Half the Sky

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NICHOLAS KRISTOF

Nicholas D. Kristof grew up near the small town of Yam Hill, Oregon on a sheep and cherry farm, and began his journalism career editing his high school newspaper. He attended Harvard University, then Oxford University for law school on a Rhodes Scholarship. During those years Kristof became enamored with travel, and Kirstof has traveled to 140 countries and lived on four continents. At twenty-five, he joined *The New York Times*, for which he was a correspondent in Beijing with his wife Sheryl WuDunn. His op-ed columns for *The Times* remain a key platform for drawing the public eye to oft-ignored human rights violations worldwide. Over his career, he has investigated overseas at great personal risk, including eleven trips to Sudan during the War in Darfur, which he was among the first reporters to call a genocide. Jeffrey Toobin, a Harvard classmate and journalist, has called him "the moral conscience of our generation of journalists." The recipient of two Pulitzer prizes and many other awards. A third-generation Chinese American, WuDunn grew up in Manhattan. She attended Cornell, then Harvard Business School for her M.B.A., and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School for her M.P.A. Having been on staff at *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, WuDunn's career has been diverse and high-achieving: she was also a business executive at *The Times*, an evening news anchor, and a vice president at Goldman Sachs, among other roles. Much of her career has focused on emerging markets in China and the developing world, and on women entrepreneurs. In 2011, she was listed among *Newsweek*'s Women Who Shake the World. Like Kristof, she's a champion of human rights and won a Pulitzer Prize in collaboration with her husband for their coverage in China on the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989. WuDunn and Kristoff have collaborated to write four best-selling books.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While working as Times correspondents in Beijing, Kristof and WuDunn witnessed and later covered the Tiananmen Square Massacre, when some 400-800 advocates for democracy were gunned down by state military. (This was the coverage for which they won a Pulitzer Prize.) This event was horrific, but the next year they discovered a more insidious problem that claims tens of thousands more lives than the massacre did: a study found that 39,000 infant girls die annually in China, simply because they receive less care than boys. This means that more baby girls die *each week* in China than died at Tiananmen Square, and go virtually unnoticed. Gradually, Kristof and WuDunn realized explosive events weren't always the most important issues to cover—their very reporting showed them the *insufficiency* of their reporting—and they begon to focus more intently on women's rights issues. Kristof and WuDunn, then, respond not to a single historical event, but to a steady stream of injustices toward women. These injustices have happened since time immemorial, but only recently have they received global attention. And never so much as now.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Half the Sky shares some ideas and arguments with Kristof and WuDunn's following book, *A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity*, which focuses on pragmatic ways to help others in developing countries, and how such help can benefit the giver. The authors also cite David Bornstein's book, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, which provides interesting profiles of social entrepreneurs who have spurred global progress, and gives evidence that it is, in fact, realistic for individuals to change the world. Another related text is *Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*, a memoir about writer Jacqueline Novogratz's quest for an intimate understanding of global poverty, and for innovative ways to rethink aid. Her approaches include the model of patient capital investment, in which benefits of aid may be deferred, but have long lasting rewards. All of these texts combine inspiring narrative with practical suggestions for ways readers can participate in today's urgent humanitarian movements. Another memoir, *I Am Malala*, tells the heroic story of teenager Malala Yousafzai's crusade for girls' education in Pakistan, which made her a target and victim of the Taliban's retribution, as well as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate at seventeen.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide
- **When Written:** 2008
- **Where Written:** New York, NY
- **When Published:** 2009
- **Genre:** Nonfiction
- **Setting:** Developing countries including India, China, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Congo, Somaliland, and Cameroon

EXTRA CREDIT

Family Trip. Kristof and WuDunn have two sons and a younger daughter, whom they've taken on reporting trips. When the

daughter was eleven, they decided to show their kids brothels in South Asia to expose them to the brutal reality of gender injustice.

PLOT SUMMARY

In *Half the Sky*, Kristof and WuDunn argue that the oppression of women is the moral and economic issue of the age, and to spur readers to take action against such oppression. To build their argument, they guide the reader through wrenching stories of women's oppression in Asia and Africa, but also heartening stories of women's triumph. They also grapple with complex issues regarding foreign aid, and outline hopeful solutions to the global problem of gender inequity and oppression.

First, they introduce Srey Rath, a Cambodian who, at fifteen, was trafficked into slavery in Thailand, raped into acquiescence, and forced to works as a prostitute until her eventual escape. The story of Srey Rath sets the tone for the rest of the book by underscoring the abuse women endure around the world, and the fact that, while her story is tragic, it's actually very common. The authors continue examining the problem of sexual slavery, in which at least 3 million women and girls are held captive. After giving more examples of how slaveholders break young women through drug addiction, humiliation, and cultural condemnation of women who have premarital sex, the authors address the question, how can we help? Many aid efforts fail, they acknowledge, and aid groups exaggerate successes, but there are possible solutions—the best way to address female slavery is to prevent it, and the best prevention is girls' education. They describe a success story of a private school in Seattle that sponsors a new school in rural Cambodia, a project that empowered local girls and revolutionized the outlook of students in Seattle. The authors stress that the project met challenges. For instance, some girls, without financial help, would have had to work to support family instead of attend school. These stories illustrate the trajectory of *Half the Sky*: the authors show a problem women face worldwide, then responses to that problem, and are honest about both the shortcomings and successes of those responses.

After more examples of slavery, Kristof and WuDunn tell stories about other sources of women's oppression, namely the use of rape as a weapon to control women, the murder of women who are deemed a shame to their family (so-called honor killings), and devastating women's health issues. The stories told in *Half the Sky* are often brutal and sometimes graphic, and occur worldwide. The authors don't intend to conflate countries of the developing world, but they do report on problems that persist across many of these countries, so they cover a diverse array of locales. These include Cambodia, Thailand, India, Afghanistan, Senegal, and Congo.

Further, the authors investigate obstacles that make solving the above problems even harder. These obstacles include Western misunderstandings of Islamic cultures, the divisions between pro-choice and pro-life advocates in the United States, and the nuanced challenges even the best-intentioned aid efforts can face. Throughout the book, the authors follow examples of difficulties in providing aid with examples of successful solutions, which underpins the author's most emphatic argument: real solutions *do* exist, and their examples can be emulated elsewhere or reinforced through financial support or volunteer work. Such solutions include investing in girls' education, microfinance, and pursuing empirically based rather than intuitive remedies. Grassroots campaigns, the authors stress, make the most promising approach to solving problems of gender inequity.

Most of *Half the Sky* follows a pattern in which chapters are split in two, the first part reporting on specific stories to explain a key factor in women's oppression, or to explain an obstacle to mitigating that factor, while the second part details a successful response to that problem/obstacle. *Half the Sky* ends on an encouraging note: the promise that each of us can offer time, money, or political advocacy to make gender equity a top global priority.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nicholas D. Kristof – Kristof is a columnist for *The New York Times* and one of the authors of *Half the Sky*. For the book, he does on-the-ground reporting on specific stories related to gender inequity in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, venturing into dangerous or otherwise underreported locations in order to tell the stories of women in these regions. He therefore is both an author of the book, and a kind of "character" within it. At times he also functions as more than a reporter, and actively works to help the women whom he has met through his reporting.

Sheryl WuDunn – WuDunn is one of the authors of *Half the Sky* and a champion for women entrepreneurs. Like Kristof, she conducts on-the-ground reporting on global humanitarian issues. She appears in the narrative of *Half the Sky* less frequently than Kristof does, but as a co-author operates as a type of implied presence in conjunction with Kristof.

Srey Rath – Srey Rath is a Cambodian teenager and former forced prostitute whom the authors meet in Cambodia. She was trafficked into Malaysia and, after a long and brutal saga, managed to return home. With help from American Assistance in Cambodia, she started a life as a skillful saleswoman. Her story is the first in *Half the Sky*.

Srey Neth – Srey Neth is one of two Cambodian women whom Kristof bought as slaves in order to free. Once freed, she first

opened a shop that failed due to a raid by resentful male family members, then received training at a hair salon. After a long saga toward independence, including a misdiagnosis of HIV, she finally established a stable life with a loving husband, a child, and a career as beautician.

Meena Hasina – Meena Hasina is a former forced prostitute in Forbesgunge, India. She had two children, Naina and Vivek, while held captive in a brothel. She eventually escaped and married a man named Kuduz, had two more children, and rescued Naina and Vivek with the help of an aid group. Her narrative in the book ends happily—her children are in a boarding school, and she works to combat the same forced prostitution that entrapped her.

Usha Narayane – Usha Narayane is a woman from the Indian slum Kasturba Nagar. Usha combatted the mobster Akku Yadav, whose gang used rape and sexual humiliation as a way to control people in the slum. Incredibly brave, Usha is an example of a woman who took the risk of defying expectations of female docility to the benefit of her whole community.

Akku Yadav – Akku Yadav was a mobster in the Indian slum Kasturba Nagar. He and his gang members used rape and sexual humiliation as a way to silence the people he exploited, since rape is so stigmatized that survivors rarely report it. Following Usha Narayane's resistance to Akku Yadav's control, a group of local women stabbed him to death in a courtroom in retaliation for his violence.

Mukhtar Mai – Mukhtar Mai is a Punjabi woman who founded the Mukhtar Mai School for Girls in order to empower girls and prevent the use of rape as a weapon. Mukhtar herself was the survivor of retaliatory gang rape. Tenacious and intrepid, Mukhtar gained international celebrity and expanded her education programs, despite consistent danger to her life.

Harper McConnell – Harper McConnell is a young white American woman whom Kristof met in war-torn Congo. She lives full time in Congo, speaks Swahili, and dedicates her time to projects with HEAL Africa, a hospital that gives exceptional care to Congolese women. Harper represents the type of dedication to combating global injustice that the authors wish to see in more young Americans.

Mahabouba Muhammad – Mahabouba Muhammad is an Ethiopian woman who was sold by a neighbor to another man, to be his second wife. At fourteen, her pregnancy by rape led to a fistula. Utterly abandoned otherwise, her life was saved by staff at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, where she now works as a nurse's aide.

Prudence Lemokouno – Prudence Lemokouno was a woman in Cameroon whose baby died in the womb, and who died shortly after from a ruptured uterus. Prudence could have been treated and saved, but she was neglected in the hospital for reasons including poverty, a lack of healthcare resources, indifference of medical workers, and the broader problem of misogyny that exacerbated all of these issues.

Rose Wanjera – Rose Wanjera is a young Kenyan woman who, when pregnant and suffering from an infection, benefited from a maternal health program established by a consortium of aid organizations, including one founded by Allan Rosenfield. Ultimately, this program was cut because of George W. Bush's funding decisions, motivated by anti-abortion views.

Jane Roberts – Jane Roberts is an American woman and retired teacher who responded to George W. Bush's defunding of the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) by co-founding with Lois Abraham a nationwide fundraising campaign. The campaign, called 34 Million Friends of UNFPA, solicited $1 donations for humanitarian issues and was enormously successful.

Ellaha – Ellaha is an inmate at the prison Rana oversees. She refused an arranged marriage with her cousin, and instead pursued a career and planned to move to Canada for a university scholarship. When Ellaha's sister also refused to marry a cousin, their family viciously beat them both for days. The sisters eventually fled, then were jailed at the prison in order to protect them from their own family.

Dai Manju – Dai Manju is a woman from Central China whom Kristof and WuDunn knew as a young teenager. Dai Manju desperately wanted to finish grade school despite obstacles. A generous donation from an American on Dai Manju's behalf (which turned out to be the bank's numerical error, which the bank honored), led to the construction of a new school. As an adult, Dai Manju became a business executive.

Zainab Salbi – Zainab Salbi is an Iraqi woman who grew up as close friends with the family of Iraq's despot, Saddam Hussein. Zainab was pushed into a marriage in America because her mother feared Saddam Hussein's lust for her. After learning of rape camps in war-torn Bosnia, Zainab founded what would become Women for Women International to help the countless unaided rape survivors.

Thomas Clarkson – Thomas Clarkson was a British abolitionist in the 1790s. He collected torture instruments as evidence of injustice, and started a visual campaign distributing posters of slave ships. With the help of testimony from a former slave, he crusaded against slavery and reshaped British visions of the country's moral priorities. In *Half the Sky*, he models what modern abolitionists can also achieve.

Tererai Trent – Tererai Trent is a Zimbabwean woman who desperately wanted to attend school, but was restricted by her family's devaluation of women. Members of the aid group Heifer International encouraged Tererai nonetheless, and, inspired to pursue her unlikely ambitions, she eventually studied in the United States where she earned a PhD and conducted research on AIDS in African countries.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Srey Momm – Srey Momm is one of two Cambodian women whom Kristof bought as slaves in order to free. She returned to her brothel after a week of freedom, due to a methamphetamine addiction. Momm eventually found final freedom after a crackdown on Cambodian brothels.

Ainul – Ainul was one of the operators of the brothel that held Meena Hasina captive. A woman and former forced prostitute, Ainul was a main disciplinarian at the brothel, which shows that women, not just men, can perpetuate sex slavery.

Naina Hasina – Naina Hasina is the daughter of Meena Hasina. She was raised in an Indian brothel by abusive guardians and, at twelve, inherited her mother's fate of forced prostitution. Naina was rescued, however, and, though burdened by morphine addiction and emotional trauma, achieved a stable life.

Vivek Hasina – Vivek Hasina is the son of Meena Hasina. Like his sister Naina, he was raised in a squalid Indian brothel. He objected to the abuse of his sister, but was powerless. Persistence and courage helped him escape and be reunited with his mother.

Kuduz – Kuduz, a pharmacist from India, is the husband of Meena Hasina. They met when Kuduz defended Meena while Ainul's son physically attacked her.

Zach Hunter – Zach Hunter is an American social entrepreneur who, as a student, founded the group Loose Change to Loosen Chains. He belongs to the burgeoning modern slavery abolitionist movement.

Bill Drayton – Bill Drayton is a former American government official who founded Ashoka, an organization that supports social entrepreneurs worldwide.

Sunitha Krishnan – Sunitha Krishnan is a key player in the abolitionist movement fighting sex trafficking. A social entrepreneur from India, she founded the organization Prajwala to give support and teach skills to Indian girls and women rescued from brothels.

Abbas Be – Abbas Be is a former forced prostitute in Delhi, India. She counsels women at Sunitha Krishnan's organization Prajawala, while training to be a bookbinder.

Sonette Elhers – Sonette Elhers is the South African inventor of Rapex. Designed to deter rape, Rapex is a device inserted into a woman's vagina that slices the penis of a man who tries to violate her.

Woinshet Zebene – Woinshet Zebene is an Ethiopian woman who was the victim of multiple plotted rapes designed to force her to marry the rapist, Aberew Jemma. She bravely challenged the culture of normalized rape by trying to prosecute him, and was ultimately supported by the group Equality Now.

Aberew Jemma – Aberew Jemma is the man who kidnapped and raped Woinshet Zebene as a scheme to force her into marriage. He was ultimately released from his prison sentence after Woinshet tried to prosecute him.

Zoya Najabi – Zoya Najabi is a young woman from Kabul, Afghanistan. She married at twelve and was subject to beatings by everyone in her husband's family, especially the matriarch. Zoya is one of innumerable victims of female violence against women.

Du'a Aswad – Du'a Aswad was a Kurdish girl in northern Iraq who died in an honor killing. After staying out one night with a Sunni Arab boy, members of her family and village decided she must die, and a thousand men participated in her drawn out, public, gruesome murder.

Dina – Dina is a teenager from Congo and a survivor of the war tactic of rape. While walking home in daylight, she was gang raped by militiamen, which led to a life-threatening fistula. Because of the aid group HEAL Africa, her fistula was treated.

Laurent Nkunda – Laurent Nkunda is a Congolese warlord whose troops see mass rape as their right, and also as an effective weapon in terrorizing villages.

Catherine Hamlin – Catherine Hamlin is an Australian who founded the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in 1975. In her tenure, she has conducted over twenty-five thousand fistula surgeries.

Simeesh Segaye – Simeesh Segaye is a young Ethiopian woman who endured days of obstructed labor without medical aid. Her baby died, and she developed a fistula that rendered her immobile and ostracized, condemned to an empty hut for years. Eventually, she was hospitalized and recovered fully.

Allan Rosenfield – Allan Rosenfield is an American doctor and trailblazing advocate for maternal health. In his work as a social entrepreneur, he combined pragmatic medicine with public health perspectives, which includes non-medical measures such as providing girls' school uniforms.

Ramatou Issoufou – Ramatou Issoufou is a Nigerian woman who needed a caesarian section from a health clinic. If Kristof had not been present, her inability to pay $42 for materials would have led to her death.

Obende Kayode – Dr. Kayode is the sole medical doctor at a clinic in Nigeria. He would have allowed Ramatou Issoufou to die in childbirth due to her lack of funds had Kristof not been present, which shamed the doctor into treating her.

Pascal Pipi – Dr. Pipi is a medical doctor in Cameroon, where many women lack funds for maternal healthcare. Resentful of the needs of local villagers, Dr. Pipi's indifference, among other factors, led to the death of Prudence Lemokouno.

Mamitu Gashe – Mamitu Gashe is a surgeon in Ethiopia who never attended elementary school. She gradually acquired surgical skills by observing a doctor in Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. Her contribution has expanded the hospital's fistula treatment capacity.

Edna Adan – Edna Adan is a woman from Somaliland who founded a successful maternity hospital there, called Edna's Hospital. With her sometimes fierce attitude and unsinkable work ethic, she gave high-quality healthcare access to women who would otherwise have gone without.

Anne Gilhuly – Anne Gilhuly is a retired teacher in Connecticut who started a major funding campaign in the U.S. for Edna Adan's maternity hospital in Somaliland.

Thabang – Thabang is a teenage girl in northeastern South Africa. Her mother, Gertrue Tobela, had AIDS, and their relationship grew discordant and abusive because of Gertrude's fear that Thabang, who sought a social life beyond her family, would also contract AIDS.

Gertrude Tobela – Gertrue Tobela is a South African woman and mother of Thabang. She was dying from AIDS and, fearing that Thabang was promiscuous and would inherit Gertrude's same fate, frequently beat her.

Lois Abraham – Lois Abraham is an American woman who co-founded, with Jane Roberts, the campaign 34 Million Friends of UNFPA after U.S. defunding of the humanitarian program.

Soraya Salti – Soraya Salti is a Jordanian woman who founded the program Injaz to teach children entrepreneurial skills. Injaz teaches 100,000 students yearly across twelve Arab countries.

Rana – Rana is a woman in Afghanistan and the director at a Kabul women's detention center. The prison's inmates include unmarried women and girls whose hymens, after a "virginity test," are shown to no longer be intact.

Sakena Yacoobi – Sakena Yacoobi is an Afghan woman who runs the bold, successful aid organization Afghan Institute of Learning. Her success supports the idea that respecting the power of local women while providing financial support is typically the ideal model for Western aid in developing countries.

Angeline Mugwendere – Angeline Mugwendere is a woman from Zimbabwe who, as a girl, was a brilliant and determined student, but too poor to afford high school without aid. She benefited from Ann Cotton's aid program Camfed, and now works as Camfed's executive director.

Ann Cotton – Ann Cotton is a Welsh woman who, after losing her baby daughter, channeled her grief into founding an organization for girls in Zimbabwe called Campaign for Female Education (Camfed). Her grassroots work has expanded with great success into several African countries.

Saima Muhammad – Saima Muhammad is a Pakistani woman who endured poverty and violent treatment by her misogynistic husband. She joined a women's group affiliated with the microfinance organization, the Kashf Foundation. Modest loans allowed her to gain autonomy, respect, self-confidence, and financial security.

Roshaneh Zafar – Roshaneh Zafar is a Pakistani woman who founded the Kashf Foundation, a major microfinance operation. She grew up wealthy and focused her privilege on supporting women in need.

Sadaffe Abid – Sadaffe Abid is a Pakistani woman who collaborated with Roshaneh Zafar to design and execute the Kashf Foundation's system of lending and repayment.

Goretti Nyabenda – Goretti Nyabenda is a woman from Burundi. She had no decision-making power in her family, forced to defer always to an abusive, irresponsible husband, Bernard. She started a women's association through the organization CARE, which led to a small business, financial success, and finally respect from her husband.

Bernard Nyabenda – Bernard Nyabenda is the husband of Goretti Nyabenda. He physically abused Goretti and forbid her to leave the house without him, until she industriously gained financial independence and demanded his respect.

Zhang Yin – Zhang Yin is a Chinese woman who began earning $6 a month in a factory, and worked her way to founding a recycled paper company, eventually becoming a multi-billionaire. She embodies the potential achievable only through equal opportunity for women.

Murvelene Clarke – Murvelene Clarke is an American who decided to give ten percent of her earnings to charity. She sponsored Claudine Mukukarisa for $27 a month through the organization Women for Women International, which allowed Claudine to thrive with education and various resources.

Claudine Mukakarisa – Claudine Mukukarisa is a Rwandan woman who was locked in a rape house at thirteen by Hutu militia, and became pregnant. She was supported by monthly contributions from Murvelene Clarke, gaining trade skills, financial tools, and stability for her young daughter.

Molly Melching – Molly Melching is an American social entrepreneur who founded Tostan, a very successful initiative to combat female genital cutting in West Africa. Her group's approach respects the codes of villages rather than imposing Western cultural values.

Jordana Confino – Jordana Confino is an American social entrepreneur who, as a teenager, started the group Girls Learn International. Based in New York, its chapters around the U.S. raise funds for girls' education in developing countries.

Lisa Alter – Lisa Alter is the mother of Jordan Confino. She exposed her daughter to realities of global gender inequity, then supported Jordan's resolve to address it through Girls Learn International.

Jo Luck – Jo Luck is a former Arkansas state cabinet official and president of the aid group Heifer International, which gives livestock to farmers in developing countries.

Sydnee Woods – Sydnee Woods is an American attorney who moved temporarily to Kolkata, India to volunteer at the women's organization New Light. She met tremendous

challenges in acclimating to Kolkata, but never regretted the decision, insisting that what she gained in relationships and purpose eclipsed all difficulties.

Beatrice Biira – A woman from Uganda who received a single goat from Heifer International. The goat enabled her to raise money to attend school, where she excelled enough to earn scholarships and attend university in the U.S.

TERMS

Fistula – Obstetric fistulas (referred to as fistulas) are holes between the vagina or rectum and bladder, which cause waste to leak from the body. Common in much of the developing world, women develop fistulas from rape, other violence, and childbirth, often with no following treatment. Fistulas are devastating and often fatal, and ensuring that women receive treatment for fistulas is one of the key women's rights issues **Kristof** and **WuDunn** say needs urgent addressing.

Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) – Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman while pregnant (or shortly after pregnancy) due to related complications. The MMR is the ratio of the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. In the United States, for example, the MMR is 11 per 100,000 live births. This is a worse ratio than in Ireland, which is 1 per 100,000 births (the best in the world). In Pakistan, it is around 490, a high MMR, which signals healthcare problems for women. Because women in developing countries have more children and worse healthcare, they face far more risk of death in childbirth. This gap, the book stresses, calls for global action.

Microfinance – Microfinance is a source of financial services, such as loans and savings, available to entrepreneurs and small business owners who wouldn't normally qualify for those services. Microfinance loans are typically small sums that, despite their small size, can give the recipient significant opportunity for sustained financial growth. The book argues microfinance is, for women, a more effective route out of poverty and toward personal safety than any law could accomplish. Kiva is a popular microlending nonprofit organization that allows individuals to make small loans to entrepreneurs in need. When successful, such loans are a way for Westerners to give real aid remotely.

Social Entrepreneur – The term social entrepreneur refers to a person who works to solve specific social problems through a revolutionary and pragmatic enterprise. While an aid worker might metaphorically teach someone how to fish—that is, teach skills that a person can profit from—social entrepreneurs "will not rest until they have the fishing industry," according to the person who made the concept popular, **Bill Drayton**. Social entrepreneurs tend to establish their own new context, like an organization or movement, and therefore bypass the aid bureaucracy most aid workers operate within. **Zach Hunter**, a student who founded a modern slavery abolitionism campaign, is an example of an American social entrepreneur.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

Kristof and WuDunn wrote *Half the Sky* in response to one key reality: across the world, women and girls are valued less than men, and therefore experience far more violence, more neglect, worse healthcare, and fewer opportunities than men. Through reporting that focuses on women in developing countries, and which focuses particularly on the devastating impact of sex trafficking, gender-based violence, and maternal mortality in Africa and Asia, Kristof and Wudunn build an argument that the oppression of women is the most critical moral and human rights issue of the 21st century.

In addition to reporting on the various and devastating aspects of the oppression of women, Kristof and Dunn also reveal how such oppression is under-recognized and not widely understood. The many explanations for this neglect include the nature of journalism, as well as political agendas, and misogyny. First, journalists are more likely to cover events and particular stories, such as terrorist bombings, than everyday cruelties—and audiences similarly have smaller appetites for everyday cruelties. Because rapes happen daily, and every day girls are sold into slavery, these injustices get overlooked. Second, gender equity isn't a top foreign policy priority for the U.S. or other countries, largely because it isn't a priority for constituents. Third, the authors document how sexism and misogyny—the hatred of women—both gives rise to the oppression of women *and* cause people to discount it. Because women are considered worth less than men, their problems are taken less seriously. The author's make the case that until a woman's life is valued the same as a man's life, justice for women will be out of reach.

Through its reporting on specific women, *Half the Sky* shows how the devaluation of women happens at many levels: governments devalue women, men devalue women, and even women devalue women. In showing this reality, the book makes it clear that the issue can't be solved only by laws or by reforming male behavior. Rather, the books shows that this misogynistic thinking is deeply embedded in cultures across the world, internalized and perpetuated by its very victims. Therefore, the authors argue, solutions will be complicated and

take concerted, serious effort (even as the book *does* suggest potential solutions, which we cover in the Solutions theme). More fundamentally, the book argues that before we can change these realities, we must face them. *Half the Sky*, then, is itself an attempt to help people see and recognize the oppression of women, through storytelling that illustrates gender inequity. The book is not meant to be just passive, though. It is also a call to action, a call to its readers and the world to act to help overcome the oppression of women.

