

Solidarity Matters May-November 2020 Participant Feedback

ANTHROPOCENE ACTIONS

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Summary

“Large-scale problems do not require large-scale solutions; they require small-scale solutions within a large-scale framework.” *David Fleming, author of Lean Logic*

As the scale of the existential challenges we face grows, many are wondering how to spread and accelerate positive changes already underway at different levels within communities and movements all over the world. Often localised and contextualised in nature, is there a horizontal framework across which those acting in very specific contexts can recognise and feel their commonalities and in solidarity bring change at a systems level?

All change begins with people. People and how they relate to others are at the heart of what needs to spread and accelerate. Solidarity Matters focused on activists and change agents rather than the issues they are working on. Evolving out of a pilot delivered in 2019, in 2020 we have iterated an approach to fostering qualitatively different relationships that could enable solidarity and collaborations across difference.

Solidarity Matters involved 22 participants and five facilitators from five continents, meeting as two groups every fortnight for over six months. The feelings, thoughts, and ideas of those involved in this experience point to key elements that seemed important to enabling solidarity across difference:

holding of safe space over time

- accessible, flexible, responsive to participants needs
- more intentional deeper exchange of the harder aspects of solidarity, including oppression, accountability, power and privilege
- discover learnings rather than be given them, e.g. come to values through participants own experience and sharing stories rather than presenting values from a particular perspective
- more grounded with better knowledge of other participants
- holding the space over a longer period may support emergence of lasting, trusting relationships and a greater valuing of such spaces in self care and healing.

bringing together diverse groups of people

- mixed power dynamics to enable collective liberatory work and solidarity that undermines the systems and processes of harm rather than unintentionally bolstering them
- sharing ways of doing and learning beyond our silos - critical engagement and self-reflection
- support participation (funding)
- finding shared understanding of what we are up against and what brings us together.

community of participants

- find other people interested in taking part in changing systems and being in solidarity
- continue learning from each other about solidarity
- access to previous experiences and wider community.

community of facilitators for convening/mentoring

- hold space flexibly, responsively, mindful of power, privilege, context, to transcend collaboration into solidarity
- focus on stories - knowing is in the group, create space to discover topics and common questions through connection
- clarity about desired outcomes and direction of process even if it changes
- guidance – things that work and don't work.

support implementing process in other settings

- spreading processes and learning within/across other networks and spaces
- clarity about desired outcomes and direction of processes
- enable wider prioritisation of introspection needed for solidarity work.

access to funding

- enable participation
- implement process in other settings bringing groups together
- build on/implement opportunities that emerge.

access to expertise

- involve participants, facilitators, others with design/scoping future phases
- support with keeping secure and using appropriate tech to enable this.

Solidarity Matters again tested and established the opportunity offered by online spaces. Well supported with diverse and experienced facilitators, the process demonstrated that it is possible to promote solidarity between people who never meet each other physically. The process also confirmed again that relationships are key, as is self-love and self-care by those who want to be in solidarity with others, something that is not equally prioritised within a 'doing' activist environment.

Taking these learnings into account, the planning/scoping of a phase 3 of fostering solidarity across difference is underway. Bringing together participants and facilitators from Solidarity Matters with others skilled in building narratives, networks and movements, we hope to further promote solidarity between many more activists and change makers working in a range of settings.

Introduction

Solidarity Matters emerged as phase two of a Values-based Solidarity pilot delivered in 2019. The purpose of the pilot was to test an approach to supporting the emergence of greater solidarity between activists and change agents working in different sectors, movements, locations, and with very different lived experiences, and specifically the role values play in fostering solidarity. We tested this by:

- bringing a diverse group of change makers together under a specific set of principles that, when appropriately resourced, could **foster qualitatively different relationships and social conditions that promote solidarity and collaborations across difference;**
- creating **opportunity for making connections between change makers, and their existing networks, issues and sectors,** fostering conditions for wider systems changes.

The explicit objectives for the process were to:

- Support participants and their facilitators in building solidarity in their existing spheres of influence.
- Experience a sense of connection and solidarity with others who they may not previously have seen as part of the change they are bringing and striving for.
- Foster the emergence of an international solidarity network rooted in common values.

The evaluation of the pilot gave us insight and learning to apply. Solidarity Matters emerged as the second phase of involving activists and change agents in testing an approach to fostering qualitatively different relationships that promote solidarity and collaborations across difference.

This report outlines findings from the evaluation of the two following simultaneous iterations. As with the pilot Solidarity Matters was a facilitated process involving change agents and activists. It ran between May and November 2020. It gives insights into the participant's perceptions of their experience, what, in their view, worked and didn't and what was missing, and the impact on their understanding and practice of solidarity.

