ART CODES

AREA/S OF FOCUS	Community education; engagement; dialogue; analysis of an issue; trust-building; generation of actions and solutions
ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	An "Art Code" is a creative and symbolic representation of an issue. The facilitator unpacks the code with the community through a four-step dialogue process in order to perceive and relate to the problem, analyze the causes and generate possibilities for action.
TARGET GROUP	Community members, students, stakeholders
INTENDED OUTCOMES	Ability to create and use art codes as a way to represent and analyze complex issues in the community
TOTAL TIME	30 minutes or more
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	No limit
MATERIALS	Depends on Art Code (Any artistic modality such as a theater skit, poem, movie, video, drawing, photograph or song) - paper, markers, fabrics, instruments, etc.
SETTING	Large room or outdoors

INTRODUCTORY FRAME

The Art Code is meant for communities to engage in critical thinking and describe a social or environmental problem, analyze it and identify the actions they can take to resolve it. Instead of explaining the problem *to* the community – show the "art code" and then facilitate a dialogue with the group afterward so that they can arrive at their own conclusions – it is much more impactful and engaging then if they are just passively listening.

PROCESS

Step 1: Develop a Code
An Art Code clearly shows the *problem,* NOT the solution! The purpose of the code is for the community to generate solutions together through a dialogue process. Examples of a code could be a drawing or photograph of a clear cut forest or contaminated beach near a community, a popular song that highlights the effects of climate change, or a 5-minute theater skit that depicts mistrust and a conflict between fishers and NGO staff around no-take zones.

Make the code *as clear as possible* about the issue at hand so that the group doesn't waste time debating or trying to interpret the meaning of an abstract code.

Step 2: Present the code
Remember not to explain the code beforehand – just show it and then ask the community!

Step 3: Facilitate a dialogue
After presenting the code, the facilitator leads the participants through a "decoding" process by asking the following kinds of questions:

1. ***Perceive***: *The community describes the problem or issue presented.*
   - What did you see?
   - What is happening?
   - How do you think the characters in the code (play, pictures, song, etc.) are feeling?

2. ***Relate***: *Draw out the personal experience of the participants.*
(this is an important step!)
   - Can you identify with this?
   - What do you know about this issue from your own lives?
   - Do you know people that have gone through something like this?
   - What is your story?

3. ***Analyze***: *Develop understanding of the root causes of the problem.*
   - What are the causes of this?
   - Who benefits from it?
   - What are its historical roots?
   - Does it affect men and women differently? How?
   - If this is a problem for so many people, why does it continue?
   - What are the consequences of this problem for you?

4. **Act:** *Explore solutions and action plans.*
   - What can we do to change it?
   - What do we need to know in order to change this situation?
   - What particular possibilities exist at this time?
   - What cultural resources or strengths do we have?
   - What would be appropriate and feasible for this group to do?
   - What is one concrete thing that we might try?
   - What steps of action do we need to take?
   - How can we use art in our action?

Note: These questions are suggested prompts! The facilitator does not have to ask every one – just the ones that are the most relevant in the time you have allotted.

Step 4: Determine next steps
The main objective of education around an issue is to get people involved. Help the group to identify how they can individually *and* collectively take action around this issue – you may also have some campaign, programs or actions for which you want to recruit and mobilize their participation. Make sure you identify concrete ways for them to get involved with specific next steps or commitments!

FACILITATION TIPS

- Be warm and inclusive with your presence. Make eye contact with the group.
- Create an inclusive space for everyone to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Invite quiet participants to participate.
- Do not describe or tell the group what the problem is. Elicit it from them by asking open-ended questions as provided in the handout. The decoding process is designed for group to perceive and describe the problem.
- Acknowledge what you hear in an appropriate way and/or affirm important points that people make. Be open to a diversity of opinions and perspectives – even if you don't agree!
- Be aware of time and move the dialogue along. *Don't describe* the four-step process to the group – they serve only as a guide for the facilitator.
- Synthesize key learnings, insights and action steps that emerged from the group dialogue to close the discussion.