**BRIDGING** DEVELOPMENT GAPS

## WHO WE ARE

Bridging Development Gaps (BDG) is an international grassroots initiative that seeks to bridge development gaps across the globe.

We envision a world free from any form of discriminations with inclusive participation for social innovative solutions.

We are determined to work towards bridging the gap between policies and actions at all levels by advocating for and empowering vulnerable groups across the globe towards collective solutions for sustainable development.

## OUR GOAL

To connect and make transformative impact through advocacy, stakeholder mobilization and partnerships, as well as capacity building as innovative transformative tools for creating opportunities and empowering women, youth and children to become the change makers and active agents in the shaping of their own life.

## OUR COMMITMENT

- Mobilize actors active in development cooperation, including representatives of vulnerable groups at local level
- Build strategic and effective partnerships across levels to work together in sustainable development
- Bridge gaps between policies on primary health care, the health for all principles, provision of quality education, environmental development including its ethical implications from a human rights based approach.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Mental Health is defined by the the World Health Organisation as 'a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, to and can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

It is not just the absence of mental disorder but encompassed our cognitive, behavioral, and emotional wellbeing – how we think, feel, and behave. It can affect our daily life, relationships, and even physical health. The state of our mental health therefore has effects on our ability to enjoy life and create a balance between life activities and efforts as well as our capacity to identify and protect ourselves from the potential negative effects of stressors.

Uncertainties and fear of the unknown can cause fear, anxiety, worry and stress. The situation with the current coronavirus COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic is no different, it can result in mental health issues. The fear of contracting COVID-19 and the significant changes to our daily lives including restrictions to our movements; working from home, fear of job loss, and temporary unemployment for some, the unusual phenomenon of home schooling for children, or just been cooped up in the house with everyone are enough factors that may result in mental anxiety. In addition, social distancing, wearing of masks and maintaining hand hygiene can also cause stress. There is also a rising shadow pandemic from the lockdown situations - the rising threat of domestic abuse, mental or physical, with about a reported 30 percent increase in domestic violence across the world.

Covid 19 can also result in severe human rights violations from stigmatisation and discriminations. This is similar to the situation during the ebola crises in Africa where nearly 50 per cent of survivors, their families and those who had contact with them experienced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression. The WHO Regional Director for Africa however, stated that at least 50 per cent of people with depression in Africa do not receive treatment for different reasons including lack of information, stigma and cultural issues are significant barriers that prevent people from seeking help.

## SOME KEY FACTS

- Depression seems to be more common among women than men
- People with existing severe mental disorders are especially vulnerable during emergencies and need access to mental health care and other basic needs.
- Different interventions work best for different people.
- Most mental health disorders are treatable.
- Some warning signs of mental illness include long lasting sadness, extremely highs and lows (mood swings); excessive fear, worry or anxiety, social withdrawal or dramatic changes in eating, or sleeping disorders.

**TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS AND OPEN UP CONVERSATIONS UN RELATED TO COVID 19**

## COPING STRATEGIES FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH:

The coronavirus pandemic has generally created fear and anxiety in the lives of many, particularly women – considering the "care" role they play in the lives of The coronavirus pandemic has generally created fear and anxiety in the lives of many, particularly women – considering the "care" role they play in the lives of their family members. These women are faced with fear of contracting the virus, anxieties about what the future would hold, loss of job, and lack of funds to feed their children (with the stay- at- home directive especially in a continent like Africa where there are, practically, no social welfare allowances being paid) etc.

Please seek professional medical health if you feel overwhelmed and lost. Also try to talk to a trusted family member or friend about your feelings.

Maintaining a good mental health involves determined and purposeful actions.

## TIPS FOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING DURING COVID 19

1. **ESTABLISH A ROUTINE** – normal routines have been disrupted but the advice is that they should not be entirely done away with. Routine helps with anxiety by creating a general sense of control, as you tick away on accomplished tasks. The outcome of this would be a "feel alive" mood, a good rhythm for the day and a sense of productivity. Practice this with your mealtimes and discover that it will help to curb the urge to overeat!

2. **AVOID SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE NEWS** – This may sound absurd in the face of physical isolation, but truth be told that the constant posts and updates about COVID-19 actually increases anxiety, worry, fear, and depression. It is advisable to create a timeframe for visiting social media and the news, and not exceed the proposed cutoff time.

3. **KEEP A DAILY JOURNAL** – Writing down your plans and activities allow you to clarify your thoughts and feelings. As you sort through the items in your journal, detect and classify your emotions into either the positive or negative group, you can then redirect the negatives into more positive directions. The practice of keeping a journal guarantees that you slow down and think through conflicts, problems, or emotions.

4. **MEDITATION** – Meditation is a purposefully slow soul-searching exercise that leads to a calming state of mind. There are various things one can meditate on, depending on your beliefs. Mediate on what you are thankful for, on positive statements or words of wisdom. Our anxieties will not change anything about our circumstances. "Make a conscious effort to be calm and think positive".

5. **PRAYERS** – Further to the above No.4 advice, pray for yourself and others. It has been said over the years by psychologists that prayers help to ease tension off the human mind.

6. **TAKE WALKS** – By walking, tension is eased due to the release of happy hormones during the exercise. It provides an avenue to connect with other people but still achieve social distancing by having conversations at a distance, waving or smiling at others. This is therapeutic and reminds you that there are other people outside of your home. However, for those self-isolating, please note that there are other forms of indoor exercises such as jogging on the spot, skipping etc., to relieve stress. Also, for those that have access to the internet, a lot of exercise classes are being offered online for free, more so now, due to the COVID-19 situation.

7. **VIRTUAL CONTACT** – If possible, call or video chat with a friend. It is very important though that you do not allow all your conversation to be dominated by Coronavirus but it is also realistic that it is not ignored either, so you must strike a balance. Chat about your challenges and share experiences. Pray and play together and even share suggestions on how to fill your time. It is good to understand that social distancing does not mean that one has to be completely isolated!

8. **SERVE OTHERS** – Reaching out to others has an overwhelming sense of satisfaction and this is a very effective tool for overcoming or reducing stress. Your attention is shifted to helping others, away from concentrating on your fears. You will feel productive, helpful, and less overwhelmed, by(a) Scrolling through your contact lists and reaching out to ask how others are doing (b) Following up on the elderly persons you know staying alone or with little or no assistance (c) Supporting a volunteer group with social welfare activities.

9. **RELAX AND DO NOTHING** – Learn to relax and do nothing sometimes – without feeling guilty. Irrespective of your circumstances, be kind to yourself and go easy. This is an unusual period in life where the graph of all activities reflects as a flat line. Take up a new hobby, read a book, create a music playlist, play family games, sleep, sit and simply be!

10. **SEEK COUNSELING** – In a situation where it can be established that you are d epressed, you should seek counseling via phone or skype. If it is severe with suicidal thoughts, emergency services should be called immediately!

**WHO** *reports that good mental health is mental & psychological well-being Some examples of mental disorders include: Anxiety and panic disorders; depression, eating disorders, substance abuse and addiction, schizpphernia, bipolar disorder.*

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