Philanthropic Actors amid Covid-19 Crisis: Together or Apart? Accelerating intra-philanthropic collaborations, rethinking inter-sector partnerships

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Abstract

Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the various partnerships formed in the Israeli elite-philanthropy field throughout the crisis, this paper examines how philanthropic collaborations were impacted by the Pandemic; and how were the perceptions of the philanthropic actors effected regarding intra-philanthropic collaborations, and inter-sectoral partnerships with government?

In the background of such partnerships lay complex and dynamic interactions of Israeli philanthropists with the government - power relations that have been influenced over the years by socio-political changes, and tensions between the business sector and the political elite. Moreover, The Pandemic reached Israel in the midst of a protracted political crisis, reflected in provisional governments without an approved budget adversely affecting NPOs.

Based on an ethnographic study, we contend that the Pandemic unfolds as a catalyst and a refiner. Within the Intra-philanthropic sphere, it accelerated and strengthened collaborations, and sharpened an understanding of their advantages; while in the sphere of inter-sector partnerships it promoted, among philanthropic actors, a sober and careful perspective towards governmental agencies, and sharpened their rethinking of the nature and essence of such partnerships.

Key words

Elite philanthropy, government, collaborations, Covid-19, crisis

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"In these days, when we are required to be physically separate from one another, this letter seeks to offer a collective and cohesive voice (…) We believe that it is precisely in times of crisis, and in times of uncertainty, that we must come together as a community and join hands for the common shared goals - a strong and healthy civil society”³.

Introduction

How, if at all, have philanthropic collaborations in Israel been impacted by the Corona crisis? And how have the perceptions of philanthropic actors⁴ been influenced by the crisis, in terms of collaborations within the field of philanthropy itself, as well as with the Israeli government?

This article summarizes the insights arising from a study we conducted towards the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 – a period which seems to herald the end of the emergency stages of COVID-19 crisis in Israel thanks to the successful vaccination campaign. Nevertheless, the social, economic and political consequences of the crisis are still prevalent within Israeli reality.

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Israel in the midst of a protracted political crisis, as reflected in three indecisive election campaigns within just eighteen months: A country administered by provisional governments without an approved budget. Nonprofit Organizations ("NPOs"), providing beneficiaries with public services in diverse areas, relying on government budgets were adversely impacted by the negative consequences of these circumstances.

In reaction to the outbreak of the pandemic, philanthropic actors began mobilizing in an attempt to support NPOs with emergency grants – some of them based on ad-hoc partnerships.

Intra-philanthropic collaborations were already in place on various levels before the onset of the crisis – be it reciprocal fund-raising among philanthropic actors or strategic partnerships in a variety of social projects. Moreover, partnerships between philanthropic actors and the government, known as inter-sector partnerships, were also common before the crisis, and

³ Excerpt from a declaration dated 17.3.2021 supporting NPO's circulated by philanthropic actors in Israel.

⁴ By the term "philanthropic actors", we refer to private philanthropists, Institutional philanthropy including funds and foundations, their leadership and professional staff, as well as infrastructure, network and membership organizations.
philanthropic actors in Israel have been considering some of the central dilemmas arising in these types of partnerships. It is important to note that senior professional echelons within the Israeli government have recognized the positive value of such collaborations, and have initiated the nomination of ministerial officers, appointed to develop and maintain working relations with philanthropic actors.

On the backdrop of all these working processes, we find complex and dynamic reciprocal relations between Israel’s leading philanthropists and the government and its representatives; A balance of powers that has been impacted over the years by socio-political changes and transformations within the Israeli field of power, and by the tensions and dissensions that have arisen between the business sector, from which wealthy philanthropists have emerged, and the political elite.

In line with this political and structural complexity, and under the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, various decisions were made and steps taken by both the government and philanthropic actors towards collaborative projects both within the philanthropic sphere and within inter-sector partnerships.

Based on an ethnographic study that included interviews, questionnaires and participant observations, we contend that the COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst and a refiner in two operating areas: within the intra-philanthropic sphere it accelerated and strengthened collaborations between, and sharpened an understanding of the advantages of intra-philanthropic partnerships and connections; while in the sphere of inter-sector partnerships it promoted among philanthropic actors a sober and careful rethinking towards governmental agencies, and sharpened their perspective of the nature of such partnerships.

We open this paper with a description of the events and processes taking place with the spread of the pandemic and throughout its course. Following, we propose a theoretical framework based on the study of philanthropy in Israel, and use it to describe the complex reciprocal relationships between philanthropy and government. After specifying the methodology, we present an analysis of our findings: A. with regard to intra-philanthropic collaborations, and B. with regard to inter-

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5 the JFN has drawn up and published a manual for establishing partnerships with the government, and the Forum of Foundations in Israel has spearheaded a comprehensive initiative of establishing dialogue with government officials.
sectorial partnerships. The concluding discussion wraps up the main themes and examines the relationships between the seemingly contradictory trends that were accelerated and honed by the COVID-19 crisis.

