

## ***SheDecides: “Stand Up Speak Out; Change the Rules and Unlock Resources”*** **How bold leadership led to a global movement**

*What started out as a fundraising initiative that was founded by a Dutch minister, has grown into a global movement supported by 40.000 individuals and a thousand organizations. One year after SheDecides was launched, one of these organizations looks back on a very successful first year.*

By: Henk Rolink & Lotte Rensen (Rutgers)

### **Rutgers: a SheDecides Champion**

Rutgers is a Dutch NGO operating in 18 countries worldwide and is proud to be one of the SheDecides Champions. Since day one, we've been very active within the movement. One of our first actions was to launch the fundraising platform [www.shedecides.nl](http://www.shedecides.nl) at the beginning of 2017 with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since then SheDecides has become an international movement advocating for the right of girls and women to make decisions concerning their own bodies and lives.

### **Reproductive Health Network: the first beneficiary**

Exactly one year after SheDecides was founded by former minister Lilianne Ploumen, we awarded the public donations to health workers in Kenya. In 2017, private individuals donated 500,000 euro to SheDecides. The Reproductive Health Network Kenya works towards reducing maternal mortality and morbidity caused by unsafe abortion. Thanks to the contribution, the organization can help 25,000 girls and women annually.

Rutgers has chosen the Reproductive Health Network Kenya after consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and partners in the field. Through our international work we know the situation in Kenya well. “During our talks, it was soon obvious that care for women and girls in Kenya would be greatly threatened if we didn't act. We chose the Reproductive Health Network because this organization focusses on abortion care and contraception. With the reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy the organization stood to lose no less than 70% of its half-yearly income. Our support is therefore badly needed,” according to Rutgers director Ton Coenen.

### **Recap of the SheDecides Flagship Event 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018.**

On behalf of Rutgers Henk Rolink visited the Flagship event that was held in South Africa on 1<sup>st</sup> March. For Share Net he wrote the following recap:

“When I entered the venue of the SheDecides flagship event in Pretoria last Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> March, I immediately realized that SheDecides is different from the other existing SRHR fora. No large conference centre with the traditional lay-out but rather a raw, cool, urban space, dotted with art and greenery. Seating arrangement also didn't meet the expectations of an old SRHR hand. We were requested to take a designated seat at smaller tables. Quickly you find out your table-companions are not the usual suspects but an eclectic group of like-minded SRHR activists, with completely different backgrounds: (deputy-) ministers, government officials (civil servants), members of parliament, embassy staff, representatives of UN agencies and of local and international civil society, service providers, social workers, youth leaders etc. All dedicated to collectively define the “new normal” in which women and girls decide about when to have sex,

who to have sex with, when to have families, what to do with their body, their life, and their future.

At the close of the event, I concluded that this is what makes SheDecides really different: we all rally behind the “new normal”, but we all discuss this at one and the same table. Within the SheDecides movement you get to interact directly with all stakeholders. No need to lobby your government delegation, no need to develop beforehand a common position or agenda among your peers: you can approach and interact with other stakeholders directly!

SheDecides is also not a single issue movement: it is about women and girls getting to decide about their bodies. I think this is something that makes SheDecides unique and something that has to be guarded.

SheDecides is bigger than just abortion, for example. The minute we start isolating and overusing one issue, then we’re not been being cognizant of all other things affecting the control of women over their own bodies. The fundamental rights of girls and women everywhere is what unites this movement and distinguishes it from other initiatives. It is also something that we should not compromise on: SheDecides is and should remain unapologetic and uncompromising about the need to provide comprehensive SRH and rights.

Within the three well framed tracks (Stand Up Speak Out; Changing the Rules and Unlocking Resources) several cross-cutting themes emerged.

- Meaningful youth participation (“we want a seat at the table, we are not the menu”).
- Economic empowerment; listen to grassroots initiatives and let young people and girls and women in the communities define their SRHR needs and be involved in the development of laws, policies and programs that directly affect them.
- And not surprisingly in South-Africa, HIV/Aids and Sexual and Gender Based Violence.

At the same time, participants stressed the importance to ensure that the SheDecides remains an inclusive movement: no one nor one group should be left behind in realizing the comprehensive SRH and rights.”

**More information on the work that Rutgers does can be found at <https://www.rutgers.international/> and <https://www.shedecides.nl/english.html>.**