

Starting the Conversation with a Period

By Sarah Dale Payne Feb 19, 2016



Very rarely does one associate a smiling girl with her monthly cycle. Yet, the conveniences many Western women take as second nature are extraordinarily revolutionary for women in developing nations. Kate Lapidés shares her experience in rural Kenya educating young women to understand and take control of their menstrual cycles in a photographic journey called "A Thousand Smiles: Images from Kenya" at Colorado Mountain College's Aspen campus, where she is the marketing and communications editor.

Her show chronicles and examines the freedom, confidence and mobility that comes with providing women with health education and resources. To do this she worked with the nonprofit For The Good Period, where she is also the Communications Director.

For Lapidés, the choice to highlight the smiles she captured was intentional for this particular project. She noticed that in the midst of poverty, strife and hardship, the spirit of the women she met was one of irrepressible joy.

"My hope is that sharing these smiles of the girls we met in Kenya will allow viewers to connect with them as individuals," she writes in describing the show. "And from there, perhaps extend a new understanding of their hopes and struggles to the millions of beautiful and hopeful girls around the world who struggle against similar barriers."

The Glenwood Springs-based organization For the Good Period provides reusable pads and information for young women in Kenya, with the hope that it will reduce the number of days they are absent from school. Current data reflects that women from many third-world communities miss, on average, six weeks of school a year due to menstruation. This not only causes many women to drop out of school, but also forces them to resort to harmful alternatives to combat the monthly inconvenience. FTGP is working to create healthy alternatives, thereby teaching women not only the importance of their menstrual cycle and proper hygiene, but empowering them to overcome the obstacles that prohibit growth toward their futures.

While this issue is not as widely reported on as others, there are numerous organizations throughout the world seeking attainable solutions similar to FTGP. Another such organization making moves toward health education, as well as environmental sustainability, is Ruby Cup. It has become popularized in outdoor enthusiastic communities for its lessened waste impact, yet it is also rapidly growing in impoverished countries for its cost efficiency, accessibility and longevity. The silicone cups can last 10 to 15 years, before being replaced, making them a viable alternative to tampons or pads in rural communities.

In a move toward self-sustainability and entrepreneurship, Colorado-based nonprofit Children's HopeChest has sent teams of volunteers to remote east African villages to teach young women how to make their own reusable menstrual pads from items they can source locally. Author, blogger, and orphan care advocate Melanie Dale has written about her team's experience educating young women on understanding their bodies and creating solutions to the obstacles impeding their schooling at unexpected.org.

Her team found that in finding solutions alongside the young women instilled them with powerful encouragement and the means to create new possibilities. The common belief shared among these groups is that when women are educated and understood, they acquire the freedom and courage to become effective leaders.

Giving the gift of courage and identity to a young woman is definitely worth a thousand smiles.

"A Thousand Smiles: Images from Kenya "

Colorado Mountain College | 255 Sage Way, Aspen (970) 925-7740*

On exhibit through May 6

Monday - Thursday 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. // Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

**Please call to confirm hours*

