ECONOMIST ENTERPRISE

The business of doing good in times of crisis:

how businesses can strengthen communities and organisational resilience

Supported by Institute of Philanthropy

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Foreword by the Institute of Philanthropy

Businesses can no longer view external crises as rare interruptions. Across Asia, climate-related disasters, public-health emergencies and other shocks are becoming more frequent, more complex and more interconnected. When communities are disrupted, businesses are disrupted too—through impacts on employees, supply chains, infrastructure and local economies. The resilience of communities and the resilience of businesses are therefore inseparable.

This reality challenges us to rethink the role of a business within its community in times of crisis. While emergency donations remain essential, they are only one part of the response. Increasingly, the greatest contributions businesses can make are through the capabilities they bring—their expertise, technology, products, logistics networks and people. The question is no longer whether companies should contribute, but how they can do so in ways that create lasting value for both society and business.

The importance of this broader role was demonstrated during the response to the devastating fire at Wang Fuk Court in Hong Kong in November 2025. The Institute of Philanthropy's founding funders, The Hong Kong Jockey Club and its Charities Trust, went beyond providing relief funding by mobilising their capabilities, networks and partnerships in close coordination with the Hong Kong SAR government and NGOs to support affected residents. By helping to address immediate needs while also contributing to longer-term recovery and community rebuilding, the response showed how timely, co-ordinated and sustained action can create lasting value for communities. It also demonstrated how effective crisis engagement can move swiftly from pledge to action when supported by preparedness, local knowledge and trusted partnerships. Importantly, this response was built on years of trust, collaboration and relationship-building with government, community organisations and other partners, demonstrating how sustained investment in partnerships can enable rapid and effective action when crises occur.

This report highlights an important opportunity for businesses across Asia to move beyond one-off acts of generosity towards a more deliberate and sustained approach to crisis preparedness, response and recovery. Its findings show that companies can create the greatest impact when they align their social investments with their strengths, work through trusted partnerships and focus on outcomes rather than inputs. In doing so, they can help communities become more resilient while strengthening trust, business continuity and long-term value creation.

The Institute of Philanthropy works to advance thought leadership, foster collaboration and unlock private capital for public good across Asia and beyond. Supporting this research reflects our belief that philanthropy can be a catalyst for stronger, more resilient societies and that businesses have an increasingly important role to play in addressing complex social challenges.

We extend our sincere thanks to Economist Enterprise, the experts and practitioners who shared their insights and the business leaders who participated in the research. We hope this report will encourage fresh thinking and practical action.

In a world where crises are becoming a defining feature of the operating environment, businesses have both an opportunity and a responsibility to help communities prepare for, withstand and recover from adversity. By doing so, they can create lasting value—not only for the communities they serve, but also for the resilience and sustainability of their own organisations.

Lester G Huang
Chairman, Institute of Philanthropy

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Foreword by Economist Enterprise

Businesses once treated disasters as interruptions: sudden shocks to endure before normal life resumed. That assumption is becoming harder to sustain. Across Asia, climate shocks, public-health emergencies and geophysical disasters are growing more frequent, complex and interconnected. Their effects spread through communities and businesses alike, disrupting workers, suppliers, infrastructure and local markets. Businesses depend on these communities to recover, so the resilience of the two is closely linked.

This report, supported by the Institute of Philanthropy, examines how businesses in Asia prepare for, respond to and recover from crises. Drawing on a survey of more than 1,600 executives across 14 markets and interviews with experts, it reveals a clear gap between response and recovery. Companies often act quickly but rarely stay the course. Emergency relief is common, yet fewer than a quarter of organisations remain involved in long-term recovery and resilience-building. Many have the leadership, training and money to respond, but far fewer have the teams, plans and partnerships to sustain their support once the immediate emergency has passed.

Long-term support need not require deeper pockets. Businesses should draw on what they already do well. Logistics companies can move essential supplies, while technology firms can help get aid to people faster and employees can offer skills and expertise that governments or charities lack. Yet companies underuse these strengths. Only 13% regularly provide their products and services, and even fewer offer skilled staff or help with leadership and co-ordination. Businesses should think not only about how much they can give, but also about what they can do that others cannot.

Making use of these strengths requires preparation before disaster strikes. Trust takes time to build and strong partnerships cannot be improvised in an emergency. Clear roles and established relationships turn good intentions into useful action.

This report offers a practical framework for businesses. It sets out five broad approaches companies take to support communities through crises and examines the structures and practices that make that support last. The framework helps companies assess where they stand, strengthen what is missing and apply lessons from each disaster to the next. That ability to learn and adapt can help ensure that each disaster leaves businesses and communities better prepared for the next.

Charles Ross
Head, policy and insights Asia-Pacific
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About the research

The business of doing good in times of crisis is the second instalment of *The Business of Doing Good*, a research programme by Economist Enterprise and supported by the Institute of Philanthropy—an independent think-fund-do tank established by The Hong Kong Jockey Club and its Charities Trust. The programme begins with the simple premise that social value and business value are closely linked. It explores this by examining the motivations, approaches and changes in how businesses create socio-economic value beyond shareholder maximisation.

This new instalment looks at what it means for businesses to do good in times of crisis, when the needs of communities can outweigh the competitive instincts of individual companies. Crises disrupt lives and livelihoods, and they strain the workers, suppliers, infrastructure and markets that communities depend on. Businesses that stand with communities before, during and after crises are helping people endure hardship. In doing so, they can also strengthen their own resilience, build trust and help local economies recover.[1]

The findings draw on expert interviews, panel discussions, desk research and a survey of over 1,600 executives across 14 Asian markets.* Together, they examine how businesses in Asia currently engage in crises, what prevents them from sustaining that support and how they can move beyond one-off emergency relief towards longer-term, collaborative action that strengthens communities and the wider systems on which businesses depend.

The report also introduces a practical framework for corporate crisis engagement. It is not a checklist or a prescribed path that every company should follow. Businesses differ in their size, sector, geography, risk exposure, resources and role in society. Instead, the framework helps companies assess their current approach, identify where they can improve and strengthen both social and business resilience over time.

Economist Enterprise thanks the experts who contributed their time and insights to this research (listed alphabetically by surname):

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* The 14 markets are: Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

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- **Ravin Trapshah**, global lead for sustainability engagement, Wilmar International

The research was conducted by a team of Economist Enterprise researchers, including Dina Alborno, Satvinderjit Kaur, Gillian Parker, Aashi Garg and Maryam Rasheed.

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Executive summary

Crises are becoming harder for businesses in Asia to treat as exceptional events. As disasters grow more frequent and complex, companies are learning that their own resilience depends in part on the communities around them. The Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 showed how one disaster could reshape communities, damage infrastructure and spur calls for companies to help in mainland China. More recently, floods in Pakistan in 2026, the Tai Po fire in Hong Kong in 2025 and the Noto Peninsula earthquake in Japan in 2024 have placed sudden pressure on households, public services and local economies. Climate shocks, public-health emergencies and conflict-driven supply disruptions can also overlap, leaving businesses to prepare for disruption that is increasingly difficult to predict or contain.[2]

The costs of crises are rising. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) estimates direct disaster losses at more than $200bn a year. Once wider economic and environmental damage is included, the cost exceeds $2.3trn.[3] Governments, businesses and communities all bear part of these costs, but none can build resilience alone. Closer collaboration allows each to contribute capabilities and resources that the others lack.

Many businesses already respond when disaster strikes. They donate money and goods, mobilise employee volunteers and support relief efforts. Yet even generous, well-organised emergency aid can do little to prepare communities for the next crisis. The challenge is not whether businesses should do more, but how they can engage better: shifting from ad hoc cheques, donations and volunteering towards using their assets, agility, capital, supply chains and expertise where they can do most good.

The benefits extend beyond the immediate response. Longer-term engagement can build trust with customers and employees, strengthen supply chains, support workers and keep local economies running. “Businesses first protect their people and operations, then work to keep critical services running for customers. Where there is a clear need, they can extend their capabilities to affected communities. That is how businesses can do good during crises: by using what they already do well where it is needed most,” says Florian Rhiza Nery, deputy programme co-ordinator at the Connecting Business Initiative, a joint programme led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Since businesses recover only as quickly as the communities around them, investing in community resilience also protects the business itself.

Corporate philanthropy has an important, if not always straightforward, part to play. Unlike separate charitable foundations, it must justify investment, demonstrate value and compete with other business priorities, while often being judged against expectations normally placed on independent charities.[4] It cannot fill every gap left by a government or meet every community need. Used well, however, corporate philanthropy becomes more than a source of funding. It helps companies build lasting relationships with communities and governments before disaster strikes, creating the trust and partnerships that make crisis response faster and more effective.[5]

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This research programme explores how companies can apply their capabilities, resources and networks across the full crisis lifecycle—before, during and after the emergency. It argues for a shift from one-off acts of generosity to a more deliberate and sustained approach to crisis preparedness, response and recovery, and examines how corporate philanthropy can support that transition.

Figure 1: Staying after the storm

How lifecycle engagement can strengthen communities and business resilience

From reactive engagement	To lifecycle engagement	Why this shift matters
Response begins once a crisis is visible	Preparedness, response, recovery and resilience are treated as connected phases	Businesses can act faster and with greater relevance, helping communities recover while reducing disruption to workers, suppliers, operations and local markets.
Support depends on leadership discretion, discretionary budgets or corporate social responsibility cycles	Crisis engagement is linked to clearly defined governance structures, risk profiles, operational needs and partnerships	Support becomes less vulnerable to delays, competing priorities or fragmented accountability, making it easier to sustain engagement and protect business continuity beyond the emergency phase.
Success is often measured by outputs, such as money donated, volunteers mobilised	Success is assessed through outputs, outcomes, learning and contribution to resilience	Businesses can demonstrate value more credibly by tracking both social outcomes and business benefits, including trust, workforce resilience, supply-chain stability, market recovery and preparedness for future shocks. Relationships with communities and government, often built through sustained corporate philanthropy, become a capability that can be leveraged during active crises.

Source: Economist Enterprise

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Key findings:

1. **Business resilience depends on community resilience.** Companies rely on the communities where they operate. When a crisis disrupts one, it also disrupts the other. Three-quarters of business leaders surveyed cite community impact as a leading reason for responding, ahead of executive leadership preference (54%) and operational or supply-chain disruption (35%). These motivations are closely linked rather than competing priorities. Supporting recovery does more than serve communities; it strengthens business resilience and helps protect a company's licence to operate.

