



Ixchel Yglesias González Báez - Mexico

Good evening. My name is Ixchel, I am from Mexico and the initiative that I bring to the table today relates to the work I have been doing in Mexico for the past seven years. I work with women that are in a situation of prostitution and women that are and have been victims of sexual exploitation.

So, what is my proposal? Well, it is a proposal that arises in a country where there are seven femicides each day, where women disappear every day, and where those who suffer the most from the conditions of vulnerability and extreme violence that we live in are women; and out of all women, those who suffer that violence the most are women who are in prostitution, either because of various vulnerabilities that lead them to be in that condition, or women who were victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It is in these spaces where violence against women is maximized and, therefore, in the situation that my country is experiencing, they are the ones who suffer from it the most. This initiative comes from the participatory research that I carry out with them.

I work independently as a private consultant. I have worked for civil society organizations, for the government, for academia and, above all, directly with them, the victims. This has allowed me to construct models with them, models of accompaniment to work with them in a tailored way, no matter how old they are; and in different ways because, in the context of sexual exploitation we can find all ages, from little girls to eighty-year-old women, with whom I have worked. These women are also in a state of total abandonment and do not have access to any shelter or space because of their age. Also, a legislative problem that we have, is that since the law always prioritizes minors, it does not allow elderly women access to a comforting space.

Therefore, on the basis of these problems, the proposal is to generate four models of accompaniment. These models are: 1) working in shelters with women. Working directly with the shelter staff and the women who are there has allowed us to develop a model of comprehensive support that empowers women. This contributes to Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which deals with gender equality. That is, how to generate tools in women that allows not just empowerment and reintegration. They themselves have told me: "Which society will they reinsert us in, if we have never belonged to it?" So it is not a question of social reintegration, but of how we can build a space for them in the world. That is, the space we need in the world, the space we want, and sometimes we have to build it, because it has been denied to us since the very first beginning.

So, this is what we propose doing with these women; but we also need to train the staff in these shelters, because often the tools needed are not available. They do have the will and capacity though, but not the right tools to accompany the women. A dynamic process is necessary inside the shelter as well as a constant accompaniment of the victims.

This would then be the third model: first, take care of the women; secondly, work with the staff of the shelters; and thirdly, work with the families of the women who are in the shelters, because the family is a very important space for socialization, it is a social institution. And if the family does not go through a process of understanding what sexual exploitation is and consists in, they often re-victimize women, who are almost always their daughters, or snub them because of their fear that they might return to that kind of activity. This creates a vicious circle that often causes the women who leave the shelters to return to a context of sexual exploitation. They return with the exploiter, and get hooked again, or have violent relationships, either with their partners or in their working environment. And that has to do with the guilt and shame of once being in prostitution. So this is a model of accompaniment and family regeneration.

On the other hand, over the years, I have worked giving training and workshops in schools, directly with the teachers, students and their families. What does this have to do with the project? It means we are bringing to the community level everything that is being done about violence against women. And in bringing it to the community level, what people do is adopt the issue and see that trafficking is not an isolated matter that happens only in the context of exploitation, but something that concerns us all; but also, that social relations, as we build them, are those that encourage the existence of human trafficking. If we want to transform the mentality, obtain subjective, cultural and long-term changes, it is going to be through training and working within the community.

I currently work on this in two Mexican states, Tlaxcala and Puebla. The proposal is to generate these four models and extend them throughout the country, because it is a job that I have been doing, but in an isolated way. Due to a lack of resources, it has not been possible to do it in an integral way. That is, when we receive funding we can carry out a project in a school; when we manage to obtain more funds, we do one with families and so on. Although we cannot reach very many people, we have been able to make a substantial change

because of the work I do directly in the communities of origin of women who are victims of sexual slavery, and I also work directly in the communities that train boys to be pimps.

Unfortunately, these communities, which are in the heart of Mexico City, in a state called Tlaxcala, have been internationally recognized as places that specialize in the training of pimps. Working there directly has allowed me to develop an integral vision that helps, not to construct myths or scapegoats, or not to reproduce the stigma that hurts women, but on the contrary, to eradicate it. It helps consider violence against women as something that should not be combated, or fought but as something we must eradicate. The word “eradicate” means to take something out by its roots, questioning all the precepts and all the notions we have about what gender is, what violence is, and all the prejudices we have about women in prostitution.

The purpose of this, in the long run is, once it can be extended – which is already happening, as I told you, we only need to spread it throughout the country – is to reach women who are in prostitution, who are adults or elderly, and women who really need an accompaniment, since there is no social institution or organization that comes to support them.

Thank you very much.