

Human Rights – Conversations Across Generations

Episode: Dr. Xanthe Scharff

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MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:04

Hi, welcome to our podcast, Human Rights, Conversations Across Generations. I'm Meredith Lockwood, founder of Lockwood Creative, a purpose-driven creative agency. And I'm here with my dad.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:16

And I'm Professor Bert Lockwood, the director of the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights at the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:26

Together, we are your father-daughter co-hosts.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:29

For over 50 years, I've had a front-row seat to the evolution of international human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:35

And now, we're sharing that expertise with you by connecting to the powerful stories and insights of human rights voices from around the world.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:43

We bridge the past and the present, making complex human rights issues more approachable and understandable.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:50

So, pull up a chair and join our table as we speak with Nobel Peace Prize recipients, political leaders and the world's leading human rights scholars and activists.

Track 8 1:04

Hey listeners. Thanks for joining our conversation today. My dad and I are talking with Dr. Xanthe Scharff, the managing director for external affairs and editor at large at the Freedom Fund. This year marks 100 years since the 1926 slavery convention. The first international treaty promising to abolish slavery everywhere. Yet 50 million people are still trapped in slavery today. At the Freedom Fund, Xanthe leads efforts to end modern slavery by doing something radically different. Instead of running top-down programs, they give money directly to frontline, survivor-led organizations who know their communities best. And it's working. Since 2014, the Freedom Fund has impacted over 1.7 million lives, liberated more than 34,000 individuals, and helped nearly 240,000 at-risk children get into school.

She co-founded the fuller And my dad and I are so excited to welcome, Xanthe to the show.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 2:26

Xanthe, welcome to human rights conversations across generations. We're so honored to have you join us today. and I think it's important that we are having this conversation in February, 2026, which this particular year marks a very sobering anniversary. It is a hundred years since the 1926 slavery convention, Your career has taken you across the world into different sectors. Could you let our listeners know what first drew you from journalism into education and now working to fight against modern day slavery? Okay.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 3:02

Just before this, I spent 10 years starting and then running the Fuller Project, which is the global newsroom focused on women. And because that newsroom, we were doing investigative work. So a lot of that does look at the worst kinds of injustice. And we did quite a lot of reporting on forced labor and abuse in supply chains. And so that's partially how I got to know Freedom Fund. And Freedom Fund is the leading global collaborative fund, which I can talk about what that means, working to stop modern slavery. and actually it was interesting when I interviewed with Freedom Fund. That's when I found out that one of our big stories we had done at the Fuller Project, which was about women in India who were working in sugarcane fields, but they were being forced to have hysterectomies. I didn't know because I, I was, you know, CEO, I wasn't doing the journalism myself. So it wasn't until I interviewed with Freedom Fund that I learned they had been the behind the scenes expert source to the journalist who did the story. So as much as these are very different roles and different organizations, it's also in the same family in some ways. So it's been really nice to carry forward what I learned from our journalists who were doing these investigations into forced labor impacting women and now be at Freedom Fund. at Freedom Fund, my role to lead on external affairs to help amplify our stories, raise the funds that we need. so I'm still learning from our folks on the ground all the time.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 4:39

Well, that's incredible. And, you know, a full circle moment for me is my new friendship with the editor in chief at the Fuller Project, Eliza. We just got to have coffee together a few months ago in Amsterdam where I used to live and she currently is. And I'm an avid reader of the Fuller Project for many, many years. so this is truly such a special moment for me getting to meet the founder, which was founded back in 2014. And through your time, um, you did get to live in Turkey and I know you did incredible reporting on Turkey along the Syrian border during the refugee crisis.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 5:13

Yes. Well, I'm so happy that you and Eliza are in touch and Eliza and the CEO of the Project, Zsuzsi Lapai, are rolling out new vision, new branding. Now they're working with a editions of kind of like a digital magazine that gets dropped each month, jus on Revolution. So I'm a board member at Fuller Project. So I'm very proud to see all of this exciting work coming out with Eliza's editorial vision, which is really bright and brave and just so much needed. so,yes , I co-founded the Fuller Project from Turkey in 2014. It was, as you know, well, given you all are

tracking human rights and, revolutions around the world. It was just was such an incredible moment in the region. It was after the Arab Spring had begun and it was just untold what was going to happen in the region. Sometimes, you know, there were success stories, sometimes there was backlash. And in Turkey, there's really this moment of people were hoping it would be a real opening and human rights defenders were feeling brave and emboldened and marching in the streets with a Gezi protest. And women and trans women were really at the front of that, um, but also a uniting of the general human rights agenda, whether environmental rights, women's rights, know, real kind of coming together to say this government is not delivering what we want. Um, and I would say since then some of that opening has closed, quite a bit of that opening has closed. There was really a moment of more hope. I think the situation there is more dire now. but it was a really interesting time to be reporting on women. They're just so brave and organizing such critical issues. And one of the things that I reported really deeply on was how women were organizing to defend their children's right to secular education. Because part of, Erdogan's agenda was to, put in place more religious schools, more imam hatips where, traditionally that's children who are moving into, u, being imams would be trained. Um, so closing down some secular schools and replacing with schools where a third of the education is religious education. And so I embedded with some of the mothers who were trying to protest, trying to work with lawyers and different forms of, uh, protest. but also with Syrian women, of course, the war in Syria led to millions of Syrians coming across the border into Turkey and, um, the majority of those being women and children. And so the women that I met were finding ways to survive showing their leadership and their resilience and strength. but also in talking to them, it was just so clear how much of the response was not done in a way to really focus on them. Um, their, whether their physical needs, their needs as mothers, their need for know, survival, that would be appropriate for them and the ways they were trying to take care of their families. So a lot has changed since then, but it was a really important time to be thinking about how women are so often left out of the story.