UNIVERSAL BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

"Women's issues" don't hold international attention in the way that terrorism and other "serious issues" do. But, Kristof and WuDunn argue in *Half the Sky*, women's issues *are* humanitarian issues—just as the Holocaust was not a Jewish crisis, but a human crisis—and shouldn't be marginalized. The authors also show that when women and girls are held back, it doesn't just affect women. Rather, whole societies suffer. Kristof and WuDunn argue, then, that women's empowerment doesn't just serve women, it serves all of society in profound ways.

Put another way: the author's argue that the cause of empowering women is not just a moral one, but pragmatic one. They make the make the case that much is at stake—economic growth, public health, education, and more—if women don't advance globally, and much will be gained if they do. For instance, the authors show how educating girls has tremendous economic benefits. When girls have access to schools, they're better able to enter the workforce, which leads to a rise in their country's GNP (gross national product). Women's education also unlocks intelligence that was formerly uncultivated, which can lead to new innovation, sometimes called "the girl effect." As Bill Gates said at a technology conference in Saudi Arabia, "If you're not utilizing half the talent in your country, you're not going to get to the top ten [in technology]." Further, the authors show that when women control household money, they tend to spend more wisely than men, choosing education and investment opportunities over goods like alcohol and tobacco. And, from such "deferred consumption," the whole household wins. The book also explains how female political participation brings good for everyone. Though women in office aren't necessarily more empathetic or peacemaking than men, they tend to pay more attention to local infrastructure and community needs. Likewise, women's voting rights have historically redirected political issues. For instance, women's suffrage in the U.S. led to an 8-15% decline in child mortality (death of children under five), showing that once women gained sway in the polls, their priorities rose on the agenda.

The author's augment their claim about the pragmatic benefits of empowering women by showing how significant parts of the business world – the ultimate pragmatists – concur: the investment firm Goldman Sachs, for instance, reports that, "Gender inequality hurts economic growth." By presenting the issue of the oppression of women as one that affects entire communities and countries, that effects not just women but GNPs and global business, the authors make clear that gender equality is not just a niche cause reserved for non-profits, but a global necessity deserving serious and sustained attention.

THE COMPLEXITY OF AID

Through *Half the Sky*, Kristof and WuDunn repeat that there is no "silver bullet," no magic remedy that will fix gender inequity in the developing world. With nearly every potential solution they posit, they point out flaws, even major failures in that approach. Further, they make clear that the complications affecting aid stem in part from issues in developing nations receiving aid, but also from issues in the Western nations providing that aid. What's more, the problems that aid intends to address are so manifold and so systemic, and humans so complicated, that aiding developing countries is a complex, often fraught, endeavor.

Within developing nations, the issues are often far more complex than an outsider can conceive. For instance, "Rescuing girls from brothels is the easy part," the authors write. They then go on to explain that emancipating female slaves takes much more than just undoing their shackles and sending them home. Often their captors force slaves into a drug addiction, which pulls freed slaves back to a nightmarish situation. Further, even if girls do return to their families, they are often ostracized and blamed for being "impure," and are met with further violence instead of a joyful welcome. Also, the psychological trauma from years of numbing rape can be, of course, debilitating. Another profoundly tragic outcome is that, since so many prostitutes contract HIV/AIDS, the health consequences can last their lifetimes. Put bluntly: When a woman escapes slavery, she has not escaped its severe effects.

More broadly, the authors explain that while women's empowerment in developing nations is a shining goal, when achieved it's not always welcome. When women advance, men (and other women) often greet it with resentment, mockery, and violence. As an example the authors tell the story of Neth, a young woman they rescued from a brothel in Cambodia, who went on to open a shop in her hometown, at first bringing success she couldn't have imagined. But soon after, men in Neth's family abused the business and finally raided the shop, leaving her destitute—all because the men couldn't respect her as a financially empowered woman. Because cultural codes withhold respect from women, the authors explain, even the most determined efforts can fail.

At the same time, the authors make clear that just as much of an issue contributing to the complexity of aid is a legacy of failed Western intervention in the developing world. The

authors explain how Western aid efforts, despite good intentions, often ignore the nuances of a culture's customs and religions, so what might seem harmless to Americans could be scandalous to others. For example, in Afghanistan an outside aid group gave soap to Afghan women, unaware that the gesture would suggest sexual promiscuity, a deeply offensive implication. Not only does such ignorance alienate the very people aid groups try to help, it can even stoke anti-aid sentiments from those who find the efforts patronizing and destructive. The authors further explain how political differences within Western nations can thwart attempts at aid. For instance, American debates over abortion often lead to women's health clinics in developing nations getting their funding blocked. The resulting loss of women's clinics means that women with fistulas—holes in organs that often result from rape or other brutalities—which are common in the developing world, have no facilities to go to for treatment. The health effects are devastating. More broadly, the book shows that when Westerners make assumptions and try to proselytize Western values to the developing world, the residents of those nations, including victimized women, can feel patronized and violated with the result that the intended aid proves unsuccessful or even detrimental.

The book doesn't only condemn insensitive aid efforts, however. It also shows models of success. The book is written for a Western, largely American, audience, so it aims to persuade readers that they can and must take action. For instance, the authors tell the story of Tostan, a group that works to end female genital cutting in West Africa. The group was founded by a Midwesterner who has engaged deeply in Senegalese culture, and has only hired West Africans to dismantle the fraught system of genital cutting. Through such examples, the book makes the case that successful aid requires a combination of effort from both the West and the developing nation, in which the West offers some level of support but also listens to and earns the participation and buy-in of citizens who understand their culture's nuances.

Ultimately, the authors want their readers to understand that, despite the complexity and subsequent problems of aid in developing nations, and despite the lack of "silver bullet" solutions, mitigating the oppression of women is both worth it and achievable. The book details the difficulties of providing aid to make clear that steps should be taken with caution and sensitivity, not to dissuade anyone from contributing to such aid, but rather to ensure that aid is given in ways that make a real impact.

SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

Half the Sky is, at its heart, an optimistic book. While the book makes clear that injustices toward women are widespread and comprise a global tragedy, the authors also show that solutions do abound, and that they may be less expensive and more creative than most think.

The authors stress that the primary, most promising solution, is girls' education. Aside from the fact that education should be a basic human right, the authors detail a constellation of benefits for women that follow when girls get schooling, including decreased birth rates (which mitigates overpopulation), fewer cases of HIV/AIDS, and paths out of poverty. And the benefits, as the authors reiterate, extend to whole societies, not just to women.

In addition to explaining particular solutions, the authors also stress the importance of using a particular methodology to identify and pursue such solutions. Namely, the authors emphasize the importance of empiricism, which uses evidence and data rather than intuition, to find solutions to the issues that contribute to the oppression of women. For instance, the authors explain that one inexpensive and surprising way to increase girls' access to and success in school is to provide communities with iodized salt, the kind Americans buy at the supermarket. Iodine deficiencies, which inhibit brain development in the womb, especially for female fetuses, affect 31% of households in the developing world. Similarly, deworming girls, handing out tampons and pads, and providing uniforms are ways to keep girls in schools longer. Expensive initiatives like creating a new school or importing teachers sometimes aren't necessary, while providing a simple resource can make all the difference.

Because its primary mission is to engage Western individuals in the effort to combat the oppression of women, *Half the Sky* tries to highlight that individual people from the first world, who so often feel dwarfed and powerless, *can* actually effect change. While the book acknowledges that many global aid efforts are directed by the United Nations or large bureaucracies, Kristof and WuDunn argue that the most effective work belongs to grassroots efforts, and they try to encourage and propose models for the further development of such work. At the same time, the authors are careful to make clear that the story of women's empowerment should never be treated as a story of Western moral conquest. That is, Western efforts must defer to the women for whom they advocate, listen to them, and never position the first world as superior. Aid should be a "kind of lubricant, a few drops of oil in the crankcase of the developing world, so that gears move freely again on their own." Aid offered as a kind of salvation provided by "enlightened" Westerners to "ignorant" third world residents, the authors make clear, is repugnant morally and, in practical terms, unlikely to succeed in achieving its goals. The authors' own reporting supports this assessment, as so many of anecdotes that *Half the Sky* show women and girls who, when given just a small opportunity, perform spectacularly.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RESCUED STARFISH

Kristof and WuDunn conclude Chapter 2 with a Hawaiian parable. A boy on a beach picks up starfish one by one, and throws each back into its ocean habitat. A nearby man, perplexed, tells the boy there are too many starfish to save, and he'll never make a difference. The boy responds, "It sure made a difference to that one." The rescued starfish represent a key point the authors make in *Half the Sky*: even if emancipation efforts won't erase the problem of modern slavery, each person who does receive aid is a real, living person for whom efforts *did* make a difference.

This idea can also be applied to the book's broader goal of recruiting the reader to the mission of gender equity. That is, even if not all the world's vulnerable women can be saved from rape or maternal mortality, as long as the work improves *any* women's lives, it's worthwhile. In *Half the Sky*, the starfish symbol isn't repeated beyond the parable, but it does represent the broader justification and argument for readers to work *toward* gender equity, even if it's never achieved in full. Put another way: the parable of the starfish is an argument for urgent action now, and a refusal to give in to despair or inaction because of the immensity of the problem.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Half the Sky* published in 2010.

Introduction Quotes

> In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: xvii

Explanation and Analysis

Kristof and WuDunn emphasize the gravity of women's oppression—and the necessity of its defeat—by comparing it with slavery and totalitarianism. They expect readers to have historical consciousness about both the transatlantic slave trade and the twentieth century epidemic of dictatorial regimes, such as Stalin in the Soviet Union, and Hitler in Germany. Slavery and totalitarianism both caused untold destruction and altered the course of history. The fights against them are seen today as noble and necessary. The authors assert that modern women's oppression is similarly widely destructive, and suggest that the fight against it will be considered just as noble and influential as those against slavery and totalitarianism.

> Many of the stories in this book are wrenching, but keep in mind this central truth: *Women aren't the problem but the solution. The plight of girls is no more a tragedy than an opportunity.*

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: xviii

Explanation and Analysis

This quote reflects two key points in *Half the Sky*. First, the book is an optimistic one. Kristof and WuDunn don't intend to walk the reader through tragic stories just to reveal realities of global injustice. Rather, the book aims to show that these stories contain the very solutions to the causes of oppression: women who are ready to be empowered. Second, the quote anticipates a recurring point the authors make later, that Western aid at its best doesn't intrude into the developing countries, imposing Western ideals and stomping out tradition, but rather enables women to take the reins on their own liberation.

Honor killings, sexual slavery, and genital cutting may seem to Western readers to be tragic but inevitable in a world far, far away. In much the same way, slavery was once widely viewed by many decent Europeans and Americans as a regrettable but ineluctable feature of human life. It was just one more horror that had existed for thousands of years. But then in the 1780s a few indignant Britons, led by William Wilberforce, decided that slavery was so offensive that they had to abolish it. And they did. Today we see the seed of something similar: a global movement to emancipate women and girls...So let us be clear about this up front: We hope to recruit you to join an incipient movement to emancipate women and fight global poverty by unlocking women's power as economic catalysts. That is the process under way—not a drama of victimization but of empowerment, the kind that transforms bubbly teenage girls from brothel slaves into successful businesswomen.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: xxii

Explanation and Analysis

In the introduction, the authors address a way they suspect their readers might, at least subconsciously, think about human rights—that injustices like honor killings and sex trafficking are abhorrent, but also an ineradicable part of human existence. Further, the reader might feel too removed from those injustices to take action, or to believe their action would make a difference. The authors strategically refute this, however, by citing the British abolition of slave trade, which readers know succeeded. Kristof and WuDunn implicitly invite the reader to imagine his or herself as similar to those stubborn pioneering abolitionists, fighting a fight that most thought was pointless. Further, they subtly imply that Half the Sky's "wrenching" stories aren't sensational or meant for entertainment, the way a movie drama is, but that they plainly show reality and lead to a central message of hope.

Chapter 1 Quotes

People always ask how they can help...A starting point is to be brutally realistic about the complexities of achieving change. To be blunt, humanitarians sometimes exaggerate and oversell, eliding pitfalls. They sometimes torture frail data until it yields the demanded 'proof' of success.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Meena Hasina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Meena Hasina's saga rescuing herself and her two children from the prison of an Indian brothel. Kristof and WuDunn anticipate that readers, after reading harrowing stories of injustice, might be asking how they can help. But the authors repeatedly insist that realism is important to the women's emancipation movement. Exaggerating statistics can undermine aid groups' credibility, encourage false hopes for aid volunteers, and cloud information that could help poor strategies improve. The authors push for constant improvement in the humanitarian world, and push against feel-good conclusions that limit aid's true potential.

Chapter 2 Quotes

The tools to crush modern slavery exist, but the political will is lacking. That must be the starting point of any abolitionist movement.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Kristof has been speaking to an Indian intelligence officer near the border of Nepal. The officer is watching for trafficked goods such as pirated DVDs. But when Kristof asks him whether trafficked girls are also a priority, the officer acknowledges there are plenty, but says nothing can done. He defends inaction further by saying peasant prostitutes keep middle-class "good girls" safe. The officer symbolizes the means to defeat women's oppression, but also the broader political indifference toward it, which spans countries in both the developing and first world. Before any strategies for women's emancipation can truly work, the idea must prevail that women of all background and colors deserve the same rights as the most privileged men. What's more, once that idea has crystallized into popular ideology worldwide, it

must motivate political action.

❝ Rescuing girls from brothels is the easy part, however. The challenge is keeping them from returning. The stigma that the girls feel in their communities after being freed, coupled with drug dependencies or threats from pimps, often lead them to return to the red-light district. It's enormously dispiriting for well-meaning aid workers who oversee a brothel raid to take the girls back to a shelter and give them food and medical care, only to see the girls climb over the back wall.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Srey Momm, Srey Neth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

After explaining the global epidemic of sex trafficking and arguing that "big stick" crackdowns on brothels are superior to the legalize-and-regulate model, Kristof and WuDunn reveal themselves to have been "slave owners." Kristof bought two trafficked Cambodian women, Srey Neth and Srey Momm, in order to free them, but stresses that "rescuing girls from brothels is the easy part." Though both women eventually remained free, women like Neth and Momm tend to live in a space between slavery and liberation, chained to brothels if not by pimps, then by a forced drug addiction, fear, or stigmatization from sexually conservative cultures. Such cultures are unforgiving toward women for their own bondage and routine rapes. This shaming of the victim reveals part of the complexity of aid, that sustained commitment to helping a desperate person tends to have far greater impact than a one-time action, but sustained commitment is also harder to perform. Further, it may make recruiting activists more difficult, when so many freed women return to the dingy brothels where abuse awaits them.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ 'Empowerment' is a cliché in the aid community, but it is truly what is needed. The first step toward greater justice is to transform that culture of female docility and subservience, so that women themselves become more assertive and demanding. As we said earlier, that is, of course, easy for outsiders like us to say: We're not the ones who run horrible risks for speaking up. But when a woman does stand up, it's imperative that outsiders champion her; we also must nurture institutions to protect such people.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Goretti Nyabenda , Akku Yadav, Usha Narayane

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

This argument follows the story of Usha Narayane, whose courage inspired women in the Indian slum Kasturba Nagar to rebel against the mobster, rapist, and murderer Akku Yadav. The authors argue that transforming conceptions of femininity from submissive to assertive is necessary for women's emancipation, which aligns with the authors' earlier point that women are the solution to their own oppression. This transformation, they acknowledge, can come at great personal risk, so outsiders, such as foreign aid groups, must support women who do take the risk, by teaching strategies or providing shelter, for instance. Later, they cite Goretti Nyabenda and her peers in a CARE association, among others, as examples of women who redefined the meaning of femininity in their community.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Surveys suggest that about one third of all women worldwide face beatings in the home. Women aged fifteen through forty-four are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

This quote puts into perspective the staggering toll that male violence takes on women. War and terrorism are examples of events that are more likely to be covered in the media and framed as noteworthy than, for instance, a man assaulting his wife until some bones break. But in reality, the ubiquity of male violence claims more lives than more dramatic, publicized violence. In the U.S., domestic violence may seem like an exception, albeit a terrible one, in domestic relationships. But the statistic shows that for at least one-third of women, home is a potential place of terror. This is a reminder that injustice can go unseen, but is no less abhorrent for its invisibility.

"We sometimes think that Westerners invest too much effort in changing unjust laws and not enough in changing culture, by building schools or assisting grassroots movements. Even in the United States, after all, what brought equal rights to blacks wasn't the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments passed after the Civil War, but rather the grassroots civil rights movement nearly one hundred years later. Laws matter, but typically changing the law by itself accomplishes little."

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Molly Melching

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Kristof and WuDunn critique Westerners' trust that laws inherently effect change. They support their critique by invoking American history and the long, ongoing movement for racial equality. Constitutional amendments were passed during Reconstruction declaring equal rights for African Americans, but across the country African Americans continud to suffer lynchings, rape, and other brutalities, as well as economic injustice. The deepest change came only after the powerful momentum gained during the civil rights movement. Similarly, laws may placate people into thinking that progress will follow, but real change typically demands changing culture bottom-up, not top-down. A concrete example of this idea is Tostan's grassroots work combatting female genital cutting in Africa, led by Molly Melching.

"Behind the rapes and other abuse heaped on women in much of the world, it's hard not to see something more sinister than just libido and prurient opportunism. Namely: sexism and misogyny. How else to explain why so many more witches were burned than wizards? Why is acid thrown in women's faces, but not in men's? Why are women so much more likely to be stripped naked and sexually humiliated than men? Why is it that in many cultures, old men are respected as patriarchs, while old women are taken outside the village to die of thirst or to be eaten by wild animals? Granted, in the societies where these abuses take place, men also suffer more violence than males do in America—but the brutality inflicted on women is particularly widespread, cruel, and lethal."

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Aberew Jemma , Woinshet Zebene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

This section follows Woinshet Zebene's story of being strategically raped by Aberew Jemma in Ethiopia, in part to manipulate her family into having Woinshet marry him, since a raped woman is thought to be unworthy of marriage. Stylistically, the paragraph and its litany of rhetorical questions hold more fervent energy than most of *Half the Sky*, showing the authors' passion about the history of women's oppression. The paragraph presents a brief, fractured global history of misogyny and its violence. Indeed, it would be hard to find reasons—for women's abuse across cultures and millennia—more apt than the essential reason that women are often dehumanized and devalued in ways men aren't.

"In short, women themselves absorb and transmit misogynistic values, just as men do. This is not a tidy world of tyrannical men and victimized women, but a messier realm of oppressive social customs adhered to by men and women alike."

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Zoya Najabi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Kristof and WuDunn describe the brutal violence Zoya Najabi endured from her mother-in-

law, which reflects the resentment and aggression toward daughters-in-laws common in parts of the world. Through this example, the authors debunk a popular myth, that only men perpetuate misogyny. In fact, misogyny is a salient cultural idea that women, too, internalize, especially when the idea is attached to long-lasting cultural customs. Even Zoya, who had been beaten by everyone in her husband's family, defended beatings in the event that a wife is disobedient. This underscores the fact that women in power don't inherently protect other women, and that men aren't inherently the only oppressors.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"In short, rape becomes a tool of war in conservative societies precisely because female sexuality is so sacred. Codes of sexual honor, in which women are valued based on their chastity, ostensibly protect women, but in fact they create an environment in which women are systematically dishonored.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Du'a Aswad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

This explanation comes after describing the honor killing of an Iraqi Kurdish girl, Du'a Aswad, on account of a night she spent out with a Sunni Arab boy. The killing, in which a thousand men participated, was intended to humiliate her sexually. Kristof and WuDunn highlight the important paradox that cultures that highly prize women's virginity end up endangering the lives of women. Rape becomes a calculated weapon because it destroys something of seen ot be of immense value: chastity and honor. (Moreover, it terrorizes communities and incurs physical and psychological trauma.) In the case of Du'a, men relished killing her with marked brutality, partly because her night with the Sunni Arab boy represented self-ownership, which was intolerable to the men. It can be deduced, then, that "the sexual codes of honor" are less about protecting women and more about male ownership, coveting, and hatred of women.

"Young people often ask us how they can help address issues like sex trafficking or international poverty. Our first recommendation to them is to get out and see the world. If you can't do that, it's great to raise money or attention at home. But to tackle an issue effectively, you need to understand it —and it's impossible to understand an issue by simply reading about it. You need to see it firsthand, even live in its midst. One of the great failings of the American education system, in our view, is that young people can graduate from university without any understanding of poverty at home or abroad." Chapter 5

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Harper McConnell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

The authors have just introduced Harper McConnell as a young American who exemplifies engaged, sensitive commitment to human rights work in Congo. In this quote, the authors make the case that the best engagement with humanitarian issues occurs when those issues are intimately known, through personal exposure. This position relates to the point made elsewhere in *Half the Sky*, that the best aid groups aren't stuck in abstract dialogue about human rights, at conferences or bureaucratic events, but are on the ground listening and learning about issues firsthand. Kristof and WuDunn encourage readers, and all Americans, to leave their comfort zones and develop more worldly priorities. Moreover, the authors lightly criticize the insular nature of universities, which ostensibly make students more worldly and cultured, yet don't necessarily expose them to economic realities.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"No one reading this book, we hope, can fathom the sadistic cruelty of those soldiers who used a pointed stick to tear apart Dina's insides. But there is also a milder, more diffuse cruelty of indifference, and it is global indifference that leaves some 3 million women and girls incontinent just like Dina."

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Mahabouba Muhammad , Dina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Prior to this chapter opening, Kristof and WuDunn told the story of Dina, a Congolese woman raped by a group of militiamen, who also pierced her organs with a stick. Dina's fistula developed from rape, but most fistulas, like Mahabouba Muhammad's, are due to a paucity of maternal health resources. The authors show that Dina's story has clearer perpetrators, and therefore more vivid cruelty. But the "cruelty of indifference" is a cruelty of which most of the world is guilty. This term refers to the neglect of women like Mahabouba, whose fistulas are preventable with adequate maternal care, but who simply aren't a political priority. The authors condemn this indifference as an international failure.

❝ "So lifetime risk of maternal death is one thousand times higher in a poor country than in the West. That should be an international scandal."

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Catherine Hamlin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Leading up to this quote, Kristof and WuDunn have explained the startling statistics surrounding maternal mortality ratios in poor countries. Some 99 percent of deaths in childbirth occur in the developing world, and since women there—with less access to family planning and more incentive to have many children, in the hopes of keeping them alive—give birth more in their lifetimes, women in poor countries are a thousand times as likely to die in childbirth than in, for instance, the U.S. The authors reveal their disgust at this fact, and claim that it should be a scandal. But, a scandal implies an unexpected and immoral drama, and women in poor countries are, frankly, expected to suffer more than women in rich countries. As Catherine Hamlin, the founder of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital says, women in the developing world are "an expendable commodity." Inciting an active response to such injustice is one of the goals behind *Half the Sky*.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Religion plays a particularly profound role in shaping policies on population and family planning, and secular liberals and conservative Christians regularly square off. Each side has the best of intentions, yet each is deeply suspicious of the other—and these suspicions make it difficult to forge a broad left-right coalition that would be far more effective in confronting trafficking and overcoming the worst kinds of poverty.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Rose Wanjera

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

This quote follows a description of Rose Wanjera, a young Kenyan woman who, when pregnant, benefited from a maternal health program. The program's sponsors included Marie Stopes International, which President George W. Bush defunded because it was associated indirectly with abortion access in China. Consequently, the defunding ended Rose's access to the health program. In the quote, Kristof and WuDunn criticize the polarization in American politics, which is often informed by conservative Christian dogmatism and liberals' lack of sympathy for religious beliefs. This division keeps liberals and conservatives from collaborating in common causes. Further, the quote implicitly criticizes American shortsightedness, or resistance to perceiving how political bickering in the U.S. can remove options for women like Rose, women who need the very maternal healthcare that conservatives frequently undermine.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Westerners sometimes feel sorry for Muslim women in a way that make them uncomfortable, even angry... Americans not only come across as patronizing but also often miss the complexity of gender roles in the Islamic world.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

Preceding this quote, the authors examined the complicated question of whether Islam is misogynistic. They ultimately argue that, although conservative and extremist Muslims do cite the Koran to justify abusive behavior, Islam isn't inherently misogynistic, which many Islamic feminist scholars work to prove. But, partly due to Western perceptions of Islam as oppressive to women, some Muslim women resist feeling pitied and intruded upon by non-Muslims. Pity is a typically patronizing response that suggests another is helplessly stuck in a situation worse than one's own. So pity for Muslim women suggests their lack of agency or power, but the authors meanwhile describe female Muslim doctors and nurses, even vice presidents, who do clearly have agency—just not, necessarily, Western ideas of agency. This is what Kristof and WuDunn mean by the "complexity of gender roles in the Islamic world," in which a woman might be a high-ranking politician but still need to ask her husband's permission to leave the country.

Chapter 10 Quotes

That is the power of education. One study after another has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty. Schooling is also often a precondition for girls and women to stand up against injustice, and for women to be integrated into the economy. Until women are numerate and literate, it is difficult for them to start businesses or contribute meaningfully to their national economies.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Dai Manju

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after the story of Dai Manju, a girl in central China who desperately wanted to attend school, and managed to with the help of a fortuitous (and accidental) outside donation. As a result of the education she received, she was able to help family members attend school and find jobs, and boost her parents' standard of living. As an adult, Dai Manju went to accounting school and became an executive at an electronics company. Her story and similar successes in her village illustrate "the power of education" to unlock formerly bolted doors. This quote states plainly the primary solution to inequality that Kristof and WuDunn offer again and again: education. Dai Manju not only actualized her own potential, but lifted up her family members and even her town's economy. This reflects the cause-and-effect relationships—which are vast but often difficult to track empirically—between girls' education and social and economic progress.

