

HALF THE SKY

YOUTH DISCUSSION GUIDE



This International Women's Day,
celebrate the movement that's
changing the world one woman at a
time with songs and stories inspired
by the best-selling book HALF THE SKY

supported by:



Introduction for Facilitators

This guide is designed to help you facilitate a youth group discussion around the issues presented in CARE's 2010 International Women's Day event, HALF THE SKY. During the event, you watched "Woinshet," a short film that depicts the experience of a young Ethiopian girl who, with her father's support, opposes the harmful tradition of bride abduction. Instead of marrying a man who kidnapped and assaulted her, and later tried to force her to marry him, Woinshet brings charges against him. What ensues is an eight-year-long effort to find justice for herself and to educate women and men about the harmful effects of the practice of bride abduction and violence against women and girls.

Your group discussion after watching HALF THE SKY will help participants understand issues related to violence against women and girls, particularly bride abduction, how the empowerment of girls and women can lead to positive changes in a country's laws, and the grassroots effort that is required to breakdown harmful cultural practices. It will also spark conversation about how your youth group can join a worldwide movement to stop violence against women and girls in the fight against global poverty.

Please note that the film, and this discussion guide, deal with sensitive issues - gender-based violence, child marriage and bride abduction - that may not be appropriate for young people under the age of 13. Given the serious nature of the topics addressed, you may want to schedule extra time to answer participants' questions and allow them to explore these issues.

Setting the Stage

After you have watched HALF THE SKY you can set the stage for a group discussion by:

- Giving a brief introduction to CARE:

CARE (www.care.org) is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. Recognizing that women and girls suffer disproportionately from poverty, CARE places special emphasis on empowering them to create permanent social change. Women are at the heart of CARE's community-based efforts to improve basic education, expand economic opportunity, increase access to health services and protect natural resources in more than 60 countries around the world.

- Showing participants Ethiopia's location on a world map. Ask your group what they know about Ethiopia. Here are a few facts that provide an overview of the country:

- Ethiopia is a land-locked country in the Horn of Africa, bordered by Sudan to the west, Djibouti and Eritrea to the north, Somalia to the east, and Kenya to the south.
- Unlike other African countries, Ethiopia was never colonized by a foreign power.
- Christians make up 62.8% of the country's population (43.5% Ethiopian Orthodox, 19.3% other denominations), Muslims 33.9%, practitioners of traditional faiths 2.6%, and other religions 0.6%
- The birth rate is the 7th highest in the world with an average of 6 children born per woman.
- Life expectancy is 55.4 years.
- The country ranks 11th in the world for deaths from AIDS.
- The literacy rate is 42.7% overall; 50.3% for males, 35.1% for females.
- There is a high poverty rate; 78% live on less than \$2 a day.
- Of a population exceeding 77 million, 85% are employed in agriculture, but this sector suffers from frequent drought and poor cultivation practices.



For facts about the country visit:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html>

Film Summary

Woinshet is based on a chapter of the book *Half the Sky*, by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. This half-hour film combines a 14-minute dramatized film recounting Woinshet's struggles and triumphs, with a 10-minute documentary that introduces the audience to gender-based violence, child marriage and bride abduction. The short film traces Woinshet's road to empowerment and offers solutions and information about these issues.

Woinshet tells the story of a brave teenager from a small village in Ethiopia who, along with her family, fought back against a brutal local tradition of abduction and forced marriage.

Woinshet Zebene was just 13 when four men hacked down the front door of her home, kidnapped her and took her to a nearby shack where she was sexually assaulted. The leader of the group was arrested and then promptly set free – only to attack Woinshet again. He tried to force her to marry him, since at the time Ethiopian law stated that a man could not be prosecuted for assaulting a woman or girl whom he later married. Instead of giving in to such a marriage, Woinshet took a huge risk and vowed to prosecute her abductor. Although her case has not yet been settled, Woinshet's extraordinary courage and resolve is an inspiration to human rights advocates in Ethiopia and around the world, and a testament to the power of young people to change their societies.

Co-directed by Marisa Tomei and Lisa Leone, *Woinshet* is an adaptation of this brave and inspirational story.

