

VANDA PIGNATO



CIUDAD MUJER

A NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT MODEL
FOR EQUALITY AND PEACE

“Ciudad Mujer a New Public Management Model for Equality and Peace”

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FOREWORD

BY LUIS ALBERTO MORENO,
PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

According to some historians, institutions only change at a glacial pace. Today's so called developed nations took centuries to progress from feudalism to constitutional monarchy. It took more centuries before those societies became modern democracies where, for example, women could have the same political rights as men.

However, changes can be accelerated. Only a few decades had passed between the first female activists fighting for women's suffrage and the first female Presidents and Ministers elected by popular vote. Even in Latin America, the region responsible to give the word machismo to the world, it is not unusual anymore to see women holding top positions in the public service.

But there are some things we cannot leave to the fickle march of history. Problems cannot wait centuries for our civilization to reach a more enlightened stage. Atrocities that should not be imprisoned by apathy, waiting for the institutions to change and give them the priority they deserve.

El Salvador understood it this way, so it decided to look for a response to gender violence, a scourge as old as humanity. This is how Ciudad Mujer was born, a unique experience that deserves to be known, studied and pondered by other countries around the world, no matter how developed they are.

Dispersed throughout the country, Ciudad Mujer Centers care for victims of domestic violence. Grand-mothers, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters find over there other women willing to help them, providing them the access to a one-stop place concentrating public services to take care of their situation: police protection, legal advice, child care lounge, reproductive and sexual health counseling, or training and support to reach economic independence.

Some will say those services should be provided by the existing institutions. Maybe it is in an ideal world where no complaint from a beaten wife is ignored and considered as a "couple's issue". Ciudad Mujer ensures that the public services oriented to women's needs reach them promptly and effectively.

The Inter-American Development Bank decided to support Ciudad Mujer project both for its innovative characteristic and for our region's urgency to find alternative solutions to fight against gender violence. There are some problems that cannot wait for our institutions to change.

This book reflects the passion that Vanda Pignato, First Lady of El Salvador between 2009 and 2014, transmitted to the project. With that same conviction with which she protected human rights as a young lawyer, Vanda took over the Social Inclusion Secretariat to achieve the election promise of President Mauricio Funes, which was giving a specific response to the requests for justice and equity of Salvadoran women.

The book "Ciudad Mujer, a New Public Management Model for Equality and Peace" has valuable lessons for all those people of good will aiming to find more effective mechanisms to protect women's rights.

FOREWORD

BY LUIZA CARVALHO,
UN WOMEN REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR THE AMERICAS
AND THE CARIBBEAN

I am very pleased to introduce this book that brings together the experience of Ciudad Mujer, a program created by the Government of El Salvador through the Social Inclusion Secretariat, under the leadership of Vanda Pignato which vision, determination and commitment have been keys to the success of this unique model, broadly recognized at the international level.

Ciudad Mujer provides and integrates specialized services and programs for women's empowerment and to guarantee their rights, becoming a reference not only for Salvadoran women but worldwide, since several countries had decided to replicate this successful and innovative model.

This book is released in a historical year, when we are celebrating 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and we are defining the development framework that will guide us for the next fifteen years. As UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said: *The promises from 20 years ago are still valid today. Together we must make 2015 the year that marks the beginning of the end of gender inequality. Now is the time for action. Now is the time to end violence against women and girls everywhere in the world.*

Models like Ciudad Mujer represent an important step to make this vision come true. This initiative fulfills the political, ethical and legal obligation to implement public policies, provided with the necessary financial and technical funds, to ensure women and girls their right to a life free from violence, promoting their social, economic and political empowerment, guaranteeing their access to quality services and to sexual and reproductive health, as well as facilitating their entrance in the labor market.

Such comprehensive and consistent responses demonstrate the will of societies and public bodies to eradicate the scourge of gender-based violence and

advance towards substantive equality between women and men. In Ciudad Mujer fourteen institutions of the Salvadoran State work together, which, from their different competencies and spheres guarantee comprehensive, appropriate and reliable care to women. This model has also had the decisive support and commitment of different multilateral organizations as well as international cooperation.

In UN Women we have followed closely the evolution of Ciudad Mujer since the beginning: our former Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet attended on March 2011 the inauguration of the first center in Colón; the model has been introduced to our Executive Board and other United Nations agencies several times, and our involvement and joint work has not stopped ever since.

On February 2013, along with our organization, the Salvadoran government convened a regional consultation prior to the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) whose priority theme was **“the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”**. El Salvador played a key role to ensure the adoption of historically Agreed Conclusions, representing the first international agreement to specifically mention femicide and putting a stress on access to justice and ending impunity. By adopting this document, governments had made it clear that discrimination and violence against women and girls has no place in this millennium.

However, violence against women and girls still represents a serious violation of human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, being its elimination a priority for UN Women. At the global level, we work to promote norms and international policies, giving support to the United Nations General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as urging the inclusion of specific and measurable goals to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls in the new development framework to be adopted in 2015. Our message is clear: Together we can end violence against women and girls.

Access to quality services for girls and women facing any form of gender-based violence is critical. By working along with governments, civil society organizations and other institutions, we contribute to build capacity to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, and to raise awareness of its causes and consequences. An important part of our job is based on identifying and supporting good practices like Ciudad Mujer, and share them with relevant stakeholders.

In this regard, this book is a valuable contribution and we hope that through it the experience of Ciudad Mujer, made possible with the strength and determination of the Salvadoran State and registered by its creator Vanda Pignato, reaches a broader number of public policy formulators and drives them to take action to make violence against women and girls a thing of the past.

The world needs full equality in order for humanity to prosper. Women's empowerment is development for our countries. Initiatives such as Ciudad Mujer inspire us, showing that change is possible and that this change is already happening in our America. Now, it is our turn to increase the pace in order to make substantive equality between women and men a reality.

To Gabriel and For Gabriel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the women and men who contributed in making Ciudad Mujer a reality.

First of all, to the President Mauricio Funes, for keeping his campaign promise and breaking the old dynamic of making promises to the female electorate and after the elections: forgetting and not fulfilling them.

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To the governments and people of the Republic of China Taiwan, the Federative Republic of Brazil, Japan, Spain, Korea, Italy, the United States of America, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

To the United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA -, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – UN Women -, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – FAO -, to the United Nations World Food Program – WFP -, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development – IFAD -.

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To Paulino Espinoza, who helped me design and organize the CD “Ciudad Mujer: la fuerza de nuestra voz”, as well as all the women – from 9 to 90 years old – who shared their talent and voices for this purpose; to the national and international artists allowing the use of their works and to the musicians who participated in this CD recording.

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I can but mention the media that has been with us and helped us to disseminate Ciudad Mujer Program throughout those years.

To my family: my parents, Dede and Antonio, for their unconditional support; to my sister Cristina and my brother-in-law Tiago, for taking care of Gabriel, and particularly Cristina, who with love and dedication decorated the Child Care Lounge of all Ciudad Mujer Centers.

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To my gynecologist, Dr. Sandra Carolina Mena Ugarte, whose insistence made me take the exam that detected my endometrial cancer early and saved my life. To my doctors: Dr. Leila Correa, Professor and Dr. Kalil Filho, Dr. Daniela de Freitas, Dr. Raúl Cutait, and the professional medical team and their assistants who helped me at this stage of my life.

To all Salvadoran heroines who always gave me love and hope and still keep filling me with it.

As I mentioned in my farewell letter as First Lady *“The realization of a dream is always bigger than any sacrifice or any kind of pain. A grateful heart only has room for faith and hope. Those feelings will make me go forward along with the Salvadoran people I love so much”*.

OVERVIEW

VANDA PIGNATO
SECRETARY OF SOCIAL INCLUSION
PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR

Through history and in almost all cultures, women have been relegated to the domestic sphere, making them invisible; is in this closed atmosphere that we call home where violence lies in all its manifestations.

This also happens in the working atmosphere, in the public transportation, in the street; where the norm is the aggression, harassment, discrimination and violence. Was there a place we felt like ours, where our rights were respected, where we could get our daily trampled dignity back?

Nowhere...

Something needed to be done and we did it. This is the story of a dream, of the need to make it possible and of all those times we had to fight against incomprehension and prejudices, until it became a reality that is already becoming visible.

The aim of this book is to draw out the experience we have carried out in El Salvador on gender policies, starting with the creation and start-up of Ciudad Mujer. In a little more than four years, this model has proved to be an innovative and successful answer from the government to the gender issue.

This model works through centers that coordinate 17 state agencies and institutions, offering a variety of integrated and comprehensive services, to provide essential social services to women towards their empowerment: sexual and reproductive health, violence against women and economic autonomy.

I am not aware of the previous existence of such a Model. It is a Salvadoran proposal, which emerged from a personal experience that inspired me to take on a profound commitment to the women of this country, which face violence, poverty, exclusion, high levels of wealth concentration and a deep machismo.

El Salvador is a country struck by a civil war during the eighties; forced to permanent migrations; despoiled by the neoliberal policies that destroyed the production structures; stressed by the growth of gangs and organized crime and with them, violence and crime.

In this terrible scenario, women have been and still are – the most affected by these conditions. In El Salvador, like in other countries of the region, the highest danger for women, including girls, teenagers and older women, is not on the streets but at home, where their main perpetrators live.

The long campaign for the 2009 Presidential election, crossing the country from one end to the other, enabled me to see at first hand the life conditions of Salvadoran women.

Women suffering but who never stopped fighting; joyful and intelligent women; strong women, always looking to move forward. Heroic women exerting themselves in the darkness, almost invisibles, forgotten by the conservative governments that always denied the deeply unfair reality of the people and, even more, of women.

In that moment I considered that if we won the election, and God gave me the opportunity to perform a public function, I would work with a main goal: making visible the invisibles.

How? I thought of an ideal place where those women could go and receive special care to face their urgent needs. I imagined a female's place: women attended by women, women who trust in women.

This is how the idea of Ciudad Mujer was born.

A place concentrating different State agencies and institutions – from the government, the Judicial Body and the Public Prosecutor – to provide women with comprehensive care services.

It could not have been otherwise, being the comprehensive approach the main condition for a project that was born as an electoral promise, and as today it is a wonderful and powerful reality, becoming a heritage of women.

Making women visible was the initial impetus; but while starting up the project, a new goal maps out the path: women's vital empowerment.

When we, women, are aware of our rights – and Ciudad Mujer is the most effective tool for that – soon we will become major stakeholders at an economic-productive, social and political level. We become agents of social change as well as builders of a new society.

In four years and four months – from March 2011 to July 2015 – six centers have assisted 867,899 women and provided 2,360,203 services, becoming a revolutionary tool for government management.

Ciudad Mujer has contributed, like no other program, to the country's institutional consolidation, through a new integrated public management model, with quality, a human rights approach and strategies of territorial intervention, as well as the correct implementation of public policies.

At a national level we have currently charted a new goal: *strengthening, defending and improving the Model and ensuring the future of its operation.*

At this point it is vital that women take ownership of Ciudad Mujer and be able to defend it in case of any attempt to weaken or eliminate it.

At the international level, we aim to spread the nature of this amazing tool, which helps moving towards gender equity, to be implemented in other countries, particularly those sharing similarities with El Salvador.

I must confess that the most astonishing about the reality experienced by women in our Latin American countries is the fact that is also experienced – with all its nuances and peculiarities - by women almost everywhere, including highly developed countries.

Ciudad Mujer is making history in the field of women's demands. It mobilizes women. However, this fight does not only belong to us, women; we also need men to join this cause that belongs to all of humanity.

I am certain that there will be neither economic development nor full social justice without gender equality. In addition, in today's Latin America, victim of organized crime and murderous violence, peace we so long for must begin at home.

I can confidently say that social violence stems from violence against women.

When I took over as First Lady and Secretary of Social Inclusion, a sentence from the Brazilian theologian, Frei Betto, that led the way I work, came to my mind:

“The head thinks where the feet stand and if you spend your time standing inside the Palace, you will think from a Prince perspective”.

I decided that this would not be my case.

CHAPTER I
GENESIS OF
CIUDAD
MUJER

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHANGE

The year 2009 marked a major turning point in the history of El Salvador in the field of women's demands for their rights: for the first time, a government would make gender policy one of its priorities.

This was possible due to a big change of government. After decades of right-wing governments and 20 years of hegemony, the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) party, representative of right wing conservatism, handed over the Executive branch to a left-wing government.

This alternation was more than politics. It represented the beginning of a big transformation in terms of exercise of power. Government's priority was no longer protecting the economic power's interests, concentrated in the hands of a few.

On the contrary, since 2009, a strong effort was put into the most vulnerable sectors of the population, and along with it, the release of a Five-Year Plan intended to establish social programs to protect the poorest and excluded, and to revitalize the national production structures, particularly the rural ones, that have been neglected for decades.

The Five-Year Plan was a real national development project based on social inclusion that considered Ciudad Mujer as a model to implement policies, which support women. Ciudad Mujer became the first governmental tool in the history of El Salvador designed to address severe gender inequality and promote women's rights.

At first, Ciudad Mujer was a campaign promise becoming over time a revolutionary model due to its structure and functioning.

In El Salvador, as well as in the majority of countries, the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights is not the same for men and women. Not only in terms of its legal recognition, but also and mostly their access.

The vast majority of women focus their lives taking care of their families and not themselves due to the social and cultural construction of gender differences. Traditionally – which is considered as “natural” when it is related to something cultural – women must forget about their needs in order to make their children and partners a priority.

A high percentage of lonely women have the sole responsibility of their families at the expense of their own sacrifice. There is still a persistent social way to see woman's value by her capacity to provide for her children alone, without asking men for help, which encourages irresponsible

fathers and damages women. At the age of 13, 14 or 15 it is common to see girls from impoverished sectors been mothers and quitting school, often, even neglecting their own health to raise their children.

All this is due to discrimination. For that reason, when we talk about human rights of women we refer to substantive equality between women and men.

Equality means autonomy, in other words: the possibility of choosing and deciding independently. It also means having your own voice and the fullest participation in all social and political spheres. All in all, equality means having the same value, and not consider oneself inferior or superior to someone.

As an example, during the war, armed women in the frontline and active militants lived a sort of equality feeling with their men comrades. After the war, this atmosphere of equality vanished because the majority had to go back to a reality where women suffer exclusion.

Also, we have to admit that women and men live and exercise their rights in different ways. In addition, the interpretation and implementation of the legal frameworks and practice is deeply sexist.

Not to mention the way the State treats women victims of gender violence. Because of the way the victim dresses or answers, she is quickly turned in responsible, therefore she deserves to be beaten up and yelled at. Given this situation, she stops herself from reporting the abuse since she will be revictimised during the process by those supposed to protect her: State agents.

Violence, inequality and discrimination are the main violations of women's human rights, violating the right to life, to liberty and security of the person; to physical and mental health; to education free from stereotypes, free from social and cultural practices that puts women in a subordination and inferiority situation. That is the reality.

The conception of Ciudad Mujer stems from the awareness of that reality and the need to give an answer to such and extended and complex problem, not only in El Salvador and Central America but in all parts of the world no matter they live in rich or poor societies, or in developed or developing countries. Ciudad Mujer is a model that was created from the particularities of the Salvadoran society, since when we are talking about building up equality, we are also talking about the need that public services envisaged their work taking into account the specific condition of women, so they can get to know and exercise all their rights.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

In 2009, the country was in the middle of a deep economic and social crisis, one of the harshest ones in its history.

El Salvador was hit by two crises: the structural one caused by the neoliberal policies applied for two decades and the consequences of the 2008 crisis in the United States where the majority of the three million Salvadoran emigrants live. Their remittances account for approximately 17 per cent of the country's GDP. This combination of internal and external factors led to a situation of near bankruptcy of the public finance.

In June 2009, when President Mauricio Funes took office, deficit was above 6% of GDP. In the second semester of 2008 the country was in recession and reached its lowest point of activity in the middle of 2009, when the impact of the crisis was felt more.

That year, according to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), remittances fell 16%. The economic activity fell as well 10%, and the mass closure of companies, small and micro business led to the lost of 40 thousand formal employments, as well as thousands of informal ones.

As a result of the lost of income from remittances, consumption and investment collapse, and the lowest foreign demand in 2009, the country's GDP declined 3.5%. Poverty rate reached 40% by the end of 2008 and remained high, 37.8%, in 2009, and severe poverty increased to 12.4%.

Poor, particularly the urban poor were dramatically affected by the increase in food prices globally in 2008¹.

During the last two right-wing governments, an average of 236 people migrated daily, leaving their families to risk their lives in search of a life horizon denied by their country.

It was a historical low economic growth in El Salvador. The country barely grew half the average of Latin America and it certainly was the lowest in Central America. The result of this growth was mostly managed by a few, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Poverty rates increased as well as social exclusion.

There were no social programs for vulnerable people and salaries were the lowest in the region. In that context, the country started to suffer even more the scourge of violence and crime, mostly since gangs began forming, and since then, they have only increased.

¹ WORLD BANK 2011. EL SALVADOR - PRÉSTAMOS PARA POLÍTICAS DE DESARROLLO PARA FINANZAS PÚBLICAS Y PROGRESO SOCIAL. WASHINGTON, D.C.

The phenomenon of gangs has originated in the United States and has spread to Central America, particularly in El Salvador.

Political violence and the economic crisis from the 70s and 80s generated a large migration to the United States. Migrants settled down in some areas dominated by youth gangs, being Pandilla 18 the best known. In this context emerged Mara Salvatrucha or MS13, composed by immigrants from El Salvador and other Central American countries.

Since 1996, United States governments applied policies of massive deportation of young people involved with the gangs. Now we see the results of those policies and the lack of attention given by the former governments of El Salvador to the deportation phenomenon - given the lack of opportunities, hundreds of young people replicated the gang model.

Besides the economic and insecurity conditions, Salvadoran social structure dramatically changed as a result of the civil war and large-scale migrations. It must be borne in mind that since the 80s and 90s the Central American region experienced a similar situation so that the family institution suffered deep and dramatic changes, particularly among the poor of our countries.

Families had to adapt to those conditions. One of the main consequences was that hundreds of thousands of women shouldered the burden of responsibility for the care of their homes, becoming the sole responsible of their family's survival.

The imposition of women's role as the sole support for their families affected even more their own development since it limits their possibilities to access to education, paid work and political participation, as well as it increases the risks of victimization through femicide violence.

In the aftermath of the Civil War in El Salvador women had to take care of their broken homes and build them up again. Women and their daughters had lived in the most absolute state of neglect during the years after the peace treaties and the democratic reconstruction of the country.

Those changes during the end of the last century and beginning of the current one were, like women, invisible to the "official culture" that kept idealizing the classic family consisting of a father, a mother and children, ignoring the fact that other forms of family existed, that questioned the approach concerning family that the States and governments of the region had. This approach was based on an ideological assumption that considered the family as an "unchangeable" and "unambiguous" social unit with three functions: bio psychological, economical and socializing.

This assumption is no longer valid since it does not represent the social reality. Acting with this logic does not only implies unknowing the problems and specific behavior patterns of the different family forms, but also take the risk of having inefficient policies.

From that wrong perspective of the country's social reality, there was no way in which policies aimed at assisting women and families under such conditions could exist.

THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY

What was the condition of Salvadoran women when Ciudad Mujer emerged as an idea?

The first impression a visitor receives from walking the streets of any city in El Salvador is the predominant number of women.

It is not only because women outnumber men in the census, but also the fact that women represent a great part of those working in the huge informal economy that supports thousands of families and makes the real country work, a country that has been hiding behind the official discourse of the political right-wing for decades.

Women rising before dawn to prepare breakfast and getting the kids ready for school; women head-loading baskets of fruits and other merchandises to sell on the street; women as street vendors cooking pupusas and local food; professional women and employees fighting on a daily basis against discrimination and being excluded from opportunities.

Salvadoran women have to face many disadvantageous situations that can be found in different dimensions:

1. Lack of economic opportunities and insertion in the labor market on an equal basis;
2. Population movements linked to the demographic transition process that affects the composition and dynamics of families, the demographic dividend, and ageing process where women play a central role;
3. Gender violence not only has direct consequences on physical and mental health, but also has effects in Salvadoran families, holding back the empowerment process and the development of women and the society at large;
4. Difficulties accessing to sexual and reproductive health-care services, lack of opportunities in education and labor training programs, among others.

Statistics indicate that there are 35.1%² of households with a female head. However, this statistic does not show the complex reality of women. In many households registered as “male-headed”, it is common having the woman contributing the most, especially if in the family there are children from former partners that she has to take care of by herself.

We are talking about women that do not often receive child support from their children's fathers; women that in many cases are also in charge of their ageing parents or with disabilities; women that have to take responsibility on raising children of their relatives who died because of the violence situation or migrated to another country. We are talking about women who are not being taken care by public policies due to their condition.

2 ENCUESTA DE HOGARES DE PROPÓSITOS MÚLTIPLES (EHPM) / EL SALVADOR HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS FOR MULTIPLE PURPOSES, 2012

In El Salvador there are more women than men of working-age population. On average there are 2.2 million women and 1.9 million men. However, men are the ones who rule the labor market and the ones getting the best jobs.

What happens with those women who are not getting paid for their work?

Hundreds of thousands of women are engaged in domestic work producing goods and services for home and self-consumption without being declared as an economic activity, even though it represents the fundamental support for the reproduction of life.

Women take up 86% of the total necessary hours to maintain the household and the family, while for men it is only 14%³. It is imperative that we recognize and value domestic work done by women.

Women who work outside the home (49.3%⁴) do not either find good conditions to achieve a real economic progress because they can not show a high technical or professional qualification, which makes them looking for jobs in general services or the informal sector of the economy, working more and earning less.

To illustrate this reality, we only need to take a look at the fact that among women precarious employment represents 25.5%. Wage gap is 14.3%, meaning that women lose \$46.25 of their income just because they are women⁵.

To access paid employment it is necessary to redistribute family care responsibilities and tasks and create technical and professional training programs to empower women so they can access to labor and productive market in the public sphere.

Regarding political participation of women in El Salvador, the gap is enormous. During the 2015-2018 term, women governed only 10.3% of city halls.

Currently, women represent 23.08% of the Executive branch, 32.1% of the Legislative branch and 40.0% of the Judicial branch⁶.

These figures represent the significant gap in terms of participation and demonstrate the different obstacles and discrimination we, women, face to enter the political arena. Discrimination is visible on a daily basis through disqualification, annulation, invisibilization and the ineligibility for decision-making positions.

Moreover, it is urgent that society, political parties and States think over the “political participation” concept when it comes to women’s participation, since it is more than only party politics representation.

3 ILO, ISDEMU, UNDP, MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL WELFARE OF EL SALVADOR. “CONCILIACIÓN CON CORRESPONSABILIDAD SOCIAL EN EL SALVADOR. REFLEXIONES Y APORTES PARA LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UNA AGENDA NACIONAL DE CUIDADOS”. EL SALVADOR 2015.

4 IBID

5 IBID

6 DATA PROVIDED BY EL SALVADOR SUPREME ELECTORAL COURT (2015), SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE AND ISDEMU’S INFORME DE LA SITUACIÓN Y CONDICIÓN DE LAS MUJERES SALVADOREÑAS 2009-2014.

To women, participate politically also means organizing themselves on a community basis, for example, debating, proposing, having influence in the decision making process on areas that affects them, both at a local and national level, achieving projects, changing norms, transforming laws, improving their environments and claiming justice.

In that respect, it is noteworthy mentioning Camacho's idea regarding the three dimensions of citizenship: the right to have rights, political participation, and individual and shared identity – or to belong to a specific political community -, which emphasizes a citizenship in the exercise of its rights and free⁷.

Thus, political participation and civic engagement are inevitable for women. Participation referred to representation in elected office posts and sites of political power, as well as the scope of action for the other areas that affect their lives – social, cultural, educational, economic – both public and private.

Women's participation is tied in with the possibility to “exercise power”: to exercise control over themselves, over their own life projects, their bodies, their goods and decisions, among others.

Therefore, I agree with Lagarde when she points out that *“being (female) humans with own rights and human status means possessing the capacity to decide on the meaning and content of life itself, and be able to guide it to satisfy specific needs. Being (female) human means being the focal point and the subject of one's own life. And for women as gender, being (female) humans means becoming social, political and historical subjects”*⁸.

7 CAMACHO, CARLOS: “PROPUESTA DE UN MODELO DE COMUNICACIÓN MASIVA PARA LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE CIUDADANÍA EN AMÉRICA LATINA”, RAZÓN Y PALABRA, MÉXICO, NO. 74, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2013.

8 LAGARDE, MARCELA: CLAVES FEMINISTAS PARA EL PODERÍO Y LA AUTONOMÍA DE LAS MUJERES, NICARAGUA: PUNTOS DE ENCUENTRO, 1998.

FROM ASSISTENTIALISM TO A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

In the recent past of El Salvador, as well as in other countries of the region, there was a deeply rooted tradition regarding First Ladies roles during Presidential terms, consisting in charity work such as food distribution, donation of medical supplies, wheelchairs, clothes and other supplies in times of emergency, as well as other direct assistance for families.

During ARENA's first term, 1989-1994, Alfredo Cristiani, created the National Secretariat for the Family (Secretaría Nacional de la Familia) intended to implement and coordinate mostly family welfare programs, as well as other activities in order to provide for children, women and old persons, under the responsibility and conduction of the First Lady.

The next four consecutive presidential terms, 1994-2004, followed the same approach: the National Secretariat for the Family organized family welfare activities, served individual petitions, and distributed cooperation funds, with an emphasis on charity work, as a temporary solution.

Conceptually, family was the subject of protection by the official policy. However, those actions did not establish clear responsibilities, did not generate projects or concrete initiatives, neither comprises from the State.

While conceptually family was the subject of protection by the official policy, reality was that neither those actions were hold accountable for, nor concrete initiatives or projects were generated as well as a the absence of commitment from the State.

Governments of the four terms mentioned above kept a traditional patriarchal and homogeneous conception of family, denying women's rights demands, on to such an extent that during former President Calderon Sol term, 1994-1999, its administration neglected the agreements from the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994, aimed to address social development from a wider perspective through population policies. It was not only about family planning but also improving women's conditions and having this family planning focused from a broader context including reproductive health and protection of women.

Because of this ideological boundary it was impossible to accept women and other groups such as elderly, people with disabilities, indigenous people and street children, among others, as subjects of rights.

The First Lady and the National Secretariat for the Family work was based in the *assistencialism* practice, which created a situation of dependence of those people who received palliative help. This practice omitted the promotion of dignity, the development of projects, and bringing a solution to the complex social problems.

As well explained by the Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano: The gift is a gesture from the top to the bottom, from the powerful to the weak as a funny concession that does not generate an obligation of any kind. Whereas solidarity is the recognition of the Other as an equal, as a subject that has the same rights I have and for instance it commits myself to that recognition.

Given that reality, it was necessary and urgent to change the *assistencialism* approach for a human rights approach, led by the government's structure through an institution or entity able to take responsibility ensuring its implementation in all governmental actions.

The human rights approach must flow into all the Executive Branch areas so that from the highest spheres of power transformations, so longed for the society, would start taking place.

To achieve it, the first government initiative aimed to institutionalize the paradigm shift in terms of social policies, was the creation of the Social Inclusion Secretariat replacing the National Secretariat for the Family.

Because of that challenge I assumed responsibility for the direction and management of that new Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic⁹, which implied to ensure that the whole government, through synergistic actions, would start working to guarantee the human rights of the Salvadoran people, particularly the most vulnerable, defenseless and excluded sectors.

With that commitment, I formed a dynamic team to manage over the limitations in terms of specialized professionals in different areas, but without the sensibility needed for the work we were going to do; for that reason I counted on human rights-sensitive people with expertise in the field and at the same time capable to assume the challenge of starting to train others in the human rights approach, in response to the needs of the public service.

Also, this working team shared a common vision and inspiration: our martyr and beatified, Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who sent us to “*change the whole system at its root*”, to stop the justice from being “*the snake that bites only the barefoot*”.

Then, the new Social Inclusion Secretariat was not a simple make up of the former National Secretariat for Family, but it intended to switch from an *assistencialism* approach to a human rights one, in which people are the architects of their own development, that is to say, ensuring the creation of conditions that allow for social inclusion, development of capacity for action and civic engagement, from a human rights approach.

This was the beginning of the end of the *assistencialism* tradition.

⁹ TERMS 2009-2014 AND 2014-2019 (PRESIDENTS MAURICIO FUNES AND SALVADOR SÁNCHEZ CERÉN, RESPECTIVELY)

Among other tasks, there was the reactivation of the National Council for Older Persons (Consejo Nacional de la Persona Adulta Mayor), the launch of a round of dialogue to draw up the first National Youth Policy, and the creation of the Sexual Diversity Division (Dirección de Diversidad Sexual), promoting, as its first initiative, the signature of the Executive Order 56 that bans any form of discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation in the Public Administration.

On the recommendation of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Council for Children and Adolescents (Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y la Adolescencia – CONNA) was created, replacing the former Children and Adolescents Division, part of the Social Inclusion Secretariat.

Also, we created the Division of Indigenous Peoples that later on became the National Indigenous Coordination Council (Coordinación Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas) in the Secretariat of Culture of the Presidency (Secretaría de Cultura de la Presidencia).

An important task was to take the Chair of the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU) and lead its internal reorganization, given that, up until that moment it had only a rhetorical role¹⁰.

ISDEMU was created in February 1996 as the governing body for public policies related to women's rights, facing two major challenges:

- Promoting a comprehensive process of institutional transformation to recover the governing role of the National Policy on Women (Política Nacional de la Mujer), established in the Law for the creation of the Institute, and ensure the mechanisms to implement the National Framework for Gender Equality, that came into force in 2011 and 2012.
- Make progress towards the gender gap: inequality, discrimination and violence faced by Salvadoran women.

On the basis of both priority areas above-mentioned, ISDEMU redesigned the National Policy on Women. The same way, the Social Inclusion Secretariat launched Ciudad Mujer (CM) as a comprehensive care center providing essential services for women.

The mandate of ISDEMU reflects the importance of the process of institutional transformation, aimed to strengthen the governing role of the National Policy on Women, and advancing in women's substantive equality, through the implementation and guarantee of Salvadoran women's rights.

In that respect, the passing of *the Law of Equality, Equity, and the Eradication of Violence against women*, in April 2011, and *the Special Integrated Law for a Life free of Violence for Women*, in 2012, is a fundamental step forward in the responsibilities of the Salvadoran State in order to protect and guarantee women's rights.

10 ISDEMU, SEVENTH REPORT ON THE APPLICATION OF CEDAW, EL SALVADOR, SAN SALVADOR, DECEMBER 2005

This new framework implies a legal paradigm shift related to gender because it recognizes the human condition of people in full equality. This is the first legal provision in force in the country that defines women as subjects of rights.

COMPREHENSIVENESS, STATE MANAGEMENT RADICAL CHANGE

As evidenced, changes we promoted were aimed to the entire population in general. The anti-crisis Plan created social programs of a high impact, which were the particular style of the government of Mauricio Funes. However, and at the same time the process of designing and building Ciudad Mujer demanded particularities that faced the inertia of a state management model we inherited, which had to be transformed.

To formulate our model we had carefully analyzed the whole State offer, both government and other agencies.

Almost all that offer had to be changed in terms of gender to make women visible and able to participate. At the same time, we found out there were special services for women that, in our opinion, raised a big problem: those services were completely unfocused and disjointed; actions were isolated and unsystematic that is to say, they were not inside a same place or system that could assemble and strengthen them.

My first concern was: Is it possible to put all that services offer together along with others that do not exist yet and give it a sense of integrated system? I could picture a city that had it all. If we brought together, in one place, all these specialized services, designed for women, their demands and needs, we would be building a real city for women.

That idea was improved until the management model we see today was reached. This model has been replicated in the six centers as of today.

It is a management model that takes as starting point the fact that women have practical or basic needs as well as strategic ones. Basic needs are those related to their condition as human beings and their feminine nature such as health and food among others. Strategic needs are those related to their gender position including services such as training, time availability for their own development, among others.

For this reason we thought of creating a single physical location where the government and other State agencies or institutions could take care of women exclusively, guaranteeing the exercise of their rights, and providing caring and quality services in a context of dignity and totally free of charge, that could not be found in other areas of the public system.

I would like to clarify that if there is one thing we have learned through this Salvadoran experience, it is that the comprehensive approach is crucial. Some foreign visitors tell me that Ciudad Mujer's services do also exist in their countries. However, the fact that such services exist does not guarantee that everyone enjoys equal access to them, especially women.

For example, despite the fact that there are health units in communities, State does not realize that for some people it is harder to access them than for others. Many women who take their time to go to the health unit do not think about their own health but the one of their children or relatives.

Also, in remote rural areas, many women have to cross-rivers, mountains and long distances unable to afford public transportation. As a consequence, women's access to health care services is not easy.

It took us one full year of work to coordinate the tasks of different government institutions, to manage partnership with its heads, and to obtain the necessary funds to make such an ambitious Program work. The fact that public finances were weak, as mentioned before, made us face other challenges in funding the Program.

In order to make Ciudad Mujer work properly, institutions had to delegate, among other actions, their specialized staff to provide services in its future Center.

The common answer from those institutions was: *"With the resources I currently have I can not delegate some of my staff to you. Get me more funds, request the Minister of Finance more funds for my Ministry and then I will be able to redeploy staff"*.

Government bureaucratic inertia distributed scarce resources to the different Ministries, Secretariats and Executive branch depending sectors, particularly the most urgent ones, such as security. At the same time, negotiations with the government to obtain funds through loans and international cooperation were also under this inertia that did not take into account Ciudad Mujer.

POLITICAL SUPPORT VALUE

Having the State focusing in women conditions and implementing Ciudad Mujer model was difficult and challenging. In every society there are prejudices and resistance towards a new situation and innovation. Those attitudes do not only come from the government's opposition, but also from the inside of the government structures.

A remarkable fact was that I also had to face prejudices from the traditional feminism movement, which did not understand Ciudad Mujer describing it as a model of assistencialism, without having much knowledge about it.

In the Executive Branch, many senior officials were skeptical and even mistrusted the fact that the First Lady left her traditional role of charity, to take over the responsibility to eliminate all forms of exclusion in the public administration, and particularly fighting discrimination against women.

“Unity around a national development project based on social inclusion”.

The strong support of the President of the Republic was necessary to have his cabinet moving towards the path we had embarked on. In June 1, 2009, the President defined the nature of his government's policy in his inaugural address by calling together all social forces: *“Unity around a national development project based on social inclusion”*. With this definition marking the path to follow, I proposed the creation of a specific area for social inclusion in the Presidency scope, and so I designed the model for that new Secretariat.

An empowered woman who is always ready to fight back makes people uncomfortable.

Political structures and State apparatus – in all its bodies – were not used to have a woman playing a central role. In El Salvador – as well as in Central America – men decide and rule and women obey. Never before had the First Lady had a central role in the Government of El Salvador.

It was personally impossible for me to accept such a role, being so active in the political scene since I was eleven years old, and especially having a big experience and knowledge in public policies as well as cultural management. I had to fight against many resistances and prejudices while positioning this process as a governmental priority for the Social Inclusion Secretariat.

I must admit that the unprecedented political power of the First Lady was a significant factor in imposing to the governmental bureaucracy this new conception already announced by the President.

In its daily work, state institutions act “naturally” discriminating women, old persons and disabled people. For example, the vast majority of public buildings did not have ramps or elevators for physically disabled people. This situation was not been taking into account by the public officials. Also, people with a sexual orientation and gender identity, different from the heterosexual one, were treated rudely and felt excluded.

Discrimination is still deeply embedded in the State apparatus. Although some measures in favor of women are apparently taken, there is still a “naturally” accepted discrimination by all.

Retirement age is a clear example: 60 for women and 65 for men. Access to this benefit five years prior than men seems like a privilege and a noble act. However, women have five years less than men to save money to live their old age. Thinking that women live 10 years more than men means that they will spend more time alone and with less income and resources.

Another example: if a widower gets married again, she loses the retirement pension she had received when her former husband past away, because it is considered that it was his right and not hers. On top of that people tend to think: “*She already has a new man to take care of her!*”

That difference given by the State and society between men and women is present in all orders of life. We are talking about a worldwide phenomenon, a centuries old patriarchal culture. A hundred years ago, in El Salvador, women were not citizens and they could not even contest for elections...

Until Prudencia Ayala. In 1791, Olympe de Gouges wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of woman and the female citizen*, 139 years later, in El Salvador in 1930, an indigenous women claimed her right to citizenship and contest elected office. Women would have to wait 15 years to be able to exercise their right to vote, and have Blanca Alicia Ávalos de Méndez and Rosa Guzmán become the first Salvadoran congresswomen.

The elimination of discrimination against traditionally excluded groups, and the promotion, by the State, of a cultural change to generate a new citizen’s attitude concerning social inclusion, must be sustained. In this lies the importance of the word of the highest authorities of a country.

In that regard, work was done so hard that in a national radio address on 13 June 2012, President Mauricio Funes talked about violence against women.

A few days before, there were two significant cases. On June 1st, a congressman, member of the Board of the National Assembly, was reported of abusing his wife. In September, after allegations were known, the Legislative Body suspended him.

In the second one, that same day, June 1st, youth athlete Alisson Renders, who disappeared on May 9, was found dead, murdered by gangs. Alisson was a 16 years old student, a fighter with a promising future in that sport.

Both cases shook Salvadoran society, and even if they were different they had a common thread: violence against women.

President considered we were in front of a real emergency, this is why he decided to address to Salvadoran people in a message over the national radio:

“I would like to address the people, but particularly and directly to Salvadoran women, from heart to heart. We are deeply shaken by those high-profile incidents related to violence against women. You know what I am talking about”, he said referring to the Congressman accused of beating his wife, and Alisson. He added: *“Those are incidents that inevitably prompt extensive media attention and we can daily see on television, hear on the radio and read in the newspapers details regarding those despicable incidents. But experience in that matter tell us that once the media interest is gone, we return – to put it one way – to calm, and so we go on with our daily lives, as if nothing had happened.”*

But it is not true that nothing happens when violence against women is not in the media’s headlines. It keeps happening that hundreds of women are murdered, beaten, raped, threatened, kidnapped, forced into prostitution, smuggled out of the country, etc.”.