What we did

Drawing on learning from the pilot we developed a six-month framework, within which there were processes and areas of focus in terms of subject matters we (the core-team) felt could support solidarity across difference. The proposed outline structure and content was:

Theme	Proposed content
Values	The role of values in supporting and enabling cross-issue and ideological collaboration and movement building.
Governance	The kinds of governance that supports emergence and enables collaboration, and the characteristics of evolving organizations with emergent features. Distributed leadership, the role of power and privilege.
Network theory, emergence and mapping	Components and characteristics of healthy, successful, impactful networks, and technology as an enabler. Mapping of networks that participants are aware or part of and if and how they interlink.

Narratives	How stories change cultures, and use of framing and data analysis, creativity and storytelling to show up the stories that have shaped our current paradigm of poverty, inequality and climate change. How to spread and tell new narratives that another world is possible in a way that feels like common sense.
Inner work	The emotional and psychological dimensions in the work of change makers, accepting and exploring how our inner and outer worlds are entwined, and how outer systemic change must also involve some kind of inner shift.
Technology that fosters humanity	How can we remake technologies, markets, institutions and other aspects of society in ways that foster our humanity?

Facilitation ‘train the trainer’

Before phase two began, a phase of facilitation training, led by the pilot lead facilitator with three participants (more information on the lead and co-facilitators is at Appendix 2), was completed. This ‘train the trainer’ phase was to test an approach to training activists and change agents to host space in a way that supports fostering solidarity across difference. The training phase was intended to extend into the delivery of Solidarity Matters, with trainees co-facilitating to ensure:

- sufficient capacity and capability to facilitate two Solidarity Matters processes running in parallel over six months
- testing of the training as applied in the space.

Participation in Solidarity Matters

With sufficient facilitators we were able to plan to run two Solidarity Matters processes in parallel. We identified and approached potential participants through our own contacts and networks and those of participants in the pilot. 26 activists and change agents joined the process and were split into two groups of 13 (A and B). Each group had an intentional mix of participants based on location, experience, issue, and type of work. As far as is possible we sought to ensure a range of gender and sexual identity. Group A was facilitated by three facilitators (including one trainee), and Group B by four (including 2 trainees).

In Group A four participants left the process for various reasons, and one more was recruited. Overall in Group A 10 people participated for the six months. In Group B three participants left, with 10 participating for the duration. An anonymised summary of participants is at Appendix 1.

Structure

The process was structured around fortnightly online sessions scheduled for two hours. It was intended that early sessions had clearly defined content (see above), and that later sessions would be more emergent, co-created with participants to explore issues the groups agreed.

Participants were invited to commit to 12 days of involvement over six months. Beyond the two-hour session of each group fortnightly, participants were encouraged to:

- apply any learning between sessions and bring their reflections and experiences to sessions
- participate in co-creation and facilitation of sessions suggested by participants
- organise and join interim sessions between scheduled sessions to explore issues arising.

Recognising their commitment, we offered participants \$100 a day to make participation feasible for everyone, rather than expecting people to volunteer their time.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation objectives were to gain insight into what needs to be present to foster and promote solidarity between activists and change agents across difference.

We collected data from:

- Session feedback forms after each session
- Informal conversations and email exchanges between facilitators and participants
- Overall feedback form and/or conversations with participants at the end of the process.

This report draws on this feedback to identify what worked, what was missing, and what could be improved, including recommendations for future iterations of Solidarity Matters. Themes are expanded wherever possible with anonymised extracts of feedback from participants.

The impact of Covid-19

It is important to acknowledge the extraordinary circumstances in which the second phase of Solidarity Matters was delivered. Whilst always intended as an online programme, it was developed and piloted in at a time when participation in online spaces for most people was less frequent. We had not anticipated that this online space might become one of many online sessions people were participating in.

There was also the strain the pandemic put on facilitators and participants, adding further pressure to their already stretched capacity, as well as the mental, emotional and health impact on themselves and those close to them. It did provide a rare context, however, of a crisis being experienced by people globally (although not equally) in a way few crises have been.

The impact of the pandemic, though difficult to quantify, will have impacted people's experience. With the increasing acceleration of the unravelling of interconnected social and environmental systems, this experience potentially offers insight into how to create and curate safe, nurturing spaces for fostering solidarity between activists and change-agents who remain, with millions of others, at the vanguard of responding to crises. Knowing more about approaches that can support the development of resilience and solidarity across difference remains urgent.

We are not alone in understanding this, and there are dangers in rushing to set up these spaces. As one participant observes; 'A lot of the movement is aware that it needs to do work. So it is trying to shortcut to that by calling everything a safe space, but not really knowing how to ensure that safe space.'

A note on the word 'solidarity'.

As you read through the report you may gain new insights or it may amplify things you already know about your own experience, or understanding, of solidarity. Participants in Solidarity Matters have diverse and different understandings of solidarity and its relationship with, and difference from, for example, friendship and collective-care. Beyond what needs to be present, and then the many nuances of what it means to be in solidarity, the organising team for Solidarity Matters are interested in learning more about intentionally **'fostering qualitatively different relationships and social conditions that promote solidarity and collaborations across difference'** which could, it is hypothesised, **'foster conditions for wider systems change'**.