Anybody traveling in Africa can see that aid is much harder to get right than people usually realize.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Molly Melching

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

This sentence follows an examination of successful initiatives, such as the Mexican welfare project Oportunidades, which effectively bribes families to send children to school. Skeptics abound, however, from outside and within countries receiving aid, and their view is validated by the many failures in aid. Even Molly Melching, the founder of Tostan, called Senegal a "cemetery of aid projects." From afar, people tend to underestimate how difficult successful aid really is. This is partly because providing material resources, such as condoms and mosquito nets, doesn't guarantee their use. Further, conscientiously planned aid projects can be subject to Murphy's Law, as the authors write. The implication exists that a nuanced understanding of challenges facing aid projects would both prevent foolhardy or ill-considered initiatives, and encourage more tolerance of projects that do flounder.

Chapter 11 Quotes

It is not uncommon to stumble across a mother mourning a child who has just died of malaria for want of a $5 mosquito bed net and then find the child's father at a bar, where he spends $5 each week. Several studies suggest that when women gain control over spending, less family money is devoted to instant gratification and more for education and starting small businesses. Because men now typically control the purse strings, it appears that the poorest families in the world typically spend approximately ten times as much (20 percent of their income on average) on a combination of alcohol, prostitutes, candy, sugary drinks, and lavish feasts as they do on educating their children.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

Kristof and WuDunn have just explained why microfinance organizations lend mainly to women—because women are more apt to be trapped in poverty than men, for reasons including that men more often control household money. The authors also frankly explain that men spend less wisely than women, often putting beer before healthcare or school fees, which can endanger the lives of children and limit access to education. Their argument isn't that women are inherently smarter or men inherently selfish, but that, empirically, women make more decisions that keep children in mind and benefit the whole household. This empirical evidence supports their argument to give women more decision-making power, not just because equality is right, but because it's practical.

Chapter 12 Quotes

So was it cultural imperialism for Westerners to criticize foot-binding and female infanticide? Perhaps. But it was also the right thing to do. If we believe firmly in certain values, such as the equality of all human beings regardless of color or gender, then we should not be afraid to stand up for them; it would be feckless to defer to slavery, torture, foot-binding, honor killings, or genital cutting just because we believe in respecting other faiths or cultures. One lesson of China is that we need not accept that discrimination is an intractable element of any society. If culture were immutable, China would still be impoverished and Sheryl would be stumbling along on three-inch feet.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

Leading up to this quote, Kristof and WuDunn discuss China's progress in women's rights over the past century as evidence for the radical cultural changes other countries can undergo that will be to the benefit of women. Here, the authors defend cultural imperialism, or the transmission of a more powerful culture's ideas to another, more vulnerable culture, when cultural imperialism protects women and girls. "Imperialism" has a negative connotation, but the authors make no apologies for it when it means fewer women are killed or mutilated. Further, they stress that culture is ever changing, and the long, gruesome tradition of foot-binding in China has disappeared, giving reason to hope for the disappearance of female genital cutting and other practices.

Chapter 13 Quotes

Incredibly, it looks as if [grassroots activists] will make female genital cutting in West Africa go the way of foot-binding in China. That makes the campaign against genital cutting a model for a larger global movement for women in the developing world. If we want to move beyond slogans, we would do well to learn the lessons of the long struggle against genital cutting.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Molly Melching

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

Kristof and WuDunn have just introduced the issue of female genital cutting, in which girls' genitals are mutilated with the intention of preventing sexual pleasure and preserving virginity. That FGC might one day vanish the way that foot-binding has is remarkable, and due largely to the tactics of Molly Melching, the founder of the Tostan in Senegal. In this quote, "the lessons of the long struggle against genital cutting" refer largely to the movement away from top-down, law-oriented campaigns toward grassroots, culture-oriented ones. Moreover, outsiders' judgmental, intrusive tactics eventually gave way to a strategy that was less judgmental, more willing to compromise its values, based on empiricism, and which transferred leadership away from foreigners to local women. The authors maintain that global aid efforts can emulate the adaptable, respectful, and empirical approach of Tostan.

Chapter 14 Quotes

The unfortunate reality is that women's issues are marginalized, and in any sex trafficking and mass rape should no more be seen as women's issues than slavery was a black issue or the Holocaust was a Jewish issue. These are all humanitarian concerns, transcending any one race, gender, or creed.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes toward the book's conclusion, which summarizes the authors' main arguments, pushes for reader involvement, and lays out clear goals for women's emancipation. Kristof and WuDunn avoid calling the movement one of "women's issues," because these are unfortunately seldom taken seriously enough, and also because the movement isn't just for the sake of women, but for all the world's population. Moreover, looking back on history readers will agree that slavery and the Holocaust didn't just affect victims—nor should the causes been fought only by victims—but rather they were more broadly human problems. The authors try to dismantle borders that would keep some from thinking women's emancipation is a niche cause that concerns only certain disadvantaged people.

Think about the major issues confronting us in this century. These include war, insecurity, and terrorism; population pressures, environmental strains, and climate change; poverty and income gaps. For all these diverse problems, empowering women is part of the answer. Most obviously, educating girls and bringing them into the formal economy will yield economic dividends and help address global poverty.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter, this resounding quote balances the most significant arguments in *Half the Sky*. Kristof and WuDunn have argued repeatedly that women's empowerment is more likely to temper terrorism and religious extremism than military threats will. Women's emancipation also unlocks intellectual power, literally in the form of "billions of IQ points," which will spur problem-solving innovation. And, girls' education will curb overpopulation, and therefore environmental strains. The most direct, and perhaps persuasive, effect of women's emancipation is what it promises for the global economy. This quote, dense with the many ways women's rights will serve all populations, reflects the vast arguments for why women's emancipation is a broadly human concern, not a "women's issue."

We like to think of aid as a kind of lubricant, a few drops of oil in the crankcase of the developing world, so that gears move freely again on their own.

Related Characters: Sheryl WuDunn, Nicholas D. Kristof (speaker), Tererai Trent , Jo Luck

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of *Half the Sky*, the authors have just told the story of Tererai Trent, a Zimbabwean mother of five who was inspired by a brief encounter with Jo Luck, president of Heifer International, to consider taking her dream of education seriously. In this story, Jo isn't a savior or even a recurring figure in Tererai's life. Jo doesn't escort Tererai to success, but rather nudges her toward it lightly in a conversation—ultimately, Tererai earned a PhD in the U.S. because of her own dogged ambition. Kristof and WuDunn stress throughout the book – and in this quote – that the best aid has a light touch, enabling personal development but not imposing Western values.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

Srey Rath is a petite, spirited young Cambodian woman, whom the authors meet while she sells goods at a market stall. With big, confident gestures, she tells a story that began when she was fifteen and, to help her family pay the bills, joined four friends and followed a job agent to Thailand, where dishwashing jobs were promised. But rather than bring the girls to Thailand, the job agent brought them to the capital of Malaysia and handed them off to a gangster. The gangster explained he had paid for them, and they now must pay him back in order to be released. Their work, Rath realized, was prostitution.

Kristof and WuDunn begin by describing Srey Rath's bubby personality in part to show that someone so confident and appealing can have an invisible, traumatic past. This invisibility of women's oppression is evident even in an encounter with a well-adjusted young saleswoman. Then, the authors lead the reader straight to the brutal heart of Srey Rath's story, showing that the book will not sugarcoat such stories of tragedy.

At first, Rath resisted. The first time she was locked up with a customer, she struggled to keep him from raping her, for which the head gangster brutally beat her. To break Rath into submission, the boss and other thugs raped her, beat her, and drugged her, and when she still didn't comply, threatened to kill her. Finally, she gave in and plastered a smile on her face for customers, while being paid nothing, fed little, and kept in an apartment with a dozen other girls.

While reporting on Rath's story, the authors write objectively and straightforwardly, much in the style of newspaper journalism. By not shying away from the details of Rath's story, the authors help readers unflinchingly confront the reality that Rath and other women endure.

Out of desperation, Rath and three other girls risked a perilous escape from their locked apartment—they crossed to the next building by balancing a wooden board across two tenth-story balconies. They managed to make it to the police department, but the police arrested them for anti-immigration laws. Rath spent the next year in a Malaysian prison. She thought freedom was finally within reach when a policeman drove her toward the Thai border, but he sold her to a trafficker, and she found herself in Thailand in yet another brothel.

Rath's story goes on to show that, even when there is hope for a forced prostitute's emancipation, forces conspire against that emancipation. First, after escaping the brothel, the girls met cultural and institutional disregard for the injustice they endured—instead of retribution for their captors, the girls were imprisoned for illegal immigration. Then, police corruption put Rath back in a brothel.

Rath's story is far too common, Kristof and WuDunn write, yet little considered in the global agenda. The authors recount their own journey to their present mission—to make gender equity a global humanitarian priority. In 1989, the authors covered the massacre at Tiananmen Square, the human rights story of the year, in which the Chinese government killed 400-800 protestors. The next year, though, they encountered a study that revealed that 400-800 infants die *each week* in China from neglect, simply because they're girls. The report made the authors question their journalistic priorities, and made them realize that journalists, more prone to covering events that happen on a given day, often neglect to report on tragic events that happen every day. In addition, they found that little U.S. foreign aid is targeted to helping women and girls despite the fact that some 60-100 million girls and women are missing, likely either trafficked or dead.

By showing their own journey to investment in gender equality, Kristof and WuDunn illustrate that even conscientious, investigative journalism like theirs can fail to report on large human rights abuses. As a result, these injustices go widely ignored by audiences. The authors' journey also shows that they're not perfect, which suggests that, just as they became enlightened to these injustices and actively responded to them, the reader can, too.

The issues aren't isolated to the developing world, the authors make clear. Rape and forced prostitution exist in the U.S., and are widely ignored. But, Kristof and WuDunn write, the problems are especially lethal in parts of the developing world. Plainly put, in much of the world girls are valued less than boys are. The authors explain that girls might not get the vaccinations their brothers get, and mothers might not get the medicine their sons get. This amounts to a "gendercide" that, the authors tell us, has killed more people in the past fifty years than all the 20th century's bloody genocides put together. They write a central statement of the book: "In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world."

Kristof and WuDunn don't want to suggest that the U.S. deserves any self-righteous sense of superiority, because many of the humanitarian problems discussed in Half the Sky *also exist in the U.S. But, their book focuses on the developing world. The authors assume that readers will see both 18th century slavery and 19th century totalitarianism as destructive conditions that led to great human rights violations. By placing the "struggle for gender equality" as the corollary moral challenge of our century, they stress the historic gravity of this struggle.*

The chapter returns to Rath. She managed to escape from the Thai brothel. After returning home, American Assistance for Cambodia provided her with a pushcart and starter goods to peddle near the Cambodian-Thai border. Through her sunny personality and industriousness she became a great saleswoman. Now, she has a husband, a son, savings for her son's education, and an expanded two-stall business. The authors invite you, the next time you're in Cambodia, to go to her stall and be charmed by her bubbly personality, so remote from the terrible experiences she was forced to endure earlier in her life.

Importantly, it was an American aid group in Cambodia that assisted Rath in building a business, and therefore gaining autonomy and security. Both Rath's success story and her magnetic, cheerful persona suggest that redemption is possible for women who have endured untold suffering.

Rath's story, the authors stress, underscores what women can achieve when given opportunity. They warn that the rest of the book will be full of sobering anecdotes, but want readers to bear in mind that, "Women aren't the problem but the solution. The plight of girls is no more a tragedy than an opportunity."

Rath's story represents the hope that is central to Half the Sky. *The authors imply that it is less worthwhile for readers to mourn global tragedies than to respond to them through action. When given opportunity, the authors make clear, women form the solutions to the very problems that afflict them.*

The authors then describe visiting Sheryl WuDunn's ancestral village in China, Shunshui. During each visit, they wondered, where are all the women? It turned out that the women had gone to the epicenter of China's manufacturing economy to work in factories that supply American retail stores. The employment of women, the authors explain, is a boon to China's national economy and brings about girls' education, women's mobility, delayed marriage, and reduced childbearing. This pattern is known as "the girl effect."

Kristof and WuDunn use the migration of women from WuDunn's ancestral village as an example of the way women's empowerment has universal benefits, such as fortifying the economy and curbing population growth. Readers may not expect that employment in factories that supply American malls is a source of women's empowerment, but the authors argue that, contrary to popular belief, it is.

The girl effect can help combat poverty all over the world, Kristof and WuDunn argue. Initiatives in India and Bangladesh had stunning success in the late 20th century, they write, and in the 1990s the World Bank and United Nations began to appreciate the global benefits of gender equality. In addition, private aid groups such as Doctors Without Borders and the Nike Foundation have focused on women. The benefits are so vast that even terrorism can be abated by women's empowerment, the authors argue. More and more, Kristof and WuDunn write, the urgent issue of gender equity is appearing on the international agenda.

A note of hope for the future, the authors imply, is the fact that gender equality has made far more appearances in the agendas of diverse groups—not just women-focused groups—as people awaken to the possibilities that women's empowerment contains.

The authors lay out the primary issues they will cover in Half the Sky, which are sex trafficking, gender-based violence (including honor-killings and mass rape), and maternal mortality. They also reference solutions such as girls' education and microfinance. They mention that wealthy countries also need to address serious domestic gender inequities. Further, while many human rights issues exist and need addressing, they consider women's oppression to have the most need, and the most opportunity for change.

The authors are very clear about what topics the book covers. This clarity helps stress that the book is a pragmatic one, aimed at both exposing injustice and presenting solutions. This is not at the exclusion or dismissal of other human rights issues, but gender equality is what the authors prioritize most highly.

The narrative returns to Rath, who agreed to journey to Malaysia and try to find the brothel where she was captive. However, when they arrived, they learned the brothel no longer existed—international public shaming of the government led to a crackdown on sex traffickers. This result shows, the authors argue, that faraway individuals can influence life for oppressed women.

The book's final segment of Rath's story suggests even more reason to hope for better conditions of women worldwide, since not was Rath saved, but her captors' operation was shut down due to international shaming. It is possible, then, to fix systems, not just save individual girls.

Just as African slavery in the 19th century was not a sad but inevitable necessity, the authors posit that the oppression of women is not a fated fact of the 21st century. In the 1780s a few Britons decided the slave trade had to stop, and it eventually did, the authors remind us. Readers can all belong to a similar movement to emancipate women worldwide, Kristof and WuDunn write, and they urge the reader to leap into this unfolding story of empowerment.

Because most readers have historical context for the transatlantic slave trade, its comparison with today's gender inequity underscores the issue's seriousness. Just as enlightened people in Britain imagined a world without African slavery, readers can imagine a world without women's oppression, and work toward that goal.

CHAPTER 1

Emancipating Twenty-First-Century Slaves. The narrative begins in Forbesgunge, India, near the border of Nepal, where sex is one of few things for sale. The authors introduce us to Meena Hasina, a former trafficked prostitute, who strolls down a village path, completely relaxed while people glare at her. At nine, Meena was kidnapped, then forced into prostitution before reaching puberty. When at first she refused to submit to customers, the brothel owners beat her, drugged her, and raped her, until she finally stopped resisting. The brothel's disciplinarian, the authors write, was a woman named Ainul who wouldn't let Meena shed a tear without a beating.

Meena Hasina is an example of a former prostitute who remains steadfast and self-assured even when cultural scorn for sex work leaves her ostracized by her community. Standing up to misogyny and societal contempt, Meena shows, takes remarkable strength. When the authors describe her history as a prostitute, the fact that her brothel's disciplinarian, Ainul, was female is evidence that injustices toward women aren't committed only by men—women, too, can be direct perpetrators.

Kristof and WuDunn explain that India likely has more slaves in such conditions than any other country. Many who begin as slaves, they write, eventually choose to continue prostitution, as the stigma attached to their prostitution prevents other opportunities. The authors explain that it's actually sexually conservative countries, such as India and Iran, where forced prostitution is most common. In these countries, visiting prostitutes is a way for repressed men to release sexual frustration. Societies turn a blind eye to this, the authors write, as long as the girls belong to lower classes.

The facts that Kristof and WuDunn relate here might be counterintuitive to some readers. By explaining that women forced into the sex trade may eventually choose to remain there, they upend the assumption that freed slaves will naturally pursue a different life. Likewise, by explaining that sexually conservative countries have the worst rates of sex slavery, they make clear that cultural taboos of sex do not protect women from rape or enslavement.

The text returns to Meena, who had two babies in captivity, Naina and Vivek, whom she was almost never allowed to see. Holding her children captive was a strategy to prevent Meena from running away, the authors report. Meena was headstrong, though, which made her the victim of regular beatings but also helped her resolve to escape. Once, desperate, she slipped away to ask the police for help—the police mocked her, but did make the brothel owners promise not to punish her. However, a neighbor soon reported to Meena the owners' plans to murder her, so she ran away to the town of Forbesgunge. There, Ainul's son found her and said she could live outside the brothel, if she continued to prostitute and give her earnings to the brothel owners. Even so, Ainul's son would sometimes beat Meena as punishment, but one day a man named Kuduz intervened to defend her.

In Meena's story, her brave obstinacy—her insistence on her own right to freedom—is ultimately what frees her from captivity. While female tenacity is often punished in cultures such as Meena's, it can also be necessary to women's emancipation. This is especially true in places where police corruption is rampant—like Srey Rath, Meena could not depend on law enforcement to protect her.

Kuduz and Meena soon fell in love, then married and had two children. But, Meena was still determined to recover her first two children. She returned to the brothel again and again, with no help from the police, and tried to rescue them, but couldn't.

Meena's saga shows the complications of women's emancipation—her enslavement led her to have children whom she also wanted to rescue. Rarely is liberation, the authors show, as simple as leaving a brothel.

The authors write of how they have awakened to the prevalence of forced prostitution due to interviews with women like Meena. The common term "sex trafficking" is a misnomer, they explain, since trafficking refers to the transport of persons across international borders. The ugly phenomenon is better described, they say, as slavery. An estimated 12.3 million slaves work in all types of labor, and the authors estimate at least 3 million women and girls are enslaved in the sex trade. The authors contrast this number to the eighty thousand slaves trafficked in the 1780s, at the peak of the transatlantic slave trade. And, as in that slave trade, they emphasize, there are few restraints on the ways modern slave owners abuse their victims.

A popular notion in the United States is that slavery was an abominable institution that belongs to another century, but Kristof and WuDunn make clear that it is very much a part of the 21st century. Moreover, far more people are currently enslaved in the sex trade than were trafficked yearly in the transatlantic slave trade. This contrast lends perspective to the truly epidemic problem of modern slavery.

In addition, sex slavery is growing worse. The rise of capitalism and globalization contributed to the problem—for example, the authors write, now a girl from Nigeria might find herself enslaved in Italy. Further, the rise of AIDS creates a higher market for girls who are young and less likely to be infected.

It is important to keep in mind, the authors imply, that human rights do not always progress on an upward linear track—that is, while other humanitarian issues have improved in the past century, globalization and other forces have in fact led to more *slavery.*

The chapter returns to Meena's children, Naina and Vivek, who had brutal upbringings with no schooling and were confused about who comprised their family. At twelve, Naina was bought clothes and a nose ring in preparation for a life of prostitution, despite the protests of her younger brother Vivek. Naina was raped by her first customer and soon began her career as a slave. Vivek later fled to the town he was told their mother lived, and the two had a beautiful reunion. But Meena remained determined to recover Naina, and approached an aid group called Apne Aap Women Worldwide, which, through connections, persuaded the police to raid the brothel and rescue Naina. At that point, Naina was morphine-addicted and emotionally broken, but was soon able to receive medical treatment.

Naina and Vivek's stories underscore the broad effects of forced prostitution—their mother's captivity led to the abused, neglected childhood of these two children. Meena's daughter inherited the role of forced prostitute, demonstrating the trade's cyclical nature. However, the fact that the aid group Apne Aap used their leverage to demand a police raid on the brothel shows the potential power of aid groups to intervene in otherwise evidently hopeless situations.

The family was reunited, but Meena, as a former prostitute, was still stigmatized by the community and in danger of retaliation from the brothel. Nonetheless, the authors write, she keeps her head high and now works as a community organizer to discourage prostitution. Apne Aap, with the help of American funding, started a local boarding school where Meena's children were placed.

That Meena achieved, in the end, safety, stability and a united family, is further evidence that survivors like Meena can lead new lives after slavery, especially with the assistance of aid groups. Those very women can also become powerful advocates against slavery, helping to end the cycle that victimizes girls like Naina.

Fighting Slavery from Seattle. "People always ask how they can help," the authors begin. The reality, they say, is that achieving change can pose a greater challenge than aid groups might lead one to believe, especially when donors want to hear a promise of success. Some efforts even backfire, such as a senator's work in 1993 to discourage Bangladeshi sweatshops from hiring young girls—as a result, the authors write, thousands of unemployed girls ended up in brothels.

The authors anticipate that the reader may be asking his or herself, what I can do to help? But they implicitly discourage naïve underestimates of just how difficult helping is (although some aid groups might suggest otherwise). The authors strive to be clear-eyed about the difficulty of addressing women's oppression, and in being so encourage the reader to have realistic expectations, too.

But, many aid efforts do work, and the authors give an example in the efforts of the expensive, private Overlake School in Washington state. The principal, Frank Grijalva, started a fundraising initiative led by students to sponsor the $13,000 construction of a school in Pailin, Cambodia, through the aid group American Assistance in Cambodia. Importantly, the group's founder stresses girls' education as the best way to prevent sex trafficking. When Overlake students traveled to Cambodia to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony, seeing the poverty of Pailin as well as its citizens' enthusiasm, they realized Overlake needed to have an ongoing relationship with the new school. The result was an inspiring success, life-changing to both the students in Pailin and in Washington.

Because the book's key argument is one of hope, they continue with a success story. Overlake's sponsorship of the school may, through girls' education, prevent grim fate of women like Meena from happening to girls in Pailin. While the primary goal of the sponsorship was, of course, to give opportunities to Cambodian students, it also awakened American students to their privilege and to the inequities worldwide, which can have profound effects as those students come of age and choose their life goals.

But, the authors write, such success stories come with complications. Take, for instance, one student at the Overlake School, Kun Sokkea, who slept in a room with her entire family and always wore the same shirt because it was the only one she owned. Financial pressures made her consider quitting school to work, so to address these pressures American Assistance in Cambodia started the program Girls Be Ambitious, giving monthly $10 grants to families with girls in school. This solution, the authors write, helps prevent the desperation that leads to trafficking. Problems persisted, however: Kun Sokkea had trouble getting to school due to the distance and male harassment, so Overlake bought her a bicycle. However, an older woman asked to borrow it, then sold it, leaving Kun Sokkea without transport, and she eventually dropped out of school. As the authors write, this was a lesson for Overlake in the nuanced difficulty of defeating poverty.

In their effort to give a complete picture of the successes and challenges in many aid situations, the authors detail Kun Sokkea's trials as an example of what can go awry. Kun Sokkea's circumstance was beyond her control: objectification of girls in the form of harassment eroded her sense of safety en route to school, and poverty left her without transport. But even smart, well-intentioned fixes to such problems can end up failing, such as the idea to give Kun Sokkea a bicycle. However, it's also noteworthy that while some tactics may fail, some concurrent tactics may work—in this case, the Girls Be Ambitious program was effective.

The chapter ends with an emphasis on the importance of educating young Americans about the challenges faced in other cultures. Exposure such as the kind the Overlake students received, the authors write, can redirect a young person's life purpose.

Keeping their Western audience in mind, which may include both parents and students, the authors implicitly encourage their readers to pursue such education, for themselves or their children.

CHAPTER 2

Prohibition and Prostitution. The chapter begins at a bustling border village between India and Nepal, where thousands of Nepali girls are trafficked. Kristof strikes up a conversation with an Indian intelligence officer, who says he is monitoring the border for stolen goods as well as terrorist suspects, as security has increased since 9/11. Kristof asks if he also looks for trafficked girls, at which the officer chuckles and says that prostitution is unfortunate but inevitable. Plus, the officer adds, trafficking peasant girls keeps "good" middle-class girls safe.

Kristof's conversation with the intelligence officer highlights cultural obstacles toward gender equality. Women, especially women of lower class, are often so devalued that law enforcement may be less concerned about their wellbeing than about the recovery of stolen goods. The officer's dismissal of trafficked women reflects the ethic of slavery, in which humans are literally commodities. Here, however, the officer regards humans as worth even less than factory-made commodities.

The authors write that modern slavery exists for the same reason African American slavery existed: slaves are considered subhuman. It's possible to end modern slavery, they argue, "but the political will is lacking." Western societies are not culpable for this slavery, since most Western men who patronize prostitutes do not go to brothels, they explain. Rather, the authors call for the West to act because its "action is necessary to overcome a horrific evil."

In the transatlantic slave trade, Western societies were directly responsible for the institution. In modern sex slavery, on the other hand, the authors think the West has a duty to respond to global sex trafficking not because the West is directly culpable, but because intervention is both morally right and necessary for slavery to end.

While there have been successful U.S. bipartisan efforts to raise awareness of sex trafficking, the authors write, generally the issue has been divisive, which has weakened the modern abolitionist movement. They explain that the U.S. left is less judgmental of sex workers, while the right views all prostitution as demeaning. These are ideological differences that keep party members from collaborating to solve the injustices they all condemn.

Some obstacles to giving successful foreign aid, the authors point out, start at home. This fact gives a broader perspective to the repercussions of political discord in the U.S.—repercussions that often go undetected—and to what could be achieved if that discord were set aside.

Kristof and WuDunn pose the question, what policy would end slavery? They explain that, at first, they believed that legalization and regulation of prostitution would be better than flat-out prohibition, but their views evolved—now they think prohibition is best, a stance supported by empirical evidence. Crackdowns on brothel operations, when paired with rehabilitation services for former prostitutes, can largely succeed, they argue.