In another passage of his speech, President noted a key consideration to understand this phenomenon of social violence in today’s Latin America: *“that widespread social violence stems from home when a father beats a mother and when boys and girls grow up in a context in which beating a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter is something normal, that happens every day.”*

“In other words, violence stems from violence against women, violence at home: where this cruel phenomenon we aim to destroy originates from. So let’s start ending violence against women”.

Such presidential intervention had direct effects. A few days later, a 10 years old girl called ISDEMU telephone line to report abuse from her partner, a 30 years old man! A girl who should be studying, playing, being a girl, cohabited with that adult. The girl had seen the President on television when he was encouraging women to report abuse and violence, and decided to call ISDEMU.

In that opportunity, I gathered together all women from the government’s cabinet to raise awareness about that situation and to propose a coordinated work in the Government. We launched an intense campaign with the slogan: *“Violence against women is violence against society”*. A number of advertisements featuring Salvadoran actresses and the President were produced, reinforcing the government’s will to tackle violence against women.



The example, described above, teaches us that big changes request strong leaderships. This was probably the first big requirement to achieve Ciudad Mujer's implementation. Another requirement was counting on people with the right skills to carry this project out. In that respect, I must highlight the team of women and men who have worked sustainedly and permanently with me all these years. Highly qualified people, committed to the philosophy, love and the goals that inspire us.

PREJUDICES AND RESISTANCE

Because of the special conditions of El Salvador, Ciudad Mujer Project had to be put away from the political and ideological scenario of confrontation, so it could be understood as a State policy, as a new State response to an old problem that should not involve any political orientation.

Ciudad Mujer has proven to be, in its four years of functioning, a response far removed from clientelism and political favoritism. Even so, resistances were continuously present, people were traditionally skeptical towards political parties electoral promises, and on top of it, Ciudad Mujer was rejected by government opposition and some media.

A paradigmatic example was an online newspaper on November 29, 2010 – four months before the inauguration of the first Center of Ciudad Mujer – publishing an article entitled “*Ciudad Paper is going to be built here*” (“*Aquí se construye...Ciudad Papel*”). This negative article was more of a simple and uninformed criticism of the Government, than a contribution to understand such an important project.

In its first paragraph the article states: “*21 months after Ciudad Mujer was presented to the country – the main project for women offered by Mauricio Funes – is less than papers... Ciudad Mujer has had a manager for six months even though it does not have a budget because it is still a promise*”¹¹.

This article aimed to show that Ciudad Mujer was just a campaign promise and it was not meant to be fulfilled, as many other campaign promises made by politics. It disqualified the President and myself “the manager”. It said that Ciudad Mujer did not have funds and its functioning was not defined. However, by the time the article was published we had already solved the purchase of the first Center and proceeded with the elaboration of the final project, presented to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

At that moment, just a few believed in Ciudad Mujer. It was not considered a serious and viable proposal. Such a project was unprecedented. It had never been done in the world so the model had not been proven. The skeptical question we were asked was: “How are you going to do it from scratch?”. However, it was obvious that this campaign proposal had a profound effect on Salvadoran people and particularly women.

¹¹ EL FARO. “*AQUÍ SE CONSTRUYE... CIUDAD PAPEL*”. NOVEMBER 29, 2010

WOMEN'S SKEPTICISM

We must not forget that our project had been disseminated as a strong campaign promise through high-impact and quality advertisements on television. Government's first hundred days – which are used by the media as a first balance of the new administration – shown Ciudad Mujer as the most popular and recalled promise that had yet to be fulfilled. The same happened in Mauricio Funes first year in power. Women started to be skeptical about that promise, thinking that it was a fantasy, an unreachable dream, and yet another proof of an election promise unfulfilled. Also, there was already a campaign against me that wanted me to explain why Ciudad Mujer was not already operating.

It was against this background that we thought we should start a quality research work to sound out people's state of mind on Ciudad Mujer. A month and a half before the inauguration of the first Center in Colón, we conducted a very particular study: not only investigating the state reaction towards the promise of Ciudad Mujer, but also triggering people's reactions by announcing that the first Center would be shortly opening. We were able to show focus groups how that Center would be and work through videos and pictures of the building in Colón.

The information collected would be of a great importance to define communication, trying to avoid high expectations that could provoke disappointment and rejection among women. Indeed, groups showed that Ciudad Mujer had generated considerable hope and lots of fantasy; particularly regarding the fact it could be a place to go to solve immediately all the problems our women face.

As summarized in the above-mentioned study, *“Ciudad Mujer was found to be a symbolic product in the imagination of women and other collectives, condensing the aspirations, needs, postponements, and fears of the past and current generations of women. It was a very interesting answer to historically obstacles that hold women back, and their subjection in the family context, at work, and in the sexual, civil and political spheres, inside the Salvadoran society. In that respect, Ciudad Mujer was a dreamed gift to women because it was an original project that had an excellent building aesthetic, imbedded into a program of political change elected by the majority of Salvadoran people. It made sense that women's demands found in this “hope” the possibility to move forward overcoming machismo and patriarchal culture”*¹².

Therefore, this longing could work as a screen projecting personal and collective aspirations; as well as the possibility of social redemption that could go beyond the project itself.

This research showed that at the beginning of 2011 people were mostly skeptical and disappointed towards that campaign promise. It also showed that by announcing an opening date to the focus group, it caused surprise and disbelief, as well as joy. Those women did not believe that such an infrastructure could be a public space to care for women. *“That is not in El Salvador”*, they said.

12 HUERTAS, JORGE H. "INVESTIGACIÓN CUALITATIVA DE OPINIÓN PÚBLICA - CIUDAD MUJER". FEBRUARY 2011

We also learned that people's multiple demands, and particularly women's, could make them imagine non-existing services such as providing immediate jobs, housing or accommodation, granting loans to meet any needs, etc. As a consequence it became essential to ensure precise official communication regarding Ciudad Mujer's services – both services offered and not offered – to avoid any excessively optimistic and propagandistic remarks.

FINANCING ISSUES AND EXTERNAL ALLIES

As it was mentioned before, by the time the project initiated, public finances were very weak, so securing necessary funding to start up was almost impossible to overcome.

Our job focused on designing the Model and, along with it, I took the responsibility to manage the funds to finance it. In 2010, thanks to a serious effort made by the government we had a budget line that allowed us to purchase the building that later on would become the first Center of Ciudad Mujer.

Meanwhile, we found our first ally, crucial to build in a time-record the remaining five centers: the Inter-American Development Bank, under the personal leadership of President Luis Alberto Moreno and its committed team.

The first Center was built exclusively with government funds and was adapted to an existing infrastructure. What remained to be done was proving that it could be a successful model. Building the other five centers was possible thanks to a combination of funds from the government General Fund, a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank, and contributions in kind and other financing contributions by different countries such as the Republic of China-Taiwan, as well as other technical cooperation sponsored by the IDB.

On May 11, 2011, the IDB approved the loan project num. 2525/OC-ES meeting its targets of poverty and social inequality reduction and reaching the needs of small and vulnerable countries, such as El Salvador¹³.

That same bank loaned 20 million dollars to finance 5 out of the 6 Centers built. The Republic of China (Taiwan), an important ally of Ciudad Mujer Program, brought sustained and diverse cooperation such as donations of computer equipment and other supplies and financed a big part of the Center in the Department of Morazán with 4.8 million dollars.

Other donors such as Japan's Counter Value Fund donated accessible vehicles for pregnant, disabled and older women; as well as wheelchairs for the Centers. Another donation from the Government of Japan made possible the construction of a pedestrian overpass accessible to disabled women, users of Ciudad Mujer Santa Ana.

¹³ [HTTP://WWW.IADB.ORG/EN/PROJECTS/PROJECT-DESCRIPTION-TITLE.1303.HTML?ID=ES%2DL1056](http://www.iadb.org/en/projects/project-description-title.1303.html?id=ES%2DL1056)

Gender equity is at the center of the IDB's agenda that implements, since the end of 2010, a new operational policy to promote gender equality¹⁴. In line with that point of view, Ciudad Mujer was considered as an example to follow in Latin America.

On June 22, 2011, Inter-American Development Bank President, Luis Alberto Moreno and President Mauricio Funes signed the loan.

In the words of Moreno back then: *"We are convinced that investing in Salvadoran women is the best investment for the future a country can make. Ciudad Mujer is an initiative that will promote the country's development. Women with better health, women living free from violence, women well informed about their rights and with access to opportunities in the labor market, will build a more prosperous and equitable El Salvador. It is an honor for me and the IDB to be partners in this initiative".*

The first disbursement was requested on January 2012 and in two and a half years it was implemented. The Social Inclusion Secretariat won two consecutive awards for the efficient implementation of the project. Even though the deadline was five years, 90% of its implementation was completed in only two years.

The funds were implemented through the Secretariat with the help of other government institutions. While the Social Investment Fund for Local Development (FISDL), an institution with proven management capacity, implemented the Component *Construction and Adaptation* of Ciudad Mujer Centers for US\$14,655,000, the Social Inclusion Secretariat took care of a "soft" component including equipment, development of a management model, consultancies for improvement, analysis of production structures, etc.

A Project Coordination Unit was created in order to administratively strengthen the Presidential institution that was not used to the amount of acquisitions and specifications required by Ciudad Mujer (telephone system, furniture, diapers, baby clothes, medical equipment maintenance, treatment plants, septic tank, fertilizers supplies, etc.).

The Government of the United States of America, particularly the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) donated medical equipment and office furniture for the first Center.

The National Budget has been progressively bearing the operation of all Ciudad Mujer centers. In terms of its sustainability, this is a system with shared investment in which each institution contributes with its human resources and the Social Inclusion Secretariat contributes with fixed and complementary operating costs. Costs of Ciudad Mujer are less expensive than having the same services fragmented, without a comprehensive approach.

¹⁴ [HTTP://WWW.IADB.ORG/EN/NEWS/NEWS-RELEASES/2010-11-04/NEW-OPERATIONAL-POLICY-FOR-GENDER-EQUALITY-IDB.8471.HTML](http://www.iadb.org/en/news/news-releases/2010-11-04/new-operational-policy-for-gender-equality-idb.8471.html)

MODEL ON TRACK: FIRST CENTER IN COLÓN, LA LIBERTAD

Thanks to the above-mentioned funds and after overcoming the different obstacles, the center in Colón was launched, being the one with more accumulated experience and having assisted the highest number of women.

It is worth mentioning some of the details related to the inauguration of Ciudad Mujer since it represents the triumph of politics as the art of the possible to seek the common good.

The Diplomatic corps accredited to El Salvador and representatives of international organizations attended the event, strengthening the Project even more, to the distrust and skepticism above-described.

The entire government, with the President of the Republic being the main speaker, was joined by then-Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet; the Chief of the Gender and Diversity Division of the IDB, Andrew Morrison; the First Ladies of Guatemala, Honduras and Panama, Ministers of Women of Mexico, Central America and Dominican Republic, and women legislators of all Latin America. Michelle Bachelet said something that day that made us feel proud and at the same time aware of the big challenge we had ahead:

“Ciudad Mujer is a very interesting model that can definitely be implemented in other countries”.

It certainly was a mark of trust in the relevance and effectiveness of the model and our job performance.

That day everybody was paying attention at what was going on with our project so we had to take that opportunity to explain the model with details and dissipate any doubts, and at the same time reinforcing the government’s philosophy in the social field.

My first conviction was confirmed: *“I believe in human rights and the state duties to make them reality and secure them. I do not believe in charity as the State action leading force”.*

I had to stress that point out since many people still believed that my role had to be linked to *assistentialism*. I expressed an idea that was well known by the First Ladies present there because it is a historical practice in all our countries: to use the First Lady’s office as the last resort for compassion. All those requests that have not been resolved where they should be, end up at that office hoping for the “sensitivity and understanding” of the President’s wife.

It was then necessary to explain that the Salvadoran government had changed: politics would no longer be charitable but based on a human rights approach.

It is understandable that a First Lady receives all urgent requests from people facing extreme situations. I did assist as many people as possible during the five years I was First Lady of El Salvador, but not from an assistencialism approach since it was not my philosophy. I did it as a last resort, a humanitarian action that should not be denied to anyone. However, a government's responsibility – in which I was part as Secretary of Social Inclusion – was to know and secure people's rights and work to assist people's needs through policies aimed to overcome poverty, marginalization and the lack of opportunities.

The implementation process of Ciudad Mujer took almost two years in which we worked tirelessly until the inauguration of the first center, Colón. Early efforts provided startling results. Three months after the inauguration of the first center, 5,054 women were already assisted and 10,778 services were already provided, indicating a significant demand. Although women mostly came from the eight nearby towns, there were also users from other regions.

Colón's accumulated experience helped us to improve the other five centers set up later on. This first city of women was a pilot program that gave credibility to the initial proposal and cleared up many doubts that had arisen from the beginning of the project.

Currently, this first center works also as a training center for its own staff, as well as the place where the future new professionals and employees of Ciudad Mujer do their internship.

TERRITORIAL INTEGRATION

Once the first center was inaugurated and we came to an agreement to build the next centers with the IDB loan, we got started on it right away. As I already mentioned, since it concerns the public administration, the five centers were built in a time-record. All of each were located in Departments selected from the poverty map and women's health situation.

The promise we made to Salvadoran women established that at least one center would be built in each of the 14 Departments of the country. We have already seen in the preceding paragraphs the obstacles we had to overcome to build, equip and operate the six centers. So there are still eight more centers to come.

This is why President Salvador Sánchez Cerén took over this challenge in his election campaign and committed himself to build the remaining centers throughout the territory. In fact, that promise had a high impact in the election he won.

The multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional working team of Ciudad Mujer is ready to continue its work with the construction of the new centers, and just waiting to secure the necessary funds to complete the program and fulfill the promises made to Salvadoran women.

CHAPTER II
MODEL STRUCTURE
AND
FUNCTIONING

BASIC PILLARS

Since the beginning, the Model has reached hundreds of thousands of women and in a short time it has become an institution deeply rooted in the Salvadoran society.

Ciudad Mujer's main strength is making equality criteria into concrete actions and essential services modifying the life of users; showing the country and the world that it is possible to count on public institutions doing a high quality job, articulated, with a gender and human rights approach and with a common and committed vision to people's welfare. In that respect, Ciudad Mujer is a unique and transcendent experience.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that has been our conceptual framework, points out: *"Gender equality is not only a goal in itself, but a means for achieving all other goals on the global agenda. Today, more than ever, urgent and sustained action is needed to transform the structures, institutions and norms – economic, political and social – that are holding back progress on gender equality. These systemic changes must be deep and irreversible."*

The work done in Ciudad Mujer goes in that same direction and it definitely represents a deep, and hopefully, irreversible systemic change. The transforming concept represented by this Model starts from its creation and it materializes in its structure.

Those are the guiding principles of Ciudad Mujer based on four pillars:

1. GENDER EQUITY

Ciudad Mujer aims to strength women's autonomy based on its three dimensions: physical, economic and decision-making; in other word, increasing the accessibility of the use of necessary tools to make the most of the existing opportunities at a social, economic, civil and political level, to ensure them a leading role in the different spheres of life.

Those goals are part of the country's framework since the Law of Equality, Equity, and the Eradication of Violence against women came into force by defining that: *"equity are the actions to achieve equality. For this reason State institutions will have to engage in measures of positive action, as tools of social justice and devise mechanisms that eliminate discrimination against women and de facto inequalities between women and men"*.

As I said in the introduction: Ciudad Mujer is the tool created by the State to give effect to the law principles; it constitutes a specific response to the fact that the law was not forgotten.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

As we mentioned before, with this approach we overcome the assistencialism that has traditionally ruled the governments of our countries. Each State Body, each institution of a government must understand and internalize the fact that women are recognized as holders of fundamental rights, and we, public officials must meet specific obligations to fulfill those rights.

The adoption of this approach is aimed to promote effective and sustainable development progress, analyzing and fighting against inequalities, discriminatory practices and unfair power relations often enclosed by public policies.

This new approach has not spread across all State institutions and levels yet. Sexist practices and the denial of women's rights are still found in State bureaucracy. This is why I insist so much on the necessity to achieve women's full empowerment, so we, women, can demand our rights to be respected and ensured.

3. COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

The main functional innovation Ciudad Mujer offers as a model of public services provision is its comprehensive approach.

Ciudad Mujer will offer women essential services under a single roof to guarantee and promote their rights, sexual and reproductive health, timely care in case of gender violence, and access to services related to economic autonomy.

This principle is based on the conviction that fragmentation leads to inefficiency and increases the services costs. On the contrary, integrated actions reduce costs, broaden impacts and increase the efficiency of gender provisions. At the same time it is an effective response to the complex reality of Salvadoran women.

An example of this: 45 years old Alba went to Ciudad Mujer Colón in 2012 for a gynecological appointment, while waiting she received talks and information about her rights and learned from the other services offered there: attention to gender violence, access to legal and identity registration services as well as economic autonomy options.

In 2013 Alba participated in the gender and entrepreneurship course as well as she requested CONAMYPE to assist her to improve her business.

In December 2014 she was part of the female entrepreneur fair held in Ciudad Mujer Colón, and she was encouraged to attend gender and human rights training courses delivered by the Territorial and Collective Education Unit. During this process she stated she was victim of domestic violence and consequently she was referred to the Module of Attention to and Prevention of Gender Violence to receive emotional care.

Nowadays Alba is still taking training courses in Ciudad Mujer Colón. In order to improve her business, she took other courses in food and nutrition education, gourmet pastry and sweets, among others.

Alba's exemplary case allows us to see the importance of having comprehensive services and enhancing women's empowerment. It also shows us how unfair and inequitable are women's lives, enabling us to take appropriate actions to change them. But first women need to get informed, educated, trained and take control of their lives to change their close circle, their children's education and their interaction with other women and men.

Women – particularly the most humble ones – have to overcome many resistances: shyness, embarrassment, and the ignorance about their own rights; as well as this tendency, to think that it is just second nature to us, to put the needs of other members of the family such as children, before our own.

We should not forget that this social situation stems from the historical abandonment of women by the State. We have been neglected from generation to generation. This situation is suffered by my Salvadoran sisters as well as by women from other neighboring countries.

Thanks to this network of comprehensive services women do not need to move from one place to another. The Model offers a variety of essential services under a single roof enabling women to have access to services such as sexual and reproductive health, attention to and prevention of gender violence, and vocational and business skills training to reinforce their economic autonomy.

The benefits of the comprehensive approach are seen in all Modules but particularly in the Attention to and Prevention of Gender Violence one.

Professionals from specialized disciplines related to that matter assist victims of any form of violence. These professionals come from different institutions and provide containment and security to the victims. This is why women appreciate such a comprehensive model in Ciudad Mujer.

The main result is a significant decrease on revictimization that we will address later in the description of this particular Module.

4. TERRITORIAL SCOPE

Ciudad Mujer aims to positively impact in the lives of women living in specific territories with specific realities.

Although tens of thousands of women already went to the different centers, we must go further and go out in the territories to promote the services, work with communities about the importance gender violence prevention, to work with women but also with men to make them aware of women's rights and the necessity to respect and ensure them, as a social obligation.

