

Proposed intervention strategy

'Making Local Governance Work for Women – Exploring New Institutional Possibilities'

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Country: Brazil

Research organisation: Instituto Nupef

Research team: Graciela Selaimen and Julia Peres Guimaraes

Partner organisation: Criola

1. Context

Since March 2012, Instituto Nupef has been engaged in deepening the dialogue with possible partners, for the implementation of the project 'Making Local Governance Work for Women – Exploring New Institutional Possibilities', which will conduct a feminist inquiry that can create potential models in relation to local governance for women's agenda setting, public information access and co-production, and solidarities, through digital technologies. After organising four meetings and conducting interviews with feminist NGO coordinators and project leaders, Nupef's team has decided to focus the project intervention in a group of 13 local feminist leaders, each of them assisted by two supporters, all of whom are part of an initiative of the NGO Criola [www.criola.org]. These 39 women are all leaders and coordinators of Afro-religion centres based in poor communities of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and are a part of Criola's programme *Multiversidade* – dedicated to strengthening capacities of black women on issues related to feminism and the fight against racism, aiming to foster their political expertise and enhance their political action, and also to promote scientific and philosophical reflection amongst this group, by offering a course on theories and political issues of the African diaspora.

Presently, the most pressing need of this project, in terms of qualifying and improving women's participation in local governance is to strengthen and amplify women's voices, especially aiming for the better recognition of these leaders as legitimate political actors. The main issues which the local leaders focus in the course of their community work are: women's health; black population's health; violence against women, political participation; religious prejudice. It is important to highlight that these women are well respected in their communities for their role as custodians of their ancestral tradition, advisors and agents of promotion of rights and citizenship. However, the same vision about their role is rarely found among local politicians and agents of the local administration. The need for improving the quality of their relations with these actors in local governance is thus recognised by them as critical. Among these women, there is consensus about the need for more reciprocity and symmetry in the relations with the local public powers.

To change their reality, the women leaders need to better understand the manoeuvres and dynamics that exist in the process of establishing a direct dialogue with state actors. The group expressed that they need information, skills and strategic direction, to understand and appropriate the political language, to better communicate with local governance representatives and institutions; to generate and

publish relevant content in local and alternative media in order to gain greater visibility and legitimacy, especially with the local governance players; and, to access public information effectively and grasp the strategies for social audit and monitoring of public policies.

An important aspect of the context we will be working in, is the fact that most of the women who will be part of this project live in conditions of abject poverty, and the organisation Criola is also facing a financial crisis. The resources provided by this project will have a tremendous significance for the continuation of some activities within this network of leaders. Another fact that must be addressed is that Criola realises that many of the local leaders have difficulty in accepting their own empowerment, many times transferring to Criola the condition and exercise of leadership. This is another key issue that this project will address and help to transform.

2. Proposed strategy

We plan to develop our activities focusing on two main axes:

a) Strengthening women's leadership and their use of ICTs

Under this axis, we plan to implement dynamics and processes of empowerment of women through the collection of histories; organisation of discussions based on feminist literature, films and photographs; the production of short videos and offering workshops and didactic material for the improvement of their capacities in using ICTs and producing multimedia content; as well as explore the potential uses of mobile telephones.

b) Architectures of power and governance – and ways to intervene in these

Under this axis we will organise workshops, panels and discussions on the following issues, among others: how to monitor public policies; the architecture of the local governance and spaces of citizen participation; democracy and affirmative policies; online mechanisms for the promotion and defence of rights; Internet and political participation; e-governance; transparency and public accountability; Internet and access to information; issues related to online privacy and security for local leaders and human rights activists.

We expect to have a working plan and a schedule of activities by the end of May.