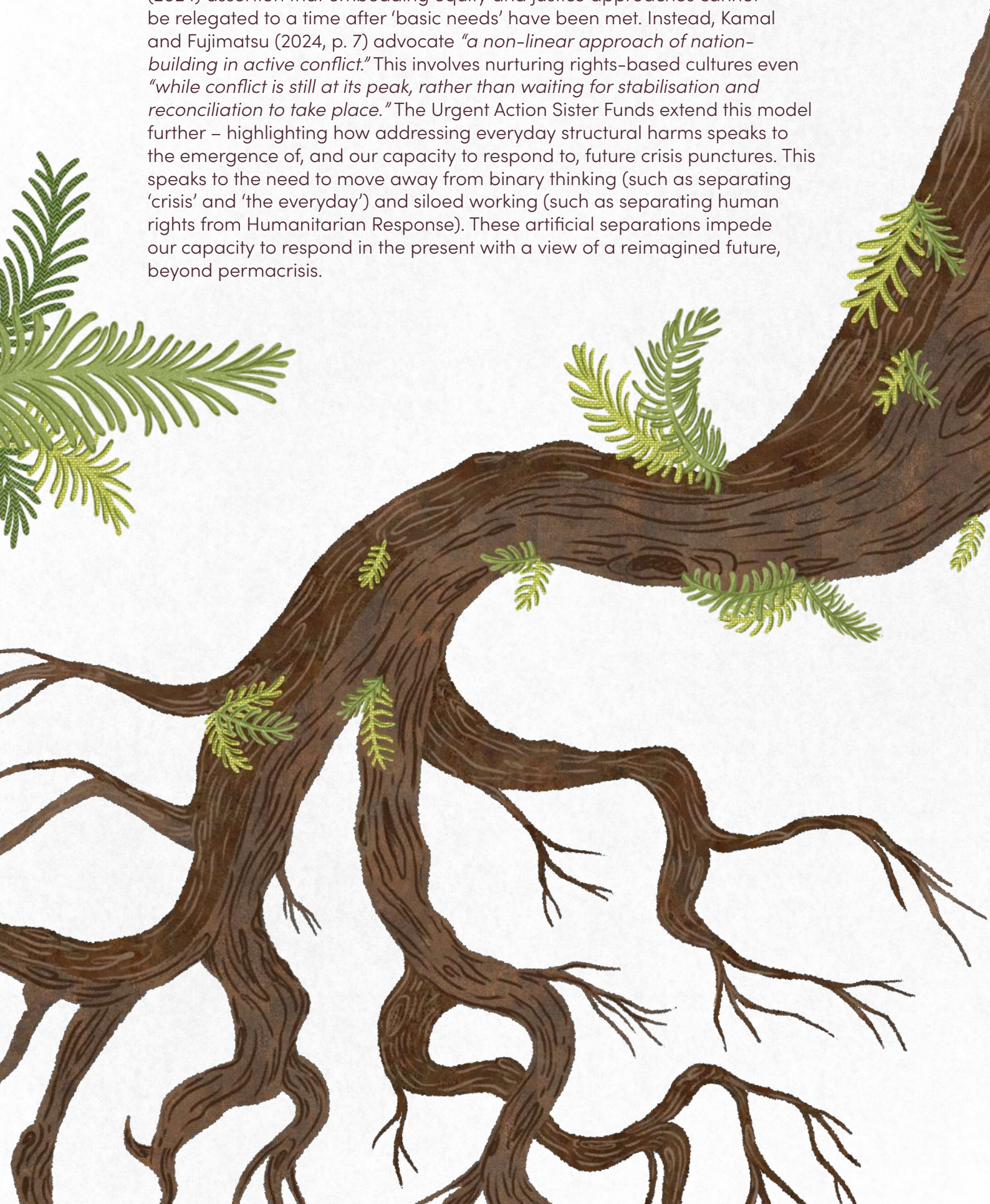
Additionally, during Covid-19, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America and the Caribbean embraced *"timeplace"* by seeking to respond to both immediate health and economic needs, whilst nurturing long-term community and territorial care infrastructures (Wong, 2024, p. 18). For example, Urgent Action Fund-Latin America and the Caribbean supported the *casas de farinha* (collective spaces for manioc flour production) in Brazil, Black women's cooperatives in Ecuador, and agroecology projects in Mexico. The support looked beyond immediate needs to promote sustainable forms of production grounded in solidarity, the recovery of ancestral knowledge, and defence of territories.[40]

It is equally critical that RRGs are available to respond to *"time-urgent"* needs that arise for movements at any point along a continuum of crisis (or beyond) (Urgent Action Sister Funds, 2024). Tohme (2024) explains, for example, that Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism have always supported Palestinian human rights defenders whereas *"it wasn't until after October 7th that this began getting more attention from other philanthropists."* Similarly, Sahasranaman (2024) explains that in Sri Lanka, although it was 2022 when the economic and political crisis was visibilised internationally, Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific recognised fault lines that extended before and after this context. As a result, Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific *"continue to support grantees"*, including providing grants which respond to the clampdown and legal restrictions on civil society, the curbing of free speech, and attacks on environmental and climate justice defenders opposing mining. As such, Buadromo (2024) explains that RRGs *"have a role in each part of that arc of crisis."*

39 Sometimes RRGs' impact on structural harms can be more direct. As Amir (2024) explains, *"often"* the Urgent Action Sister Funds' grants respond to the *"immediate thing"* but also involve some thinking or work on *"why did this immediate thing take place?"* To illustrate, Amir (2024) explains that Urgent Action Fund-Africa gave an RRG to informal tea sellers in Kenya so they could hire a lawyer in response to being targeted. Yet, with their lawyers, the tea sellers worked to shift the narrative around informal workers and respond to government attacks that informal tea sellers do not pay taxes. Amir (2024) explains, *"if you think of a rapid response grant you wouldn't necessarily think that it would entail that. You would just think that it's lawyers to get people out of prison."* Kemitare (2024) describes a similar example from Senegal where a female politician was killed. The public outrage to the femicide was exacerbated by a remark by another politician who pushed a victim-blaming narrative. Although Urgent Action Fund-Africa disbursed a RRG in response to the femicide, women's rights organisations used public anger to spur forward a campaign for the criminalisation of rape – catalysing legal reform. Kemitare (2024) stresses that longer-term funding is critical but argues that the example demonstrates how RRGs can perform a *"catalytic"* role in supporting structural change.

40 This example was shared as a comment by De Vries on an earlier draft of this report.

The Urgent Action Sister Funds' approach speaks to Kamal and Fujimatsu's (2024) assertion that embedding equity and justice approaches cannot be relegated to a time after 'basic needs' have been met. Instead, Kamal and Fujimatsu (2024, p. 7) advocate *"a non-linear approach of nation-building in active conflict."* This involves nurturing rights-based cultures even *"while conflict is still at its peak, rather than waiting for stabilisation and reconciliation to take place."* The Urgent Action Sister Funds extend this model further – highlighting how addressing everyday structural harms speaks to the emergence of, and our capacity to respond to, future crisis punctures. This speaks to the need to move away from binary thinking (such as separating 'crisis' and 'the everyday') and siloed working (such as separating human rights from Humanitarian Response). These artificial separations impede our capacity to respond in the present with a view of a reimagined future, beyond permacrisis.



