

Igniting a Global Movement To Improve the Health of Girls and Women

By

KATE ROBERTS

Vice President,
Corporate Marketing, Communications & Advocacy,
Population Services International (PSI)
Washington D.C.

Today, fifteen years after I first joined the global health community, I remain an impatient optimist. As Vice President of a global health organization, PSI, and as a Young Global Leader for the World Economic Forum, I have seen what is possible when the global community works together to overcome seemingly impossible development challenges—particularly for girls and women.

Today, more than ever, private capital and creative partnerships among governments, the private and non-profit sectors, and civil society, are needed to test and develop promising health solutions for girls and women that governments and businesses can't advance on their own.

We are standing on the threshold of a new era of collaboration in philanthropic giving. More women are breaking through gender barriers and achieving unprecedented levels of power and influence, allowing them to ignite change and offer hope to women around the world who are shackled by the effects of poverty.

Companies are forming innovative partnerships with nonprofits and governments in the developing world to address pressing health needs, and we are seeing impressive results. Women are standing toe-to-toe with men

as philanthropists—working together to solve some of the world’s most complex problems. The world has seen that progress is impossible without unlocking the potential that exists in *every* girl.

Unlocking that potential will require an inspired effort.

Harnessing Creative Energy for Social Causes

Prior to joining PSI, I was managing director for the international advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi in Romania. My life revolved around the relentless pursuit of finding new and creative ways to market cigarettes, soda, and other commodities that men, women, and youth “had to have.”

My life changed courses when a remarkable man named Michael Holscher, who worked for PSI, convinced me that I could use the same creative energy to market products and services that have a health benefit and affect social change.

Not long after I met Michael, I joined PSI and spearheaded the development of YouthAIDS, a cause marketing campaign designed to create awareness and raise private capital for high-impact health solutions around HIV and AIDS. The funds raised from this campaign would eventually be invested to develop and deliver one of the most effective HIV prevention tools available.

Unleashing the Power of the Private Investment in Health

In 2007 the World Health Organization and UNAIDS recognized voluntary medical male circumcision as an effective tool to reduce the risk of HIV infection among men. Randomized control trials confirmed that circumcised men are 60 percent less likely to acquire HIV from their female partner.

This exciting development clashed with an onslaught of skepticism by many global health experts who believed it would be impossible to convince men to undergo this simple procedure. Even if demand for the service could be created, many believed it would be impractical and too costly to make it widely available, particularly across sub-Saharan Africa where the HIV epidemic maintains a stronghold.

The health experts at PSI were more optimistic. With philanthropic contributions of \$500,000 we launched a circumcision program in Zambia and later expanded the program in neighboring countries. We were able to prove, through communications campaigns, that we could create demand for circumcision among young males. The program also demonstrated that the service could be offered safely and cost effectively. Armed with proof, that initial investment has since leveraged more than \$77 million from donors, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development, and the UK Department for International Development, to expand the program in other countries.

Between 2007 and 2012, PSI was able to provide circumcision services to more than 400,000 men in 7 countries – Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Using the World Bank-approved DALY metric, PSI’s circumcision interventions added 503,521 years of healthy life. Combined with efforts from other health organizations, local governments and with support from international donors, more than 1.1 million African men have been circumcised —moving us even closer to an AIDS-free generation.

An Opportunity for Girls and Women

If we can apply this leverage model to deliver health solutions for the 600 million girls and women across the developing world, we will change the course of humanity. The effects of poor health prevent young girls and women from going to school, joining the workforce, and earning equal status with men—it prevents them from reaching their full potential. Today, 75 percent of HIV infections among 15- to 24-year-olds in sub-

Saharan Africa are young women, and up to one-half of girls in developing countries become mothers before the age of 18, largely due to lack of access to modern family planning options. The burden of preventable disease and health complications is undeniable, and it impacts all aspects of a girl's life, as well as her family, and her community.

So, why invest in girls and women?

It's simple. Girls and women deliver for their families, communities and nations when they are healthy, educated and empowered to reach their full potential. It's time we deliver for them.

PROFILE:



Kate Roberts is the Vice President of Corporate Marketing, Communications and Advocacy at Population Services International (PSI). She is also the founder of YouthAIDS and Five & Alive, two marketing programs implemented by Population Services International (PSI).

Kate produced the “Staying Alive” concert with MTV, began the multi-million dollar, celebrity-driven YouthAIDS cause marketing campaign with ALDO Shoes called “See No Evil”, and led four award-winning documentaries aired on VH1, The Discovery Channel and National Geographic aimed at raising awareness about the global HIV/AIDS crisis. Roberts has been featured in *The Washington Post*, named “Power Player of the Week” by Fox News, one of the *Vogue* 100 women and celebrated as a “CNN Hero.”

Kate speaks at The Aspen Ideas Festival, Google, Columbia University, Harvard Business School and Wharton and was awarded “Young Global Leader 2007” by The Forum. Most recently, Roberts co-founded and serves on the Board of the Global India Fund, serves on the World Economic Forum's Global Health Advisory Board and is implementing a partnership with Nike to scale up efforts of the Girl Effect program.