The Empirical Picture: Philanthropy coping with the COVID-19 Outbreak

Once the COVID-19 pandemic spread in Israel, the situation of service-providing social NPOs deteriorated. Government programs and budgets were frozen and NPO employees were asked to take unpaid leaves of absence – even as their beneficiaries required their assistance moreover due to the crisis.

Philanthropic actors in Israel were quick to respond to the increasing severity of the crisis. As early as March 2020, the leading infrastructural philanthropic organizations (IPOs)\(^6\) issued a decisive statement of support, which broadcast a message to the local NPOs facing the overwhelming challenges of the current crisis. The statement, signed by dozens of Israel's major foundations and leading philanthropists, offered "a collective and cohesive voice". It expressed an explicit commitment by private donors and foundations to continue their support of critical NPO efforts, vowing to provide them with resources to cope with social, economic and political uncertainty.\(^7\)

Another important step initiated during the first stages of the crisis was the convening of an inter-sector partnerships roundtable\(^8\), which included representatives of both the public sector and philanthropy, and examined the social needs arising as a consequence of the crisis. In its turn, the inter-sectorial roundtable established “subsidiary round tables” that focused on the needs of specific populations such as the elderly, women, youth at-risk and others. Furthermore, the leading IPOs established permanent communications among themselves as well as with the

\(^6\) The "Forum of Foundations in Israel" and the "Jewish Funders Network".

\(^7\)This statement correlates with similar statements of international foundations, calling to meet the emergency needs of NPOs.

\(^8\) This institution was first established following a 2008 government decision, which convenes representatives of the public sector, the business sector and the social sector in roundtable sessions focused on socio-economic issues. See: http://beinmigzari.pmo.gov.il/PMO-RoundTable/Pages/FoundingRoundTable.aspx
Israeli Civic Leadership Association (ICLA). Subsequently, all these communication channels prompted a two-way flow of information. On the one side streaming updates on the impact of the crisis on the non-profit sector and the arising needs of its beneficiaries. On the other end streaming information of the philanthropic response, including emergency contributions and assistance provided to medical institutions and NPOs on the front line.

Alongside the described actions of the IPOs, there began to appear new philanthropic initiatives promoted by leading philanthropists, which gathered additional philanthropic forces around them. These initiated mutual appeals among philanthropic actors in order to mobilize additional support for NPOs/projects in which they were previously involved: Philanthropists involved with food distribution initiatives raised large one-time contributions from their peers, who had not been previously involved with such NPOs. Moreover, new, additional donors were recruited through veteran members to support initiatives for providing credit to small businesses and NPOs.

The philanthropic collaborations arising in the aftermath of the crisis and generated by it, took varied forms, such as the case of an ad-hoc foundation to provide direct support grants for employees of cultural and artistic institutions, established at the initiative of one of the larger foundations that supports culture and art in Israel, which recruited additional contributors for this purpose.

Another point of particular interest in this context is the establishment of the “Veshamarta” initiative aimed at protecting elderly populations in institutional settings by formulating protocols for protective conduct and by supplying large quantities of protective equipment. The project was initiated by a philanthropist who mobilized additional donors from his circle of acquaintances and from foundations. Eventually, the entire enterprise was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health.

Finally, the case of the philanthropy-government initiative for strengthening NPOs also demonstrates the collaborative environment on the backdrop of the crisis. In this case, a group of foundations wished to provide focused financial support to NPOs that were unable to meet the eligibility terms of the general support programs offered by government. The participating foundations pooled their financial resources and partnered with government to establish a joint foundation that would award direct financial assistance to NPOs harmed by the crisis.
The sparse research available on elite philanthropy in Israel describes a dynamic field in constant motion, characterized by developments and transformations, both on the institutional-organizational level and on the level of practices and conceptions of actors operating within it (Barkai, 2003; Hasky-Leventhal & Kabalo, 2006; Silber, 2008, 2012; Krauz-Lahav, 2020; Krauz-Lahav & Kemp, 2020; Schmid & Rudich, 2012; Shimoni, 2009, 2017). The rapid formation, and evolving of Israeli philanthropy over recent decades is described as associated with socio-economic factors, including the shrinking of the Israeli welfare state, the spread of neo-liberal policies, the sharp increase in social gaps and inequalities, the increasing attrition of social rights and the dramatic increase in social needs that have remained outside governmental care (Silber, 2008).