Discussing the Issues

The following discussion questions are divided into issue areas based on the film, so you may choose the topics on which you want to focus. Each issue area includes information to help you guide the discussion, followed by suggested questions. Additional information about the issues addressed in the film may be found by visiting www.care.org.

One Woman Can Make a Difference

In many parts of the world today, women and girls are the victims of discrimination and oppression, often facing daily challenges that are the result of poverty, conflict, and disease. To most people these conditions seem overwhelming, but there are times when an individual rises to the challenge and refuses to be defeated by her circumstances. Woinshet was such an individual. Taking on a system that harmed women and girls in her country, she showed a steadfastness and courage that was remarkable for any woman, let alone a young girl in her teens. With the support of her family and from women around the world, Woinshet demonstrated that one person – one woman – one girl – can open the door to change. Her actions serve as an example to other women and girls about the important role they can play in fighting injustice and extreme poverty in countries around the world.

- What was the most valuable thing you learned from watching the film?
- How would you convey the message of the film to family, friends and peers?
- Why was it important for women and girls around the world to raise their voices on behalf of Woinshet?
- How do you feel our group can make a difference in the lives of women and girls around the world?

Bride Abduction and Gender-Based Violence

Bride abduction has been a practice throughout history, and it is still found in a number of cultures around the world. In parts of Ethiopia, despite new laws that outlaw the practice, the custom still persists that a man may kidnap a girl or woman and hide her. An abducted girl is then regarded as “tainted” because of the possibility that she was raped during her abduction. To avoid the shame associated with the violation, her parents sometimes consent to a marriage with her kidnapper.

On the other hand, some parents who fear that their daughters’ may be abducted on the way to school may keep their daughters at home, preventing them from getting an education. In addition to bride abduction, Ethiopian women and girls experience other forms of gender-based violence. According to a report by the UN Population Fund (2005), 59 percent of Ethiopian women have suffered sexual violence. (Sources: <http://www.peacewomen.org/news/Ethiopia/Oct05/domesticviolence.html> and <http://dalnews.dal.ca/2008/06/04/violence.html>)

- Did you find it surprising that a community could pressure a young girl like Woinshet to marry her abductor? What changes in attitude/behavior have to take place in a society to stop the practice of bride abduction?
- When the village elders say to Woinshet’s father, “Don’t embarrass us,” what do they mean? Why would they be embarrassed by a father supporting his daughter?
- How would you describe the atmosphere in the scene where Woinshet, her father and brother pass through the village in the cart, on their way to meet with the judge? Why is it important that she is accompanied by the male members of her family?

- How would you characterize the attitude of the judge who questions Woinshet and Aberew, her abductor? Is Woinshet treated fairly?

Poverty and Child Marriage

Although bride abduction is rooted in long-standing cultural traditions, poverty helps to fuel the practice. At the same time, the practice then serves to ensure another generation of poverty by forcing young girls into early marriage.

In Ethiopia, as in many other parts of the developing world, it is customary for the groom to pay a “bride price” to the family of his prospective wife. It can take the form of money, property or other types of wealth, such as livestock. A family hoping for the income from the marriage of a daughter may set a high bride price, especially if she is young, as younger girls are considered more “valuable.” A man who wants a wife but cannot afford the bride price might resort to kidnapping to avoid paying. In some cases, the girl’s parents may even agree to the abduction of a daughter whose care they can no longer afford. Some parents feel that they are helping their daughters secure a better life by marrying them at young ages. In addition, feeding, clothing, and educating girls is perceived as a financial burden for some poor families in developing countries.

Under the practice of bride abduction, girls as young as ten or eleven have been kidnapped. In a forced marriage, young girls may suffer physical consequences of early sexual activity and pregnancy, and they also face a high risk of abuse and psychological trauma. Forced marriage often spells the end of girls’ educational hopes and undermines their ability to contribute to the economy and create better lives for their children.

Since 1948, the United Nations and other international agencies have attempted to stop child marriage, but this ancient custom still persists in many parts of the world. Child marriage has a devastating impact on both the girls who are married and their communities. Programs are needed to educate and empower women and girls, but ending child marriage requires the consent of all those involved, including fathers, the larger community, and religious and tribal leaders.