BERT LOCKWOOD 8:16

I'm curious, Xanthe. year, years ago, I attended a wonderful I think it was at Berkeley that dealt with, uh, journalists had covered the killing fields. And, um, and one of the things that was fascinating to me was that there was this special bond and almost the sense that you weren't a real journalist, unless you had sort of covered one of these war situations, that that was where you sort of tested. And, and, and, and there was sort of a, a real bond amongst that came from that. it had reminded me that my father was a trial lawyer. And one of his attitudes was that you weren't really a lawyer if you weren't a trial lawyer, if you hadn't sort of tested your, your skills. I'm curious, is there a bond that you felt with other journalists? I mean, that have actually been on the ground,

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 9:15

the bond that I most feel with journalists is with those journalists who care voices that are not included in the mainstream narrative, especially women. So I recognize what you're saying. And I think that's real. You know, I am not a war reporter myself. Um, and certainly have many friends who, you know, for my generation, it would have been reporting in Iraq, right? That

was, I'm 45. So 9-11 happened just as I was finishing college. So people who were just a couple of years older than me were starting as cub reporters, cutting their teeth, going to Iraq. So have lots of friends who spent years during that war. And during that war, you know, if you were a freelance journalist, you could be sent out there with thousands of dollars in your pocket, stringing from the New York times, you find, find a way to get yourself out there and, and do really important work. I think, again, times have changed the times of freelance reporters being sent off at their own peril with pockets full of cash to do this kind of stringer reporting. You know, you know, things have really changed. I think a lot of that actually changed during the war in Syria because journalists were getting kidnapped. ISIS was, know, r so horrific in the filming of, you know, beheadings and things like And so, there was a movement to stop sending freelancers at their own peril, actually just stop sending freelancers to these kinds of war zones. So anyway, that's just a bit of a, a bit of backchatter on that, The real bond I feel is, know, we saw that women were left out of war reporting and I started the fuller project with a woman who had been a cub reporter in Iraq. And so she had seen women left out of that story and she had dedicated herself to reporting them into that story. I had a really different background, in that I was a military spouse and now I'm divorced, but as a military spouse, I supported five 9-11 deployments. To Iraq and Afghanistan mainly and I also felt that the story of women who support soldiers or Marines and the families is not fully written in or understood. You know, there was just really sparse reporting about the impact on families. And

BERT LOCKWOOD 11:34

you know,

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 11:35

together, I think we had a pretty 360 view in a way of how much is missing and also the true cost of war, and if we understand the true cost of war, maybe we're going to make different decisions before we go into wars like Iraq, which has been so widely criticized as, a decision that was taken in a way that didn't factor in civil society or even some voices within our own government. Certainly not the voices of the Iraqi women who then suffered setbacks in their own physical security with the outbreak of violence, which is always true. So, that how I kind of connect to those ideas of, of war, but also reporting on women.

BERT LOCKWOOD 12:12

Yeah, I'm fascinated that the Iraq one a particular interest to me My best friend, uhm, at NYU, when I was at the Center for International Studies in the early 1970s, was Mohamed ElBaradei, who was at the time, he was the one urging the U. S. not to go in to find these weapons of mass destruction that let his, the IAEA continue, and, of course, they disregarded that, and he ended up winning the Nobel Prize. I'd call it Peace Prize for that, but, uh, was a terrible situation,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 12:50

Well, and another, situation, Xanthe, that I know you had first-hand experience, was in Uganda during the Lord's resistance army conflict, uhm, particularly working with displaced victims of

war children, who were soldiers, uhm, and a critical gap that you also witnessed was how, when the conflict ended, humanitarian aid stopped, but the development aid was very slow to arrive, which left people in mass crisis, an, from a podcast interview, I listened, uhm, that you were on,

From a podcast interview I listened, that you were on, you had noted that you got to interview hundreds of people who were sometimes kicked out of camps. They would return to their ancestral villages without knowing how to farm. There weren't schools, education wasn't available. you really got to bear witness to heartbreaking circumstances. And I'm curious for our listeners, if you could share about your time in Uganda and how that experience shaped your worldview about what works and also what doesn't work in terms of international aid.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 14:00

So, I did that work for my PhD. So, I was at the Fletcher School and the requirements of the PhD were to get in very deep on the issue. So, I actually spent quite a lot of time in northern Uganda on the ground and talked to literally hundreds of people. I mean, actually, more people than, in retrospect, I feel like I should I talked to a lot of people about their situation and what was consistent with what I had studied. What I had studied at Fletcher was there had been a move in humanitarian and development aid to have all international actors try to harmonize and try to, make similar moves in their bilateral agreements with governments. So, President Museveni, who is still in power in Uganda, had gained a reputation of doing well as far as HIV, addressing HIV, had gained some trust among donors. And so, there was a desire to harmonize the funding that would go into the Ugandan government so that they could be the ones who would be in control, rather than having to do a million things for a million different funders all the time. So, not a perfect process, but some move in that direction. With northern Uganda, this was a really complex war. I mean, leader of that war, Joseph Kony, was I don't even know how to describe, but, um, not necessarily fully sane actor, right? Like, not a rational actor, I think that's the best way to say it. Not a rational actor, religiously motivated, but obviously motivated by power and controlling people as And, was controlling people from his own ethnic group, but also having them, brutalize their own family members. So, forcing people into fighting with him, in just the, the most horrific ways. but that ethnic group had also been at odds with ethnic group, but also political bloc, which is kind of the more important aspect of that. And so, um, so there were real questions about Museveni's interest in fully serving that part of the country and that group of people. so that was kind of in the background where, during that war, the humanitarian sector kind of came in and set up these camps. And in the camps that humanitarian aid could be delivered in a way that was a little bit separate from the kind of broader government machine. So people could go into those camps. And actually, in some cases, the education rates would increase, you know, above what you would expect because their kids are in the camps. They're near to the schools. they're, th going to primary education. Um, so, you know, the camps are like tiny little villages, you know, all the services are in the camps. Everybody's in the camps. yeah, so when The the war ended, it ended abruptly. the Lords Resistance army was pushed into South Sudan and a military operation and it was over. I was actually supposed to go do my doctorate in South Sudan and I landed in Entebbe in Uganda to do my preparation so that I would go. And I was informed,

actually, you're not going where you were supposed to be going because now everybody has pulled out of that area. These fighters are now in Sudan. So I reoriented and decided to do my work in Northern Uganda instead. Yeah. now the camps, because the government, now that this was over, they wanted camps closed. You not supposed to kick people out of but people were telling me that they'd been kicked out. And so they're going back to these villages, but these are people who, these are farming people. And you can imagine farming who learned to farm. You spend your lifetime at your parents' knee, you know, learn about the seasons, about the rain. All of this is really difficult to pass down. So they no longer had ways to effectively farm and be, you know, able to provide sustenance and earn income. And also now schools have to be put back in those rural places. like you said, exactly, Meredith, which is that humanitarian aid comes from one funding stream. Development aid is very different and it is done in coordination with the government to much, to much, much, much greater degree. And so there's a lot of negotiation where the government is taking back control over the way that things are done. Um, so it was just, it was a sad time going. I would go for months at a time, go home, collect my research, go back again, and still find that people have been promised that schools are coming. Aid is coming, you know, six months are passing, more time is passing, and it's still not happening. Okay.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 18:27