2. **The most effective crisis responses begin locally and continue beyond the emergency.** Crisis response works best when it reflects local needs rather than corporate preferences. Yet fewer than one-quarter of companies surveyed respond primarily because local governments, NGOs or community organisations request support. Longer-term engagement is even less common. Across most forms of support, only 12–17% of organisations remain involved in resilience-building after the immediate emergency. Recovery should begin alongside emergency relief, with support that continues after public attention has shifted elsewhere.

3. **A company's greatest contribution is often not its cash, but its capabilities.** Money does matter. But businesses can often create greater value through their products, logistics, technology, data and skilled employees. Around half of surveyed organisations continue to share knowledge during longer-term recovery, while only 12–15% continue financial or in-kind support. Yet many companies make limited use of these capabilities. Only 13% regularly deploy products and services, 11% skilled employees and 9% leadership or co-ordination support. Business capabilities can become public assets in a crisis. Zhang Fan, assistant to the secretary-general at Tencent Charity Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Chinese technology company Tencent, describes this as a shift from a "capital philosophy" to a "capability philosophy". Corporate philanthropy, she argues, should mobilise a company's expertise as well as its financial resources.

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4. **Strong partnerships begin before crises strike.** Companies with trusted partners can mobilise faster and co-ordinate resources more effectively. More than half of surveyed organisations already work with governments, NGOs or business partners, yet fewer than one in five have formal links to national or regional disaster management frameworks. More than half say short-term funding makes partnerships difficult to sustain. Without co-ordination, well-intentioned support can duplicate efforts in some places while leaving gaps in others. Although only 11% of surveyed organisations have one, corporate foundations can help convene partners, identify unmet needs and align resources. The strongest responses are shaped with frontline organisations before crises occur and sustained throughout recovery.

5. **Companies should judge success by outcomes, not inputs.** Many companies still measure what is easiest to count: money donated, volunteers mobilised or supplies distributed. These indicators are useful, but they reveal little about whether support helped communities recover or become more resilient. More than seven in ten surveyed organisations identify better measurement of social and business returns as a priority. Stronger evidence also helps companies direct resources where they have the greatest impact and sustain investment when budgets come under pressure. Cost is already the biggest barrier to long-term engagement, cited by 62% of respondents and three-quarters of micro-organisations, defined as those with annual revenue of less than $50m. What matters is not how much companies give, but whether their support leaves communities better prepared for the next crisis.

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Chapter 1. Businesses show up. They rarely stay.

When crises strike, businesses across Asia show up. But companies differ in what prompts them to act, how they respond and whether they remain engaged once the emergency passes. Our survey suggests that while many businesses have the resources to help, far fewer have the systems needed to sustain that support.

Where companies focus their response, and what prompts them to act

Businesses act when a crisis is visible, systemic and close to home. Where community suffering and business exposure converge, engagement follows. Where the costs fall mainly on communities and the risks to individual businesses are less direct, engagement is rarer. The survey points to this pattern in two areas: the types of crises that draw business engagement and the factors that prompt companies to act.

Climate and weather-related disasters prompt the strongest corporate response. Almost two-thirds of surveyed organisations identify them as the crisis they engage with most often. This reflects the close link between community needs and business risk. Companies with large workforces, physical assets and complex supply chains are especially exposed to floods, storms, heatwaves and other climate hazards. Manufacturing and energy companies report the highest levels of engagement, at 68% and 73% respectively. Public-health emergencies rank second, cited by just over half of organisations. The lasting effects of the covid-19 pandemic continue to shape corporate priorities across Asia.

Cybersecurity incidents, such as those that disrupt public infrastructure like power grids, hospitals and transit systems, and socioeconomic crises both receive far less attention. Only one in ten surveyed organisations identify them as priorities. For cyber risk, this may reflect differences in digital maturity across markets,[6] the tendency to treat cybersecurity as an operational rather than societal issue or the lower visibility of these risks compared with floods or pandemics. Technology companies are the exception, reporting much higher engagement with cyber incidents.

Socioeconomic crises rarely have a single triggering event. They build slowly, through stagnant wages, unaffordable healthcare, precarious employment and disaster insurance that many households and small businesses cannot access. This makes these elements fundamental to resilience, dictating a community's capacity to withstand and recover from a crisis, whether it is a flood, a pandemic or a cyberattack. Much of this sits upstream of what any individual company can control. Wage floors, healthcare systems and insurance markets

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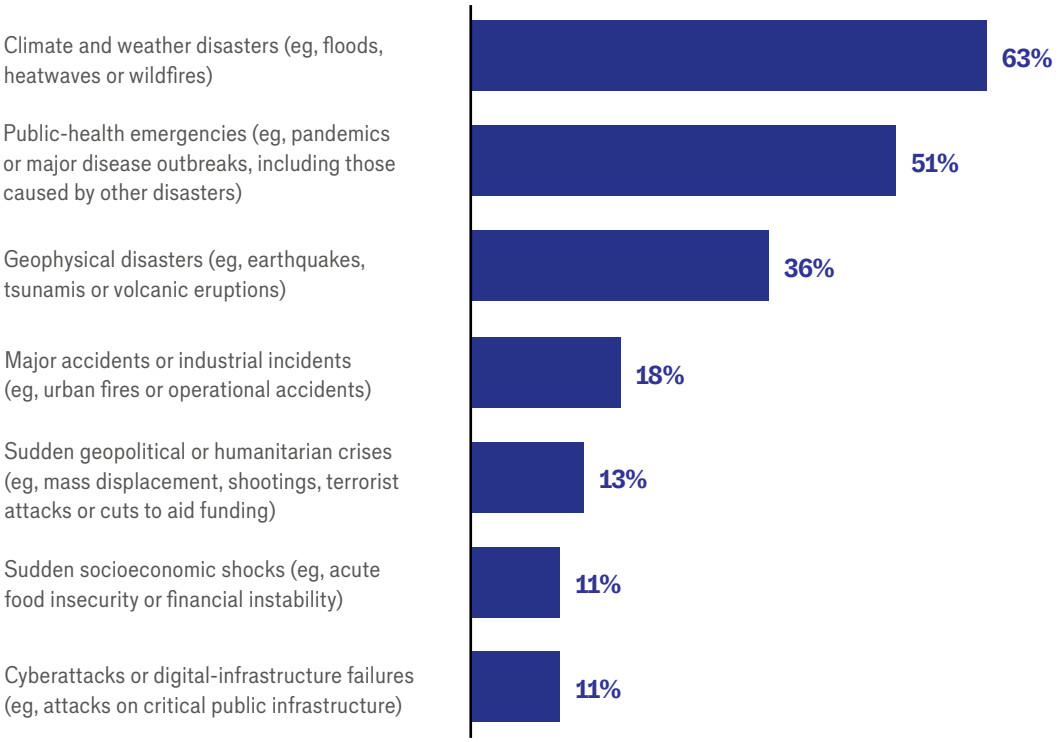
are substantially shaped by policy and regulation. Nevertheless, businesses still have real influence within that structure through the wages and benefits they provide workers and supplies, products designed for underserved markets and through support extended to the smaller businesses in their value chains, which tend to be hit hardest and recover slowest without it. Businesses that invest in these foundations also tend to build a reservoir of trust in the communities where they operate, with several experts we interviewed linking visible local engagement to stronger employee retention and motivation.

Businesses respond most readily to crises that disrupt both their operations and the communities around them.

The findings point to a simple conclusion. Businesses respond most readily to crises that disrupt both their operations and the communities around them. Climate events, health emergencies and geophysical disasters affect workers, infrastructure and supply chains at the same time, creating a clear business case for action. Cyber and socioeconomic crises can be just as damaging, but their effects are often less visible or more dispersed. Corporate engagement therefore depends not only on the scale of a crisis but also on how directly companies experience its impact alongside the communities they serve.

Figure 2: When disaster hits home

Types of crises that organisations primarily respond to, % of respondents



Source: Economist Enterprise survey, 2026

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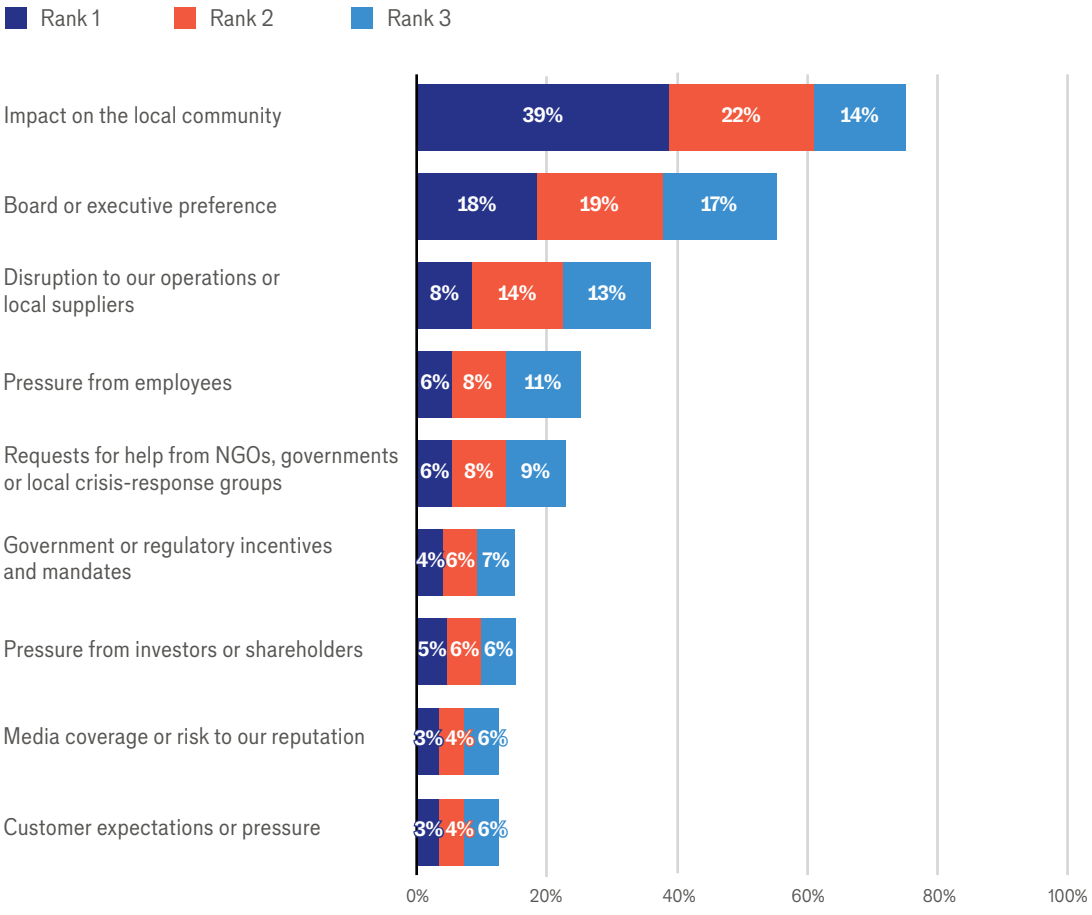
75% of business leaders surveyed cite community impact as a leading reason for responding to crises

Source: Economist Enterprise

The factors that prompt companies to act reinforce this pattern. The strongest driver of corporate crisis engagement is the severity of impact on local communities. Three-quarters of surveyed organisations rank this among their top three reasons for responding. Board or executive support follows, cited by 54%, while disruption to operations and supply chains ranks third, at 35%. Employee expectations (26%) and requests from NGOs, governments or community organisations (22%) also shape corporate responses.