The authors lend credibility to their argument by showing another example of how their views have evolved. This demonstrates their serious consideration and admission of past errors. Here, what might seem like the more empathetic and progressive solution—viewing prostitution as inevitable, and therefore demanding regulation for sex workers' protection—is shown to be incorrect by empirical evidence.

Kristof and WuDunn write about a crowded, sprawling network of brothers in Kolkata, India, called Sonagachi, often cited as a successful example of legalized and regulated brothel operations. A sex worker union called Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) was founded there in the 1990s, encouraged the use of condoms, lowered the AIDS rate, supposedly blocked forced prostitution, and even began giving tours of Sonagachi. Models like Sonagachi, they mention, have the indirect support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In order to weigh the different arguments for and against prostitution regulation, the authors introduce the reader to a much-praised example of regulations in practice. Sonagachi's history of good publicity and some real achievements shows the nuance needed in determining when policies fail or succeed—what looks successful on the surface may have well hidden failures.

Yet, further examination shows that Sonagachi's success is more modest than advertised. Kristof and WuDunn acknowledge that, after Kristof criticized Sonagachi, liberals in India accused him of undermining the self-ownership of sex workers, who are trying to make better lives for themselves. One liberal wrote, "Your stance . . . smacks of the Western missionary position of rescuing brown savages from their fate." But, the authors argue, many sex workers in Kolkata have contrary views.

By noting the criticism of Indian liberals, the authors acknowledge a popular counterargument of the "white savior." A common trope, the white savior is a white person who imposes his or her own values on people of color in a patronizing way that dismisses cultural differences and degrades their autonomy. However, the authors try to show that their argument derives from the experience of sex workers, not from their own Western self-righteousness.

Kristof and WuDunn introduce the reader New Light, an organization that supports current and former sex workers, and to Geeta Ghosh. Geeta has seen a very different side of Sonagachi, they write, and was kidnapped as a child by a trusted woman, enslaved at twelve, kept in a room, and raped for a month by the same man. She worked for years under the threat of execution. Her experience is not uncommon—the authors write about a Yale researcher who researched and toured Sonagachi, and was told that most sex workers were in fact trafficked, and that customers could spend a few extra pennies to not wear a condom.

The authors' choice to report the experience of a former sex worker—rather than, for instance, Kristof's own experience visiting Sonagachi—to weigh prostitution regulation vs. prohibition helps refute the implied "white savior" indictment. Continually throughout the book, they report the words and experiences of women they've interviewed in an effort to draw attention to voices often unheard, rather than position themselves as central spokespersons for oppressed women.

The authors examine different approaches to prostitution in order to assess what they call the "legalize-and-regulate" model vs. the "big-stick approach," with prohibition enforced by crackdowns. While Sonagachi did curb AIDS slightly, a more successful reduction happened in Mumbai, the authors explain, where numbers of prostitutes have fallen dramatically in recent years, partly due to American pressure for crackdowns—the big stick approach. The authors use the Netherlands and Sweden as another illustration of regulation vs. prohibition. The Netherlands legalized prostitution for the sake of sex workers' health and safety in 2000, they write, while in 1999 Sweden criminalized *buying* sexual services, but not sex work itself, reflecting the view that prostitutes are likely victims, not criminals. Sweden's crackdowns had more success, driving down the price of sex services and discouraging traffickers. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, Amsterdam has become a sex tourism destination with many trafficked prostitutes, the authors report, and there's no evidence that STDs or HIV rates have decreased.

Kristof and WuDunn use the examples of Sweden and the Netherlands to explain their support of the big-stick approach to prostitution. They therefore exemplify what they argue in the book's final chapter, that solutions should be based on rigorously empirical evidence, not on intuition. Examination of Sweden and the Netherlands works as evidence in tandem with testimony from Geeta Ghosh, to round out the author's argument for zero-tolerance of prostitution.

In the developing world, this debate is mostly a distraction, the authors argue, because the establishment of laws doesn't guarantee that governments will actually *enforce* those laws. Only in recent years have U.S. embassies gathered information on trafficking (in a document called the Trafficking in Persons, or TIP, report), and the issue needs to feature on the international agenda, holding countries to much higher standards for crackdowns. The big-stick approach should focus on punishing men in Asia who purchase virgins, they argue, which would have a positive domino effect. Further, the authors point out that crackdowns have already had success in parts of Cambodia, after data on trafficking led to shaming of the Cambodian government—there, finding a young girl showcased in a brothel window is less common now than it used to be.

By reporting on the ways international attention gradually weakens the sex trafficking industry, the authors give empirical evidence of far-reaching effects that follow when Western countries give sustained attention to injustices in the developing world. This section anticipates later arguments in the book that Americans can work toward gender equity by demanding that their own government give more attention to sex trafficking.

Rescuing Girls is the Easy Part. Kristof and WuDunn begin by saying they became slave owners by simply paying cash in exchange for two young women. But rescuing girls, they write, is easy, while preventing them from returning to brothels is hard. Their unexpected purchases happened when Kristof was traveling as a correspondent in Cambodia, and stayed in a brothel in Poipet. With an interpreter, he interviewed two young women under the guise of hiring them, Srey Neth and Srey Momm.

This section's jarring opening, in which the authors describe themselves as slave owners, makes viscerally real the existence of slavery today, not just in a previous century. This helps the reader feel, rather than intellectually understand, the shocking reality of modern slavery.

Neth is a thin teenager in tight jeans and a pink t-shirt, nervous at being in the company of two men. In a monotone voice, she recounts her road to enslavement: a female cousin, telling the family Neth would be selling fruit, sold her to a brothel, who sold her as a virgin to a Thai man. Now she is trapped in the brothel, dead-eyed and prized for her light skin. With Neth's consent, she and Kristof scheme for him to buy her, so that she can return home. For $150, she soon "belongs" to Kristof.

The description of Neth's clothes, which recalls any typical American teenager's dress, helps the reader to understand the innocence and ordinariness of sex trafficking victims. Neth, a Cambodian teenager, is no different from any American teenager, the authors imply, and deserves the life and rights that a healthy, safe American teenager might have.

Kristof finds Srey Momm, a frail young girl, in a different brothel. In Kristof's description, Momm vacillates between cheerful and hysterical, and pleads to be purchased and returned home. Kristof does just that, for $203.

Just as he does for Neth, Kristof buys Momm from her brothel, again making stark the reality that humans can be bought in modern society with not very much cash.

Neth was welcomed back by her family, and opened a village store, her dream, while American Assistance for Cambodia kept an eye on her progress. Momm's return home was, at first, jubilant, as her whole village flocks to her with cheers and embraces, and her mother sprinted a mile from work to greet her, sobbing. It was decided that Momm would rent a market stall, with help from the same American aid group, which went well at first. A week later, however, Kristof received the terrible news that Momm had a methamphetamine addiction, and had voluntarily returned to the brothel. American Assistance for Cambodia helped her twice more to establish a new life, but each time she returned. The next year, Kristof saw Momm in the same brothel, where she kneeled and begged forgiveness.

The reappearance of American Assistance for Cambodia (following their relationship with Overlake School in Pailin) is significant: by showing a single group assisting women in multiple narratives, the authors subtly show the influence aid groups can have. However, the group's repeated efforts do not keep Momm from returning to her brothel multiple times, underscoring the fact that no aid group's work will always succeed—rather, so many other factors beyond aid must align in order for complete success.

Neth and Momm illustrate, the writers argue, that many women live a blurred line between slavery and voluntary sex work. Over time, Momm's role in the brothel leaned toward managerial, and soon she would be beating other girls. But she escaped that fate, as her brothel folded due to crackdowns and the cost of bribery. Suddenly, Momm was free. She married a former customer and settled into a better life.

Categorizing people is easy, but the nuance of the sex slave trade resists black and white designation: some girls may be effectively trapped, though technically free to choose a life outside prostitution. Importantly, this echoes the earlier argument that simply rescuing a forced prostitute does not free her—bondage is more than being locked in a room, and can include forced drug addiction. Moreover, the managerial future Momm escaped highlights the cyclical nature of the sex trade.

Meanwhile, the authors write, Neth's flourishing shop led to more competition in her village. But worse, men in her family, refusing to respect a young female entrepreneur, abused the shop, stealing as they wished, and finally raided it. Desperate to help her ailing father financially, Neth agreed to go with a trafficker to Thailand, where a job as dishwasher was promised. American Assistance for Cambodia, however, persuaded her not to—it was another trap for sex trafficking. Instead, the group found a reputable salon where Neth then studied hairdressing. All was going beautifully, when Neth's health began to decline. She had HIV.

At first, Neth's story illustrates that helping a former forced prostitute establish a new life can meet unforeseen obstacles—misogynistic cultural attitudes did not permit Neth's financial success to go unpunished. However, sustained support from American Assistance for Cambodia did lead to a job at a hair salon, which led to a career, showing that, even when difficult, commitment from aid groups is worthwhile.

A young, educated suitor fell in love with Neth, and she fell in love with him. They soon began a loving marriage, but she never told him about her history in the brothel, or her HIV. Kristof and WuDunn, who maintained a friendship with Neth, describe their heartbreak at seeing Neth deceive her husband about a disease that endangered him and their baby, with whom she was pregnant. But, Neth finally agreed to take another HIV test, a more reliable one that came back negative. After her earlier suffering, Neth eventually had a healthy baby, a caring husband, and plans to open a beauty shop.

Neth's tumultuous saga shows the aftereffects of life in a brothel—although she ultimately did not have HIV, she endured the terror of believing she'd pass it onto her baby, meanwhile hiding her past her husband out of shame and fear. Yet it also shows that, even after a rocky reentry into freedom, life is long and hope can restore itself, especially with support from others.

Kristof and WuDunn outline three lessons in this story. First, rescuing girls from brothels is a complex mission. Second, the difficulty should not make anyone forfeit the mission. Third, even if a problem is so formidable it can't be eradicated, it's worth mitigating. They end with a Hawaiian parable, in which a boy on a beach tosses washed up **starfish** back into the ocean. A nearby man says that there are too many starfish, and he'll never make a difference. The boy responds, "It sure made a difference to that one."

In Cambodia, Kristof took two girls out of slavery, similar to the parable's boy who rescues one starfish at a time. The fact that neither figure could help all the girls, or starfish, did not negate the importance of those they did *help. Including the parable and the three listed lessons tacitly encourages readers to summon resolve and work toward gender equality, while bearing in mind that their work will not free every enslaved woman—or even solve all the problems faced by any* one *enslaved woman.*

CHAPTER 3

Learning to Speak Up. Kristof and WuDunn claim that one reason so many women are oppressed is the societal expectation for women to be docile. The authors make clear that they don't blame the victims, since practical and cultural reasons motivate women to be complacent. But, the authors argue, as long as women and girls allow themselves to be abused, abuse will continue. Education can show girls that submissiveness isn't inherent to being a woman.

Here, the authors are careful to avoid victim blaming, but in a more subtle way. Just as women must never be blamed for being raped, women must not be blamed for adhering to their cultures' prescription of docility. They also point out the value *of docility: it can protect women from violence, incentivizing them to be submissive. However, the authors argue, for women to advance, they must exercise agency by resisting cultural norms.*

In the Indian slum of Kasturba Nagar, Usha Narayane, a young Dalit woman (the typically poor, darker-skinned Untouchable caste), showed what can happen when women self-advocate. Remarkably, Usha's parents managed to send her and her siblings to university. Usha was visiting home one day when she encountered Akku Yadav.

Giving the reader the information about Usha's caste is important for a non-Indian reader to understand the context of the Kasturba Nagar. Usha's background and skin color inherently disadvantage her in India.

Akku Yadav, a higher-caste man, was the ruling mobster of Kasturba Nagar, a place virtually unprotected by law enforcement. His preferred way to terrorize the community was rape and sexual humiliation, such as raping a pregnant woman in public, or burning a naked man with cigarettes and forcing him to dance in front of his daughter. The more grotesque Akku Yadav's crimes, the authors write, the more likely residents were to submit, especially since the stigma of rape discouraged survivors from telling others.

Akku Yadav's crimes demonstrate the power of sexual shame in places like Kasturba Nagar. Because shame usually kept women from reporting their rape, it became a tool to both silence and terrorize them. In public rapes, the violence of sexual humiliation compounded the violence of the rape itself.

Akku Yadav didn't target Usha's family, because their education made them more likely to receive aid from police. One day, when Akku Yadav terrorized Usha's neighbor, smashing furniture and threatening to kill the family, Usha reported him to the police. In retaliation, Akku Yadav and forty thugs surrounded her house with a bottle of acid to throw on her, demanding she withdraw the complaint. Usha barricaded the door and called the police, who never came, while Akku Yadav yelled lurid descriptions of how he would rape and kill her. Usha turned on the cooking gas and threatened to light a match if they broke into the house, blowing them all up.

That the Narayane family's education shielded them from Akku Yadav shows the significance of education in India. Education brings more than economic opportunity–in societies of deep inequity, education becomes a status signal that is itself insurance against abuse and manipulation, a way to win the attention of corrupt officials. In their description of the scene with Akku Yadav, Kristof and WuDunn don't sensationalize the violence. Readers will recognize this type of scene—a stand off between a mob of angry men and a heroic figure—from movies more than real life, but it's important to recognize that this event actually happened, and so to sensationalize it might be disrespectful.

A crowd of Kasturba Nagar residents, who took pride in Usha's schooling, were enraged on her behalf. They threw stones at Akku Yadav's mob until it retreated, then burned down Akku Yadav's house. The police then arrested him for his own protection, and a rigged bail hearing was held. Hundreds of women from Kasturba Nagar marched to the courtroom, where Akku Yadav mocked and threatened them. The women attacked, throwing chili pepper in the police officers' faces and knifing Akku Yadav until he was killed, even slicing off his penis in retaliation for his having once cut off a woman's breasts.

Kasturba Nagar's residents owed their new sense of empowerment largely to Usha's bravery. An extreme example, the events dramatize the power of a single self-assertive woman to influence hundreds of others. Similar to the scene at Usha's house, the authors take pains to not sensationalize the violence in the courtroom. The women's final act of cutting off Yadav's penis shows just how much of his power was based on sexual violence, and by extension how sexual violence is in fact a strategy *men use to gain and keep power.*

Kasturba Nagar erupted in celebration. Although Usha wasn't at the courtroom, she did organize the attack and was arrested. Enormous resistance from the women, however, led to Usha's release. All the woman claimed responsibility, reasoning that if hundreds participated in Akku Yadav's killing, they could not all be imprisoned. Now, the authors report, Usha is certain that Akku Yadav's gang will try to retaliate, but says she isn't worried. Usha became the hero of Kasturba Nagar, and the slum's new beloved leader.

Solidarity between the women of Kasturba Nagar enabled Usha's protection. Though this level of solidarity isn't applicable to every situation, it does illustrate the power of individual women united for a cause. Usha's story is exceptionally dramatic, but also a testament to the extreme reversal of power made possible by women who advocate for their own rights.

The authors write, "The saga of Kasturba Nagar, is an unsettling one, with no easy moral," as they do not condone murder of anyone. But, the women of Kasturba Nagar found the voice to demand their own rights. It's necessary, the authors argue, for outsiders to support such women who resist docility. The most effective tool of empowerment, though, is girls' education. In the end, oppressed women and girls must take leadership in the human rights revolution.

The authors explicitly refrain from praising or romanticizing the murder of Akku Yadav, to make clear that the story's most important lessons lie outside *of violence. Most importantly, Usha's empowerment inspired the empowerment of other women, who rejected codes of female docility. Moreover, the authors imply that Usha's education increased her ability to self-advocate, and if more girls had educational opportunities, cases of such self-advocacy would multiply.*

The New Abolitionists. Kristof and WuDunn introduce Zach Hunter in Atlanta, who was twelve when he heard that modern slavery existed, and started the organization Loose Change to Loosen Chains (LC2LC) to fundraise for modern slavery abolitionism. He belongs to the recent surge of social entrepreneurs. Bill Drayton explains social entrepreneurs as people who do not simply work within current aid or government bureaucracies, but create their own context by forming a new movement or initiative. From the 1700s to the 1980s, most economic growth was confined to half the world's population, Drayton says, but now that transformation has extended to developing countries and change is happening rapidly.

Zach Hunter's story juxtaposes Usha Narayane's strikingly—he began his work as a seventh grader in Atlanta, a situation Western readers are much more likely to relate to than Usha's Indian slum. This familiarity makes it more possible for readers to imagine themselves joining the abolitionist movement like Zach did. The fact that a person so far removed from a place like Kasturba Nagar can still play a role as social entrepreneur shows just how plausible globalization makes major contributions to progress.

Women's emancipation would be much stronger, Kristof and WuDunn argue, were it backed by more social entrepreneurs. Advocacy beyond the UN and aid bureaucracies is necessary, they write—for instance, investment in charismatic leaders in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr. would stimulate the movement. Today, women are often excluded from political office, but occupy most social entrepreneurial roles outside government, bringing extraordinary change worldwide.

Kristof and WuDunn's emphasis on the ways women work outside government contexts illustrates how important ingenuity is in the movement for gender equity. Women have found their way into nontraditional positions of power, sometimes inventing those very contexts. At the same time, that such ingenuity is necessary points to how official paths of gaining power are often closed to women.

Sunitha Krishnan is one such social entrepreneur. A social worker in Hyderabad, India, she has a small stature and a detached manner when speaking about the abuses she underwent, the authors write. One day, a group of men, who opposed Sunitha's literacy work in a village, raped her, which caused the community to ostracize her. The rape and its effects motivated Sunitha to advocate for sex workers. Soon after her decision, a police crackdown on Hyderabad brothels, with no resources for the newly homeless sex workers, led to suicides and devastation among the sex workers and their children. In response, Sunitha collaborated with a Catholic missionary (despite being Hindu herself) and founded Prajwala, a school and shelter for rescued prostitutes and prostitutes.

Though not the main point behind telling Sunitha's story, the police crackdown in Hyderabad contains important lessons. Without a strategy and provisions for prostitutes' life beyond the brothel, the crackdown ended in catastrophe. This underscores the complexity of solving sex trafficking, and serves as a reminder that freeing a forced prostitute doesn't actually place her in safety. Further, Sunitha's Hinduism didn't conflict with the Catholic missionary ethic, an example of productive collaboration between different religious groups.

Sunitha worked on the ground, confronting pimps and gathering evidence with which to convince police to raid brothels. Thugs retaliated by stabbing to death Sunitha's first employee, himself a former pimp. It became clear that Sunitha and her workers were in serious danger, so she shifted her approach to work more with the government and aid groups. Prajwala has expanded to also rehabilitate former prostitutes and train them in vocational skills—not only in making crafts, but in welding and carpentry, uncommon careers for Indian women.

Sunitha's persistence is both inspiring and a cautionary tale: confronting thugs was brave but reckless, and ultimately lethal. Working in cooperation with established systems, then, can be necessary for social entrepreneurs. Further, Prajwala's training of women in typically male vocations shows how social entrepreneurs who defy gender roles can bring about change both progressive and pragmatic.

Sunitha downplays Prajwala's success, saying that prostitution has nonetheless increased. But Abbas Be is evidence of the good Prajwala has done. Sold to a brothel, Abbas watched a rebellious girl in the brothel be hog-tied, beaten, and stabbed to death as a warning to other girls. When she was freed in a brothel raid, Abbas found shelter in Prajwala and is now a bookbinder and a counselor for other girls. Sunitha had Abbas tested for HIV, and because she tested positive, Sunitha is trying to find Abbas an HIV-positive husband.

It's noteworthy that Abbas Be is a success story despite being HIV-positive. The fact that she contracted HIV while enslaved in a brothel doesn't fate her story to be tragic. To the contrary, she has developed confidence, skills, and a role advocating for other women. Essential to Half the Sky *is the reminder that oppressed women have unique and complex stories.*

Prajwala's workers want all brothels shut down, not just regulated, Kristof and WuDunn report. "Aid groups would have been too sensible to tackle the problem" of prostitution in Hyderabad, they write, but Sunitha's tenacity led to great change. Further, while it was Sunitha who led the charge, American donors including Bill Drayton's organization and Catholic aid services, made it more impactful.

Sunitha serves as subtle support for Kristof and WuDunn's own argument that brothels should be eradicated. The fact that Sunitha, a woman who knows so intimately the brothel system in Hyderabad, disagrees with the legalize-and-regulate system is compelling evidence for eradication. Notably, Sunitha's initiative thrived in part because of American financial support, the kind of support readers can give.

CHAPTER 4

Rule by Rape. The chapter begins with South African medical technician Sonette Elhers, who invented Rapex. Rapex is a device inserted into the vagina like a tampon, with barbs that clench down on the penis of a man who violates a woman. The need for Rapex reflects, the authors write, commonplace violence against women worldwide. They stress that, "women aged fifteen through forty-four are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined." Intimate partners perpetrate violence that seriously impacts women's health.

The authors' inclusion of Rapex supports the argument that rape direly needs to be addressed—the cause is so urgent, it compelled a mechanical invention to make women safer. Rapex, however, doesn't address the deep cultural problem that leads to rape: misogyny. Further, the authors explain that it is often the people to whom a woman is closest, a husband or boyfriend, who inflicts the most brutal and frequent abuse, which shatters the myth of male protectors.

Violence against women is also subject to technological innovation, the authors report. For instance, since the first documented case in 1967, the use of acid as a weapon, splashed in the face and melting the skin, has grown. In Kenya, for instance, the threat of such violence forms unique obstacles for women to gain political power, since rape literally could ruin a woman's image. The authors write that, "a culture of sexual predation," more than individual men, is usually the root problem.

It may be counterintuitive to readers that modern innovations can be tools for misogynistic purposes, but just as torture instruments were developed across eras, new tools to suppress women are emerging. The problem of rape is ultimately rooted in cultural ethics. Given that fact, punishing specific perpetrators might be a temporary solution, but wouldn't address the core problem.

The authors introduce Woinshet Zebene, an Ethiopian girl. She was raised in a rural culture in which a man, when rejected by a woman, commonly recruits friends to kidnap her, then rapes her, which effectively obligates her to marry him, since she'll struggle to find another husband. Ethiopian law prevents a rapist from being prosecuted if he marries the woman he raped. Teenaged Woinshet was victim to the violence this custom encourages.

The perverse system to which Woinshet is subjected is another example of rape used as a tool of power. In this case, raping a woman becomes a way to assert ownership over her, cutting off her options due to limitations for women who are considered impure.

In their hut outside the capital Addis Ababa, Woinshet and her father tell the authors the story. Stealing a goat, they explain, is a grave transgression, but kidnapping a woman is not. With "quiet dignity," Woinshet describes being seized, at thirteen, from her hut one night by a group of men. For two days, Aberew Jemma and his friends raped and beat Woinshet.

Much like the Indian intelligence officer's disregard for trafficked girls at the beginning of chapter 2, the ethos in Woinshet's village is that women are worth less than a commodity such as livestock. While Woinshet describes her harrowing story, the authors' description of her "quiet dignity," is a poignant reminder of how brave and resilient a girl must be to survive such brutality. Rather than solely present Woinshet as a victim, the author's also capture her strength, and in doing so even more powerfully indict a world that would seek to oppress her.

After Woinshet escaped from her kidnappers, her father rejected the idea of her marrying Aberew. They decided to report the rape as a crime, and Woinshet walked miles to a bus stop, waited two days and took a grueling journey to have a pelvic exam. Village elders urged the Zebene family to settle the dispute and agree to marriage, but they refused. Afraid of prosecution, Aberew kidnapped Woinshet again, and resumed the rapes. While trying to escape, Aberew recaptured her and, incredibly, took her to court, where Woinshet pleaded to be returned home. But, the official sided with her rapist.

In Woinshet's saga, not only her rapist and kidnappers, but also authority figures in her village and the government deny her right to a life free of violence. In cultures such as Woinshet's, corruption isn't the only reason violence toward women persists unpunished. Rather, endemic misogyny makes authorities condone abuse.

The authors report that Woinshet didn't want to marry anyone so young, but wanted to stay in school, despite accusations that she had broken tradition by refusing her rapist. She fled from the compound where Aberew had imprisoned her, to the local jail, where she was placed in a cell for protection, while her rapist went free. After resistance from the police and judges, a judge finally sentenced Aberew to ten years in prison, but he was soon released. Fearing for her life, Woinshet fled to Addis Ababa to live with her father.

It is noteworthy that Woinshet actively wanted to pursue an education, a testament that not only elders or outsiders want education for girls, but girls themselves often want it, too. Woinshet continued to struggle not just against her abusers, but against authorities who found her plight unworthy of intervention.

"Woinshet found support in an unlikely corner," the authors write: Americans wrote angry letters objecting to the Ethiopian legal code that rapists cannot be prosecuted for victims they marry. The Americans belonged to Equality Now, which gave Woinshet moral support and funding for school. Equality Now brought enough negative attention to Ethiopia to spur the law to change.

It was outsiders who finally intervened in Woinshet's situation, evidence that noisy objection to abuse, from half way across the world, can in fact effect change.

However, a change in law doesn't entail a change in culture. Kristof and WuDunn think some Westerners put too much energy toward changing laws. Constitutional amendments passed after the Civil War did less to empower African Americans, they argue, than the civil rights movement did. They cite the leader of the growing Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, who says cultural change starts with education, not just laws. Woinshet is now in high school, they report, and planning to go to law school.

Maintaining their realist perspective, the authors imply that expecting new laws to inherently effect change is to view causal relationships too simplistically. Historically, in the United States as well as developing countries, laws have needed shoves from grassroots movements to actually enact the intended—or purportedly intended—results of the law.

The authors claim that the reasons behind epidemic violence against women can be boiled down to sexism and misogyny. They ask rhetorically, "How else to explain why so many more witches were burned than wizards? Why is acid thrown in women's faces, but not in men's?" Americans, they argue, must spotlight widespread abuse in developing countries, in part by establishing more diplomatic roles for gender equity. One step would be a Women's Global Development Office, included in the proposed International Violence Against Women Act, which will be reintroduced to congress yearly until passed.

