

Guatemala:
Research-action project in communities affected by the atrocities
(ECAP, November 2004)

1. Preceding facts

During years 2002-2004, ECAP has carried out a study on the psycho-social impact of the massacres in 22 indigenous communities of the country of five linguistic regions.

For this study, through individual interviews and focal groups, the following information was compiled: change in the social organization; change in the cultural identity; impact of the substitution of the norms and authorities by others of a greater social control; cultural impact of the losses; the situation of individual and communitarian “altered duel”; the changes of roles; the impact of the sexual violation and the emotional climate (impunity, threats, fear, and distrust).

Also we made a total of 70 semi structured individual interviews to people seriously damaged in their mental health, as a result of the massacres, to evaluate Upheaval of Posttraumatic Stress, altered Duel, scare and physical and/or psychosomatic diseases.

2. Psycho-social actions

• Main Objectives:

1. To contribute to the Psychosocial strengthen of people and communities who live in an internal armed post-conflicted society.
2. To contribute to the analysis and theoretical methodological reflection on the issues faced by a post-conflict society.

• Activities

1. Self-help groups, workshops

The participants of the group are victims of torture and people from the community elected by them to give support to the group. The people who are part of the support group are chosen by the victims. About one workshop monthly was carried out each month, lasting 4 hours plus meal-time,

Contents handle with the group: the following issues are managed according to the preference of the participants:

- Human rights
- Trauma. Fear, guilty feelings, feelings of helplessness, unfinished mourning...
How did they make us feel so scare?
How did we cope with fear?
What do we do with fear?
- Conflict resolution strategies. Relationship victim-victimizer, impunity, rumor, lynching, stigma, prejudice, social restructuring.

- Centered around culture. Identity
 - Reparation
 - Justice
 - Information management. Judicial process. Analysis of juncture. Social, national and local problematics.
 - Reconciliation.
2. Home Visits
 3. Accompany different process of the victims: exhumations, inhumations, justice process, as well as local commemorations
 4. Support to the organization of intercommunity meetings
 5. Research: evaluation of the communitarian and individual damage
 - (i) Life before and after violence: leadership and organization; culture, harassment and militarization; it was not possible to live any longer: life in the mountain, community and group destruction, how did we feel after having been under this suffering?
 - (ii) The individual psychosocial damage: PTSD and the impact on the social and individual life.
- Methodology
 1. The group
 2. The word and listening
 3. Drawing boards: Drawing boards is an important tool since it becomes a method to collect memories in a written form of the contents reviewed by the group, which, in the same time, allows to go over the issues already reviewed. This material is also used for the summaries at the end and the beginning of the meetings.

The use of the drawing boards has been a quite positive experience and the members of the different groups have said “in that way the words don’t go away”; “You can go back to the first ideas and it helps”.
 4. Drawing: With the purpose of understanding the words, the facilitators used pencil to draw what the participants wanted.

Two examples: Our rights: Right to welfare, how do we draw it? “A hospital. A house with many windows and a cross. On the windows we paint Beds, sick people and physicians”.

The Right to bury the death: A woman says: please draw a person lying facedown, another face up, another one standing and the last one upside down”

Why? “I didn’t find my husband and I don’t know how he was buried.”

- Impact:

Victims can meet, talk and explain their pain, without fear; this is an important step from being a passive subject about what happened to becoming active: being able to talk about what happened, to talk about how to live and what to do with what happened in their lives; we called this step: being a victim and becoming a survivor.

Victims know they are not the only who have suffered the same.

Victims are able to build groups and participate in social life: support to the creation of networks of solidarity

Capacity building among the community promoters for treating victims of torture

Victims feel able to fight for their rights: Reflection on rights, reparation, and national juncture. To promote a reflection space about the reparation process lived, with the creation of committees which are looking for compensation. In this sense, we have promote reflection in the groups and in the person leading the other committees has participated in workshops who has been benefited by the work so he can take this information to other communities in the region in which ECAP does not work.

The empowerment of the victims to face their daily life. The victims/survivors develops skills to built the present and the future life

Collection of communitarian and individual information for research.

Exchange with other organizations: Puentes de Paz, Pastoral Social Ixcan, Saqbé, Utzkaleman.

Strengthening of the ECAP methodology through research

Increase in the number of participating women

- Difficulties:

Too many groups in some communities

Local processes: the participation in development projects

National processes: Indemnification of ex-patrols

Lack of trained Human Resources to performed this job

3. **Key elements in our work**

- To propose rigorous diagnosis in order to design interventions which are adequate to the context, so that concrete answers and interventions may be designed in relation to local necessities; these diagnoses should also influence public policies (including at the international level);
- To propose our support to minority sectors who do not know enough about mental health issues;
- To initiate and support social networks of solidarity
- To work with theoretical and practical focus which are based on the interconnection between the psychological and socio-political dimensions of the issues;
- To give people the tools they need so that they can decide what they want to do with their own life, so that they can better perceive and control their world, their relation with themselves and others;
- To allow people to be confident in themselves again, to be able to do, act and create;
- To contribute to the construction of a vision of the world in which things are a bit more predictable;
- To contribute to the destruction of the idea that nothing will never change;
- To contribute to the education in pacific values, based on the resolution of conflicts in a negotiated and non violent way;
- To put the idea of justice back at the center of the society;
- To support the people in recuperating their force;
- To use the resources of the local culture;
- To contribute to give the dignity back to the people;
- The individual, the family or the group has to be able to lead and control change.