VPRIDE

Guide to being an Ally

DEFINITION OF AN ALLY:

"YOU MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE PART OF A MARGINALIZED GROUP, BUT YOU STAND WITH THEM, SUPPORT THEM AND USE YOUR VOICE IN IMPORTANT SPACES TO DEFEND THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS."

– DR ASTRID KERSTEN, HCDI

1. CREATE SPACES

An important role as an ally is to reserve a chair at a table that doesn't usually reserve a chair for people in marginalized groups. When you're at a meeting and you don't see someone from VPride or there is no SOGIE diversity, take it as an opportunity to step in and question why they're not at the table, or ask them to be invited to the table, or take the opportunity to represent VPride.

2. ADVOCACY AND POLICY MAKING

Your job as an ally is to advocate for other people to enter the same spaces that are open to you. If your organisation doesn't have enough women, you advocate for women, if your organisation doesn't have diverse SOGIE people, you advocate for SOGIE diverse people, if your organisation doesn't have young people, you advocate for young people. So, inclusion is everybody's job, and inclusion only happens if everybody works for it and that also means, influencing policies whenever you can.

3. INFORM WHERE YOU CAN

If you have access to particular resources, or information, in a way that you can better educate the people around you and your community, like the issues they're facing or on any aspect that you have understanding, what you can do as an ally is help the people around you understand.

4. INCLUDE WHEREVER POSSIBLE

Remind the people around you that members of the SOGIE community are humans, their sexualities are often the least interesting thing about them. As humans, we are not one dimensional, these are our uncles, our nephews, our cousins, our daughters, our aunties – they're humans. And at the end of the day they're connected to a community and being in a community is the heart of Vanuatu – we are all connected, our communities are so small, and we have to bear in mind that when we hurt one member of the community, we are causing conflicts within the entire community. Even if we can't see the conflict and the effects it has.

5. AWARENESS AND NETWORK

We know there will be people willing to listen and people who won't, but it's important we carry out awareness raising at National and Provincial levels. Working through these networks will help us trickle the information down to the grass roots because when we gender sensitize at the top level, it will eventually come down to the grass roots level and it's likely to be in a language they understand. People may be more willing to be open because there are chiefs and leaders sharing the informaiton.

6. DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTS

You can be a good ally by looking at the report and seeing if it's inclusive. In Vanuatu we have a lot of reporting after a natural disaster hits the country, but the main question that an ally should be asking when reviewing such reports is, 'is there data on SOGIE diversity? If not, why isn't it included in the report?' - and as an ally you should be asking these kinds of questions and making these kinds of analysis.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) does not yet include Gender diversity in the census, but if more allies come forward and insist that they include the SOGIE community in the census it'll help give that push towards inclusion. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) does not yet include the SOGIE community either but again if there are more allies that come forward and bring it up, then it might change.

Look at your own organisation – when you do disaster risk assessments or community profiles, do you include SOGIE diversity? The Hospital doesn't collect SOGIE diversity statistics.

Data collection is important. VPride completed its first study where they presented data, but data collection doesn't happen unless we push together, to signify its importance.

7. STEP UP AND SPEAK UP

There's this unspoken obligation as an ally, as an individual, to step up and say something or do something. Just like with domestic or gender-based violence, someone who sits back and watches, is not better than the perpetrator. If you see something on the street, or you see a hate comment like the ones we saw during Pride Month, take the initiative to comment and show your allyship, someone from the SOGIE community might see that comment and feel better.

As an ally, you have a responsibility to speak up, to show your support for the community itself, even if you're not apart of it, you should always have that cognitive empathy to understand that people from this community go through so much on a day-to-day basis.

"It's important as an ally to remind the people around you that we are too close knit to be treating each other badly for things, like sexuality, things that don't really affect us as people."

– Josepheen Tarianga,
We Rise Coalition & Sista