Conclusion: Feminist philanthropy, towards the horizon



This report began with a question. If we care about humanity, justice, and liberatory futures, how can we respond to permacrisis? This report argues that feminist movements already have the solutions. Multiple examples demonstrate that feminist movements are already responding to the structural roots, and immediate manifestations, of complex and intersecting crises that arise within our communities (Greener, 2022; Njeri and Daigle, 2022). As such, the challenge comes in reshaping the donor ecosystem, so it effectively scales up this work through supporting the "multi-solving" approach offered by grassroots movements (Mease, 2022, para. 2).

Feminist Funds offer us two ways forward to action this scaling. First, Feminist Funds can act as donor intermediaries that do far more than redistribute funds. The Urgent Action Sister Funds' frameworks, model, strategy, and internal culture has been specifically designed to address feminist movements' multi-layered and holistic infrastructure needs in crisis. As such, adequately resourcing Feminist Funds would, in turn, enable them to effectively scale the solutions offered by feminist movements. Second, there are numerous opportunities for philanthropy, foreign aid, and Humanitarian Response to learn from the Urgent Action Sister Funds' model in order to effectively resource, and scale, the work of feminist (and wider grassroots) movements. This concluding chapter unpacks learning from the Urgent Action Sister Funds' work, articulating core features of a model for feminist philanthropic crisis response, and providing key recommendations for philanthropists, bilateral and multilateral donors, and humanitarian actors. This model and recommendations are intended to offer practical frameworks and approaches crisis response actors can adopt to more effectively align crisis responses to communities' needs, and scale pre-existing solutions to permacrisis.

A model for feminist crisis resourcing

Three decolonial frameworks

The Urgent Action Sister Funds adopt three, overlapping, decolonial frameworks for their work which underpin feminist philanthropic crisis response. These are: movement-led resourcing, multidimensional intersectionality, and collective care. These frameworks are designed to bring resourcing more in line with communities' diverse and holistic needs in crisis, and speak to a *"politics of living"* rather than a *"politics of life"* (Feldman, 2012, para. 1).

The first of these frameworks is movement-led resourcing. This refers to a strength-based approach that nurtures sustainable movements through providing financial and non-financial resourcing to uplift, support, and amplify movements' pre-existing strategies, knowledge, and skills. What is important to recognise here is this is fundamentally about seeking to recognise, understand deeply, and invest in what already exists, rather than impose external ideas. This approach aims to avoid the paradox of shifting power through 'localisation'- instead recognising communities' agency and autonomy as the starting point (Mulder, 2023). As such, philanthropic practice within this framework involves a deep commitment to orient models, frameworks, cultures, and everyday decision-making around communities' (as opposed to donors') needs.

The second of these frameworks is multidimensional intersectionality. Multidimensional intersectionality builds on Crenshaw's (1989) work to propose an expansive theoretical framework for understanding the wholeness of individual, community, and planetary experiences. It is a framework for recognising and responding to how structural oppressions, as well as individual and contextual factors (such as a groups registration or security status), are affected by crisis and shape crisis resourcing.

The third of these frameworks is collective care - an anti-oppressive political framework that moves us towards healing and liberation through embracing a breadth of diverse practices that integrate holistic approaches to wellbeing, grounded in ancestral and community knowledge. Collective care is underpinned by a political analysis that recognises that a lack of care has led us to, and shapes, the current era of permacrisis. In turn, centring collective care will reshape our relationships with each other and the planet.

Four resourcing practices

The Urgent Action Sister Funds highlight four core ways these frameworks can be translated into concrete resourcing practices. The first resourcing practice is value-led, holistic grantmaking which refers to grantmaking that is targeted at actors based on their value-alignment (in this case, feminist movements). Value-led grantmaking does not pre-define an issue or issue-area for grantees' work. Reflecting movements' holistic needs when living in, and responding to, crisis, value-led grantmaking is open to resourcing a wide range of types of crisis and care infrastructures – from survival and safety, to care, healing, and planetary infrastructures.

The second resourcing practice is rhizomic resourcing, which focuses on resourcing a diverse multiplicity of movement actors responding to crisis. This includes: movement activists (even if they are not embedded in a formal group structure, such as activists who are operating from exile); groups and organisations (including unregistered groups); and movements (including informal and more structured forms of collective organising). Importantly, in rhizomic resourcing, grantees' autonomy to respond to crisis in ways that they know are effective and relevant to their local context is respected, following a strategy of *"multi-solving"* (Mease, 2022, para. 2). Equally, rhizomic resourcing provides opportunities for movement actors to connect and experience solidarity, including through agendaless spaces – fostering a multiplicity of connections, which strengthen movements and their ability to respond to crisis.

The third resourcing practice is an emphasis on reciprocal relationships grounded in care. These reciprocal relationships are recognised as a critical form of resourcing in their own right. These relationships involve communicating to movement activists that they are cared for as people, that their realities are understood, and demonstrating through actions that activists are not alone in this work. Reciprocal relationships underpin feminist accompaniment which provides an effective, flexible crisis resourcing strategy to support movements with contextual challenges they face. Additionally, reciprocal relationships can facilitate flexible resourcing – revealing where a specific context or individual need indicates that donors should adapt their usual processes or frameworks.

The fourth resourcing practice is the building of a diverse donor ecosystem which recognises the need for greater investment in grassroots movements, and can respond to communities' varied needs. Building an ecosystem response requires uplifting grantees' experiences and work through philanthropic advocacy, to build donors' capacity to align their resourcing with movements' needs. Equally, it requires embracing complementarity and coordination, ensuring movements have access to RRGs, as well as larger, multi-year grants.

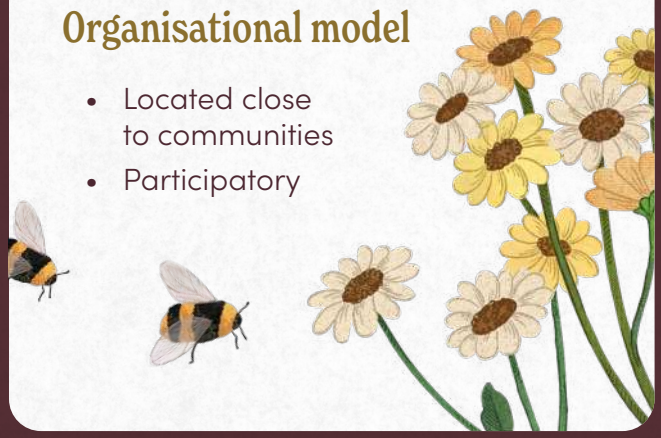
Organisational models and philanthropic cultures

It must be emphasised that, as an exploration of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' work suggests, these frameworks and resourcing practices are only effective when they are implemented within specific organisational models and philanthropic cultures. Feminist philanthropy is concerned with ceding power. As such, it is delivered through models which seek to bring resources closer to communities. This often includes the integration of participatory models whereby decisions are made by those who share identities and/or experiences with the communities that resources are intended to benefit.

