



KNOW-HOW 3000

Experience AT A GLANCE

Arpilleras – Embroidering Resistance

What is it about?

Using embroidery to document and denounce the violation of rights of women affected by the construction and operation of dams in Brazil, while promoting processes of empowerment and visibility.

Why an intervention?

The construction of dams in Brazil tends to imply human rights violations committed by the electric energy companies. As in society as a whole, women face greater difficulties in struggling with these violations. In many cases companies provide compensations in the name of the men only, excluding women systematically from resettlement and reparation measures. Moreover, sexual harassment, trafficking in women and prostitution tend to rise in the proximities of the construction sites. In this context, the “arpilleras” (a form of textile art) provide a familiar and safe language, which allows affected women to open themselves and recount experiences that are not easy to talk about, and at the same time permits the exhibition of externalized experiences, representing therefore an attractive vehicle for communication.

What does it change?

The arpilleras created a safe space to exchange experiences and to analyze the difficulties affected women face. The process starts with the interiorization of their loss and the self-recognition as victims in order to overcome the situation and become the active protagonist of their story. Additionally, the method has been very useful to achieve media attention and to broaden the discussion about the contradictions of the dominant energy model in Brazil within some civil society sectors.

How does it work?

- Planning and implementing the program in congruence with the organizational structure: The program relates to other activities and programs and to the overall strategic objectives of the movement. This fact enhances local ownership and the sustainability of implemented processes.
- Planning and implementing the program in congruence with the organization’s overall method of popular education: This method aims at strengthening the process of self-organization and local decision making. It is important to promote processes instead of isolated workshops, involving participants in various degrees and forms in order to shape the development of the experience.
- Combining various languages and tools to reflect, document and denounce the violations of rights: The arpilleras were complemented by capacity building activities, applying other resources and tools of collecting data on human rights violations. Combining an artistic with a rather technical language, allows the message to appear more legitimate and genuine, reaching a wider audience.
- It needs a team for pedagogic coordination, responsible for coordinating and implementing the action plan, as well as a team for communication, responsible for transforming the outcome of the workshops into vehicles of communication in order to achieve great visibility.

Who are the beneficiaries?

About 900 women affected or endangered by dam projects in Brazil; as well as the Women Groups and Human Rights Groups of MAB.

Who could use that approach?

Any organization aiming at empowering individuals and groups in the context of human rights work or for therapeutic purposes.

Who is already using it?

The arpilleras constitute a technique born in Chile during Pinochet’s military rule, used by women for income generation, as well as to confront and denounce human rights violations perpetrated by the military regime. Since then, the technique has been widely applied in different localities as a response to traumatic experiences and in conflict or post-conflict contexts.

HORIZONT 3000

AUSTRIAN ORGANISATION FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Sector: Human Rights – Civil Society
Period: 2013 until now
Organisation: MAB (Movement of People Affected by Dams)
Further material: <http://mabnacional.org.br/>
Documentary Project: <http://arpilleras.wix.com/ofilme>
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