One thing that I think is so inspiring about your work today is through the Freedom Fund, you know how imperative it is to get the funding and resources to the people on the ground, to local organizations, to survivors, to victims. And it must feel like an incredible moment for you to reflect on your time in Uganda and now having that hands-on experiencing and learning from that time and now knowing how to be part of the solution, to really help people on the ground, to help survivors.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 19:02

Yeah, I actually, my lessons in the need to listen to people on the ground started before then, really my first major professional endeavor was to start a scholarship fund for girls called Advancing Girls Education in Africa. And I started it because I had reported a story about a family in Malawi and readers of that story in the Christian Science Monitor wanted to help the girl they read about who hadn't been able to go to school. And so they started sending me emails and saying, I'd like to send money for the girl I read about who was not in school. And so I even got requests like, hey, can I send you a check and can you give it to this girl's mom so she can cash it and send the girl to school? You know, so. Bert gets, so, you know. wonderful expression. So, you know. You don't have good intentions, but also, not only did they not know how to help, but I also didn't know, because I was not an education expert. I was actually an intern for CARE Malawi and I was fortunate they they wanted me to go and do research in the field. So I brought my experience from grad school and doing some, you know, basic research design. But I also worked really closely with their colleagues. But I was not an education specialist by any means whatsoever. So I was in that position of it being really obvious that I didn't know how to do this, which was a blessing. I think, you know, knowing what you don't know is a really good place to start. And so my Malawian colleagues guided me through an appropriate way to set up a rudimentary scholarship fund. And then that was always the ethos

of Advanced Girls Education Africa and still is. The programming is led by our country directors who are women who know girls. They know what they need. And that leads to some really critical decisions about how that program is shaped, which I can share more about. so that early on was just an important lesson. I you know, Bert, you work with a lot of young people. And I think all of us, what we really want when we go into international affairs is to be on the ground, be in the field, you know, really be there, get to know people, get to talk to people. A in many cases, you learn over time that that may or may not be your best value add. And so with Age Africa, it became clear to me that my value add was going to be. Amplifying stories, organizing people around a board, raising money, you know, and then making sure that we listen to our country directors so that we can get the girls the right help. So, and sometimes

BERT LOCKWOOD 21:36

Yeah.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 21:36

doing some cross-country research and sharing best practices, things like that. Um, so, also true in Uganda, Meredith, but for me, it started a long time before then, both by seeing things that I thought were doing, done right, and things that I thought were not done right.

BERT LOCKWOOD 21:53

did you have Mike Glennon, uh, by any chance at Tufts?

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 21:57

Not lucky enough to be in his classes because he's, you know, got a legendary status, um, but I didn't do international law.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:04

Oh,

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:05

So, um,

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:05

okay.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:05

but yeah, but I was there.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:07

He, he, he was on our faculty before he, um, went, went there, so.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:14

Absolutely loved, yeah. We had great people. I, I heard on one of your shows, Hurst Hannum mentioned.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:19

Oh, yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 22:20

Mm-hmm.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:20

Uh,

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:21

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:21

yeah,

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:21

Maybe

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:21

yeah, yeah.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:22

you know John Hammock.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:24

I know the name, but I don't think I know him personally, but, uh, Hurst and I go way to the early 1970s,

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:32

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 22:33

a, a long And then they the fellow that took Hurst's was the, um, leading, Nigerian human rights lawyer. Uh, Chi Anselm Odinkalu. and he, he has written, um, I think three articles for me in the human rights quarterly that I uh, for Johns Hopkins. but he's there three years, I guess. uh, but, uh, yeah, no, that's a, a, a wonderful school.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 22:58

Yeah. Well, I'm hoping I'm going to get to hear some of Burt wisdom about how the instruction practice of human rights has changed over the decades. Cause I think I've been in, in, in, in the doing too much to know how the whole broader frameworks are changing. So hopefully we're going to get into some of that.

BERT LOCKWOOD 23:17

I don't know that I have I'm, I'm, I'm so immersed in it you know, I attract a cadre of students that come to Cincinnati specifically because they want to study, uh, international human rights. and you know, some people are that students are less interested in human rights these days than, and others. And I'm in something of a cocoon on that because, that's not my experience, but then it could well be the experience of others that, uh, don't have the privilege that I've this is oldest of the programs that, uh, at a law school in the world that deals with international human rights. And they recruited me to put it together in 1979. The reason that it's in Cincinnati, Ohio is not because Cincinnati, Ohio was the ideal place to create an international human rights program in 1979, but it's part of the nice story about our culture that rich people are generous with their money and often money to set up special programs. And we were the beneficiary a that, uh, it was the key lawyer named Bill Butler in New York, who was very active with the international commission of jurists. And, with his father-in-law's money, he had created the Arthur Garfield Hayes program and civil liberties law at NYU. And he decided with this gift from one of his clients, Urban Morgan, he would, uh, give it to Cincinnati. It had to go to the university of Cincinnati, but he had the discretion where within the university to spend it. And so he decided to create sort of the international counterpart to Arthur Garfield Hayes program and civil liberties law at NYU. So, that's why it's uh, Cincinnati. And they recruited me to put it together. I was at American university, the associate dean, but human rights has been my field for a number of years already. my wife says, I told her we were three years. Um, and,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 25:32

Well, it's important to mention that mom, my mom is born and raised Brooklyn.

BERT LOCKWOOD 25:36

Yeah.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 25:37

Yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 25:37

they met at NYU. and my mom was in DC also working. And then my dad told her, well, we're just going to do a year or two in Cincinnati, Ohio. My mom is not familiar with Ohio. uh, 46 years later, they're still there. And my mom still reminds him often. So, but the Urban Morgan Institute is, is really an organization. And, for me, Xanthe, it's been pretty incredible to grow having a human rights father and getting to see his students, thrive in their careers around the world. And that I also grew up with, and now I'm friends with many of his former fellows. and they'll come on the podcast and tell us about their work and where they started from. And, it's really been such a beautiful bridge of connection for people really caring about making this world a better place for everybody. and, you know, even hearing your stories from Uganda, and I think we'll talk about the Congo, getting to your stories, of all the incredible work you both do. and I would love to take us into your work at the Freedom Fund and to talk about modern slavery in the year of 2026. and before we dive really deep into the topics, I know for some of

our listeners, to many forms of modern slavery that some may be familiar with and some maybe not. There's, I was hoping we could give them just a quick little educational of certain kinds of forms. I know they've read about bonded labor, but they might not really know what exactly that means as well as domestic servitude, which is forced labor, particularly in certain countries. from Saudi Arabia to the Emirates, et cetera.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 27:16