Here, the authors locate their argument beyond the modern era and within greater human history. Mistrust, fear, and hatred of women have led to irrational accusations of witchcraft for centuries. That same legacy of misogyny makes women more likely to experience acid attacks today.

Misogyny, however, exists not only among men, the authors argue. Women, too, manage brothels, prioritize sons over daughters, and cut girls' genitals. For instance, in the Sierra Leone civil war, women fighters assisted in holding women down to be raped, as a way for soldiers to bond. Further, the author's report, women in some countries kill female babies under the husband's threat of divorce. Many women support beating women, and mothers-in-law can be especially cruel purveyors of violence.

Concrete villains make an easier target to fight than does a deep cultural ethic. That is, if men were solely responsible for misogyny, the task of ending misogyny would be clearer. However, the authors give evidence to show that women also internalize misogyny and even assist in sexual violence. The fight is against cultures *that condone violence against women.*

This was the experience of Zoya Najabi from Afghanistan, who was married at twelve and beaten by all her in-laws, but especially her mother-in-law. Zoya describes to the authors being whipped by her mother-in-law until her feet "were like yogurt." Zoya says that the beating was wrong because she had in fact obeyed her husband—not because beating women is wrong. Women, the authors explain, internalize misogynistic values, then perpetuate them.

Here, the authors use vivid descriptions of Zoya's mother-in-law's beatings to make the consequences of female misogyny concrete rather than abstract to the reader.

Mukhtar's School. "The most effective change agents aren't foreigners but local women (and sometimes men) who galvanize a movement," the authors begin. Mukhtar Mai is a good example. Growing up in a village in Punjab, Mukhtar never attended school and doesn't know her age. When a higher-caste gang raped her younger brother Shakur, an early teenager, the gang accused him of having sex with a girl from their caste, to avoid punishment. Mukhtar had to apologize on Shakur's behalf for this invented crime, and when the tribal council decided the apology wasn't enough, they ordered Mukhtar to be gang-raped. After four men raped her in a stable, a crowd jeered at her while she stumbled home.

The authors' focus on Mukhtar Mai underscores their argument that internal change ideally comes from within *societies, not from intervening outsiders. Her story, beginning with her brother's rape by other men, shows that boys also fall victim to rape. In places where rape is an assertion of masculinity, or of the culture's predominant idea of masculinity, boys may also be victims of this perverse ethic.*

Mukhtar prepared to perform the reaction expected of her: to kill herself. But, her parents prevented this and a village Muslim leader publically denounced the rape. Remarkably, Mukhtar then reported the rape, had her rapists arrested, and caught the attention of Pakistan's president, who gave her $8,300 in compensation. She put the money toward building schools, what the village most needed. The authors describe Mukhtar, on Kristof's first visit to see her, as a deferential girl sitting in the back of her father's house, face covered, letting the men speak. When she finally opened up to Kristof, she spoke passionately about the need for education to prevent rape. Meanwhile, as she reported to Kristof, the police guarding the house were actually exploiting Mukhtar for her money.

It's noteworthy that both Mukhtar and Woinshet found the wherewithal to fight their culture of rape with, initially, support from parents. Resistance is easier when trusted models or encouraging voices of resistance are nearby. This is further evidence of the infectious nature of advocacy—advocates inspire other advocates. Further, Mukhtar shows that appearances can be deceiving, especially when filtered through Western lenses: at first appearing timid and submissive, Mukhtar shows herself to be daring and vocal.

Mukhtar had already founded the Mukhtar Mai School for Girls, and Kristof's column on the school brought in $430,000 in donations. But, it also brought resentment from Pakistan's government, and the release of her rapists. When Mukhtar denounced the government, the president put her under house arrest, then ordered her kidnapped and cut off from outside contact. This happened while President George W. Bush was praising Pakistan's president for "bold leadership."

That President Bush praised the Pakistani government while it terrorized a champion of women's rights shows the potential gaps between political rhetoric and political reality. Because Mukhtar was high-profile, her case became public to the U.S., but for lesser known cases, government oppression can go unseen.

After Mukhtar's harassment became public, the embarrassed U.S. government pressured Pakistan to release her. By the time Mukhtar had permission to travel to the U.S., she had gained international celebrity. Lavished with attention from *Glamour* magazine and politicians, Mukhtar found the interviews and pageantry overwhelming. By contrast to her U.S. reception, her own work focuses on the underserved and largely unseen rural communities. The authors describe a commencement at one of Mukhtar's school as having a thousand-person attendance and messages against domestic violence.

Mukhtar's resistance to her extravagant reception by American magazines and politicians shows the ironic ways humanitarians can be greeted in the U.S. Mukhtar was treated as a celebrity, with a celebrity's level of admiration and excess, but this ostentatiousness in fact alienated her. She advocates for virtually invisible rural communities, to which such fanfare wouldn't resonate.

Some efforts fail, however, the authors stress—Mukhtar personally worked to keep one girl from marrying at twelve, but the family married her off nonetheless. Even so, her initiative has expanded to include a free legal clinic, a boys' school, and other civic resources. Though Mukhtar didn't have a sophisticated way of speaking, her resolve and willingness to both embrace victims and urge authorities to work for them made her extremely influential. Mukhtar herself changed, the authors describe, no longer deferring to the men in her family, despite murderous threats from one of her brothers. Her dress is less conservative, though she retains her Muslim faith.

Even with Mukhtar's personal commitment to keep girls in school, some fall through the cracks. The authors bring in this example to temper any assumption that Mukhtar's heroism is without failure. It's also important for the authors to emphasize that, even as Mukhtar grew more confident and liberal in her attitudes, she maintained her Muslim faith. Progress and Islam, this implies, are not incompatible.

Yet the Pakistani government persisted in their attempt to terrorize Mukhtar, smearing her with the myth that she was money-hungry, and even targeting Kristof and WuDunn. The president warned her against spreading a bad image of Pakistan in the U.S., and threatened to imprison her for false charges of fornication. Desperate, her chief of staff told Kristof and WuDunn that, if they died even in a train accident, it would be a plotted murder.

Mukhtar's story is a rather operatic tale—the president at first aided her, jumpstarting her education work, then resisted her success and viciously sought retaliation. The very real threat of state-sanctioned murder highlights just how dangerous becoming a powerful woman can be.

Mukhtar's courage shows that leaders emerge not just from privileged backgrounds, the authors argue. Her leadership inspired other women, like sixteen-year-old Saima, to advocate against rape. After a group of men paraded Saima naked through her village and raped her, Saima chose not suicide, but to prosecute the attackers. Though there's no data, rapes in Punjab reportedly have declined due to threat of prosecution.

Mukhtar's self-advocacy was contagious, influencing other girls to follow suit. The saying, "empowered women empower women" appears in action here. Further, by raising the social and legal stakes of committing rape, Mukhtar and her allies reduced its prevalence.

Mukhtar's tenacity is contagious to those privileged to know her, like a policeman once enlisted to harass Mukhtar but who grew spellbound by her commitment to helping others. He risked his career in order to support Punjabi local women, the authors write. After political shifts in Pakistan, Mukhtar Mai is now safe from government spying. She also married a former policeman as his second wife, "making Mukhtar an odd emblem of women's rights," but with the first wife's well wishes.

The effect Mukhtar had extends, notably, to men who changed their perspectives on women's rights. This implies that Mukhtar and women like her can actually influence ideas of masculinity—a policeman forsook a very masculine job to defend the rights of women, perhaps including the idea of "integrity" in his new brand of masculinity. Also, Mukhtar's role as second wife show that it's possible to both champion women's rights and adhere to some conservative customs.

CHAPTER 5

The Shame of "Honor". The hymen, Kristof and WuDunn explain, is an object of worship and symbol of honor in many cultures. For that reason, a torn hymen is a motive to murder girls. Virginity has been valued across history, the authors explain, and virgins have been bought and sold. Today, this persists in parts of the Middle East. The authors write that, "the paradox of honor killings," in which a woman is murdered for suspicion of impurity, "is that societies with the most rigid moral codes end up sanctioning behavior that is supremely immoral: murder."

Here, the authors place modern violence against women in a global history in which virginity is prized as a commodity, and conversely a lack of virginity is a reason to murder women. The prize of virginity is represented in the intact hymen, a tissue membrane over the vagina opening (the absence of which in fact indicates nothing about a woman's sexual history, as it can break from any kind of physical activity). Half the Sky *shows consistently that hating women and wanting women's bodies can coexist.*

The authors tell the story of Du'a Aswad, a seventeen-year-old Kurdish girl living in Iraq, who spent a night with a Sunni Arab boy. Though honor killings are outlawed in Iraq, the authors report that security forces watched a thousand men participate in Du'a's killing, ripping off her skirt, kicking her "as if she were a soccer ball," and dropping stones and concrete bricks onto her. Afterward, some men covered her body in the street. This is one of an estimated 5,000-6,000 honor killings a year, the authors write. That statistic doesn't cover honor rapes, in which rape is used to systematically disgrace and terrorize women. In Darfur, the authors report, rape was a strategic weapon for Sudanese-sponsored militias, and women who sought medical help afterward were punished, to prevent negative publicity. Reports of mass rapes are staggering, such as the estimated 90% of women in parts of Liberia during the civil war. One doctor tells the authors that he discourages survivors from going to the police, because the police will rape them.

The vivid and nearly unbearable telling of Du'a Aswad's story serves to imprint a lasting image of honor killings on the reader's mind. Multiplied by 6,000, the murder of Du'a is even more tragic. Importantly, rape is not just violence for the sake of individual male satisfaction, but a systemized weapon in many situations. The doctor's advice that girls not go to the police shows the omnipresent threat of rape women endure.

Eastern Congo, the authors write, is the "world capital of rape," where militias attack civilians, raping women with bayonets or shooting guns into their vaginas. When one three-year-old in Congo was raped, then shot, her father killed himself. The authors report a former UN general as saying, "It has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict."

The authors' description of weaponized rape is unflinchingly graphic, which makes the reader confront it all the more. It also highlights the way tragedy spreads—a father committed suicide after the unspeakable was done to his toddler. The former UN general's statement challenges the idea that soldiers are the most vulnerable people in war and that civilian abuses are exceptions.

Kristof and WuDunn introduce Dina, a teenager the authors met in her Congolese village, Kindu. One day before sunset, Dina told the authors, while walking home from her bean field, five Hutu militiamen – despite having no conflict with her village – raped her, then punctured her insides with a stick. Afterward, she developed a fistula in her organs, with feces and urine draining down her legs. The authors describe meeting Laurent Nkundu, a warlord and welcoming host who denied any use of rape by his soldiers. But, they write, "everyone knows that rape is routine." A male teenage soldier even told the authors that rape is the soldiers' right.

The use of sticks and bayonets to enact an even more vicious and horrible sort of rape (if rape can even be made more vicious and horrible) sheds light on the weaponization of rape. By simulating rape with objects, soldiers use the woman's vagina literally as place to enact war—that's how symbolically weighted the vagina is, and how vulnerable women are in war.

While most casualties in these conflicts are male, violence toward women—rape, disfigurement, and torture—are used to "terrorize the rest of the population." When Dina told Kristof and WuDunn her story, a line of women lined up, wanting to tell their story of rape as well. After her ordeal, Dina sought help in the city of Goma, from HEAL Africa, a hospital where she was placed with dozens of other women with fistulas. Physical therapy and surgery helped her heal before her return to Kindu, back to the threat of more rape.

The authors don't discount the violence men face in war—most deaths, after all, are male. But violence against women is an efficient way to terrorize a whole community. Once again, in Dina's story the authors show how an aid group's intervention as necessary to stabilizing a woman's health and life.

"Study Abroad"—in the Congo. Kristof and WuDunn describe HEAL Africa as a "sanctuary of dignity" from the misogyny in Congo, where Harper McConnell, a young American women, among others, gives important help to patients. Using Harper as an example, the authors recommend that those seeking to help gender inequity issues first acquaint themselves with other cultures. Studying abroad or taking gap years in developing countries, rather than visiting Europe, deepens the worldviews of young people. While violence is a real threat for women abroad, American and European women tend to be treated hospitably, and even have more opportunities for volunteer work than men do, since men may not be allowed to teach girls, the authors write. Most of the groups mentioned in *Half the Sky* accept committed volunteers.

In Half the Sky, *Harper's story works as a representation of what good can come when young Americans commit – deeply commit – to aid work in developing countries. Her story segues into what the authors believe is a greater cultural need for Americans to broaden their global outlook, especially in education, implying that an intimate encounter with poverty is necessary to sensitively and sincerely contribute to the cause of gender equality.*

After Harper graduated from the University of Minnesota, unsure of what to do with her life, she arranged with her church to work as an onsite volunteer at HEAL Africa. HEAL Africa is a major and successful hospital, where all but three employees are Congolese and acquiring resources as basic as water, electricity, and bandages is a feat. As a single young American, living in Goma can be challenging, but Harper reports benefits: in bed with malaria once, she thought she saw Ben Affleck hovering above her. It wasn't a hallucination – Affleck had come to visit the hospital. At twenty-three, Harper also started a valuable skills-training program women can attend while awaiting surgery. Skills like weaving and soap-making give women the chance for economic independence. Despite missing amenities, Harper reports loving her life in Goma, from "rejoicing with a family over their improved harvest" to "dancing with [her] coworkers over a grant awarded for a program."

The authors' emphasis on Harper's success in Goma—her joy, close relationships, and positive influence at such a young age—functions as a persuasive argument for readers to pursue a track like Harper's. Here, the authors keep their audience in mind, intending for Harper's sunny but realistic story – not to mention her encounter with a superstar actor – to inspire readers to broaden their own idea of what interactions with developing countries might look like, beyond writing checks or buying woman-made coin purses.

CHAPTER 6

Maternal Mortality—One Woman a Minute. The previous descriptions of violence were horrific, Kristof and WuDunn write, but an even more pernicious cause of oppression exists: "the cruelty of indifference." Outside Congo, fistulas like Dina's are caused less often by rape and more often by lack of medical attention during childbirth. Simply put, maternal health is seldom a priority.

While rape and other violence has more clear perpetrators, most Westerners can be considered implicated in "the cruelty of difference." Maternal health isn't a priority for individuals or countries, and the authors imply that responsibility for this is widespread.

The authors write that, "for every Dina, there are hundreds like Mahabouba Muhammad," an Ethiopian woman who was sold as a girl to be a man's second wife. Soon pregnant by her abusive sixty-year-old husband, no one – not the first wife or her village – would help her, until finally an uncle found her. She tried to have the baby alone, but her small pelvis obstructed the birth. After seven brutal days, a midwife came, but the baby had already died and Mahabouba couldn't even stand up. People insisted she was cursed, and her uncle put her in a hut on the edge of the village with food and water. One night, still unable to walk, she had to fend off hyenas with a stick all night long. The next morning she crawled half a day to the house of a missionary, who took her to the Addis Abba Fistula Hospital. There, she joined other girls also being treated for fistulas, with urine leaking to the floor and causing leg sores from the acid.

Dina developed a fistula directly from a single incident of rape. Mahabouba's situation, on the other hand, was more complicated: it involved abandonment by her family, being traded into marriage, abuse, neglect, and finally the consequence (obstructed labor) of pregnancy at too early an age. The roots of Mahabouba's crisis are harder to trace than Dina's, one of the reasons maternal health is so neglected: typically, no single event causes the problem, and no single fix solves or prevents it.

The Addis Abba Fistula Hospital is run by Catherine Hamlin, an Australian woman who denies any claim of sainthood, saying that she loves her work. Catherine says, "For lepers, or AIDS victims, there are organizations that help. But nobody knows about these women [with fistulas] or helps them." In Western countries, medical developments eradicated fistulas, but they remain common in some developing countries. Catherine and her husband opened the hospital in 1975 and have administered over twenty-five thousand surgeries. Mahabouba's fistula couldn't be fully repaired, but she was given a colostomy, an outer pouch which stores feces. Now, Mahabouba works at the hospital as a senior nurse's aide.

That fistula sufferers go mostly ignored compounds the tragedy of fistulas. This is an important reminder that the most visible aid projects in popular culture do not encompass all the world's urgent aid crises. Happily, Mahabouba makes yet another example of women who, once victims of oppression, work on behalf of other women, after being given an opportunity to do so.

Fistulas are inexpensive and usually easy to repair, the authors explain. Yet, most of the tens of thousands of yearly sufferers never receive treatment. One hospital employee describes fistula patients as "the modern day leper." Fistula sufferers are triply disadvantaged by being poor, rural, and female. Healthcare in developing countries is bad for men, the authors write, but, as Catherine says, "women are an expendable commodity." Further, insufficient funding is a perennial obstacle for maternal health, the authors write, as is indifference from both liberal and conservative groups. The authors also cite journalists as part of the problem: fistulas are almost never covered in news media.

Historically, lepers were pariahs, pushed out of society. This reality stemmed from ignorance, intolerance, and fear. Likewise, the authors imply, today fistula sufferers are ostracized due to fear, prejudice, and indifference. Few people advocated for lepers, and few people advocate for fistula sufferers.

While other public health issues have improved, maternity health largely hasn't. The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of developing countries is disgracefully worse than in the first world, and since women in those countries have more pregnancies, their chance of dying in childbirth is even higher. As the authors put it, the "lifetime risk of maternal death is one thousand times higher in a poor country than in the West. That should be an international scandal." Maternal morbidity—injuries of women caused by childbirth, such as fistulas—is even more common. But, the authors write, they hesitate to give the reader numbers, because people are far less likely to respond to statistics than to stories, even when statistics make a better logical argument.

By pointing out the human propensity toward favoring specific stories over statistics, Kristof and WuDunn justify their own methodology in Half the Sky. *The book locates specific examples of widespread problems, and by garnering empathy for unique players, the authors hope this empathy will extend toward other situations and motivate readers' action. Still, numbers reflect the urgency of addressing gender inequity, so applying logic based on statistics can also be useful to readers, the authors imply.*

To accommodate the human preference for story, Kristof and WuDunn write about Simeesh Segaye, an Ethiopian woman they met at the Addis Abba Fistula Hospital. At nineteen, Simeesh was thrilled to be pregnant, but her obstructed labor, then a two-day bus ride to the hospital, left her baby dead. When she made her way back to her village, waste leaked from her and gave her a terrible odor. She tried to take a bus back to the hospital, but she was forced to get off, as passengers refused to tolerate the stench. Simeesh's fate was to live in a hut alone, barely eating what her parents brought her, deep in depression and contemplating suicide while liquids ran down her legs. After two years, her parents paid the high cost for a private car to take Simeesh to the fistula hospital, where she was finally treated for the many ailments she had developed. After months of work and physiotherapy, she recovered her mobility and, importantly, her dignity and ability to take pleasure in life.

By describing in some detail the grueling experience of Simeesh developing a fistula—and the painful recovery—the authors make more vivid the reality of having a fistula. Strikingly, Simeesh meets no empathy from people who see her excruciating condition but cannot tolerate the smell, which underscores again that cultural intolerance is an obstacle on the road to gender equality.

A Doctor Who Treats Countries, Not Patients. The authors introduce Allan Rosenfield, an American obstetrician who was influenced by witnessing women enduring childbirth injuries during the Korean-American War. In 1966, he moved to Nigeria for a job and saw that healthcare in Nigeria desperately needed more focus on disease prevention, and so launched his lifelong commitment to public health. Public health includes vaccinations but also campaigns to urge seatbelt-use and other non-medical solutions, such as providing school uniforms to keep girls in school longer, therefore reducing early pregnancies. He later moved his efforts to Thailand, where he enacted the revolutionary, unorthodox idea to permit midwives to prescribe birth control and insert IUDs. Eventually, after tireless advocacy for practical maternal health, Allan founded the organization Averting Maternal Death and Disability (AMDD) with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. He also "began approaching maternal death not just as a public health concern but also as a human rights issue," the authors write, and stressed that governments needed to be held accountable for human rights obligations.

Allan Rosenfield's revolutionary tactics to prevent health problems indicate the power of indirect, unexpected solutions. This is part of Half the Sky*'s hopeful message, that innovation of new models can effect major global change in the future. That he was a major, lionized player in the field of public health also indicates the power of one person to improve solutions for women's rights issues—he is an example of the charismatic leaders that the authors argue would help the current women's emancipation movement.*

Kristof and WuDunn write that Allan fundamentally influenced the field of global public health, which is popular today. As an aged man confined to a wheelchair, he continued to attend conferences and advocate for women until his death in 2008. His legacy includes the presence of AMDD in fifty countries. To describe his legacy in action, the authors introduce Obene Kayode, the only doctor in a Nigerian clinic, and Ramatou Issoufou, a pregnant woman in dire need of a caesarean section. Dr. Kayode explained to Kristof and WuDunn that he was waiting on her husband to provide the $42 for the operation materials. The AMDD made the materials available, but families still needed to pay for them in order to receive treatment. Because Kristof and WuDunn were present, the staff was shamed into performing Ramatou's surgery even without payment. Both Ramatou and the baby appeared unconscious y the time the surgery was performed, but it went smoothly, demonstrating the miracle-like effects possible when women's health is a priority.

The story of Ramatou Issoufou isn't a purely happy one, since even though she and her baby were saved, they were saved by the fortuitous presence of Western journalists. Put another way, while Allan Rosenfield's legacy did make safe childbirth more likely, it didn't guarantee that Nigerian women would receive good health care. Financial obstacles—modest in American dollars—can easily lead to maternal death, even with Allan's positive influence. The authors of Half the Sky *are constantly trying to be realistic, to show both triumphs and that those triumphs aren't complete, and much remains complicated and still be to accomplished.*

CHAPTER 7

Why Do Women Die in Childbirth? In posing the titular question, Kristof and WuDunn ask the reader to "consider the factors that converged to kill Prudence Lemokouno," which are many. A young mother of three, Prudence was a patient in a Cameroon hospital when the authors met her. Before that, after three days of obstructed labor at home, a midwife jumped up and down on Prudence's stomach, which ruptured her uterus. Her family paid for transport to the hospital, but said they could only pay $20 of the $100 Dr. Pascal Pipi required (which may have been untrue, since a family member had a cell phone).

By taking the reader through a calculated, thorough journey of Prudence Lemokouno's death, the authors strive to make very clear the complicated reasons for maternal death. By doing so, they urge the reader to recognize the complexity behind maternal death, and that simply providing more sympathetic doctors than Dr. Pipi would never address the problems.

The authors describe Dr. Pipi as having a "serious and intelligent manner, superb French—and a resentful contempt for local peasants." Dr. Pipi complained of women's disregard for preventative health measures, appearing spiteful and angry. By the time Kristof arrived, Prudence had been in the hospital for two days and her baby had died, now rotting inside the womb, poisoning her. Dr. Pipi resented Prudence's husband's objections to her treatment, and demanded $80 more for the urgently needed intervention. Kristof and his videographer donated blood and money at that moment for Prudence's surgery. Her condition improved, but after some hours Dr. Pipi disappeared—he had gone home. Apparently the hospital staff was spiting Prudence's family, and by the time Dr. Pipi bitterly operated on Prudence in the morning, she was in a coma, neglected by nurses, her catheter unchanged and overflowing with urine. Furious, her family took her back to her village so she could die at home, three days later. "That's what happens, somewhere in the world, once every minute," the authors write.

Dr. Pipi challenges the trope of the altruistic, good-hearted doctor—he is bitter, classist, and vocally intolerant of poor Cameroonians. But, the text's treatment of Dr. Pipi is not vicious, nor does he represent all Cameroonian doctors. This underscores the fact that the scornful indifference of a single doctor isn't the only culprit behind Prudence's death. Moreover, the fact that Kristof and his videographer so determinedly intervened, yet Prudence still *died, shows how immovable some obstacles to rescuing mothers can be.*

The authors outline four reasons behind Prudence's death. First, biology played a role: "Humans are the only mammals that need assistance in birth," they write – more assistance than is typically provided in many developing countries. Second, a lack of education contributed to Prudence's tragedy. With an education, Prudence would have been more likely to have fewer children, to give birth in a hospital, and to be a financial priority for her family. Also, a more educated midwife would not have sat on Prudence's stomach. Third, the poor rural health systems contributed, since the hospital denied Prudence the immediate treatment she needed. Also, the shortage of supplies, antibiotics, and doctors (caused partly by emigration of African doctors). Fourth, disregard for women contributes to maternal mortality—"As late as 1920, America had a maternal mortality rate equivalent to poor parts in Africa today," the authors write, but women's suffrage raised women's perceived value in society, and better women's health followed.

Part of the authors' outline illustrates the common misuse of foreign aid resources—for instance, building hospitals is a more popular aid campaign than hiring auditors to make sure those hospitals are staffed. More broadly, this part of the book shows that, for women to receive the necessary healthcare, they must first be valued as human beings. This fact returns to the idea that women's rights, such as maternal health, are often won through indirect paths that raise how much women are valued—for instance, the right to vote and influence elections.

It's crucial to note that poverty does not make a high MMR inevitable. The authors write that over fifty years, Sri Lanka brought its MMR down from 550 per 100,000 live births to 58, because Sri Lanka gives attention to gender issues that have major public health benefits, from promoting literacy to providing ambulances and mosquito nets. One doctor describes maternal health as a good metric for healthcare as a whole, because varied strategies must be used to achieve good maternal health. In India, an experimental program that pays women to give birth in hospitals has had success, the authors report. Allan Rosenfield stressed that "we have what it takes"—money is not the foremost obstacle to maternal health.

It would be reasonable, the authors imply, to assume that poverty is the central obstacle to achieving top maternal healthcare. But in reality, the determination to stop maternal deaths—and to make women a government priority—is a more key resource than money alone. The implication is an optimistic one, since Allan and other advocates believe that it's possible to improve maternal health without radical budget overhauls.

