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NOTE TO READERS:

This discussion guide gives an overview of the entire two-hour *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* film, and then provides specific background information and resources for the country segment that deals with Education in Vietnam.
“We wanted to create a unique experience that goes beyond “issue” filmmaking to simply tell incredible stories”

From the Filmmaker
Maro Chermayeff

Working in documentary film has always been an adventure, a pleasure, and a roller coaster ride—but rarely does a project come along that changes one’s entire worldview.

Making *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* has truly been a life-changing endeavor and an honor. The concept for the transmedia project was originally brought to me by my fellow executive producers: Jamie Gordon and Mikaela Beardsley. Mikaela had recently produced the film *Reporter* about the intrepid *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof. She was very excited when, in conversations in the field, he talked about his upcoming book to be co-written with his wife Sheryl WuDunn addressing the struggles and triumphs of women and girls in the developing world that they had personally encountered over years of reporting.

That book turned out to be the groundbreaking work, also titled *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, which became an international bestseller. The game-changing element of the book is the focus on personal stories that allow readers to deeply connect with individual, true stories of women and girls facing horrendous difficulty and inequity. It tackles head on issues such as maternal mortality, sex trafficking, gender-based violence, and forced prostitution—and illustrates the hope offered by the life-changing opportunities of education and financial empowerment. The storytelling nature of the subject-driven narrative leant itself beautifully to documentary film.

As a New Yorker, I knew of Nick’s work as a journalist for *The New York Times*, and of the highly regarded Pulitzer Prize-winning articles that Nick and Sheryl had written together during their tumultuous years as reporters based in China, but I had never met either of them. Nick and Sheryl believe in the power of social media and the potential of this subject matter to reach new and diverse audiences through multi-platform content. This is where the larger concept of the transmedia project inspired by their book came from.

Now, the project is launching on multiple platforms, with a four-hour television series for PBS and international distribution through Fremantle Media; a one hour film for Community Cinema; free curricula developed for Community Classroom, over 20 short films and educational modules made in partnership with some of the project’s more than 54 NGO partners worldwide; mobile games for India and Africa (executive produced with Games for Change with the support of USAID); a social-action Facebook game; and two websites—one housed on PBS.org and another advocacy-based site at halftheskymovement.org.
As a filmmaker, the centerpiece of the project for me was the documentary series. Filmed in ten countries, the series is inspired by Nick and Sheryl’s work—but also goes beyond the page to film new and immediate stories that lend themselves to the drama that television demands. Our approach was to orchestrate 2-week trips to six different countries, following Nick as he reported on an agent of change working to better her own life or the lives of women in her community. Joining Nick on each leg of the journey was a different actress who had experience advocating for social issues, but who was not an expert in the specific issue we were following in that location. Rather, she was there to act as the eyes and ears of the audience, allowing an intimate and honest way into some of these tough and demanding stories. We had the good fortune to be joined by Eva Mendes in Sierra Leone, Meg Ryan in Cambodia, Gabrielle Union in Vietnam, Diane Lane in Somaliland, America Ferrera in India, and Olivia Wilde in Kenya.

The experience of the shooting was some of the most difficult I have ever experienced in over twenty years of producing and directing large and complicated series. Having directed a ten-hour series aboard the USS Nimitz on a six-month deployment to Iraq (PBS, Carrier), run away with a traveling circus (PBS, Circus), and made a film about toxic waste being dumped on a Native American community (HBO, Mann v. Ford), I was prepared for and yet still stunned by the conditions in which most people in the world live. I was especially affected by the experiences of women living under these conditions. From rough terrain to blistering poverty, the situations were incredibly challenging and the issues were often heartbreaking. For example, children being raped as early as two and three years old in post-conflict Sierra Leone or the staggering reality of trafficking and sexual slavery of young girls in Cambodia. But the women we worked with were some of the most amazing, courageous, and admirable women I have ever known. The tears often flowed. Two of the more emotional experiences occurred while trying to help the fourteen-year-old Fulamatu seek justice against the uncle who raped her and two of her friends, only to watch the case crumble, and during the harrowing brothel raid in Cambodia with the fiery Somaly Mam that freed several under-age girls being held in slave-like conditions where they were forced to work as prostitutes with 10-30 clients per day.