Philanthropic culture is equally central to the frameworks that underpin a feminist philanthropic crisis response. A movement-led response necessitates a willingness to take institutional risks, in order to address the significant personal risks faced by activists daily. It necessitates flexibility, including through a willingness to change processes, and even mandates, to respond to communities' contextual and emergent needs. Equally, it entails a willingness to undertake labour, and engage with frustrating and difficult work, in service of movements – from building contextual knowledge to understand lived realities beyond one's own, to commitments to language justice and disability justice, to engaging in philanthropic spaces where there are deep value tensions. This is challenging work, necessitating internal practices of collective care to ensure staff can show up for activists, and each other, with the "capacity for compassion" (Leiper O'Malley, 2024).

Organisational model

- Located close to communities
- Participatory



Core frameworks

- Movement-led resourcing
- Multidimensional intersectionality
- Collective care



Resourcing practices

- Value-led, holistic grantmaking
- Rhizomic resourcing
- Reciprocal relationships
- Ecosystem responses



Internal Culture

- Willingness to hold institutional risk
- Flexibility
- Acting in service of movements
- Internal collective care practices



Key recommendations

At the heart of this report are six, core recommendations for how to effectively respond to, and look beyond, an era of permacrisis. These recommendations are:



Embrace equity and justice:

Recognise the need to respond to the inherently political nature of crisis, and its co-option in service of anti-rights agendas, by taking an explicit position in support of equity and justice.



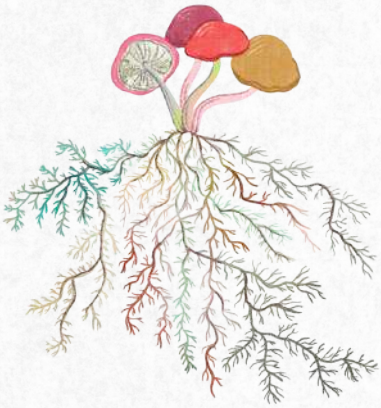
Respond across the continuum of crisis:

Respond both to visible punctures and to the structural harms that shape (and transcend) these punctures, creating everyday precarity.



Adopt intersectional resourcing:

Tailor responses to account for the fact that identities, crises and harms intersect, meaning that crises fall unevenly and exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Be open to a multiplicity of intersections that shape communities' lived realities.



Reject a tyranny of the urgent:

Reject false single-issue, single-actor 'solutions' in favor of holistic responses, pluralised decision-making, and non-linear approaches that nurture rights even amidst urgency.



Integrate collective care:

Centre collective care as a core framework for enabling communities to survive, and to live, within permacrisis – offering a means to heal intergenerational harms, reshape our relationships with each other and the planet, and move towards a reimagined future.



Centre and scale resourcing for grassroots solutions:

Recognise that feminist movements are already delivering effective responses to permacrisis through "multi-solving" (Mease, 2022, para. 2). Shift current resourcing modalities, whilst also increasing the size of spend and length of commitments, to enable this work to be scaled to meet the demands of this moment.

These core recommendations raise a range of strategic questions for philanthropists, bilateral and multilateral donors, and humanitarian actors, which are elaborated in the next few pages.

Strategic questions for philanthropists

- Are you meeting critical gaps in the current donor ecosystem? For example, are you resourcing communities in the Global South and East, targeting resources at the communities facing the greatest structural barriers in accessing funding, resourcing grassroots movements, and/or working with groups advancing rights and equity agendas? What structural barriers are you not currently recognising that could support you to more effectively target resources?
- What aspects of your approach are about meeting your needs as a donor or institution? How might these practices be harming communities or the effectiveness of your resourcing? What would it mean to reconceptualise your approach so it is driven by the communities you resource?
- In what ways could your current approach to protecting institutional risk be impeding the effectiveness of your resourcing and preventing you from meeting communities' needs? How could you reconceptualise risk?
- How could you move resources closer to the communities they are intended to benefit? Does your team have lived experience of the issues you seek to address? How can you integrate participatory approaches that cede decision-making power?
- What could shifting to value-led grantmaking look like for you? How can you construct more open frameworks that allow your grantees to address the multiplicity of intersections that arise in crises (and our lives)? Can you loosen geographical restrictions to respond to the transnational nature of the crises we face?
- How far do your current application and reporting processes allow for different needs? What would they look like if you centred language justice and disability justice?
- How far do you understand the diverse realities of communities living in crisis? What do you need to do to acquire contextual and up-to-date knowledge (being mindful of the need to do this in non-extractive ways)?
- What would it mean for you to shift from resourcing organisations to resourcing movements? Would it change your decisions about how you distribute funds? How might movement resourcing speak to different foundational needs to sustain collective work?
- What resourcing is required to sustain movements over the long-term in an era of permacrisis? What intangible resources (care, solidarity, acuerpamiento, connection, authenticity, etc) can you offer in the way you relate to the communities you support? How can you support a broader range of crisis and care infrastructures through your resourcing?
- How can you use your power and privilege to support grantees' social change agendas? What opportunities do you have to shift the wider donor ecosystem so it better meets communities' needs?

Strategic questions for those delivering Humanitarian Response

- What opportunities are there to partner with, and learn alongside, Feminist Funds recognising complementary expertise and shared agendas? How could the Urgent Action Sister Funds' early warning system (see box 3 in the appendix) support preparedness and rapidity? How could Feminist Funds, and feminist movements, support targeted responses to communities that Humanitarian Response is not currently reaching?
- How can we resist the push towards narrow needs-based approaches, particularly in the wake of budget cuts and challenges to the legitimacy of Humanitarian Response? How could recognising shared agendas (across human rights and Humanitarian Response) support more effective challenges to 'the neutrality trap'? Does the current moment of burgeoning needs and funding crisis create an opening, necessitating us to consider how we can prevent perpetual and expanding humanitarian crises?
- How can we shift from a localisation agenda to an approach which centres the pre-existing autonomy and approaches of communities responding to crisis? How can we reconceptualise core concepts (including risk, capacity, and neutrality) to ensure the value of community responses are recognised? Are there opportunities to rethink decision-making structures to ensure decisions are driven by those with lived experience of humanitarian crises, and that decision-making is pluralised?
- What aspects of a framework of multidimensional intersectionality are not reflected in current needs assessments? How could a more holistic view of communities' experiences increase Humanitarian Responses' capacity to reach individuals and communities with the highest rates of mortality and morbidity?
- How can we respond more holistically to account for communities' needs beyond survival? What intangible resources do communities need to live within, and beyond, crisis? How does considering these needs (for community, connection, planetary wellbeing, love, etc) shift the way we organise and deliver Humanitarian Response?
- How can we increase resourcing for wellbeing given its centrality to survival and sustaining communities in protracted crises, as well as its connection to living lives with meaning and value? What opportunities are there within MHPSS (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support) to move beyond narrow therapeutic and biomedical approaches to reflect the multilayered, holistic, and pluralistic nature of wellbeing? How does a recognition that community is important in its own right shift our approach to wellbeing?

A call to action

The recommendations and questions above point to the need for a radical shift away from current resourcing models. Feminist crisis response calls for us not just to tinker within current approaches, but to shift the foundational ideas that underpin current thinking and practice. It calls for us to look beyond neutral humanitarianism, to rethink capacity and risk from the perspective of local actors, and to reshape philanthropy in service of communities and movements.

This work is daunting but feminist movements aren't waiting. Despite being chronically underfunded by those outside of their communities, feminist movements are delivering solutions along the continuum of crisis, that benefit us all. Donors just need to step up to meet them. Our capacity to move beyond an era of permacrisis depends on it.