The authors describe previous (and preventable) obstacles to maternal health improvements. UN goals to reduce maternal mortality go perennially unreached, due in part to emphasis on birth attendants for the sake of newborn health, which didn't actually save mothers' lives. Emergency obstetric resources, Allan and others argue, like C-sections, are essential. A key quandary, according to the authors, is how to pay for such emergency services? They use the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital as a model with an answer: the hospital has trained staff without medical degree to give anesthesia and even perform fistula surgeries.

Another inspiring example of maternal health improvement takes place, again, in the foreigner-founded Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, underscoring the influence of foreign aid. The model of training non-medical staff in surgical procedures provides hope for the economic problem of importing doctors into Africa, returning to Half the Sky*'s positive message for the future.*

The authors introduce Mamitu Gashe, an Ethiopian woman who grew up illiterate and with no schooling, and is now among the hospital's top surgeons. She began by making beds in the hospital, eventually assisted doctors, and finally received training herself. With superb technical skills, she became a master surgeon, the authors report. Meanwhile, she gradually worked her way through elementary school.

Mamitu upends the stereotype of surgeons as hyper-educated, just as she upends the stereotype of uneducated women as unintelligent. Mamitu's prowess as a surgeon challenges any assumption that illiterate women in African can't be important players in humanitarian causes.

Globally, a major obstacle to maternal healthcare is the absence of a constituency. The authors specify the U.S. as lacking in advocates to reduce maternal deaths. They stress, however, the importance of avoiding exaggeration—"saving women's lives is imperative, but it is not cheap," they write, nor does it contribute to national economies the way girls' education does. To make maternal health a global priority might cost some $9 billion a year, the authors report, or roughly $22,000 per life saved. Vaccines, by contrast, may save a child's life for only $1. The best motive to stop maternal deaths "isn't economic but ethical," they write, as it comprises a human rights issue, and an urgent one.

By stressing that the best argument to save mothers' lives is ethical, not economic, Kristof and WuDunn give an important reminder: while pragmatic motives for women's rights exist (after all, women's rights benefit countries' GNPs and productivity), those motives should be secondary to the issue of human rights. Just as women's oppressors need to recognize women as wholly human, their advocates need to recognize women as worth saving because, simply, they're human.

Edna's Hospital. In Somaliland, a place where few Westerners venture, Edna Adan founded a beautiful new maternity hospital. Kristof and WuDunn think that some Westerners have become so cynical about corruption in Africa that they doubt any cause there is worth pursuing, but Edna, through collaboration with Western donors, shows how deeply misguided that stance is. The authors describe speaking to Edna in her modern home, where she tells them she grew up in a time when school for girls was nearly unthinkable. Her family, however, was elite, her father a pioneering doctor. Nonetheless, at eight Edna's genitals were cut, with Edna in shock and restrained, in the customary process known as "female circumcision." Her father's discovery that Edna had been cut – the procedure was enacted by her mother – was the only time she ever saw him cry. The event motivated Edna's later advocacy for women's health.

The authors reference the "cynicism" of Westerners as an obstacle to progress. Like indifference, it can prevent participation in urgent causes. As the authors report, the most encouraging figure in Edna's life was her father, evidence that men can be just as enlightened as women in advancing women's rights. The fight for women's rights is a human fight, not a female one.

Class privilege and her father's resolve enabled Edna to have an excellent education, studying in England to become her country's first qualified nurse-midwife and first woman to drive. She later worked for the UN, but dreamed of returning home to improve the healthcare in Somalia (modern-day Somaliland). War thwarted her mission, but despite her wealth and status at the UN, she was determined to found a hospital. She asked Somaliland's president (who was her ex-husband) for a land grant. Edna spent her entire lifesavings building a hospital on the former site of government torture and executions, then a waste dump.

Edna's story is heroic, but it's noteworthy that early privilege made it possible. In order to maintain a realistic perspective on how people can effect change, this is important to keep in mind—while Mukhtar Mai was luckily given money with which she started her project, Edna had a career track that allowed her to build wealth. And still, Edna had to risk her lifesavings to build her hospital—without her sacrifices, the hospital couldn't have started. So while the authors emphasize earlier that funding isn't the foremost obstacle to maternal health advances, it remains a major obstacle.

Nearly finished, the construction halted when there was no money left for a roof. But when a writer for *The New York Times* published an article about Edna, it moved an American named Anne Gilhuly, who lived in a wealthy Connecticut suburb, to take action. Anne and a friend collaborated with a group from Minnesota, who started Friends of Edna, and provided the remainder needed to finish Edna's hospital. The authors describe the tenacity Edna had in every step of her project, including her demand that irreverent construction workers teach women how to lay bricks. Hand-me-down equipment from other groups and Edna's demand for first-rate hygiene make the hospital exemplary in Somaliland, where even surgical masks are a rarity in the country. Today, the Friends of Edna are working toward building an endowment so that hospital will continue after Edna dies.

Intervention from attentive Americans rescued Edna's noble project from the potential abandonment that many African initiatives face, another case for the influence Americans can have in faraway women's lives. Notably, one of the features of Friends of Edna is sustained *support, not providing only a batch of one-time funding, but joining Edna in her mission to give women medical help.*

Kristof and WuDunn describe the unlikely ways the hospital functions, such as treating a woman who was pushed into the hospital in a wheelbarrow, and rescuing a woman with a fistula whose husband, disgusted by her smell and waste, stabbed her in the throat. The authors characterize Edna, walking through the hospital, as "like the weather in October: alternately stormy and sunny." She might be furious with a nurse one minute and warm to a patient the next. Once, the authors report, a man drove into the hospital while his wife was in labor, and his wife had the baby at that moment in the car. Refusing to pay hospital fees, the husband tried to leave but Edna shouted for the gate to be closed, so she could pull out the placenta in the backseat. When Anne Gilhuly and other American backers visited Somaliland and the hospital, Anne reported that being in Somaliland is "much more interesting than playing bridge at the local Y." Anne also, having seen Edna's unforgiving side, decided that such ferocity is necessary given the high stakes of failure in the hospital.

Characterizing Edna vividly as mercurial, liable to change temperament any time, is another challenge to stereotypes about aid givers. While her sacrifices make Edna appear saintlike, she also erupts at the staff who care for her patients. This shows both the humanity of heroic figures, and that efficient change sometimes demands impatience, not saintlike calm. An alternative way of looking at Edna's temperament is that saints are not required to enact change: any person *with sufficient drive and willpower can create change.*

CHAPTER 8

Family Planning and the "God Gulf". The chapter begins with Rose Wanjera, a young pregnant Kenyan woman seeking prenatal care, whose husband had recently been mauled to death by wild dogs. A doctor found that Rose had a life-threatening infection, and enrolled her in a maternal health program. The clinic Rose visited, the authors report, was made possible by a consortium of aid organizations, including AMDD and CARE. Marie Stopes International also funded the clinic, until President George W. Bush cut off funding for Marie Stopes, because of its association with abortion access in China. The funding withheld money for Rwandan and Somali refugees, and for the very program Rose Wanjera attended.

The case of Rose Wanjera highlights the far-reaching, often invisible effects of politics in the U.S. Motivated by personal morals, the conservative mission to prevent abortions in fact led to greater risks for a pregnant woman seeking only to have a healthy child. One lesson here is to consider what unseen effects might follow political decisions in foreign policy.

What happened to Rose and the refugees, the authors argue, reflects the "'God Gulf' in American foreign policy." Different views on family planning polarize liberals and conservatives, preventing the formation of bipartisan coalitions to fight sex trafficking and other issues. Republican presidents have instituted a "gag rule," preventing funding for any aid group with any link to abortions (even if that link used no U.S. funding). As a Ghanaian doctor said, "the global gag rule results in more unwanted pregnancies, more unsafe abortions, and more deaths of women and girls." The UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) has been a conservative target, though it doesn't in fact provide abortions. UN groups, the authors write, are bureaucratic machines that "probably do more for the photocopier industry than for the world's neediest," but they're still indispensible. Conservatives criticized the UNFPA for counseling China when China had coercive abortion policies. But in fact, the UNFPA's involvement had apparently *reduced* abortions in China, not increased them, largely by introducing the copper-T IUD, a safe birth control method that averted some 500,000 abortions in China a year.

The failure of the global gag rule to save lives is a further example of false cause-and-effect assumptions that influence foreign policy. That is, the conservative logic to decrease abortion rates by gutting funding for any group linked to abortion makes a kind of sense at first glance. But upon a closer look, those same defunded groups are in fact preventing abortions through other services they provide. As examples in Half the Sky *illustrate time and again, simple reasoning is often wrong reasoning. That inexpensive IUDs have prevented millions of abortions in China shows that contraceptive efforts, rather than funding cuts, are more likely to reduce abortion rates.*

The authors argue that there is a pattern of conservative anti-abortion positions actually leading to *more* abortions. They further argue that pro-life and pro-choice factions need to find common ground on reducing abortions altogether, especially unsafe abortions, which often kill women. 122 million women worldwide, the authors report, want contraception and have no access to it. Compounding the disgrace, the authors argue, is that fact that use of modern contraception is hardly increasing.

Kristof and WuDunn imply that rifts between liberals and conservatives have grave consequences most people fail to see. While women's oppression persist in the developing world, moral disagreements in West about particular issues obstruct progress on some human rights issues that all parties can agree are terrible.

Yet, "curbing population growth isn't nearly as simple as Westerners assume," the authors argue. Contraception campaigns often have only a modest effect on birth rates. Encouraging small families by reducing child mortality (increasing a child's likelihood to live) is an effective strategy, they write. The most effective contraceptive, however, is girls' education. Giving women more agency in family decision-making may also curb population growth.

The authors suggest that, importantly, tactics such as making condoms plentiful and free—though helpful—aren't a cure-all to problems of population growth and AIDS. Rather, a multi-pronged, well-rounded, and sociological approach is necessary to meet those issues.

Family planning, Kristof and WuDunn write, is also vital in fighting HIV/AIDS. Biological factors make women more vulnerable to getting AIDS than men are. The authors make the case that, "one of the greatest moral and policy failures of the last thirty years is the indifference that allowed AIDS to spread around the globe." This rose due in part to some conservatives' claims that AIDS is God's retribution for homosexual immorality. Conservative resistance to distributing condoms also exacerbates the problem of AIDS—despite that condoms can be life-saving and cost only two cents each, they are "rationed with extraordinary stinginess." Ironically, the Clinton administration donated fewer condoms than either Bush in their presidential terms. Even so, the George W. Bush administration primarily used abstinence-only programs to combat AIDS. They describe one tactic, in which lollipops were distributed to girls with the message, "Your body is a wrapped lollipop." After a man "sucks" on it, all that's left for the next partner is a soiled lollipop.

This section points out another important point about the global repercussions of American politics—Democratic administrations may not be wholly progressive regarding human rights, and Republican administrations may be more liberal with some aid resources, as the condom distribution example shows. This suggests a possibility that humanitarian issues, including access to family planning, could transcend political divisions. However, the abstinence-only program in the Bush administration shows how the approach can be patronizing, belittling a woman's body by comparing it to a lollipop, while ignoring the reality that such programs won't stop girls from having sex, but will result in those girls being uninformed about contraception and STD-protection.

As the authors report, most studies suggest that abstinence-only programs fail in their objective and lead to increases in AIDS, pregnancies, and diseases. Members of the abstinence-only campaign have maintained that AIDS resulted from promiscuity, a claim the authors report to be false. To the contrary, women are more likely to get AIDS from their husbands after marriage than from pre-marital promiscuity. The authors describe the experience of one former prostitute, who had never contracted AIDS in the brothel, but did as soon as she married. This leads to a crucial point: "AIDS is often a disease of gender inequality," especially when young girls lack the power to say no to older men.

The assumption that women in Africa are promiscuous and therefore more likely to contract AIDS relates to a broader problem: the racist idea that black people are hyper-sexualized. In white American history, this false idea has eroticized black women, leading them to be sexually objectified. Further, the assumption of promiscuity among African women relates to historic colonial impressions that African people have less self-control and civility than white Europeans. What's more, the authors show that the assumption of female promiscuity is disproved by the inverse—male sexual behavior appears to be more responsible for the spread of AIDS.

Kristof and WuDunn introduce Thabang, a fourteen-year-old girl living in a South African village whom the authors describe as, "tall, flirtatious, and liberal with makeup." Her father died from AIDS, and her mother, Gertrude, and younger brother have it as well. The family moved from middle class to living off skimpy welfare, since Thabang's mother could no longer work. Like any teenager, the authors write, Thabang craved fun and distraction, but when Thabang started wearing makeup and spending time with boys—and receiving older male attention—Gertrude beat her in fury. Thabang was the only family member without AIDS, and it wrecked Gertrude to imagine her daughter trapped in the virus. To the authors, Thabang also seemed embarrassed by her mother's condition and poverty. A violent, sad tension had grown between mother and daughter. Thabang insisted that, though some friends slept with men in exchange for money, she was a virgin. Nonetheless, both women were grief-stricken with both love and anger.

The authors describe Thabang sympathetically, portraying her desire to meet boys and wear makeup as normal teenage impulses. This sympathy invites the reader to identify with Thabang and to see the route that might lead a girl to contract AIDS. Readers can see that Thabang's desire for independence and diversion, especially given the tragic atmosphere in her home, might reasonably push her to a situation in which being offered attention and gifts from an older man could lead to unsafe sex.

The authors argue that schools should encourage girls like Thabang to be abstinent, but should also give instructions on condom use, and encourage HIV tests and male circumcision, which reduces AIDS transmission. Such preventative measures, they point out, are much less costly than treating AIDS patients. In one study, the most effective AIDS prevention strategy (measured against training teachers in AIDS education; encouraging student homework on condoms; and providing free school uniforms) was warning girls against sugar daddies. These older men provide gifts or money in exchange for a sexual relationship—and have much higher HIV infection rates, the authors write. The warning influenced girls to have sex with boys their own age more than with older men.

The AIDS prevention study demonstrates that solutions are best when based on empirical evidence. Intuitively, one might think that having students research the benefits of condoms would be effective, but the most effective strategy was the simplest and least expensive: warning girls that older men, having had more partners, are more likely to have HIV.

The authors report that, while religious conservatives have limited family planning access, many also sponsor and operate clinics for the most underserved and rural populations. What's more, the Catholic Church more broadly has been more amenable to condom distribution than the official Vatican position. Because missionaries have been so instrumental in healthcare in the developing world, Kristof and WuDunn argue that were religious aid work channeled into women's empowerment, it would reap enormous benefits. "Aid workers and diplomats come and go, but missionaries burrow into a society," they write, and are uniquely situated to improve women's rights. Pentecostalism has an especially crucial opportunity to advocate for women, as the faith is rapidly growing in the developing world. Though some Pentecostal leaders make false promises, churches do encourage vocal female participation and discourage alcohol and adultery, both of which burden many women. Importantly, as evangelical churches have become more humanitarian-focused in the past two decades, the authors write, "bleeding-heart evangelicals are out in front alongside bleeding-heart liberals in fighting for aid money," to tackle problems such as malaria and fistulas—a major advancement.

The emphasis on religious missionaries' success in humanitarian causes serves several functions. First, it shows Kristof and WuDunn as continually open to the most practical humanitarian strategies—although their background isn't evangelical, they celebrate the good evangelicals have done in the developing world. Meanwhile, the authors argue for more gender-focused tactics within the missionary paradigm. Second, it shows that approaches some liberals might consider too moralizing and intrusive—such as a missionary position against alcohol and adultery—can in fact have positive effects for women who are encumbered by male drinking and sexual behavior. Third, it reflects a viable path for collaboration between liberals and Christian conservatives, whose shared humanitarian values can lead them to a common fight, leaving differences at home.

Kristof and WuDunn suggest that liberals could adopt the traditional Christian policy of tithing, or donating ten percent of their earnings to charity. Americans who attend regular worship services, the authors report, are much more likely to be charitable than those less religious. However, the authors make the case that all people should consider more how their donations are put to use. They also believe that better models for youth volunteer service abroad, demanding less commitment than the Peace Corps does, are necessary.

By invoking the traditional Christian donation model to encourage more non-Christian donors, who are on the whole less charitable, the authors take a pragmatic, nonjudgmental approach to evangelical Christianity—they suggest not converting to another religion, but simply borrowing ideas that are useful.

Jane Roberts and Her 34 Million Friends. The section begins with George W. Bush's withholding of $34 million from the UNFPA, which irritated many people. But one Californian, Jane Roberts, was beyond irritation, and wrote a scathing letter to the editor in which she detailed the injustices—deaths in childbirth and female genital cutting, for instance—the defunding would lead to, and asked 34 million of her fellow citizens to donate $1 each. A woman in New Mexico, Lois Abraham, had a similar idea, and drafted a chain letter imploring people to send $1 wrapped in a sheet of paper, and mark it "34 Million Friends." Heaps of envelopes started showing up at the UNFPA office, which was unequipped to handle the deluge of mail and had to hire temporary staff. Most envelopes came from women and contained $1. Jane and Lois began giving speaking tours, and donations soared, eventually reaching $4 million. Even after President Obama restored funding for UNFPA, the group continued to fight for women's rights.

Jane Robert and Lois Abraham's story shows the potential power of an ambitious, even improbable idea when it is marketed with tenacity. At the same time, the authors' mention of how the UNFPA staff at first couldn't manage the influx of mail serves as a subtle reminder that good intentions often have unforeseen consequences. Although this problem was relatively minor and quickly solved, some aid efforts burden the recipient in unsustainable ways.

CHAPTER 9

Is Islam Misogynistic? The chapter opens with an anecdote about Kristof's interpreter in Afghanistan, who appeared very modern until he said his mother will never visit a doctor because Afghanistan has no women doctors, and for her to visit a male one would be against Islam, even if she were dying. The authors report that, of countries where female genital cutting and honor killings are common, many are mostly Muslim. While Latin countries are known for machismo cultures, girls are more likely to be educated and cared for than in predominantly Muslim countries, where polls show some people "just don't believe in equality." For instance, "more than 34 percent of Moroccans approve of polygamy." The authors argue that these attitudes have far more to do with culture than with the Koran, but they acknowledge that this claim is complicated by the fact that Muslims who do oppress women often cite the Koran as justification. The authors ask the frank question, "Is Islam misogynistic?"

Kristof and WuDunn carefully but clearly approach this vital question of whether or not Islam is inherently misogynistic, taking pains to not generalize about all Muslims or all interpretations of the Islamic faith. Sensitivity here is important, because negative claims about Islam as a whole can on the one hand stoke Islamophobia, the prejudice against Muslims that stems from ignorance about the religion, and on the other can alienate Muslims who might otherwise be open to ideas of female empowerment. The authors stress that, while oppression in Muslim cultures is real, it's important to recognize the distinction between the Islamic faith itself and the cultures where oppression is salient.

They begin with the history-informed answer, no. When Muhammad introduced Islam to the world, the authors write, Islam served women by limiting polygamy and banning female infanticide. Some Muslim women even owned property, which was more rare in Europe. Further, early Christian regard for women was often clearly misogynistic. The main difference is that Christianity has progressed more over the centuries than Islam. For example, in 2002 when a Saudi Arabia school caught fire, the police allegedly forced girls back into the fire rather than let them leave without body coverings. Plus, pious Muslims today are more likely to follow the codes of gender discrimination endorsed in the Koran than Christians and Jews are to follow corollary, obsolete codes in the Bible.

Much of Half the Sky*'s Western audience will be better acquainted with the Judeo-Christian tradition than Islam. So, by comparing misogynistic Biblical prescriptions with similar ones in the Koran, the authors appeal to their readers' possible familiarity with how modern interpretations have shed more extreme—and culturally obsolete—demands of the Bible, to show that the same may be done with the Koran. Further, they stress that Europe, which many consider to hold models of enlightened societies, has been at times more benighted than the Middle East.*

However, the authors stress, many Muslim are fighting for gender equality. For example, some Islamic scholars refute Koranic verse translations that suggest beating women is permissible. Islamic feminists also argue that, "it is absurd for Saudi Arabia to bar women from driving, because Muhammad allowed his wives to drive camels." Kristof and WuDunn use the complicated example of slavery as an analogy: Islamic law approves of slavery but also encourages freeing slaves, and though some Muslim governments abolished slavery only in recent decades, the institution is now officially banned in the Islamic world. The authors argue that, as with slavery, Islam can embrace women's emancipation, too. They bring in the historical example of Aisha, one of Muhammad's wives, who was falsely accused of adultery and defended by Muhammad. After Muhammad died, Aisha vocally refuted misogynistic views in Islam, and even led an armed rebellion (by camel) against a male caliph. Recently, Islamic scholars have resurrected Aisha's work to reshape interpretations of the Koran.

It's important to Kristof and WuDunn's argument to cite voices within the Muslim community—not just onlookers—who view women in different, more empowering ways. This shows the complexity and discord within the Muslim community about how the Koran should be interpreted—Islam is not monolithic and unchanging, but contains a spectrum of factions that disagree. What's more, these tensions have existed since the beginning of Islam, as the example of Aisha illustrates. One can even draw parallels between Aisha and the strong-willed women portrayed in Half the Sky, *like Mukhtar Mai or Edna Adan, who also rebelled against the status quo.*

The authors describe a time when Kristof "quizzed" female Saudi medical staff about their views on women's rights. They resented the questions, demanding, "Why does it matter so much what we wear? Of all the issues in the world, is that really so important?" One woman explained that, when they are alone, women complain about Islamic rules, but don't want anyone fighting on their behalf, which patronizes them. The authors argue that, "Westerners often miss the complexity of gender roles in the Islamic world." Paradoxes abound in countries like Iran, where the vice president may be a woman but women need the consent of their husbands to travel abroad. Further, views on gender equality are quickly evolving in the Middle East, the authors write, among both men and women. They cite Soraya Salti as a leader in promoting entrepreneurship in Arab countries. A Jordanian, Soraya founded the program Injaz to teach business skills to 100,000 children a year, offering girls an alternate career path from the restrictive male-dominated workforce.

The anecdote about female medical staff place Kristof in a position of self-scrutiny, since he was the one asking the questions that the women found tiring and patronizing. This is another example of how the authors gain credibility by showing themselves to be susceptible to insensitivities. In this case, Muslim women in professional careers felt belittled by what they considered a Western obsession with what they can and cannot wear—this epitomizes a broader tension between the common Western fascination with Muslim dress but ignorance about Islam, and Muslims who feel misunderstood. Further, the Iranian female vice president serves as evidence that women may be simultaneously empowered in one way and repressed in another—rarely is the dynamic simple.

Kristof and WuDunn describe the Women's Detention Center in Afghanistan, where "inmates include teenage girls and young women who were suspected of having a boyfriend and then subjected to a 'virginity test—a hymen inspection." The director, a woman named Rana, has both been empowered to build a career, and thinks that girls who have lost hymens deserve punishment. Ellaha is one young inmate for whom being in jail is safer than being free. When Ellaha found work at an American construction company in Afghanistan, a supportive boss arranged a scholarship for her in Canada. Her family resisted, wanting her to marry her cousin, but Ellaha refused, which inspired her younger sister to refuse an arranged marriage also. So in retaliation the family beat them both for days, chaining their wrists and ankles, until they agreed to marry their cousins. Eventually, Ellaha and her sister ran away and were arrested, subjected to a hymen inspection, which they passed, then jailed by Rana for their own protection.

Rana reflects more paradoxes common to some Muslim cultures—she has built a career in spite of male dominance and works to protect girls like Ellaha, but also believes that girls without hymens (not a reliable test of virginity) should be jailed. This begs the question, would Ellaha's treatment be different if her hymen happened to not be intact? Further, the protection for girls is circumscribed, since the facility is a jail, not a shelter or women's center.

The authors write that among the many reasons for Islamic extremism and terrorism is "the broader marginalization of women." Societies with more men than women, like many Muslim societies, tend to have more violence, the authors report, especially when the male population is younger, as they are in Muslim countries. Some men are raised in an environment "with the ethos of a high school boys' locker room," they write, which can cultivate violence. Further, countries with more women's oppression tend to also have economic problems that foment unrest, since economies are held back when women remain an untapped economic resource. The authors quote a UN report as saying, "The rise of women is in fact a prerequisite for an Arab renaissance." Bill Gates made a similar claim to a conference in Saudi Arabia, about technology's dim future there without the employment of women's minds. Kristof and WuDunn also suggest that patriarchal homes inform governments to be more patriarchal.

The purpose of this section is twofold: it argues for other reasons besides the Islamic faith for why many terrorists are Muslim, and also claims women's empowerment is necessary to dissolve the violence afflicting parts of the Islamic world. A key implication is that the integration of men and women leads to a better-balanced and less violent environment. Moreover, since poverty and instability make people more likely to succumb to anger and desperation, it follows that countries where women don't contribute to economic growth may have more violence. This has nothing to do with Islam, the authors imply, but everything to do with misogyny.

The Afghan Insurgent. The authors begin by writing that, "Western aid efforts have been particularly ineffective in Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan." An influx of well-intentioned American volunteers arrived in Kabul in 2001, they write, buying SUVs and cornflakes, but seldom working in the countryside where they would have been more helpful. What's more, some gestures were received as shameful, such as giving free soap to women—in Afghanistan, soap is associated with washing after sex, making the gesture deeply offensive. Some groups, the authors report, have been successful, but true success would require Westerners to recede and local citizens to engage. Perhaps most important is to gain the support of the local mullahs (religious leaders), even if that means making concessions in school curricula.

At several points in Half the Sky, *Kristof and WuDunn urge more people to volunteer abroad. This section provides an important caveat—some volunteer efforts can be intrusive, dismissing the needs of the people volunteers intended to serve, while ignoring cultural codes. Even the best intentions don't immunize volunteers against offending others in unforeseen ways, as with the soap example. The authors pragmatically argue that compromising aid groups' ideals can be worth the expense if it helps local people embrace aid contributions.*

The authors give the example of Sakena Yacoobi as a leader in successful aid efforts in Afghanistan. An Afghan Muslim herself, she founded the Afghan Institute of Learning, which the authors argue American aid groups would have done well to donate to instead of dispatching their own volunteers to Kabul. After earning two degrees in the U.S., Sakena opened a girls' school in Peshawar, which had 15,000 students by the second year. The Taliban outlawed female education, so, incredibly, all eighty schools were secret, and only one was raided, luckily with enough time to turn the classroom back into a living room. After the Taliban fell, Sakena was able to extend her services to 350,000 people, including a university for women and workshops on legal rights. There are even religious lessons that teach women how to cite the Koran to defend their rights to their husbands. Sakena also runs health clinics and teaches vocational skills so women can earn money.

