

Starting the Discussion

Around the world, a total of 1.4 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day. An additional 1.5 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. Combined, this is almost half of the world's population. The burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women and girls – 60 percent of the poorest people on the planet are female. But when women and girls have the opportunity, they can become powerful catalysts for change in their societies.

“Half the Sky” helps us recognize that poverty is not inevitable. It is the product of decisions, practices and beliefs that prevent people, especially women and girls, from reaching their full potential. By working together to empower women and girls, we can change the world and help end poverty.

- How would you convey the message of the book *“Half the Sky”* to family, friends and colleagues?
- What was the most valuable thing you learned from reading the book?
- In *“Half the Sky”* we meet women and girls from around the world. How are their situations similar, despite the unique challenges that they face?
- Of all the women and girls featured in the book, was there one whose story impacted you the most? Why?
- How was that person's life affected by gender discrimination? How was her life affected by the widespread poverty in her country?
- How is gender discrimination in the United States different from the discrimination women and girls face in *“Half the Sky”*? How is it similar?
- How is poverty in the countries featured in *“Half the Sky”* different from poverty in the United States? How is it similar?
- How are women and girls disproportionately impacted by poverty?
- Why is the empowerment of women and girls an effective way to address global poverty?
- Are there women in your life who exemplify women's empowerment? What about them makes them powerful?

Goretti's Story & Women's Economic Empowerment

Providing economic opportunity for women is key to the fight against global poverty. In *“Half the Sky,”* Goretti's story in chapter 11 demonstrates how empowered women can overcome societal barriers and help lift their families and communities out of poverty. When women organize and participate in the economy, their household incomes increase, allowing them to invest in their families' health care, nutrition and education, and helping to provide a foundation for social change.

CARE has launched the Access Africa signature program (www.care.org/accessafrica) to help 150 million people in 39 sub-Saharan African countries break the vicious cycle of poverty. A cornerstone of Access Africa is the village savings and loan methodology, which CARE pioneered in the early '90s. In village savings and loan associations, like the one that Goretti takes part in, women save a small sum each week. From this fund, members take out loans to invest in small-scale entrepreneurial activities. They then repay the loans with interest, growing the fund and enabling others to access credit.

- How does the CARE village savings and loan program benefit Goretti? Are there benefits beyond the new income that she earns?
- How does earning and “handling” money change Goretti’s social status?
- Does coming together as a group help the women support themselves and their families better than they could as individuals? How? In what ways do the members act to empower each other?
- Why is it important that the members each contribute their savings to the pooled fund?
- How do Goretti’s choices about how to spend family income differ from her husband’s?
- What personal risk does Goretti take in joining the village savings and loan association?
- Why is it important to educate men about the benefits of women’s economic empowerment?
- What challenges and opportunities do women in business in the United States share in common with Goretti’s group?
- What qualities does Goretti possess that make her a potential leader in her community?
- How can our group apply what we have learned from Goretti’s story and all the stories in *“Half the Sky”* to make a difference in the lives of women and girls around the world?

Take Action

Encourage your group to take this discussion a step further and join the movement to fight global poverty by empowering women and girls. Here are a few suggestions for how your group can take action *now* to help women like Goretti:

1. **Speak out** in support of women’s microfinance programs: Write your members of Congress and ask them to support the Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act, S.1425 (www.care.org/GROWTH).
2. **Join** the CARE Action Network at www.can.care.org. You will receive regular updates on ways to take immediate action when it is needed most.
3. **Spread** the word about what you’ve learned. Discuss the issues raised in *“Half the Sky”* at future group meetings and with friends, family members and colleagues. Visit CARE’s Web site for other book recommendations (www.care.org/bookclubs) and ways your group can stay involved (www.care.org/getinvolved).
4. **Donate** to CARE’s programs as a group: 90 percent of CARE’s resources go directly to poverty-fighting programs.