



Empathy in the time of a Crisis... Response from a funder

By Naghma Mulla, COO, EdelGive Foundation

Today, as the world faces a time of great uncertainty, we, stakeholders in the development sector, cannot ignore the large impact that this pandemic is having on communities, programmes we support, and on-field staff that toils to transform at the grassroots. As funding organisations, particularly, it is part of our responsibility to ensure minimum disruptions to their programmes.

Amid discussions around maintaining physical distance and isolation, COVID 19 has, in-fact, given us a rare opportunity to come together in solidarity, and work through these uncertain times.

Having worked with a cohort of mostly small to mid-sized organisations, we realise the immense economic and societal strain that the spread of this virus has placed on our grantees. Disruptions in timelines, decrease in physical interactions such as training and community mobilisation activities, and lack of resources to address administrative challenges, have emerged as major challenges for our cohort. We see the immense impact of this on vulnerable communities heavily dependent on the programme support that the NGOs provide them. As funders, it is thus our responsibility to address these concerns and make provisions for extended support to our organisations. Here are some ways which we are adopting, which can be taken up by other funders as well.

Empathy, above everything else, will be the key lever towards tackling this situation. Until we are able to understand the plight of our grantees/partners, we will not be able to provide the needed support to them. It is time to rise-up beyond operational management, to build compassion and understanding, between us.

Communicate! With empathy as our guiding principle, ***maintaining communication*** with our organisations is of essence. Many of them are seeing months of work coming undone. With no assurance of sustainability, the stress multiplies under the circumstances. We can help them feel less isolated by simple gestures of solidarity.

Relax reporting timelines by a month, to begin with. Understanding there may be delays on reporting, but expressly accommodating for it.

Budgetary reallocations- To the extent possible, accommodating for the urgent and unforeseen expenses, staff salaries, travels, safety provisions, cost of sanitisers, is extremely important. This means we, as funders, will have to relax some of the pre-set requirements and allow for some flexibility in expenditure.

Staff salaries if ever there is a time to recognise the work of field workers in the success of programmes we support, this is it. Field workers need to be paid on time, and assurance from funders ensures that they are.

Readjustment of annual targets over the next 2 to 3 quarters, so as to reduce pressure on programme delivery over the next few critical months. This restructuring will ensure training and community intervention driven programmes are accounted for and balanced out.

As funders, now is the time for us to must **make speedy decisions** to enable our organisation to take speedy action. We can also play an important role as ***influencers across partner networks, facilitating collaboration*** and ***encouraging more funders to get on board***

Our role right now is absolutely critical, and we urge all funders to reach out to their grantees and partners. Our assurance will make a world of difference as we move towards an uncertain future and difficult times.