Kristof and WuDunn present Sakena Yacoobi as a paragon of social entrepreneurship in the Islamic world—she's Muslim, and therefore sensitive to the needs of other Muslims in her native Afghanistan. Also, her education project managed to subvert the oppressive Taliban and integrated a holistic approach to education, treating health and economic stability as essential to learning.

The authors describe Sakena as, "one of the great social entrepreneurs of Afghanistan...and constantly in danger," receiving daily death threats and changing bodyguards frequently. Although Sakena is a pious Muslim, some fundamentalists wish her dead. At the end of the chapter, Sakena is quoted as imploring the international community to channel funds not toward weapons but rather toward education, calling it the only way to defeat terrorism.

Though an exceptional example—not one readily emulated—Sakena is evidence of the power of women who stick to their convictions, refusing to compromise their faith while disowning the parts of their faith that oppress women. Notably, she gives a powerful counterargument to the popular idea that military might defeats terrorism—in her eyes and experiences, sending girls to the classroom packs a greater punch.

CHAPTER 10

Investing in Education. Kristof and WuDunn describe living in central China as newlyweds, and getting to know a teenaged girl name Dai Manju. Her family had "no running water, no bicycle, no wristwatch, no clock, no radio," and couldn't afford to send Dai Manju to school, or even see the point—after all, both her parents were illiterate. When she was told to drop out in sixth grade, she yearned for school and was given bits of pencils and paper by affectionate teachers. Kristof and WuDunn wrote an article about Dai Manju, and a reader donated ten thousand dollars to fund her education, which ended up funding a new school as well. The impact was tremendous, and Kristof and WuDunn called the donor to thank him. But the donor had only sent a hundred dollars—it turned out that the bank had made a mistake, which thankfully it honored. Dai Manju went on to accounting school, finding jobs for family members and sending money home until her parents became among the village's most wealthy. At thirty, she had married a skilled worker, had a baby, and was on a career path to become an entrepreneur. The scholarships accidentally funded by the bank led to echoes of Dai Manju's story across the village, with girls finding factory jobs, sending money back home, and renewing the cycle of prosperity.

The funding of Dai's school was an accident, but a remarkably fruitful one. Learning about the tremendous impact just ten thousand dollars had on a small village in China invites the readers to imagine what similar donations could accomplish. Although it's a large sum for one donor, in the grand scheme of foreign aid it's a paltry amount, and its impact illustrates the cyclical benefits of education. Girls who were able to leave for factory jobs lifted up their siblings, cousins, and even parents as well as improving their own futures.

As the authors write, schooling is both requisite to fight poverty and "often a precondition for girls and women to stand up against injustice." But the benefits are difficult to measure statistically, they stress, and advocates tend to frame the data in ways that better market their cause. The authors offer the counterexample of Kerala, which is one of the best-educated places in rural India yet hasn't grown economically. The authors regard this and the few similar examples as exceptions, but stress that, "education isn't always a panacea." Most of their own evidence is anecdotal, but some empirical evidence exists attesting to the benefits of girls' education, such as a study in 1970s Nigeria, which found that each extra year of primary education reduced the number of babies a woman had by 0.26.

To strengthen their arguments, Kristof and WuDunn consistently return to empirical evidence, which in the case of education is difficult to provide. And despite the fact that anecdotal evidence abounds for the social benefits of education, the authors make clear that education isn't a cure-all. Though this chapter does not focus on the moral argument for women's rights as the chapter on maternal health does, the argument can be made that providing girls education is also, simply, morally right.

Building schools isn't always the answer to increasing education access, the authors argue, since teachers don't always fulfill their jobs. Deworming children, however, is one of the most cost-effective ways to impact schooling. Removing intestinal worms worked for the American South in the early 1900s, and it works for African countries today. Providing girls with resources to manage menstruation is another strategy—when girls have only a rag to absorb blood, fear of embarrassment from stains often keeps them at home, but providing free pads can keep girls in the classroom. This is not without complications, though—the authors cite a pad distribution project in African started by the company that makes Tampax and Always products. Some schools lacked toilets, so the company built toilets at enormous financial cost, but cultural taboos about blood prevented girls from being able to throw pads away. Another way to increase girls' education is to provide iodine, which is necessary for fetus brains to develop, by simply iodizing salt. One study suggests that iodine deficiency, which affects some 31 percent of households in developing countries, can decrease a child's IQ by up to fifteen points. Iodine supplies for women can help their daughters perform in school better and longer.

This section gives ample evidence for the argument that the best solutions are seldom the most intuitive. Building new schools, for instance, may be easier to market and justify than a mission to iodize salt, but iodizing salt probably has more profound effects. Further, this section illustrates the unforeseen complications that accompany some aid projects, such as the need to build bathrooms in schools. Distributing pads seems at first like a straightforward, inspired project, but the lack of other fundamental resources made it evolve into a big undertaking. This section implicitly reminds the reader to keep a balance of pragmatism and enthusiasm—while ambitious visions for aid is useful, not accounting for mishaps can ruin a project's goal.

Kristof and WuDunn claim that bribery is another effective way to boost girls' education, though it's never called bribery. In the 1990s, a Mexican official began an experimental antipoverty program in which families were awarded stipends for sending sons and daughters to school. The program yielded impressive results and is now called Oportunidades. This widely admired program, the authors report, gives cash grants from the central government directly to mothers, who are more likely to spend it for the child's benefit. The authors praise Oportunidades for its emphasis on external evaluations, which gave the administrators a clear view of its successes and shortcomings. By allowing parents to invest in their children the way the wealthy do, "the program broke up "the typical transmission path of poverty from generation to generation," the authors report, and raised education rates by 20 percent for girls.

The stunning success and longevity of Oportunidades shows that unorthodox—or what might be interpreted as unorthodox—solutions such as "bribery" can work, and very well. Bribery is typically associated with corruption, but the model of Oportunidades transmits the same idea to improve girls' chance of escaping poverty. Importantly, the model also suggests that when given economic opportunity, poor families can enable their children to excel, which can push countries like Mexico closer *(not fully) to meritocracies, or societies in which ability determines success.*

In other programs, bribery with food at school also works to encourage parents to maintain their children's attendance, the authors write, and it helps students pay attention, provides nutrition, and prevents stunted growth. Though school meals cost only ten cents per child per day, the authors report that lack of funding prevents some 50 million children from benefiting. While school attendance is important, so is learning ability once *in* school, the authors write. One study in Kenya showed that the most effective of six ways to encourage good test scores was to offer a small scholarship to middle school girls for the next grade depending on their results. Fearing embarrassment, boys raised their scores, too.

When poor children's primary needs, like food, are met, they are much better able to compete in performance with those who have privilege. Academic success, then, often has much to do with how healthy and equipped one is outside the classroom.

The authors stress that some people object to foreign aid, given that so many aid efforts fail. When Bono, a champion for aid in Africa, gave a talk at an international conference, he was met with resistance from some Africans in attendance. One Kenyan man has begged donors, "For God's sake, please just stop." The authors acknowledge some points as valid: aid is easier to mess up, they write, than most Westerners expect, especially since just providing a resource, such as mosquito nets, doesn't guarantee its use. As an example, the authors describe the HIV transmission-preventing baby formula that many women—even if they receive an AIDS test, and give birth in a hospital, and the hospital has the formula—will chuck on the way home from the hospital, because feeding a newborn from a bottle would betray that they have AIDS. Another example is a story in which an aid group in Nigeria distributed a superior strand of cassava seeds, a staple crop raised by women. The crop eventually became so profitable that men took it over and spent the profits on beer. The project failed.

Kristof and WuDunn take pains to acknowledge counterarguments against the foreign aid efforts that comprise a major motivation for Half the Sky *to be written. The fact that people from the same African countries that receive foreign aid are exasperated with it is a compelling argument to examine the shortcomings of aid work. The story of introducing new cassava seeds in Nigeria epitomizes the follies of the most well-intentioned, well-planned aid work.*

But, the authors stress, compared with the 1960s, "*an extra 10 million children survive each year now, an extra 100 million per decade*," due to projects like vaccination and rehydration for diarrhea. The financial investment the U.S. made into smallpox vaccinations was returned both financially and in some 45 million lives.

The authors close this part of the chapter by implying that, though many projects fail or flounder, or even cause damage, cynicism should never reign in the question of aid initiatives.

Ann and Angeline. The authors introduce Angeline Mugwendere, who grew up in Zimbabwe going to school wearing only a ratty dress with nothing underneath. She washed dishes at teachers' house in exchange for gifts, like a pen. In her sixth-grade exams, she earned one of the highest scores in Zimbabwe, yet couldn't afford to pay for the next year. Here, the authors introduce Ann Cotton, a Welsh woman whose baby daughter died at seven weeks from a lung disease, the greatest pain in Ann's life. After having more children, Ann went on a masters program trip to Zimbabwe, where she realized that poverty, not cultural attitudes, was the main obstacle to sending girls to school. In the village of Mola, she met two girls living in a makeshift hut sixty miles from home so they could go to the cheaper school in Mola. Their struggle reminded her of her grandmother's hardships in Wales, and she was moved to raised funds upon returning home. After struggling to sell cakes at a market stall, she managed to found an organization called the Campaign for Female Education (Camfed). She funded the schooling of Angeline, who excelled as expected.

The origin story of Camfed can be interpreted as a story of how empathy can be cultivated. Ann Cotton's firsthand experience losing her daughter apparently gave her the urge to honor the child and deepened her sensitivity toward women's struggles for rights. She associated the trials of girls in Zimbabwe with the trials her own grandmother endured. Apparently, by relating her own history to the hardships she witnessed in Zimbabwe, Ann was inspired to commit to women's empowerment. Of course, personal experience with loss isn't necessary to move someone to action. But, because empathy involves the ability to relate to another person, using personal experience to recognize another's humanity can be an important part of sensitive foreign aid.

Kristof and WuDunn report Camfed as now helping 400,000 students a year attend school, with only local staff on the ground and much local enthusiasm. What's more, Camfed's brand is wholly about the students, not about Ann or even her baby, who inspired her work. The authors are explicit that they highlight Camfed as evidence that aid groups should "focus less on holding conventions or lobbying for new laws, and more time in places like rural Zimbabwe, listening to communities," and sending girls to school. A major problem Camfed has faced is sexual abuse from principals who barter high grades for scholarships, a problem they addressed by having local committees award scholarships. In addition to providing pads, underwear, and other resources, Camfed even supports girls post-graduation with vocational resources. What's more, alumni have formed advocacy groups, some even becoming philanthropists, despite their small incomes (by Western standards). The authors close the chapter by circling back to Angeline, who is now the executive director of Camfed in Zimbabwe.

The authors' praise for Camfed seems to reflect some fatigue that they feel—after seasoned careers of exposure to aid strategies—for Western aid groups' elaborate conferences and focus on laws. This fatigue indicates the tension between an abstract or theoretical approach to humanitarian problems, versus on-the-ground intervention with concrete input from local stakeholders. The two aren't incompatible, and in other sections the authors argue for more political lobbying (within the U.S.), but the authors do reflect frustration with aid bureaucracies that can ignore the real life urgency of human rights issues.

CHAPTER 11

Microcredit: The Financial Revolution. Near Lahore, Pakistan, Saima Muhammad lived in misery, the authors write: her unemployed husband beat her daily, her daughter lived with an aunt because of the lack of food at Saima's derelict home, and a cloud of debt hung over her. Her mother-in-law advised her husband to take another wife, which might wreck the family financially, and her sister-in-law mocked her for being unable to feed her child. At her life's lowest point, she joined a women's group affiliated with the Kashf Foundation, a microfinance organization. She borrowed $65 to buy beads and cloth, the authors write, and soon started an embroidery business, eventually expanding to employ thirty families, and started giving orders to her husband. The authors describe her, at their interview, as radiating confidence, wearing gold jewelry and showing off her remodeled home and new television. All the abuse Saima suffered earlier, including from her mother-in-law, seemed to have melted with the rise of her business. She also, the authors report, plans to send to her three daughters to high school.

Like many stories in Half the Sky, *such as Zoya Najabi's, Saima's story shows that female solidarity isn't guaranteed. Her mother-in-law is an antagonist in Saima's life, encouraging her son to find a second wife, although another wife would threaten Saima's already threadbare way of life. Further, Saima's sister-in-law cruelly mocked her for failing to feed her own child, even though Saima wasn't responsible for the family's poverty. Women do not inherently support other women, even when their struggles are shared.*

Saima is an "unusually successful participant in the microcredit revolution sweeping the developing world," Kristof and WuDunn write. They claim that microfinance has empowered and protected women far more than any law could. Like most microfinance programs, Kashf lends almost exclusively to groups of women, who guarantee one another's debts and discuss topics like family planning and education. Men tolerate the breech of cultural rules that push women out of business, because it brings in money, the authors write. One woman reported that her husband stopped hitting her when she used the loan as leverage.

Saima's triumph isn't representative of the average microfinance story, since she rose from extreme desperation to marked success. But, Saima does illustrate that financial independence correlates with increased respect and, more importantly, less abuse.

Kashf was founded by Roshaneh Zafar, a Pakistani woman who grew up in great privilege, which she redirected to empower the underrepresented in her country. First working for the World Bank, she says she worked with, "megamillion-dollar projects, but the money never got down to the villages." She studied the work of another social entrepreneur and returned to Lahore to start Kashf (which means "miracle"), where she found that women were at first very resistant to taking loans. She teamed up with another Pakistani woman, Sadaffe Abid. The authors describe Roshaneh and Sadaffe as brilliant, but lacking at the time in knowledge about poverty. With time and persistence, they shaped their business model to include tracking loan repayments, checking creditworthiness, and even employing men in places where women branch heads just wouldn't be accepted. The model depended largely on women inside the groups, who vetted their own members, since if anyone defaulted the whole group would be responsible for the loan.

Kristof and WuDunn present Roshaneh as an example of a social entrepreneur who needed to gain an intimate understanding of poverty before she could fix it. This returns to the tension in aid work of abstract vs. concrete understanding of humanitarian issues. The authors imply that only once Roshaneh gained a nuanced grasp on poverty in Pakistan could she address it.

Through Bill Drayton's organization, Roshaneh became an Ashoka Fellow and networked with other social entrepreneurs. In addition to lending small loans, Kashf accepted deposits so that women could build savings, which may be more important than loans, the authors report. An in-house study showed that, "by the time the borrowers have taken their third loan, 34 percent have moved above the poverty line in Pakistan."

The reappearance of Bill Drayton's influential Ashoka Fellowships underscores the role connectivity and idea exchange play in social entrepreneurship. To avoid figuratively reinventing the wheel in each country, social entrepreneurs emulate and borrow from each others' ideas, to the great benefit of organization like Kashf.

The enormous success of Kashf and similar organizations hasn't been universal, the authors stress. In Africa, microfinance has been less successful than in Asia—malaria and AIDS, dispersed populations, and other factors contribute to the disparity. Moreover, annual interest rates are a high 20-30 percent, making loans untenable for those who can't profit from them, which can make microfinance borrowers even worse off, the authors write. Roshaneh acknowledges that, "microfinance isn't a panacea," and says that health and education—especially education—are vital.

It's important to note that microlenders aren't charity groups, and charge enormous interest rates by Western standards as part of the business model. In this section, education, which runs through Half the Sky *as a key to women's emancipation, appears even in the world of microfinance. The authors purposefully highlight Roshaneh's emphasis on education—microfinance won't dissolve poverty, but when paired with education its impact is compounded.*

Kristof and WuDunn write that women suffer more from poverty than men, hence microfinance's focus on women. In famines, more girls die than boys, and the strain on crops that drought or flooding bring correlates with the murder of killing "witches"—elderly women who no longer contribute to productivity. But one of the biggest reasons for female-focused campaigns, the authors report, is the "impolitic secret of global poverty," that men spend money less wisely than women. Men, who control most family incomes, are less likely to spend funds on education and starting a business. The authors report that the poorest families spend about ten times as much "on a combination of alcohol, prostitutes, candy, sugary drinks, and lavish feasts as they do on educating their children." Girls would benefit most from a shift in priorities. The authors acknowledge that it may seem insensitive to criticize poor families for spending money on activities that bring pleasure to life, but defend their stance with the argument that a daughter's education shouldn't be a luxury when there is beer being drunk.

A term for the phenomenon of women's unequal burden of poverty is the feminization of poverty. The authors tread carefully through the reasons behind this inequity, since they're directly related to male, pleasure-based money spending. To criticize the spending patterns of poor people—for whom beer and celebration might make life's trials more bearable—risks being paternalistic, just further patronizing advice from American outsiders. But, the authors maintain that education for girls trumps the desire for beer. They also imply that wives at home enjoy less diversion than husbands who go to bars, which is itself another inequity.

One solution, Kristof and WuDunn posit, is to put women in charge of more money, since women are more likely to invest wisely and improve their family's health. In one South African study, children raised by grandmothers had healthier gains in height and weight than those raised by grandfathers. The authors argue that donor countries should "nudge poor countries to adjust their laws to give more economic power to women," such as making widows, not brothers, the typical heirs to a man's property. They admit that it may seem unorthodox to note the gendered nature of money spending. But, they stress that the belief is commonly held, even by the former president of Botswana, who told the authors that "Women do work better," and are more likely to defer consumption in favor of investment.

In previous anecdotes, the authors have shown that money tends to serve as leverage for women income earners, giving them newfound power. Here the author extend that idea to countries—countries that donate aid money should ask the recipients to adopt more policies for gender equity. The authors argue that to sway behavior with money is a good tactic. Further, by quoting the former president of Botswana the authors make clear that it's widely believed, even among men, that women have superior work ethics and money savvy.

The effect women have in their home may be extended to the government, the authors write. Female leadership has risen, and groups like Women's Campaign International have had success in coaching women activists to enter political arenas. While the authors acknowledge that, despite popular belief to the contrary, little evidence suggests that women leaders are more empathetic or peacemaking than men. However, women leaders *do* attend more to the needs of women and children, and are less likely to be corrupt. Nonetheless, the authors report that both men and women judge women leaders more harshly, even when their performance is superior. Over time, though, women officials gain more respect. Further, evidence for the power of female participation is found in American history—when women won the right to vote, better public health followed, since women constituents cared about public health, and child mortality plummeted. The authors state that, contrary to naysayers' argument that women who leave the home neglect their children, women's political participation has in fact saved countless children's lives.

The authors refute a popular assumption that women leaders are naturally more empathetic and patient than men, and will inherently advocate for women's rights. Just as female solidarity isn't guaranteed, not all women advocate for other women or the poor. Importantly, bearing this in mind prevents generalizations about female politicians and stereotypes about women at large. However, having women in power does mean having people who understand women's issues in leadership positions, which can change priorities. Also note that the fact that constituents judge women leaders more harshly than men—even when they perform better—reflects that gender bias imbues life at all levels, from the household to politics.

A CARE Package for Goretti. Kristof and WuDunn introduce Goretti Nyabenda, a mother of six living in Burundi in a red adobe hut, where she was effectively trapped, since her husband Bernard was stingy with permission to leave the house. They grew cassava, beans, and other crops, but barely survived on the profits, the authors report. Further, Bernard's evenings drinking banana beer cost 30 percent of the family's disposable income, while Goretti couldn't make a single spending decision. The authors write that, "Goretti's interactions with Bernard consisted mostly of being beaten, interspersed with having sex." When telling her story to the authors, sitting outside her hut, she frowns and describes her life as wretched and filled with anger.

Goretti's own description of her life shows the great emotional tax of powerlessness. Goretti had no agency to make decisions for the family or even herself, despite being an adult woman and mother of six, which can leave one feeling resentful and trapped.

Goretti's mother-in-law told her about a local CARE association for women, and Goretti disobeyed Bernard by sneaking out one day to attend. CARE associations have about twenty women, so Goretti, seeing other women eager to join, started a new one and was elected president. One day all the women tilled Goretti's fields together, as is typical of the CARE groups, to Bernard's happy surprise. The authors write that, "each woman brings the equivalent of a dime to each meeting," which permitted Goretti to borrow $2 and buy fertilizer—the first money she had ever handled. With the money from fertilized potatoes, she paid off her $2 loan and brewed banana beer, then borrowed more and bought a pregnant goat. Goretti's financial success, and her ability to pay for Bernard's malaria treatment, hushed up her husband, who she didn't allow to drink her banana beer. At meetings, the authors report, women "trade tips on how to manipulate husbands," as well as animal training and entrepreneurial tools. Further, women are taught to give birth in a hospital and register their babies, so they'll be eligible for welfare. Simply put, CARE meetings reshape the women's perceptions of what life as a woman can look like.

CARE groups illustrate the importance of idea exchange among women. Just as social entrepreneurs benefit from networking, women benefit from communities that cultivate new ideas and provide mutual support. Forced isolation is a common tactic in oppressive regimes—likewise, husbands who restrict women from leaving the house cut off their access to new ideas and to finding joy. When people are effectively powerless, they have to find ingenious ways of gaining power. It makes sense, then, that women like Goretti use group meetings as a chance to slyly subvert codes and trade ideas about manipulating husbands.

Goretti's CARE group's influence is so widespread, the authors report, that members are trying to eradicate the tradition of men finding second wives (mistresses) after bountiful coffee harvests, which depletes incomes and spreads AIDS. CARE women sometimes even fine men for attempting this. Now, the authors write, Bernard approaches Goretti for cash, and Goretti leaves the house without asking him. Kristof and WuDunn stress that the microfinance model isn't perfect, and Goretti's success could collapse. But so far, the success has been palpable, and her children have school supplies as well as a new model for womanhood. Meanwhile, Bernard, who was reluctant to be interviewed, admits that he prefers having a partner to having a servant, although he still seems to have reservations. Goretti tells the authors she used to keep silent, but, "now I know I have good ideas, and I tell people what I think."

For its members, CARE meetings helped redefined femininity from a submissive role to a vocal and self-advocating one. Additionally, CARE helps men like Bernard rethink masculinity—though reluctant and perhaps even resentful, Bernard admitted that his wife's success benefits him, as well. He has at least partially come to terms with having to ask a woman for cash, given all she has done to improve their standard of living.

CHAPTER 12

The Axis of Equality. Kristof and WuDunn introduce billionaire Zhang Yin, a bubbly woman from China who started her career earning $6 in a factory. After working her way to a job at a paper company, Zhang Yin learned the paper business and eventually followed her idea of recycling American scrap paper to sell in China, driving around California with her husband and arranging to funnel paper from dumps. By 2006, she was a multi-billionaire. The authors write, "there is some thing larger going on here...six of the ten wealthiest women in the world are now Chinese." They argue that Zhang Yin and her peers reflect that China has leveled the labor playing field for women, as have a number of once oppressive countries.

The inclusion of Zhang Yin isn't so much an example of what women can achieve when they put their mind to it—although she can be interpreted as that, too—but of the gains possible when a society supports employment opportunities for women. That is, the authors' point isn't that more women can become billionaires, but that women have success on par with male peers when given the chance.

The authors say they hear doubts that overcoming oppression is possible, along the lines of, "What can our good intentions achieve against thousands of years of tradition?" But China is a great answer. A hundred years ago, they write, "foot-binding, child marriage, concubinage, and female infanticide" seemed inextricable from Chinese culture. Though it might have been cultural imperialism for Western countries to criticize these practices, the authors maintain that it was morally right. Slavery, genital cutting, and honor killings today should likewise never be preserved on account of respecting cultural differences. Cultures can and do change, they write. In early 20th century China, conservative pushback was vehement, just like it is in the modern Middle East, but the culture nonetheless changed. Later, Communism cost millions of lives, they write, "but its single most positive legacy was the emancipation of women." In fact, it was Mao who claimed, "Women hold up half the sky," from which the book gets its title.

The authors anticipate what some readers might thin:, that some parts of culture are so deeply etched as to be indelible. But China makes a compelling argument to the contrary—and a compelling argument for optimism about the future of women's rights. Moreover, Communism's legacy of expediting women's emancipation in China is an important lesson in the winding, often confusing paths of history. Chinese communism is depicted in the United States as having reduced freedom in that country – and in many ways that's true. But it also helped to reduce the oppression of women in certain ways.

The authors emphasize that China still has problems, including sexual harassment, sex-selective abortion, and a resurgence of concubines. But, of all countries, China has made the most progress in women's rights, and is one of the best places (at least in cities) to be born female. They use WuDunn's grandmother as an example—at five, her feet were bound so they would be attractive to men, but which also made her hobble around "like a slim penguin on short stilts" even after she moved to Toronto and had seven children. Over time, the practice of foot-binding disappeared, but women were still considered inferior. The authors explain that in recent decades, however, female economic contributions have reformed cultural attitudes. Plus, women have excelled in formerly male domains, like science, math, even chess. Importantly, China serves as a useful model because it's easy to trace its economic growth to the emancipation of women, especially peasants outside cities. This success would be challenging for more conservative countries like Pakistan to emulate, but Indian executives have set their sights on employing more women, the authors write.

Invoking WuDunn's grandmother makes more personal the disturbing effects of women's oppression, which impacted her in the form of her bound feet for her entire life. And yet she also became the matriarch of a family in modern Toronto, suggesting women's strength even in the face of such cultural oppression. At the same time, the practice of foot-binding in particular invites the reader to question modern interpretations of beauty and the ways they might constrict women. And the way that foot-binding has disappeared offers the hope and possibility that with effort other such oppressions can be made to wither away.