References

Acacio, I., Passos, A. and Pion-Berlin, D. (2022). Military Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis in Latin America: Military Presence, Autonomy, and Human Rights Violations. *Armed Forces & Society*, 49(2), pp. 372-394. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X211070035

ActionAid (2021). *Covid-19 and Civic and Democratic Space*. ActionAid. [Online]. Available at: https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Uganda%20factsheet_0.pdf [Accessed 1 May 2025].

Ahmann, C. (2018). "It's exhausting to create an event out of nothing": Slow Violence and the Manipulation of Time. *Cultural Anthropology*, 33(1), pp. 142-171. Available at: https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.06

Al-Abdeh, M. and Patel, C. (2019). 'Localising' humanitarian action: reflections on delivering women's rights-based and feminist services in an ongoing crisis. *Gender & Development*, 27(2), pp. 237–252. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2019.1615280

Amnesty International. (2023). European governments donors' discriminatory funding restrictions to Palestinian civil society risk deepening human rights crisis. *Amnesty International*. 28 November. [Online]. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/european-governments-donors-discriminatory-funding-restrictions-to-palestinian-civil-society-risk-deepening-human-rights-crisis/ [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Anderson, B., Grove, K., Rickards, L. and Kearnes, M. (2019). Slow emergencies: Temporality and the racialized biopolitics of emergency governance. *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(4), pp. 621-639. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519849263

Asaad, S. and Vilkomerson, R. (2025). *Repression, retrenchment and resilience. Philanthropy and support for Palestinian liberation after a year of genocide*. Funding Freedom. [Online]. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IHvBBw2td27cgmJlcQR7ZfHnTLE2cVOP/view [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. (2019). *Feminist funding principles*. Unpublished.

Ayyash, M. (2024). Colonial Racial Capitalism and Violence: Theorising the Relationship between Empire and Israeli Settler Colonialism. *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 23(2). Available at: https://doi.org/10.3366/hlps.2024.0339

Baguios, A., King, M., Martins, A. and Pinnington, R. (2021). *Are we there yet? Localisation as the journey towards locally led practice.* ODI. [Online]. Available at: https://media.odi.org/documents/ODI-SH-Localisation-Report-Oct21-Proof06.pdf [Accessed 20th September 2025].

Barbelet, V. (2019). *Rethinking capacity and complementarity for a more local humanitarian action*. ODI. [Online]. Available at: https://media.odi.org/documents/12957.pdf [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Barry, J. and Đorđević, J. (2007). *What's the point of the revolution if we can't dance?* Colorado: Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights.

Belloni, R. (2007). The trouble with humanitarianism. *Review of International Studies*, 33, pp. 451–474. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210507007607

Black Feminist Fund. (2025). *Our grantmaking.* [Online] Available at: https://blackfeministfund.org/grantmaking/#:~:text=Cooperation%20not%20competition,women%20and%20gender%20expansive%20people [Accessed 18 June 2025].

Brilliant, E. (2000). Women's Gain: Fund-Raising and Fund Allocation as an Evolving Social Movement Strategy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 29(4), pp. 554-570. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764000294005

Brown, S., Mena, R. and Brown, S. (2024). The peace dilemma in the triple nexus: challenges and opportunities for the humanitarian–development–peace approach. *Development in Practice,* 34(5), pp. 568–584. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2024.2334774

Buonfino, A. (2004). Between unity and plurality: the politicization and securitization of the discourse of immigration in Europe. *New Political Science*, 26(1), pp. 23–49. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0739314042000185111

Cabnal, L. (2010). Feminismos diversos: *El feminismo comunitario.* Barcelona: ACSUR-Las Segovias.

Callahan, J. (1994). Defining Crisis and Emergency. T*he Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 15(5), pp. 164-71. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/15470336_Defining_crisis_and_emergency

Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy. (2022). *Measuring the state of disaster philanthropy: Data to drive decisions.* Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy. [Online]. Available at: https://www.issuelab.org/resources/41134/41134.pdf [Accessed 19 January 2024].

Chacko, D. and Chakraborty, R. (2024). Disproportionate Impact of Climate Change: Housing Crisis and Displacement among the Transgender Community in India. In: Samanta, D. and Garg, M. (eds.) *The Climate Change Crisis and Its Impact on Mental Health* Hershey: ICI Global, pp. 198-212. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-3272-6

Civic Futures (2023). *The Security Playbook.* Civic Futures. [Online]. Available at: https://civic-futures.org/the-security-playbook/ [Accessed 15 January 2025].

Clark, C., Sprenger, E. and Veneklasen, L. (2006). *Where is the money for women's rights? Assessing resources and the role of donors in the promotion of women's rights and the support of women's organizations.* AWID. [Online]. Available at: https://awdflibrary.org/index.php?p=show_detail&id=1106 [Accessed 3rd February 2024].

Clerkin, B. and Quinn, M. (2019). Restricted funding: Restricting development? *Voluntas*, 30, pp. 1348–1364. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-00048-6

CLIMA Fund, Global Greengrants Fund, Grassroots International, Thousand Currents and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights. (2023). *Soil to sky: Climate solutions that transform.* [Online]. Available at: https://climasolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CLIMA-Soil-to-Sky-Climate-Solutions-That-Transform.pdf [Accessed 20 June 2025].

Council on Foundations and Foundation Center (2018). *The state of global giving by US Foundations:* 2011-2015. Council on Foundations and Foundation Center. [Online]. Available at: https://www.issuelab.org/resources/31306/31306.pdf [Accessed 24 January 2024].

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. *Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, 1(8), pp. 139-167. Available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Cruz, M. and Luke, D. (2021). Methodology and academic extractivism: the neo-colonialism of the British university. In: Morreira, S., Luckett, K., Siseko, H., Kumalo, S. and Ramgotra, M. (eds.) *Decolonising Curricula and Pedagogy in Higher Education.* London: Routledge, pp.154-170.

Datta, N. (2025). *The Next Wave: How Religious Extremism Is Reclaiming Power.* [Online]. European Parliamentary Forum. Available at: https://www.epfweb.org/node/1147 [Accessed 2 July 2025].

Davies, R. (2022). Philanthropy and Disaster Response. *Philanthropisms Podcast.* [Podcast]. Available at: https://whyphilanthropymatters.com/podcast/philanthropy-and-disaster-response/ [Accessed 7 March 2024].

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1980). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Paris: Minuit.

Desalvo, C., Dossa, S. and Modungwa, B. (2023). Disrupting learning and evaluation practices in philanthropy from a feminist lens. *Gender & Development*, 31(2-3) pp. 617-635. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2023.2256580

Development Initiatives. (2023). *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023*. Development Initiatives. [Online]. Available at: https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023 [Accessed 13 May 2025].

Easterly, W. (2010). The cartel of good intentions: The problem of bureaucracy in foreign aid. *The Journal of Policy Reform*, 5(4), pp. 223–250. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1384128032000096823

Eddens, S. and Kroeger, K. (2022). Funders, it's time to change how we think about risk. *Alliance.* 15 November. Available at: https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/funders-its-time-to-change-how-we-think-about-risk/ [Accessed 7 January 2024].

