Social Engagement to foster women empowerment against gender violence at the Amazon

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Abstract

  A Social Engagement to foster women empowerment against gender violence is taking place in Brazil, with women from riverine communities at Amazonas State. This fieldwork on gender and women empowerment is developed by Sustainable Amazonas Foundation (FAS) and Think Olga in riverine Communities.

The stages of the project are focused on understanding the background/history of the Communities, their daily life considering families, challenges, the role that women play

and how it is possible to help with their empowerment and prevent and respond to gender based-violence.

'The term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life', according to UN Women *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

FAS and Think Olga spent 10 days of immersion in three communities, where it took place the "First Forest Women Gathering ". The meeting gathered 35 woman, from 16 to 75 year old and it was a special moment of sharing their dreams, fears, anxieties and plans. Most of them declared that in their daily life there is almost never a chance of inspiring moments like that. The "Gathering" opened the research and helped the team to build a diagnosis on the amazon women. One of the aims is that the women continue to build a safe network, to be there for themselves and protect each other.

The diagnosis presented a very tough reality faced by girls and women of the forest. Unfortunately, the inequality of gender in the families is the current existing model. Cases of domestic violence are common in the relations at the Communities. There are different kinds of violence: physical, psychological, moral, sexual, verbal, institutional, domestic, virtual and others. At the interviews different kind of violence were reported by women.

One of the statistics of the project shows that all the women interviewed know the path of denouncement they should follow after suffering from any kind of violence. Meaning they do know that the law protects them, what oficial institutions they should look for. Apart from cultural aspects of traditional communities, such as patriarchy, the logistics is an enormous challenge. Most of Communities at the Amazon are isolated, in the middle of the forest and rivers. Access to communities takes place only by river. The price of the ticket, the distance and the travel time are variables that interfere with transport and, consequently, in the isolation of these communities.Therefore, ´the roads are the rivers' so it implies long distances to the closest Municipalities, where police stations and hospitals are located. The hard access to the official institutions that can help women that suffered from any kind of violence makes the process even harder.

The sad reality is that they stay silent, do not denounce and so the violence goes on in their lives.

The output of the project is a Board Game that involves the thematic of gender equality, violence and women empowerment. It is important that women can continue to build a safe network.

"First Forest Women Gathering "is a starting point for the construction of a safe space for honest conversations, sharing and protecting each other.

Key words: "gender equality"; "women empowering"; "gender violence"; "woman from the Amazon;

Introduction

In the remote Amazon communities women face daily threats such as: domestic violence, small political and decision-making participation and precarious access to quality education and health. Patriarchy is the system found in most of the riverine communities and so women are submissive to what men decides. It is a reality that takes courage and strength to be envisage.

One of the main challenges of the project is to present women an alternative kind of relationship between them and most importantly to make them stronger as a group and as an individual. It is a women right to be safe and have a good life no matter where she lives.

At the Declaration and the Platform of Action from Pequim, adopted by 185 countries at the World Women Conference in 1995, establish government compromises to improve women rights. Our project focus on making sure all women from the communities we work know this and help them achieving these rights.

Methodology

The surveyed communities are Tumbira, Saracá and Santa Helena do Inglês, part of the Rio Negro Sustainable Development Reserve (RDS). Created in 2008, the RDS is a natural area that houses traditional populations, it is a Conservation Unit in the public

domain, so its inhabitants have the responsibility to develop their activities ensuring the maintenance and protection of that ecosystem.

The average number of inhabitants per community is 100 people. Most of the inhabitants are descendants of the founder (o) of the community. People outside the reserve, who have the desire to live permanently in the Rio Negro Reserve, can only settle after approval by the community.

Phase 1. research and diagnosis

Women of the Forest 1st Meeting - The first activity conducted in the project took place in Tumbira, riverside community in the Amazon. The name of the meeting was given by the women invited to join the gathering. FAS team articulated and sent the invitation so 35 women were able to attend the meeting. The women are from three different communities and took place at Tumbira community, inside a Protected Area at the Amazon forest. At the meeting, Think Olga team and all the women presented themselves and the main activity was an exercise about their past, present and future in a collective or group reality. The purpose of the meeting was to open a dialog between women, as they are not used to gather as a group and share about their personal lives. Normally the women meet for income generation activities and not ´as friends´.

15 individual interviews: Individual interviews with woman from all the three communities with different ages, community leaders and non community leaders, teachers, young women and older women. Individual interviews that made it possible for Think Olga team to elaborate a complete and diagnosis on woman reality at a community in the Amazon.

Field visit: FAS and Think Olga team visited public services that support and attend women in the Municipalities of Iranduba. The visit took place at the police station specialized in women, which in theory attend riverine and indigenous communities located at Iranduba area and NGOs that support women victimized by violence.

Participatory observation: At the participatory observation the researchers shared their routines, habits and interests of the researched communities with the aim of comprehend and study the way of living from the women interviewed and the community dinamic in general. and While visiting for a whole week, the researches

were able to participate on local routine such as local celebrations and habits, going beyond the interviews and sharing life experience together with women, man and children from the three communities.