Working with Nick and Sheryl was an invaluable and amazing opportunity as a director. I was so impressed by Nick in the field as he tenaciously sought out the story and by Sheryl's incredible ability to see the big picture and address the large global issues. I knew I wanted to honor their work. We all felt from the start that it should be an epic production, visually stunning and visceral, showing the amazing places we visited and people we met in all their beauty. We wanted the reality of their world to be accessible and yet, at times, shocking—an edge-of-your-seat adventure with global significance. We wanted to tell true stories, yet also deepen people’s experience and understanding of the issues women and girls face in the developing world. We also believed, and Nick and Sheryl were deeply committed to showing, that the stories could and should be uplifting and empowering. Even in the darkest of circumstances, we found the most startling humanity and confirmation of the human spirit’s resilience. People who engage with all of our content—on the multiple platforms available—will be angry, motivated, inspired, and most important, feel connected to the subjects and themes. We wanted to create a unique experience that goes beyond “issue” filmmaking to simply tell incredible stories about the capacity of human beings to persevere against all odds and the restorative power of opportunity in parts of the world that are not “over-there,” but a small leap from our own backyard.
The Film

In 2009, Pulitzer Prize winning-journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn published a ground-breaking book about the oppression of women and girls worldwide. That book was *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*—an instant bestseller that immediately catalyzed an already burgeoning movement to eradicate gender inequality.

The landmark PBS documentary series *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* aims to amplify the central message of the book—that women are not the problem, but the solution—and to bolster the broad and growing movement for change. Using the story of the book and its impact as a launchpad, the documentary zeroes in on the lives of girls in some of the countries around the world where gender inequality is at its most extreme and explores the very real ways in which their oppression can be turned to opportunity.

Featuring six celebrated American actresses and the commentary of the world’s leading advocates for gender equality, the film is a passionate call to arms—urging us not only to bear witness to the plight of the world’s women, but also to help to decisively transform their oppression into opportunity.

### Episode One

![Gender-Based Violence](Sierra Leone | Eva Mendes)

![Sex Trafficking](Cambodia | Meg Ryan)

![Education](Vietnam | Gabrielle Union)

### Episode Two

![Maternal Mortality](Somaliland | Diane Lane)

![Intergenerational Prostitution](India | America Ferrera)

![Economic Empowerment](Kenya | Olivia Wilde)

*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* is a production of Show of Force and Fugitive Films in association with Independent Television Service (ITVS). *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by CPB with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* is inspired by Nick Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn’s book of the same name.
Episode One

In Episode One we follow Nicholas Kristof and three American actresses to developing countries where gender discrimination is at its most extreme. We explore the shocking extent of gender-based violence in Sierra Leone with Eva Mendes, the global crisis of sex trafficking as experienced by women and girls in Cambodia with Meg Ryan, and the need for and power of educating girls in Vietnam with Gabrielle Union, where she visits an innovative education program that is transforming, not only the lives of the country’s poorest and most vulnerable girls, but also the futures of their families and their communities. Featuring commentary from Sheryl WuDunn and interviews with some of the world’s leading advocates for gender equality—including Hillary Clinton, Michelle Bachelet, and Gloria Steinem—*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression to Opportunity for Women Worldwide* offers a nuanced and moving account of this century’s most pressing problems, and an uplifting, actionable blueprint for change.

**Gender-Based Violence**

Our first stop is Sierra Leone, a country recovering from years of colonial oppression and a terrible civil war and which is still suffering from rampant gender-based violence. Guided by Amie Kandeh, the passionate and dedicated coordinator of the International Rescue Committee’s Women’s Protection and Empowerment Program in Sierra Leone, Kristof and actress Eva Mendes come face-to-face with the enormous challenges women and girls face in a country where rape is practically the norm—challenges embodied by Fulamatu, a buoyant 14-year-old who hopes one day to become a bank manager. When we meet Fulamatu she was raped repeatedly by a local church pastor—a family friend who is close enough to be officially considered her uncle. She had risked the shame of telling her parents and the ridicule of her community to break her silence and press charges against the perpetrator. The outcome is a sobering object lesson in the insidious effects of gender-based violence, and the urgent need to end impunity for the violators.