Since the 1980s, following a long tradition of concentrated fundraising efforts overseas among US and European Jewish communities (Hasky-Leventhal & Kabalo, 2006), the share of Israeli philanthropists in the field gradually increased, whereas their contributions were made, via both private and corporate foundations. Thus, over recent decades we have witnessed the emergence of a variety of independent Israeli philanthropic institutions: family, corporate, public and community foundations that raise, mediate and allocate donations for social programs and initiatives (Gidron et al., 2006). Today, some of the leading Israeli philanthropists direct their philanthropic activities through private organizations, NPOs and foundations, which are often managed by the philanthropists themselves (Silber, 2012), and in recent years we see a growing trend of Israeli family foundations that are being established (Brener et al., 2010).

This formation of institutionalized Israeli philanthropy has been studied in depth in the work of Silber (2008) who examined the perceptions of leading Israeli philanthropists as to their role in the development of the field, and the philanthropic discourse that they have been shaping in recent years. Silber also investigated the attitudes of Israeli philanthropists to the role and function of the state and their attitudes towards elected public officials, i.e., the “politicians”. Her

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work points to the existence of “civic anger” as a motivation for philanthropic giving (Silber, 2012). Indeed, the issue of criticism directed at the role of the government in coping with social issues in general and in the context of social-philanthropic collaborations in particular, is discussed in current research of Israeli philanthropy (Almog-Bar & Zichlinksi, 2010; Krauz-Lahav, 2020; Krauz-Lahav & Kemp, 2020; Schmid & Shaul Bar Nissim, 2015; Shimoni, 2017). The research points to a structural ambivalence in the attitudes of philanthropists towards government and its representatives: Shimoni (2009, 2017) claims that leading Israeli philanthropists have negative perceptions towards the government, although they expect and even demand governmental involvement in their philanthropic projects, while Krauz-Lahav’s ethnographic study (2020) describes complex, tense and fragile reciprocal relationships between philanthropic actors and the long-standing right-wing Israeli political regime (Krauz-Lahav, 2020).

However, in order to understand the background for this ambivalence, it is necessary to examine philanthropy-government power relations in the wider socio-political context of economic, social and political changes in the Israeli field of power. Alongside processes of structural change in the Israeli economy over recent decades and their influence on the composition of local financial elites (Maman, 2004, 2006), members of the business community were required to cope with the socio-political struggles of Israeli society, the breakdown of collectivist political culture and the accelerated entry of neo-liberal values (Ram & Filc, 2004). These struggles and transitions found expression within the field of elite philanthropy itself, through philanthropic actors' discourse and practices (Krauz-Lahav & Kemp, 2020). Barkai (2003) claims that the business community is attempting to promote a liberal-secular agenda through its activities within the field of CSR. The philanthropy of business leaders is expressly motivated by their feeling that the State is in a deep social crisis. It is impacted by specific developments and political events such as the murder of Prime Minister Rabin and the rise of the Shas ultra-religious political party, perceived as threats to their privileged status as an Ashkenazi, secular, Zionist and liberal elite (Barkai, 2003).

In the field of private philanthropy too, the act of giving is intertwined within a sense of a “national mission”. Silber (2008) shows how the giving patterns of Israeli philanthropists are frequently characterized by Zionist engagement and “pioneering” volunteering activity. The discourse that accompanies their giving is motivated by a sense of immediate urgency for social action and by rage towards the state and Israeli politics (Silber, 2012).
The subjects of Silber’s study (2008) in the field of private philanthropy and those of Barkai’s study (2003) in the corporate field are among the leaders and founders of the business community, and mostly belong to the veteran financial elite in Israel. Over the years, this elite was composed of well-known and deeply rooted Ashkenazi networks and families that had also accumulated their wealth thanks to their historical connections with the “nobility” of the formerly ruling parties (Mapai, HaAvoda) (Fraenkel, 2000; Etisoni-Halevy, 1997). On the background of the crisis that this elite had undergone since the 1977 political upheaval and the continuing erosion of the power of the Labor Party, the leaders of the business community have allocated most of their donations to national goals, while attempting to further a secular-liberal agenda through their philanthropy (Barkai, 2003). The challenges facing philanthropists in the face of these socio-political changes have become even more complex in the past decade with the rise of new right-wing religious political elites, the entrenchment of the political right in government and the rise of populist-nationalist political discourse (Krauz-Lahav, 2020; Krauz-Lahav & Kemp, 2020).

The nationalist and Zionist characteristics of the activities of Israeli philanthropists were also found by Brener et al. (2010), who emphasized that the pattern of allocating most of the resources to intra-State Israeli purposes is incompatible with Israel’s position as a leading economic player and its membership in OECD nations. Contrary to the patterns in other countries in the West, Israeli institutional philanthropy is strongly engaged in public-government activities, such as through participation in the financing of public hospitals, schools and other public bodies (Ibid).