This may not be possible. As one participant with many years' experience of being in solidarity commented when asked whether it was possible to curate a process 'I'm not sure – I haven't experienced it yet.'

Participant's experiences and reflections.

Overall experience

Of the 17 participants that gave feedback, all got something valuable from the process. For some it was quite a profound experience, for others it was a reminder of the value of spaces to interact with others. Even for those who didn't feel it added anything to their understanding of solidarity, they enjoyed meeting and being with others in the group and having a regular time for exploring issues and sharing during a difficult period.

For many there is a sense that the collective-care within the groups was really valuable. As activists and change agents, many participants identified that emergency and urgency is what drives their lives, with self-care, sharing with, and learning from, each other de-prioritised to a point where capacity to be in solidarity is much reduced.

There was also reference to the apparent lack of spaces where activists and change agents can feel safe enough to express vulnerability and share what's not going so well and what feels hard. Many describe a culture in spaces they attend that is antithetical to showing the vulnerability that many see as essential for fostering solidarity.

For many, therefore, it was a reminder of what is needed for people to offer and receive solidarity.

'I went back to a lot of things I had neglected over time, because you're in a rush most of the time and you always have this sense of emergency ... it was refreshing, and helped me go back to basics, organize a lot of things around self-care and what we do with working with others, especially this year'

'It's been a healing process for me, a self-introspection space and personal growth learning from other people, and different struggles. It showed me how solidarity matters not just on the ground, but talking and being in the space where you share the same commonalities with other'

people, and not just the local and the continent, but globally. It was really helpful because of the pandemic.'

'... people seemed to gravitate towards healing, nourishment, renewal ... This process of learning and talking, about our feelings – we don't get activists talking about our feelings, but perhaps we should. We can incorporate some of these things into our circles – why keep it for strangers?'

'It's made me value so much more these open exploratory spaces and their value to building solidarity, but I found it very challenging to carve that space out ... gets at very deep seated productivism that drives a lot of our work, and the world didn't fall apart because of the time I took to attend ... Maybe that's the message – you need to create spaces in that way to challenge our productivist mindset.'

'In other activist spaces you're asked to be strong, put your best foot forward, not to reflect ... Most of my connections are campaigns or work-based - issue becomes the focus point of working together. This was very refreshingly different. Didn't matter what you worked on, you can still connect at a human level ... I could say things and not be laughed at or explain myself with a lot of words, and I have to do this a lot in places where our activism is not understood. This was a safe place that made it really special.'

'Space with real experimenting, and being open to what will happen, and not being very directed. Opportunity to be engaged with the process, and just see what will happen, how it will go. For example the painful dynamics I've seen in other groups – will they emerge. How deep can we go. That space for reflection to reflect on previous experiences of solidarity whether they went well or badly, how I might want to do things differently based on conversations with others in the group, and noticing how the facilitation in the group went well.'

'[It was a] support system during difficult times. Something stable in times of grave uncertainty. Felt soothing knowing there is this community ... where I was able to exchange.'

Even though there was some value, for others it felt less useful, and something of a wasted opportunity, leaving expectations unmet.

'I didn't feel that there's anything I've not done before. For me the added value was meeting people who are awesome I definitely feel like it's important both the stuff that we did and what I was looking for ... [my] expectations were we were going to dive into solidarity work and learn how to do it better ... [we] recreated a space where you could share your heart, which is great and meaningful, but in a different way.'

'Stimulation mixed with some frustration. The most diverse group I've worked with that I can think of, possibly ever. Rich experiences and insights through that, but with a sense of not quite reaching our potential, [but] with an understanding we probably never could.'

'Interesting experience, brilliant people participated – the curation of that impressed me most, from all over the world, brilliant people with different and complementary skills, aligned around systemic challenges we're facing ... Did not live up to the potential created by bringing these people together.'

Impact on how participants make sense of, or foster, solidarity

Of the 17 participants who gave detailed feedback:



five experienced a shift in, or new understanding of how they make sense of and/or foster solidarity.

10 felt that their basic understanding did not alter, but that they nevertheless learned things that enriched their understanding.

two participants, whilst they enjoyed the process, felt that there was no impact.

Some participants found the process confirmed them in their views, and others revised and refined what they thought they knew. Some were surprised at how quickly what they considered solidarity was built within their group, and reflected on what conditions need to be available for this to occur.

Some saw the Solidarity Matters space as the kind of safe space that is vital to fostering solidarity, but which is rare in activist spaces. There is a sense from many participants that there are key building blocks to solidarity (which they saw in this space) that, if absent, mean no solidarity at all. There is a real paradox here. Having the time to create space, to practice self-care, and other foundational principles on which solidarity relies was, many participants recognized, difficult when it is not a privilege that those they seek to be in solidarity with always have.

'Solidarity is strongest when there are friendships, and alliances that are stronger than a political persuasion, and if that's not present, there's no solidarity at all.'

'[It made me think] how it really matters, and building it. Not just the solidarity, but values, and we have different thinking, but we must understand the background and individuals. It took me from thinking about the connectedness, but understanding individuality before creating that connectedness. Made me look at the outside and inside of solidarity, and the network we created within the group.'