Yeah. So 50 million people are in some form of modern slavery around the world. Actually, that's up to 40 million, about 10 years ago. So we're going in the wrong direction. And it is also the highest recorded number in history, which if you do the math is about one in 150 people in the United States, it's about a million people, which is about, what is it? About three in a thousand.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 27:39

Yeah

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 27:40

So these are big numbers. now people do count differently and people do define differently, but I hope we can try to make it simple for Um, and I'll say even the phrasing modern slavery, I find this is more common in Europe or in the UK, because of the history that we have with slavery, you know, in the United States, it brings up different ideas. So, in the U S we tend to use the term trafficking, um, but that term also has its So we can just actually get into it and be specific. What are we even talking about? So of that 50, of that 50, about 27 is forced labor. 27 million is forced labor. Um, internationally, a lot of people then are also counting forced marriage, forced marriage. Again, let's break down a tiny bit. So some people believe that anybody under the age of 18 is an, if you're married, it was a forced marriage because under 18, you couldn't consent to the marriage, setting the debate about that aside, because in some countries, the age of legal marriage is less than 18. So setting aside exactly how that should be set. The forced marriage numbers are done based on whether or not a person reports that they were forced into their marriage. So that's how we're getting at these estimates. so forced marriage, it could be someone who is now an adult, or it could be someone who is a child and it could be a girl or a boy, but it's many more, it's much more often that it's girls and women who are reporting this forced situation. I think one of the misconceptions about women, uh, who face modern slavery is that it's all sex trafficking. It's, it's really kind of a mix, kind of an even mix, a little bit more, um, forced labor than sex trafficking, if you're going to split those apart. So now to go back to the categories that you talked about, Meredith, and try to break these down a little bit. So yeah, bonded labor or debt labor, this is where a person is working. For example, I'll give you some concrete examples. It's going to be more, more helpful. So freedom fund works in a range. We call them hotspots, but different places, different countries. One of the places we've worked for a while is in Nepal. In Nepal, we work with a group of people called the Haruwa-charuwa. They are what's called the scheduled caste, as in if people have probably heard of the caste systems that exist in, in that part of the world. Haruwa-charuwa is an agricultural, or cattle raising group of people. And

with these people, we found that 80% of them were in a form of modern slavery because of debt. debt-related forced labor. So, for example, a person could be born onto a plot of land and told, parents owe me money. They're going to work for me until you pay it off, but then have to rent equipment, like have to, you know, rent a shovel and therefore never be able to pay it off. An I think the thing that's really, really, really hard about this is in Nepal, we actually are, we work by supporting frontline groups and even supporting some of the survivors of this kind of modern slavery to form their own groups and sort of organize union, unionize, start protesting. They had a lot of success. The prime minister actually declared this group of people free. This is a huge declaration after mass protests and organizing. the difficulty is that the system is so entrenched. You can imagine where are they going to go because they have been denied education and they don't have alternative forms of income yet that are really well-established. So now we continue working with them and have had some recent successes too establishing that they merit, they deserve some rehabilitation, some economic opportunities, some access to land, that sort of thing. Otherwise, how are they going to get on their feet because they've been exploited for generate. I mean, going back since anyone can remember they've been exploited. So it's a, it is really a deep restructuring of societal norms, expect access, you know, access to resources. So that's an intergenerational example of bonded labor. so we talked about domestic servitude, you mentioned people going to the East. I actually just came back from Ethiopia where I was visiting our hotspot and got to meet some of the survivors of this kind of modern slavery where they went to the Middle East, off in Saudi Arabia, but it could be other places as well, because it's usually out of desperation. It's a young mother with, you know, a couple of kids and a recruiting agency is telling them, you can have the opportunity to make real money and send this money back. Just go for a year, just go for a couple of years, whatever. So the recruiting agency will get them a passport and you can imagine it could seem excited. Like I'm going to the airport for the first time. I mean, some people are going by land or by, you know, but some people are going on a plane and having this adventure. in which they want to provide for their families, they get there, their passports are taken away. They have no form of communication. They're made to work around the clock. They're physically or sexually abused. The stories are harrowing and the women, when they come back, you know, the amount of time that it takes to rehabilitate a person that has experienced that kind of modern slavery. What I've, it's been explained to me, you know, you can't just send them back to their, we need to support, give them psychosocial support and get them back on their feet. And it takes a lot of time. so, that's one form. Um, and I can tell you more about how we helping those women in Ethiopia.

BERT LOCKWOOD 33:15

well, and doesn't that happen that sometimes the community won't take them back? because of the stigma.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 33:22

I, I don't, I don't know specifically the circumstances. For instance, I know, I mean, I have heard stories some, in some cases where if a woman, for example, has been raped and is abused. you know, taking care of a small child. Um, I don't know if that's the case in Ethiopia or not. I

think what, what I was told was that it had more to do with a woman's ability to just be emotionally stable and financially stable and dealing with the, you know, post trauma. Um, and then of course, being able to hold some new kind of income generating activity, you know, we still need to feed those kids Right. So getting back on their feet. But so in Ethiopia, I did not hear about that kind of rejection, but it, it may be the case. I just didn't hear about it.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 34:09

Xanthe, listening to you just also reminded me an incredible three-part documentary series. I watched called Bonded by Brick about the brick labor in Pakistan, that shines a spotlight on Fatima, who is known as like the modern day Harriet Tubman, who's devoted her life to ending bonded labor across her country. if you haven't seen it, it's and moving. so that was just something that, that came to mind. And, when people hear modern slavery and you've said that, you know, for some women you work Who are trafficked. and to bring it full circle to the United States, I think sometimes, we don't realize the severity of trafficking here in our own country. you know, we can talk about the Washington DC suburbs, that there forced as children to work in homes, caring for children, women who have to clean and cook. For our listeners, can you tell us about your experience and knowledge of modern slavery here in the US and what that really looks like to bring it to the vantage point for us?