Figure 3: Close to home, quick to act

Factors that prompt a corporate crisis response, % of respondents by rank



Source: Economist Enterprise survey, 2026

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Taken together, these findings suggest that corporate crisis engagement is neither pure philanthropy nor simple self-interest. The two reinforce each other. Businesses respond because communities are suffering, but also because the same crisis can disrupt workers, suppliers, customers and public services. Community need may prompt the initial response, but continued engagement depends on recognising that resilient communities also support resilient businesses.

Businesses respond because communities are suffering, but also because the same crisis can disrupt workers, suppliers, customers and public services.

Business leaders increasingly acknowledge this link. "We like to do good. But there has to be a justification. There has to be a return on investment," says Ravin Trapshah, global lead for sustainability engagement at Wilmar International, a Singapore-based agribusiness. The company assesses each crisis according to its relevance to the business, including the communities, countries and supply chains affected. A flood in Indonesia, where Wilmar has significant operations, is likely to prompt a different response from one elsewhere.

"We like to do good. But there has to be a justification. There has to be a return on investment."

Ravin Trapshah, global lead for sustainability engagement, Wilmar International

Mr Trapshah is equally clear that crisis engagement is no substitute for sound business practice. A company can give generously and still be "slammed" in the media over unrelated issues, such as environmental controversies that have nothing to do with the relief effort itself. Doing good, he says, is "not going to be a silver bullet" for a company's wider PR and reputational challenges. Rather than weaken the case for engagement, this clear-eyed view helps companies focus on where they can make the greatest contribution. That, in turn, makes long-term support easier to justify and sustain.

What systems are in place

Many companies already have the foundations for effective crisis engagement. Four in five surveyed organisations say senior leaders play a formal role in preparing for societal crises. Nearly three-quarters train employees for crisis response, and more than half hold pre-allocated response funds or ongoing partnerships with governments, NGOs or other businesses. Together, these provide the leadership, people, funding and relationships that enable companies to act quickly.

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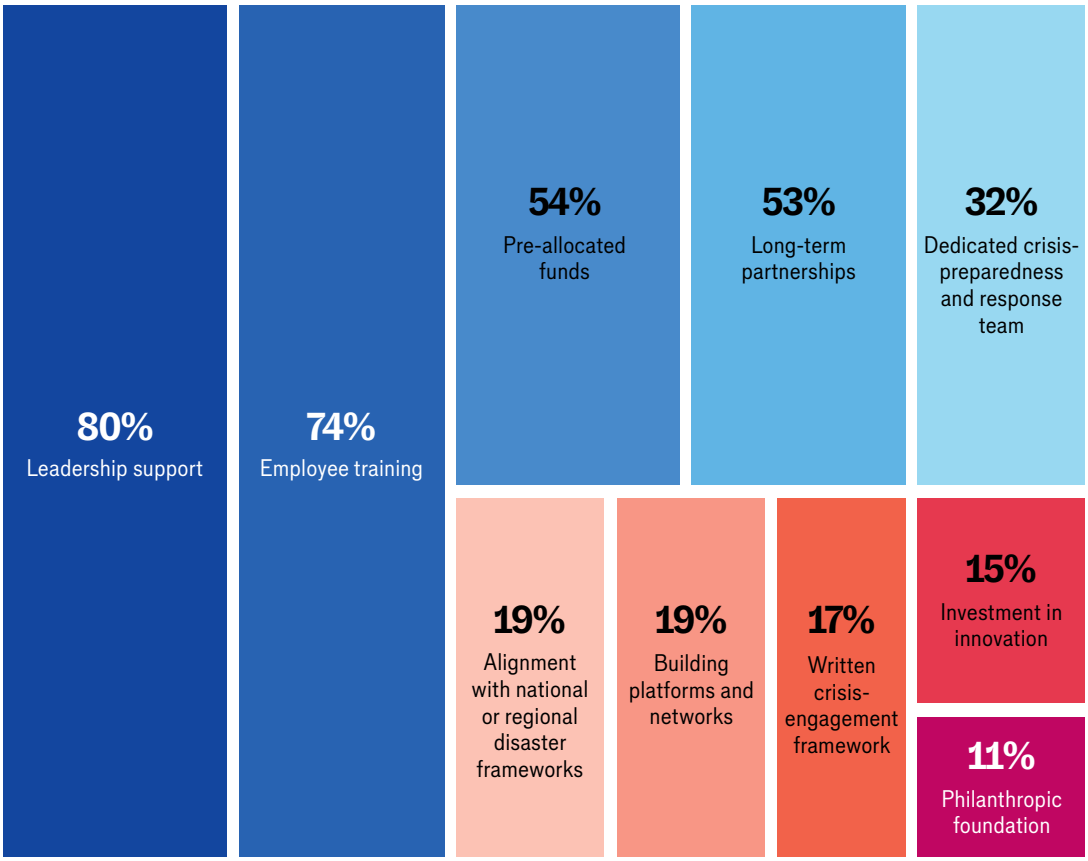
Figure 4: Ready, but not all set

Elements of corporate approaches to crisis preparedness, % of respondents



Source: Economist Enterprise survey, 2026

Only 32% of organisations have a dedicated crisis-preparedness and response team

Source: Economist Enterprise

The capabilities needed to sustain engagement are much less common. Fewer than one-third of surveyed organisations have a dedicated crisis engagement team. Less than one in five align formally with national or regional disaster frameworks, have a written framework for supporting affected communities or invest in innovation for crisis preparedness.[7] Dedicated philanthropic foundations—in effect, a ring-fenced pool of funding and staff for social causes, including crisis support—are rarer still, at 11%.

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The contrast is striking. Businesses in Asia have built the capacity to respond quickly with leaders who can make decisions, employees who are trained and funds that can be released at short notice. But the long-term machinery, of dedicated teams, written frameworks and formal ties that keep support flowing once public attention shifts, are missing.

Businesses in Asia have built the capacity to respond, but lack the long-term systems to keep support flowing once public attention fades.

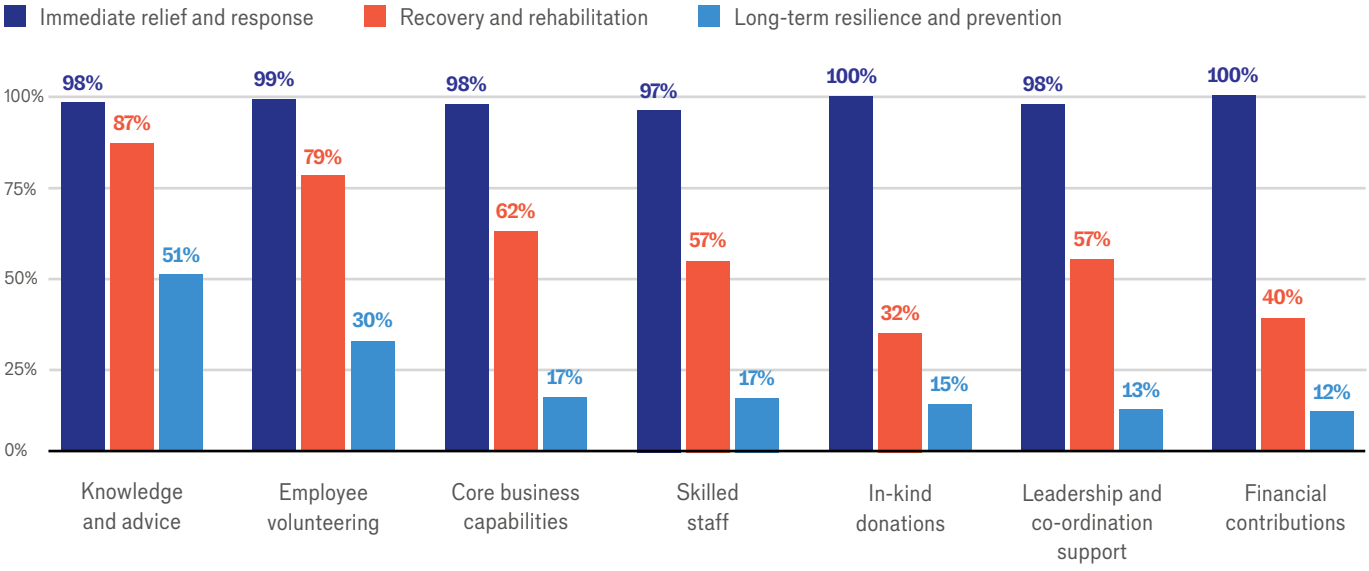
What companies deploy

Most surveyed companies concentrate their efforts on the emergency phase, when needs are immediate and decisions must be made quickly. Financial donations, in-kind contributions and employee volunteering are the most common forms of support during this period. Leadership and co-ordination also feature prominently, helping companies mobilise resources in the first days of a crisis.

Engagement falls sharply once the emergency has passed. Only 12% of organisations that provide financial support continue doing so during longer-term recovery and resilience-building, and only 15% provide in-kind support. Knowledge-sharing proves more durable. More than half of surveyed organisations continue to exchange expertise beyond the emergency, suggesting that technical capabilities and shared learning often outlast cash or donated goods.

Figure 5: The long recovery, the short response

Capabilities mobilised during immediate relief, recovery and long-term resilience, % of respondents



Source: Economist Enterprise survey, 2026

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Only 12% of organisations that provide financial support continue doing so during longer-term recovery and resilience-building

Source: Economist Enterprise

The survey also suggests that many companies underuse the capabilities that distinguish them from other actors. Fewer than one-quarter regularly provide financial or in-kind support. Only 13% routinely deploy their products and services, 11% skilled employees and 9% leadership or co-ordination support. Yet these are the assets businesses are uniquely placed to contribute. Deploying them more consistently would allow companies to play a greater role throughout the crisis lifecycle, extending their contribution from emergency relief to recovery and long-term preparedness.

