"Fostering Change Through Youth Leadership: Leadership Development Training for Young Women in Goa, India"

While sex trafficking, or the trade of people for commercial sex work, has been around for much longer, it has emerged in recent years as a major international human rights concern. With effects of sex trafficking being multifocal and far-reaching, it is important to ensure that women and children do not become victim to this trade and to challenge underlying beliefs about life options for girls. Leadership development lies at the heart of this. Effective anti-trafficking initiatives empower young people, challenge deeply rooted perspectives about gender and life options, involve participatory activities, and create new forms of community leadership.

Presenting the results and experience of field work occurring from May 15-July 31, 2015 in Goa, India, the poster will convey the role of youth leadership development in implementing the SDGs, combating sex trafficking, empowering women, and promoting lasting change and social inclusion. In partnership with Rahab’s Rope, a non-governmental organization that works with women and children at-risk or affected by sex trafficking, a leadership development training for young women, ages 17-22, will be developed, implemented, and evaluated. Young women in this area of Goa usually have little education or marketable skills, leaving them at great risk of being trafficked. It is crucial to provide these women with increased opportunities outside of the sex trade and positive beliefs about their role in fostering change for themselves and others. As a result of the leadership training, the young women are more empowered in future and current leadership roles, further reducing their risk for involvement in sex trafficking and promoting human rights, empowerment, and social inclusion, which are all key components of the SDGs.

To develop the training, interviews with staff and participants, research, and observation are utilized. The curriculum covers decision-making, communication, critical thinking, gender empowerment, self-esteem, confidence, and body image. It addresses underlying issues and mentalities, such as pervasive feelings of hopelessness that leave women vulnerable to trafficking. The training will be evaluated through surveys and interviews, and the poster will also report on best practices and lessons learned. These insights on the role leadership development plays in combating trafficking are useful for organizations and practitioners working towards the SDGs in related capacities. The hope is to not only help curb sex trafficking, but to equip leaders to bring lasting change to their communities. This change and the ability of young people to be agents of change are necessary in the fight against sex trafficking and for the realization of the SDGs.