



## Mariana Ruenes de la Fuente - Mexico

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Hi to everyone, Monsignor and all our new friends. It is genuinely an honor to be here again, and the proposal I want to share today is the summary of some years of asking the same question over and over again: how can we make change happen, and how can we make it happen for a long time? How can we reach all of the people that we have to reach?

It all started six years ago. We started an organization called *Sin Trata*, which fights against human trafficking, but specifically sexual exploitation. We do it through prevention, because we believe that that is the way we are going to stop fighting against the current. One of the challenges we face in the organization, and that many organizations might identify with here, is that we are doing prevention, but, number one, María is still vulnerable, she still faces emotional, physical and economic insecurity. So she has information now, but how can we make sure that when the moment comes, this information will be enough to save her life, for her to say no when the amazing opportunity she has been waiting for actually comes?

The second challenge we face as an organization is that, well, we have reached María, right? And during these six years we have reached like 24,000 kids, but we still have about 1,300,000 children just in the Metropolitan area, just in Mexico City, so how are we actually going to reach all the rest and how are we ensuring that the attention we are giving them is quality attention? So it is also a problem of human resources, of how we are going to stretch our human, time and economic resources to reach all of these children.

The third challenge we face is: we are giving here prevention, but do we actually know that it works? Can we measure the change in attitudes? I have wondered over and over again, and felt a lot of frustration just thinking about when that moment, and that proposal comes, for her to leave home, will she be able to survive her own desperation and hopelessness?

This proposal does not have beneficiaries, but co-creators. In my experience, aid is almost always a trap. I do not believe in assistentialism, and that is something key in this entire proposal. What we want is for María to be able to outline her problems and solutions. How are we going to do that? I am actually kind of nervous because for more than a year I have been tweaking this proposal so that it is a complete circle, so that it is completely sustainable, so that everyone in this cycle actually gains something, so that we are not begging organizations for help or partnership, but so that everyone gets something out of it.

How does this cycle start? We have three main stakeholders; of course we know that the most vulnerable people are in schools, so they are students, and they are the future, as we continuously repeat. So, the first main co-creators – not beneficiaries – are students. The second are schools; and the third one are partners, who will then become sponsors at a given time.

How does this cycle start? First of all, we register schools, and we do all of this registering in an online platform making use of the tools we have today. The second stage is to do group building; so what we want for María and her friends is to actually build a group. Through a handholding process, through an online platform, we are going to facilitate all these tools. So María is going to learn with her friends not only how to do the side thinking, but she's also going to learn with her friends how to reach consensus, how to be tolerant and how include everyone in the process of change.

When she has this project, she will start implementing it, she will start testing it until she gets a probable solution or learns from her mistakes. The third part of this stage, which is key, is renewing that cycle. I don't know if any of you have participated in the MUN for example, where you first train in your home and then in your school, but then you come all together and that motivates you to present and prepare. I was thinking that we could build this in a scale that fits, we could do it in a small scale, a big scale, in a district, in a nation: it can stretch as much as we wish. The key here is that we give them incentives, so the school wins if the students win, because we have these partners that would facilitate some kind of reward, that promotes further human development. They would have, for example, a reward like getting computers for the schools, or getting sport facilities. This way we create an incentive and recognition also helps them get into this, because they have to agree. As you know, getting schools to actually open slots for you and give you time is not easy, so that's why schools also have to learn.

The next step would be to repeat the process, it is a cycle, we have to repeat it on and on, in order for transformation to take place. What will happen? Well, María is going to realize that her actions are actually making something happen, so she will have another chance to continue this transformation. What we want is first to build social cohesion. Social cohesion and network supports are actually going to protect children.

Secondly, we want to allow solutions at local levels to happen; we want people – who are the experts in their own contexts and situations – to be able to outline what are their situations and their solutions. Secondly, we want to trigger self-empowerment, not empowerment, but self-empowerment, to allow local change-makers to arise. What we also want is to reduce resource spillage. It is so much money we have to invest just to reach one community, and we also have to reduce the dependency that people have on some programs. The other thing we want is for it to be easily replicated, and we have a model that is sustainable, replicable, and that causes a systematic change.

What I want to say is that we can make this work anywhere, any time, and with whom we want. Our job is to create networks, but we have to be eliminated at some point in this process. Because it will be up to María and her friends, and her teachers, neighbors, parents, and community to do the rest of the job. I believe that that is the future of how to approach these issues. I'm so sorry that the time is up, and please let us gather together again and create new alliances.

Thank you very much.