



Connections for Change

Video Transcript

In the summer of 2011, I woke in the night to noise and commotion. A woman had arrived at the health clinic in rural Madagascar where I was sleeping. She had been in labor all day, and her family had come to borrow the one stretcher in the village to take her to a hospital. The next day, I asked my colleague where they had taken her. I was confused, since the nearest town was a 4 hour walk away. But that's where they had gone, to then take a taxi to another town where they might find help.

My name is Samantha Lint, and I am 23 years old, and from Washington, D.C.

I have been passionate about sexual and reproductive health and rights since long before that night in Madagascar, but I believe that story illustrates the types of challenges that we seek to address in improving reproductive health and family planning around the globe.

I want to tell you how that story is connected to my story, and to every woman's story, in a global movement for sexual health and reproductive and rights that manifests in local actions.

At 17, I read *Half the Sky* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, and it was then that I decided to work for women's empowerment globally. That passion led me to Madagascar, where I worked with a French NGO on an epidemiological study. There I saw how intrinsic reproductive health and rights are to women's empowerment.

I met girls younger than I was who already had several children. I saw the impact of lack of sexual education on STD and HIV rates. The stories of young women in Madagascar were different than those at home, but I began to see themes of access and choice across contexts.

In the U.S., I have spent my youth organizing for the reproductive health of my American sisters. On my conservative university campus, I led Students United for Reproductive Justice, and raised awareness in the Richmond, Virginia, community, and advocated for legislative change.

I took my lessons in organizing and youth empowerment to Rwanda, where I worked with an NGO to organize an empowerment program for young women living with HIV. My theory is that those who have experienced social injustice are best qualified to bring about social justice.

The young women I met were remarkable, and I was able to support them in their own project to do HIV and sex education outreach to street children. They knew best what the needs were of their local context, and how to respond effectively. Yet, they also had a passion for learning about the circumstances of women in other countries.

From Rwanda, I returned to my local context, bringing lessons learned there to an internship at the White House in the Office of National AIDS Policy. There I worked to advocate for greater collaboration with the international community, particularly to empower girls and women in order to prevent HIV.

I remember one day, after a meeting for young black gay men in the U.S., getting Whatsapp text from one of my Rwandan students. It felt totally normal to move from the domestic HIV sphere to chatting with my Rwandan friend.

That is the strength of my generation. We are connected, and in our work on SHRH, we stand to gain from each other's experiences through these connections. We take strength from the global nature of our struggle, and thus reduce the shame and shadows that surround many SHRH issues in revealing the universality of our demand for respect, autonomy, and health.

Our connection also facilitates the wider connection of SHRH to broader development goals. We insist that SHRH rights do not exist in a vacuum, but are linked to solutions for poverty, gender equality, climate change, and education.

I now work at Abt Associates, on the SHOPS project. I've monitored data on contraceptive prevalence, and written about long-acting methods. I myself have joined the growing number of American women choosing such methods. My choice has much in common with the choice of a woman in Egypt, in India, or Uganda. I want to stay healthy, and take charge of my life. While my daily circumstances are undoubtedly different, I, like my sisters across the globe, am a drop in a ocean of youth advocating for not only our local sexual and reproductive rights, but for global SHRH.

We are the driving force in engaging our peers to achieve the Family Planning 2020 goal of 120 million new users.

"Global commitment, local action" has been at the center of my activism. Audre Lorde evokes this theme in one of my favorite quotes: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." My rights in my local context are not fully realized until the rights of women in every local context are realized, a realization that happens through global commitments to local action. Thank you.