**Sex Trafficking**

As interviews with WuDunn and some of the world’s leading advocates for gender equality explain, in many parts of the world cultural attitudes and traditions are used to justify the low status of girls, rendering them vulnerable to all manner of exploitation and abuse. This is nowhere more evident than in Cambodia, where the pernicious global problem of sex trafficking is perhaps at its worst. Actress Meg Ryan joins Kristof in Phnom Penh as he catches up with Somaly Mam, one of the women profiled in the book *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*—a woman who was herself a child sex slave and who now has dedicated her life to rescuing and rehabilitating others. As Mam’s story merges and mingles with those of the girls in her charge, the horrors of sex trafficking are writ large—so too is the awesome resilience of the human spirit and the vast, untapped potential that resides in each and every one of Mam’s girls.

**Education**

That potential, WuDunn and our luminary advocates tell us, is the key to bettering our world: tap into those girls and they will change the future. The clarity of that equation, the elegant cause-and-effect of it, animates Episode One’s final sequence, in Vietnam, where former Microsoft executive John Wood’s organization Room to Read is transforming the lives of the country’s poorest and most vulnerable girls. Hosted by Bich Vu Thi, program officer of Room to Read’s Girl’s Education program, Kristof and actress Gabrielle Union get to know a few of the program’s stars and encounter firsthand the incredible obstacles which stand between these girls and their bright futures. Still, these girls are almost miraculously undaunted—and fiercely determined to change both their circumstances and those of their families. The ripple effect of their education even now is making itself felt—and there is no doubt that with a little bit of help, a little encouragement and support, these girls and the tens of millions of others like them in the developing world will be a powerful army for change.

Combining vivid, visceral on-the-ground stories with the commentary of a vast and impressive roster of experts, advocates, and agents of change, Episode One takes us deep into the lives of girls in the developing world and makes us witness to their seemingly impossible struggles—at once challenging and inspiring us to be a part of the vital, urgent project to empower them once and for all.
Episode Two

Episode Two continues our journey to the hot spots of gender oppression around the world and highlights the courageous work of some of the extraordinary women and men who are taking a stand in the face of incredible odds. This episode focuses our attention on the role of women in their families and their communities—examining the fundamental obstacles that hinder their potential, and charting the ripple effect that results when that potential is harnessed.

Veteran journalist and Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide co-author Nicholas Kristof is once again accompanied by a three celebrated American actresses who offer fresh and personal perspective on the issues in each country. Kristof travels to Somaliland with Diana Lane to examine maternal mortality and female genital mutilation, to India with America Ferrera to explore intergenerational prostitution, and with Olivia Wilde to Kenya, where the transformative power of economic empowerment is changing women’s lives and is laying the groundwork for the next generation. In the process, the film considers the central role of women in the health and stability of their families and communities and establishes their critical role in the global efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve peace.

Featuring on-camera commentary from Sheryl WuDunn and some of the world’s most respected and outspoken advocates for gender equality—including Melanne Verveer, Zainab Salbi, and Desmond Tutu—Episode Two underscores the fundamental obstacles to women’s progress and prosperity and celebrates women’s boundless capacity to better our world.

Maternal Mortality

The episode begins in Somaliland—an unrecognized country, populated mainly by nomads, where the average woman today has a 1-in-12 chance of dying in childbirth. Joined by actress Diane Lane, Kristof reconnects with Edna Adan, founder of the Edna Adan Maternity Hospital in Hargeisa. A spry 70-something woman often and rightly described as a “force of nature,” Adam is almost single-handedly revolutionizing the experience of childbirth in her country—providing medical care to women who would otherwise have none, training midwives, and fighting tirelessly against female genital mutilation—a traditional practice still common in much of Africa (and elsewhere), which severely compromises a woman’s ability to deliver a child. In Somaliland, the challenges women face in the developing world are starkly apparent: Poverty and tradition conspire to undermine a woman’s health, directly threatening her life, and having a lasting impact on her children’s survival and ability to thrive.