What, then, are the implications of this decline in engagement once the immediate crisis has passed?

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Chapter 2. Implications of fading engagement

Across most forms of support, only 12–17% of surveyed organisations remain engaged in long-term recovery and resilience-building. The challenge is rarely a lack of goodwill. Instead, short-term funding, competing priorities and weak co-ordination make sustained engagement difficult. Turning one-off responses into lasting support requires stronger organisational systems, deeper partnerships and better evidence of what works.

Turning one-off responses into lasting support requires stronger organisational systems, deeper partnerships and better evidence of what works.

Funding runs out before recovery does

Limited budgets are the biggest barrier to sustained crisis engagement. Nearly two-thirds of surveyed organisations identify cost as their main constraint, rising to three-quarters among micro-organisations. Short funding cycles compound the problem: more than half of respondents say they make partnerships hard to sustain once the immediate crisis has passed.

Figure 6: Staying power comes at a price

Barriers to sustained crisis engagement, % of respondents

Source: Economist Enterprise survey, 2026

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Recovery, however, rarely ends when funding does. Communities continue rebuilding long after public attention fades. And the effects of a disaster can linger across the workers, suppliers and markets on which businesses depend.[8] Sustained crisis engagement is therefore more than an act of philanthropy. It also helps businesses protect their operations and strengthen their own resilience. Yet much corporate support still concentrates on immediate relief. Extending support into recovery, preparedness and resilience can help companies reduce future losses and lessen the need for repeated emergency assistance.[9]

Leadership attention moves on

Senior leaders often determine how companies respond in the first days of a crisis. They can release funding, remove obstacles and signal that action matters. But crisis engagement becomes fragile when it depends on executive attention alone.

Nearly half of surveyed organisations say that shifting leadership priorities are a barrier to sustained engagement. When crisis response is not embedded in teams, budgets and processes, support remains ad hoc. As operations return to normal, the focus returns to day-to-day business. ”Once the crisis is over, once the business is running again, I think they tend to just focus on running the business,” says Asif Ibrahim, vice-chairman of Newage Group of Industries, a Bangladeshi apparel and textiles manufacturer, and chairman of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Sustainable Business Network Disaster and Climate Risk Reduction Taskforce.

Governance structures often reinforce this pattern. In half of surveyed organisations, ultimate accountability for societal crisis engagement sits with the board or C-suite. In another third, it rests with a single department. Concentrating responsibility in one part of the organisation leaves engagement vulnerable when attention shifts. The issue is not that leaders move on and priorities change. It is that few organisations have clear arrangements for handing responsibility from emergency response to longer-term recovery. How companies manage that transition is a governance question, and one explored in chapter four.

Marco Toscano-Rivalta, chief of the Regional Office for Asia-Pacific at UNDRR, argues that executives eventually return to familiar questions: can the company afford it, can it justify the investment and will it generate a return? Unless organisations can answer those questions, crisis engagement will struggle to compete with other business priorities.

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Good intentions without co-ordination reduce impact

Businesses often mobilise before they fully understand what communities need. The result can be duplicated effort, gaps in support and resources directed to the wrong places.[10]

Companies widely recognise the need to co-ordinate more effectively. Around seven in ten surveyed organisations say they need closer alignment with public-sector disaster frameworks and government guidance. A similar share want stronger standing agreements with NGOs and industry peers before a crisis occurs, along with stronger networks to support joint action. These findings suggest that many companies still build partnerships during emergencies rather than before them.

Jo Hayes, chief executive of Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong, the local affiliate of the global housing non-profit, recalls how businesses responded to the Tai Po fire in Hong Kong in 2025. While she recognises the scale of support, she notes that many donors continued to support their existing charity partners, reflecting the range of needs across the community. But needs can change quickly during an emergency. Co-ordination among organisations can help direct resources to where affected residents need them most.

Organisational design plays its part too. Companies often separate sustainability teams, corporate foundations and commercial operations. Humanitarian organisations likewise separate operational staff from corporate partnership teams, partly to avoid any perception that donations influence commercial decisions. These boundaries can prevent the people who understand corporate capabilities from working directly with those who understand community needs.

Funding practices can create similar challenges. When each donor tightly earmarks its contribution, no one pays for the staff, logistics and co-ordination needed to make collective relief effective. Cash is vital in the first days of a crisis, but recovery also depends on flexible funding that covers operating costs. More flexible or pooled funding would give frontline organisations the discretion to direct resources where they are most needed.

Preparedness requires systems, not just plans

Most surveyed companies have the basic ingredients for crisis preparedness. They report leadership support, employee training, pre-allocated funds and established partnerships. Far fewer, however, have built the systems needed to turn those assets into a repeatable response. Dedicated crisis teams remain uncommon. Written frameworks are rare. Formal links with national disaster systems are weaker still.

When those systems are missing, companies often rely on improvisation. They may be willing to help, but without clear processes and reliable information they deploy the resources they have rather than those that communities need most.

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After Haiti's 2010 earthquake, organisations were "piling in over each other" because no one was co-ordinating the response, says Lene Bjørn Serpa, former head of corporate sustainability at Maersk, a Danish shipping and logistics company. Ms Nery of the OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative recalls floods in Mozambique in early 2026, when she was deployed with the UN's rapid-response team as private-sector response co-ordinator and saw local companies immediately offer cash and in-kind donations. "Goodwill is important, but it is not enough. For businesses to engage effectively during crises, we need better information-sharing and co-ordination so that the right help reaches the right people at the right time," she says.

"Goodwill is important, but it is not enough. For businesses to engage effectively during crises, we need better information-sharing and co-ordination so that the right help reaches the right people at the right time."

Florian Rhiza Nery, deputy programme co-ordinator, OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative

Weak measurement undermines long-term commitment

Companies tend to measure what is easiest to count: money donated, supplies delivered, volunteers mobilised and people reached. These indicators are simple to collect, but they reveal little about whether support helped communities recover, strengthened preparedness or reduced future risk.

Cheryl Chen, formerly a senior expert for the Asia-Pacific arm of GoHelp, the disaster management programme of global logistics company DHL, says disaster philanthropy has traditionally been viewed as an act of goodwill during times of suffering, rather than an activity expected to demonstrate measurable returns. That is changing. More than seven in ten surveyed organisations identify better frameworks for measuring social and business outcomes as an area for improvement. Without stronger evidence, it becomes harder to justify sustained crisis engagement when budgets tighten or leadership priorities shift.

Building that evidence is not straightforward, however. Much of the information needed sits with governments, NGOs and community organisations rather than businesses themselves, Ms Chen notes. Until companies can measure what difference their support makes, sustained investment in preparedness and recovery will remain harder to justify.

73% of organisations surveyed identify better frameworks for measuring social and business outcomes as an area for improvement

Source: Economist Enterprise

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Chapter 3. A framework for lifecycle engagement

The previous chapters showed that many companies want to help during crises but struggle to stay engaged once the emergency has ended. This chapter sets out a practical framework to help businesses move from reacting to crises to engaging across the full crisis lifecycle. Rather than prescribing a single model, it helps companies assess their current approach and identify opportunities to improve and build capability over time. The right approach depends on a company's size, sector, resources, risk exposure and operating context.

The framework considers three questions:

1. Where does a company sit in its approach to crisis engagement?
2. Which organisational systems shape its approach?
3. What practical steps would strengthen those systems, where deeper engagement fits the company's priorities and circumstances?

It brings together three parts. The first describes five broad approaches to crisis engagement. The second looks at the organisational systems that support each approach. The third identifies the practical changes that help companies strengthen their approaches over time.

Few companies will fit neatly into a single position. Most will be stronger in some areas than others. The framework is designed to make those differences visible, helping leaders assess each system on its own merits and focus on the next practical step rather than an overall score.

The framework also captures two ways that companies contribute: philanthropy and commercially-anchored action. Both become more developed over time, but they serve different purposes. Corporate philanthropy—grants, concessional capital, in-kind donations, pro bono expertise and employee giving—is provided on a charitable or below-market basis, without the expectation of a direct commercial return. Commercially-anchored action, including much of what sits under corporate social responsibility (CSR), creates social value while advancing business objectives such as protecting supply chains, employees, customers and markets, or strengthening reputation and licence to operate.

They each have a role throughout the crisis cycle, but they are most effective in different situations. Commercially-anchored engagement is often strongest where there is a clear business case, such as restoring operations, supporting affected employees or helping suppliers recover. Philanthropy can reach further. It can support preparedness and long-term recovery, assist communities beyond a company's value chain and provide flexible funding where needs are greatest. Because it is discretionary, however, philanthropy is also more likely to surge during high-profile emergencies and fade between them.

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The crisis engagement spectrum

The first element of the framework is an engagement spectrum that describes five broad approaches to crisis engagement, from unstructured or reactive support to more adaptive and institutionalised engagement across the crisis lifecycle (figure 7). The most advanced approach is not necessarily the right one for every organisation. Where a company sits should reflect its size, sector, resources, risk exposure and role in society.

The spectrum is intended to be applied across the organisational systems that shape crisis engagement, described later in this chapter, rather than to the organisation as a whole. This helps identify where capabilities are well developed, where gaps remain and where the next practical improvements are likely to have the greatest impact.

Figure 7: From impulse to institution

Five approaches to crisis engagement, from unstructured response to adaptive lifecycle engagement

Approach to crisis engagement	Key characteristics
No structured engagement during a crisis	Unstructured, minimal engagement, dependent on individual initiative, leadership discretion or one-off circumstance
Reactive engagement in crisis response	The business responds when a crisis occurs and can mobilise some support, but decisions, roles, budgets and partners are often arranged case by case
Prepared engagement with selective lifecycle coverage	The business has clearer triggers, responsibilities, partners, assets and review processes, but coverage may remain focused on selected crisis phases
End-to-end lifecycle engagement	Crisis engagement is integrated into business strategy and structures, with cross-functional ownership, long-term partnerships, more stable funding and outcome-oriented learning
Adaptive and institutionalised lifecycle engagement	Crisis response is embedded and dynamic. The business uses forward-looking capabilities to anticipate emerging risks, together with flexible resources and continuous learning, and contributes to broader ecosystem resilience

Source: Economist Enterprise

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Organisational systems determine whether engagement lasts

The second element of the framework identifies the organisational systems that shape crisis engagement: governance, capabilities, partnerships, funding, and data and learning (figure 8). Together, these systems determine whether companies can sustain their engagement before, during and after a crisis.