Kristof and WuDunn make a claim that "sounds shocking to many Americans: Sweatshops have given women a boost." Injustices inside factories, like sexual harassment and dangerous conditions, are real, but factories remain preferable to grueling farm work back home, they argue. Plus, women are preferred to men as factory workers. The West should actually encourage more foreign manufacturing, especially in Africa and the Middle East where little is exported today. They describe the African Growth and Opportunity Act, an under-recognized U.S. program to reduce tariffs on African products, which they argue should merge with the European corollary to boost African industry.

The authors expect readers' shock at the claim that sweatshops are good for women. The argument isn't quite central to Half the Sky, *so the authors don't devote very much text to it, but they do walk the reader through some evidence as to why factory jobs help women gain autonomy. Moreover, they even advocate for increased manufacturing in countries with weak industry. This reflects the book's repeated claim that economic empowerment unlocks solutions to women's oppression.*

The authors look to Rwanda as another model of gender progress. Rwanda remains an "impoverished, landlocked, patriarchal society that still lives in the shadow of the 1994 genocide in which 800,000 people were slaughtered in one hundred days." Yet remarkably, women now play new and indispensible roles in Rwanda, to the whole country's benefit. After the genocide, the authors write, women and girls made up 70 percent of the population and had to fill the workforce, but moreover the male role in the genocide cast women as less brutal and more responsible. They had the active support of the new president, who appointed women to cabinet positions. The authors report that, in 2008, women made up 55 percent of the Rwandan legislature, compared with the paltry 17 percent in the U.S. House of Representatives. Rwanda is also "the least corrupt, fastest-growing, and best-governed countries in Africa," with a burgeoning economy. The authors explain that both Rwanda and China are evidence that governments can support women in ways that also supports economies.

An extreme example, and one fraught with tragedy, Rwanda's narrative reflects what's possible when governments actively support women. In Rwanda's case, the support seems motivated not by political pressure for equal representation of women in politics, but out of a practical recognition that women can have a powerful influence in politics. Like China, Rwanda shows the long trajectory of history, and how much can change within a few decades.

Kristof and WuDunn describe Murvelene Clarke as a woman living in Brooklyn who wanted to donate some of her $52,000 salary to charity, in the imitation of Christian tithing. She went to the website Charity Navigator and found Women for Women International, where she was paired with a Rwandan woman Claudine Mukakarisa, the authors write. At thirteen, Claudine and her sister were kidnapped by Hutu militiamen, held in a rape house where men stood in line for their turn, and were raped for days. "Maggots were coming out of our bodies," Claudine says, and they had to crawl in the hut, unable to walk. Claudine was released, but her sister was killed, the authors report. Confused about her swollen belly, young Claudine thought she couldn't be pregnant, because the believed only girls who are kissed become pregnant. She gave birth alone in a parking lot, at first abandoning the baby but retrieving it. For years she begged on the street, barely surviving and being chased away for her rank smell, until an uncle took her in in exchange for sex. When she became pregnant again, he kicked her out. She managed to earn $1 a day and send her children to school.

Murvelene functions in Half the Sky *as a model, committed aid donor who makes a difference from afar. Murvelene doesn't need to travel to Rwanda or volunteer on-the-ground to affect the life of a Rwandan family. Further, the juxtaposition of Murvelene and Claudine is a striking reflection of the modern world and the reader's role in it: the intersection of Murvelene's life in Brooklyn, with which most Western readers can better identify, and Claudine's life in war-torn Rwanda invite the reader to consider how he or she might intersect with an unknown person. The story is especially poignant given the repeated obstacles Claudine met after having two children by rape, and that the most reliable help she found was from a stranger in another country.*

Murvelene's $27 monthly donation has radically changed Claudine's life, Kristof and WuDunn report. Women for Women trains women in saving and accruing wealth, so Claudine buys charcoal for cooking, to sell to other families at a small markup. She also attends the organization's daily morning classes, alternately on vocational skills and on "health, literacy, or human rights." Murvelene and Claudine exchange letters and photographs, and even after Murvelene lost her job, she continues to donate 10 percent of any income she gets, even gifts of money. Murvelene says, "for me, it was a way to get out of myself. A lot of times, you forget how fortunate you are here, never really needing anything." Rwanda'a economy benefits greatly from the economic contributions of women like Claudine, the authors write.

Murvelene's commitment to aid extended even after she lost her own source of income, underscoring the fact that donation amounts can adapt to the situation of the donor (and how even small amounts of aid can impact a person's life in the developing world). The authors highlight the good it has brought to Murvelene's life, too, since part of Half the Sky*'s goal is to persuade readers to join in aid contributions. And while the authors are explicit that Rwanda's economy benefits from women like Claudine, they implicitly posit that it benefits also from donors like Murvelene.*

Tears Over Time *Magazine.* Kristof and WuDunn first describe Zainab Salbi, an Iraqi woman living in the U.S., as Hollywood's conception of a "free-spirited Middle Eastern princess." When Zainab was growing up in Baghdad, she spent weekends at Saddam Hussein's house (her father was his personal pilot) playing with his children and calling him "uncle." Her upbringing was therefore filled with shiny gifts, like a new car every year from Saddam, but also fraught with fear, the authors write. Saddam and his sons were known for raping girls, then blackmailing them, and worse. Zainab describes Saddam as "a poison gas," that they breathed slowly. Saddam doted especially on Zainab, once insisting she wear his robe to the swimming pool, though she thought it would be too transparent and kept refusing.

The authors use the story of Zainab's early life to later trace how she came to care so deeply about women in dangerous situations. The implication is not that advocates need an intimate history with tyrants or war to be able to empathize with victims. Rather, the story shows one woman's journey to a passion for justice, a journey that could happen in many readers' lives (with a far less dramatic inciting event).

In university, Zainab's mother suddenly pushed her to marry an Iraqi man in the U.S., the authors write, who after three months of marriage violently raped her. She immediately left him, but lived in fear of U.S. authorities discovering her ties to Saddam. Zainab fell in love with and married a Palestinian man and saved up for a honeymoon in Spain. One day soon after their wedding, Zainab idly read an article in *Time* magazine about strategic rape camps in Bosnia. Zainab burst into tears, the authors write, and exclaimed that she had to do something to help. No aid groups seemed to be working for Bosnian rape victims, though, so Zainab approached a Unitarian church for help, and she and her husband used their basement to serve as headquarters for a project they called Women for Women in Bosnia. They donated their honeymoon money to the project.

Women for Women International, which grew out of Zainab's work for Bosnia, is the same group that connected Murvelene in Brooklyn and Claudine in Rwanda. The emotional response of Zainab (a rape survivor) to rape camps in Bosnia eventually led to Murvelene's support of Claudine, herself a survivor of rape. The authors don't explicitly remark on this web of shared suffering and common causes, but leave it for the reader to consider.

For three years, the couple struggled to build the project, barely subsisting on what was leftover to pay bills, when a $67,000 check came in the mail from a charitable phone company. The donation enabled the group Women to Women International to evolve and work with war survivors worldwide, catching the attention of Oprah Winfrey. One day, a war survivor in Congo told Zainab—the only person she had ever told—about her own rape and the rape of her three children by soldiers, who also shot her son in the feet when he refused to rape his own mother. Zainab began to weep, and was moved to tell her own history of her rapist ex-husband and her closeness with Saddam. Later, she learned that her mother forced Zainab into her first abusive marriage because she feared that Saddam would seize her as a mistress, a danger that could have cost Zainab everything. After telling Zainab's story, the authors conclude, "Women for Women International is effective because it touches people at the grassroots level."

It's noteworthy that the Congolese mother who endured her own rape and the rape of her daughters inspired Zainab to tell her own story. In many narratives in Half the Sky, *benefits of aid are not unidirectional. That is, the giver often reports rewards, emotional and otherwise, from the act of giving, and also humility. The chapter's conclusion is also a key lesson gained from Zainab's story: that grassroots, bottom-up work usually changes the most lives.*

CHAPTER 13

Grassroots vs. Treetops. Kristof and WuDunn begin the chapter with a vivid description of genital cutting: "approximately once every ten seconds, a girl somewhere in the world is pinned down. Her legs are pulled apart, and a local woman with no medical training pulls out a knife or razor blade and slices off some or all of the girl's genitals." For decades, both Westerners and Africans have tried to intervene, but only recently have some succeeded. The struggle against genital cutting holds many lessons for the aid world at large to "move beyond slogans," they put plainly.

The chapter opening intends to jar the reader into awareness of the violent reality of female genital cutting (FGC), in order to keep FCG from being simply an abstract idea. The authors stress that the long fight against FCG represents broader aid struggles, and by noting its failures the aid community can avoid major follies more generally.

Today, female genital cutting occurs mainly in Africa among Muslims, and has ancient roots, evidenced in female Egyptian mummies. An ancient Greek philosopher gave instructions on cutting the clitoris in order to discourage sexual pleasure and therefore promiscuity, which is still the impetus for genital cutting, the authors report. Cutting most commonly involves "snipping the clitoris or clitoral hood," though there are varying degrees of extremity. Cutting instruments are rarely sterile and can lead to lifelong injuries, or even death. A crusade against what was called "female genital mutilation" (FGM) began in the 1970s, and was mostly unsuccessful and met with local resistance. The authors report that some girls even looked forward to it as a rite of passage.

The millennia-long history of female genital cutting may seem like a reason to argue that the practice is ineradicable. But, just as Kristof and WuDunn argued earlier, China saw the disappearance of foot-binding despite disbelief that it would ever go away. The same progress is possible with FGC, as long as the change is not a Western prescription, the authors suggest. It's important to recognize that views of FGC vary in Africa, much the way views might vary on a controversial social practice in the U.S.—some girls looked forward to the rite of passage, while others in Africa disowned the practice.

Advocates eventually learned to use the less judgmental term "female genital cutting" (FGC) Most important, leadership of the moment transferred to local women like Edna Adan. Kristof and WuDunn draw the reader's attention to Tostan, a West African group with perhaps the most success in decreasing FGC. Tostan was founded by Molly Melching, a white Midwesterner who visited Senegal in 1974 and effectively never left. After being entrenched in Senegalese culture and watching clinics be built by outsiders without local buy-in, Molly grew skeptical of aid groups. She saw firsthand that laws failed and aid groups floundered. Moreover, her own daughter, who was half-Senegalese, begged to be cut, jealous of her friends. In 1991, Molly founded Tostan, which dispatches local trainers into villages to teach village adults about the dangers of FGC. Tostan takes pains to avoid angering local men, and focuses on human rights rather than on women's rights. Some feminists object to Tostan's bending to misogynistic culture in Senegal, but Tostan remains committed to a positive, nonjudgmental ethic, informing women of FGC's dangers while encouraging women to make their own decisions.

Tostan's history involves a central question in the women's emancipation movement: how much should activists bend to accommodate the misogynistic codes in order to gain traction that might, ultimately, help dismantle those codes? Consider the case of Tostan, in which teachers stopped discussing women's rights—the group's central mission—because men objected. This may make activists bristle, yet the ultimate gain is Tostan's slow cultural acceptance in Senegalese villages. Even the term "female genital cutting" (as compared with "mutilation") is seen by some as too mild, since the practice does mutilate *the female body. But mutilation connotes a bad, even tortuous practice, whereas cutting is more neutral. On the part of activists like Molly, FGC is a term calculated to be more hospitable to conservative people in places like Senegal.*

One day, influenced by Tostan, a group of thirty women declared they would not cut their daughters. But the apparent victory ended up a disaster—other villagers accused the women of betrayal and of accepting bribes from white people. Molly realized that, because villagers intermarry with people of other villages, the decision to stop FGC had to occur across multiple villages. The authors quote Molly as comparing Western perceptions of FGC to how Senegalese people might see orthodontic braces as cruel—Westerners wouldn't appreciate being called cruel for trying to improve their children's lives. Molly's sensitivity to the villages' cultural codes helped reduce FGC enormously.. As part of Molly's commitment to local buy-in, Tostan is staffed entirely by Senegalese.

From the beginning, Tostan's ethos stressed local buy-in, which seems inspired. Yet, even this smart tactic failed at first. A group of women's consensus to stop FGC in their community didn't unify the whole community, and in fact stirred conflict. Tostan's ultimate success, however, attests to the power of adaptability in the aid world. Molly recognized that she hadn't understood the villages' marriage systems, and had to change Tostan to accommodate for these networks. Her comparison of FGC to orthodontic braces shows empathy for keepers of the African tradition—while she doesn't equate braces with FGC, she does stress that accusing Senegalese people of cruelty for what they see as helping their daughters only serves to alienate them.

Tostan's tactics are thought to be groundbreaking in the fight against FGC, and are emulated more and more by other groups in Africa. By investing in local buy-in and cultural sensitivity, Tostan has succeeded where UN conferences, laws, and billions of dollars have generally failed. Tostan, Kashf, CARE, Apne Ap, and other groups, all have in common local ownership and bottom-up approaches.

The authors summarize the key point that expensive conferences and abstract perspectives on human rights are far inferior to the approach of groups like Tostan, which listen to local people and engage on the ground.

Girls Helping Girls. While the "frontline in the grassroots war against the abuse of women" takes place in Africa and Asia, Jordana Confino fights from the U.S.. A charming, self-possessed young woman, Jordana grew up with a lot of privilege in a New York suburb. Her mother, Lisa Alter, introduced her at ten years old to topics of women's oppression, which moved Jordana to start Girls Learn International in the eighth grade to advocate for girls' education. Twenty chapters across the U.S. now exist, and though some members are just building resumes, some are deeply invested in fundraising for the classrooms to which their chapters are connected. While the authors admit than Girls Learn isn't the most efficient aid group, they argue that it does cultivate commitment to women's emancipation among American students. Jordana's passionate drive, for instance, is evident when she speaks at an assembly at the Young Women's Leadership School, declaring, "Girls' rights are human rights!"

At other points, Kristof and WuDunn criticize some aid groups' waste in their inefficient funding allocations. These criticisms remain, but they use Girls Learn International to illustrate the power in prioritizing women's rights issues at a young age. Importantly, Jordana's inspiration happened within her home, not after a life-changing trip to a Nigeria or India. Emulating Jordana's path may be more plausible to some readers than gaining intimate familiarity with poverty.

CHAPTER 14

What You Can Do. Kristof and WuDunn begin this chapter by referencing segregation and discrimination, which was once considered by many Americans to be an inevitable part of Southern and American culture. But the civil rights movement, with its leaders and coalitions, proved this cynical idea wrong. Similarly, environmentalism only became a functional movement after leaders of the environmental movement took a stand. Likewise, Kristof and WuDunn have hope that a broad, revolutionary movement for global gender equality will arise.

The authors contextualize the women's emancipation movement by comparing it with two movements known to the reader: civil rights, and environmental justice. Most readers will know that these two movements profoundly affected modern life, so in the same way, the authors imply, women's emancipation can have a vital and transformative impact.

The authors argue that the ideal model is in fact the British campaign to end the slave trade around the turn of the 19th-century. They explain that slavery was considered inevitable for most of human history, accepted by Saint Paul and Aristotle. In the 1780s abolitionism wasn't a political issue, but then it abruptly rose to the top of the British agenda. For fifty years, Britain suffered tremendous economic costs for ending its role in slavery, the authors report, even leading to short wars. Eventually, though, the decision influenced American and French ideologies about slavery.

Slavery makes an excellent example of the way commonly held values can radically change with human moral progress. For millennia, slavery was normalized, considered essential to the way economies functioned and hierarchies were organized. Now, most find slavery abhorrent. This evolution in opinion is another case for optimism about the future of women's rights.

Slavery didn't take place in Britain, the authors report, so "for the average English family slavery was out of sight," which enabled denial about its atrocities. Thomas Clarkson was the leading British abolitionist who overcame willful ignorance and has been called in the *Economist*, "the founder of the modern human-rights movement." The authors write that Clarkson secretly collected manacles, thumbscrews, and other barbaric devices used to brutalize African slaves, and made posters of a diagram of a slave ship loaded with 482 slaves (he was careful not to exaggerate, though the ship held up to 600 slaves). He debunked the apologists' myth that slaves were doted on, and persisted even when the economic cost of ending slavery seemed far too great for the cause to be viable. But, when the British public was confronted with the reality of wretched, rank, disease-ridden slave ships, slavery became too unpalatable to defend, the authors write. Clarkson's tireless campaigning, with the company of a former slave, led to political pressure in the forms of an enormous sugar boycott and petitions.

Thomas Clarkson's tactics have marked similarities to modern tactics in women's emancipation and other causes. Exposure to the brutality of an inhumane practice motivates changes in behavior. For instance, exposing the cruel conditions of chickens and pigs inside factory farms helped give rise to the popularity of vegetarianism. By presenting visual evidence of human rights abuses, Clarkson provoked visceral disgust from Britons, who finally saw the abuse as too shameful. In spite of economic arguments, Clarkson and his allies achieved what was, years earlier, thought to be preposterous. Likewise, eliciting such a visceral objection to women's oppression—something like what Zainab Salbi experienced when reading Time*—can revolutionize people's response to gender inequality.*

Abolitionists were considered in their day naïve idealists ignorant about economic complexities, the authors explain. Today, urgent issues of sex slavery and other violations are also commonly dismissed. The authors stress that "leadership must come from the developing world itself," with the support of Western activists. Moreover, the authors argue that women's emancipation would help combat terrorism far better than the U.S. strategy of increasing weapons and military presence to the resentment of people in countries like Pakistan, which unwittingly encourage more extremism. Kristof and WuDunn claim that for all major challenges facing humanity, like climate change and strained resources from overpopulation, "empowering women is part of the answer." Though not a silver bullet, the benefits are both practical and just. They use Bangladesh as an example of a country that is far more stable than its neighboring Pakistan, due largely to its investments in women's rights.

Here, the authors broaden their argument and make the major claim that women are part of the solution to all modern global challenges, moving from the moral argument (the same as Clarkson's argument against slavery) to a pragmatic one. Unlike the fifty years following the end of Britain's role in slavery, in which the British economy suffered, women's emancipation will boost innovation and economies.

Kristof and WuDunn ask the reader to consider the consequences of allowing half a country's brainpower to go unused, costing "billions of IQ points." They describe the Flynn Effect, the phenomenon of the growth in IQs—for instance the eighteen point average IQ gain in the U.S. from 1947 to 2002. Nutrition, education, and stimulation may account for this remarkable growth, all of which are part of women's emancipation. Future gains in IQs will lead to "a new infusion of human intelligence" with which to solve the world's daunting problems.

The authors give still more compelling evidence for big returns on social investments in girls and women. Better access to nutrition and education will, put plainly, make the world smarter. Implicit is an invitation to consider what could be accomplished with a new influx of empowered thinkers.

The authors use Heifer International, which gifts livestock to farmers, as an example of an aid group that has grown more women-focused for pragmatic reasons. Its president Jo Luck traveled to Zimbabwe, where she met Tererai Trent. As a girl, Tererai was considered more useful at home than at school, but desperately wanted an education, so she did her brother's homework for him. She was married at eleven to a man who beat her each time she tried to read, but when she and other women happened to meet Jo Luck, Jo kept asking them what their hopes were. The authors say this perplexed the women, who hadn't allowed themselves to think in terms of hopes or goals. But with Jo's insistence, Tererai admitted she dreamt of an education. Inspired by the encounter, Tererai nurtured that dream by studying vigorously, and writing her dream on a scrap of paper, which she buried in a tin can. She began working for Heifer International, and her colleagues encouraged her to apply to schools. She was admitted to Oklahoma State University, where the authors describe her taking care of all her five children and working at nights, barely making ends meet. She then found a job with Heifer International, and earned her PhD, researching African AIDS programs. Each time she visited Zimbabwe, she dug up the tin can and checked off the goals she had accomplished. She had become Dr. Tererai Trent.

Tererai Trent functions as an example of what effects small acts of intervention and human connection can have in a person's life. Granted, Tererai's story doesn't suggest that the only boost necessary is to cheerlead young women to follow their dreams—especially since Tererai's ascension cost her strain and financial insecurity. But her story does illustrate that sometimes small seeds of encouragement can lead to the self-confidence necessary to take risks, especially for women in countries where self-confidence is an act of resistance to cultural norms.

Kristof and WuDunn point out that, though women still are underrepresented in politics worldwide, they dominate in the civic and nonprofit sector, and are increasingly guiding projects to be women-focused. The authors list what the emancipation movement must strive to accomplish. First, it should build coalitions that transcend conservative and liberal lines. Second, it should avoid overselling success or inflating statistics, and stay realistic. Third, helping women shouldn't come at the cost of ignoring men's suffering in developing countries. Fourth, "American feminism must become less parochial," focusing on developing world issues as much as on first world issues, and conservatives should fight for African lives as much as unborn fetuses. Finally, the authors say that the movement needs to be flexible, with strategies based on empirical evidence as much as possible. For instance, they cite evidence that television was used in both Brazil and India to spread ideas that led to reduced fertility rates and women refusing to allow themselves to be abused. The authors make clear that they don't advocate for television to replace education, but that idea infiltration can occur through surprising media, and that the data supporting such programs should be trusted and followed.

The authors lay out clearly what they think the women's emancipation movement demands. Most arguments are addressed earlier in the book, but this is the first explicit case for a more worldly American feminism. Kristof and WuDunn tacitly criticize what they see as both American self-absorption, of which both conservatives and liberals are guilty. Meanwhile, the example of television as a tool to transmit new ideas in Brazil and India makes excellent evidence for how the best tactics can be counterintuitive. Many lament what they consider to be the cultural degradation and homogeneity that TV brings. But the authors argue that TV can be a powerful tool of communication, and therefore empower women to be more individual and self-advocating.

Further, the authors stress that the movement must include a range of causes, namely "maternal mortality, human trafficking, sexual violence, and the routine daily discrimination that causes girls to die at far higher rates than boys." UN initiatives help promote this agenda, and the U.S. should have an agency devoted to gender equality, they argue, but ultimately the best efforts occur outside bureaucracy in the form of schools and clinics. The authors want to see a grassroots movement crossing political and religious boundaries to lobby the U.S. government to complete three initiatives. The initiatives are, first, a $10 billion five-year effort to promote girls' education, not just building new schools but providing resources like menstrual pads. Second, salt iodization in poor countries to prevent fetal brain damage. Third, $1.6 billion over twelve years to end obstetric fistulas, a women's health issue about which conservatives and liberals should all agree. The authors claim that if these initiatives came to fruition, more people would join the women's emancipation movement, aware of both the problems and possible solutions.

Here, Kristof and WuDunn lay out what specific political policies readers might campaign for. These relatively straightforward policies help make the women's emancipation movement less murky and more approachable to the reader. The authors make the point that success breeds more success, and once the movement gains more momentum, it will also gain more activists, who will be heartened by the fact that its goals have been shown to be achievable.

Kristof and WuDunn emphasize that the first world, too, needs to address domestic problems, like the child sex slave trade. Readers don't need to leave the continent, they stress, to find valuable projects in need of volunteers. Spending both time and money is the best way to join the movement, they write, whether at home or abroad. And the result doesn't have to be self-sacrifice, as Sydnee Woods shows. Sydnee quit her job in Minneapolis to volunteer at New Light in India, where she struggled with strangers' constant suspicion of her, a black single woman, which exhausted her emotionally. The authors asked Syndee if she regretted the decision, and she said flatly no, that the experience changed her fundamentally, enriched her life, and made her a better person. People like Sydnee, the authors write, reflect the empirically supported case that helping others improves one's happiness. The authors also directly encourage the reader to donate money discerningly and consider volunteering abroad at places like Mukhtar Mai's school if possible. Further, they recommend that students try to take "gap years" to travel and volunteer, and that parents extend vacations to the developing world. The women's emancipation movement, they conclude, is well underway, and the question is "whether each of us will be part of that historical movement, or a bystander."

One of the authors' final arguments for jumping into the women's emancipation movement is that committing to the cause will, truthfully, serve the giver. Sydnee Woods is a compelling example of a beneficiary of her own sacrifices. The struggles in India deepened her relationship with the world and broadened what she thought herself capable of. The section's final line asks the reader to consider whether he or she will be a participant or a bystander—this invites a heftier question, of what the reader's own role in history will be. Throughout history, during the Holocaust or transatlantic slave trade, for instance, the inaction of bystanders enabled oppression to prevail. People looking back on history tend to judge those bystanders, and so here the authors make readers face the scrutiny of that same historical gaze: to question how they might be guilty of inaction themselves in the face of profound moral wrong.

Four Steps You Can Take in the Next Ten Minutes. First, the authors write, go to www.kiva.org or www.globalgiving.org, or other humanitarian sites, and make a small donation or loan. Second, sponsor a girl or woman through an organization such as Women for Women International. Third, sign up for informative newsletters on www.womensenews.org and www.worldpulse.org. Finally, join the CARE action network at www.can.care.org, which will help readers advocate for policy change and voice themselves as informed voters.

Here, the authors actualize their initial promise to "recruit" the reader to the women's emancipation movement, by giving concrete and simple steps the reader can take.

Kristof and WuDunn conclude with the story of Beatrice Biira, a Ugandan girl whose family received a goat from Heifer International. The goat, which they named Luck, produced enough milk to provide money to send Beatrice to school, though she was years behind. Beatrice worked her way to a scholarship, then to an American college, then to graduate school—as she puts it, "all because of a goat!" The authors urge a collective effort to help girls and women "truly hold up half the sky."

Beatrice's success story makes for an uplifting conclusion to the book, and demonstrates why women's emancipation is so necessary. Compared with the book's harrowing opening story—Srey Rath and her saga in multiple Malaysian brothels—Beatrice's story seems uncomplicated and achievable, giving the reader a final push to join this urgent, already unfolding movement.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Lambert-Sluder, Rose. "*Half the Sky.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 20 Jun 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Lambert-Sluder, Rose. "*Half the Sky.*" LitCharts LLC, June 20, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/half-the-sky.

To cite any of the quotes from *Half the Sky* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Kristof, Nicholas. Half the Sky. Vintage. 2010.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Kristof, Nicholas. Half the Sky. New York: Vintage. 2010.