Intergenerational Prostitution

As WuDunn and our cast of gender equality advocates argues, tradition is, in many ways, the greater evil. In too many places in the world, tradition still is used to marginalize women, to keep them down and in their place. This vicious cycle repeats itself generation after generation, damaging and ending lives and undermining the ability of thousands of women improve their quality of life and live their full potential. The key—as Kristof and actress America Ferrera discover in India—is intervention by someone from the inside: someone like Urmi Basu. A social worker and an educated, middle-class Bengali, Basu has dedicated her life to stopping the cycle of intergenerational prostitution in India, where 90 percent of girls born to sex workers follow in their mothers’ footsteps. What she is up against is neatly illustrated by one of the young girls in her care, Monisha, who is on the brink of being wrenched out of school and likely sold to a brothel by her own family—a family that belongs to a sub-caste of sex workers. What keeps Basu going is girls like Sushmita—and more to the point, women like Sushmita’s mother, Shoma, who has lived the utter brutality and devastation of prostitution every day of her life and desperately wants a different fate for her daughter. Shoma’s hope for her child is the seed of real and lasting change.

Economic Empowerment

When women have equal control over their finances and the financial decision-making on the personal, community, and national levels, everyone benefits. WuDunn and the many contributors who lent their voices and considerable expertise to Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide all stress that putting money in the hands of a poor woman changes everything. During their visit to Kenya, Kristof and Olivia Wilde witness the impact of the economic empowerment of women firsthand. In this episode’s final segment, they explore the impact and challenges of microfinance and the ways it is transforming the lives of women and those around them. We begin with Jane Ngoiri, a former sex worker-turned-dressmaker who is now able to send her four children to school, where they are each at the top of their class, and end with Rebecca Lolosoli, a Samburu woman who built a safe haven for women on the slender thread of a jewelry-making business. Kristof and Wilde see for themselves the dramatic and tangible transformation that can be set in motion by a woman with a little money of her own and a system of support to help her make the best use of her financial and personal resources. Replicate the experiment several million times, and the world will be an entirely different place.

The episode—and the film—ends with an urgent call to action, an invitation to the viewer to take up the central moral challenge of our time, and to join a movement that will tap the immense potential of women to create a more peaceful and more prosperous world for us all.
In Vietnam, girls are colloquially referred to as “flying ducks,” a saying that has its roots in Confucian tradition and refers to the belief that a girl’s value to her family is lost after her marriage. For parents who have limited resources, choosing to invest in their sons’ education over their daughters’ seems like a better bet, since tradition dictates that boys are responsible for taking care of their parents in their old age, while a girl’s skills and talents will benefit her husband’s family.

Son preference is deeply rooted in many Asian countries, and daughters may be seen as a liability, especially where dowries must be paid. In the film, Bich Vu Thi, Room to Read Girls’ Education program officer, talks about her own struggles achieving access to education in a poor family where girls were not valued. She says, “One boy is one child, but ten girls are not equivalent to one child.” In a country like Vietnam where the average person earns just one dollar a day, the preference for boys coupled with other factors—such as the need for daughters to help at home, the cost of schooling, and the long distances students often have to travel to attend school—puts education out of reach for thousands of girls whose families are living on the economic margins.

“I told my children I don’t have land to give them when they grow up. The only thing I can give them is education.”

— Hiep Dao Van, Father of Room to Read participant Phung Dao Ngoc

**Individuals Featured in Education in Vietnam**

**Nicholas Kristof**  
Journalist; Co-Author of *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*

**Sheryl WuDunn**  
Journalist; Co-Author of *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*

**John Wood**  
Founder and board co-chair of Room to Read

**Gabrielle Union**  
Actress; Ambassador for Susan G. Komen for the Cure®; Founder of the “A Step for Success” program

**Bich Vu Thi**  
Program officer of Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program

**Nhien LeKin An**  
Community organizer at Room to Read

**Duyen LeThi Ny**  
Student; Room to Read participant

**Nhi Nu Thi Huynh**  
Student; Room to Read participant

**Phung Doi Ngoc**  
Student; Room to Read participant

**Hiep Dao Van**  
Phung’s father
The Doi Moi and Room to Read

In the 1980s, Vietnam’s government introduced a series of reforms aimed at improving the country’s living standards and economy. Since then, the Doi Moi (renovation), as it’s called, has made great advances—specifically in the areas of growing private enterprise, attracting foreign investment, and transforming the country into an industrialized nation. But concerted efforts to improve education have been met with many challenges, especially in rural areas.

