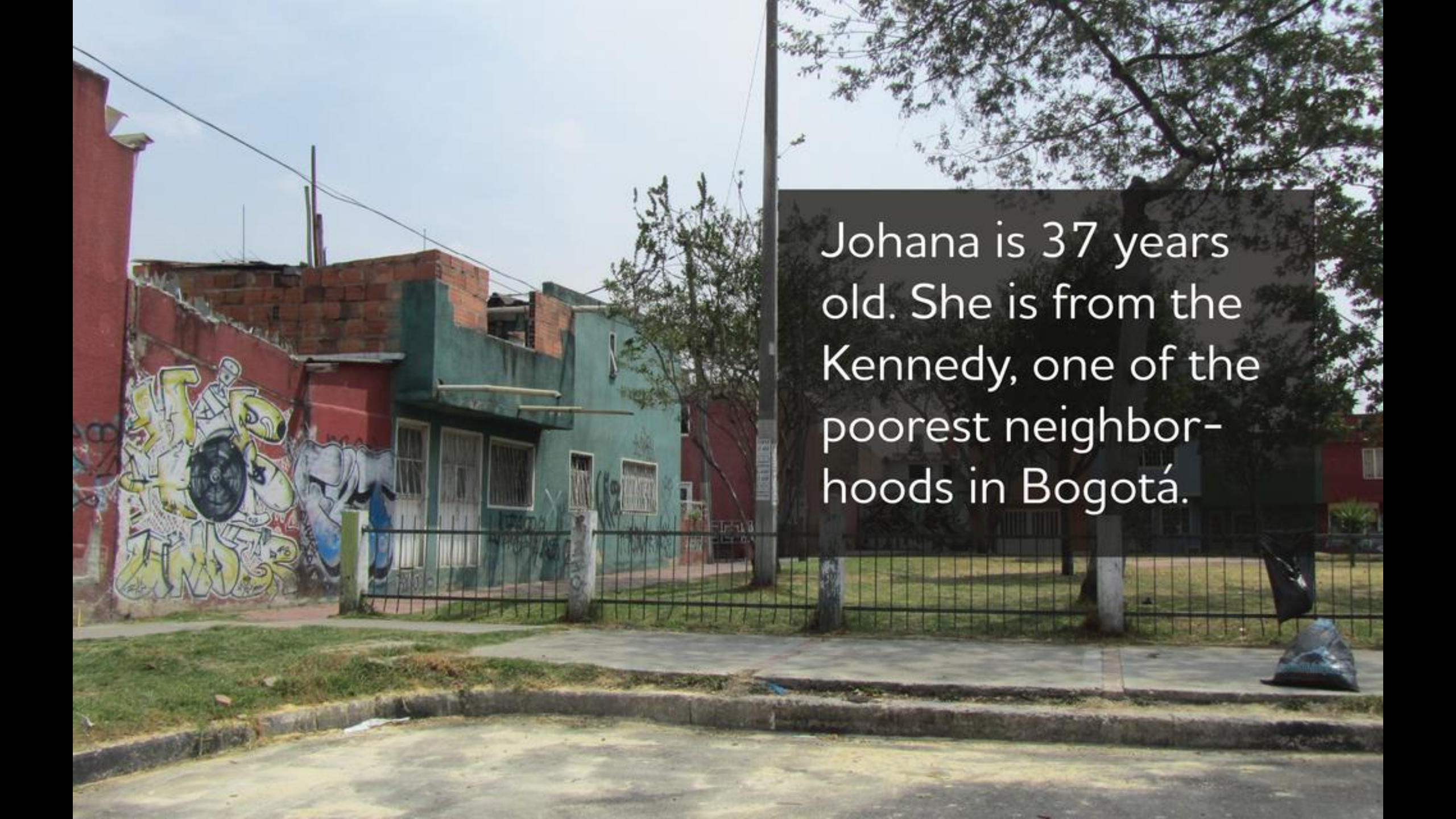




HOW WOULD IT  
BE IF WE HAD  
OPPORTUNITIES?  
6 years, 4 months  
for a drug offense





Johana is 37 years old. She is from the Kennedy, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Bogotá.

Johana lacked the income to support her children, so she asked her aunt for work selling drugs.

From her aunt's supermarket, she made calls to drug dealers and consumers, but never came into contact with the substances.



Together with  
other members  
of her family,  
Johana was  
arrested and  
imprisoned.



Her incarceration only exacerbated the problems for her family.

One child ended up in the care of the state, while others faced more dire circumstances.

“Sometimes I say, ‘If I hadn’t ended up here, my son wouldn’t have become addicted to drugs ... My daughter wouldn’t have had to endure so many things for not having me there.’”





“I pray to God that when I leave here it’s not too late for them ... what most affects me, and what most pains me, are my children.



“The judge says,  
‘You’re not fit for  
society, you’re not  
capable of living  
with your children’  
... But believe me,  
when you’re alone  
with your three  
children ... you can’t  
say, ‘Sorry, I can’t  
feed you, I don’t  
have work.’”





Seventy percent of incarcerated women in Colombia are single mothers. Many are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and crime, where selling drugs appears to be the only option to support their families.

Instead of addressing the root causes of this vicious circle, incarceration often only makes the situation worse. Upon leaving prison, they cannot secure work.