'[solidarity] is fascinatingly easy to build if you spend time with each other. How just by being together you actually end up building trust ... Because we were already in each other's spaces and thinking along similar lines it was actually really easy to do. And I don't think it matters so much what we talked about as long as we talked to each other and that we were in the space together.'

'The context created the safe space so people could show themselves as vulnerable enough and then you can show solidarity. It was conceptual, but it was also happening in a concrete way. This is important because in our personal experience in our current model of working ... you're so into producing, developing and delivering you forget you have to stop, and how important these safe spaces are to showing yourself vulnerable. In fact vulnerability is seen as a weakness, something nobody really wants to show because you have to be effective, productive, and that's something we have to really incorporate in our everyday life and work to really change things. ... Not many people have this opportunity – if you have to satisfy your basic needs, such decisions

are harder. [But] if we don't have spaces surrounded by solidarity, that not only accepts you but celebrates you and encourages you, then the change will never happen.'

'You can't have solidarity if you don't have safe spaces. If you don't have safe spaces, and you don't define the rules, and non-negotiables, activists can't evolve. When I talk about solidarity, I'm extending whatever I know in terms of sharing experience, I'm extending myself to try and further your cause, and if I do not have a safe space for that, what kind of solidarity is it? Is it really solidarity if it's not safe?... Whatever I hold in terms of values and meanings will not be the same as others, and if I do not recognize that I will build a wall with other activists. You need to make space for other views of the world, and ways of reaching whatever goals you want to reach.'

'It made me value so much more these open exploratory spaces and their value to building solidarity, but I found that it very challenging to carve that space out. Gets at the very deep seated productivism that drives a lot of our work, the world didn't fall apart because of the time I took to attend. Profound value, but challenging too.'

Some participants talked of their own understanding of solidarity shifting from a conceptual to an embodied understanding. Less a way of taking their own work forward, to one of wanting to be there for other people.

'There is this first-hand experience of solidarity I had during this programme, and this is the year when I have the most reflection that this is solidarity in practice, and a caring in practice, despite geography and economic positions and areas we work on ... Understanding solidarity in a way that isn't just intellectual.'

'I feel like it did create quite a shift in my understanding of solidarity, from quite an intellectual concept of how can we come alongside each other and see ... if there is scope in supporting me in what I'm trying to do ... this experience shifted me to something that touches me more emotionally around what's it like to say I want to be there for you across difference.'

For some the process, though useful, didn't explore deeply enough the tensions and power dynamics that need to be addressed for the emergence of solidarity across difference. The space was too safe, with not enough intentionality or time given to exploring the difficult aspects of solidarity, including the dynamics of privilege and power.

There was wide recognition that fostering solidarity is complex, requires negotiation, compromise and sacrifice, particularly by the privileged and powerful. Whilst for some building friendships and collective care are crucial building blocks that need to be present for fostering solidarity, for others far more is needed for building and sustaining all the many variations of solidarity in the real world.

Some would have liked to go more quickly beyond these building blocks into the messy, often challenging, aspects of solidarity that require generative conflict and grappling with issues that the diversity in the group offered a rare opportunity to explore. There was some frustration too that, whilst the groups did to a degree come to embody solidarity, some of the harder issues, such as oppressions (historical and current), were not explicitly recognized and named and were left unaddressed, unintentionally reproducing ongoing systemic oppressions.

'My thinking about what contributes to solidarity, and the idea that relationships are absolutely key, was affirmed again and again in the sessions through different conversations and engagement we were having. Affirmation of certain dynamics are painful, and when people come together these are replicated, and this is a dynamic that shouldn't be happening, and affirmation that this is not right it is oppression. ... a bit easier in this space because it wasn't just me.'

'It's very complex – the tension is almost necessary. If there's tension it doesn't have to be to try to alleviate it very quickly, but rather to try to see where it's coming from and what it's meant to teach us. When we have a very diverse group there are different experiences, different sharing points, and I think it's like necessary or welcome tension or otherwise we're perhaps not in a space where we can feel like or say what we really feel, even if it can generate discussion ... If we look at what solidarity can achieve it's also understanding what is oppressive. So it's achievable but it takes realization which is the simplicity of listening.'

'Collective care work and power dynamics work - there's a friendship element there, but it doesn't end there. You need trust, and friendship is important, so you can't skip that, but to take that as a final objective you can't then claim to be in solidarity because solidarity does include the power dynamics and risk taking, or how you sit with certain privileges ... [We] stayed within the realm of what was nice and pleasant, and my experience of solidarity work is actually being able to hold pain or conflict better ... there's all these types of solidarity to practice that are specific, and which need specific discussing and tools and sharing ways to even think through them. That's where the learning comes from being out of your comfort zone. Otherwise we're not really equipped to roll with the punches that are coming.'