Although Vietnam has made significant progress in achieving universal primary education and improving girls’ access to schooling, the overall quality of education is poor by international standards and facilities and teachers are in short supply. Children in rural areas are forced to travel miles alone to reach the nearest school, and family responsibilities often outweigh students’ hopes for education, with girls in particular dropping out so they can contribute to the household income. Room to Read Vietnam was launched in 2001 with the hope of reaching thousands of these children—especially girls—who would otherwise be denied an affordable, quality education.

Room to Read is an international organization that focuses on improving literacy and gender equality in education across the developing world. John Wood founded Room to Read in 1999 after a trek through Nepal, where he visited several local schools. Shocked by the lack of resources and moved by the dedication and passion of the students and teachers, John quit his senior executive position with Microsoft and began his journey to build a global team that would work with communities to create sustainable solutions to their unique educational challenges.

Room to Read now works with thousands of children in 10 countries throughout Asia and Africa, and programs in countries such as Vietnam have had an indelible impact on students and their families. The organization’s work in Vietnam alone has included constructing 120 schools and establishing 567 libraries, and through its Girls’ Education program it has been able to reach 1,972 girls who might otherwise have had little or no access to education.

Son Selection and the Gender Imbalance

As a result of son preference, sex-selective abortions have become much more prevalent in Vietnam and the ratio of boys to girls has risen substantially to an average of 110 boys for every 100 girls (and as high as 130 boys per 100 girls in some provinces). If this gender imbalance continues to increase, there may be serious repercussions for women and girls, who will face more pressure to marry at a younger age, making opportunities for education and formal employment even less likely. There is also growing concern that such an imbalanced ratio, coupled with lack of education and employment opportunities for girls, could fuel the sex-work trade, as well as sex trafficking.

Sources:
» www.roomtoread.org
» www.childrenseducationfoundation.org.au/resources.html
» asiapacific.unfpa.org/public/site/global/lang/en/pid/301
Access to education is recognized as a basic human right as well as a significant factor in breaking the cycle of poverty and improving quality of life for children, communities, and countries. Despite this, millions of girls and women around the world are disproportionately denied the opportunity to attend school and pursue education and training outside the home.

Of the approximately 75 million children who are currently not in school, the majority are girls. Worldwide, for every 100 boys out of school, there are approximately 122 girls who lack access to education. In developing countries and countries with strict cultural and religious codes regarding gender roles, this gap is much wider: For every 100 boys out of school in Yemen, there are 270 girls, in Iraq 316 girls, and in India 426 girls.

**Fast Facts**

- Of the 781 million illiterate adults in the developing world, two-thirds are women, and nearly one out of every five girls who enrolls in primary school does not complete her primary education.
- Nearly three-quarters of girls out of school are from excluded groups such as ethnic minorities, isolated clans, and very poor households, even though these groups represent only 20 percent of the world’s population.
- In the United States, the dropout rate for Latinas aged 16 to 24 is 30 percent, compared with 12.9 percent for blacks and 8.2 percent for whites, and only 10 percent of Hispanic women complete four or more years of college, compared with 13.9 percent of blacks and 22.3 percent of whites.
- U.S. women comprise 48 percent of the U.S. workforce but just 24 percent of science, technology, engineering, and math workers.
- Educated women have greater control over their financial resources and are more likely than men to invest their resources in their families’ health, education, and nutrition.
- No country has ever achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without first having at least 40 percent of its adults able to read and write. An extra year of primary school boosts girls’ eventual wages by 10 to 20 percent and an extra year of secondary school increases earnings by 15 to 25 percent.
- Educating women increases productivity in agrarian communities. According to a 2005 report by the United Nations (UN), if female farmers in Kenya were provided with the same education and resources as male farmers, crop yields could rise by 22 percent.
- One year of female schooling reduces fertility by 10 percent and a child born to a woman who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past age 5. Women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family-planning methods, delay marriage and childbearing, and have fewer and healthier babies.
- Education fosters democracy and women’s political participation. A study in Bangladesh found that educated women are three times more likely to take part in political meetings than those without schooling.
- Girls’ education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. A study in Zambia found that AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls than girls who have access to education. Young rural Ugandans with secondary education are three times less likely to contract HIV.
Benefits of Educating Girls

Opening classroom doors to girls around the world not only brings the immediate benefit of individual empowerment, but is also seen as the best investment in a country’s development. Girls’ education has been shown to help reduce child and maternal mortality rates, contribute to local and national economic growth, and improve the health and well-being of individual women and their families.