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 35:18

Yeah. We have different forms. People are perhaps a little bit more aware of sex trafficking in the United Um, hearing hearing so much about Epstein. So for a lot of people, this is really shocking. And at the same time, it has, you know, our, our awareness needs to go beyond Epstein. Actually, this is happening every day. It's happening to vulnerable. vulnerable girls and boys, it happening It's happening because bigger picture systemic failures, including the foster care system, which puts a lot of kids at risk. And when kids are at risk and they run away from home, sometimes predators are able to spot those really vulnerable kids. But it also happens to girls who are just very seeking of seeking of attention. And a predator may be able to pick them up even in a mall, you know, in a setting that we would consider sort of everyday. So there are a lot of different forms going on. The online environment also is creating additional vulnerability to that kind of grooming and coercion. And so are a lot of different ways that can play out But one of these very surprising stories that you mentioned, Mer, I've been doing some awareness raising with a wonderful colleague, Evelyn Chumbo, who works at the Human Trafficking Legal Resource Center. And Evelyn tells her story because she wants to inspire people to action. So she's very clear. I'm not just telling you this so that you can feel badly. I'm telling you so you can take action. And her story is that she, when she was nine years old, she was a great student in Cameroon. She really enjoyed going to school. She had a great family life, but her parents wanted to give her a better life. And so they allowed her to be adopted by a family in the US. And when she got to the US, she was enslaved. As a nine-year-old, she didn't go to school, and she was forced to take care of the young children. And this same trafficker trafficked six kids on the same passport. So, this was an operation and one of the things that really struck me about what Evelyn said is that if more people were aware of the signs and had been willing to speak up, it could have been stopped. She was there until she was 17. Then she escaped to a Catholic church. But one day, she lit a fire by accident when she

was cooking for the little kids. And the firemen came, and she was home alone. I think she was nine at the time. Home alone, caring for little kids. The firemen came, and they didn't report it. You know, they put out the fire, and they left. And that was the end of it. They could have rescued her if they'd known what the signs were. So this is happening. It certainly happens in agriculture, in manufacturing. Again, I think some of this is the confusion around the word trafficking. You know, forced labor is happening when people are forced into conditions that are not proper, not right. Their wages are taken. They're forced into overtime. They're forced to work while being sexually harassed. They have no way to report it. So it's this combination of deeply exploitative conditions. And that's why the more vulnerable a person is, the more it's happening. and so, you know, there's a between, you know, if you're an immigrant, it's more likely to happen to you because you perhaps already in a more economically unstable situation or maybe you're afraid to report things that are happening. And so we see some overlaps.

BERT LOCKWOOD 38:45

And, Xanthe, I saw you had some connection with Kevin Bales.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 38:50

Yeah.

BERT LOCKWOOD 38:50

And published three articles in the Human Rights Quarterly by him. And he came out here a number of years ago to talk about that subject.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 38:59

Well, as I was joining Freedom Fund, that was the first book that I was, you know, I was told please read Kevin Bales' book because it was so formative in terms of people's understanding of what this is, what modern slavery actually is. And he has a really nice way of breaking it down, which is to say in the olden days, the slavery that, you know, Americans are used to thinking about in our horrific past, that was legal slavery. You could have a piece of paper that said you owned a human being. Whereas today there's no legal piece of paper. It's really all about coercion and control and how, you know, how people are benefiting. but also that his book is called Disposable People. Also the idea that, you know, if you, if in the legal slavery, people actually cared that the, they're, you know, the person working for them could continue working. In the disposable version of today, people are sort of chewed up and spat out so quickly. you know, you know, there's so many people to, so many people being exploited at any given time.

BERT LOCKWOOD 39:58

the other thing I wanted to mention, the, Katmandu, you mentioned something and, and, I don't know if you know Iain Guest, who's a former British journalist that he's in Washington, D. C. uh, uh, uh, emailed me that they're doing a course in, at the University of Kathmandu on of transitional justice this summer for international students. But the fellow who's teaching father was, uh, disappeared, during the, the conflict. But, um, Dr. Ram

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 40:29

is,

BERT LOCKWOOD 40:30

Bhandari

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 40:30

um,

BERT LOCKWOOD 40:31

is the guy's name.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 40:33

and Iain Guest is the executive director, of the advocacy project, which helps marginalized communities to tell their stories, claim their rights and produce social change. And, you and Iain have a very similar philosophy of speaking to survivors and victims and helping create change through sustainable models and getting them the resources in their homes, in their local villages, in their cities to really see that change. so we'll have to connect you with Iain Guest

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 41:03

Um,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 41:03

because throughout this conversation, I've been thinking about him as well. And the Advocacy

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 41:08

And,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 41:08

Project. so going into the devastating trafficking in the United States, we've also seen a drastic impact of United States AIDS cut through the Trump administration. they, you know, have announced massive cuts to our global development funding. It's estimated 60 billion loss in foreign aid worldwide. Um, to quote you, Xanthe, you've called this a moment of reckoning for the anti-slavery movement. Could you speak about the impact this has, uh, particularly for victims?

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 41:46

Yeah, again, this goes back to vulnerability. So if there's cuts in nutrition programs and agriculture programs, of course, it's going to have an impact on communities. And when communities are desperate, that that is when. Girls get shipped off, you know, that, that's, that's when things really deteriorate. So, of course, these things are connected. Um, I will say, Freedom Fund does have support from U. S. government. we've had really important, meaningful support for some of our programs in different countries. And in particular, I think

one of the things that's been important has been the support that we've had to help children who are in the worst forms of child domestic labor. and we have continuing support for that work in Ethiopia, for example. Um, and one of the reasons why government funding is important, i just, it functions very differently from other forms of support. It has allowed us to do large scale baseline research to understand the scale of child domestic work. And we will be able to do end line research as well. Child domestic work, just to break down for a second. S, some folks have traveled in parts of the world where this happens and some haven't. But in Ethiopia, as it was explained to me, is very prevalent that, for instance, if you live in Addis Ababa, you may have a child working in your home. That child may be a distant relative from a rural area. Maybe the child was orphaned or maybe the family just can't afford education. And so there's an agreement. And so there's an agreement. Let's send this kid to the city where this family has more money. The kid will work, but also they will go to school. That would be the agreement. Many times what's happening is the kid is not going to school and they are eating dinner by themselves. They're the only one in that household doing any, you know, doi, doing the chores. They, they don't, they're not getting helped out by anyone else. And they're extremely vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. So this, I will say I worked in girls education for, for a decade and I have seen rural kids working in people's homes. But I wasn't aware of such a massive practice, which is contributing a huge number of the total global child labor numbers. This is a really, really substantial number of kids. So for us to have that kind of support that's going to allow us to do the research that will, you know, then, so we can go out to lots of other folks and funders and say, this is what this looks like on the ground. These are the interventions that work. And here's how we can think about it across different contexts. Really, really important, especially because this is very culturally complex. you know, there, there are forms of this, which are okay, you know, children over 15, with limited hours who are getting education and they're getting an opportunity and there are forms that are really not okay. And it's so, it's very difficult to get all the stakeholders involved, figure out what that right red line is and empower communities to report when kids are So, um, that's a long way around, Meredith, I think coming back to the new era that we're in, right? That was your question. This is sort of a moment of reckoning. we have to do things differently. You know, we don't know, are we, is this pendulum going to swing back or not? We don't know. But, you know, USAID has been dismantled. We're in a new era. And at the moment anyway, there is much less money. It's not just the U. S. government. It's the British government. It's, it's a range of European governments that are pulling back, sometimes because they're putting more money towards military, sometimes just because everyone is kind of pulling back into their own domestic affairs. And so what I would say is, if that's going to be the case, if there's going to be less of this institutional kind of money out there, then it's got to work harder at, which means cutting out the middleman, right? We got to get the money to the front lines. And the best way to do that efficiently is to do, you know, t light touch that we need to do, but then just listen to the people near the problem, the people whose community it is. They're the ones who are going to be there. You know, these, these interventions take time. Like in Ethiopia, one of the things they told me, partners work with a watch group of mothers who watch for these kids getting abused and they will go to the house of the, I'm saying employer with air quotes because a child should not be employed, but they'll go to the employer. They'll go 15 times before they get the person to open the door and talk to them and let them raise awareness

