

# Discussion Guide

for the PBS documentary *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*



## Overall questions

- How does poverty in this country compare to poverty in other countries? What are the similarities and differences? How should we balance attending to the two?
- Less than 1% of U.S. foreign aid is specifically targeted at women and girls. In light of stories such as these and the particular challenges facing women and girls, do you think this figure is enough? Should foreign aid targeted at women and girls be a higher priority for the U.S.?
- How aware do you think most people in this country are of the issues presented in the film? Why do you think people may not be more aware? What can be done to raise the profile of these issues?
- Which story or issue resonated most deeply with you? Why?
- What actions do you think you can take as an individual or a group to make a difference in addressing one or more of the issues in the film?
- Do you feel ready to commit to making a difference of some kind for women like those in the film? Is there more information you would need to become motivated? What are some first steps you think you could take to get started? What are some long-term goals we could set as a group?
- Sometimes we see something that moves us and we are momentarily inspired to act. Often though, that momentum gives way as we move back into thinking about our daily lives. What can we do to maintain awareness of our wider world and particularly the inspiration we feel to make a difference?

# Night 1 Suggested Questions

## *Gender-Based Violence*

- What information about gender-based violence resonated most with you during the screening? What was most surprising?
- Michelle Bachelet, executive director of UN Women, says in the film, “You see violence against women in rich places, highly educated families, in very low-income families in all regions of the world.” Before seeing this film, did you think of violence against women and girls as a worldwide crisis? In what ways, if any, is gender-based violence an issue in your community?
- Sheryl WuDunn notes that there are 60 million women and girls “missing” because they have been literally “discriminated to death.” What will it take to change this? What institutions other than the government should be tackling these problems?
- Gender-based violence is a broad issue. What small, tangible steps would you first take to help end this phenomenon? How would your approach in your local community be different from your approach internationally?

## *Sex trafficking*

- One of the primary reasons that sex trafficking and sexual slavery continue to flourish is that there are too few penalties for traffickers, brothel owners, and the patrons and sex tourists that keep this economy running. What are some of the consequences for survivors who come forward to seek prosecution? How do these challenges compare with the barriers faced by women who seek justice for other forms of gender-based violence? What are some of the strategies mentioned in the film that are crucial for ending this practice?
- Nicholas Kristof says that one of the “global paradoxes is that countries with the most conservative sexual mores tend to have the most prostitution.” Why do you think that is? What value do women have in these societies? What examples from the film illustrate this?
- Sex trafficking is not just a problem in the developing world — 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States each year. What impact, if any, do you think sex trafficking and sexual exploitation are having in your community? What more could or should the United States do to combat sexual exploitation on the national and international levels?
- What would you like to do in your community or abroad to help end sex trafficking? How can we as a group most effectively work together to take action on behalf of sex trafficking victims who are looking for a way out of the sex trade? What campaigns have you heard about recently to end sex trafficking and how can we get involved?

## *Education*

- What insights did education in Vietnam give you about the status of women and girls’ education around the world? What information surprised you the most?
- What role does education play in your life? Did you experience any challenges gaining access to education or college? Did boys and girls in your community face different educational challenges? How did your experience compare to that of the women in the film?
- Do wealthy countries have a responsibility to help poor countries improve access to and quality of education for girls? Why or why not? What more could or should the United States do? What do you think is the best way for you and the members of your community to help?
- What are some of the ways we can try to improve girls’ education around the world?

# Night 2 Suggested Questions

## *Maternal Mortality*

- What information about maternal mortality resonated most with you during the screening? What was most surprising?
- What are the additional implications of maternal mortality and women's health? How does women's health affect men? How is maternal health connected to the cycle of poverty?
- What more could the United States do to improve maternal health? What impact, if any, do the high maternal mortality rates in the poorest countries have on the social and economic health of our country? Is global maternal mortality a national security issue for the United States? Why or why not?
- Do wealthy countries have a responsibility to help poor countries improve their maternal health care? Why or why not? Do you think individuals from wealthy countries or international organizations can be effective in the developing world? What are the benefits and challenges? What role do you think you can play?

## *Forced and Intergenerational Prostitution*

- Urmi Basu describes the cycle of intergenerational prostitution: "Women who are in prostitution have very little ability to make their daughters aspire to do something different. It's not that trans-generational prostitution happens because they want to make it happen. It's because they have no option, they have no escape." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What are some of the barriers that girls can face when they try to break out of this cycle?
- There is an international debate raging around the subject of prostitution and whether women will be better protected if it is legalized. What do you think? What impact do you think legalizing prostitution would have on the global sex trafficking crisis?
- Some women choose to enter the business of prostitution of their own volition, and are not forced or coerced. How can we make life safer for these women? How can we ensure that women everywhere have the power to make real choices about engaging or not engaging in sex work?
- What can you as an individual or we as a group do to protect prostitutes and help end forced prostitution?

## *Economic Empowerment*

- When we read about these types of problems, we tend to immediately think of aid programs and organizations, but what about business as a solution? What are the benefits and pitfalls of social entrepreneurship in comparison to traditional aid?
- In the film, Nicholas Kristof explains that microfinance programs have not been as successful in Africa as they have in Southeast Asia. Why do you think that is? What challenges do women in African countries face that are unique to their regions?
- What role has the issue of economic empowerment played in your life? Were there different economic expectations for girls and boys in your community or family? Were you expected to be financially independent when you grew up? How did your experience compare to that of the women in the film?
- How can we take action to help economically empower women around the world? Could we join a microlending group -- like Kiva, Heifer, or Women's World Banking -- and raise money to loan to female entrepreneurs? Should we spread awareness in our community about the benefits of microloans in developing countries? What else?