Phase 2. Development of the interactive game

At the phase 2, the interactive game was developed with all the insights and crucial data from the initial diagnosis. The methodology for the creation of the game was inspired on design thinking skills and co created by Think Olga, FAS and ARCO (an innovation hub).

Phase 3. training and mentoring

At phase 3, Think Olga will lead the training for the application of the game at the communities with local women and FAS team. There will be a local team of diverse women to lead the ´rounds´ of playing the game - older women, young women, teachers, leaders and non leaders. The idea is that they learn how to lead the playing and the game will be an important tool to support the empowering of women. The Meeting that took place in the beginning of the project will be able to take place several times along the year so the women can continue to build a safe place of sharing their private lives and making sure they are taking care of each other. The game will be very interactive and helpful for the women to be inspired at the gatherings throughout the year.

It will also take place a questionnaire of evaluation and feedbacks on how it was to play the game and how it can be improved. After this important stage, the team returns to make the final adjustments and conclude the final version of the game.

The diagnosis structured the game, considering four elements: 1. *Context -How can we take advantage of community meetings in the construction and application of the game?-; 2. Structure -Which structures are strategic for the game?-; 3. Target Audience -Which audiences should we keep in mind while building the game?-; 4. Language -What aesthetics can we incorporate into the game?.*

   1. *Context*

Use the occasions that are already part of the local calendar: football, championships, celebrations, crafts, cuisine, flour mill.

The game may have the potential to become a tradition in the calendar and culture (example: campfire sisters, meeting women from the forest)

The theme of the game should address the social structures that are the basis of riverside communities. He is committed to transmitting knowledge about violence, family and work, but concepts should be a background, not the direct subject of the game.

2. Structure

That the game can contemplate, as a tool and format, natural resources and manual expression. One idea is to use materials that exist on site, especially natural resources (example: crafts and costume work by Incenturita). It is interesting that the game can contemplate the invisible feminine wisdom (cuisine, handicrafts, embroidery).

May the game be an opportunity to encourage the exchange of knowledge. May it also be cooperative -not a competitive- game.

Anyone can organize the game, it shouldn't need facilitation. It must be easily replicable. Access must be for everyone, the game can no longer be an exercise of power.

3. Target Audience

Players - Age should not be a criterion for playing. The game should be designed for women of all ages. The game can demand different and constantly changing roles (once you are the captain, another time you are the articulator, another time you are the farmer). The captain would be the guardian of that match (rotating position among women).

Multiplying Agents - They are the guardians of the game. They have the role of mobilizing players and spreading the game so that other people know how to play and become future guardians. Interesting for this profile are: teachers, health agents, presidents (women), FAS employees, other community leaders.

4. Language

The game needs to be fun. It is interesting that he extrapolates the word using the body as an expression (example: dynamics of the leader in the encounter of the forest, gaymada, germeson).

It is important to appropriate the language that is already popular. We do not need to bring new terms, we will use the terms they know (ex: manas, gathering). Avoid academic, legal or gender equality manual jargon.

When using illustrations, they must be more realistic, figurative and without excessive elements.

When making use of images, give preference to images that are literal and represent the daily lives of riverside women.

Discussion

With the objective of creating a game that was able to prevent and respond to the gender violence that women live in the riverside communities of Tumbira, Saracá and Santa Helena do Inglês, the research team went to the field in a first phase of investigation of the problem, with the following hypothesis: the lack of knowledge about domestic violence is the main obstacle to the complaint.

What we found is that the lack of information is not the main barrier to reporting. There are still edges in this journey, but there is much more widespread knowledge among women than expected.

The problem we encountered, therefore, was another. Although they know the Maria da Penha law and the attendance services, it works as a learning and understanding about their relationships and dynamics with husbands and companions with whom they share the house, but it is not effective as an official support of the State, with full access to services of the women's service network, such as police station. Thus, at times, the law is seen by women as too rigid and not very flexible, since she seldom only wants to "give a press to her husband."

The main factors found were barriers to access in the dynamics of the communities, being territorial, financial and cultural. In the dynamics found within the riverside communities, the rhythm happens in another pace, in relation to the dynamics of cities and metropolises, such as Manaus, and resources and structures are also scarcer.

Another factor is the authorities' lack of knowledge about the riverside context. In the police stations visited and in the interviews with women who resorted to this service,

the difficulty of faithfully describing the reality of the riverside woman, for not knowing her, is perceived by the State to underestimate them and their knowledge.

Finally, a key fact for understanding the problem is the absence of a specialized service for this context. The services of assistance to women victims of violence are found in Manaus - 34 km away - and Iranduba - 40 km away -, different realities from riverside and geographically distant communities. Access to communities takes place only by river. And the price of the ticket, the distance and the travel time are variables that interfere with transport, and consequently, in the isolation of these communities.