One participant felt strongly that a clearer focus on identifying a methodology, supported by content, for fostering solidarity would have been useful, applied through a shared task within the group. In their view without the groups actually working together on something concrete, solidarity wasn't possible, and that a better conceptual and methodological framework was what was needed to move the conversation from the abstract to a real experience.

'Just hanging out these two hours, and chatting and breaking out, and here and there learning about each others practice, but we were not really working together and I think that's essential to create a connection you have to do stuff together. It's not enough to be on a stream together. I got the feeling we had open abstract discussion of what is solidarity, which is big questions. But my learning style it helps me if I get some input, read this paper and watch this movie and put it in perspective of your own experience. [That way] we have a feeling that we're in this together, and then we take an action together and it reinforces the feeling, and lets you question it ... It's a permanent exploration how solid is our solidarity and you see it in the action, and the action may make it more or less solid.'

What was the impact on participant's and their practice?

The impact on practice for most participants very much mirrors their shift in how they make sense of solidarity. For those who experienced a shift, their practice has been impacted, particularly in more mindfully focusing on working across difference, the generative power of group dynamics, a better sense of comfort with not always knowing, and in creating space for more of the being as well as the doing.

'I've been opening up to other organizations, and I've started working with others because there are things that need to be worked on, even with people who are more different than I would normally work with ... It's not always as I want it to be – it's not easy and swift, but in my practice now I try really linking people in spaces where they will not expect it.'

'[most of what I learned] came out of the group, and that's one of the lessons I've learned because everything was happening organically, and everything that came out was so beautiful. Through the group we created the space safe for ourselves to be as expressive as we can and see ourselves in our own work and outside of it, which was for me powerful and is something that I've taken from the group.'

It has taught me to be a little bit more comfortable with formlessness and encouraging group dynamics like this more. I'm used to facilitating, but what this taught me is spending a little bit more time to get people out of their comfort zone in a gentler way.'

'Systems change – we talk about it a lot, but inner systems change, how do you help to facilitate that? I think as a process and thinking about how to build solidarity, I think it's quite a fascinating approach ... we need this inner shift and feeling of solidarity that comes with moving something like this. From my perspective a lot is shifting through this and there is much more of an exchange and we feel much more that we're learning from each other and I think that's really inspired and influenced by processes like this one.'

'I think the sense of the intentionality of how you work with other people, and the sense of really looking for those connections and those things that connect you with other people, I think those things are really key and important, and I think that's how my work has been impacted. Very refreshing to know that you don't have all the answers, you can always be learning.'

'I am more encouraged to do the things the way I think I should do them. This deep listening, this making myself vulnerable – these elements that sometimes I doubt, they were reinforced.'

'Re-emphasises that we have to be really deliberate and conscious of spaces that don't reflect that system [that we're trying to change, and] which creates tension to navigate. I'm part of a number of networks ... I'm trying to resist getting into business straight away – how can we hang on a bit longer at the beginning of each one to check in and spot connections and overlaps.'

'I've learned to care in a collective space, and I'm very thankful to other participants for teaching that. It is possible to be in the activist world and be caring.'

'I've got even more of a hunger now to be connecting with people around the world than I did before. And to do it in a similar way. My conceptual to embodied understanding [of solidarity] was tested, evolved and stretched.'

'Feeling connected is a precondition of solidarity, and requires letting go of your expectations and even some of your needs.'

'Providing immediate support to those who need it is one big one – being there both for ourselves, and myself, it's okay – you need to take care of yourself – you need to be in solidarity with yourself to be in solidarity with others was a big point of consideration for me. These predicaments are not going away, so it's going to need more of that type of support, more reflections, taking more time to reflect individually also as a group.'

'Reinforced something I'm increasingly feeling that it's all about relationships. I feel like how we're wired as human beings – that bit that when we've been able to touch into empathy, to hear something really personal as a story, short circuits a lot of the stuff that will get in the way of solidarity – the language difference, ideology difference, this is my lens, what I'm focusing on. The building the relationship and feeling the empathy short circuits that, but it's really hard.'

What feelings did participants notice during the six months?

A specific question in interviews with 16 participants was about the feelings they most noticed during the process. The word cloud (below), reveals divergent, perhaps surprising feelings experienced by participants, revealing some of the necessary tensions and messiness that participants talk about as needing to be present in solidarity. It also reveals that some words, like trust, came up frequently to describe diverse aspects of the process, like who invited them into the space, to making a conscious decision to trust the process, and for some experiencing a building of trust with others in the group. As one participant put it,

'We came into the group literally strangers and online, building trust and solidarity involved creating safe space for people – it was quite a feat. We never felt we had to explain ourselves, or defend ourselves, and effort was made to involve everyone, and we had a say in the process ... The term safe space came up a lot. We're all activists in our own way, and we acknowledged it's not always easy to find safe spaces. Activism can be confrontational, NGO's can be difficult to work for, activists may be wonderful at being activists, but can be difficult people. I think solidarity can only happen when you feel safe and trust people.'



These feelings are closely aligned with what surprised or struck people about Solidarity Matters.