These tensions and dissonances constitute the historical and socio-political background for the ambivalence of Israeli philanthropic actors towards the government. Whereas on the one hand they criticize the role and conduct of the government regarding social issues and problems, and on the other hand they understand and accept the need to collaborate with the government and mobilize its involvement in the projects that they initiate (Krauz-Lahav, 2020). Krauz-Lahav (2020) points to the frequently harsh feelings of philanthropic actors as to what they perceive as the unfair and populist conduct of politicians and government representatives towards wealthy philanthropists. They describe their relations with the politicians and the regulators as complex, tense and delicate relations of power, especially where various inter-sector partnerships are concerned. At the same time, they demonstrate a high self-awareness regarding the inherently
problematic nature of the clash between “capital” and “government” within the philanthropic arena. This is a central and lively discourse, where philanthropists and professionals sit together, revolving around the political role and significance of philanthropy within a democratic regime (Krauz-Lahav, 2020). The complexity of reciprocal relations between philanthropy and government is also described from an institutional point of view by a case study depicting an inter-sector partnership that failed because of conceptual differences, structural barriers and issues of trust between the parties (Almog-Bar & Zichlinksi, 2010).

On this background of complex and fragile reciprocal relations between philanthropy and government and the ambivalent attitudes of philanthropic actors towards the long-standing right-wing regime, the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a case study indicative of the way in which patterns of connectivity and withdrawal, take place within both intra-philanthropic collaborations and inter-sector partnerships in a time of extreme socio-economic crisis.

**Research Design**

This study is based on combined ethnographic field-work: in-depth interviews, participant observations, and data from questionnaires. In order to examine the ways in which Israeli philanthropy copes with the ongoing Covid-19 crisis while engaging in inter-sector partnerships and intra-philanthropy collaborations, we carried out in-depth Zoom interviews with five informants situated in key roles in the local philanthropic field; mainly heads of major IPOs. To gain a wider perspective on the field and the customary modes of discourse during the crisis, we carried out participant observations in various philanthropic Zoom meetings and forums. Additionally, we analyzed data from an institutional philanthropy study, conducted among dozens of Israeli philanthropic foundations. The combination of these methods allowed us to gather recent and up-to-date empirical evidence, and to investigate the ways in which internal and external collaborations were formed, managed and referred to, during an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. The multi-dimensional analysis allowed us to illuminate the increasing complexity of philanthropy-government power relations and the inter-sectorial tensions and contradictions, within their broader socio-political context.
Chapter 1 – Intra-philanthropic collaborations in the midst of crisis: Rapprochement, consolidation and togetherness.

“At a very early stage, we were struck by the understanding that this crisis is not something we can understand or overcome independently.”

A., the director of a large philanthropic organization and a central informant in the field, describes the feelings that gripped her and her colleagues when the COVID-19 pandemic began rapidly spreading throughout Israel in March 2020 and it was already evident that this was an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis. When we spoke with her and with additional informants in the field – the directors of IPOs and foundations – a central theme that arose from their statements was a clear increase in the sense of “partnership” as an important approach and a desirable way to cope with the crisis within the intra-philanthropic field itself.

Another informant explained that in retrospect it is possible to identify three stages of development during the crisis. The first, a brief and chaotic emergency state, was characterized by individualism: philanthropists and foundations independently transferred emergency grants to health institutions and NPOs they previously supported, and gave rise to an understanding that philanthropy can and should constitute the backbone and anchor for NPOs. The second, was characterized by exchange of information, knowledge, insights and the development of collaborative partnerships under emergency conditions. The third, involved questions that go beyond the emergency period, such as what can we do in the intermediate future to provide appropriate support amid crisis.

Indeed, all interviewees described how the message of collaboration quickly spread throughout the field as the philanthropic IPOs immediately joined forces and began working together on the basis of open and current communications, mutual updates and intensive exchanges of information – so as to provide beneficial response to the various emergency needs raised by NPOs. A central characteristic pointed out by informants was the sharing of information and knowledge as the initial response to the crisis – a trend that continued to expand in philanthropist forums and “interest groups” that were actually established prior to the crisis by the IPOs, but now became far more active and increasingly intensive as the crisis deepened. During these meetings, participants shared challenges and difficulties, mutually examined options for responding to the unique needs, and learned from practices and insights of others.
Interviewees indicated that such discourse and level of collaboration between foundations and donors were not inconsequential, and are indicative of a perception of the “emergency” nature of the new reality; they saw this as a consequence of deep commitment to NPOs that increased donors’ extraordinary willingness to expose themselves – something that had not usually happened. A consequence of this information-sharing discourse, which became increasingly prevalent as the crisis intensified, has been the high level of comfort that philanthropic actors currently feel in contacting each other and sharing mutual potential initiatives – so that it is possible that this increasing collaborative discourse, served as fertile ground for the mobilization of philanthropic collaborations on the practical level. As described by one of the informants: “today, more than before the crisis, it is easier to share, as well as request and raise funds from one another. This connectivity and sharing among themselves was greatly strengthened during this period.”