Through this territorial approach Ciudad Mujer works with local actors from the centers' areas. Ciudad Mujer seeks to work with local governments knowing that political diversity in the territory confirms, on one hand that women's fight is not an ideological matter, and on the other hand that it ensures the development of a strong democratic society.

Also, the promotion of services and human rights of women can be done by users of Ciudad Mujer, strengthening this territorial approach.

SIX CENTERS FOR ONE MILLION WOMEN

At the time of this publication, Ciudad Mujer centers are distributed as follow:

CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN. Inaugurated on March 28, 2011.

Located at Kilómetro 29 ½ de la carretera a Sonsonate, cantón Entre Ríos, Colón, Department of La Libertad.

Planned to assist a population of 162,000 women living in eight towns in the area: Armenia, Ciudad Arce, Colón, Jayaque, Sacacoyo, San Juan Opico, Talnique y Tepecoyo, it really assists women from all the towns of La Libertad and some of Sonsonate.

CIUDAD MUJER USULUTÁN. Inaugurated on September 30, 2012.

Located at 9ª Calle Oriente and 6ª Avenida Sur and final 8ª Avenida Sur. Barrio El Calvario, Usulután.

Initially planned to assist a population of 75,000 women of the cities of Usulután, Santa Elena, Ozatlán, Concepción Batres, San Dionisio, Ereguayquín y Santa María, it currently covers all the towns of the Department.

CIUDAD MUJER SANTA ANA. Inaugurated on January 13, 2013.

Located at Finca Santa Teresa, kilómetro 61 ½ Carretera Panamericana, Cantón Chupadero, Santa Ana, Department of Santa Ana.

This center benefits a population of 235,000 women mostly from San Sebastián, Salitrillo, El Porvenir, Chalchuapa, Coatepeque and Santa Ana. However, this center provides assistance for women coming from all the towns of Santa Ana, and even some from Ahuachapán and from the Republic of Guatemala.

CIUDAD MUJER SAN MARTÍN. Inaugurated on March 10, 2013.

Located Finca Gran Bretaña, Kilómetro 16 ½ Carretera de Oro, San Martín, Department of San Salvador).

This center benefits 357,000 women from San Salvador, Soyapango, Ilopango, Tonacatepeque and San Martín, as well as users coming from San Pedro Perulapán, San Bartolomé Perulapía and Oratorio de Concepción (Department of Cuscatlán), among others.

CIUDAD MUJER SAN MIGUEL. Inaugurated on December 15, 2013.

Located at 15 Calle Oriente, between 10 and 8 Avenida Sur, ex centro Fenadesal, San Miguel, Department of San Miguel.

It benefits a population of 151,156 women mostly from the towns of Chinameca, Lolotique, Moncagua, Nueva Guadalupe, Quelepa and San Miguel, but also from the whole Department of San Miguel and some towns of La Unión.

CIUDAD MUJER MORAZÁN. Inaugurated on December 11, 2014.

Located at Carretera Panamericana, Cantón Llano de Santiago, El Divisadero, Department of Morazán.

It covers a population of 47,000 women from Sociedad, El Divisadero, San Carlos, Jocoro, San Francisco Gotera, Sensembra, Yamabal, Guatijagua, Chilanga and Lototiquillo. Through its Territorial Unit it assists other towns of the Departments of Morazán and La Unión, as well as the eastern part of the country, through its Territorial Unit. This center also assists women from the so-called “ex bolsones”, in the Nahuaterique zone.

The six centers reach a scope of influence of slightly more than one million women, almost one third of women in the country.

Services provided by Ciudad Mujer are totally free of charge since State institutions procure them.

Ciudad Mujer opens from Monday to Friday, from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30p.m (generally); however, in case of an emergency it closes until the woman has completed the care service she needs.

As an exception, the Specialized Institutional Police Unit to assist women, which is part of the Module of Attention to and Prevention of Gender Violence, opens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

MODALITIES OF CARE

The protocol of action to assist users is the same for all centers. The good treatment a woman gets when setting foot in Ciudad Mujer provides her with security and predisposes her favorably to follow the route proposed by the professionals.

The attention process follows these steps:

- First step: Reception, registration, information and orientation of potential users, designing a personal route for each. Under the single register form for all the centers, all personal information and data of women who benefit from the services are collected.
- Second step: Referral, depending on each case and its demands, to the different modules where women will be assisted and will be provided with services according to their profile and necessities.
- Third step: Attention in the modules and, if necessary, redefining the route according to the evaluations made during the processes.

When a woman accesses in Ciudad Mujer she receives a user card. Also her information is put on a shared database with the six centers so if she changes her address she will be able to continue the process she is following or the service she is receiving, in the closest center.

All women receive information and orientation about their requests and take part of a first information session done by the counselors (orientadoras).

A common characteristic of those services is the attention provided by women and the fact that men are not allowed in the centers. Although it seems discriminatory there is a reason behind.

Women's male partners can interfere – following the society's sexist and patriarchal pattern – in their process of empowerment. Also, from the other side of the counter, a man can intimidate women who need assistance.

In that respect, discriminatory attitudes and women abuse in state offices often take place, even in those institutions aimed to defend and protect them.

Staff providing care in the centers is exclusively made up of women aiming to generate a warm and cordial atmosphere as well as credibility towards state institutions.

The fight against discrimination is also effective here in Ciudad Mujer, through the inclusion of disabled women and women within the sexual diversity population. In our working teams there are women with different disabilities, as well as women within the sexual diversity population who are an example of self-improvement and access to a life with dignity through the recognition of their rights.

We also have staff from different ages: from young professionals, in their early 20s, to elderly women who are still willing to contribute with their experience, commitment and dynamism. All of them have been showing the users that we, women, can do anything at any stage of our lives.

Institutions created to represent women must work on their credibility this is why we emphasize the necessity to build up trust. One of our leitmotiv is that none of our users can leave Ciudad Mujer poorly assisted or even less, not assisted at all.

Besides cordiality in service provision, it is very important to take extreme hygienic procedures in the centers, make sure that all areas –both indoors and outdoors- are pleasing, comfortable and in perfect conditions. This is a message itself to dignify women since we consider them the most valuable part of the social structure.

In a place that provides services in dignified conditions, another key factor is confidentiality. This condition is crucial to have women coming to Ciudad Mujer, and it is not only applied for procedural guarantees of victims of violence. All procedures, services and information are absolutely confidential.

The architectonic design of Ciudad Mujer contributes to this confidentiality. Men who accompany users to Ciudad Mujer stay outside the building and they are not able to see what women do. The paths to overcome women's situation are multiple and they all need cordiality, security, trust and confidentiality as key conditions.

How many times we assisted women who come to Ciudad Mujer with their husbands pretending they have a doctor appointment but the truth is that they go to the gender violence module! Or we run into the perpetrators trying to access the center, but they are never allowed to. All centers have their permanent security and custody by the National Civil Police. Men, who are close relatives, can only access Ciudad Mujer with the authorization of women, to sign documents as guarantor, or for child support, among others.

With this Model, the appointments and attentions length is different from the other public institutions since the staff listens and talks carefully to the women.

While I visit the centers of Ciudad Mujer, women tell me: *"Vandita, I have been waiting for more than 15 minutes"*. And my answer is: *"I know my dear "this is how it is"*, and then I tell her why: *"because we dedicate at least 20 or 30 minutes to each woman"*. When time comes that same woman will also be attended by a professional capable of analyze and contain, and detecting those problems that were not expressed then. The majority of women understand this very well this is why they do not get desperate while waiting their turn.

For that very reason, one of the most important keys of this process is the job done by the counselors (orientadoras) who are the first to establish contact with the users right after being attended by the receptionists. Counselors not only have to listen to the women's requests when it is their first time, but also, and mostly, they have to gauge which services do they need even though the users themselves probably did not figure it out previously.

As an example, a woman over 40 years old might go to Ciudad Mujer just for a loan, but counselors ask her questions to identify if she needs a cytology, mammogram or even if she is facing difficulties with her children's support. Women can get more than they expected at the beginning, with all those services they will be able to demand more rights.

Ciudad Mujer often faces cases of physical discomfort, that after being explained show that a psychological attention is needed along with a medical one; life situations that demand making money to survive; or extreme cases of physical violence that require immediate medical attention and police and legal protocols.

Users can reveal, in an environment of trust, a situation of gender violence of any kind, even though the main reason of their appointment was something else. They find out there are

solutions to patrimonial, identity or training/education problems that are stopping them from progressing; or they learn from employment and productive development alternatives that will help them leave their abusers.

In addition to the services that each user needs, counselors motivate women to participate in the Module of Collective Education to raise awareness on their rights and their empowerment. In such cordial and friendly environment women accept to go through the training/educational course and I can assure that as they advance in their processes, they are becoming different women with new hopes and expectations.

As an example of how this “culture in action” works: Joaquina¹⁵, a 45 years old woman with no identity documentation, arrived at Ciudad Mujer Colón. She has been trying to issue it for a long time but she never could despite her efforts. How did this happen? She worked making tortillas and because of that kind of work, she had been doing since she was six years old, her fingerprints vanished. Every time she went to the identity document office, its staff showed a lack of sensitivity towards her story by saying: “Ma’am, you do not have fingerprints, you can not get DUI”¹⁶. And then she returned again to be inexistent.

This is a paradigmatic case for us. What she was not able to do for 45 years we did it in Ciudad Mujer in 45 minutes thanks to the coordination among the government institutions that are part of the program.

Joaquina arrived to Ciudad Mujer to request a loan to improve her tortilla business. She did not even ask for her identity situation to be resolved but due to her condition the alert system was activated for the staff from the National Registry of Natural Persons (RNPN), the Ministry of Health and the Public Defender’s office (PGR), represented in the center. Professionals from these three institutions and the Social Inclusion Secretariat met and found a joint solution so she could have her ID and exercise her other rights.

Outside of Ciudad Mujer those institutions would have never thought of sitting together and create a joint strategy to resolve the case of Joaquina. They would have refused to assist her or made her go through a long process without guidance.

In Ciudad Mujer those institutions work with a human rights approach and a sense of coordination and comprehensiveness, this is how they provided Joaquina with the quick and right solution so she could enjoy her rights. This is an example of our initial goal: making visible the invisibles.

Such stories are daily found in Ciudad Mujer.

One of the main achievements of this project is getting women to come to Ciudad Mujer, use its services, recommend them to other women and keep coming back.

We have proved that changes are possible. When political promises are genuine and implemented by honest and committed people, they become a reality.

¹⁵ THE NAME OF THE USER HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT HER PRIVACY.

¹⁶ IDENTITY DOCUMENT (IN EL SALVADOR DUI: DOCUMENTO ÚNICO DE IDENTIDAD)

INSTITUTIONS TAKING PART

Professionals from the following state institutions provide comprehensive and integrated services to Ciudad Mujer users:

- Ministry of Health (MINSAL)
- Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU)
- National Civil Police (PNC)
- Public Defender's Office (PGR)
- Attorney General's Office (FGR)
- Forensic Medical Institute of the Supreme Court of Justice (IML)
- Banco de Fomento Agropecuario (BFA)
- National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises (CONAMYPE) of the Ministry of Economy
- Defender of Consumer Rights Office
- Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute (INSAFORP)
- Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MTPS)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG)
- Solidarity Fund for the Micro-enterprising Family (FOSOFAMILIA)
- National Registry of Natural Persons (RNPN)
- Ministry of Education (MINED)
- Social Inclusion Secretariat (SIS)

And in an indirect way, through occasional actions:

- Secretariat of Culture of the Presidency (SECULTURA)
- Social Investment Fund for Local Development (FISDL)
- National Fund for Popular Housing (FONAVIPO)
- Ministry of Public Works (MOP)
- Vice-Ministry of Transport (VMT)

Each official of those institutions has been trained in a way she can provide a solvent, cordial and affectionate care. Those are professional women coming from different ministries and organizations who built up right away a solid working team in Ciudad Mujer.

MODULES AND SERVICES

The following modules of attention and services are provided in Ciudad Mujer:

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MODULE: it offers services for the early detection of uterine-cervical cancer and breast cancer, and reduction of perinatal and maternal deaths with special focus on monitoring pregnant women. It also provides dental, nutrition and mental health care as well as health education, among others.

ATTENTION TO AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN MODULE: it offers services of orientation and guidance, psychological care, police support, monitoring criminal action and protection of the right of maternity, housing, child identity, child support, and other individual rights.

ECONOMIC AUTONOMY MODULE: it offers labor intermediation services, vocational and technical training courses, supporting entrepreneurship, along with microcredits financing services.

COLLECTIVE EDUCATION MODULE: it offers courses, workshops, cultural activities, events encouraging reflection, etc., and creates educational material to disseminate human rights and prevention of gender violence. It also works with the surrounding communities.

CHILD CARE LOUNGE: Ciudad Mujer has a Childcare lounge to enable women to use the different services of the center while their, up to 12 years old, daughters and sons are taken care of.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MODULE

Based on the three pillars defined by the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin American and the Caribbean, this module and the following one – Attention to and Prevention of Gender Violence – ensures the Physical Autonomy one, which is controlling one's own body. It means taking care of one's own reproductive health, deciding freely and responsibly on matters related to sexuality, decision-taking, and enjoying the physical and mental integrity by having a life free from violence.

The main goals of this module are the reduction of maternal deaths and pregnancy among adolescents.

This module works as a Ministry of Health's specialized team in sexual and reproductive health. It shares the goals of health policies and meets effectively strategic objectives. This is the most populous module of all in any of the six centers.

Those are the offices providing the above-mentioned services:

- Internal medicine
- Pediatrics
- Nutrition
- Dentistry
- Gynecology
- Obstetric care
- Ultrasonography, mammography and radiology
- Clinical Laboratory
- Nursing Service
- Pharmacy

It also offers free transportation for women having high-risk pregnancies who are not able to commute by themselves to the medical office for their prenatal checkup.

This transportation service is also for elderly women with special needs, women with a physical disability, as well as victims of extreme violence.

This Module often attends adult women who are getting their first full medical checkup because they could not have done it before since they were not aware of that prevention. Ms. Isabel M., a 60 years old user, never had a mammogram until she came to Ciudad Mujer.

“It is different than other places, from the entrance you are greeted kindly, they give us guidance and orientation, we do not have to figure out where we have to go, it is a broad system, the building is beautiful and you feel in an atmosphere of trust. I feel fulfilled because I have never been treated this nicely before, because it is hard to take the first step for a cytology test and in other places you feel like crying for the way they treat you. I can tell women who should not go anywhere else, they should come here, the Government’s best: Ciudad Mujer”, said Ms. Isabel.

Several women did not want to deal with male professionals or their partners did not allow them to.

There are mothers who want orientation for their daughters; girls and adolescents who are alone and whose rights have been violated. Unfortunately, the public health apparatus is not in a position to secure special care to such common and widespread cases yet.

In El Salvador, one of the public health goals is reducing cervical and breast cancer deaths.

Ciudad Mujer attends those women who, according to MINSAL’s protocol, need a cervical cytology and a mammogram as part of their routine checkups for prevention and early detection.

The Collective Education Module raises awareness to the family about those factors that have an impact on the disease’s development and promotes women’s health self-care.

In 2009, the National Health Survey showed that only 44.9% of sexually active women aged 15 and older had taken the exam for the early detection of cervical cancer. And only 8.5% of women aged 40 and older had a mammogram in the last year.

In 2012 cervical cancer death mortality rate decreased significantly compared to 2009, 2010 and 2011. At the same time mammogram-screening rate increased from 8.1% to 16.5%, from 2010 to 2012.

Having women taking all the medical exams required, even pregnancy related ones, it is a difficult task to overcome, even for private institutions. In our centers, when a pregnant woman enters the module for the first time she will be attended during 4 or 5 hours, by 6 or 7 different professionals within the different medical offices.

A pregnant woman in El Salvador can hardly make it to the hospital every month for the prenatal required tests: she has either no money for the bus or lives far from the health centers.

This is why efficient and quality care services are crucial, especially given that 90% of maternal deaths are considered preventable. Many cases of maternal mortality are associated to adolescent pregnancies. During the 2009-2013 period, the percentage of adolescents - aged 10 to 19 – who are pregnant has remained above 30%.¹⁷

Ciudad Mujer prioritizes all high-risk pregnancies. Adolescent maternity requires extra controls to guarantee a healthy pregnancy both for the mother and the unborn child.

There are many cases in which pregnancy could not be prevented due to structural conditions; legitimate power relationships in the private sphere did not reveal the existence of abuse; there are also difficulties for the survival of the new family group.

For this reason, counselors can provide a comprehensive solution through the modules of Economic Autonomy, Collective Education and Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Our health professionals can receive up to 10 cases daily where the medical condition of the patient shows violence or sexual assault, which is revealed during the visit. In these cases, the alarm gets immediately activated so the Module of Attention to Gender Violence can proceed.

In cases of pregnancy of minor girls, ISDEMU intervenes and coordinates with the key institutions under the protection of the child and adolescence framework in force. The National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONNA) is the highest authority in this topic and coordinates the National System of Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents since the passing of the 2009 Law on Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (LEPINA). This topic will be addressed later in the description of the Module of Attention to and Prevention of Gender Violence.

¹⁷ DATA PROVIDED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF EL SALVADOR

Finally I need to underline that, through the National Policy on Women, progress in the health system have been made by adding the gender approach in its priority goals in terms of comprehensive health. This is how the specific goals are defined:

- Guaranteeing the provision of comprehensive health for women with quality and cordiality throughout their life cycle.
- Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy in rural and urban areas.
- Preventing reproductive risk and the leading causes of morbidity related to women's sexual health.

Not to diminish what States can do in favor of women in terms of health, in general public investment in human resources, infrastructure and developing plans and programs, does not result in a comprehensive understanding of women and the complexity of the processes they have to experience throughout their life cycle.

Ciudad Mujer is the one covering this precise demand that until 2011 it was not properly attended by the country's health system.

In Ciudad Mujer we have walked hand in hand with women who started taking care of their children before they were born by initiating the prenatal care service and nowadays they have healthy and strong children.

Many challenges have been achieved such as having women thinking of their own health, attending their medical checkups, as well as transferring cases of violence that enter in the health module to the gender violence module, and having women complete it so positively that they are referred to the Economic Autonomy one.

My reward to this great effort we have done to make Ciudad Mujer a reality is that women come back because they trust us. They feel they are in a safe and beautiful environment – full of gardens and flowers -, where everybody treats them properly and with affection.

ATTENTION TO AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN MODULE

It is disturbing how a growing number of women are victims of gender violence. Through the media in Latin America, but also in Europe, the United States, the Middle East and Asia, we constantly see cases of femicide, human trafficking, violence, abuse, and discrimination.

Ciudad Mujer was created to respond properly to victims of gender violence which is a global scourge suffered by women.

An emblematic case is that of Esperanza¹⁸, a young women willing to self-improve and becoming a lawyer. Esperanza's partner was a police agent who did not allow her to continue her education.

¹⁸ THE NAME OF THE USER HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT HER PRIVACY.

When her partner found out she was still studying he arrived home enraged. There he beat her up, cut her with a knife and finally shoot her. He thought he had killed her and he committed suicide.