Enari, D., and Viliamu Jameson, L. (2021). Climate Justice: a Pacific Island perspective. *Australian Journal of Human Rights,* 27(1), pp. 149–160. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2021.1950905

ERA. (2025). *Impact of US funding cuts on LGBTI+ rights organizations in the Western Balkans and Turkey.* ERA. [Online]. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BcOtAM49adb5MJZQP_v--BLAZXD8K5oK/view [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Erickson, B. (2018). Anthropocene futures: Linking colonialism and environmentalism in an age of crisis. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 38(1), pp. 111-128. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818806514

Eşençay, S. (2020). When COVID-19 Becomes a Political Ally: Poland's Law on Abortion. *LSE Politics Blogs*. 24 June. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/06/24/when-covid-19-becomes-a-political-ally-polands-law-on-abortion/ [Accessed 16 January 2025].

Eyakuze, C. (2023). Through the Philanthropic Lens. In: Black Feminist Fund (eds.) *Where is the Money for Black Feminist Movements?* Black Feminist Fund. [Online], pp. 12-23. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63e021d24b58945e72d0b01c/t/6455c25b760af64b44a3a2f9/1683341918324/Where+is+the+Money+for+Black+Feminist+Movements.pdf

Feldman, I. (2012). The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Developmen*t, 3(2), pp. 155-172. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2012.0017

Flegal, J., Hubert, A., Morrow, D., and Moreno-Cruz, J. (2019). Solar geoengineering: Social science, legal, ethical, and economic frameworks. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources,* 44 pp. 399–423. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-102017-030032

Funke, P. (2012). The Global Social Forum Rhizome: A Theoretical Framework. *Globalizations,* 9(3), pp. 351–64. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2012.680727

Gillespie, E. (2019). *Women's Foundations and funds: A landscape study.* Women's Philanthropy Institute. [Online]. Available at: https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/e2a43bf0-b645-48c9-8ec5-5d8805aaf7dc/content [Accessed 26 January 2024].

Global Fund for Women. (2024). *What is feminist philanthropy?* [Online]. Global Fund for Women. Available at: https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/what-we-do/women-in-philanthropy-a-feminist-philanthropy-infographic/ [Accessed 14 February 2024].

Global Philanthropy Project. (2020). *Understanding the resourcing of the global "anti-gender ideology" movement.* Global Philanthropy Project. [Online]. Available at: https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/MTM-Summary-.pdf [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Global Resilience Fund. (2025). *Accompaniment: The practice of solidarity, care, accountability, and trust.* Global Resilience Fund. [Online]. Available at: https://www.theglobalresiliencefund.org/accompaniment#:~:text=Accompaniment%20can%20also%20be%20understood,to%20support%20each%20other's%20struggles [Accessed 13 January 2025].

Greener, C. (2022). T*wo Years at the Forefront: Exploring the needs and experiences of women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ led organizations two years into the Ukraine humanitarian response.* Oxfam. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.21201/2024.000018

Habib, L., Hassan, M., and Akil, C. (2021). The story of the Doria Feminist Fund: de-colonising the funding narrative in the MENA region. *Gender & Development*, 29(2-3), pp. 611-622. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.1982544

Hagelund, A. (2020). After the refugee crisis: public discourse and policy change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8(13), pp. 1-17. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0169-8

Hayes, B. and Joshi, P. (2019). *Rethinking civic space in an age of intersectional crises: a briefing for funders.* Funders Initiative for Civil Society. [Online]. Available at: https://www.fundersinitiativeforcivilsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FICS-Rethinking-Civic-Space-Report-FINAL1.pdf [Accessed 16 January 2025].

Hersi, F. and Kabachwezi, E. (2022). *Overlooked and Unseen: Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan Human rights defenders living with disabilities in conflict countries.* DefendDefenders. [Online]. Available at: https://defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-PWD-Report.pdf [Accessed 16 March 2025].

Hessini, L. (2020). Financing for gender equality and women's rights: the role of Feminist Funds, *Gender & Development,* 28(2), pp. 357-376. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2020.1766830

Hines, R. (2007). Natural Disasters and Gender Inequalities: The 2004 Tsunami and the Case of India. *Race, Gender & Class,* 14(1/2), pp. 60–68. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675195

Hooks, B. (1999). *All about love: new visions.* New York: William Morrow.

Houldey, G. (2021). *The Vulnerable Humanitarian: Ending Burnout Culture in the Aid Sector.* London: Routledge.

Human Rights Funders Network (2020). *Advancing Human Rights: Annual Review of Global Foundation Grantmaking. Human Rights Funders Network.* HRFN. [Online]. Available at: https://www.hrfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/HRFN-Advancing-Human-Rights-2020-Full-Report.pdf [Accessed 16 January 2025].

Human Rights Funders Network. (2022). *Funding for Intersectional Organising: A Call to Action for Human Rights Philanthropy.* HRFN. [Online]. Available at: https://www.hrfn.org/resources/ahr-intersectionality-report-2022/ [Accessed 19 December 2023].

Hurlbert, M., Acharibasam, J., Datta, R., Strongarm, S. and Starblanket, E. (2024). Decolonizing Indigenous Drinking Water Challenges and Implications: Focusing on Indigenous Water Governance and Sovereignty. *Water,* 16(5), pp. 748. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/w16050748

Kaiser, B., Thiele, K., Jansen, E., Paterino, A., Avelino, F. and Wijsman, K. (2025). Power and Polycrisis: on the durability of capitalism-patriarchy-colonialism (CPC). *Journal of Political Power,* 18(1), pp. 147–164. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2025.2453234

Kamal, A. and Fujimatsu, R. (2024). *From humanitarian resistance to resilience: Nation-building inactive conflict.* ODI. [Online]. Available at: https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/HPN_NP88_HumanitarianResistance-Final-090424-web.pdf [Accessed 2 June 2025].

Khoury, R. and Scott, E. (2024). Going local without localization: Power and humanitarian response in the Syrian war. *World Development*, 174, pp. 1-13. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106460

KIT Institute. (2025). *Building narrative power for gender justice in Latin America – La Alianza Latinoamericana de Fondos de Mujeres y Feministas.* KIT Institute. [Online]. Available at: https://www.kit.nl/institute/publication/building-narrative-power-for-gender-justice-in-latin-america/ [Accessed 15 September 2025].

Knapp, C., Reid, R., Fernández-Giménez, M., Klein, J., and Galvin, K. (2019). Placing Transdisciplinarity in Context: A Review of Approaches to Connect Scholars, Society and Action. *Sustainability,* 11(18), pp. 4899-4924. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/su11184899

Knowles, S. (2020). Slow disaster in the Anthropocene: A historian witnesses climate change on the Korean peninsula. *Daedalus*, 149(4), pp. 192–206. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_01827

Latimer, T. (2023). *Small Isn't Beautiful: The Case Against Localism.* Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

Layode, M., Schwier, J., Hayi-Charters, S., Holland, M. and Andrian, S. (2021). *Disparities in Funding for African NGOs: Unlocking philanthropy for African NGOs as a pathway to greater impact.* African Philanthropy Forum and The Bridgespan Group. [Online]. Available at: https://www.africanpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/disparities-in-funding-for-african-ngos-report.pdf [Accessed 24 January 2024].

Leigh, D. (2024). Transness as insecurity: Anti-trans movements and the security politics of reproduction. *Security Dialogue*, 56(1), pp. 3-20. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106241283282

Lever, E., Staszewska, K., and Miller, K. (2020). *Money more money to the drivers of change: How multilateral and bilateral funders can resource feminist movements.* AWID and Mama Cash. [Online]. Available at: https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/MovingMoreMoney_FINALFINAL.pdf [Accessed 24 January 2024].

