

Is Solidarity a Charity ?

Charity is something you give to those ‘less fortunate than yourself’. It suggests a belief in a hierarchal system, an ‘us’ and a ‘them’. It creates a power dynamic that further reinforces systems of oppression and economic inequality.

Solidarity, by contrast, takes a systems-change approach. Its foundational philosophy is that all relationships and power dynamics are multi-directional and acknowledges that everyone has wisdom and resources to solve problems.

The writer Tim Wise offers a useful framework to understand the differences between solidarity and charity:

Who creates the problem? Charity work is often based on the premise that marginalized people have some sort of deficit. Those who work in solidarity, on the other hand, understand that conditions of inequity are created by the dominant culture.

Who holds the knowledge? Charity workflows from the premise that the giver has the expertise to decide both what the community needs and how to provide it.



Solidarity work, however, assumes that the recipient community is in the best place to determine its own needs, and they have the right to determine how and when and if a service will be provided and by whom.

Where is the accountability? Charity work turns accountability inward so that the organizations providing services are ultimately only accountable to themselves and their funders. Yet, solidarity work turns accountability outward so that served populations decide whether or not the work is beneficial.

As an example, for the past few years the Greek society is immersed in a deep economic crisis and recession. Someone could certainly say that before they were living in a perfectly healthy society but suddenly things changed and many people in middle and lower incomes have become poorer, to a point that many cannot even sustain themselves and their families anymore.

Can we possibly think of what was missing during the last fifteen years from the Greek society? What is that thing that most of us who managed to have a fairly good life forgot about? I think that the answer can be given just with a single word: solidarity. But what exactly is solidarity and how can we define it at this time? Who are those people who need it most and who are those who can give it more easily?

Therefore, I think that solidarity means to get out on the road for the worker who was fired, to get out on the road for the teacher who has no other option but to work for 600 euros per month while he or she is also a parent, because in the end you should know that their own prosperity is also yours, as their despair can also easily become your own despair.



We should therefore demand higher taxation of the rich and lower for the poor, protect our social benefits and ask for more assistance from the State to people with lower incomes. Also, those who are fortunate to be wealthier should at least try to show off less and not provoke the others with their unneeded consumption in a time when people living next to them are starving. It is all about being HUMANS!