When I found out about this case, I personally went to the hospital to see her. From that moment, Ciudad Mujer staff provided a comprehensive care service including medical care and psychological and emotional support.

Esperanza's professional career was successfully accomplished. She is now a lawyer and an excellent public official who recognizes herself as a femicide survivor.

Ciudad Mujer provides in all its centers services for victims of different forms of violence, as stipulated by the Special Integrated Law for a Life free of Violence for Women.

We cannot ignore a sad reality suffered historically by the most vulnerable people such as girls, boys, adolescents, women, and old persons; we are talking about violence within the family.

In our country, women had gone through a spiral of violence on the street, at work, at school and at home. It is particularly at home where the other forms of social violence stem from.

Like in all the countries of the region, El Salvador has been following the dramatic pattern by which at home boys learn that abusing women is normal.

Ciudad Mujer has opened its doors to women determined to end the cycle of abuse and violence they have been suffering for years, even decades; also entrepreneur women who need to take control of their own finances and economy as well as control of their own lives.

In its operational dimension this is the module that requests more coordination between institutions. For example, in the event of a physical violence situation, both the gender violence module and the sexual and reproductive health one are activated almost in its entirety, working hundred percent under a comprehensive approach.

Those are the institutions taking part in this module:

- National Civil Police (PNC) on duty 24 hours a day
- Attorney General's Office (FGR) to file the administrative complaint and activate the criminal procedures.
- Forensic Medical Institute of the Supreme Court of Justice (IML), proceeding with forensic examinations of physical aggressions and collecting scientific evidence.
- Public Defender's Office (PGR), providing legal assistance and information regarding the tools women have to protect their rights, and initiate the corresponding process before both Justice of the Peace Court and Family Court.
- Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU), providing emotional containment, psychosocial care, and self-help groups.

From this module is possible to require the intervention of different Sexual and Reproductive Health Services such as gynecological care, laboratory services and access to other specific services established by the protocol used in cases of sexual violence.

As an example, in Ciudad Mujer, after going through the procedure carried out by the forensic examiner, a woman victim of rape has the possibility to take a bath, be provided with clean clothes and a place to rest as well.

Here is where ISDEMU's work must be highlighted. Through its specialized staff it takes care of all the crisis situations and coordinates psychological care to get the victim stabilized and allow her to take the best decisions given the situation. One of its most important tasks is the support provided to victims for their vital empowerment and to overcome victimization to become survivors and independent women.

Psychological – both individual and group - therapies are crucial, as well as support and self-care groups, shelters (Shelters Program) and the coordination of actions for accompanying and protecting the abused woman and her children, including police support.

Outside of Ciudad Mujer a woman victim of violence is estimated to take between two and four months to go through the police and legal procedure that will lead to the arrest of her perpetrator. Such a long process leads to revictimization of women because in our sexist contexts they suffer intimidation, humiliation and attitudes intended to have the victims stepping back from their complaint.

Ciudad Mujer is a different story. A woman can prove violence occurred, file a complaint and have her perpetrator arrested in just one day and place.

This institutional coordination effort is successful, not only regarding the woman's personal situation but also the effectiveness of the legal and police procedures.

Ciudad Mujer has considerably become an empowerment factor. After four years of operation of this Model, there are more and more women than during trial they state: "I have Ciudad Mujer's support".

This exercise of power endured by women leads to a modification of the behavior framework that is usually underestimated. ISDEMU authorities feel there is a change in the attitude of judges when women claim there is an institution monitoring observance of norms and the real protection of the victim.

Through this system more women are able to prove the abuses committed against them and file complaints against their perpetrators. Also, both police and Public Prosecutor (PGR and FGR) offices in Ciudad Mujer are able to avoid its deficient functioning when guaranteeing women's rights.

In Ciudad Mujer we really work in life and death situations faced by women, which implies several difficulties and hard work. As a representative example of it, I would like to share Aurora¹⁹'s experience.

¹⁹ THE NAME OF THE USER HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT HER PRIVACY.

“I work in the health system, I am 40 years old and I have been victim of psychological violence by my husband. Because of my job I had to visit areas with a strong presence of maras (gangs), there, some unknown subjects took my colleague and me and drove us to a solitary place where they sexually assaulted us. I passed out and when I woke up again I was already at the hospital.

I left the hospital with fear and I kept working, I did not file a complaint due to lack of trust. One day I had to accompany some women for their medical checkups to Ciudad Mujer. When I saw how they assisted women with security, kindness and trust I decided to explain what happened to me and look for help regarding that awful situation I had to endure both at home and at work, making me feel fear.

In Ciudad Mujer, I mean, in the Module of Attention to and Prevention of Gender Violence ISDEMU’s psychologist took care of me and helped me find other alternatives to improve my life quality. Since that day I feel protected regarding my security and emotional stability.

Also, in Ciudad Mujer all the legal procedures with the police, the prosecutor’s office and the forensic office started. I am positive that I will have a more peaceful life and with better opportunities to develop as a woman.”

The functioning of the judicial system in El Salvador, and in the region, that still works in a context of masculinity, deserves special mention.

What do I mean by that? Laws, but especially those that implement them, in many occasions protect the perpetrators, abusers and violators of women’s rights.

We can still see how the efforts we have done have been thwarted by justice giving privileges to those assaulting women. When crimes go unpunished and recur again, perpetuation of injustice against women and even worse, impunity, are committed. We are indebted with all the girls and women we represent.

This is why through Ciudad Mujer standing up against gender violence and saying “Enough!” to its perpetrators has been easier. But it is not only Ciudad Mujer.

As we know, progress starts with the complaint. Today in El Salvador women are also supported by other spaces. I am talking about the radio program Voz Mujer (Woman Voice) and the hot line number 126 being spaces where women know they are heard, valued and cared for.

TYPES OF GENDER VIOLENCE

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

Any act or omission of the perpetrator, which affects woman’s economic survival. Among the most common crimes: denying child support, dealing with the partner’s debts, taking away money the woman earns, not allowing her to work outside the home, controlling over her own income.

FEMICIDE VIOLENCE	It is the most extreme type of gender violence against women, product of the violation of their human rights in both the public and private spheres, consisting of a set of misogynist attitudes leading to social or State impunity, which could end with femicide or other forms of violent death of women.
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	Any act, directly or indirectly, aimed at physically hurting the woman, carrying the result or risk of physical injury or damage, perpetrated by current or former spouse or person who is or has been in a similar emotional relationship with her, even without cohabitation.
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE	Any act, directly or indirectly, aimed at emotionally hurting a woman, lowering her self-esteem, and harming her healthy development; whether it is a verbal or non verbal conduct, devaluing a woman or making her suffer, through threats, demanding her obedience and subservience, coercion, making her feel guilty or restricting her freedom, and any other health distress leading to her self-concept distortion, her value as a person, the world's vision or her own affective capacities within any relationship.
PATRIMONIAL VIOLENCE	Any acts, omissions or conducts affecting the property rights of a woman, including damage of own goods or joint assets goods through transformation, removal, distraction, damage, lost, limitation, retention of objects, personal documents, goods, property values and rights.
SEXUAL VIOLENCE	Any act attempt to threaten or violate the right of a woman to decide freely about her sexual life, not only a sexual act but any other sexual contact, genital or non-genital, by any person regardless of the relationship to the victim.
SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE	Any messages, values, icons or signs aimed to transmit and reproduce the relations of dominance, inequality and discrimination in social relations established between people making women's subordination in society natural.

MODULE OF ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

This is the second most popular module and also the hardest to manage, according to the experience in all the centers from the past years. Economic autonomy is defined as the capacity of women to generate income and personal financial resources, based on access to paid work under conditions of equality with men.

Due to this situation this module is intended to support and encourage female entrepreneurship as a strategy for the empowerment, independence and improvement of women's well being.

As I mentioned earlier, in El Salvador, the pattern of women's participation in the labor market has been altered with some important population movements, such as massive migrations caused by the Salvadoran civil war, internal migrations, and people displaced by natural disasters that affect us regularly.

Despite the political stability reached after the Peace Agreements, factors such as the lack of opportunities and high levels of wealth concentration among a few have remained the same, causing the departure of Salvadorans to wealthier countries.

In such a complex social and economic fabric, the main role of women as well as the responsibility they took, has not been valued by the authorities.

About the 58% of small-scale economic units are owned by women²⁰. Those business initiatives are mostly located in the subsistence sectors with an income average below to the male-headed business.

In female-headed households is where we find the majority of unpaid domestic work. Women spent 6 more hours than men doing household chores. Recent studies have found that an estimate 800,000 women cannot have a paid job because they have to do household chores²¹.

Two of the main problems that have a negative impact on women's employability are maternity and women's double shift which prevents them from fully engage in their business units. Male dominated environment harasses them when they get pregnant, and maternity becomes an obstacle and uncertainty to future employment.

Although women are the ones who mostly make the social structure of the big informal economy of El Salvador work, their jobs remain inexplicably invisible. This is why the management of the eight public institutions part in the module of economic autonomy is crucial:

- Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MTPS)
- Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute (INSAFORP)
- National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises (CONAMYPE) of the Ministry of Economy

20 ISDEMU, REPORT ON THE SITUATION AND CONDITION OF SALVADORAN WOMEN 2009-2014, BASED ON INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY 2011-2012. SAN SALVADOR, 2014

21 ISDEMU, REPORT ON THE SITUATION AND CONDITION OF SALVADORAN WOMEN 2009-2014, BASED ON THE ANALYZE OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN (PNM). SAN SALVADOR, 2014

- Banco de Fomento Agropecuario (BFA)
- Solidarity Fund for the Micro-enterprising Family (FOSOFAMILIA)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG)
- Defender of Consumer Rights Office
- National Registry of Natural Persons (RNPN)

Some users arrive at this module indirectly. They arrive at Ciudad Mujer looking for other services - mostly health and violence related services – and realize they have the opportunity to benefit from those services. Most relevant cases are women victims of violence who discover through economic autonomy a new way of living for their children and for themselves.

There are also users who arrived at the module voluntarily or by recommendation of the territorial staff that promotes rights and services. In terms of personal growth, getting out of the house, building interpersonal relationships and bonds of solidarity, allow women to broaden their horizons and see beyond their home and community. Users leave the domestic sphere to develop production processes, participate in trade fairs, attend study-circles and some of them see themselves as community female leaders.

Doña Luisa's story is a good example. She is an 80 years old woman living in Santa Ana who was sad at home. When she arrived at Ciudad Mujer, she registered in the School of Agricultural Training (ECA), received all the courses, including gender and entrepreneurship ones, and partnered with other course mates. She is already producing legumes, vegetables, and aromatic herbs successfully sold. As of now Doña Luisa also has a new group of friends – her partners – whom she talks, shares and laughs. She feels productive, in good spirits and happy.

The module specialists have define the common profile of its users:

- Salvadoran women of all ages, even though the most common one is between 18 and 40 years old (among those there is a significant number of foreign women without a legal registration).
- Women with a deeply rooted culture of dependence to their families and/or in charge of their children (both young and adult women), engaged in all the reproductive tasks.
- Women with low personal strengths (self-esteem, social skills and empowerment to take control of their own lives as unique and social beings).
- Women with little time and mobility/transportation difficulties.
- Women vulnerable to or victims of any type of gender violence.
- Women showing consistent behavior patterns along with social standards and cultural stereotypes marginalizing their role in the social sphere and discouraging their real emancipation.

Each user arriving at this module can be referred to one or more offices in accordance with her interests and needs. Those are the services provided by this module:

- VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING COURSES

Women are able to access to courses offered by the Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute (INSAFORP) or those managed by the Social Inclusion Secretariat in coordination with private institutions and other strategic allies.

In order to offer the most suitable courses for women to be able, later on, to enter the labor market, we conducted a previous study on market and production structures in the areas where the six centers of Ciudad Mujer are located.

The areas of the six centers face different realities. For example, Ciudad Mujer San Martín is located in a predominantly high-density urban and semi-urban area with a high concentration of services and commerce, whereas Ciudad Mujer Colón combines rural and agricultural production areas with big factories and the maquila industry. Finally, Ciudad Mujer Usulután is located in an area of fishery production and marine-based tourism, to cite but a few examples.

Thus, courses cannot be the same for the six centers. In San Martín it is more reasonable to have courses such as cosmetology, computer maintenance and repair, or haute couture; whereas Ciudad Mujer Colón has provided certificate electrician courses (first women in El Salvador to have it), car mechanics, and industry equipment operator courses; in Usulután we also provided motorboat engine maintenance and sales advisor courses.

Given the potential for tourism in the area of Ciudad Mujer Santa Ana, we trained women to become specialized tourist guides, with knowledge in history and culture heritage as well as additional training in first aid, driving specialized vehicles and prevention and detection of human trafficking.

One of the main characteristics of Ciudad Mujer as a public policy model is its capacity to absorb information from the whole territory and sharing its requirements to the state apparatus. This good knowledge of the territory puts pressure on the training institutions to add new specialties or adapt them to women.

Ciudad Mujer also encourages and provides up-to-date and inclusive training courses in order to overcome the traditional vision in which women had been trained or educated for “feminine” activities, and that is an outdated concept.

Thus, women can choose among a wider range of courses based on local production structures but also in accordance with their life projects.

Now we can proudly say that we have supported women who have been trained in traditional areas such as food production, dressmaking, cosmetology, but also many women have also been trained in innovative areas such as appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT); computer maintenance and repair, shoemaking, and milk pasteurization training, among others.

Through the School of Agricultural Training, we have prepared women in agro-industry cultivation and production techniques so they can go beyond domestic subsistence agriculture.

Thanks to this methodology we are responding to local circumstances because, as I mentioned before, reality is not the same for women who live in a community, in a rural area or an urban one. In some areas, as is the case of our center in Morazán, due to a lack of employment offers the alternative is finding market niches and develop value chains through a women entrepreneur network able to provide large scale services.

In particular it is significant that the majority of courses take place outside the centers, in the communities where women live. This is a strategy that we casually call “itinerant courses” and it is based on the concept that institutions go to the territory instead of women going where the institutions are.

Wherever women need it, Ciudad Mujer goes with the “itinerant courses” so distance, time and commuting difficulties are no longer an obstacle for women’s self-improvement.

- LABOR INTERMEDIATION SERVICES, JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND LABOR RIGHTS

Ciudad Mujer users can be assisted with the Ministry of Labor services through labor intermediation services along with vocational and employment guidance needed to look actively for a job.

We rely on the support of the Labor Market Observatory that helps us identifying what companies require and what are the demanded profiles. Labor intermediation with companies offering employment is one of the main pillars of this institution.

Professionals from the Ministry of Labor also help out women to create their resumes.

They also provide assistance and receive complaints alleging unjust dismissal or non-compliance with the legal regulations regarding employment and occupational safety and health standards such as salary debt, failure to comply with holiday payment, full bonus, overtime and salary, as well as abuse, discrimination and sexual harassment at work.

For other services or special monitoring the Ministry of Labor’s delegate can refer the user to the closest office of the MTPS.

• SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Given the production structures reality, not every woman wants to or is able to enter to the labor market as an employee in a public or private institution. Thus, in Ciudad Mujer we encourage women to set up their own business, both individual business and partnership.

This is why in each center there is an office of the National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises (CONAMYPE), which evaluates and defines the needs of each entrepreneur. If a woman needs vocational or additional training she is referred again to INSAFORP. Once this stage is finished, an itinerary to create her business starts:

Thus, women receive:

- Entrepreneurship and gender courses;
- Guidance to start a business;
- Consulting and technical assistance to develop a business plan and/or formalize the business;
- Support to consolidate and innovate;
- Promote entrepreneurship.

If the user is already an entrepreneur or a micro or small business owner, CONAMYPE provides her with specialized courses, technical assistance, entrepreneurship tutorials, business partnership promotion, formalization process, participation in networks, links to government programs and other services related to business management.

Women can also take courses at the School of Agricultural Training and later on participate in the Agriculture Association promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture to develop cooperatives and/or agriculture capacities required to established a new business or join new production chains in the agricultural industry.

• ACCESS TO PRODUCTIVE LOANS

In this module Banco de Fomento Agropecuario (BFA) and the Solidarity Fund for the Micro-enterprising Family (FOSOFAMILIA) provide the users with loan counseling.

Unfortunately, although the interest rates provided by the above-mentioned institutions are lower than the private system ones, reality is that credits are not adapted to those women's profile because of the legal and financial framework. This is an obstacle we have not overcome yet, because the rules do not consider the special situation of women and their business.

In general, financial institutions belong to the male-dominated culture. Risk assessment for loans excludes women who generally do not have eligible assets to guarantee a loan.

This way, besides the shortage and lack of diversity of financial products, there are also requirements that women rarely meet, even though they have a viable business project.

This is why in Ciudad Mujer we work together with international cooperation agencies, as well as partner countries, on projects aimed to develop valuable productive initiatives through the provision of seed capital and inputs.

We are also developing a strategy to establish a guarantee fund in order to have more women able to access to the loans and assets they need.

The story of Teresa²² is a good example:

“I am a 42 years old woman and this is my story: After I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I went through the medically indicated treatment. Even though it was a very hard process, I decided I wanted to live.

Once the treatment and process finished, I set myself another goal, which was starting a business. This is how I decided to look for financial aid through banking institutions to provide me with a loan to start up my dream... but all of them closed their doors on me, I did not qualify for a loan because of the illness.

Despite several denials, I did not give up. This is how I arrived at Ciudad Mujer and felt welcomed and valued since they believed in me.

I started the process to establish my business. They provided me with guidance, assistance, and economic resources I had been looking for so long.

I was very lucky since I received seed capital from a project in Ciudad Mujer to install my cafe and now I am a fulfilled and happy woman.

Ciudad Mujer helped make my dream come true because they believed in me and they saw my potential but above all they saw me as a woman.

Now I can say I am an entrepreneur woman and a cancer survivor”.

MODULE OF COLLECTIVE EDUCATION

This module sets up the comprehensive link between Ciudad Mujer, women and communities. This is a back and forth mechanism between the institution and society. It is an operational and silent arm, leaving marks in the territory, making women literate in their own rights and bringing immediate answers. This is the module that reaches those places that have never been taken care of by the State, and penetrates, with difficulties and danger, into those territories the State has been progressively abandoning in the face of the advancement of crime.

This module is based on one of the three pillars defined by the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin American and the Caribbean: decision-making. It means the equal representation of women

22 THE NAME OF THE USER HAS BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT HER PRIVACY.

in the political sphere in all its levels, and measures oriented to promote their full participation in equal conditions.

A good example is as of the Group of Progressive Women (Grupo de Mujeres Progresistas): 11 women, young, adult, and old woman, who live in the community Salinas de Sisigüayo in the town of Jiquilisco, work on shrimp farming.

Before they got together they were women whose lives revolved around domestic work, some of them, single mothers did not have any support for their survival and their family's.

They were part of another cooperative where they learn how to work in an organized way. After a while 11 women decided to work separately from the cooperative and created alongside with their economic project, a project of Community Savings.

The cooperative supported them by giving them a small pond for fish farming in order to start with the productive initiative; due to the lack of adequate conditions for this type of business their project started to have several production problems.