Access to education also provides girls with self-confidence and is critical in the development of essential leadership skills that empower women to take active, decision-making roles in their homes and communities. In addition, children of educated women are more likely to go to school, contributing to poverty reduction for generations to come.

Each year of school a girl receives produces measurable benefits. In Africa, the child of a woman who has not been to school has a one-in-five chance of dying before age 5, but a child whose mother attended five years of school has a 40 percent lower mortality risk. In China, eight years of school enables a girl to become a teacher, after which she is eligible for additional training at no cost: Eight years of schooling can lift a girl out of poverty.

Barriers to Education

With so much evidence of the benefits of educating girls, why are women and girls still less likely to have access to education?

- Parents believe that girls can make a greater contribution to their families and communities by staying home. Parents with limited resources may choose to withdraw a daughter before she reaches the end of primary school to help with domestic responsibilities, believing that her limited employment prospects do not justify the cost of keeping her in school.
- Sons are often seen as the priority. Boys’ education is given preference when resources are limited. In many cultures, sons also have the role of supporting parents in their old age, whereas daughters are more likely to be living with their husbands’ families. For this reason, a son’s education seems like a better long-term investment.
- The school curriculum may not seem relevant. Parents may find the lessons to be irrelevant to or in conflict with the roles that a girl is expected to take on in her family and community. There may also be a cultural bias against educated girls, who are perceived to be too willful or self-sufficient, which will make it more difficult for them to find husbands.
- The quality of education offered may be poor. Under-resourced and low-quality schools are not seen as worth the investment of time and limited financial resources.
- Parents are often reluctant to send a daughter to a school that is too far away or seen as unsafe. Safety and propriety are critical issues for girls, and schools with insufficient resources are often not “girl-friendly.” For example, they may not provide appropriate toilet facilities or segregated areas that are required in some communities.
- Girls’ self-esteem and confidence are undermined by hostile school environments. Even when they do manage to enter school, girls may be confronted by gender-stereotyped curricula, teachers’ low expectations, and an unfriendly school environment.

Sources:

“The failure to invest in these girls is nothing more than planned poverty.”


“Girls’ education is transformative, it’s earthshaking, it will change the course of history.”

– Maria Eitel, President of the Nike Foundation

“Girls’ education is transformative, it’s earthshaking, it will change the course of history.”

– Maria Eitel, President of the Nike Foundation

The failure to invest in these girls is nothing more than planned poverty.”

What is Needed?

Establishing universal access to education is critical for eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving gender equality, combating disease, and ensuring maternal and child health. Progress has been slow, but where sustained improvements have been made, it is often the result of coordinated efforts to increase political focus, provide outreach and education to parents and communities, provide targeted resources, and take a creative approach to addressing hidden factors that contribute to absenteeism such as health, sanitation, and safety. Strategies include:

• **Reduce or eliminate school fees.** In sub-Saharan Africa, school fees consume nearly a quarter of a poor family’s income. Fees keep children out of the classrooms and have a disproportionately negative impact on girls. Countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda have abolished school fees, which has led to a surge in enrollment.

• **Provide merit-based scholarships.** Michael Kremer, a Harvard economist, examined six different approaches to improving educational performance in Kenya and the approach that raised student test scores the most was to offer scholarships to girls who had scored in the top 15 percent of their class on sixth-grade tests. Boys also performed better, apparently because they were pushed by the girls or didn’t want to endure the embarrassment of being left behind.

• **Offer financial incentives to families.** One of the most successful antipoverty initiatives is Oportunidades in Mexico, which pays impoverished mothers a monthly stipend if their children attend school regularly. Oportunidades has raised high-school enrollment in some rural areas by 85 percent and has been especially beneficial for girls. In addition, by paying the stipend to mothers instead of fathers, women’s economic status within the household is elevated, setting an example for the next generation.

• **Address health concerns that impact attendance.** Students, especially girls, are often incapable of attending school due to health matters. Menstruation, intestinal worms, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies all contribute to absenteeism. One of the most cost-effective ways to increase school attendance is to deworm students. Intestinal worms affect children’s physical and intellectual growth, and a study in Kenya found that deworming could decrease school absenteeism by a quarter. Giving girls disposable sanitary napkins and access to private toilet facilities where they can change them has also been an effective strategy in increasing female attendance at high school.

