

ACTIVITY 4:

COPINH's strategy

Materials: Case study: *Guardians of the River*; large copy of the handout: *Movement ecosystem* graphic on the wall; copies of handout: Power and Strategy worksheet; sticky notes or cards in four different colours.

Step 1: Connecting COPINH's power analysis and strategic choices

Plenary: Place a large Movement Ecosystem on the wall with space to add stickies around each strategy. Download, share, or refer to the example of a power and strategy matrix.

Use the *Power and Strategy worksheet* to take a more nuanced look at how different arenas of power require different strategies for resisting and building power. The two right hand columns invite different kinds of observations about strategy. In the column labelled "Engage, challenge, expose, and resist dominant power", note actions COPINH took to confront and shift the power dynamics and actors in the context. In the column "Build, create, and mobilise transformative power", note the ways in which COPINH built their transformative power, including the more internally focused activities that strengthened their cohesion.

Introduce the small group activity and form four small groups. Assign one colour of sticky note for each arena of power.

Small groups: Use the *Power and Strategy worksheet* to analyse the struggle of COPINH (and the wider movement) against the Agua Zarca Dam. For each arena of power, note specific examples of power over in the first column:

- Who and what are the actors, structures, and forces that contribute to the problems that COPINH is confronting?
- In the case of specific actors, what are their interests? Remember that strategies and power dynamics operate at local, national, regional, and international levels.

Note answers in any or all of the three columns:

- How does identity – particularly gender, ethnicity, class, and location – play out in each arena of power, both in terms of discrimination and violence, and in relation to strategy, as a potential source of community and narrative-cultural strategies?

In the second two columns, identify the strategies used by COPINH and their allies to challenge and build power in each arena – both to oppose the dam and to build and exercise their own power:

- What were the different entry points, angles and possibilities for challenging the construction of the dam and the political repression accompanying it?
- At the global level, how did the US Congress figure in COPINH's power analysis and strategies? What was the role of the legal system?
- What about other global, regional, and international institutions?
- How did COPINH and their allies build, mobilise, and exercise their power?
- How did COPINH engage, challenge and contest ideas, beliefs and narratives? How did they activate different belief systems and views of the world?

As a final step, pick key strategies (maximum three) used by COPINH or their allies, and write these on the sticky notes, using the colours assigned for each arena of power.

Plenary: Groups take turns to share highlights from the *power over* column, building on each other's contributions rather than repeating. Focus on how the different arenas of power intersect and involve converging structures, actors, and dynamics. Invite each group in turn to share the COPINH strategies they identified, starting with those for contesting visible power, then moving to hidden, invisible, and systemic.

Step 2: COPINH's Strategies in the movement ecosystem

Plenary: Examine the range of COPINH strategies in light of the broader movement ecosystem. Invite small groups to place their sticky notes on the Movement Ecosystem, near the relevant area of strategy.

Notice any patterns, such as colours of sticky notes clustered around certain kinds of strategies, or gaps where there are fewer strategies.

- How did COPINH build and mobilise their power to resist or block the building of the dam?
- What organised capacity was COPINH able to activate in their resistance – members, allies, etc?
- How did they use and influence legal mechanisms and policy spaces to advance and draw attention to their agenda and defend their rights?
- What resources, capacities and alliances did they require?
- How did they turn up the heat on decision makers and expose corrupt abuses of power through direct action?
- How did they continue to build and mobilise relationships with allies both inside and outside structures of power, within movements and across borders?
- How did their vision and values shape their strategy and their narrative, and serve as the foundation of their power?

Share and discuss the handout: [Lessons from COPINH](#).

Step 3: Vision and values

“In our worldview, we are beings who come from the earth, the water and the corn. The Lenca people are ancestral guardians of the rivers... [taught] that giving our lives in various ways to protect the rivers is to give our lives for the well-being of humanity and of this planet.” Berta Cacereres, Goldman Prize acceptance speech

Plenary: An effective long-term strategy is always anchored in a clear vision, explicit values, and a bold ambition or intention. COPINH’s vision and values provided a continuous touchpoint for the political culture it seeks to create, and its community-building, demands, and narratives.

Buzz groups: Use stickies and a brainstorming process to generate words and phrases that capture COPINH’s vision, values, and bold ambition.

Plenary: Read aloud the quote from Berta Cáceres’ speech when she won the Goldman Environmental Prize (duplicated above). Discuss:

- How do you think COPINH’s vision and values shaped their strategy and strengthened their base of community members and allies?
- How did COPINH’s years of community building and other groundwork strengthen their power and fortify their resistance?
- From your own experience or study, how do vision and values shape and strengthen the strategies, agendas, and ways of working of organisations and movements?