- How does child marriage perpetuate the cycle of poverty in a society?
- What challenges might poor parents in developing countries face in keeping their daughters in school and unmarried until they are adults?
- When girls are prevented from going to school, how does that impact their future families and overall society? Is that true here in the U.S. as well as in other countries?
- If you could talk to Woinshet about her decision to stay in school and not marry her abductor, what would you say? If you could talk to her father about his actions to support his daughter, what would you say?

Education for Change

In 2001, the Ethiopian government enacted a new Family Code which held that the minimum age for marriage in Ethiopia is 18 years. Early marriage is nevertheless common, especially in rural areas, and many girls, sometimes as young as 10 to 13, still are abducted by kidnappers even though this practice is a criminal offense.

In any country, in order to make real progress, in addition to changing the law, community values and attitudes that support harmful cultural traditions must be changed. The elimination of harmful traditional practices, such as bride abduction, requires an effort to change social attitudes and values that fuel such practices.

The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) continues to push for enforcement of the new law and to lobby for additional changes in the legal code. Other initiatives must focus on education and awareness raising as well as community mobilization and action as a way of empowering women and girls. These educational efforts must help villagers - both women and men - understand the detrimental effects of bride abduction and other forms of violence against women and girls.

Education is key to making cultural change, starting with the education of girls. Benefits of girls' education include:

- Lower infant, child and maternal mortality rates
- Delayed marriage and better parenting skills
- Healthier, better educated children
- Improved literacy and math skills leading to greater economic opportunities for women
- Protection of girls from HIV/ AIDS, abuse and exploitation
- More skills and knowledge that can enhance girls' self esteem

Woinshet herself serves as an excellent example of the benefits of girls being educated, as she continues to put her knowledge and skills to work to help other women and girls.

- How did one girl, Woinshet, taking a stand in her community help lead to changes in Ethiopia's legal code? Can you give another example of how one young person can take action to change their society for the better?
- Why is changing the law sometimes not enough to stop practices like bride abduction and child marriage?
- In addition to girls' education, what changes could be brought about by improving education for all young people in Ethiopia?
- In Ethiopian society, what do boys and men have to gain from stopping bride abduction, child marriage and violence against women and girls?

Action Steps

Your group can take this discussion a step further and join the movement to fight violence against women and global poverty by empowering women and girls. Here are a few suggestions for how to take action:

1. Download CARE's Student Action Toolkit and learn how other young people are fighting global poverty at www.care.org/student.
2. Join the CARE Action Network (<http://can.care.org>) and receive regular updates on ways to take immediate action when it is needed most. Learn how you can make a difference by encouraging your members of Congress to do more to fight violence against women.
3. Contact your Congressional representatives and urge them to pass the International Violence against Women Act (IVAWA), which was recently reintroduced in the House and Senate and has bi-partisan support (visit www.care.org to learn more.)
4. Donate to CARE's programs that empower women and girls by visiting www.care.org; 90 percent of CARE's resources go directly to poverty-fighting programs.
5. Spread the word about what you've learned. Discuss these action steps and the issues raised in the film at future group meetings and with friends, family members and fellow students. Write a letter to the editor of your local paper about the importance of fighting gender violence.
6. Take the pledge to get involved in global girls' issues at www.thepowerofgirls.com. The Power of Girls is a partnership between CARE and Girl Scouts of the USA that is empowering girls to think globally, connect with other girls around the world and take action to make the world a better place for girls everywhere!
7. Speak up! Does your group have ideas for how to further share the message of *Woinshet*? We want to hear about them. E-mail any thoughts, feedback or ideas to groups@care.org.

The contents of this discussion guide were authored by CARE and the Community Engagement team at ITVS - The Independent Television Service.

CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty, with a special focus on working with poor women because, equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to help whole families and entire communities escape poverty. Women are at the heart of CARE's community-based efforts to improve basic education, prevent the spread of HIV, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity and protect natural resources. www.care.org

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E-mail groups@care.org with any questions or for more information on ways to get involved.

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