CAS Community Outreach: Champaign Girl Scouts Learn About Africa

On Feb. 22nd U of I student Anne Lutomia, who comes from Kenya, participated in the Girl Scouts’ annual Thinking Day at Faith United Methodist Church in Champaign. Lutomia spoke to an audience of 80 Girl Scouts and 20 adults. The theme of this year’s Thinking Day was “empowering girls will change our world”. The program aimed to raise awareness of the situation for many girls and young women and empower them to take a stand against inequality.

Lutomia shared with the troop how Thinking Day is celebrated in Kenya where Girl Scouts (called Girl Guides) are also popular. She detailed the ways life was different for her as a young girl in Kenya as compared to that of young girls in Illinois, noting how many girls in rural areas often must run several miles to school rather than expect a ride from their parents in a big shiny car. She also described girls’ role in the hard work of income-generating activities such as farming and selling produce at the market. Young Kenyan girls’ efforts are often essential because economic life is much more precarious there. For example, she explained that in years of drought, a family may not have enough money to pay for school fees. This is a special problem for girls because some parents give priority to educating boys in times of hardship.

Lutomia then turned to music, teaching the local scouts a Thinking Day song done by Girl Guides in Kenya, plus leading them in the ever familiar tune of Hakuna Matata.

This day brought back a lot of memories for Lutomia:

*I was excited to talk about Lord Robert Baden-Powell and Lady Olave Baden-Powell (founders of scouting) because they are familiar to me. The two were buried in Nyeri, Kenya and their story is told during Thinking Day in Kenya. During Thinking day we sang songs ...and were also told stories about the two.*

Apart from making a presentation, Lutomia also joined with people from other countries (Cyprus, Yemen, Bolivia, Nepal and Democratic Republic of Congo) in mounting a cultural display. Her display included some games, African dolls, and musical instruments. In addition, she taught young scouts how to use a pestle and mortar, how to carry babies on their back and how to do head ties.
Next year the theme of the day will be: "Environment": UN Millennium Development Goal 7: Girls worldwide say “We can save our planet”. Lutomia plans to share with the Girls Scouts the story of Kenyan woman Wangari Maathai the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

For more information about Thinking Day, please visit: http://www.worldthinkingday.org/en/about