• **Improve quality and relevance of curricula.** Students need to have access to information and skills that are not taught at home, such as computer literacy, fluency in an internationally spoken language, financial skills, and knowledge of social systems. New methods to promote interactive and collaborative learning can help develop critical thinking and decision-making skills and equip girls and boys for a rapidly changing world.

• **Provide mentors and role-model programs.** Girls benefit from mentorship that provides them with support and information that they may not hear from their parents or teachers. When girls receive information that will help them make good decisions about all aspects of their lives, they are more likely to stay in school, take care of themselves, and be successful in future activities, whether that is raising a family, being a community leader, or having a job. With expanded support systems and multiple role models, girls are better informed and can protect themselves from being hurt by others or doing harm to themselves.

Sources for What is Needed?:

» www.unicef.org/education/index.php
» www.unicef.org/education/campaign.html
» www.ungei.org
» www.care.org/campaigns/education.asp
» www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/flagship_initiatives/girls.shtml
» www.un.org/wcm/content/site/chronicle/home/archive/Issues2010Empoweringwomen/educategirlserradicatepoverty

“We often have the idea that providing education is about building a school, providing teachers, school books, and it’s so much more complicated than that in an environment of poverty.”

– Nicholas Kristof, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*
Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals

Achieving education for all children is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted by the international community in 2000. Under Millennium Development Goal 2: Universal Primary Education (MDG 2), countries committed to ensuring that by 2015 children everywhere—boys and girls alike—will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that the gender disparity would be eliminated by 2005.

As of 2008, overall enrollment in primary education in developing regions reached 89 percent, up from 83 percent in 2000; enrollment increased by 18 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 11 percent in southern Asia. But the goal for gender parity in education was not achieved by the 2005 deadline and the pace of progress toward the 2015 goal of universal primary education continues to move too slowly. For MDG 2 to be met, aggressive strategies are needed to address both human and material needs—buildings, books, and teachers—and to ensure gender equality in society, good health and nutrition, and the strong backing of governments and communities.

Sources for Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals
» www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml
» www.unicef.org/mdg/education.html
» unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001902/190214e.pdf
Thinking More Deeply

1. 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?

2. 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?

3. Why is girls’ education an important issue? Discuss how it affects children, families, communities, and nations. How is girls’ education connected to the cycle of poverty?

4. In *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, Bich Vu Thi—Room to Read Girls’ Education program officer—talks about her own struggles achieving access to education in a poor family where girls were not valued. She says, “One boy is one child, but 10 girls are not equivalent to one child.” What do you think she meant by that? How do you think this attitude influences girls’ opportunities?

5. Room to Read student Duyen Le Thi Ny rides her bike 17 miles to attend school. When Gabrielle Union asks her what she is afraid of, she says, “Ghosts.” She then clarifies her answer and says, “Living ghosts.” What do you think she meant by this? What are some of the challenges and dangers girls face in the process of making the journey to and from school?

6. In the film, Bich Vu Thi says, “In the Mekong Delta, if girls are educated it is very difficult for them to get a husband. Men don’t like an educated wife.” How could educating women and girls also empower and improve living standards for boys and men?

7. Nicholas Kristof says in the film, “We often have the idea that providing education is about building a school, providing teachers, school books, and it’s so much more complicated than that in an environment of poverty.” What challenges and complications is he referring to? How do the parents in the film address these barriers and how do their actions shape their daughters’ futures? Do you think we are facing similar challenges in our own country? Could you provide some examples?

8. How do you think Gabrielle Union’s close identification with Room to Read student Nhi Nu Thi Huynh and her support for Nhi’s struggle to get an education will impact Nhi’s future? Do you think Union’s encouragement can stand up to the negative feedback and repressive behavior of Nhi’s father? What constitutes good mentorship, and what level of support is needed to help a girl like Nhi overcome these obstacles?

9. Do you agree with John Wood that “it is a moral failure” that millions of girls woke up this morning and didn’t go to school? How does his statement connect with Phung’s father’s belief that by sacrificing a small amount today, he is giving his children a path out of poverty?
10. 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 people in your community to help?

11. Sheryl WuDunn says, “When you educate a girl, there is a ripple effect that goes beyond what you would get from a normal investment…. When you educate a girl, you educate a village.” What are some of the ripple effects that were illustrated in the students’ lives in the film? What do you think life will be like for their children and the next generation of girls in Vietnam?