In addition, the Manaus and, mainly, Iranduba police stations lack a private place for reporting and the physical spaces do not transmit the feeling of receptivity. Structural limitations also cause a complaint to be dropped.

There is no communication between the State's service agencies. Each place has a different acronym and protocol. The performance of the organs is content with being inside the door and is not willing to build together and in an integrated way with the others.

In addition to the absence of the State, it was evident that just resolving access to care services does not resolve a series of issues that emerge a priori in a context of gender violence within these communities.

Problems such as lack of autonomy and income, as well as confidence and security to work on this problem within communities, in addition to the individual aspect of the problem, are key points in interrupting the cycle of violence and, mainly, the silencing that women experience when domestic violence cases go public.

The point of autonomy and income deals with the low circulation of money, which makes it difficult for new business opportunities. For women, this scenario becomes even more difficult, as the patriarchal structure perpetuates an unequal division of labor, in a scenario where traditionally the work performed by women is less valuable.

All the examples mentioned above reinforces the ´invisibility factor´ as one of the great challenges for women of the communities. The patriarchy and the way the communities were build reinforce the structure that ´suffocate´ women and the roles they end up playing that unfortunately leave aside their individuality. The reality in the communities deals with the social division in families and houses and the absence of a public experience of spaces by women. In the interviews, all said that there are no moments

of individual fun and leisure among women alone. They are lived, almost always, in smaller family nuclei (wife, husband and children).

The game

Isolation is one of the invisible foundations of patriarchal culture and has a powerful influence on the riverside context, passed down from generation to generation.

As a consequence, an environment of scarcity is created: lack of exchange of experiences, lack of exchange of knowledge, lack of advice, lack of subject matter.

Research on violence against women shows that isolation leads to silence, the victim's sense of guilt, the aggressor's impunity and the minimization of the problem.

Isolation is one of the biggest factors that prevent women from leaving the cycle of violence, inside and outside their homes.

'Women in situations of violence lose their family and social ties. Violent husbands are very jealous and control their partner's movements. They want to know where she went, who she spoke to on the phone, what she said, why she wore such clothes, who looked in the street, etc. In many cases, they end up restricting relationships with family and friends to hide the difficulties they are experiencing. Making violence a public fact means being embarrassed and reducing hopes of rebuilding the marriage.

With the diagnosis ready, we started the game development phase. And among the key problems for this creation, is the interruption of the isolation of women within the communities.

Therefore, the central objective is to create a game that, by strengthening a network between women, is able to break the isolation and make it possible to break the cycle of violence. The game needs to be part of the culture and routine of the communities.

Among the goals for those who play it are the sharing of emotions and feelings, a first step for women to share similar experiences; the reinforcement of communication links, a way to convey the feeling that the person is being understood and brings balance to the person who has the feeling of loneliness and isolation, typical of victims of violence; the strengthening of the collective, in order to enable connection through stories and provide activities in leisure spaces, meeting a basic human need, which is socialization, in addition to finding connection and belonging within the communities themselves;

and, to generate empathy and trust, so that, when realizing that their feeling is recognized, the victim believes that it is worth moving forward and trusting those who are listening, even if they are unknown.

A question that accompanied us throughout this creation is 'How can a game be a tool for transforming this reality?'.

We know that structural changes demand time, intense work and depend on effective public policies. For this reason, we understand the game as a potential first tool to strengthen a network of women in the communities.

A network where it is possible to encourage exchanges of experiences and feelings, reduce the feeling of distrust among women, fight disputes and competition between women and foster cooperation.

For this to happen, it is important that meetings take place and are safe and welcoming spaces. And do this while dealing with topics relevant to your routine and your future.

Seeing possibilities in the present and in the future with information on women's rights, deepening knowledge about violence and the denouncement journey, learning about physical, psychological, emotional self-care, incentives to generate income and work.

The game aims to be a trigger for a cycle of changes. It has no end in itself, it is a means to work on positive relationships between women.

Theory of Change:

The problem found is that culture leads to the isolation of women and prevents violence.

The operating strategy is to strengthen self-esteem and value the female gender. Also to change the relations between men and women - empowering women, encouraging the creation of a network among them and achieving results by the change of attitudes and behavior in the community.

Public policies need a gender-based perspective, in planning and implementation, in order to offer more information and motivation to women's denoucement - to increase in complaints and the use of public services.

Once the game is approved and implemented, the expected behavior change will be measured using the following <u>indicators</u>: Outputs are that women come together to play the game; outcomes are to increase self-esteem and appreciation of the female gender and women have the feeling of protection; impact if that women recognize themselves as agents of change and women change their attitude towards their lives and the community.

Conclusion

After the results and indicators mentioned above are successfully measured, we intend to expand the coverage of the game to hundreds of other communities in the Amazon.

We believe that all women should have the opportunity to be more aware of their rights and the game is an important tool to start. While playing the game regularly, women have the chance to get together and be stronger as an individual and as a group. They feel more confident and empowered to live their lives safely and fight for their rights.

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