Ciudad Mujer, with UN Women help and through a project with IFAD funds, gave them \$13,000 to rebuild the pond and the warehouse to storage and protect the product.

As of today this group of women feel motivated and aware of the support they received from the program, not only at a financial level but also with entrepreneurship training providing them with better tools to manage the project and the proper handling of legal documents.

It is worth mentioning that a 20 years old young woman is the leader of this project assuming the responsibility with love and dedication even though at the beginning she was not familiar at all with the organization, administration and legal procedures.

To advance the empowerment of women in particular regarding their civil and political rights, this module implements activities to raise awareness and promote techniques, methodologies and training material in accordance with the group of women.

Although talks and training courses are provided in Ciudad Mujer centers, most of them take places outside of the institution. The visible face of Ciudad Mujer in the communities is this module's staff; they are the ones who get to know women, where they live, the ones who coordinate with the educational institutions, NGOs, local leaders and local governments.

Our professionals in Collective Education are the same who make up the territorial units going over the territory and covering Ciudad Mujer's areas of scope.

They are also the ones bringing the services to women who for different reasons cannot go to the center. For example, if they identify homes where women had filed a complaint on child support or there is a problem with land property, they schedule a visit with staff from the Public Defender's office.

CHILD CARE LOUNGE

What a woman does if she wants to go to the doctor's office, spend four or six hours a day on a training course or getting legal advice if she has dependent children that nobody else can take care of? She simply stops receiving those services she needs or she does it half way, stressed out and feeling guilty and more worried to take care of her children than herself. This is one of the reasons why women stop taking care of their health.

For them, to enable them to use the different services of Ciudad Mujer, a child care lounge was established where boys and girls could be taken care of while their mothers were properly receiving services in the other modules.

This module is a response to two priority approaches:

First of all, the recognition that even though care work has traditionally been carried out by women, from an ethical, human rights and gender perspective, this reality must be changed, and the State must facilitate conditions to equitably redistribute care work. This is why Ciudad Mujer takes the responsibility on children's care while women are in the center, and also because it is part of the promotion of economic autonomy approach, in the social protection and care work distribution pillar.

Second of all, it represents a measure of special protection for girls and boys. No matter what, the way institutions work in Ciudad Mujer responds to an adulthood logic: doctor's appointments, psychological services, technical training courses, legal advice, etc. Even more in case of gender violence where we have to avoid having children being victimized while listening to the stories or seeing their mothers go through the examination.

There is no doubt that the Child Care Lounge is one the most carefully designed spaces in Ciudad Mujer. It stands out for its atmosphere, the modernity of the equipment and facilities, as well as the loving attention of its staff.

The Child Care Lounge was designed to allow children to have fun and learn about their own rights. I always like to point out that it is not a simple daycare or nursery, we do

not “watch” kids, we take care of them with love, professionalism and with activities in accordance with their age.

This module is divided in three areas: one for 0 to 2 years old babies; another one for girls and boys from 3 to 6 years old, and finally one area for children between 7 and 12 years old.

This module provides the following services:

- Development of early stimulation activities, entertainment and toys.
- Nursery room for newborns.
- Creativity and reading stimulation.
- Psychological, pediatrics and nutrition care services in case of emergency.
- Promoting awareness of rights among children through play-based activities, teaching basic rules of coexistence and violence prevention.

Also, all centers have a private breastfeeding area. Mothers can breastfeed their babies and after they can continue receiving their services without losing their turn, and leaving the kids with the specialized staff.

ADAPTABILITY OF THE MODEL

Our dream, and at the same time our challenge, is to replicate Ciudad Mujer in other countries, especially in those sharing the same social, economic and political characteristics. Those countries where women are victims of prejudices and have historically been abused and invisibilized.

We started at home, and our home is not only El Salvador, our home is Central America and includes all the women of the region.

Among public figures, leaders and public officials of different countries that have visited Ciudad Mujer, many of them have asked about the partial adaptability of the model.

My answer is the following: at least in Latin America, Ciudad Mujer model needs to keep the five original modules, with no exception. The service network has to be implemented and coordinated in one place and work under the comprehensive approach as the fundamental pillar of the model.

Part of the work of its staff is aimed to articulate all the actions in each center at an interinstitutional level. It is worth the effort since it is based on the certainty that when services are dispersed they generate disincentive towards the achievement of women’s rights.

This concentration of specialized services in one place fosters institutional and administrative synergies that physical separation would not allow to, and it responds to the complex reality of women since they could arrive to Ciudad Mujer for a health problem and end up requesting other services. Statistics show that women hardly receive one attention per visit only, they generally use multiple services.

Also, based on the logic of women's autonomy, it is not possible to work on only one of the pillars and leave the others, Ciudad Mujer – through its five modules – has an impact on all of them (physical, economic and decision-making).

Another fundamental component is its territoriality that makes the model flexible, and guarantees the insertion and monitoring of its real functioning. This last component gives Ciudad Mujer the capacity to be replicated in other countries and regions.

To give an example of this coordinated work: each module has its own protocol of attention that defines all the procedures to be followed, describes interinstitutional integration, and the strategic allies added through legal agreements, etc. But this is a protocol that has never been definitely printed because it is constantly being reviewed and adjusted.

To sum up, wherever Ciudad Mujer is replicated, its adaptability will be provided by its own permanently active structure, its users needs, its link to the territory and its harmony and understanding with the other participant institutions.

Our model is permeable and flexible and it has continued to adapt to women's reality – whose lives are variable and changing – to provide better services and to achieve the final goal of the program: to build a citizenship for a better life with equality and justice.

CIUDAD MUJER IMAGES



AERIAL VIEW OF CIUDAD MUJER SANTA ANA



CHILD CARE LOUNGE – CIUDAD MUJER



MODULE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH – CIUDAD MUJER



USERS OF CIUDAD MUJER BENEFITED FROM THE ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM



MAMMOGRAM SCREENINGS – CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN.



CAR MECHANICS COURSE – CIUDAD MUJER SAN MARTÍN



SHOEMAKING COURSE IN TACUBA, ACHUACHAPÁN – CIUDAD MUJER SANTA ANA



MOBILE UNIT FOR INDUSTRIAL SEWING, DONATED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BRAZIL – CIUDAD MUJER



HAIRDRESSING AND HAIR STYLIST COURSE – CIUDAD MUJER MORAZÁN



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, JAUME SEGURA AND THE HEAD OF COOPERATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, TOMÁS PALLÁS, AT THE CEREMONY FOR SEED CAPITAL DELIVERY TO CIUDAD MUJER USERS.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO AND WORLD FOOD ORGANIZATION DIRECTOR-GENERAL, JOSÉ GRAZIANO DA SILVA, DURING THE INAUGURATION OF THE PROGRAM CULTIVATING FUTURE AND HOPE, ACCOMPANIED BY THE VICE-MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK, HUGO FLORES. 2012.



SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURAL TRAINING (ECA). CIUDAD MUJER SANTA ANA.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP "MUJERES FE Y ESPERANZA DE COLÓN", CANTÓN CIMARRÓN DE LA LIBERTAD.
THEY WERE TRAINED IN CIUDAD MUJER.



EL SALVADOR COOKING CLASSES – CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN



COMPUTING COURSE – CIUDAD MUJER SAN MIGUEL



ELECTRICIAN COURSE – CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN



SOCCER TOURNAMENT – CIUDAD MUJER JOVEN



"LAS MUSAS", DURING THE RECORDING OF CIUDAD MUJER "LA FUERZA DE NUESTRA VOZ" CD.



PRACTICING, ELECTRICITY TECHNICAL COURSE – CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN



PUPPET WORKSHOP – CIUDAD MUJER JOVEN

IMAGES



CLOSING OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, MARCH 2009. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: DRA. VANDA PIGNATO; CANDIDATE RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT, MAURICIO FUNES; FMLN SECRETARY GENERAL, MEDARDO GONZÁLEZ; AND CANDIDATE RUNNING FOR VICE-PRESIDENT, SALVADOR SÁNCHEZ CERÉN.



GABRIEL FUNES PIGNATO WITH HIS PARENTS, PRESIDENT MAURICIO FUNES AND DRA. VANDA PIGNATO, DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION, JUNE 1, 2009.



GABRIEL FUNES PIGNATO WITH HIS MOTHER, DRA. VANDA PIGNATO, DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL CEREMONY, JUNE 1, 2009.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GUADALUPE DE ESPINOZA, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF SOCIAL INCLUSION, YANIRA ARGUETA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ISDEMU, VANDA PIGNATO, SECRETARY OF SOCIAL INCLUSION, AND CARLOS URQUILLA, DEPUTY PROCURATOR (OFFICE OF THE PROCURATOR FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS), AUGUST 2015



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO AT A WORKING MEETING WITH PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (IDB), LUIS ALBERTO MORENO, WASHINGTON DC., 2011



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE PRESIDENT OF CHILE AND UN WOMEN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MICHELLE BACHELET, DURING THE INAUGURATION OF THE FIRST CENTER OF CIUDAD MUJER IN COLÓN, LA LIBERTAD, MARCH 2011



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE PRESIDENT OF BRAZIL, LUIZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA, IN CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN, LA LIBERTAD, 2011.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL, BAN KI-MOON, AT A MEETING DURING THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION, APRIL 2013.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH HER HIGHNESS SHEIKHA MOZAH BINT NASSER, OF QATAR, 67TH UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 2012.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL AND UNDP ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR, REBECA GRYNSPAN, MAY 2014.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO DURING THE "MEDAL OF LIMA" AWARD CEREMONY BY MAYOR OF LIMA, SUSANA VILLARÁN DE LA PUENTE, AND ACCOMPANIED BY MICHELLE BACHELET, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UN WOMEN, LIMA, PERÚ OCTOBER 2012.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO DURING THE AWARD CEREMONY. AWARD TO THE INITIATIVE IN HEALTH AND EMPOWERMENT BY SOUTH SOUTH NEWS AND THE UNITED NATIONS. ACCOMPANIED BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, DR. W. BALDWIN SPENCER, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 2011.



AWARD TO CIUDAD MUJER BY THE DEMOGRAPHIC ASSOCIATION OF EL SALVADOR (ADS). FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADS ING. RAFAEL AVENDAÑO; PRESIDENT OF ADS, MARTA DE TRABANINO; DRA. VANDA PIGNATO; PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR, MAURICIO FUNES; AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF ADS, ANTONIO LEMUS SIMÚN, MAY 2012.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES, MICHELLE OBAMA, IN CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN, MARCH 2011.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR DEVELOPMENT, ANDRIS PIEBALGS, IN CIUDAD MUJER SANTA ANA. ACCOMPANIED BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF EL SALVADOR, JAIME MIRANDA; AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN EL SALVADOR, JAUME SEGURA; HEAD OF COOPERATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN EL SALVADOR, TOMÁS PALLÁS, 2013.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO DURING THE SIGNATURE OF THE AGREEMENT FOR THE DEFENSE OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN, ACCOMPANIED BY THE PRESIDENT MAURICIO FUNES AND THE PROCURATOR FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, DAVID MORALES. MARCH 2014.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN), MA YING-JEOU, DURING ITS VISIT TO CIUDAD MUJER COLÓN, JULY 2014.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN, SHINZO ABE, IN THE WORLD ASSEMBLY FOR WOMEN, IN TOKYO, JAPAN. SEPTEMBER 2014.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO DURING THE CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL ORDER OF THE LEGION OF HONOR OF FRANCE ACCOMPANIED BY HER MOTHER ADELINE PIGNATO, PRESIDENT MAURICIO FUNES AND THE AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE IN EL SALVADOR, PHILIPPE VINOGRADOFF. OCTOBER 2013.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF STATE, HILLARY CLINTON DURING THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD CEREMONY, FOR THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY. WASHINGTON D.C., MARCH 2013.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, BARACK OBAMA, IN SOUTH AFRICA. DECEMBER 2013.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH MEXICAN ACTRESS ANGÉLICA ARAGÓN, GUEST OF HONOR AT THE GRADUATION OF 2,394 WOMEN IN CIUDAD MUJER SAN MIGUEL, MAY 2014.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH REPRESENTATIVE OF UN WOMEN IN EL SALVADOR, PATRICIA OLAMENDI, SUPPORTING THE CAMPAIGN "BRING BACK OUR GIRLS", MAY 2014



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE PRINCE OF ASTURIAS, H.R.H. FELIPE DE BORBÓN, MAY 2014.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH THE U.S. ACTRESS BROOKE SHIELDS DURING THE ELLIS ISLAND MEDALS OF HONOR CEREMONY AS RECOGNITION FOR HER WORK WITH CIUDAD MUJER PROGRAM. NEW YORK. MAY 2012.



ADELINA PIGNATO (DEDE) AND ANTONINO PIGNATO, DRA. VANDA PIGNATO'S PARENTS. JUNE 2014.



GABRIEL FUNES PIGNATO WITH HIS UNCLES, TIAGO NOGUEIRA DE VASCONCELOS CABRAL AND CRISTINA PIGNATO.



DRA. VANDA PIGNATO WITH HER SISTERS CARMELA AND CRISTINA.

CHAPTER III
TOWARDS
WOMEN'S VITAL
EMPOWEREMENT

THE ROAD TO EQUALITY.

WHICH MECHANISMS, FOR WHICH EQUALITY?

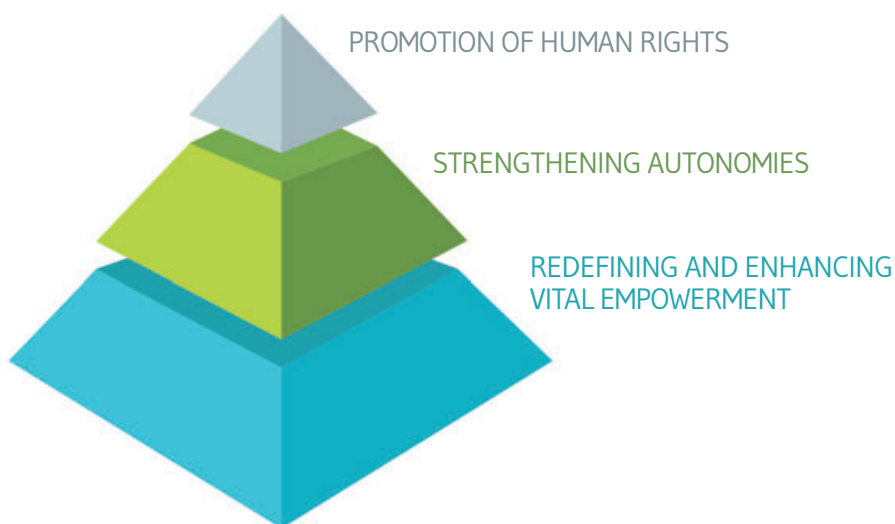
Two of the questions we have asked ourselves were: Which mechanisms, for which equality?. Recognizing that the country requires “architecture” for equality leads us to recognize as well the progress the country has made; but unfortunately, it leads us too to value the challenges where the condition and position of women have an insignificant relevance.

Women’s human rights law represents an ethical and legal framework that regulates a set of liberties based on the principles that guarantee a life with dignity and justice, both at the individual and collective level.

Similarly, it must be recognized that women live in societies where the ownership of their bodies and their imaginary are seen as natural, environments where they are victims of violence and discrimination and where they have limits to access to tangible and intangible assets.

This recognition bring us to establish a critical path to achieve the three fundamental spheres in order to guarantee that the architecture for equality will be habitable and will cover the needs, and the real obstacles that are holding women back.

This is a proposal of the design for the critical path towards women’s equality:



Through this logic we intend to promote, from the first sphere, knowledge of women's rights, alongside with raising awareness of state officials and society in general to stop perpetrating the same pattern of violence and discrimination.

Dissemination and knowledge of women's human rights are fundamental actions to understand the economic, social and political structure where their lives pass through. Also, it is essential to understand the critical aspects that explain inequality and discrimination, in such a way that women could be able to take ownership of the knowledge of their rights and how those will allow them to have an impact where discrimination persists.

The second sphere is related to the strengthening of the three autonomies, how important is for women to take ownership of those autonomies and exercise them in a comprehensive way, since they are interrelated.

AUTONOMIES:



The starting point of this second sphere is the economic autonomy of women related to the ability to earn one's own income and control assets, which is a fundamental pillar to achieve the other autonomies.

Women's economic autonomy depends on their relation with the market, the State and the family; they are all actors that can facilitate or generate – as it usually happens – obstacles for the access to and control of their own benefits.

This lack of access is strongly reflected in the poorest women, those suffering the biggest social exclusion and having little if any opportunities.

One of the effects of poverty is reflected by women's use of time.

Although the big transformative capacity women have, those living in poverty see themselves limited by their role as responsible for unpaid domestic work, especially the reproductive and care one, which creates an overload of work reducing the time for training courses or recreation, as well as the options and opportunities to enter the labor market and access to better jobs and adequate income.

The recognition of this condition to exercise women's economic autonomy establishes the need to open new spaces for technical training in traditional and non-traditional areas; to generate working abilities and access to a decent job, to facilitate women entrepreneurship, and to manage access to inherited property, and family assets which, in many cases, women can not access to due to patrimonial violence.

We also recognize women's lack of time, especially due to care responsibilities, and the need to provide women with a space for childcare and an area for breastfeeding, without having to worry about their kids being in a dangerous situation.

Physical autonomy is linked to freedom, one of the main principles in which equality and dignity are based on.

This autonomy is related to women's control over their bodies, the capacity to make decisions about their own lives, about their physical and emotional integrity, and about their sexual life.

The elements generating this lack of freedom are related to stereotypes concerning the role of women in society and represent one of the strongest mechanisms of reproduction of women being treated as objects. As a consequence, social institutions also reproduce those stereotypes reinforcing them in the social and collective imaginary. Those stereotypes assign what is acceptable in front of society and family as the only possible way to be a woman, which generates serious obstacles to make physical autonomy a reality.

Violence against women is one of the most tangible expressions of discrimination. This is why it is so important to analyze the relation between progress and setbacks from symbolic violence to femicide but also emotional and sexual violence.

Violence takes place within the privacy of the home and it is reproduced by State institutions when they do not guarantee prevention, attention, protection and access to justice.

Given those conditions we considered the challenge of linking up the institutions in charge of prevention, attention, protection and justice for victims, so women would not only be taken care of but also connected to the other autonomies.

Another approach of physical autonomy is the one concerning sexual and reproductive health.

Sexuality and maternity are two serious conditions that women have to face. And it is even worse when it is maternity among adolescents that has increased over time instead of decreasing.

The recognition of sexual and reproductive health as part of women's rights is connected to the principles of autonomy, integrality and dignity, in such a way that women have to receive proper and specialized services to allow their access to adequate information and attention through a set of secure, effective, achievable and acceptable methods and techniques with a comprehensive approach, to have women's decisions being considered throughout their life cycle.

This is a comprehensive strategy: sexuality education, self-care, counseling and basic services.

Regarding the third autonomy, which is decision-making, we can talk about two spheres: political participation and civic engagement, which allows for articulated actions to facilitate women to broaden their condition and value their position.

Doing politics from the women's sphere implies facing different forms of exercises of power that affect them, such as the sexual division of labor. Those obstacles have prevented women from the enjoyment of political rights: from the fight for females' suffrage, the fight for their rights to a life free from violence, to the fight for an elected office as a congresswoman, president, mayor or city councilwoman, as well as elected to represent a community development association, or union leaders among others.