Alongside the coming together of IPOs, which fostered collaboration at the level of discourse between the actors in the field, the second stage was also characterized by various configurations of practical philanthropic partnerships between foundations and donors that were established in order to provide a response to immediate emergency needs. Most of the informants referred to these collaborations as “highly successful”, describing a speedy and impressive mobilization aimed at jointly raising large sums. This also applied to existing philanthropic partnerships (that have been established prior to the COVID-19 outbreak) – whereby the discourse between partners became more open, collaborative and efficient amid the crisis, and the joint work was carried out with a very high level of mutual transparency and trust.

Interviewees indicated that in many cases philanthropic collaborations amid the crisis were actually based on prior acquaintances with high levels of comfort and mutual trust (“cliques” in the field of philanthropy). These enabled the joining of forces in advocacy and efforts towards maximizing and leveraging “big” government financing.

Interviewees pointed to three types of collaboration in the philanthropic field: The first involves the mutual and reciprocal raising of funds among donors and foundations, towards projects and organizations in which they were previously involved in, and which now required emergency grants, such as for the benefit of food distribution organizations. The second type involved joint projects that were established ad-hoc in response to immediate emergency needs, such as
“Veshamarta”, mentioned above. The third type involved strategic intermediate and long-term collaborations, such as joint forums established by the foundations in specific subject areas that were deeply harmed by the crisis (e.g. an art and culture forum), as well as a joint funds established by a number of foundations in order to support the rehabilitation of the post-crisis routine.

Interviewees reported that all these required the partners to deploy flexibility, dynamism, and a high level of fast and adaptive responses. Thus, the main challenge for the philanthropic actors during and after the COVID-19 crisis was to cope with the changes taking place – a challenge that also constituted an opportunity for renewed self-examination.

It seems that the necessity of coping with a changing reality and continuing uncertainty had sharpened and accelerated for many of the philanthropic actors an understanding of philanthropy’s role in times of socio-economic crisis, as well as the importance of intra-philanthropic “partnership” and “connectivity” in the face of changes and upheavals. The crisis significantly strengthened the sense of “togetherness” among the foundations and philanthropists themselves, as well as the understanding and recognition of the advantages of their joint power. They understood at a very early stage that this partnering was vital in the face of chaos experienced by the NPOs and their beneficiaries. Indeed, the actions taken by the IPOs when they issued the announcement of support was based on an understanding that in the face of such tectonic changes one must provide civil society a stable “backbone” and establish a safety net for the NPOs – or as one of the interviewees stated: “If there is something that philanthropy knows how to do, it is to serve as an anchor.” This understanding of the importance of joint action within the philanthropic field arose from the actors’ own conception of their role, as they viewed “the deep social role of philanthropy as that of continuing to serve as the stable and mitigating element” in the face of socio-economic turmoil. “This is the essence of philanthropy” said another interviewee and explained that the heads of the foundations understood that they would be able to achieve a sense of stability and durability by coming together to create a “multiplier of power” within the social field. In this context, all of our informants agreed that the COVID-19 crisis had reinforced the value of “partnership” within the field of philanthropy, and had improved the implementation and quality of partnerships.
This consensus among informants receives further corroboration from a study that we conducted among dozens of philanthropic foundations. Many indicated that the issue of collaboration and partnerships was central, and still is, when describing the ways in which the foundations were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Most respondents reported that the main impact of the crisis was operational, and especially affected their ad-hoc partnerships with other foundations and the pooling of resources towards emergency needs. They testified to the increased search for partnerships amid the crisis, recognized the great value of the pooling of philanthropic resources, and described such collaborations as successful and beneficial. Some of them described how they chose to apply themselves to joint efforts in a way that fostered the allocation of additional special grants for emergency needs, increasing “new” funds that did not come at the expense of the foundations’ strategic goals.

Indeed, many respondents most often defined the COVID-19 crisis as an event that emphasized, sharpened and accelerated the need for connections and partnerships, and which had indeed pushed foundations to enter joint initiatives. One of the hopes expressed when they considered the future in the long-term, was that the COVID-19 crisis would constitute “a true opportunity to achieve a deep change within the social and philanthropic field” in the sense of creating more collaborations, sharing information and pooling of resources, and the merging of initiatives and organization. They expressed an insight, by which such philanthropic partnerships as these are the optimum basis for establishing action strategies that are stable, robust and resilient in the face of external crisis.

