



ENHANCING SOLIDARITY.



What is Solidarity?

A feeling of unity arising from common experiences, interests and beliefs between individuals and groups, and demonstrated by collective support and action.

We often think of solidarity in terms of our actions with friends and allies, we can also feel and be in solidarity with strangers and people beyond our immediate communities or countries who share similar feelings about right and wrong, and about justice and human rights.



Why is Solidarity Important?

Solidarity is essential for creating social change. It is what brings us together, unites us and forges collective efforts that are stronger than we could ever achieve individually. In our work on violence against women (VAW), solidarity helps us move from an individual perspective to building group consciousness. It allows us to move beyond supporting an individual woman to supporting all women to enjoy lives free of violence, we begin to appreciate how women all over the world experience common oppressions. When there is no solidarity, activists feel isolated, there is a climate of fear, burn out and wasted resources.

Organizational activities are less powerful than they could be, and mixed messages can create confusion in the community with an increased likelihood of replicated efforts. The task of preventing VAW is a large one, in order to achieve this goal, we need to feel we are not alone, that others support us and stand together in solidarity with us.

Solidarity is important every day, but now more than ever because of the unique circumstances presented unto us by the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is also critical in this moment because of the need for heightened activism against various social injustices including racism, climate change, economic exploitation, etc. As individuals and as organizations, this is the time to connect through our shared humanity and stand with each other, express collective support and action.



What does Solidarity look like?

It is sometimes hard to know what solidarity looks like, since we identify with it first as a feeling. We can usually feel whether others are working in solidarity with us or not. Many forms of collaboration exist without solidarity—people manage the practicalities of shared tasks and goals, while still missing the deepest levels of shared passion, values alignment and commitment to a greater vision. Solidarity holds a rare power and is what has made movements across history so transformative and memorable. Solidarity can connect strangers, creating lasting connections that endure the greatest challenges.

To access a collective power we need to know what solidarity looks like, so that, above all, we can look for and nurture those qualities within ourselves and in our efforts to grow the movements we support.

- **Cohesion** is when there are common principles or shared beliefs within a group. It doesn't mean that everyone has the same opinion on everything but rather that there is agreement on the fundamentals— for example, that violence against women is an injustice.
- **Cooperation** is when individuals working together demonstrate respect, support and sensitivity to each other. This means engaging, discussing, listening and compromising.





- **Trust** is the foundation of all positive relationships, both personal and professional. It must exist for solidarity to flourish. Trust arises from consistent honesty, sincerity and straightforward communication, creating the faith that there will be transparency and that no one will deceive another.
- **Mutual Respect** is demonstrated when everyone's capacity and perspective is honored and valued. This means seeing all individuals as equals and acknowledging that every individual has something important to contribute.
- **Empathy** is the ability to connect with the experience and feelings of others. It is the reason we can feel in solidarity with someone we have never met.
- **Reliability** is what sustains a feeling of solidarity. Even when problems, differences, conflicts or challenges emerge, there must be a genuine commitment to persevere—to work through the challenging times together. We must show up for each other reliably and consistently – even through difficult times.
- **Reaching Out to individuals**, activists and others is a way of showing solidarity. Reaching out in solidarity is a way to say, “we can be stronger together” and “I’ll stand by you.” It is about making connections based on shared values.

Solidarity is not taking up the space and assuming the lead or replicating the inequalities we are trying to stop. It is dangerous and harmful to assume that we know better than the people we are trying to stand in solidarity with, when this happens, we use our power over them and end up perpetuating unhealthy power dynamics.

Standing in solidarity with other people doesn't mean that we are forfeiting our rights or ignoring /downplaying our issues or injustices. As witnessed during some social justice campaigns, downplaying injustices in the guise of making it more inclusive, such as the #MeToo movement being supplanted by #Mentoo or #Blacklivesmatter being corrupted into #Alllivesmatter -- this is very harmful and distracts the attention from urgent structural inequalities.



Why is Solidarity sometimes difficult to practice?

We know in principle that solidarity is essential, yet in practice it is often hard to feel and foster at a personal, organizational or collective levels.

At personal level, solidarity is at times difficult to practice because of a lack of confidence or belief in ourselves, feeling distant from the issues, feelings of competition, being preoccupied with own struggles, fear of judgement, feeling intimidated by others, unwillingness to move out of our own comfort zone, etc

At an organizational level, solidarity is at times difficult to practice because of competition, suspicion of others, desire for recognition, lack of confidence in our organizational purpose or identity, being unconstructively critical, an unwillingness to put in the time, etc



What can we do to stand in Solidarity with others during COVID-19?

During moments of crisis is when we can “walk the talk” of standing in solidarity and being strong allies.



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INDIVIDUALS

- Check in with family, friends, colleagues and neighbors about how they are doing.
- Support vulnerable people who are more affected by the pandemic, for example, offering to do shopping for the elderly, supporting a single mother with childcare, etc.
- Avoiding sharing fake news that may raise alarm and checking in with people before you share news about the pandemic or any other graphic news.
- Start a virtual group that practices collective care exercises like meditation, affirmation, book clubs etc

GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

- Government institutions can put in place structures / facilities to support vulnerable groups most affected by the Pandemic, for example, providing food and shelter.
- Governments can deem VAW services as essential.
- Governments can have a zero tolerance policy for harassment or abuse of women through all government services and offices.
- Ensure all security personnel enforcing curfews and lockdowns are aware of VAW, take it seriously, allow women seeking services to move, etc.
- Train all services providers (health, security, justice, education, etc) to understand the basics of VAW and how they can effectively prevent and respond to it.

ORGANIZATIONS

- Reach out to community members, partners and funders to find out how COVID-19 is affecting their lives and their work.
- Support self-care and wellbeing among staff and all stakeholders.
- Share updates (e.g., funding opportunities, important materials, etc).
- Pool resources.
- Listen and support wherever possible — and provide extra support for partners (or individuals) with more acute needs.
- Strengthen our connections and relationships—developing a plan for how to keep in touch throughout the crisis.
- Consider writing a joint press release or formal statement of solidarity drawing attention to how women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, sex workers, individuals reliant on daily wages, and other groups are at increased risk during the pandemic.

DONOR INSTITUTIONS

- Fund innovations supporting vulnerable groups most affected by the Pandemic.
- Support partners to adapt their programs to meet current demands of COVID-19.
- Allow flexible terms, spending and reporting schedules.
- Provide core funding that allows organizations to allocate resources where there is most need.
- Listen to the groups you support. Ask them what they need.

References;

1. Raising Voices (2020) Guidance Note 4: How can VAW prevention programs adapt? Series on Preventing Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Kampala, Uganda.
2. Raising Voices (2020) Guidance Note 2: How can activist organizations adapt? Series on Preventing Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Kampala, Uganda.
3. Raising Voices (2012) Get Moving! Facilitator's Guide. 2nd ed. Kampala, Uganda