'People opened up online, people who I wouldn't expect ... it was surprising that they felt safe enough to say 'I'm not doing great because things are not going great' and that was very surprising for me that you can have that kind of intimacy online.'

'The honesty, because I had to see myself as an individual, as much as I'm part of movements and campaigns, but the honesty in the space as we were sharing. At some point in these spaces you don't feel like you can express yourself. You always wonder who's behind it – you choose your words for funders, for example, but at some point I became free because someone else in the group became free.'

'It's okay not to be so serious all the time. I felt really rested and refreshed after meetings – that was a big surprise.'

'Surprising that my expectation was more a structured learning process which it wasn't. This having to trust that process, even if it felt like this is really de-railing sometimes, to stick with it ... to actually trust in it and stick with it and see what comes out of it as a process is fascinating to me.'

'The sense of feeling refreshed, and the sense of feeling relieved and it was healing to articulate vulnerability and go deeper with people I don't know.'

'A lot more emotionally engaged discussion than I was expecting. I'm not always very good at that. I think that's something that I usually do with people I'm very close to. The amount of time we spent talking about how we are rather than what we do – I was expecting more about the practical orientation rather than how we feel. I thought that was really good, even though I found it challenging.'

'People who are absolute strangers that have so many different expectations of a process like this because of their background and context get to know each other and, in the end, they're so familiar to me. That's pretty amazing.'

'The extent to which people opened up and shared their vulnerabilities, the amount of trust people put into a zoom call. We weren't face to face, but really opened up, and people shared very emotional moments, and that helped everyone trust the process even more. People took their time with trusting the process, but it was very slowly getting built, midway we were there, and then it's much more caring and then a space where we looked forward to coming to. A space that didn't stress us out.'

'Overall incredible, and the way people were showing vulnerability from this group of strangers, and just being able to do that in an online setting, to feel like there is a safe space to be completely yourself and be vulnerable and be able to share the challenges that you're going through in work and otherwise, that was really amazing. Wow. In a well facilitated space it struck me this could happen.'

'I realised sometimes we hadn't even understood the question in the same way. This really helped me – it was stretching, frustrating and helpful to feel that bit of different ideologies, and how the same words mean different things for people.'

'Most interesting when I heard about the concrete situations and battles and challenges and successes people were dealing with. And there was a lot of good will and kindness and openness to engage with each other which I really appreciated.'

'The power of creativity, because the sessions in which we were asked to be creative those went really well, and allowed people to bring different sides of themselves and to experiment in different ways and bring in elements of fun. Fun is often absent not just in activism, but also in this world. ... you can have mindless fun, but there's also fun that is generative ... that's important to me in the movements I'm in and want to be building ... the role of imagination is very important. Building a new world requires imagination. If we're not engaging in creative things in our daily lives and movements there's a mis-match.'

What was missing?

Participants point to many things that were missing, and which would have made their experience richer and more applicable to their situation and practice. From just knowing more about each other, to a more practical learning of tools and techniques to foster solidarity, to training for facilitators to hold spaces like this, to far deeper, systemic and structural work on solidarity. There is much here to reflect on for further developing approaches to fostering solidarity, for example:

- More intentionality in going deeper to name, define and explore some of the harder aspects of solidarity, including oppression, accountability, power and privilege. Aligned with this is the burden many activists and change makers with lived experience or histories of oppression feel they bear for doing the heavy lifting of both drawing attention to this and devising solutions for overcoming these injustices.
- A clear challenge to those in the global north expressing their anxieties and concerns on issues like climate change. For activists in many parts of the world this is in itself seen as a privilege not enjoyed by those living with the consequences of global north actions for many years who don't have the luxury of worrying because they're too busy taking action.
- Actively decolonizing solidarity by being aware of history and mindfully dismantling the structures and systems of oppression and injustice that underpin the many crises we are experiencing to avoid unintentionally reproducing harm when tackling these.

'I would have liked to have understood who was in the virtual room much earlier I think that you build relationships, trust, solidarity also on that basis, and it's not just about your job description but it is more about who are you ... When we actually got to that stage it was almost like a step change can happen now – we have a much better sense of who's there and that means you can now start building much more trusting relationships.'

'Deeper exchange [between participants] at the beginning. That would help a lot and it would also make all the difference when it comes to covering even more topics and having more difficult conversations, because there were a lot of things that we wanted to talk about, but we didn't really have the time to. We didn't cover topics around racism, patriarchy, neoliberalism – they're always there because of the world we live in, but maybe if we had gotten to know each other earlier we might have found the time later on to really cover them and their role in preventing solidarity.'

'The process, I felt, could have supported us to go deeper and we didn't – it wasn't designed in. We lost the opportunity to explore something that I'm really longing to explore with people I felt could have given me really interesting insights. And clarity about what our purpose was in getting together. Why people are here and what the tensions are between the different purposes that brought us here. How much of a stretch can we accommodate, can it work for us, do we understand where the stretch is? We never had those conversations.'