The heads and directors of foundations described the ability of foundations to collaborate among themselves as “multipliers” towards two distinct sectors: First as a driving force for increased efficiency within the social sector and the NPOs; and second, as a force of influence towards the professional echelons and decision makers within the governmental sector. Indeed, in this context, there was a consensus among all interviewees and respondents that philanthropic partnerships are a useful and vital tool in leveraging action and increasing influence with the government and its ministries. This issue, of the changing power relations between the local philanthropic field and the Israeli government during and following the COVID-19 crisis is discussed in the next chapter.
**Chapter 2 – Inter-sector partnerships between philanthropy and government: Growing ambivalence and complexity in the face of the Covid-19 crisis**

“... some testified that the work with the government improved during this period... but the sense of a loss of trust is very deep...”

In all of our conversations with informants, they discussed feelings of disappointment, anger and frustration towards the government on the backdrop of the crisis. Criticism was directed towards government decisions in managing the crisis in general (and towards the politicization of the crisis in the absence of a stable government), but more than that, criticism was directed towards the way in which the government treated the joint-ventures of government-philanthropy collaboration. In some of the cases, the government had made independent unilateral decisions to freeze projects and discharge their employees, without even consulting with their philanthropic partners; this behavior conveyed a message that the government’s concept of partnership relations was a lean one of joint funding only, rather than a true partnership in assuming responsibility and joint decision making processes. Our informants described a sense of real shock within the field of philanthropy, as well as a loss of trust: “the harsh feeling was that the government had turned its back and gone off.”

However, despite their negative feelings over the unilateral conduct of the government, philanthropic actors tended to assume responsibility and add the resources required as a consequence of the freezing of activities and financing on the part of the government – so as to continue activities in joint projects with the understanding that these were particularly vital in the face of the crisis; “no project broke down – philanthropy continued to operate and filled the vacuum left by the government when it withdrew and stopped supporting projects during critical moments of crisis.”

Even when inter-sectorial roundtables were established so that the government and civil society may share information regarding the needs arising from the field, these were ultimately disappointing, since as early as May 2020 most activities in the roundtables had effectively ceased, after dwindling away rather than through any declared termination.

As opposed to the faltering ties with the government in the mechanisms for gathering and sharing information that were specifically established for coping with the crisis, in some cases communication channels that were established prior to the pandemic between government and
separate independent philanthropic projects were preserved and maintained and proved effective and beneficial. Thus, philanthropic projects mobilized to help in the distribution of food baskets and equipment for remote learning, in accordance with messages provided by the government in much the same way that they had been prior to the crisis.

However, beyond these connections, that had existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, new collaborations were established between philanthropy and government. An example of this is the “Veshamarta” initiative mentioned above. One informant reported a lively interest within philanthropy in collaborating with the Ministry of Health when this initiative was launched, but explained that the conditions during the emergency stage had not matured to the point that this became possible and philanthropy did not wait for collaboration. At the same time, the informant added, the Ministry of Health could not ignore the project and its success, and at a later stage, it adopted the model and used it as the basis for the “Magen Avot Ve-imahot” (A shield for fathers and mothers) project.

Another example of cooperation described by our informants as extraordinary and ground-breaking was the founding of a philanthropy-government initiative for strengthening NPOs, a joint fund for providing financial support to NPOs harmed by the crisis. A quarter of the foundation’s funds were donated by philanthropic foundations active in Israel while 75% was provided by government budgets. The criteria for providing NPOs with assistance were based on the usual support indices used by the Ministry of Welfare; but, these were altered somewhat in negotiations between the government and philanthropy, and were adjusted to expand accessibility under the circumstances of the crisis. Our informants emphasize that this collaboration, amid crisis, is groundbreaking and extraordinary in that for the first time a joint financial foundation mixes between two utterly different sources – a public budget and

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10 It should be noted that such joint mechanisms that merge government budgets with donations are found elsewhere in the world, such as the Premier’s Flood Relief Appeal established following floods in Queensland in 2010, which was funded by the government of Queensland and by donations provided by businesses and other private parties. Another example is the Clean Ganga Fund established by the Indian Government inviting private contributions alongside the initial governmental budget allocated to the mission.
philanthropic funds, and the two parties reach an agreement regarding distribution criteria, with the distribution itself carried out by a joint committee.

Our informants described how the process itself revealed some of the challenges that arise in establishing collaboration between government and philanthropy: the challenges of language and conceptualization, gaps in strategic planning and operations in face of government procedures and the tensions of authority and power between steering and executive committees, the professional echelon and the political echelon.

Although it is still early to conclude, at present opinions differ regarding the level of success achieved by the joint fund. Some voices laud the very fact of collaboration and the extension of the toolkit available to the Ministry of Welfare in providing services., Others raise doubts referring to the rigid criteria agreed upon which required three rounds for complete distribution of the total funds and pointing to the fact that the collaboration was not repeated.