Governance defines who makes decisions, who is accountable and how the business works with governments and emergency responders. It also shapes how companies navigate the legal and regulatory environment during a crisis. Capabilities determine what resources, from skilled employees and specialist expertise to products, services and logistics, a business can mobilise. They include the use of core business assets, in-kind donations, pro bono services and employee volunteering. Partnerships with NGOs, government, peers and community groups help ensure support reflects local needs and complements wider response efforts. Funding determines whether financial support, from grants, concessional finance and matched employee giving to commercial budgets, is timely, flexible and sustained. Data and learning enable companies to assess what worked, improve future responses and build organisational knowledge.

Few companies develop all systems at the same pace. Assessing them individually helps identify the gaps most likely to limit long-term engagement and highlights where the next improvements will have the greatest impact.

Figure 8: What keeps support going

The organisational systems that shape sustained crisis engagement

	Governance	Capabilities	Partnerships	Funding	Data and learning
What it covers	Ownership, decision rights, escalation routes, accountability and leadership oversight; awareness of the legal and regulatory environment	In-kind goods, services, products, assets, staff skills, logistics and digital, data and platform capabilities, together with the playbooks, processes, surge capacity and preparedness mechanisms that enable them	Relationships with NGOs, government, peers, intermediaries and affected communities	Availability, flexibility, speed and sustainability of financial resources, including grants, concessional capital, foundation funding, matched employee giving and commercially aligned budgets	Tracking, review, evidence use, knowledge retention and feedback loops
Why it matters	Determines whether crisis engagement is intentional, co-ordinated and aligned with business priorities	Determines whether the business can translate intent into effective action before, during and after crises	Determines whether engagement is credible, locally informed and complementary to wider response systems	Determines whether commitments can move beyond discretionary or delayed support	Determines whether the business learns from each crisis and improves future engagement

Source: Economist Enterprise

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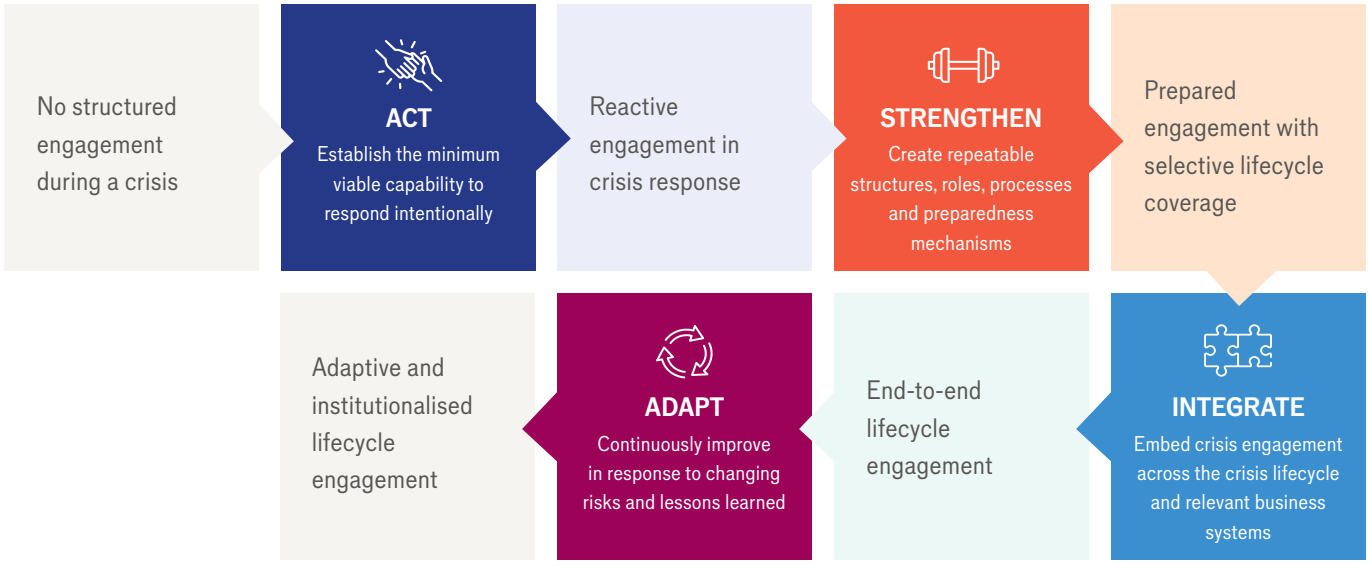
Transitions to strengthen crisis engagement

The third element of the framework sets out critical transitions: Act, Strengthen, Integrate and Adapt (figure 9). Each describes practical steps businesses can take to strengthen the organisational systems over time. The transitions form a continuous cycle rather than a linear sequence. As risks change, businesses must continue preparing, responding, recovering and learning.

Figure 9: Making the next move

The transitions that strengthen crisis engagement over time



Source: Economist Enterprise

The transitions apply to both philanthropy and commercially-aligned engagement. In the early stages, support is largely ad hoc, with one-off cash or product donations and spontaneous employee fundraising organised in response to individual crises. As businesses strengthen their systems, philanthropy becomes more structured through ring-fenced emergency budgets, matched employee giving, pre-agreed protocols for in-kind donations and pre-vetted grantees. As companies move towards integration, philanthropy becomes strategic. It is managed separately from commercial activity and directed towards needs that commercial investment is less likely to address, such as preparedness, long-term recovery and support for communities beyond the company's operations. At the most advanced stage, philanthropy is institutionalised in the organisation through permanent mechanisms such as corporate foundations, reserve funds, pooled funds and concessional capital that allow businesses to commit funding before a crisis and sustain support after immediate attention has moved on.

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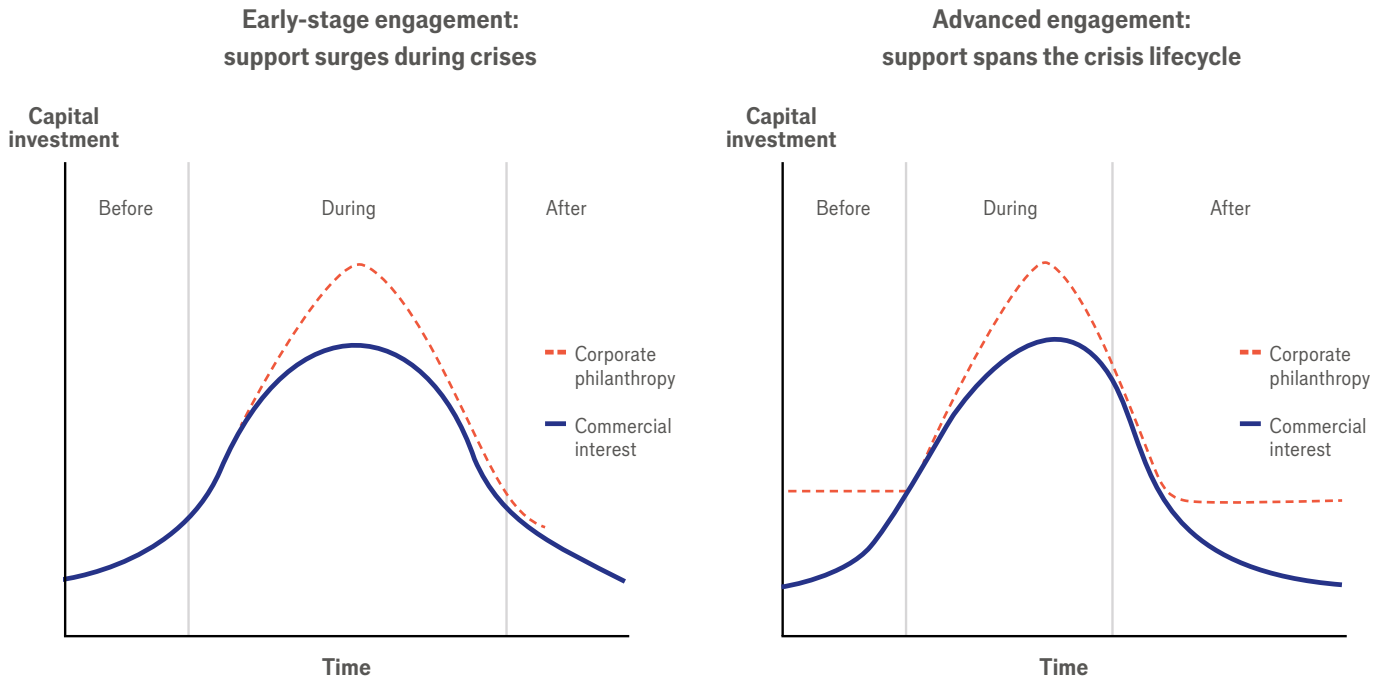
The figure below illustrates the change these transitions are designed to achieve. In the "before" scenario, commercial interest remains relatively consistent, while philanthropic support rises sharply during crises and falls away once the emergency has passed. In the "after" scenario, engagement extends across the full lifecycle: philanthropic and commercial contributions complement one another through preparedness, response and recovery, rather than concentrating on the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

Figure 10: Beyond the surge

How support before, during and after a crisis changes as corporate crisis engagement matures



Source: Economist Enterprise

The transitions recognise that companies develop at different rates. One business may have mature partnerships but only be starting to formalise its governance. Another may decide that its current level of engagement is appropriate given its strategy, resources and exposure to risk. The framework therefore helps companies identify their next practical step rather than pursue a single ideal end state.

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A practical framework rather than a checklist

The framework's value lies in bringing these three elements together. The engagement spectrum helps companies understand where they are today. The organisational systems explain what enables or limits sustained engagement. The transitions identify the next practical step. As a whole, it provides a flexible tool for identifying strengths, addressing gaps and prioritising improvements that reflect each company's circumstances.

The goal is not for every company to reach the highest stage, but to build crisis engagement that is proportionate, sustainable and effective. Because preparedness, response, recovery and learning form a continuous cycle, the framework should be revisited as risks, capabilities and business priorities evolve.

