

Global Interfaith Partnership

**Indianapolis, Indiana & Chulaimbo,
Kenya**



Meeting the needs of vulnerable children in western Kenya

June 2011

www.globalinterfaithpartnership.com

In This Issue

[Growing up female in
Chulaimbo](#)

[Global Interfaith Sisters meet
in Chulaimbo](#)

["My major cry is poverty..."](#)

[A student's thanks](#)

[How you can help](#)

Quick Links

[About Us](#)

[Kenya Carnival](#)

Global Interfaith Partnership

Indiana Partners

[Beth El Zedeck](#)

[Faith Missionary](#)

[North United Methodist](#)

[St. Joan of Arc
Catholic](#)

[St. Luke's United Methodist](#)

[St. Monica Catholic](#)

[St. Paul's Episcopal](#)

Growing up female in Chulaimbo



A variety of factors - the burden of household responsibilities, the lack of feminine hygiene products, the fear of sexual assault or harassment, the pressures of cultural traditions - make it very difficult for girls to complete their education in rural Kenya. Compared to boys, girls are much more likely to drop out or perform poorly in school, thereby reducing their opportunities for adult employment and increasing the probability that they will get pregnant while still young themselves.

In the last year the Global Interfaith Partnership has focused more intently on addressing these issues. An increased number of adolescent girls receive sanitary towels so they do not miss school during their menstrual periods. For safety reasons, secondary school girls supported through Umoja are now permitted to attend boarding schools. Amongst the most innovative of our approaches has been connecting women in Indianapolis with women in Chulaimbo to respond together to the needs of young girls.

This newsletter focuses on the experience of a small group of women from Indiana who traveled to Kenya in May to learn more about the challenges of growing up female in Chulaimbo. Read more about their experience, and for more information, please be in touch!

Peace,
Ellen Daniels-Howell

Global Interfaith Sisters meet in Chulaimbo

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[Second Presbyterian](#)

[Tabernacle Presbyterian](#)

**Partnering with over
25
Kenyan
congregations
including:**

African Inland Church

African Israel Ninevah

Anglican Church of
Kenya

Church of Christ

Coptic Orthodox

Legio Maria

Pentecostal Assembly
of God

Roman Catholic

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In the fall of 2010, women in Indiana and women from Chulaimbo came together to form the Global Interfaith Sisters ("Nyimine" in Luo) to respond to the needs of Chulaimbo's adolescent girls. Through monthly Skype conversations, these women have recognized that, though the two cultures are very different, as women they have many shared concerns. For the Indiana women one of the most poignant moments came after the groups read portions of the book *Half the Sky* (Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn). When the Kenyan sisters were asked about the impact the book had had on them, they declared: "We have learned that **despite the fact that we are disadvantaged as women, we can make a difference!**"

When the group of Indiana women went to Chulaimbo in May, they finally had the opportunity to meet in person. It was a week to support one another as women leaders, and culminated in shared leadership for a one-day gathering for adolescent girls.



Almost 200 women and girls (and quite a few boys and men) were part of this special community gathering for encouragement, fellowship, food and fun which the Indiana women were told was unlike anything that had happened before. New friendships were made, and there was a lot of conversation and laughter.



One of the most remarkable activities of the day was tie-dying t-shirts imprinted with the Global Interfaith Sisters logo. Although it was a bit chaotic, everyone had fun creating the brightly colored shirts which the women and girls now wear with pride to let others know that they are part of an international sisterhood!

"My major cry is poverty..."

In the Global Interfaith Partnership's efforts to understand better the needs and concerns of adolescent girls in rural western Kenya, six women from Indiana went to Chulaimbo in May and met with groups of female teachers, guardians, primary and secondary school girls, and women professionals. For each of these "key informants" our meetings were very personal: young or old, to ask female Kenyans about issues affecting girls is to ask them to share the stories of their own lives.

"My major cry is poverty," one guardian says, and goes on to tell about inadequate food, unsafe housing, and an inability to pay her daughter's school fees. A secondary school girl, who heads her own household, describes coming home from school late in the day, knowing that she still has to fetch water, make dinner, and do other household chores before she can begin her homework. "I don't know where to begin," she says. A primary school girl reveals the temptation to seek money and necessary supplies from the local men in exchange for sexual favors. A teacher shares her helplessness about young female students she believes are being sexually exploited by neighboring men.

By the end of each meeting we were tired. The complex interplay of culture, poverty and disease made it easy to feel overwhelmed. Yet, in the midst of hearing so many difficult stories, we were struck by the strength and resilience which also had been revealed. We respected the courage of these women and girls' to speak so openly about their lives. We admired their passionate desire to create change, even if they, like us, are unsure where to begin.

We have been privileged to hear these women and girls' stories. The best way we can honor their trust is to join hands and begin to work for change.

A young student writes her thanks

Women traveling from Indiana in May to learn about issues affecting girls spent an afternoon at Kuoyo Primary School. Almost 50 girls volunteered to talk about their experiences of growing up female in this rural area. Before the meeting began, eighth grader Rosemary Atieno read the following letter of appreciation.



To our beloved Umoja family, Head Teacher, teachers, and all my fellow pupils:
Good evening. I am very glad to take this golden opportunity to give you a vote of thanks. I just don't know how to thank you. You have really made our lives change very much. I thank you for the [sanitary] pads you give us. Many of us girls who had started [menstruating] sometimes could not come to school because they feared that boys may laugh at them seeing blood on their dresses. But you thought it wise and bought us the pads, and now we can come to school even if we are attending our periods.

I also thank you for the school fees you pay for our fellow sisters and brothers who after doing their KCPE [Kenya Certificate of Primary Education] could not have made it to secondary. I just thank you very

much and ask the Almighty God to add you more days so that you continue helping us and other orphans so that they also enjoy their future after receiving education because it is our key to life. I also thank you for the love you give us because we used to feel unwanted, by not having parents and even close relatives to love us.

Thank you a lot and may the almighty God keep you strong and healthy.

Rosemary Atieno
Standard 8
Kuoyo Primary School

How you can help...

Americans are often surprised to realize how much impact donations of any size can make.

- \$8 will purchase sanitary towels for an adolescent girl for a year, allowing her to attend school regularly.
- \$25 will buy 6 months of lamp kerosene for studying.
- \$100 will buy 6 months of weekend and evening food for a child-headed household.
- \$200 will pay the cost of room and board at a girls boarding school.

For more information about the Global Interfaith Sisters, contact [Ellen Daniels-Howell](#).