

Looking back: The shifts and drivers of philanthropy in 2023

As we welcome the new year, it's the perfect time to reflect on the achievements and challenges of the philanthropy sector in 2023, in order to build on the successes achieved and find ways to address any problem areas.



Image source: Cathy Yeulet – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

The philanthropy space in South Africa is a vital source of sustenance for those in need of social support. When taking into consideration the wide range of causes that require help - from those assisting humans and animals to the environment - it's vital to ensure that the philanthropy sector is in a healthy state.

NPOs were the most supported beneficiaries

The [Annual Review of South African Philanthropy 2023](#) reports that 'non-profit organisations (NPOs) were the most supported beneficiary type' this year. This is generally an advisable method of impact giving, as there is a paper trail and it helps givers to avoid scams.

Strategic tech involvement in fundraising

The rise of digital platforms like social media has enabled more efficient and transparent fundraising, while also increasing the quality of impact measurement.

Dalit Shekel, key accounts manager at Relate Bracelets, a not-for-profit social enterprise that raises funds for social upliftment initiatives, says tech is increasingly a key enabler in philanthropy.

“Tech connects the market and allows for seamless interaction. Other benefits of tech include the increased ability for people to make purchases of charity related products online, linking information sharing platforms like social media and sites with the payment gateway, where purchases and donations can be made at the drop of a hat. In our case, we’ve seen this with the sales of bracelets that we manufacture and sell to support charitable causes,” she says.



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Ongoing economic impact of the pandemic

The year 2023 saw significant shifts in the focus and priorities of impactful philanthropic giving locally. One of the main drivers of change was the Covid-19 pandemic, which continues to have a devastating impact on the well-being of society. The impact is felt in various ways, including economically and mentally.

Shekel says, “People lost family members, including breadwinners, and many families are still trying to recover financially. The pandemic exposed and worsened the deep inequalities and vulnerabilities that plague South Africa and also highlighted the resilience and innovation of its people. As tough as our people are, there is still a need for philanthropic support due to the socio-economic aftermath of the pandemic.”

The Annual Review of South African Philanthropy 2023 report states that “Most high net worth givers did not change their giving practices in response to the pandemic; and one-third increased their focus on immediate needs.”

A collective sense of community

Shekel says, “In the face of trials, our collective strength and sense of community became a guiding light. The World Health Organisation’s recent [recognition](#) of loneliness as a pressing health threat has struck a chord, leading to a new Commission on Social Connection — echoing what we’ve always championed: the vital importance of human connection and community.”

In relation to Relate’s 2023, she says, “We have witnessed growth in philanthropy in areas like clean water, education, and mental health — fundamental human needs gaining the attention they deserve. Philanthropy’s growth aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 6 — ensuring access to water and sanitation for all. In 2024, our focus at Relate will heavily involve initiatives related to access to safe water, a basic human need for health and well-being.”

The way forward

Looking ahead, Shekel says, “Approaching 2024, a wave of change is sweeping across industries. It’s not just about brand activations; it’s about creating a 360° brand experience in unexpected places, tapping into the ‘Fomo’ culture, which means having divided attention span because of other things that could be happening on the internet at the same time, and the power of belonging as we dive into a new era.”

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