Those pillars of autonomy are also socio-cultural constructions becoming a long march towards equality.

The fight for civil and political rights was not a coincidence, but a long fight of the social movements. It begins with a process to raise awareness on women's rights through a strategy of literacy of those rights, and continuous through the organization and strengthening of local expressions to have impact on society and the State.

The third sphere is related to the exercise of women's rights and the promotion of their vital empowerment.

The awareness and exercise of rights among women leads to a dual-track: the control over their own lives and decisions is an indispensable condition for women to access to public spaces and decision-making positions, opening up their possibilities in both the personal and collective sphere, of exercising a greater and better democracy.

EVALUATION

Every day, an average of 317 women arrive to the six centers of Ciudad Mujer.

The flow rate varies depending on population density of each of the centers, but it is quite constant. In Ciudad Mujer there are 576 women – public officials from the institutions part in the model plus own staff from the Social Inclusion Secretariat – who work to provide with comprehensive care women and their children.

From the inauguration of Ciudad Mujer Colón in 2011 and to the present day, Ciudad Mujer received close to 900,000 women, more than a quarter of the female population of El Salvador. And the number of services is even bigger – more than 2.3 million – since each user receives more than one service.

ATTENTIONS PROVIDED TO WOMEN IN THE SIX CENTERS OF CIUDAD MUJER FROM MARCH 29, 2011 TO AUGUST 12, 2015

CENTRE	DATE OF INAUGURATION	TOTAL NUMBER OF USERS BEING ASSISTED	TOTAL NUMBER OF SERVICES
Ciudad Mujer Colón	March 28, 2011	211,977	452,657
Ciudad Mujer Usulután	September 30, 2012	149,820	421,956
Ciudad Mujer Santa Ana	January 13, 2013	167,099	527,052
Ciudad Mujer San Martín	March 10, 2013	188,842	456,293
Ciudad Mujer San Miguel	December 15, 2013	127,967	415,600
Ciudad Mujer Morazán	December 11, 2014	22,194	86,645
TOTAL		867,899	2,360,203

Source: Compiled by the author based on Ciudad Mujer's data

The efficiency in Ciudad Mujer’s performance can be measured by different variables: impact of its services; users feedback and users returning to be assisted again; and recognition of the institution by the Salvadoran society and the international community.

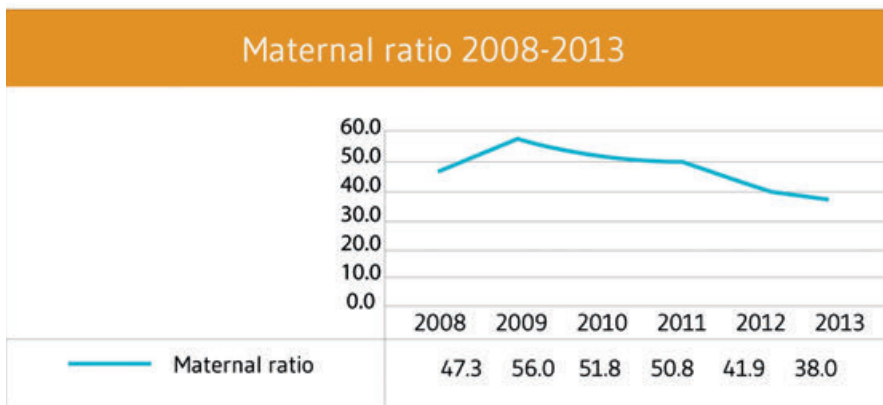
Ciudad Mujer has a remarkable high level of approval according to different opinion surveys. Also, its users unanimously approved its services. Our users are the best promoters of the program in their communities.

It is worth mentioning the positive influence Ciudad Mujer had on health indicators. In this sense, I also have to point out the impact of the health reform adopted in 2010 by Doctor María Isabel Rodríguez. The new National Integrated Health System brought medical services to regions and towns of the country where a health unit did not exist before.

Obviously, work done by the health system along with Ciudad Mujer improved health indicators concerning women. Let me give you some examples:

In 2012 cervical cancer death mortality rate decreased significantly compared to 2009, 2010 and 2011. At the same time, more and more women are taking the mammogram exam. The mammogram-screening rate increased from 8.1% to 16.5%, from 2010 to 2012.

In 2011 maternal mortality rate was at 50.8%. In 2013 this rate dropped to 38% and has since gradually decreased.



Source: Compiled by author based on MINSAL data 2008-2013

However, even though statistics are a valuable tool to evaluate results, they do not provide us with a complete overview for two basic reasons: the first one because of the effects rising up from the nature of the model, the second one because the complexity of this topic makes it not always quantifiable, particularly the impact on users subjectivity.

As any other government program, Ciudad Mujer has its scope limited by both the functioning of other State bodies and the country’s reality.

Thousands of women arrived at a center of Ciudad Mujer because they had suffered any form of violence. They receive the assistance they need: individual psychological containment, medical exams by the Sexual and Reproductive health doctors; and then they attend psychological group therapy sessions where they will learn about power abuse, legislation, self-esteem, self-worth. Depending on the case they will also be guided to file a complaint to the justice authorities.

From that point on, another State body is in charge, the Judicial one, through criminal and family courts. Unfortunately in all the countries of the region women's lack of trust towards justice services inhibits them from filing complaints.

As I mentioned before, it is not possible to quantify the effects Ciudad Mujer's services have on women. How can we measure the psychological impact of the attention provided by our professional team?

Once a woman goes through a process of empowerment she will not be the same woman again. There is a break with submissiveness and self-denigration.

This constantly happens. Many women might not file a complaint or they might not even get a job or start a business, so they are not included in statistics. But Ciudad Mujer changed their lives.

Due to the model's characteristics the inclusion cycle of women is accomplished. Besides specific results, thousands of women have entered the cycle of empowerment. This is how women's identity is built which is, for example, an indispensable condition for the exercise of politics.

"Ciudad Mujer's women" – as some call themselves – exercise their civic engagement in city halls, communities, schools, and at home, generating a situation that breaks the traditional cultural pattern and leading the way for the transformation of roles and stereotypes. We will address Ciudad Mujer's role in civic engagement later in this book.

I must insist that the qualitative aspect of this model's functioning proves its uniqueness.

For example, the case of Mabel is special since her political empowerment has not led to the enjoyment of her physical and economic autonomy.

Mabel, a well-known female leader, stated:

"I am Mabel R., when I was 17 years old I wanted to be part of my country's revolutionary movement. My ideals pushed me to do it. I was very young and I was sent to Honduras first and from there I came back to El Salvador and become part of the fight for the revolution.

After the peace agreements I benefit from a land-transfer program and I arrived to a community that was not organized at all. There I started to organize its women. I did not have any formal education but I fought to get some training courses for us, I have always been a social fighter, and on the way I found Ciudad Mujer, where we had been trained and guided.

As of today I can proudly say that I do not regret what I have done because part of my effort is be able to have Ciudad Mujer's support, where they provided me with medical care, guidance and training.

Now more than ever I see myself as a fighter and a defender of women's rights. Ciudad Mujer also put a smile back on my face because I was given a dental prosthesis, new teeth and today I feel fulfilled and happy."

We had to face cases where women would arrive at the centers with their children saying "I have been threatened and not going anywhere because only here I can be protected". When shelters are not an option for victims – for different reasons -, we had to find all over the country a member of the family or someone close to support those women.

In Ciudad Mujer we do not stop providing assistance to a woman victim of violence because of the schedule. We have never abandoned a case. Our accompaniment is permanent. This is the difference between Ciudad Mujer and other services and programs implemented by public and private institutions.

Our project is being on for four years already. It started from nothing and already has qualitative and quantitative results. This is not normal within public services in our countries.

In a country like El Salvador, with serious economic and social difficulties, numbers cannot be outstanding but the impact Ciudad Mujer has on the lives of its users and its cultural effect is unprecedented in terms of public policies.

FUTURE'S AGENDA

The current and future success of the Model requires the continuous improvement of its performance. For this reason it is necessary to sustain and improve services, its quality and cordiality; strengthen the institution through training its professionals, extend the number of users to cover the whole female population; achieve the goal of bringing the services closer to women in all the national territory.

As of today we had added new challenges to address the needs and demands of women and their difficult reality.

First of all, I am talking about the extreme vulnerability that girls, adolescents and young women have to face, being the ones who suffer gender violence the most. But it is also about going deeper in raising women's awareness about their rights and the full exercise of their potential. This means advancing in women's vital empowerment at a physical, economic and political level.

A third big challenge is promoting Family Schools aimed to have an influence at home and at school, the place where we develop ourselves as persons. We have a great task ahead of us.

We are aware that Ciudad Mujer by itself will not be able to modify such a complex and difficult reality, and will not change overnight the patriarchal and sexist culture that dominates our societies. But Ciudad Mujer has become the engine of the cultural change the society needs.

My goal is that Ciudad Mujer leads the way and women become the architects of their own destiny, as it should be. This is why we have to commit ourselves to work those women's vital empowerment.

CIUDAD MUJER JOVEN (CIUDAD MUJER YOUTH)

One of the challenges Ciudad Mujer is facing as of today, which is also one of the priority issues of our future agenda, is offering services for adolescents.

During those four years we have noticed that most of our users were adult women and just a few of them were adolescents or young women. Among users, 71% are women aged 25 and older, 24.2% are young women between 18 and 25 years old and just 4.7% are adolescents under 18 years old²³.

52% of the country's population is under 25 years old. There are almost 1.8 million young people, and women represent more than a half.

This leads us to question: How is it possible that with such a big adolescent and young women population, just a few have arrived to Ciudad Mujer?

We know that girls and adolescents are the main victims of any form of violence: not only criminal violence, which is very serious, but also sexual violence including abuse, harassment, insults, despise or bullying. Also, the main victims of human trafficking are girls and adolescents.

As we have seen through the Module of Sexual and Reproductive Health, the percentage of early pregnancies has remained very high. Those pregnancies have a negative and irreversible impact in situations women have to go through.

According to UNICEF, one in three pregnant women in El Salvador are 15 years old or younger. Also, 33% of adolescents aged 15-19 have been victims of physical, sexual or emotional intimate partner violence.

For example, data from the PNC reports that among complaints for crimes against women's sexual freedom such as rape, sexual assault, statutory rape and sexual harassment, 42% of the victims were adolescents.

Among victims of rape, 40.32% were adolescents aged 12-18²⁴.

²³ DATA PROVIDED BY CIUDAD MUJER

²⁴ DATA PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL CIVIL POLICE (PNC)

According to our experience, adolescent users do not recognize themselves as victims of violence.

For example, in Ciudad Mujer, girls who are pregnant from rape and go through their prenatal checkup do not feel their rights were violated because their own families often accept such situations. Some times adolescent victims of rape tell us they did not fight back enough or they consented to the sexual intercourse because of the position of power of the adult who committed it.

However, when they get more confident with our staff, the story is different. “I felt it was an abuse”, “I did not want to, but I had no choice”, “If I said no, I would have been worse”, “I do not want to go through this anymore, I do not want them to touch me” those are confessions made by girls when they begin to recognize themselves as people with rights to decide over their own body.

“Women’s bodies belong to themselves”, it is a sentence we often see in international conferences. But how difficult is for our girls and adolescents to take ownership of this truth!

This is why in Ciudad Mujer Joven we are implementing specific strategies of dialogue with the youngest population. It includes a process of raising awareness and training of our own staff in accordance to the special treatment for this age group.

The report “Empowerment of Adolescent Girls”²⁵, states that adolescent disempowerment is the lack of power they are entitled to when they find themselves devalued, subordinated, uneducated and at risk, which is allowed by social standards they internalized such as multiple psychological, cultural, economic, social, legal, and other obstacles that they face.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, disempowerment of adolescents appears when the groups they are part of consider them difficult and rebellious, when society regards them as problems, when they engage in risky behaviors.

Situations such as leaving school, living in the street, pregnancy, becoming mothers at a young age, unemployment, addiction to drugs, and infraction of the law disempower adolescents. To this gender disempowerment we can also add the ethnical component that reinforces discrimination and hinders adolescent’s capacity and willingness to participate in society.

I believe that no countries in the world can claim to have eradicated such situations of disempowerment as of today, and this is why it is so important to build specific strategies to end this “catastrophic loss of human potential” as Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director, stated.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the most important values of this Model is its flexibility and permeability to adapt to women’s reality to provide better services. This is why when we identify that something is wrong we do not stand here and do nothing: We get started and we have a strategy on the way!

25 PAHO. EMPOWERMENT OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS. A KEY PROCESS FOR ACHIEVING THE MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS. WASHINGTON DC, 2010

I must point out that Ciudad Mujer Joven pilot has been possible with the support of UN Women and private companies such as Telefónica.

ESCUELAS DE FAMILIA (FAMILY SCHOOLS)

When the Vice-President of the Dominican Republic, Margarita Cerdeño de Fernández, which I truly admire and is planning to implement Ciudad Mujer, invited me to her country, I found out about the program called “Family Schools”, which caught my attention because I considered it an important part of the change we all want for the Salvadoran society.

Just as Ciudad Mujer literates women in their rights, those Family Schools teach a new model of masculinity, where men and women together understand parental and shared domestic responsibilities, and that modern men have to go along with family dynamics in a equal basis, changing social patterns. This also includes the responsibility of their own sexual behavior and its consequences.

Men live in modern times when it comes to smartphones, cars and jobs, but when it comes to the family sphere it is ancient history.

In Latin America, adolescents aged 10 to 24 represent 30% of the population. We cannot avoid such a percentage and we must include in the future agenda specific programs like this one, to generate contexts of mutual respect and deconstructing the cohabitation rules based on violence and subjection.

We have already started the process of adaptability of the Dominican model to the conditions of El Salvador and Ciudad Mujer, to begin the implementation of Family Schools.

WOMEN’S VITAL EMPOWERMENT

Having assisted more than a quarter of the female population of the country is more than just a quantitative dimension.

Ciudad Mujer has generated a high impact on those women’s lives and at the same time has contributed to their vital empowerment through the awareness of their physical, economic and political autonomy, basic condition to achieve gender equality.

These women who are currently examples of life, lived in high-risk situations that brought them to Ciudad Mujer. Going through the program institutions certainly was a process of empowerment itself. Casuistry never ends.

Women reaching their economic autonomy, breaking ties with their perpetrators, and deciding about their own destiny.

Or even those seamstresses working for survival, that after taking the training courses in Ciudad Mujer created a microbusiness partnership to produce uniforms and became suppliers of the Ministry of Education's Program of School Uniforms.

Another group of women from Usulután, breadwinners, who created the project named "Estrellas del Bajo Lempa" ("Under the stars of Bajo Lempa") are producing and selling vegetables and primarily peppers.

Women achieving their physical autonomy and being now in control of their own body so men cannot use it as a weapon of power.

An adolescent who already overcame mistreatment and abuse and is now a woman with self-worth who surprises us for being so mature when she states that "all women needed Ciudad Mujer".

Or Sandra who finally said enough to her abusive husband, an influential public official who has been getting away with it until she started to fight back with Ciudad Mujer's accompaniment. Court already gave her custody of her child as well as housing for both of them.

And as a final example, Marisol who first arrived at Ciudad Mujer being victim of psychological and physical violence, and now she is already legally separated from her husband and she is an independent and confident woman who sells products in the area of Usulután and decided to help other women ending the cycle of violence.

20,000 FEMALE DEFENDERS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Political empowerment deserves special attention due to its social impact. In a short time, thousands of women became fully aware of their rights and have taken the responsibility with the women of their communities. Nowadays they are getting organized in social tasks throughout the country.

It has been a task that required a great effort of interinstitutional coordination in which, as Ciudad Mujer, we followed ISDEMU's strategy: strengthening women's civic engagement, and supporting the governing body as a joint effort.

Our first experience was in 2011 with the creation of the Advisory Councils and the Social Accountability Office on Women's rights. Both of them work at a departmental and local level and participate in the different accountability process of the Cabinets of Departmental Management and local ones.

Advisory councils have been created in the 14 departments of the country as well as 231 local advisory councils with 8,000 female leaders, representing the different communities of the municipalities. This means that 88% of the country's municipalities have groups of women organized.

These women get together in the leaders homes where they discuss strategies regarding the different problems affecting their lives. Every time institutions block their social inclusion, they question them, becoming pressure groups by exposing their opinions publicly about the fulfillment or violation of women's human rights in the public territorial management.

In addition, there is a new and stronger empowerment experience: the Defenders of Women's Human Rights Network.

It is an extended network of women transferring knowledge they have gained with ISDEMU and Ciudad Mujer to women in their communities.

Around 10,000 women are part of this network, most of them suffered gender violence and all kinds of discrimination, but they had overcome the situation and improved themselves, and from their identity as women they started their emancipation and civic engagement.

For the 2015 local elections, political parties were looking for them to be part of their lists. This was an unprecedented event, so our female leaders told us: "They asked us if we came from Ciudad Mujer because that was the prerequisite they needed".

Defenders and female leaders, part of the Advisory Councils, both departmental and local, also have operational tools allowing them to act in a more organized way.

After an intense work in local and national workshops, and with ISDEMU's support, by the end of 2014 they launched the National Platform for Salvadoran Women's rights. There they identified the main problems women have to face, proposed solutions, and pointed the institutions responsible for providing them assistance regarding their needs and demands.

This great operational tool, made by women, covers all the themes: economic autonomy, care work and social welfare protection, inclusive education, comprehensive health care, life free from violence, environment, political participation and civic engagement.

According to ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean, political autonomy or decision-making autonomy implies promoting, defending and guaranteeing the full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels. It also means establishing women's participation in the executive, legislative and judicial bodies, as well as in local governments.

In El Salvador, the National Policy on Women establishes a guide for our actions, which is increasing the participation of women in all individual and collective spheres and in the different levels of decision-making, in equal conditions and with the full exercise of all their rights, without any limitation due to discriminatory cultural patterns.

However, as I mentioned before, women's participation in decision-making levels in the country is currently very low.

We still have a long way to go in order to have women participating in equal conditions with men in the country's political sphere. But I must highlight that in the past four years of intense work with Ciudad Mujer we have made giant steps we had never imagined we would do when we started to build this powerful program.

We all have learned during the process. We all have grown with the experience. Today I am absolutely certain that women's action are the ones that allow us to face injustice, enforce our rights and enable us to achieve a life free from violence and discrimination.

During the launching of National Campaign for the Defense of Women's rights through Strengthening Citizenship, I stated the following:

"This campaign is aimed to have you as the main speakers, and share with other women how make one's own voice heard, how to recognize, defend and build one's own rights.

We want you to be the masters of your own destinies. And even though this is a battle led by women, it is not exclusively ours. It must be a battle of Salvadoran husbands, sons and brothers. No one should be left out, it is the only way to achieve our goal".

INSTITUTIONALIZING CIUDAD MUJER

Ciudad Mujer has led and caused all the steps taken towards our women's empowerment process. This is why it is very important to institutionalize its existence.

We must avoid having the ups and downs of politics, and changes of government halting or eliminating this Model, which is an example worldwide. As we saw, its originality also requires legal regulation taking into account the possibility of its international projection.