Lough, O., Phillips, S., Spencer, A. and Daigle, M. (2023). *Beyond survival: Exploring wellbeing in humanitarian action.* HPG working paper. ODI. [Online]. Available at: https://media.odi.org/documents/Beyond_survival_WP_Lough_final_M13QblB.pdf [Accessed 1 July 2025].

Lukomnik, J., Frazer, S., Cabral Grinspan, M., and Nepon, E. (2024a). *The State of Trans Organizing (3rd Edition).* Global Philanthropy Project. [Online]. Available at: https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The_State_of_Trans_Organizing_2024.pdf [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Lukomnik, J., Frazer, S., Cabral Grinspan, M., and Nepon, E. (2024b). *The State of Intersex Organizing (3rd Edition).* Global Philanthropy Project. [Online]. Available at: https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The_State_of_Intersex_Organizing_2024.pdf [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Mama Cash (2024). *In Movement Together: Funding feminist activism globally.* MamaCash. [Online]. Available at: https://strategicguide.mamacash.org/ [Accessed 14 February 2024].

Markusson, N., Ginn, F., Ghaleigh, N. and Scott, V. (2014). 'In case of emergency press here': framing geoengineering as a response to dangerous climate change. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change,* 5, pp. 281-290. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.263

McClearn, J., Jensen, R., and Talhouk, R. (2023). Othered, Silenced and Scapegoated: Understanding the Situated Security of Marginalised Populations in Lebanon, SEC '23: Proceedings of the 32nd USENIX Conference on Security Symposium, 259, 4625 - 464. Available at: https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2306.10149

McConnell, A. (2020). *The Politics of Crisis Terminology.* Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1590 [Accessed 28 February 2024].

McEwan, C. (2021). Decolonizing the Anthropocene. In: Chandler, D., Müller, F., Rothe, D. (eds.) *International Relations in the Anthropocene.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 77-94.

McHugh, L., Lemos, M. and Morrison, T. (2021). Risk? Crisis? Emergency? Implications of the new climate emergency framing for governance and policy. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 12(6). Pp. 1-15. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.736

Mease, L. (2022). Rethinking Scale in Climate Solutions. *Stanford Social Innovation Review.* 26 October. SSIR. [Online] Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/rethinking_scale_in_climate_solutions [Accessed 14 January 2025].

MEL Core Group. (2024). *Sister Funds' Grants Data Analysis.* Unpublished.

MEL Core Group. (2025). *Sister Funds' Grants Data Analysis.* Unpublished.

Mills, C., Firth, L. and Cairns, B. (2024). *Time to end the dominance of short-term grants: The evidence for multi-year funding.* Institute for Voluntary Action Research. [Online]. Available at: https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Time-to-end-the-dominance-of-short-term-grants-the-evidence-for-multi-year-funding-February-2024.pdf [Accessed 13 May 2024].

Monbiot, G. (2003). The myth of localism. *The Guardian.* 9 September. [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/sep/09/economy.wto [Accessed 28 May 2024].

Morley, A. and Silver, R. (2024). Undoing Aid: UK Aid Cuts, Development Relationships and Resourcing Futures in Malawi. *Development and Change*, 54(6), pp. 1452–1479. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12810

Mulder, F. (2023). The paradox of externally driven localisation: a case study on how local actors manage the contradictory legitimacy requirements of top-down bottom-up aid. *International Journal of Humanitarian Action,* 8(7), pp. 1-19. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-023-00139-0

Njeri, S. and Daigle, M. (2022). *Women leading local humanitarian response during the Covid-19 pandemic.* Humanitarian Policy Group working Paper. ODI. [Online]. Available at: https://odi.org/en/publications/women-leading-local-humanitarian-response-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/ [Accessed 28 September 2025].

NPC. (2024). *Shifting your funding practices during Covid-19.* NPC. [Online]. Available at: https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/covid-funding/ [Accessed 23 February 2024].

OECD netFWD (2019). *Philanthropy and Gender Equality: Insights on Philanthropy for Gender Equality.* OECD Development Centre. [Online]. Available at: https://www2.oecd.org/development/networks/Book-NetFWD_PolicyNoteOnGENDER_web.pdf [Accessed 24 January 2024].

Okech, A., Essof, S. and Carlsen, L. (2022). Movement building responses to COVID-19: lessons from the JASS mobilisation fund. *Economic Politics*, 39, pp. 249–269. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s40888-021-00241-9

Olmos-Vega, F., Stalmeijer, R., Varpio, L. and Kahlke, R. (2022). A practical guide to reflexivity in qualitative research: AMEE Guide No. 149. *Medical Teacher*, 45(3), pp. 241–251. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287

Onyeneho, N., Aronu, N., Igwe, I., Okeibunor J., Diarra, T., Anoko, J., Djingarey, M., Yoti, Z., Chamla, D. and Gueye, A. (2023). The Impact of the Ebola Virus Disease Epidemic among Women in the Provinces of North Kivu and Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Journal of Immunology Science*, 3, pp. 11-19. Available at: https://doi.org/10.29245/2578-3009/2023/S3.1103 [Accessed 15 January 2025].

Pringle, J. and Hunt, M. (2015). *Humanitarian Action* (living reference works entry). Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05544-2_235-1

Prospera. (2024). *Our members.* Prospera. [Online]. Available at: https://prospera-inwf.org/member-funds/ [Accessed 23 February 2024].

Prospera (2025). *Women's and Feminist Funds.* Prospera. [Online]. Available at: https://prospera-inwf.org/womens-funds/ [Accessed 29 April 2025].

Pruth, C. and Zillén, E. (2023). *Hope and resistance go together: The state of women human rights defenders 2023.* Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. [Online]. Available at: https://shorturl.at/BHuN1 [Accessed 1 April 2025].

Pursiainen, C. (2017). *The Crisis Management Cycle.* London: Routledge.

Pursiainen, C. (2022). *The Crisis Cycle.* Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.2037 [Accessed 28 February 2024].

Rodríguez Rondón, M. (2020). Bodies of Exception. *NACLA Report on the Americas,* 52(3), pp. 268–273. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2020.1809081

Roepstorff, K. (2020). A call for critical reflection on the localisation agenda in humanitarian action. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(2), pp. 284-301. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1644160

Saleh, L. and Sood, N. (2020). *Vibrant Yet UnderResourced: The State of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Movements.* Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and Mama Cash. [Online]. Available at: https://fundlbq.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Astraea_MamaCash_LBQ_Report_VDEF-v2-SPREADS.pdf [Accessed 25 January 2024].

Schad, A., Oztanriseven, F. and Grabowski, M. (2020). The Impact of Philanthropy during humanitarian disasters: A review of the literature. *Journal of Strategic Innovation and Sustainability,* 15(2), pp. 168-194. Available at: https://www.proquest.com/docview/2434860370?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals

Sekalala, S., Forman, L., Habibi, R. and Meier, B. (2020). Health and human rights are inextricably linked in the COVID-19 response. *BMJ Global Health*, 5, pp. 1-7. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003359

Sekyiamah, N. and Provost, C. (2024). *We need to know the humanitarian sector stands with us.* Institute for Journalism and Social Change, Global Fund for Women, MADRE, and Purposeful. [Online]. Available at: https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/The-Active-but-Underfunded-Role-Young-Women-and-Girls-Play-in-Crises-Web-1.pdf [Accessed 12 June 2025].