Figure 11: Good intentions, built to last

A framework for effective crisis engagement

	Governance	Capabilities	Partnerships	Funding	Data and learning
No structured engagement during a crisis	Crisis decisions handled informally by senior leaders, with no clear ownership	Deployable and donatable assets not yet identified; response capability not yet established	Partners not yet mapped	No dedicated crisis budget; funding decided case by case	Actions not yet tracked or documented
ACT Establish baseline capability	Appoint a crisis lead; enable rapid decision-making; define a simple trigger, such as employee or customer impact	Identify assets that can be deployed or donated immediately using a simple inventory or spreadsheet; mobilise staff for basic support roles, such as logistics or volunteering	Engage with one or two trusted NGOs or intermediaries through referrals or recognised platforms; avoid direct delivery without local knowledge	Use discretionary CSR, philanthropic or emergency budgets; establish a simple fast-track approval process	Track basic outputs, such as funding provided, goods donated and people reached, using simple logs or spreadsheets
Reactive engagement in crisis response	A crisis lead is in place, but roles remain unclear; co-ordination happens only during crises	Basic mobilisation is possible but inconsistent; assets and donatable goods and services are not tracked systematically; staff receive little or no training	Repeat engagement with a small number of partners, but no formal vetting or agreements	Funding is usually available, but not pre-allocated	Basic tracking is in place; debriefs are informal or inconsistent

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	Governance	Capabilities	Partnerships	Funding	Data and learning
STRENGTHEN Build preparedness and repeatability	Define roles across teams; establish escalation procedures; introduce a simple crisis checklist or scorecard	Build an asset register; map staff skills; develop basic response playbooks	Vet partners against simple criteria such as credibility, local presence and capability; build ongoing relationships; introduce non-binding memorandums of understanding	Ring-fence an annual emergency budget; define approval thresholds	Conduct structured debriefs; introduce consistent measures, such as response speed, reach and partner effectiveness; store lessons in a central repository
Prepared engagement with selective lifecycle coverage	Clear accountability; defined protocols and triggers; leadership support and alignment	Asset register maintained; trained responders identified; basic scenario planning in place	Shortlist of trusted partners; some formal agreements; clearer division of roles	Emergency and philanthropic funds available and deployed quickly; basic forward planning	Regular reviews conducted; lessons captured but not yet applied consistently
INTEGRATE Embed crisis engagement across the lifecycle	Integrate crisis engagement into business continuity and risk planning; appoint an executive sponsor; align roles across functions	Expand capabilities beyond response to include preparedness, such as drills, and recovery, such as rebuilding support; embed training in HR and operational processes	Formalise long-term partnerships; define roles across each phase of a crisis; engage with government and sector platforms	Move to multi-year or rolling budgets; align funding with strategic priorities, such as supply chain resilience or community stability	Track outcomes as well as outputs; feed learnings into planning cycles; refine strategies using data
End-to-end lifecycle engagement	Crisis engagement embedded in planning and governance; executive or board oversight; cross-functional ownership	Capabilities span preparedness, response and recovery; regular training and simulations	Stable, multi-stakeholder partnerships; collaboration across sectors and all phases of a crisis	Multi-year funding aligned with strategic priorities, ESG commitments or regulatory requirements	Outcome measurement embedded; feedback loops inform decisions and planning

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	Governance	Capabilities	Partnerships	Funding	Data and learning
ADAPT Continuously improve and shape systems	Embed crisis readiness in corporate strategy; review governance regularly as risks evolve; make crisis readiness a standing board priority	Introduce adaptive capabilities, such as forecasting tools and surge capacity; continually strengthen systems and skills	Take a leadership role across the ecosystem by co-designing programmes, shaping standards or contributing to public policy	Establish permanent or flexible funding mechanisms, such as reserve funds, pooled funds or foundations; align funding mechanisms with long-term resilience goals	Introduce real-time or near-real-time monitoring; apply lessons continuously; share insights externally where appropriate
Adaptive and institutionalised lifecycle engagement	Crisis readiness is embedded in strategy; governance evolves as risks change	Capabilities evolve continuously to anticipate and respond to emerging risks	Plays a lead role in the wider ecosystem; system-level collaboration	Long-term, flexible and scalable funding structures support sustained resilience	Continuous learning is embedded, with data informing decisions inside and outside the organisation

Source: Economist Enterprise

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Chapter 4. From response to readiness

The previous chapter introduced a practical framework for assessing and strengthening corporate crisis engagement. This chapter shows how businesses can use it to move beyond emergency response towards longer-term preparedness and resilience. Organised around the critical transitions—Act, Strengthen, Integrate and Adapt—it draws on the experience of companies across Asia to illustrate practical, proportionate steps that companies can take to strengthen crisis engagement over time.

Act: establish the minimum capability to respond

The first step is not to build a sophisticated crisis engagement system. It is to create enough structure for the business to respond deliberately rather than improvise.

Define who decides and how decisions are made

Companies do not need a complex crisis framework. An effective first framework should identify who leads the response, what triggers action, which partners to contact, what assets the company can mobilise and how decisions will be recorded. It should also answer four practical questions: who has been affected, what do they need, what can the company realistically provide, and where can it add the greatest value?

"Just signing a cheque is not the way Tata operates."

Shrirang Dhavale, head for social sustainability, Tata Sustainability Group

Unilever, a multinational consumer-goods company, works with local partners and national emergency groups to assess the scale of a crisis before deciding how to respond. That process shows where its products, communications and livelihoods programmes will count for most. Tata Sustainability Group, the sustainability resource centre for Tata Group, an Indian multinational conglomerate, uses a categorisation system that considers the scale of a disaster, the needs of the most disadvantaged communities, the government's classification of the emergency and the group's presence in the affected area. The assessment determines whether the response is led centrally, locally or by an individual Tata company. "Just signing a cheque is not the way Tata operates. Being with the affected communities when they are in need is most important," says Shrirang Dhavale, the group's head for social sustainability.

A simple framework that defines roles, triggers and available assets is often enough to replace improvisation with a more deliberate response.

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The starting point for businesses is to identify what they can offer that humanitarian organisations cannot easily access elsewhere, such as logistics, data, technology, supplier networks, specialist expertise or essential goods and services.

Identify and deploy the capabilities only the business can provide

Companies increasingly want to contribute more than money. Businesses "don't want to be seen as just ATMs", says Ms Nery. The starting point is to identify what they can offer that humanitarian organisations cannot easily access elsewhere, such as logistics, data, technology, supplier networks, specialist expertise or essential goods and services. Zhang Fan, assistant to the secretary-general at Tencent Charity Foundation, describes this as a shift from "capital philosophy" to "capability philosophy". The question is not simply how much money a company can give, but what the wider business can mobilise. "Money is only money," she says.

Case study: Sany Charitable Foundation turns machinery into emergency capability

The Beijing-based Sany Charitable Foundation, the philanthropic arm of SANY Group, focuses on "leveraging corporate resources—our technology, products, rental dealers and client network," says Shen Danxi, its secretary-general and chief executive. After earthquakes in Turkey in 2023 the foundation deployed excavators alongside professional search-and-rescue teams during the critical first 72 hours. The company's greatest contribution was not financial but operational with the provision of specialised equipment that few others could provide.

Photo: Beijing Sany Charitable Foundation

The strongest crisis responses build on what a company already does well, mobilising capabilities that no humanitarian organisation could easily replicate.

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Case study: Wilmar International uses procurement and logistics to control delivery

Wilmar International prioritises in-kind support over cash donations. During the covid-19 pandemic it supplied food from its own operations and procured medical equipment requested by hospitals, including oxygen supplies and hospital beds. By purchasing directly from suppliers and managing delivery itself, the company controlled costs and ensured supplies reached the intended recipients.

Let community needs inform what support the organisation provides

Capabilities add the most value when they match local needs. Humanitarian organisations and community groups are often best placed to identify immediate priorities, so close dialogue with local partners can help businesses direct support where and when it is most needed. During covid-19, non-profit organisations such as Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong were encouraged when corporate donors and foundations began by asking a simple question: “What do you need most right now?”

Likewise, after the Tai Po fire, Ms Hayes recalls some responsible donors taking the time to understand where gaps remained before offering support for essential costs such as staffing, logistics and administration. In many cases, what organisations needed most was the flexibility to maintain and scale their response as circumstances developed. Listening closely can reveal needs that donors might otherwise miss.

Photo: Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong

Measurement and monitoring should also adapt to the stage of the crisis. During an emergency, organisations need simple indicators that record what was provided, how quickly it reached affected communities and through which partners. More detailed assessment of outcomes can follow once immediate needs have been met.

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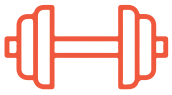
Ms Hayes recalls being asked to forecast long-term outcomes early in the response to the Tai Po fire. "Within the first few weeks of responding, frontline organisations were asked: 'How many families can you guarantee that you're going to serve for the next three years?' At that stage, organisations are still assessing needs, co-ordinating support and understanding the longer-term implications of the event, so it takes time for that information to become clear."

As recovery progresses, companies should shift from measuring activity to results. Early on, simple operational indicators are enough. Over time, organisations can assess whether their support strengthened recovery, preparedness and resilience.



Strengthen: build muscle memory for future crises

Responding well once does not create preparedness. Companies become more resilient by turning experience into routine and embedding crisis engagement in everyday decision-making.

Define decision-making authority, funding and accountability before a crisis

A repeatable response depends on clear decision rights. Companies should decide in advance who can commit which resources, under what circumstances and how quickly. Rajib Shaw, professor at the Graduate School of Media and Governance at Keio University, describes three levels of decision-making. Senior leaders set priorities, release resources and define the organisation's risk appetite. Managers translate those decisions into action across business units or markets. Frontline staff respond through agreed protocols rather than waiting for instructions.

When responsibilities across these levels are unclear, responses can stall. Leaders may approve action but operational teams lack the authority to act, or frontline staff may be expected to respond without adequate guidance. One non-profit executive attributed the success of their crisis response to the organisation's agile structure and governance. "Urgent operational decisions were made on-site to ensure a rapid response, while regular communication was maintained with the chief executive and board chairperson," the executive said.

Decision-making authority must also be matched by ready access to funding. Ring-fenced emergency budgets, clear approval thresholds and separate funding streams for immediate relief and longer-term recovery allow companies to respond quickly without sacrificing oversight.

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Case study: PayPal builds speed into decision-making

PayPal, a digital-payments company, has built its crisis response around three principles: speed, consistency and a local perspective. Karen Little, the company's global lead for rapid response and strategic partnerships, explains how a cross-functional committee assesses each crisis against its likely impact on employees, customers and the business before escalating recommendations to senior executives.

Speed depends as much on funding as decision-making. PayPal combines its assessment process with a pre-approved emergency budget and an additional contingency fund, allowing larger responses, such as during the covid-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine, to be approved without creating new governance processes.