'Political dimension of our work – could have been more explicit and part of a designed process. I think it could have been done more intentionally – how you can explore power over and power with. It was almost as if we were a bit too polite and we were in a way uncomfortable talking about difficult dynamics, racial dynamics, and global south global north dynamics, people of colour. It could have been more present from the beginning. And I think that would have helped [and] I felt like the group was ready and mature enough to go into difficult questions.'

'Build up facilitation skills within the group to replicate it. Offer a follow up facilitation course. Building these skills is important.'

'Something at least simple could have been done to produce something together. Or at least now you've been part of this process you are part of this community of people ... maybe a little bit more structure for after the process – you are in the community, not just your group, but a bigger group of people.'

'What kinds of exercises would be good for bringing together different groups in trust work where they face political oppression, and the types of energisers you do for solidarity ... that would have been good to be able to take forward in other group work of mixed power dynamics. And talk about accountability processes, which keep coming up in NGO and grass roots circles. Collective liberatory work ... decolonising solidarity. Invite activists ... to do your historical homework whatever you're working on, logging, mining, police. Learn the history of it so you don't reproduce ignorance or assume your ignorance is excusable because you have good intentions. If you're treating the symptoms then you can't solve it. So many people focused on solving the climate problem, but not the root cause – still the pie in the sky that came from other processes of harm, from systemic displacement and systemic mass destruction, and we've got to face that system of violence that's pretty brutal.'

Experience of facilitation

Facilitation was seen as crucial to the process by all participants that gave feedback, but there are clear learnings for future iterations.

How the space was facilitated was informed by feedback from participants following every session. It was the facilitators who took to the group when and how they planned to change direction as a result of feedback, particularly when things went less well. For example, the session on values (2nd session for both groups), whilst interesting for some, was seen by many as a very global North concept to label how everyone feels, and disempowering for those furthest away from the concept.

Whilst not a good experience, it felt like a catalytic moment. The facilitator team took the decision not to continue with a follow-up values session, and to pivot instead to a co-creative and emergent process, working with the experience and expertise within the group rather than relying on external presenters working to a more fixed series of topics.

This was an important moment for the majority. A few felt this undermined the methodology of the process, and their experience of what they got out of the process. Others welcomed the space given to participants, but also felt that time taken in decision making about what the group would do used a lot of time.

Others wondered whether the non-directive style of facilitation in and of itself was actually crucial to the building of trust and therefore solidarity that did emerge. There was appreciation for the mix of facilitators, and that the trainee facilitators also participating in the space and sharing of their own experience made for a richer experience.

Some felt the facilitation was very skilled, but under-resourced for the complexity of the process they were seeking to hold, something to reflect on for future iterations.

'It was open to all of us to hold the space and facilitate. As much as we do that in our own movements, it's always a challenge, but it's always a new learning, so the facilitation was for me was good, and everyone who facilitated in the process were themselves which is important, that's why we opened up because of the space they create and hold for us, so I think I'd give them 10 out of 10.'

'There were times when we were still waiting to be lead and waiting to be facilitated ... Freedom was there to make decisions and have some say, but at the same time there was enough leadership that we didn't get lost ... It was a good balance. [There was some] assumption that people [facilitating] in-between sessions had skill to facilitate, and they don't always.'

'I kind of go back and forth – every week in the questionnaire I would say I wish we have a really bit more strong facilitation, but now I'm almost that maybe that was the whole point and to not have this very strong, rigid facilitation, but rather let it drift and lets silences occur and maybe that's actually what helps that solidarity in the group.'

'I think [global South lead facilitation] would have shifted the power dynamic. I think the facilitators were good, I think the ratio was a little bit too many – there was a sense of being over-facilitated.'

'Was lovely ... particularly in an online space, where you have to be cautious with different backgrounds and experiences – the things you say and do. All facilitators did a good job with being impartial and patient.'

'Very important – one of the key ways of neutralizing the more unconscious effects among a well meaning group of people with power and privilege is to share the administrative power, so I think the makeup of facilitators was important. Representation in the facilitation groups is crucial.'

'I was impressed with efforts to democratize the process, facilitators went out of their way to get feedback. Initially got hard feedback, because lots of people not sure why they were there. Went out of their way to hold the process and guide the conversations to get to place where people realized it was an organics process. Helpful that it was a team of 4 – they did cover each-others backs quite well. Towards the second half began to wear the participant's hat. That was really interesting, but they would often step back and welcome others to facilitate – I thought that was a very nice shift.'

Very caring, really tried to make design a space where everyone feels comfortable and also not just comfortable sharing, but also challenging ourselves and others. When things needed to shift a bit they did that. Also really helpful that they asked participants to also help in co-facilitation on several occasions. It was of great value to tailoring the programme even more.

'[Is] this as facilitated processes, or can it be self-facilitated work, and for me at this stage it felt under-powered in terms of facilitation (not in terms of skill). I felt it was an unreasonable task

asking them to hold it, and there's a real thing in our culture of not valuing facilitation and to put too much on one person.'