Shariatmadari, D. (2022). A year of 'permacrisis'. *Collins Dictionary Blog.* 1 November. Available at: https://blog.collinsdictionary.com/language-lovers/a-year-of-permacrisis/ [Accessed 20 April 2025].

Silva, M. (2025). How Philanthropy Can Flip the Conservative Playbook Before It's Too Late. *Common Future.* 18 March. [Online]. Available at: https://www.commonfuture.co/article/how-philanthropy-can-flip-the-conservative-playbook-before-it-s-too-late [Accessed 2 July 2025].

Slim, H. (2020). You don't have to be neutral to be a good humanitarian. *The New Humanitarianism.* 27 August. [Online]. Available at: https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/08/27/humanitarian-principles-neutrality [Accessed 8 January 2025].

Smith, J. (2019). Overcoming the 'tyranny of the urgent': integrating gender into disease outbreak preparedness and response. *Gender & Development,* 27(2), pp. 355-369. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2019.1615288

Spring, U. (2025). Engendered-Sustainable Peace in the Patriacene: Future Threatened by Violence, Climate Change, Pandemics, and Tipping Points. *Peace and change*, 50(1), pp. 3-30. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12743

Teixeira, M. and Motta, R. (2024). Broadening the Climate Movement: The Marcha das Margaridas' Agenda for the Climate (and Other) Crises. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 37, pp. 513–541. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-023-09464-z

Thornton, L. (2021). How authoritarians use gender as a weapon. *The Washington Post.* 7 June. [Online]. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/06/07/how-authoritarians-use-gender-weapon/ [Accessed 16 January 2025].

UNHCR (2025). *Humanitarian Principles.* UNHCR. [Online]. Available at: https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/protection-principles/humanitarian-principles [Accessed 27 October 2025].

UN Women (2025). *At a breaking point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women's organizations in humanitarian crises worldwide.* UN Women. [Online]. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/05/at-a-breaking-point-the-impact-of-foreign-aid-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-crises-worldwide [Accessed 12 June 2025].

UNWRA. (2024). *Final report for the United Nations Secretary-General: Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality.* UNWRA. [Online]. Available at: https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf [Accessed 17 June 2025].

Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism. (2023). *Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism – 2023 qualitative analysis slides.* Unpublished.

Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean. (2023). *How Can We Ground Ourselves in Care and Dance Our Revolution?* [Online]. Urgent Action Sister Funds. Available at: https://rootingcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FAU_RootingCare_en.pdf [Accessed 3 January 2024].

Urgent Action Sister Funds. (2022). *Sisterhood Feminist Principles of Philanthropy.* Urgent Action Sister Funds. [Online]. Available at: https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/UAF_PoP_FINAL_Single-pages_WEB_25032022.pdf [Accessed 2 March 2025].

Urgent Action Sister Funds. (2024). *Briefing Paper on the Sister Funds RRG Model - Draft v2.* Unpublished.

Urgent Action Sister Funds. (n.d.). *Care at the Centre: A global offering from the Urgent Action Sister Funds.* Colorado: Urgent Action Sister Funds.

Uzelman, S. (2005). Hard at work in the bamboo garden: Media activists and social movements. In: Langlois, A. and Dubois, F. (eds.) *Autonomous media: Activating resistance and dissent.* Montreal: Cumulus Press, pp. 17-27.

Vey, J. and Storring, N. (2022). *Hyperlocal: Place Governance in a Fragmented World.* Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

Viktorivna, O. (2024). The Concept of Rhizome as a theoretical and methodological approach in the study of society within the postmodern paradigm. *Scientific Knowledge: Methodology and Technology*, 53, pp. 24-49. Available at: https://doi.org/10.24195/sk1561-1264/2024-1-6

VuLee (2018). 10 things progressive funders must learn from conservative ones, or we are all screwed. *Third Sector.* 13 December. [Online]. Available at: https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/vu-le-10-things-progressive-funders-learn-conservative-ones-screwed/fundraising/article/1521135 [Accessed 12 June 2025].

VuLee. (2025). Funders, here's the blueprint for saving democracy. *Non-profit AF.* 14 April. [Online]. Available at: https://nonprofitaf.com/2025/04/funders-heres-the-blueprint-for-saving-democracy/ [Accessed 2 July 2025].

WeWorld. (2020). *The Triple Nexus: Questions and Answers on Integrating Humanitarian, Development and Peace Actions in Protracted Crises.* WeWorld. [Online]. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/triple-nexus-questions-and-answers-integrating-humanitarian-development-and-peace#:~:text=The%20Nexus%20is%20an%20operational%20framework%20that%20entails,context%20analyses%2C%20needs%20assessments%2C%20and%20common%20 [Accessed 16 January 2024].

Wong, N. (2024). *When No Thing Works: A Zen and Indigenous Perspective on Resilience, Shared Purpose, and Leadership in the Timeplace of Collapse.* California: North Atlantic Books.

List of interviews

Abou-Habib, L. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 26 August 2024.

Alpizar, L. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 12 August 2024.

Amir, M. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 29 July 2024.

Anonymous 2. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 30 July 2024.

Anonymous 3. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 13 August 2024.

Anonymous 4. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 20 August 2024.

Anonymous 5. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 26 August 2024.

Buadromo. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 17 July 2024.

Cortés, E. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 4 July 2024.

Cruz, S. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 15 July 2024.

Gorani, A. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 8 August 2024.

Gualberto, A. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 22 July 2024.

Kabore, M. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 23 August 2024.

Kemitare, J. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 19 September 2024.

Leiper O'Malley, D. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 23 August 2024.

Marcía, S. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 5 July 2024.

Maskay, J. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 17 July 2024.

Menon, D. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 25 June 2024.

Mulugeta, M. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 8 August 2024.

Navarrete, D. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 19 July 2024.

Nowak, S. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 18 July 2024

Obianwu, O. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 15 July 2024.

Sahasranaman, V. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 17 July 2024.

Singh, N. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 8 July 2024.

Tedla, H. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 16 August 2024.

Tohme, J. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 22 July 2024.

Trinidad, Y. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 24 September 2024.

Wainaina, M. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 14 August 2024.

Werunga, C. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 31 July 2024.

Yocogan-Diano, V. (2024). Interview. Feminist crisis response for research study. 26 June 2024.

Appendix

Box 1: Core features of collective care

1. **Multi-layered and political:** Collective care entails broad responsibility to ourselves, each other, and the planet. Collective care is a political act which moves us towards liberation.
2. **Holistic and intersectional:** Collective care embraces a broad view of wellbeing, including embracing planetary and spiritual wellbeing, embracing a range of associated healing modalities.
3. **Concerned with the roots of harm:** Collective care focuses on approaches (such as healing justice) which seek to explore and address the causes of trauma, harm and violence.
4. **Grounded in ancestral and community knowledge:** Collective care focuses on uplifting the knowledge and care practices that already exist in movements and communities, particularly centring the deep knowledge and longstanding care practices of Black and Indigenous communities.
5. **Pluralistic:** Collective care practices should be shaped and determined by communities themselves, reflecting the differences and complexity of each individual and communities' experiences.
6. **Relational and everyday:** Collective care is not an add-on, but shapes how we see, and are, in the world.