about why this is wrong. They will knock on that door 15 times. You know, what person from some other country, some other place far away is going to do that? That's the work of a person in the community who is impacted and cares and understands and will be there forever. They going to be there forever watching. So that's what freedom fund is about. and I think that approach is getting validated in different ways. even as this kind of larger bilateral aid is pulling back.

BERT LOCKWOOD 46:50

That's, that's powerful, Xanthe

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 46:53

You know, Xanthe, I um, time working in Calcutta. I worked with an incredible NGO called the Women Interlinked Foundation, which was Bengali women-led to help young girls and women who are survivors of trafficking, child marriage, gender discrimination, and poverty. And we worked on different training programs, um, because they had shelter homes throughout West Bengal. and many of the young girls and women were rescued throughout. India, but had settled in West Bengal through this organization. And I was over there helping with training programs from fashion to jewelry to textiles and more so that we could provide socioeconomic opportunities to break the cycle, for these women so that they could gain independence, financial literacy, and economic Um, and for me, this was just a personal experience. we had a British volunteer come And I went to visit to kind of give her an overview of the training she was going to be because we trained some of the first ever female goldsmiths in Calcutta. so through I went over to her little B&B. And it was run by an older Bengali woman who must have been between 75 and 80 years old and just was going to go have tea and meet with this British volunteer. And I was taken back because when I sat down, I noticed a very small child in the corner. A young boy could not have been older than 14. And he was there to serve us biscuits and tea, did not speak, was incredibly timid and kept his eyes on the ground. And I had never experienced that before. I was not sure what was going on. And I was secretly hoping it was a grandchild, but I knew it wasn't by the energy and the way she spoke to him. I was very, very uncomfortable. when I I had asked the when they came to our studio, if she could explain what was going on in that home. And she didn't really know. So she went home that evening and spoke to the woman owned the B&B in the house and said that that was her houseboy. And he lived on the roof under a blue tarp. And he was around 13 or 14 years old. And he was her servant. And he has stuck with me to this day. you know, it was also something for me as a foreigner in that country and as a Western woman, I wanted to immediately provide money. I wanted to get him out of that situation. But my hands were tied because I couldn't go force that on this woman in her almost 80s. But I did speak to the local nonprofit. And just like you said, their women knocked on her door and tried to explain to her that that is not okay. But due to generational and the caste system, she did not understand. And they continue to work with her. And then I was educated that he was probably one of hundreds of of servant children. So, to me, this is a very personal mission of the work you do. And I'm so grateful for the Freedom Fund that they are working with local organizations. Because for me, getting to work with local organizations in India taught me firsthand about what they really needed and how Western countries and organizations could truly help. And if I could take our conversation

from India into Bangladesh. Because just this the Freedom is in The Guardian in a great article with great news to share. The article is called Invisible Children Born in the Brothels of Bangladesh Finally Get Birth Certificates. And for me, who volunteered in Calcutta in the Red Light District. that was my first glimpse of what an apocalyptic situation looks like. I would love if you could share with our listeners about the work the Freedom Fund has done in Bangladesh, particularly in local along with local organizations you partner with.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 50:47

Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing that, Meredith. these experiences certainly leave their mark on us. is a good news story. I mean, our team is really proud of the work of our partner in helping kids in Bangladesh to be registered with birth certificates. So back up with this story in Bangladesh, which was so beautifully done by the reporter, Kaamil, yeah. In Bangladesh, we work with partners who are protecting children from getting pulled into sex trafficking. there are brothels that are almost like small cities, you know, where there's just a huge amount of, if you want to call it sex work or whatever you want to call it, you know, some, some, in some cases, uh, there's reasons not to call it sex work, you know, depending on your view of whether or sex can be considered work. this is a really widespread practice. the area where we focus is on the children and because, kids are growing up to mothers who about half of the time have been forced into this. And the, many times have been forced into it as children themselves. Regardless of they become embedded, you know, this becomes their home. Uh, they have children of course, because I mean, they, they are having sex and I think unlikely that they're provided with condoms. And so, they get pregnant, they have children, the children report that they're hiding under the bed during, you know, during when, when, uh, men are coming. um, so these children themselves become extremely vulnerable to being groomed at a very, very young age, as young as even, and um, subject to, um, being shot up with animal steroids to look older and just all manner of horrible things to, groom and kind of bring these children into the trade. One of the factors that Freedom Fund learned about that creates extreme vulnerability is that the children were not allowed to get birth certificates because the law was interpreted as requiring the husband's name and signature. And so, Freedom Fund together with partners interrogated the law and found that there is in fact, a, um, alternative route, especially if that child is living in one of these brothel areas. And so for the first time they started to use that alternative route to get children registered. And because of the way we work, we bring our partners together. So once one partner started to register children, all of the partners started to do it. And now 700 children have been registered. This is important because without registration, they can't go to school. They can't get access to any kind of nutritional supplements. They can't get health. They can't get anything. And in addition to that, it makes it very easy for traffickers to just say, of course, this kid is 18. Well, there, you know, t no documentation to say otherwise. And so puts some extraordinary risk and vulnerability. So this, as you can imagine, some interventions require campaigns. This required no convincing the mothers. Of course, they want their children to have this most basic right. So, uh, this was really a wonderful successful success in Bangladesh. Um, we've worked with the government to make this happen. We expect to be able to really snowball, and move forward. Um, sometimes progress is slow and then sometimes you're able to kind of kick a door open. And that's really what that was about. our awareness at Freedom Fund of the

importance of birth registration was very much helped by survivors. So Freedom Fund does an enormous of research. We've done hundreds of research study, at least 200 different studies. And we did do a study in which we, funded, a group to look into issues that create vulnerability to trafficking. And they centered survivors and listened to survivors as they set the research agenda. And this was on the research agenda, birth registration, not just in Bangladesh, but in different contexts. So that's helped us to have our eyes open to this issue.