Complexity and ambivalence expressed by philanthropy regarding collaborations with the government of Israel is nothing new. This is also reflected in a study we conducted within the institutional field among dozens of philanthropic foundations in Israel. In the context of this study, we asked whether foundations tend to align their activities with government priorities. Most responded in the negative, but 30% did answer in the affirmative while 20% testified that they tend to align with the priorities established by local government. Nevertheless, many respondents, whether tending to align or not, emphasized the great importance of their independence and autonomy in making decisions regarding causes and mode of activity, emphasizing that they did not depend on the government, and that their professional considerations diverge from government interest. Those who tended to align wished to explain their position as an instrumental one based on considerations of efficiency, leveraging resources and achieving a wide impact.

Similar explanations were also given by respondents who were questioned about their collaboration with the national government or local governments. In this context, more than 50% of respondents reported collaborating with the public sector and explained that such collaborations increase the budget, impact and sustainability of projects in the long run. Moreover, they explain that through collaboration, they mediate the needs of NPOs and the
public to the government, but the terminology used indicates ambivalence once more: “forced,” “necessary” “needed”.

The ambivalent and complex picture of collaboration with the government is also noted in the viewpoints of respondents regarding the crisis and its aftermath. In this context, various respondents, as well as our informants, described the loss of trust on the background of the political situation in Israel and its governmental instability; a loss that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in regard to which the functioning of the government was described as “defective” and “flawed”.

However, when asked to estimate how these matters will impact collaboration between philanthropy and government, yet again, a complex picture arose. First, there were assumptions in both directions as to the roles that the government may assume in the near future in view of the crisis. Some assumed that the government may invest more in social services and some feared that it would further retreat from its responsibility for social services, inter alia, due to austerity arising of severe budgetary shortage. Secondly, despite the loss of trust and the challenges involved in collaborating, instrumental considerations of increased financing, efficiency, achieving a wider impact and securing long-term sustainability play a crucial role in tipping the balance to the side of continued collaboration.

“This strongly reinforced the significance of their role as philanthropists to establish initiatives, create models and shine a light on places that are less cared for. There is still an expectation that the government will provide funds, because of the scale. They do not strive to replace the government.”

Moreover, these reflections are based on an optimistic and hopeful position that is also in some sense a consequence of the crisis events. Hence, alongside the loss in trust, philanthropy recognizes that government agencies gained new understandings, both regarding the distinct identity of philanthropy which is clearly differentiated from NPOs, and the significance of partnerships and the care required on the part of the government in entering such partnerships, with all its nuanced implications: “Since then, there is greater care on the part of the government in entering partnerships and there is critical thinking before entering new partnerships, which is also based on a renewed professional appreciation of the knowledge,
experience and professionalism of philanthropy, instead of just narrowly perceiving it as a source of funding.”

**Concluding discussion: Covid-19 crisis as accelerating intra-philanthropic collaborations and refining inter-sectorial partnerships**

“Philanthropists understand the power of their togetherness, of their connectedness; and that collaboration with the government must be structured in a different way from this day on... ‘Togetherness’ is a power even when facing a 'common enemy'.”

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its social, economic and political consequences in Israel, has affected the local philanthropy field. In the study that we conducted among foundations, most indicated that the crisis had significantly impacted their modus of operations. Respondents devoted particular attention and special emphasis to the topic of collaboration – both within the intra-philanthropic and the inter-sectorial spheres.

Moreover, the picture arising from the findings presented above is that of two seemingly obverse trends: on the one hand, there is a rapprochement and a strengthening of togetherness among philanthropic actors, while on the other hand there is an ambivalence and reexamination of government-philanthropy relations. In the discussion below, we consider the connection between these two trends and offer insights regarding the role of the COVID-19 crisis in their acceleration and refinement.

The first theme arising from the field and tying the two trends together is the understanding among philanthropic actors that in times of colossal socio-economic crisis, intra-philanthropic collaborations provide a vital and importance “multiplier” effect towards the government and governmental agencies. The crisis was presented as an “accelerator” and as creating “momentum” for the joining of philanthropic forces in a way that might better utilize governmental resources for immediate emergency needs. The governments’ initial response to the crisis and the unilateral processes that it implemented, led to an intra-philanthropic dialog that was characterized by anger and a deep frustration. Many philanthropic actors felt that the governments’ conduct constituted a “blatant breach of partnership” and signaled to them that “there is no conception of partnership on the part of the government towards the philanthropic
It seems that this dialog underlay a mutual understanding regarding the power and necessity of the philanthropic “togetherness” during this chaotic time.

The informants in the field described this concept of “togetherness” that grew stronger, as a generator of the “multiplier” – a power that can be translated into pressure on the government in the context of inter-sectorial partnerships. Collaboration between foundations and philanthropists were considered to be contributing to a “maximization of benefits” in the sense of increasing the value of the group and its ability to “motivate” processes with the “external” partner – the government: “‘Togetherness, the foundations among themselves, naturally creates power which may be translated to putting pressure on the government through inter-sector collaborations’.