Maintain an inventory of assets, capabilities and deployment plans

Knowing what resources exist is only half the task. Companies also need to know how quickly they can be mobilised. An asset register should cover products, specialist expertise, facilities, data, supplier relationships and skilled employees. It should also identify who controls each asset, what approvals are needed and where each asset is likely to add the greatest value.

SANY Foundation took this approach after finding that local dealers and clients were deploying machinery independently during disasters, with little co-ordination. It created an online platform that keeps an up-to-date register of equipment, distributors and operators. When a rescue request comes in, internet-connected equipment helps SANY Foundation match these resources with emergency organisations within minutes. Companies can build on such registers with playbooks that match different capabilities to the first 24 hours, the first week and the longer recovery period.

Build trusted partnerships before they are needed in a crisis

Companies should identify partners before disasters occur and invest in those relationships over time. The strongest partnerships are built through regular collaboration rather than emergency introductions. Catherine Huang (Yi Huang), general secretary of China Merchants Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Chinese conglomerate China Merchants Group, explains why: "Societal crises are rarely simple—they are complex systems that no single institution or project can resolve alone."

"Societal crises are rarely simple—they are complex systems that no single institution or project can resolve alone."

Catherine Huang (Yi Huang), general secretary, China Merchants Foundation

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Choosing the right partner matters as much as building the relationship. “NGOs add a lot of value to the ‘character’ of a response, but they are not a monolith,” says Mr Dhavale of Tata Sustainability Group. After the Nepal earthquake in 2015, Tata partnered with SOS Children’s Villages, a charity that supports children in emergencies, because protecting them from trafficking required specialist expertise beyond general disaster relief.

Partnerships should also remain active between crises. During covid-19, Crescent Enterprises, a UAE-based multinational, co-established a resilience fund with partners to support local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups.[11] Because these relationships continued after the emergency, the company could quickly reactivate a coalition when the next crisis arose. The second fund also drew on lessons from the first, including stronger guidance on governance for participating businesses. Ola Al Haj Hussin, manager for corporate citizenship at Crescent Enterprises, describes the approach as identifying trusted partners that can be mobilised when crises emerge and investing in those relationships before they are needed.

Review every response and apply the lessons to future crises

Companies should review every response while lessons are still fresh. A structured review should examine how quickly resources were mobilised, which systems were activated, how partners performed and what could be improved.

During a crisis, PayPal creates a dedicated Slack channel bringing together dozens of colleagues involved in the response. One or two months later, the company conducts a structured review based on four questions: what worked, what did not, what should change and how participants would rate the response. The findings are incorporated into a living playbook that continues to evolve.

Useful indicators include approval times, mobilisation speed, partner performance, people reached and lessons from what went wrong. Tata Sustainability Group also updates its protocols after every response, helping to improve future decisions across its ecosystem.

Each crisis should strengthen preparedness for the next. Consistent reviews and practical lessons help organisations improve their systems, shorten response times and build institutional memory.

Photo: OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative

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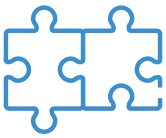

Integrate: make crisis engagement part of the business

Where Strengthen makes a single response repeatable, Integrate embeds crisis engagement in the way a business operates. Rather than activating only when disaster strikes, crisis engagement becomes part of governance, business planning, partnerships and investment across preparedness, response, recovery and resilience.

Embed crisis engagement into governance, planning and day-to-day operations

Crisis engagement becomes sustainable when it is built into the way a company operates rather than activated only when disaster strikes.

At PayPal, a cross-functional committee brings together social impact, legal, product and giving teams, replacing what Ms Little describes as disaster response being "done all over the place and in silos" with "one source of truth". Ms Nery argues that integration also depends on support beyond senior leaders. Technical specialists, middle managers and staff working with governments, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations all help embed crisis engagement across the business.

The survey shows what makes that shift last. Among organisations whose crisis response evolved into a lasting initiative, almost two-thirds cite strong employee support as a key enabler. Six in ten point to a formal board or executive mandate backed by multi-year funding, while more than two in five identify a clear commercial or operational benefit. Integration succeeds when leadership commitment and business value reinforce one another.

The strongest organisations also apply crisis capabilities through day-to-day operations. Siam Piwat, a Thai property developer and retailer, offers rent relief, flexible payment terms, deposit support and co-marketing to help tenants continue trading during crises. PayPal takes a similar approach, enabling customers to donate through its platform, highlighting relief charities and offering payment relief to affected small businesses.

Commit funding, partnerships and resources before disasters occur

Companies should agree on roles, build relationships and commit resources before a crisis begins. When partnerships and funding are established in advance, organisations can respond immediately rather than negotiate responsibilities during an emergency.

Too often, humanitarian organisations have viewed businesses primarily as donors rather than operational partners, says Kareem Elbayar, head of the private sector unit at OCHA. More effective responses begin with shared planning, clear responsibilities and an understanding of what each partner can contribute before a crisis occurs.

Mona Chhabra Anand, unit head for resilience building and localisation at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), an international organisation, points to Sri Lanka's response to Cyclone Ditwah, where private-sector staff worked alongside civil-society representatives in the government's co-ordination centre

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"Too often, humanitarian organisations have viewed businesses primarily as donors rather than operational partners."

Kareem Elbayar, head of the private sector unit, OCHA

around the clock for three weeks. She sees this as an example of ADPC's approach to localisation, which brings government, businesses and civil-society groups together to strengthen local capacity to manage disasters. In Sri Lanka, these relationships were built over almost a decade, enabling businesses and public agencies to "see each other as partners and collaborators, not as competitors or adversaries". This long-term investment in relationships and local capacity meant that, when the cyclone struck, partners could work together immediately rather than establish roles and trust during the crisis.

Mr Elbayar recalls a similar lesson from Jamaica, where businesses stood ready to support the government and humanitarian organisations in response to Hurricane Melissa but were initially held back because responsibilities had not been agreed in advance. The barrier was not capability, but preparedness.

Case study: Yahoo! Japan agrees roles before disaster strikes

Yahoo! Japan, a web portal and search engine, has agreed in advance with local authorities to support evacuation centres during disasters. Its system provides tailored food and essential supplies for groups often overlooked by standard relief efforts, including older people, people with diabetes, pregnant women and children with special needs. Because responsibilities are agreed before emergencies occur, support can begin as soon as evacuation warnings are issued.

Funding should follow the same principle. Multi-year budgets allow companies to invest in preparedness and recovery alongside emergency relief, rather than concentrating on the immediate response.[12]

The commitments that matter most are made before disasters occur and honoured long after the immediate response has ended.

Measure the outcomes the support achieves, not just the activities

Companies should judge crisis engagement by what changes, not simply by what they contribute. Donations, volunteers and supplies delivered remain useful measures of activity, but they reveal little about whether communities became more resilient or organisations strengthened their capacity to respond.

Measuring those outcomes is rarely straightforward. Businesses are often too far removed from events to assess impact directly, argues Ms Serpa. Instead, they should rely on trusted partners working on the ground. Austin Snowbarger, director of strategy and research at the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, adds

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that most non-profits would rather receive flexible funding and be trusted to respond to changing needs than be judged against narrow output targets that overlook longer-term change.

The goal is not to measure every activity, but to understand whether support made a meaningful difference. That requires companies to work with trusted partners, focus on outcomes and accept that the most valuable results may only become visible over time.

Companies should judge crisis engagement by what changes, not simply by what they contribute.

Photo: OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business Initiative Global Meeting

Adapt: learn and evolve

Companies in Adapt treat every crisis as preparation for the next. Rather than relying on established approaches, they continually refine how they prepare, respond and recover. The most advanced also help strengthen the wider systems on which resilience depends. Readiness is no longer a destination but a continuous process.

Regularly adapt capabilities, plans and decisions to changing risks

Companies should regularly review whether their capabilities still match the risks they face. The greatest value often comes not from creating new capabilities but from applying existing ones in new ways.

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Case study: Tencent turns payment infrastructure into crisis support

After an earthquake in Gansu province in 2023, Tencent resisted making an immediate donation, and instead assessed conditions on the ground and found that aid distribution still relied on paper records and manual checks.

Rather than funding the existing system, Tencent adapted its digital payment infrastructure, including Weixin and Weixin Pay, to distribute vouchers directly to affected communities. The approach made assistance faster and more transparent, gave recipients greater choice and supported local businesses. What began as an emergency response has since evolved into a wider digital platform for community philanthropy.

Preparedness should evolve in the same way. Crisis strategies should be reviewed regularly as climate, health, cyber and geopolitical risks change. Mr Snowbarger notes that companies with established disaster strategies often benefit from clear decision-making frameworks, but these can become too rigid. Mature organisations know when to follow existing processes and when new risks require a different response.

Operational capabilities need the same refresh. DHL's Get Airports Ready for Disaster programme illustrates this approach, training airport staff in disaster-prone regions to manage sudden surges of relief supplies and in 2025, expanding to include NGOs and local responders through a dedicated academy.[13] Adaptation depends on continually updating capabilities, plans and decision-making as risks evolve.

Invest in the wider partnerships and systems that build resilience

The most mature companies recognise that their own resilience depends on the resilience of others. They invest not only in their own preparedness but also in the wider systems that support communities, infrastructure and emergency response.

Mr Toscano-Rivalta argues that businesses should become co-creators of resilience rather than simply donors. UNDRR's Corporate Chief Resilience Officers Network, a coalition of resilience leaders from major multilateral companies, has developed the free Resilience Maturity Assessment, enabling businesses of all sizes to assess resilience across six operational dimensions and four levels of maturity. By drawing on shared expertise, the tool strengthens resilience beyond any single organisation.

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The same principle applies to partnerships. Collective platforms allow companies to combine funding, expertise and operational capabilities that none could provide alone. The Tencent Charity Foundation is developing one such network in China, bringing together companies willing to contribute their capabilities through a shared platform. According to Ms Zhang, the challenge is assembling many organisations into a coherent response. Success depends on trusted relationships, strong convening and organisations able to co-ordinate collective action.

Ms Huang of China Merchants Foundation explains what that kind of co-ordination can look like once it is established. It sits on the governing body of the NGO Disaster Relief Coordination Platform, alongside government emergency-management authorities and other major disaster-relief foundations, and holds standing agreements with partners including One Foundation, China Foundation for Rural Development and Tencent Charity Foundation. Built up over more than a decade rather than assembled during a crisis, these relationships let the Foundation draw on what each partner does best, such as government access, frontline reach or digital platforms, instead of duplicating it.