BERT LOCKWOOD 54:40

Xanthe, this has been absolutely Reader's Digest, h this feature that they The Most Unforgettable Character I Ever Met. I'd be curious, uh, if they were to approach you to write that, whom you would choose and, and, and why?

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 54:59

What a great question. I, without doubt, the most important person in my professional and, you know, my mission, of my is Anesi, who's the girl that I wrote about for the Christian Science Monitor. she shared her story with me and that motivated these readers to want to help. And ultimately thousands of people got involved in this mission. and she continued to share her I think what, what's interesting is that it was not actually a success story over the year that we tried to help her because we were so early in and we didn't know how to have a really robust, effective intervention. And so after a year, she dropped out and she took up a marriage proposal. So it was really a lesson for me. You know, I was so grateful she shared her story. And also I really learned the lesson of how robust interventions need to be and that they need to be locally led with local support. to be effective. Um, I did go back and see her. So it had been 20 years, but I went back and found her in her village to kind of hear how her life had gone, and met other girls who were in our first set, who had been successful, you know, and how their lives had changed, as a result of that Um, it was meaningful and also honestly painful to meet with her and to know that that was someone who, you know, the best intentions had not, we had, had not been able to do everything we wanted to do. but it was also meaningful to go back and to listen to each other's stories 20 years later and just kind of, you know, meet as people, um, and see, you know, how, how life takes us forward.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 56:35

That is so wonderful. and, Xant before we do our closing reflections, one more topic to me, that is one of my utmost passions co-hosting with my dad, a podcast on human rights. I continuously will advocate that you cannot have human rights without environmental rights. Um, and one thing I deeply respect of the freedom fund is the work your team does at the intersection of climate justice and modern slavery. modern slavery. And we could have an entire podcast dedicated to the work you're doing for climate justice from artisanal mining to the devastation of timber and cattle industry in Brazil. I do want to discuss a little bit. were you also wrote incredible article last September, you got published in Time. And that article's title called Child Labor is Helping the Clean Energy Transition. And I think this is a really important topic to share with our international audience, because a lot of us who want to be change makers and we educate ourselves on how to protect people and planet. Okay. So we're going to go and invest in electrical vehicles, we are all for solar panels and wind turbines and, you

know, maybe we slow down buying as many cell phones. We don't need the latest and I'm a techie person. So I like digits and gadgets and all of but I'm going to quote a really great part of your article, that helps us start a little bit of educational topic for our listeners is to quote "In crude minds across central and sub-Saharan Africa, hands that should hold pencils and school books, hammer rocks and search for the minerals that power electric vehicle batteries, solar cells and wind turbines". And I just want to repeat that "hands that should hold pencils and school books, hammer rocks and search for minerals". That was so unbelievably powerful and beautifully written Xanthe that I think can really allow people an inside look into what these children in mines are going through from slavery and labor when they should be in school and they should be learning and growing and having fun and they should be children. And I was hoping we could talk a little bit the estimated 40,000 children who are currently working in cobalt mining in the DRC. There's also an estimated 10,000 children mining mica in Madagascar and globally more than 1 million children working in mine and quarries. As we transition more and more to clean energy, how can we ensure we're not building a sustainable future on the backs of children in their labor?

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 59:23

There are different things that need to happen. And the thrust of that article had to Listening to women and women's empowerment. And in there, I talked to some women activists and listened to some of their solutions, including that... Women themselves need to be given decent work. So women face a lot of sexual discrimination, wage discrimination, um, being kept out of the best jobs and not having safe environments in which to work. And when women have good and decent work, they are much more likely to keep their kids in school. They don't want their kids in the mine. They want their kids in school. So that's one piece you know, voicing up for. Good policies for women, uh, internationally is a really important piece of it. Another piece that's just a bit broader than that is just in general, the work for decent wages for all workers. And I quoted the executive director of one of our grantees from Freedom Fund RAID, which is a corporate watchdog. And in the DRC, what they're doing is actually suing companies with the DRC's own laws to force those companies to provide decent wage and to meet the basic expectations for workers. And one of the things that was explained to me that was interesting is people believe that child labor is just happening only in these artisanal mines. And these artisanal mines are not providing the big multinational companies so that this is a problem that's not feeding into our technology. This is a problem off on the side. But what was explained to me is that the minerals are actually in the processing. They're, they're blended together. You can't really separate, you know, you can't say for sure that this supply chain is clean and this one isn't clean. When in the DRC, we know that children are working in some of the mines. And so their response is really to work decent conditions for all adults. Because if we have that, then the children are going to be better taken care of and we can get those kids out of mines. So I think that's really important. You know, these corporate watchdogs, they get pittance when it comes to international funding. Bert, you know this, the amount of money that's out there for human rights on the ground, n, is tiny I just spoke a researcher at SwedeWatch. They publish a report about this. It talks about the ESG, the environmental, social, and governance marketplace. you know, those organizations that do the ESG analysis for companies. The value, the financial value of that marketplace is 80 times the

size of the amount of money that's going to the frontline human rights research and investigative groups that would deal with these issues of corporate malfeasance and supply chains. Where ESG is a voluntary mechanism. It doesn't actually have teeth. These human rights groups and journalists who expose wrongdoing, it actually has teeth. So, for us who are involved in supporting international organizations, those supporting those groups goes a long way. They're doing a lot with very little money. And as you know, from the journalism side, I can say a little bit of money to a nonprofit journalism outfit goes a very long way. One investigation, one investigation by a dogged reporter can lead to the kind of name and shame that can cause companies to change their behavior. there's there's a lot. There's also development in the legal framework, particularly in Europe and in the UK, to move from a kind of voluntary framework to one where there's actually real teeth and responsive. Companies actually are responsible. If there is forced labor in their supply chain, they can't just say, oh, I just didn't know they're actually responsible. And there are consequences for that. So we're moving into a future in some of some countries it's going to be harder for companies to get around this. there's a lot we can do. Being aware is important. It's very difficult as a consumer to sort of pick around. But, know, raising a voice, trying to make better decisions, consume less. And those are all really good steps.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:03:26

Xanthe, to your prior a number of years ago, I was at a meeting at the University of Maryland. There 20 human rights experts. And the fellow that convened the meeting said he was going to go around the table. And he wanted us each to address if there was one thing we could do to improve human rights, what would it be? And I was about two thirds of the way around the table when it got to me. I I you may think that this an absurd response, but deadly serious message behind it. If there was one thing that I could I would one year of the Pentagon's budget to Mary Robinson, who was at the table. at the time she the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and I could guarantee that we'd have a vast improvement of human rights, but there is so little funding that goes toward, you know, I think they, I mean it, in some ways it's, it's ridiculous that when we look at what are the most effective ways internationally, people usually point to special rapporteurs, and who are special rapporteurs? Well, they're typically like me, I mean they're full-time law professors who do this on top of their full-time job, I mean, and, and, and don't get paid for it and, you know, that's, that's what we point to as one of our most effective ways of dealing, uh, with it, so.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 1:05:00

Yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:05:01

well I think globally we need more women in power, par in leading countries and peace negotiations, um, one part of your research, Xanthe, with your colleagues at the Freedom Fund, as well as local organizations, and updated statistics that I was not as aware of, is in Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and for many of our listeners who I am sure know of issues in the cocoa industry, that Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Produce 60% of the world's cocoa And. that women work 30% more hours, but women only own 25% of the farm. So they only have a

quarter of ownership of their own land, of being landowners, I should say. And the extreme inequality gap in the workforce there. one I continually am inspired by your work. And again, the Freedom Fund is corporate accountability. And I think the more we can empower everyday people with these kinds of statistics and to break it down in real numbers for them. an example here is that when we can empower these local women in Ghana and the Ivory Coast and provide them income control and land ownership. What women do is they invest back in themselves, their community, and most importantly, their children. So that their children can stay in school and their children do not have to be laborers and part of the modern day slavery landscape. and before we go to our final question, if there's anything, Xanthe, you want to add from corporate accountability, please let me know.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 1:06:52

No, I, I was moving with you towards gender equity aspect. I mean, there's lots of evidence that when we can work on people being, you know, societies being more fair, women having their rights, all indicators improve. And so, you know, children are better cared for, they get better nutrition, more likely to live in stable societies. It's a better indicator of, um, democratic governance. Um, so certainly that's very, very near to my heart. And I think when we're talking about levers for change, levers for community organizing, you know, um, supporting women, hearing their voices, interventions that are supporting women and girls, not to the, obviously not to the exclusion of all human rights. but certainly focusing on those marginalized populations is, , where we need to concentrate our scarce resources.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:07:43

Absolutely. And I know that the Freedom Fund, had great press and media attention because the very, very generous MacKenzie Scott provided, I believe the total is 95 million donation. and then please correct me if I'm wrong, but having firsthand experience in international development aid and humanitarian aid, that number to some of us might sound really big. And it's like, wow, you got 95 million, but to me, that's a drop in the bucket when you're talking about all the international hotspots you're working in and Um, and I think it's an important place to note is how can everyday people support your work and the Freedom Fund who feel compelled to get involved and take

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 1:08:27

action? Thank you so much. Yeah, you're right that we are stewarding that money well, and it will get spent on the front lines, and with 50 million people facing these conditions, um, we need to do much, much more, um, and the rest of the field is also still really suffering. So, some of our partners, we were the only ones to be able to continue giving them funding. Their other funding partners dropped away, um, amid aid cuts. um, and I'm proud to be a part of an organization that made a quick decision to do it. To actually spend the MacKenzie money. So, uh, it depends on the organization. For some, it's right to put that in an endowment for stability over time. but we quickly that we would spend it down over about nine or 10 years. And the, the reason being that we felt like she gave it to us in trust. She gave it to get to the front lines. We should push it out. And, you know, she didn't give it to us to hold on to forever. We should give it to us to push it. So that's, that's what we're doing. And, um, when you to

spend it out over nine years, yes, our, our budget increases, but it's, it doesn't increase in the dramatic way that you would think when you, when you look at the top line number. Um, so, you know, we, we will be able to open up work, uh, in one new hotspot, which I will hopefully get cleared next week. Our folks have been trying to figure out that we had found funding for. And we will be able to give more flexible funding, higher levels of flexible, unrestricted funding to more of our partners. We have over 190 frontline partners around the world and we're constantly finding ways to make it easier for them so that the money is, you know, less, less controlled so that they have more freedom. So that's all in the spirit of Mackenzie Scott. for everyday folks, I would say there's two things. Two things. One, of course, we run on philanthropic contributions. All of that information is on our webpage at freedomfund.org. so we're very grateful for those gifts that make our work possible. And we endeavor to get that money to the field as efficiently as possible. Um, but the other thing is raising awareness. So that's just, uh, this is the 100 year anniversary of the anti-slavery convention, bringing it back to Meredith's note at the top of the call. Um, really a lot of people still just don't know the basics of this issue. So every time that you follow us on LinkedIn or on Instagram and you share that message out, you are really helping to propel forward a movement that should have reached every ear in the world. I mean, everyone should be aware of these issues and be a part of the solution. So those are, you know, that's a simple but powerful way to help us move forward.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:11:08

Xanthe, if you could, send to me an, an address, I want to send you a human rights care package.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 1:11:15

Thank you.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:11:16

let me know where you would like it, uh, sent, but this has been absolutely wonderful. Your.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 1:11:21

Thank you. So, so are both of you. thank you. And , uh, I'm certainly inspired by, by my parents and Meredith. I can see how you're inspired by Bert. So it's really wonderful to be with you both here and, be a part of this intergenerational conversation.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:36

you are a hero of the podcast and our door is always open. would love to have you back and, you know, any of your colleagues and friends, you know, you mentioned Evelyn, anybody who we could also share our platform, our spotlight on them. people. the more we can be storytellers and compassionate, I think we can bring people back together. And I think we need that. So we are here to support your efforts, your and thank you so much for being so generous with your time.

DR XANTHE SCHARFF 1:12:03

Thank you so much.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:12:09

Hey, listeners, we hope you enjoyed our conversation with Dr. Xanthe Scharff just as much as we did. From her journalism on the Syrian border to her work transforming how we fight modern-day slavery, she demonstrates that real change happens when we truly listen to the people on the front lines. The Freedom Fund's model of trusting survivor-led organizations isn't just changing individual lives, it's transforming entire systems. We are so grateful to Xanthe for sharing her wisdom and for the incredible work the Freedom Fund team is doing to end slavery in our lifetime. To learn more about their work and to support frontline organizations, please visit freedomfund.org, which is also linked in our show notes. If you or someone you know needs help, the National Human Trafficking Hotline is available 24-7. You can call 1-888-373-7888 or text 233-733 or visit humantraffickinghotline.org. Again, that is also available in our show notes.

As always, thank you for listening to our podcast, Human Rights, Conversations Across Generations. Please rate, review, and leave us a comment. And make sure to share our episode today with Dr. Xanthe Scharff. If there are any topics or guests you would like to see on our show, you can email us at humanrightsconversations@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you. Until next time.