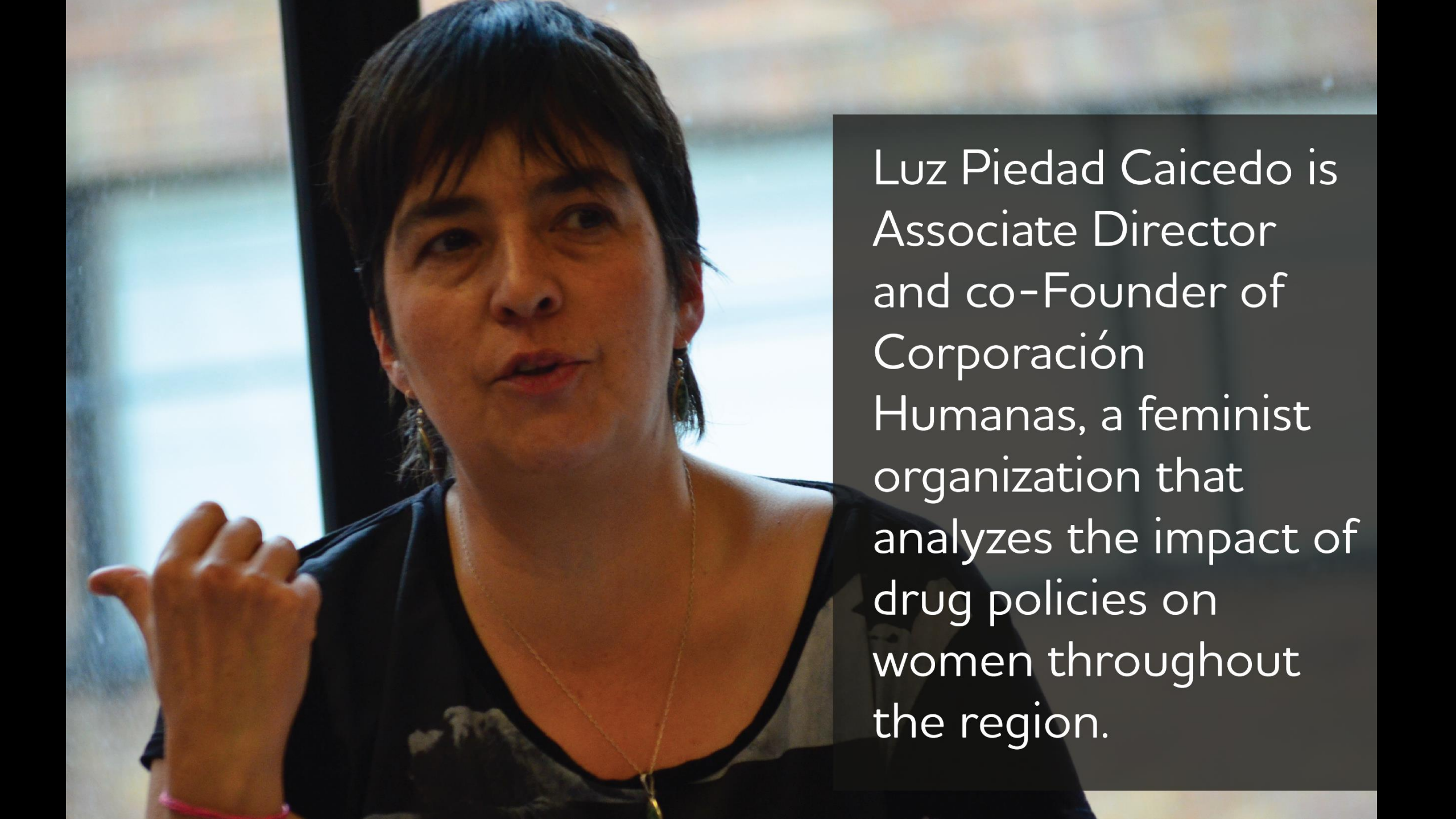
“You leave prison ... and you want to do things right, and it turns out that the only way is to work in a restaurant. And you have your three kids, and you have to pay rent and feed them ... and they pay you \$100 a month. How do you do it? Tell me, as a mother, how do you do it?”





“That’s where I say, forgive me, but I’m going to go sell drugs one day, and that day I can go pay rent.”



A portrait of Luz Piedad Caicedo, a woman with short dark hair and bangs, wearing a black top and a gold necklace. She is gesturing with her right hand. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a window.

Luz Piedad Caicedo is Associate Director and co-Founder of Corporación Humanas, a feminist organization that analyzes the impact of drug policies on women throughout the region.



“The situation for women continues to be difficult upon leaving prison. If you have a criminal record, it’s even more difficult to find work.”





“It’s not surprising that many commit drug offenses again—they lack the support necessary to emerge from poverty.”





“In the Bible it says that [women] are ... the foundation of the home. Well, then help us to be a strong foundation. Many of us are here for our children, how would it be [if we had] opportunities?”



**Producer and Photographer**  
Adam Schaffer

**Interviewers**  
Demaluí Amighetti, Marie Nougier, Luz Piedad  
Caicedo, Sergio Chaparro, Zhuyem Molina,  
Nischa Pieris



## **Editorial Assistance**

Coletta Youngers, Kathy Gille,  
and Kristel Muciño

Special thanks to the Ministry of Justice  
and Law of Colombia