Ciudad Mujer's specific characteristics – many State institutions in the same infrastructure, comprehensive services, and the special modalities of care – must be institutionalized. This conviction stems from the experience of its functioning and many dialogues and exchanges of views we had with public officials from different international organizations and cooperation.

In 2014 the Law of Development and Social Welfare Protection entered into force. This law represents *“the framework for human development, protection and social inclusion, promoting, protecting and guaranteeing the full observance of human rights”*.

This law, sponsored by the government of President Mauricio Funes, established as one of its goals *“Gradually reducing gender inequality and advancing towards substantive equality between women and men”*.

The Universal Social Welfare Protection System was regularized by this law creating a Subsystem *“that will be the government body for the coordination of all social welfare protection programs to provide security against the risks and challenges they face throughout their life cycle, particularly for those who lack of contributory social security and those in conditions of economic, social and environment vulnerability”*.

In this Subsystem we find high impact social programs established during the former government, such as Urban and Rural Solidarity Communities; Provision of school uniforms, shoes and supplies; Scholar food and health; Temporary Income Support Program; Our Eldest Right (Nuestros Mayores Derechos); Universal Basic Pension; Family Agriculture Program; Agricultural Packages; Access and coverage to universal and comprehensive public and free health; Access to and Improvement of Housing; Basic Social Infrastructure; Early Childhood Comprehensive Care; and of course, Ciudad Mujer!

There is a legal framework that protects Ciudad Mujer. However, and as I mentioned before, it is recommended for Ciudad Mujer to be institutionalized in order to protect its structure and functioning modalities. A regulation that recognizes Ciudad Mujer System as a comprehensive action of State institutions aimed to provide holistic services to women for the fulfillment, enjoyment and exercise of their human rights.

Ciudad Mujer System must be guaranteed, it is defined as a set of institutions working together physically or in a functional way in order to provide specialized services to women, inside unique places called “Ciudad Mujer Centers”, with comprehensive services linked to women’s rights in order to promote and guarantee them, through the highest levels of interinstitutional coordination and the lowest levels of bureaucracy, and where the reduction of physical and functional fragmentation of such services leads to a greater access to them.

In addition, this system must be considered of Public Interest, in such a way that it should be provided with enough budgetary resources to ensure its proper functioning, and be part of the main priorities of the country’s foreign policy, particularly in terms of policies and actions related to international development cooperation.

CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS

A POLITICAL DECISION

As we have seen through the previous chapters, Ciudad Mujer is the result of a political decision.

In order to make it a reality it was necessary to overcome obstacles of any kind. We have achieved them only because of an obvious reason: the firm commitment to make women's demands a central axis of government's policy.

Ciudad Mujer is a political decision seeking to transform the state of things and intended to trigger radical change, and it is also the result of a deep understanding of reality and the assumption of the need to contribute to its changing.

In the case of Ciudad Mujer, the decision was built up from a conviction that I have mentioned before: the origin of social violence is at home where domestic violence is, especially violence against women. At the same time this conviction has another reason, the problem of social violence in Latin America today, being the biggest problem and risk our countries are facing.

During the seventies and eighties, regional problems and the resulting violence were of ideological, political and economic nature. Social and power struggles against dictatorship and other forms of oppression, expressed in different ways – civil war, urban and rural guerrillas – and the repression of regimes caused such a violence situation that took away thousands of lives.

The end of that period led the way to democracy and the recovery of the institutions. But at the same time wealth concentration increased as well as the resulting social inequity. We are not the world's poorest region, but we certainly are the most unequal and unfair one.

In this context of poverty, inequality and exclusion, but also of expansion and strengthening of organized crime, was born a new type of social violence that has already claimed more victims than wars.

Some South American countries have recently achieved important successes in their fight against poverty and, ironically, crime has strongly increased.

Violence is no longer the consequence of political struggle. Neither is poverty, as some conservative political movements and intellectuals, stigmatizing the poor, continue to associate with.

Social violence has become "independent", if I may say so.

The big crime industry has deeply penetrated in our societies and it is fuelled by the large excluded population, especially young, to build its irregular armies.

Meanwhile, it is taking over sectors of the economy, many times, and more and more frequently, with the complicity of politicians, judges and businessmen.

This phenomenon is well known. If I mention it is because I am certain that this war will not be won with weapons.

The big battle against crime is a transformative cultural process that begins at home and with education and in the social sphere with the recognition of the fundamental role women can play in this process.

In terms of politics, it consists in having all State institutions fighting against big crime organizations, which are transnational, and have already gotten inside State bodies.

In order to promote the cultural change it is very important to begin with “seeing” women, respecting and guaranteeing their rights, opening up the paths for a larger participation in politics and in the economy as well as fighting with energy and commitment against gender violence.

This is exactly my conviction and hope:

Women being visibilized, empowered, and with the capacity to decide by and for themselves. Women participating, voting, electing and being elected.

In El Salvador, women were the ones who, with their support helped, the Frente Farabundo Martín para la Liberación Nacional – FMLN -, the only political party truly committed with this program, to continue with a second term. And they did so because women wanted to protect Ciudad Mujer and all the changes the program achieved.

GLOBAL VIOLENCE WITHOUT RESPONSE

Gender violence is, with no doubt, a global phenomenon, spread in every country in the world with the same characteristics. The only two differences are the drama around it and, in those countries with high homicide rates, the intensity.

The World Health Organization’s World Report on Violence and Health notes: *“Violence is among the leading causes of death for people aged 15 to 44 years worldwide, accounting for about 14% of deaths among males and 7% of deaths among females”*.

According to the World Health Organization, Gender violence is a global problem of epidemic proportions.

It goes beyond social classes, age, level of education and culture. It is everywhere, in every country, in both the developed and developing countries. In some is more visible, in others less.

Even though many people want to deny this reality, reality sets in. Violence does not belong to Latin America or the Middle East. It goes through the world society, including the most developed countries.

This has been happening for a long time, however we see now through the media the different forms of violence and particularly the ones committed against women.

Indeed, every day cases of femicide, in which victims are generally young and adolescents aged 14-18, has a prominent place in the media through newspapers FrontPages and the news on the radio and television.

National and international organizations statistics have been showing the increase in violence against women, that has not find yet, with very few exceptions, firm responses from the States, the governments, the judiciary and the legal body.

In Latin America gender violence causes more victims than any disease, and more victims than the ones of civil wars, repression and the dirty wars we currently live.

Violence is one of the leading causes of death among women aged 15 to 44, according to the World Health Organization's World Report on Violence and Health.

According to a UN Women report, the percentage of women killed by their partners reaches 45% among the victims in the United States. Also in that same country, 83% of girls aged 12 to 16 have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools.

It is not different in the European Union. Last April, in the closing session of the European Summit on Good Practices to Eradicate Gender Violence, Secretary of State for Social Services and Equality, Juan Manuel Moreno, said that in the European Union between 20 and 25% of women have experienced violence at some point in their life, and seven women are killed every day by their partner or former partner.

Some studies released by the European Union state that the most developed countries in northern Europe (Finland, Sweden and Germany) are the ones with the highest percentage of victims caused by gender violence.

Then we should not reproduce the same stigmatizing patterns conservative and right wing movements worldwide follow: all women batterers and murderers are only Latin Americans, Africans, Asians and Muslims and, even worse if they are poor.

Unfortunately, gender violence is everywhere and affects women in all social classes, only that in high social classes there is more impunity and silence.

What is my point? If we are facing a worldwide epidemic, dimensioned and reported by international organizations and NGO around the world.

Why is gender violence not addressed?

Why have governments discontinued funding institutions aimed to fight against gender violence?

Why does Justice around the world issue decisions that reinforce impunity, which is another form of violence and discrimination against women?

Isn't there political commitment for that?

Why does such a double standard exist among legislators voting laws to protect women and after pronouncing headed speeches they harass their own employees and abuse and beat their wives?

We have seen many high profile cases everywhere in the world, including developed countries where statistics speak for themselves.

It has been twenty years since Beijing and the situation, in this sense, has gotten worse. We have only seen more and more hypocrisy from countries signing and ratifying international treaties and agreements, from Head of States or presidents who “are touched” by femicides and then, do nothing.

EDUCATING FOR PEACE AND EQUALITY

I have already mentioned that, in general, and everywhere, experiences of programs on violence and addiction prevention have failed. Its implementation is not the reason of this failure.

I personally think that those programs have been made without the serious and total commitment of the education system and the lack of deep knowledge of the reality where they were implemented.

But I have to point out that the commitment of the education system is crucial. In the twenty first century, school curriculum is still influenced by the encyclopedic knowledge of the nineteenth century. Students are meant to know more about universal history than human soul, or their own environment.

We have recently seen debates about the education system, particularly if the system should educate for work. Some progressive tendencies have strongly rejected this idea.

But if we see that the deepest problems we suffer in America – and I include the United States – are violence and social and gender inequality, it is hard to understand why there is no debate about educating for peace and equality.

The interrelation between school and family is vital for any kind of prevention program. In Ciudad Mujer we have learned that very well. We know that the “driving belt” of contents we have to promote are essentially women, those who are never taken into consideration.

In general, women, more than men, are carriers of values.

REFUNDING POLITICS

It is clear that is necessary to generate a real debate about gender inequality in general and violence in particular. It is essential to promote serious national agreements to have this problem, affecting all countries, addressed by the State.

I do not understand political parties and movements when they claim they are left-wing or progressive, and they practice machismo, thinking that having in their platform a quota for women is enough for women’s participation, openly ignoring the problem of discrimination and violence against women within their parties.

It is very common listening to left wing political leaders, in all countries, saying: “*in my political party we respect electoral quotas for women*”, however, how many women hold decision-making positions? How many women hold party leadership positions?

Reality is that women’s conditions are not taken into account.

Women continue to support their families through care work and with different times than men. Thus, it is not enough guaranteeing formal quotas with regulations or laws, without generating the real mechanisms to have women’s full participation.

I must insist: it is urgent to generate conditions to distribute care responsibility on an equal basis, in the family and community spheres but also in the political organizations themselves; to establish mechanisms to adjust time and schedules in order to guarantee the participation of women, as well as proper spaces, access to political training, etc.

Regarding right wing parties and movements, it is evident that they intend to avoid addressing this problem and, in many cases, they oppose to its solutions. From their axiological perspective, which is anachronistic, they rather talk about family and its values, avoiding looking inside the homes to see how patriarchal violence and culture are fully represented, and how women are discriminated and abused.

For those reasons I believe that political parties should renew their platforms.

The political parties of the region played a very important role in recovering democracy all along Latin America. They represented a bastion against dictatorships. But their agenda is old fashioned. Today Latin America has new challenges and we need our male and female leaders to undertake them with conviction and energy.

It is urgent to open a new political period in Latin America through a new agenda that takes into account the social reality. Politics and the work of political parties must be rewritten because people's skepticism and rejection towards them will only lead to a new frustration.

The experience going on in El Salvador allows me to confirm that is not only possible but also electorally convenient to put gender issues at the center of the debate.

Obviously, that experience also allows me to affirm that if promises made are not fulfilled, frustration will be like a boomerang for those who made them: they will be temporally deceiving women voters but they will lose them later on. At the same time, they will be fuelling people's distrust towards political leaders.

Our democracy is based on political parties and those will have to be aware of the importance of gender equality in the immediate future of our countries and people.

As ECLAC stated, we have to start from the conviction that *“development is directly related to the advancement of women in public affairs and private life and that, without genuine equality, the democracies and development of the countries of the region will continue to suffer from shortcomings that hinder their efforts to achieve the objectives set out in The Future We Want, the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+)”*.

Latin American and world leaders must understand that the fight against gender violence and discrimination is equivalent to the one battled by the twentieth century suffragists, in their struggle to achieve the female vote, and at the same time this fight is necessary for re-founding democracy in terms of equality.

Nowadays, eliminate all forms of violence against women, guarantee the full enjoyment of their rights, facilitate her economic autonomy and empower them at a political, economic and social level, is extending and improving democracy again. It is about re-founding it to start a new and better cycle for Humanity.

I would like to address to Latin American leaders from my modest position of fight for gender equality.

If we were able to defeat military dictatorships and conquer democracy back; if we were able to defeat neoliberalism and recover the State as an instrument to serve the fight against poverty and to support equality and social justice; if we were able to do all of that...

What is stopping you from fighting for gender equality and social peace? This is not an easy challenge that must be achieved only in Latin America. In our continent we need the United States of North America to take responsibility over their reality and get ready to give it answers.

We have always been told that the North American nation is an example of democracy. We cannot deny this statement from the perspective of a political democracy. But in terms of social matters, the United States should have rigorous debates to put gender violence in the local political agenda.

The problem is that in the United States, State architecture is based on institutional norms that do not specifically contemplate women's rights. This is why it is essential to open this debate within the American society and raise awareness about its significance.

Ciudad Mujer crosses those institutional frameworks and provides women with identity and empowerment to conduct changes from the social sphere.

What are the obstacles for North America and Latin America to agree in addressing together this global epidemic that affect us all? Ideology or political prejudices cannot be placed above such a problem that affects more than 500 million people, that is to say, women who live in this continent.

All of our countries and our regional organizations are in debt to this thematic. In the last decades in Latin America the associations that have prospered are the ones in the areas of economics and trade exchange, and just a few had a more political role.

Associations such as Mercosur, Andean Community (Comunidad Andina), the Union of South American Nations, ECLAC, SICA, Central American Common Market (CACM), CARICOM, ALCA, ALBA; and other organizations such as OAS, ECLAC, ALADI and SELA.

When there are so many spaces for integration it means we are still isolated and none of them work as they should. Truth is that Latin American lacks of an efficient observatory to measure all forms of violence against women in general, and femicides in particular; lacks also of a unique and efficient observatory to dimension social violence; and finally lacks regional and continental strategies to fight against organized crime.

In the last years Latin America has had several female presidents. The United States could be the next one. But this circumstance does not change American women's condition. It is important that nations, by themselves but also together in a joint effort, take the political responsibility to fight against violence and discrimination against women.

CIUDAD MUJER'S PROJECTION

I truly believe that the experience of Ciudad Mujer is a contribution to that serious debate societies owe to this thematic.

Many times I ask myself: Since the phenomenon of violence against women is – as I said – a global epidemic, Why don't we use Ciudad Mujer model in both developed and developing countries?

Honestly, I am certain of the big positive effect this model we implemented in El Salvador could cause in those societies.

I remember very well a conversation I had with a female Minister of a Latin American country whose economy is very solid. When I explained Ciudad Mujer's achievements to her, she responded it was not necessary in her country because the State already offered all the services for women's protection. Then I thought deeply and asked myself why government bureaucrats do not understand that for women it is a must to put together all the services and to assist in different aspects and ways, because women's have little or no time for themselves.

I do not comprehend why they do not understand that providing all services in one infrastructure, with such a special modality of care, is a dignifying way to fight for women's rights. How do they refuse to accept that women suffer mistreatment from public officials who are not qualified to assist them in almost all State institutions?

On the contrary, Ciudad Mujer provides them with dignity and hope as well as defends and makes them feel citizen and also restores the trust they had lost in the State.

I am strongly convinced that this Model is applicable not only to the reality of poor and developing countries but also the reality of the most advanced nations.

You cannot cover up the sun with one finger: patriarchal culture and machismo dominate the world society. Women are as discriminated in New York, Berlin, London or Paris, as in Buenos Aires, San Salvador, Beirut or New Delhi.

The vehemence I used to talk about this experience we implemented in El Salvador is related to the quantity of stories I have learned which had an impact in my life, in this four years of building and defending of Ciudad Mujer.

Those are not just simple stories, they are dramas that make us open our eyes and see the severity of the daily life of millions of women. Those are the invisible stories weaving a storyline that can only end up in tragedy, pain and lost.

We have learned from the case of a father and a mother who took their daughter to the baker once a week to be raped in exchange for bread. Those parents did not even try to hide this situation as if it was something necessary or natural.

An entrepreneur woman who was dramatically beaten by her husband who also betrayed her, and finally ripped her off and left her with nothing, even though they had built together an empire of goods.

The farmer man who considers her wife's menstruation a disease and while she is "sick" her older daughter has to serve him sexually.

The woman standing out in politics but she is humiliated and questioned about her own sexuality because she is single.

The activist woman who has politics as her vocation and who always has to be behind her husband because if she becomes the focus of attention she is considered a bad influence.

The old woman who is victim of abuse by her relatives due to her age and condition.

An adolescent girl who is forced to have sexual relations against her will to prove she loves her boyfriend.

A student who always has people waiting for her at the school door to get her sexually exploited.

Women victims of gangs. They kidnap their kids and in order to return them, women must go to prison and have sex with dozen of inmates, with the complicity of prison authorities.

Female adolescents recruited by their dance teacher for a supposed show in the United States who end up being victims of trafficking and forced into prostitution.

I could continue with more stories. This casuistry is brutally and dramatically replicated in all Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico.

All those drama stories made me stronger and made me want to keep fighting for and with those women: together, with one voice and through the same path towards dignity.

There it is Ciudad Mujer's mission, which I also share: making visible the invisibles, empower the disempowered.

I know that Ciudad Mujer is a lifelong commitment. It is not related to political circumstances, or to political office. This flag I will always hold high belongs to me as a women. I only hope, long for and dream that it becomes a flag held by many more hands of men and women of all ages and conditions, working for equality, peace, justice and dignity.

ACRONYMS

- ALADI (Latin American Integration Association /Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración)
- ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America /Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América)
- ALCA (Free Trade Area of the Americas /Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas)
- BFA (Banco de Fomento Agropecuario)
- IDB (Inter-American Development Bank)
- CARICOM (Caribbean Community)
- CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States)
- CM (Ciudad Mujer)
- CONAMYPE (National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises / Consejo Nacional de la Micro y Pequeña Empresa)
- CONNA (National Council for Children and Adolescents/Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y la Adolescencia)
- ECA (School of Agricultural Training/ Escuela de Capacitación Agrícola)
- FISDL (Social Investment Fund for Local Development / Fondo de Inversión Social para el Desarrollo Local)
- FOSOFAMILIA (Solidarity Fund for the Micro-enterprising Family / Fondo Solidario para la Familia Microempresaria)
- INSAFORP (Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute / Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional)
- ISDEMU (Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women / Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer)
- CACM (Central American Common Market)
- OAS (Organization of American States)
- ILO (International Labour Organization)
- UN (United Nations)
- PNC (National Civil Police / Policía Nacional Civil)
- UNDP (United Nations Development Program)
- RNPN (National Registry of Natural Persons / Registro Nacional de las Personas Naturales)
- SELA (The Latin American and the Caribbean Economic System)
- SICA (Central American integration System)
- SIS (Social Inclusion Secretariat / Secretaría de Inclusión Social)
- UNASUR (Union of South American Nations)



“Ciudad Mujer is a wonderful initiative”
Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Secretary General

“This is the most complete program I have ever seen to fully address the gender issue. I hope other countries in the world will bear fruits like this”
Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Former President of Brazil

“Ciudad Mujer Program not only focuses on the response to violence against women but also offers services intended to empower them in all aspects of their lives... This is exactly the approach and vision we need to address violence against women”
Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile and former Executive Director of UN Women