'I thought it was done well. My one point of feedback is I often mistrust facilitation that does not state its assumptions, and that was actually where tension came from. In those instances what are the assumptions, what are the values shaping certain decisions, shaping certain topics, shaping the content of certain topics? ... When foundations are unstated, then the assumption is that we all share the same foundation, and that is an assumption that often power and privilege assumes, and that the whole world is like me when in fact it is not.'

Paid time to participate

Having taken the decision to pay participants a rate of \$100 a day, we didn't actually ask about participant's perceptions of this. However, five of those interviewed commented on it spontaneously. Overwhelmingly they felt it was crucial to enabling some activists, who are stretched in so many directions, and who are often asked to give their time for free, to take part. It created more of a level playing field when others were able to take part because their organisation allowed them the time as part of their paid work.

'The connective piece, the solidarity piece – activists often don't have the resources to afford time for self-care because they are exhausted with frontline work.'

'It was a taboo to talk about money ... It was an important element for me to engage in these sessions. I felt blessed. Making money more transparent, and speaking about it, could be also interesting. Part of the privilege and power issues lying behind this taboo.'

'I thought people being able to access funding to join was, I hope, a decisive factor in some being able to be present who might not have otherwise been able to be so. I thought that was key.'

'How important was financial support we got? If we'd taken that out of the scene would that have impacted on caring and sharing and time people can invest in this?'

What now?

This is just a snapshot from an extensive, rich and honest data set of feedback, formal and informal, and sharing. All that is captured in this document, and in other feedback, will inform design and scoping processes for future iterations of Solidarity Matters.

One learning from running the most recent Solidarity Matters groups is that a didactic, imposed process is neither the way to foster solidarity, or to share and spread approaches to doing this. For the next iteration of Solidarity Matters, therefore, we'll be inviting previous participants and facilitators to join a team of people with different experience and knowledge of building solidarity in a range of settings.

Together we'd like to create a way to enable many more change agents and activists to have access to the spaces and experiences that participants have valued so much. Together we would like to extend and deepen a community of practice spreading approaches to fostering and sustaining solidarity. We also aim to catalyse the emergence of a decentralised framework that helps connect, nurture and

strengthen those already responding to crises in different ways and at different scales around the world.

We will take learning from this process of scoping and planning and continue to do all we can to promote fair, loving and ecologically regenerative societies.

Appendix 1 – participants

Group A		Group B	
Independent filmmaker/artist activist working on social justice issues and identity.	South Africa	Involved in environmental, climate movement, feminist power shifters, progressive philanthropy.	UK
Involved in new economy seeking to better understand and act on the implications of the growing destabilisation brought about by environmental breakdown.	UK	Writer, researcher on ecological agriculture and food sovereignty, and building community resilience to climate change impacts in rural Asia	Malaysia
Ecofeminist, political activist part of the LGBT+ community working with other seed savers to gather and transmit love, knowledge and strength.	Mauritius	Feminist organizer working on climate and environmental justice as well as supporting the decolonize movements of the Black, Algerian, Moroccan and African diasporans.	Belgium
Campaigner for food cooperative and climate justice movement.	Poland	Regeneration/decolonial transformations facilitator.	Kenya
Artist with strong connections to Latin American indigenous movements, with a focus on radical pedagogies of education within movements organizing against extractivism.	Macedonia	Involved in eco and climate justice, Feminism and gender justice, Food justice/agriculture	South Africa
Involved in progressive philanthropy, systemic alternatives networks, clean air movement	Belgium	Involved in sustainability internationally and connecting LGBTQI+ communities nationally and internationally.	Bolivia
Activist organising for economic justice, racial justice/liberation, Feminism and gender justice.	Gambia	Involved in radical philanthropy, eco and climate justice, feminism and gender justice	UK
Feminist educator, focused on indigenous just transition, eco and climate justice and gender justice.	Cyprus	Involved in labour and worker rights, Feminism and gender justice	India
Involved in anti-coal movement, racism within the climate movement, Black Earth collective, and degrowth community	Germany	Works to restore and re-story our relationship with Earth and each other.	Netherlands
Activist practitioner for transformational systemic change.	UK	Economic justice, Eco and climate justice, Racial justice/liberation, Youth work, Food justice/agriculture, Indigenous rights, land justice, radical philanthropy	Chile/UK

Appendix 2 – facilitators and co-facilitators

Main Facilitator both groups - is based in Germany and is inspired by transformative facilitation/learning processes honouring the wisdom of our lived diverse experiences bringing in creativity, joy, embodied and trauma informed practises.

Co-facilitator both groups – based in UK, supports others in changing systems, shifting cultures, working across silos.

Co-facilitator group A – based in Kenya, works on the intersections of gender, economy and ecological justice.

Co-facilitator group B - based in India, an independent journalist-writer-poet collaborating and working across different disciplines and formats to enable dialogue and minimise polarisation.

Co-facilitator group B – based in India, an ‘activist-researcher’ exploring alternatives to mainstream development models, documenting worldviews of communities articulating different ways of being and networking.