Table 1: Features of mental health and collective care, highlighting some of the differences between Western models of wellbeing and the Urgent Action Sister Funds' collective care framework

Features of mental health	Features of collective care
Focus on the individual	Focus on the collective: how the wellbeing of the individual, their community, and the planet are interconnected
Mental health viewed as a universal and shared experience	Recognises individual's and communities' experiences of trauma and harm are distinct and shaped by context and identity
Treated as an isolated condition, disconnected from social context	Understood holistically, with wellbeing viewed as intrinsically tied to spirituality, physical health, planetary wellbeing, and experiences of structural harms
Focus on immediate symptomatology	Concern with healing and addressing roots of distress, including intergenerational and collective trauma
Apolitical, understood as a broadly inward-looking concern	*"*A political ethos*"* connected to collective liberation (Cortés, 2024)
Solutions continue to reinforce separateness: medicalisation, self-help, institutionalisation	Solutions emphasise reconnection: to each other, wounds of the past, the planet
Entangled with capitalism and consumerism, with recovery premised on individual wealth and access to healthcare	Focused on long-standing knowledge and practices of Black and Indigenous communities - care can be centred through fostering and supporting community resources, often outside of formal health systems
Characterised by discrete interventions	Characterised by a centring within everyday life and practices
An enabler of a healthy life and improver of our relationship with others	An enabler of a healthy and joyful life, deep reciprocal relationships, sustainable and transformational activism, and just futures

Box 2: An overview of features of movement-led resourcing

1. **Movement-focused:** Movement-led resourcing strategies consider how to nurture sustainable movements, as opposed to being focused on strengthening individuals or groups in isolation.
2. **Needs-led:** Movement-led resourcing is shaped by the needs of movements and communities who are facing the most acute impacts from structural harms and crises. This means resourcing seeks to amplify and support pre-existing movement approaches - and is flexible and responsive to needs that arise. Movement-led resourcing involves developing processes and cultures which centre movements' needs over those of donors, such as through taking institutional risks to address the personal risks activists face.
3. **Contextually relevant:** Movement-led resourcing speaks to movement's specific lived realities, ensuring resourcing is relevant and amplifies movement's pluralistic and contextually relevant forms of crisis response.
4. **Participatory:** Movement-led resourcing is shaped by, and meaningfully involves, ceding power to movement actors in decision-making.
5. **Non-extractive:** Movement-led resourcing seeks to minimise the time, energy, and costs involved for movements to apply for and manage funds – from simple application processes, to donors who proactively acquire the contextual knowledge to resource effectively.
6. **Centres equity and justice:** Movement-led resourcing shares, and seeks to bolster, movements' equity and justice agendas through financial and non-financial resourcing. Donor practices are committed to justice in process and outcome, grounded in anti-oppressive practice.

Table 2: An overview of the features of a framework of multidimensional intersectionality

Features of multidimensional intersectionality	Description	Example of resourcing response
Attention to intersecting identities	Structural oppressions intersect to create unique and compound structural barriers.	Targeted resourcing focused on groups facing compound discrimination, such as Black trans disability justice activists.
Attention to how identities interact with group and movement status	Organising status and identities create further structural barriers to accessing resources.	Flexible resourcing, includes a willingness to fund unregistered groups and resource groups in closed civic space.
Attention to intersections between crisis punctures and everyday/structural violence	Crisis punctures are rooted in structural harms, with communities facing a continuation (and often exacerbation) of structural harms during crisis punctures.	Resourcing is delivered across the continuum of crisis, such as addressing the way that groups are facing both the challenges of a crisis puncture (e.g., conflict) alongside structural violence (e.g., racism).
Attention to the fact that crises intersect (polycrisis)	Different crises layer, and compound, one another.	Resourcing supports non-siloed movement responses, such as facilitating activists working to tackle the climate crisis within a crisis of eroding civic space.
Attention to intersections of scale	Crises are often both experienced at scale but also at a local or individual level (such as the way the crisis of civic space results in attacks against individual activists or groups).	Resourcing is mobilised for individuals and groups, as well as at a large scale.
Attention to intersections between 'public' and 'private' harms	A recognition of continuums of violence, as well as the way the 'private work of living' is shaped by, and shapes, public space.	Resourcing recognises the need to support activists to live well.

Features of multidimensional intersectionality	Description	Example of resourcing response
Attention to intersections between human and planetary wellbeing	A recognition of the fact that the safety and wellbeing of people and planet is intrinsically connected.	Resourcing integrates climate justice, planetary care, and respects communities' relationship to land and place.
Concern with visibility	A recognition that multiple factors, including the nature of violence (e.g., 'slow' or protracted compared to 'spectacular'), and whose lives are impacted by violence, can render some harms less visible than others.	Resourcing approaches are proactive and targeted at crises and harms that are invisibilised in mainstream, hegemonic funding spaces.
Recognition of *"timeplace"* (Wong, 2024, p. 18)	The present is a moment between devolving and emergent worlds.	Responses in the present also speak to the role of the past and look to the future, such as through integrating healing justice approaches.
Consideration of *"the holistic human"* (Leiper O'Malley, 2024)	Efforts to avoid reductive approaches, recognising we each have distinct and unique experiences. A recognition of living in its wholeness.	Resourcing is grounded in reciprocal relationships and attempts to understand an individual's experiences and perspective. Resourcing is concerned with the *"politics of living"* (Feldman, 2012, para. 1).
Openness	Intersectionality is approached with an openness to numerous and messy interconnections, including those not yet imagined.	Resourcing is flexible – frameworks and criteria are loosened or changed in response to movements' lived realities.

Box 3: An overview of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' early warning system that supports crisis preparedness

Sources of information that feed into the early warning system can include:

- Long-term relationships with grantees and movement advisors. Discussions within these relationships are often broad and open, exploring topics beyond grantmaking.
- Staff's own experiences, which often overlap with those of advisors and grantees.
- Application and grantmaking data. The fact that this includes data which captures eroding civic space and is holistic (highlighting a range of forms of harms facing activists, groups, and movements) facilitates pattern-spotting.
- A wide range of external sources, such as information from social media or wider partnerships/networks. Access to a breadth of information is supported by a culture that emphasises the Urgent Action Sister Funds' staff holding up-to-date contextual knowledge.

The effective analysis of this information is enabled by:

- An organic, ad-hoc process which does not treat information with rigidity or as a checklist.
- Experience, which brings comparative data, an awareness of patterns, and in-depth knowledge that supports intuition.
- A global and holistic vantage point which enables the identification of transnational and intersecting crises, as well enabling cross-regional learnings.

How this information supports crisis preparedness and resilience:

- Enables conversations with groups and movements to build internal preparedness.
- Results in grants focused on building groups' and movements' preparedness.
- Facilitates non-financial resourcing, such as connection-building, strengthening groups' and movements' resilience.
- Enables the Urgent Action Sister Funds to fundraise and prepare its internal response, facilitating a rapid response when acute crises arise.
- Facilitates conversations with the Urgent Action Sister Funds' philanthropic partners, strengthening the crisis response across the philanthropic ecosystem.



URGENT ACTION FUNDS

Sustaining Feminist Activism Worldwide