The survey suggests businesses recognise this opportunity. Nearly half identify co-investing with public and private partners in essential services such as power, water and transport as the area where collective action can create the greatest value. A further 41% highlight pooled financing mechanisms that provide emergency liquidity.

Use every crisis to improve future preparedness and decision-making

Every crisis should improve the next response. Companies should use each experience to update their understanding of risk, refine their decisions and strengthen their preparedness.

Ranjini Mukherjee, director of research, knowledge management and capacity development at the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, an international partnership that works to strengthen the resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks, says businesses should understand supplier exposure, map critical dependencies and invest in risk analytics, early-warning systems and shared data.

Photo: UNDP

Siam Piwat has moved from reactive crisis management to what it describes as a more ”data informed, transparent and resilience driven” approach. Real-time information on customer behaviour and footfall at its properties allows the company to adjust support for tenants as conditions change and identify emerging risks earlier.

Experience should also shape future decisions. Drawing on experience across several market cycles, Crescent Enterprises anticipated the potential impact of regional instability on smaller businesses and convened partners early. Lessons from one crisis therefore became part of preparations for the next.

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The Institute of Philanthropy perspective

Standing with Tai Po

Hong Kong's deadliest fire in decades broke out on the afternoon of November 26th 2025 at Wang Fuk Court, a public-housing estate in Tai Po. Flames consumed scaffolding and green safety netting across seven towers. More than 20 hours later, parts of the estate were still burning.

Residents fled with whatever they could carry. Medications, schoolbooks and family photographs were mostly left behind. Within hours, thousands of people needed somewhere to sleep. The elderly and those with chronic illnesses needed medicine after leaving prescriptions behind, while children needed a path back to school.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club and its Charities Trust, founding funders of the Institute of Philanthropy, joined government departments, NGOs and civic organisations in a wide response. Drawing on relationships and partnerships built over decades, these groups mobilised within hours. The Club donated HK$70.2m to the government's support fund for Wang Fuk Court residents. The Trust allocated HK$200m in assistance, split between emergency relief for the bereaved and those most affected, and longer-term recovery.

PHARM+ photo courtesy of The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust

Housing was a key priority. Non-profits and programmes backed by the Trust converted more than 500 vacant transitional-housing units into furnished homes within 48 hours. Relocation support soon reached over 1,930 households. Among the responders were planners and ambassadors from JC PROJECT LIFT, a Trust-backed programme that builds resilience among families living in transitional housing. They helped residents settle in, distributing supplies and connecting them with services.

Older residents needed medicine as much as shelter. Through the Jockey Club PHARM+ Community Medication Service Network (PHARM+), a Trust-backed scheme that connects vulnerable residents with community pharmacists and health non-profits, partners delivered more than 2,220 medication-support sessions, including emergency dispensing, counselling and health advice. Many helped older adults managing chronic conditions.

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Children lost uniforms, books and routine. Trust-backed non-profits worked with kindergartens and families to get students back into classrooms quickly, while other programmes used sport and music to help young people reconnect with friends.

The speed of the response owed much to relationships built long before the fire. Non-profits, community groups and Trust-backed programmes, including JC PROJECT LIFT and PHARM+, were already active in these communities, giving government agencies and local organisations a head start when residents needed them most.

As immediate needs eased, the Trust's network of charities and specialist non-profits has shifted its focus to longer-term psychosocial and bereavement support, adapting as residents' needs change. A new Compassionate Support Programme for Bereaved Families is now under way, alongside on-site mental-health outreach and work to bring communities together across transitional housing sites. This response partly reflects early estimates that around 15% of residents are at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder.

What has followed is not one intervention but many, repeated over months: a furnished flat, a course of medicine, a spare uniform, a counselling session or a shared meal, over and over. Each has been a step back towards ordinary life.

Photo courtesy of CONCORDIA Sheung Yue River (operated by Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, a grantee of JC PROJECT LIFT)

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Responsible transition: know when and how to step back

Effective crisis engagement includes knowing when to step back. Support should not end simply because public attention has shifted, but neither should it continue once others are better placed to lead. As recovery progresses, companies should ask whether they are still making a distinctive contribution or whether local organisations and public institutions are ready to take the lead.

Crisis support should be "time-bound and impact-driven", says Chadatip Chutrakul, chief executive of Siam Piwat. As conditions stabilise, companies should ensure their support "remains effective without creating dependency or distorting normal business conditions, while helping stakeholders adapt and move forward after a crisis."

Plan from the outset how support will be handed over

Responsible transitions begin long before support ends. Companies should define from the outset how they will scale back, transfer responsibilities and eventually exit. That handover may include funding, data, equipment, training, procurement opportunities, customer access, operational expertise or relationships with government. The objective is not simply to withdraw but to leave local systems stronger than they were before the crisis.

Shift from direct relief to strengthening local systems

A company's role should evolve as recovery progresses. During the emergency phase, businesses can often move faster than public agencies by deploying logistics, digital platforms, products or skilled employees. As recovery takes hold, the emphasis shifts from direct relief to strengthening public systems and local capacity.

Re-establish normal business relationships in a planned way

Clear boundaries are an important part of a responsible transition. Companies providing pro bono support during emergencies should define when those arrangements end and normal commercial relationships resume. "It's important for us to have a clear understanding of when we are engaging on a pro bono basis and supporting a particular crisis period, and when we transition back to daily business, because we also have a commercial organisation," explains Ms Serpa, who worked for Maersk. Clear expectations help preserve trust, particularly where humanitarian organisations are both partners and customers.

A responsible transition leaves communities stronger, preserves trusted partnerships and allows companies to step back without leaving critical gaps.

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SMEs: keeping crisis engagement lean, local and repeatable

The principles in this chapter apply to businesses of every size. Smaller firms, however, do not need dedicated foundations or large philanthropy teams to make a meaningful contribution. Their strengths often lie in close relationships with local communities, faster decision-making and practical assets that can be mobilised quickly. The framework is intended to be proportionate. For SMEs, that means building simple routines that turn goodwill into consistent action.

Assign clear responsibility for crisis decisions and response

Even the smallest business benefits from knowing who will make decisions during a crisis. For many SMEs, this can be as simple as appointing a named lead, identifying a deputy and agreeing a basic escalation process. The plan should clarify who approves spending, oversees communications, checks employee safety and decides whether support should remain local or expand.

Zhang Qiang, professor of public policy and founding director of the Innovation Center for Risk Governance at Beijing Normal University, cautions that sole traders and small businesses may not need a formal crisis lead. Readiness can instead come from taking part in community emergency drills and knowing where to turn for information and support, reducing the need to improvise when a crisis occurs.

Deploy the capabilities the business can contribute most effectively

For many SMEs, the greatest contribution is practical rather than financial. Few have dedicated philanthropy budgets, but many can provide staff time, vehicles, storage space, equipment, supplier relationships, customer networks and local knowledge. Begin with what the business can contribute faster, better or more reliably than others.

Begin with what the business can contribute faster, better or more reliably than others.

In some communities, that may mean making modest contributions to a shared contingency fund through a local business network. Professor Zhang also points to the value of employee mutual-assistance funds, which help workers support one another when incomes are disrupted. Elsewhere, businesses may create greater value by keeping prices stable, extending credit, sharing equipment, offering temporary workspace, helping suppliers reopen or keeping employees on the payroll. These actions may be less visible than financial donations, but they can play a critical role in local recovery.

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Build local partnerships that extend the organisation's capacity to respond

Small businesses rarely need to build their own crisis response systems. They are often most effective when they work through chambers of commerce, industry associations, local business networks or platforms that connect businesses with governments, NGOs and humanitarian organisations.[14] More than half of surveyed SMEs already report ongoing partnerships with these organisations.

Working through a network allows small contributions to become a co-ordinated response. Networks can identify community needs, pre-vet partners, reduce duplication and translate humanitarian requests into practical business action.

Case study: The Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation pools private-sector capacity

The Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation brings together large companies and medium-sized, small and micro enterprises to strengthen disaster management across the country. It channels private-sector resources into cash and in-kind donations, as well as direct participation in disaster preparedness, response and recovery programmes.[15]

Its Emergency Operations Centre monitors hazards, maintains an inventory of deployable assets and co-ordinates with government and humanitarian partners. Member companies are organised into industry clusters, including water, power, telecommunications and logistics, allowing each to contribute where it adds the greatest value.[16] The foundation has supported responses to crises including Typhoon Odette in 2021 and the eruption of Mayon volcano in 2023.

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Conclusion: The strategic case for staying engaged

The most valuable contribution a business can make in a crisis is rarely its largest donation. The era of the one-off cheque is giving way to a more strategic model of engagement, in which companies contribute with purpose and remain involved long after public attention has shifted.

Effective crisis engagement depends less on generosity than on organisational capability. The framework in this report is designed to help companies strengthen that capability over time. It is not a ranking, and the most advanced stage will not suit every business. Companies will be stronger in some areas than others. The task is to identify the gaps that matter most and strengthen them in ways that fit the company as it actually is.

Three questions distinguish the most effective organisations.

The first is **why**. The case is practical, not altruistic. Communities that recover quickly return workers, suppliers and customers to normal sooner. Visible, competent support builds trust with governments and the public, protecting the license to operate. And the relationships forged through sustained engagement become assets a business can draw on when it is the one under strain.

The second is **when** to contribute. The framework encourages companies to invest not only in emergency response but also in preparedness before crises occur and recovery after the immediate response has ended.

The third is **what** to contribute. Financial support remains essential, but a company's greatest value often lies in its capabilities. "Leveraging business assets and expertise, not just asking them for money," says Mr Elbayar of OCHA, means drawing on logistics, technology, data, products and skilled people that others cannot easily provide.

The survey suggests that companies are already moving in this direction. Six in ten respondents identify deeper collaboration with industry peers as a priority over the next two to three years, ahead of building employee capabilities or investing in technology for crisis prediction and response. The trend is towards shared capability rather than isolated action.

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The opportunity is to give with judgment, offer what others cannot and follow through so local systems emerge stronger.

Ultimately, sustained crisis engagement is built on relationships rather than moments of visibility. Ms Al Haj Hussin of Crescent Enterprises argues that lasting engagement is not related to momentum or promotional moments, but to building long-term relationships and strengthening society over time. Companies that invest in those relationships before crises occur, strengthen them through recovery and learn from each response will be better placed to support communities while strengthening their own resilience.

The opportunity is to give with judgment, offer what others cannot and follow through so local systems emerge stronger. Companies that do this will help more people more effectively and earn trust and standing that no single cheque can buy.

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