Another theme, seemingly contrasting to the multiplier one, was the new and sober attitude of philanthropic actors towards inter-sectorial partnerships following the crisis and the government’s conduct through it. But, the informants that we interviewed described how despite feelings of anger and frustration and despite the loss of trust, philanthropists and foundation in Israel still adhere to the understanding that in order to lead significant, strategic actions that will have a widespread and sustainable influence, it is necessary to collaborate with the government:

“Government funding in all areas of civil society is of crucial importance. One cannot ignore it. A philanthropic sector that believes it can work while remaining detached from the governmental sector is severely deluding itself. … but what is the model that would be best for government and philanthropy to enter a partnership?”

The ambivalent discourse of the philanthropic actors is clearly discernible and seems to have intensified due to the crisis. The COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent loss of trust in the relations between government and philanthropy have led to a wakeup call among philanthropic actors and a re-examination of collaborations with the government, whereas they now take extra care when considering such inter-sectorial partnerships. In this sense, one outcome of the crisis as displayed in the attitudes of philanthropists and foundations towards partnerships with the government is a process of re-thinking the “how” rather than the “if”. It is a process of disillusionment and of greater precision in the definition of the respective roles of the foundations and the government in these partnerships, which must, undoubtedly, be restructured. Interviewees presumed that after the crisis passes, and given the current low level of trust that philanthropists have towards the government, they will come to these future partnerships with a sober state of mind, more
organized and “ready”, and with a more focused and utilitarian perspective. They testified that there is less faith today in the government as a “true partner”.

This prediction presented by interviewees, wherein they foresee increased ambivalence and rethinking of inter-sector partnerships by philanthropic actors, is corroborated by the reflections of foundation professionals who, when asked about the ways in which the crisis will influence Israeli philanthropy in the coming decade, emphasized the central impact on collaborations, and expressed a combination of concern and hope – on the one hand concern that in the long-term the COVID-19 crisis would cause donors and foundations to steer away from collaborations with the government as a consequence of its deficient conduct, while on the other hand expressing hope that in the long-term the crisis will lead to an increase of collaborations, both between donors and foundations among themselves and between philanthropic actors and the national and local governments.

The clear consensus on this issue was that in view of the crisis and its consequences, the increase in collaborations is necessary and important, in face of predicted austerity due to the shrinking of the public budget, and further predictions regarding the possible termination of NPOs, in parallel with an increase in socio-economic challenges. However, it seems that this consensus mainly pertains to the intra-philanthropic sphere, i.e., it is more reflective of a movement towards the strengthening of partnerships between philanthropic actors among themselves than towards inter-sector partnerships. In general, respondents estimated that in future, once the COVID-19 crisis passes, there will be less reliance on government funds and greater reliance on philanthropic collaborations: “When the government doesn’t function and the general resources shrink, philanthropy must exert a greater and more strategic presence.”

In this paper, we have examined the case of the COVID-19 crisis in Israel and the way that it has influenced trends of collaboration and withdrawal in the intra-philanthropic and the inter-sector spheres. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, the literature of Israeli philanthropy points to the structural and political complexities, which in turn create tense reciprocal relations between philanthropy and government, and the critical and reserved attitude of leading philanthropists towards the regime (Almog-Bar and Zichlinski, 2019; Barkai, 2003; Krauz-Lahav 2020; Krauz-Lahav & Kemp, 2020; Schmid and Shaul Bar-Nisim, 2015; Shimoni, 2017; Silber, 2008, 2012).
Nonetheless, some researchers point to philanthropic endeavors driven by a sense of a Nationalist-Zionist mission, which is distinct and unique to the Israeli philanthropic field (Barkai, 2003; Silber, 2012; Krauz-Lahav & Kemp, 2020). Thus, in fact, this inherent ambivalence of Israeli philanthropic actors towards the regime and its agencies already existed before the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis.

In this context it seems that the COVID-19 crisis, on top of the increasingly severe political crisis in which Israel has been mired in recent years, has exacerbated and intensified the inherent political tensions and dissonances between the philanthropic field and the government. The conduct of the government when the crisis began and its handling of the socio-economic challenges that arose, in particular where inter-sector partnerships were concerned, deepened the rift between the parties, and required the philanthropic actors to re-examine the very-matter of collaborations. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis in Israel has served to accelerate and intensify trends on both levels - intra-philanthropic and inter-sectoral - serving to accelerate partnerships and strengthen connectivity between philanthropic actors (often as a “multiplier” vis a vis the government). This, in turn, led to a greater understanding of the benefits inherent in intra-philanthropic collaborations, while at the same time also fostered a careful and sober perspective of inter-sector partnerships during the crisis and with a view to its aftermath. It remains to be seen to what extent these trends will continue over time, so long as the social and economic consequences of the crisis prevail.
References


