



Young People Against Gender Violence

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Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

Casina Pio IV

Vatican City, 15-16 November 2014

Thank you very much and good morning everyone.

Before anything else, I would like to thank Florencia Pedregosa for opening today's session and for giving us courage, for giving me the courage to take the floor now and address you.

I would like to start out by congratulating each one of you here. I would like to tell you that it is quite an honor to have been able to come from Cape Verde to be among you people who are so kind and loving.

My presentation will revolve around a project that was recently implemented in Cape Verde, which is called Young People against Gender Violence. This project was financed by the European Commission with a total of fourteen participating entities and organizations. They come from European countries, Brazil and Mozambique. The main purpose of the project is to contribute to reducing gender-based violence by improving the understanding and skills of the youth groups that belong to civil and religious communities, especially young people who are enrolled in high school and secondary school. Our goal in this project is also to raise the awareness of these groups on issues like violence and especially gender-based violence. The project began last July. We had a representative of an organization from Italy here yesterday, her name is Silvia Stefani, and together with the municipality of Praia, the city where I come from, we have actually been able to implement the project after a lot of difficulty. What happened first was that twelve young people were selected, six boys and six girls between 20 and 29 years of age, coming from different parts of the city. The strategy that was used with them was peer education. According to this methodology, the young people in question are educated and trained so that they will be able to share their knowledge with others.

Before going through the various phases of the project, I would like to introduce to you the first peer educators in Cape Verde. As I said there are 12 of us, men and women from different social backgrounds. Some were professionals, other were students, others came from religious groups or from associations – this is just to tell you that they represent different categories of society, and it was a very positive thing to be able to exchange thoughts and to be able to have this experience of different people coming together. With these 12 individuals we have undertaken the project and we have worked throughout the project. This was the initial phase.

The next phase came after the implementation of the project and included training sessions. The important thing for us is to be educated, to receive training, so that later on we can actually make an impact on civil society. What you see here is an initial session, it is a theoretical session, where we were imparted certain concepts about gender. More in detail, we discussed the role of education in the development of the human person. We also looked at the dichotomy of the existing difference between sex and gender because there is often confusion, people use the two terms interchangeably, and that is not correct. We also engaged in a very fruitful reflection on the social construction of man and woman and on the social construction of gender-based violence, and finally we discussed media and their role in education. Above and beyond the theoretical sessions we had with different trainers in different areas and topics, we also had the great privilege of having a residential session during which we were given technical guidelines, especially in the area of communication so that we could improve our work with other young people. This was a very intensive session that lasted two days. It was held in a historic place, Cidade Velha in Cape Verde, which is a World Heritage site. It is a World Heritage site because it was the first city to be founded in Cape Verde. I think it was a good choice because beyond its historical worth, it is also very beautiful, and the landscape is very peaceful and calm.

The second phase of the project, after receiving some practical and theoretical training, involved our intervention in various high schools. I think this was the most interesting part of the whole process because it was a practical part in which we were called to actually implement and share what we had learnt during our sessions. It was very fruitful because we realized that there was a lot of interest and motivation from the youngsters, because this kind of training was different. I remember the very first day at the end of the session

when we opened up a space for evaluation and asked the participants how they felt about that day. One young woman said that she was impressed with the strategy that we used because the session did not focus on the trainers; it was instead a very fruitful form of dialogue, in which everyone had the possibility to exchange their ideas and discuss things, so it was very interesting. The participants said that every day they were extremely keen to come back. It was on Tuesday and Wednesday that we had two days of training and they were keen to come back. Now, this required a lot of effort, it was not that easy for us. But we were very happy, because at the end our students, our peers were able to actually show what they experienced during the training.

As part of the practical aspect of our session, we had training in community groups. The participants of these groups were put together, they were selected. I think there were six or seven groups, some of which were religious. We initiated a different type of discussion because unfortunately we realized that there were a lot of stereotypes especially as regards the social role of men and women – what should a woman do and what should a man do – so this was really a great challenge, being able to listen to the experiences of the participants in these groups. We also took advantage of the situation to try to convey a different message to the participants and show them that certain ideas that we learn socially can be modified according to the needs of our society. We also had sessions with our civil servants, which were also very dynamic, although they were more dynamic with the associations and groups, because the people were more mature and participants were different so we had to adapt our language. We tried to raise awareness because, again, some of these individuals had a very stereotypical image of men being the head of the household. We tried to provide them with a sort of guideline, a sort of source of reflection just to show them that through dialogue it is possible to forge consensus without creating a distinction between men and women, because at the end of the day we are all human beings.

Now, with regard to the results that we were able to achieve through this project, obviously I cannot say that everything we wanted to achieve has been achieved. Nonetheless, we are very much persuaded of the fact that with the implementation of this project we were able to raise the awareness of young men, young women and children as regards their role in contemporary society, which requires a proactive attitude in the different fields and areas of social life. Another result that we achieved is that youths and adults became more aware of gender-based violence related issues. Often we have stereotypes in our minds that have little to do with reality. It was very interesting for us to be able to shed light on certain issues and to present ideas that can steer us and guide us in our lives. The young people who attended these sessions showed that they could indeed change their attitudes in society and make a difference. I think we were also able to convey the message as to the need for a more positive community – that was actually the theme and the slogan of the first part of the project. Another result that we achieved is that young people proved ready to pass on the message to their peers, because that was the basic issue that we were dealing with, i.e. how to spread the message with a snowball effect. Moreover, we were able to step up understanding and knowledge in the area of positive masculinity, both on the part of students attending high school and the religious groups, communities and associations we dealt with.

The topic of my presentation is not directly related to the topic of trafficking in human beings. Nevertheless, I do believe that it would be a good idea to engage in a deeper analysis of the matter, because everything is interconnected. Whenever we speak about gender-based violence if we look at power relations between the sexes, it is easy to see the link that there can be with human trafficking. There is no better weapon than prevention. I think this project is a positive example of what has already been implemented in Cape Verde. It is a good method which might possibly contribute to implementing prevention measures against the great scourge that we heard so much about yesterday, which is the trafficking of human beings. I think it is important to realize that this scourge is on the rise in many parts of the world, and this is why in my country, Cape Verde, we are really working hard at a preventative level.

I would now like to share with you my recommendations to avoid prostitution and human trafficking. The first thing to do is strengthen family relations, because families are the foundations of society and must be structures capable of offering dignified conditions to their members, first and foremost their children, because they are the future generation. Therefore, it is important to provide educational opportunities and healthcare, and it is important for the individuals of the family to benefit from all the necessary conditions to be able to fulfill themselves as adults. It is also important to forge and design public policies, because it is nice to have good ideas, but these have to be sustained, supported by public policies. And this leads us to the question of empowerment, which we discussed yesterday, because policies must empower young people. How are young people going to have the openness and autonomy to create and to innovate? How can they possibly do that if they do not have educational opportunities, if they do not receive training, if they do not have a chance to show what they learnt? Thus, my suggestion is that civil society associations, religious groups, policy makers – everyone should do their best in order to make sure that young people have greater opportunities to be trained and to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Thank you very much for your attention. I hope we will have a fruitful working session.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO AVOID PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

On the basis of my humble life experiences, I would like to present the following recommendations that can serve to avoid prostitution and human trafficking:

1. Strengthen family ties;
2. Strengthen Public Policies, in the sense of preventing human trafficking;
3. Promote youth employment (youth empowerment), in order to combat poverty and social exclusion.