

Discussion Guide for UConn Reads: *Half the Sky*

Many study guides are available for *Half the Sky* that can be used for group discussions. This guide includes the questions that emerged from the discussions of the UConn Reads Committee:

1. In *Half the Sky*, we meet women and girls from around the world. How are their situations similar, despite the unique challenges they face? Which story had the most impact on you? Why?
2. One of the critiques of the book is that although it creates a compelling image of women's poverty and human rights abuses, the authors focus mostly on individual charitable action rather than structural changes in economies, governments and educational systems. What do you see as the pitfalls of charitable action? Are there ways that charitable action can lead to structural change? See, for example, Ross, Amy. (2011). [Neo-Missionaries and the Polemics of Helping](#). *Expositions*, 5.2, (103-110).
3. Even though *Half the Sky* focuses on Africa and Asia, many of the problems highlighted, such as gender discrimination and human rights abuses (e.g., sex trafficking and sexual violence), occur in the United States and Europe as well. How are these issues similar across regions and how are they different across regions? What accounts for these differences (e.g., history of colonialism, economic development, education, government structures, religion)?
4. If we hope that readers finish this book with an understanding of the message of "change", how can you conceptualize societal change? For example, can you relate 'change' to the current Occupy Movement and the efforts of this group to create change?
5. Kristof and WuDunn are Pulitzer Prize winners and the Harvard Kennedy School named Kristof one of the seven Top American Leaders in 2011 for the ways his writing combined activism and opinion journalism. In what ways are the authors effective as writers? What is effective about this type of journalistic writing and what may be the pitfalls? For example, some have suggested writings such as this can be sensationalistic, voyeuristic or endanger those they are writing about. What is your opinion about this?
6. For many readers, the level of interpersonal violence depicted in this book is both deeply upsetting and shocking. Recognizing that this level of violence exists everywhere, how can we understand this aspect of human nature? How does your discipline help you process, understand or account for these issues?
7. Having read this book and having heightened your awareness of the issues raised, what can and will you do now? On page 252 the authors provide "Four Steps You Can Take in the Next Ten Minutes." What is your opinion of these four steps? Are there other actions that might be more effective?