12. Maria Eitel, president of the Nike Foundation, says in the film that “girls’ education is transformative, it’s earthshaking, it will change the course of history.” Achieving education for all children by 2015 is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000. Sadly, that goal does not seem likely to be achieved at the current pace, but if it was—if every girl around the world was educated—what impact do you think that would have? What would the world look like in 50 years?
Suggestions for Action

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual and that people might do as a group. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. **Join the global movement to educate women and girls and improve the quality of education for all children.** Visit the *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* movement website to learn more about the issue and find out how to host a screening with your friends, family, community, or organization and facilitate a discussion of the film and the best-selling book that inspired it. www.halftheskymovement.org

2. **Mobilize your community and harness the power of The Girl Effect.** The Girl Effect is a collective movement created by the Nike Foundation, the NoVo Foundation, the United Nations Foundation, and the Coalition for Adolescent Girls that is driven by thousands of grassroots and community-based campaigns around the world aimed at empowering girls and improving life for their families and communities. The Girl Effect Tool Kit has a range of resources, tips, multimedia tools, and step-by-step guides for creating your own campaign, organizing community events, and starting local clubs to galvanize support for girls’ education and empowerment.

   The Girl Effect: www.girleffect.org

3. **Join the fight to end illiteracy and help to provide schools, libraries, and quality educators to girls and women who need them most.** Room to Read is changing the world by working with thousands of children in 10 countries throughout Asia and Africa. Through programs like the one in Vietnam, Room to Read’s staff and supporters are having a lasting impact on students and their families for generations to come. Visit Room to Read’s website to find out how you can help: www.roomtoread.org.

4. **Find out more about how educating women and girls can help end poverty.** In September 2000, the United Nations signed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the aim of halving the number of people living in poverty, reducing child mortality, fighting disease, and improving social and economic conditions in the world’s poorest countries by 2015. Learn more about the Millennium Campaign’s focus on women and find out how you can help:

   End Poverty 2015: www.endpoverty2015.org
   The “Get Involved” section of the UN MDGs website: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/getinvolved.shtml
   The “Millennium Development Goals” section of the UN Women website: www.unifem.org/gender_issues/millennium_development_goals
   MDG Monitor: www.mdgmonitor.org

5. **Become a volunteer, mentor, or tutor.** Get involved in an area chapter of CARE and connect with the Girl Scouts of the USA to learn more about girls’ education and volunteer and mentoring opportunities. CARE and Girl Scouts of the USA are among the many organizations and campaigns that have partnered with the Women & Girls Lead initiative of the Independent Television Service (ITVS) to improve the lives of millions of people around the world. See www.womenandgirlslead.org for more details.

   The “CARE in Your Community” section of the CARE website: www.care.org/getinvolved/regional/index.asp
   The “Volunteering” section of the Girl Scouts of the USA website: www.girlscouts.org/for_adults/volunteering
Resources

www.halfftheskymovement.org—This is the official website for the *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* movement, as well as for the book and film of the same name.

www.roomtoread.org—Founded by John Wood, Room to Read partners with communities across Asia and Africa to improve educational opportunities for children by focusing on the two areas where programs can have the most impact: literacy and gender equality in education.

www.careinternational.org—CARE International is an organization that is fighting poverty and injustice in more than 70 countries around the world and helping 65 million people each year find routes out of poverty.

www.cedpa.org—The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) works through local partnerships to give women tools to improve their lives, families, and communities. CEDPA’s programs increase educational opportunities for girls, ensure access to lifesaving reproductive health and HIV/AIDS information and services, and strengthen good governance and women’s leadership in their nations.

www.girlscouts.org—Girl Scouts of the USA has a membership of over 3.2 million girls and adults and empowers girls by tackling important societal issues, embracing diversity, and reaching out to every girl, everywhere.

us.camfed.org—The Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) fights poverty and HIV/AIDS in Africa by educating girls and empowering women to become leaders of change.

www.girlsinc.org—Girls Inc. inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold through life-changing programs and experiences that help girls navigate gender-related, economic, and social barriers.

www.girleffect.org—The Girl Effect is a collective movement to lift 50 million women and girls out of poverty by 2030 through the education and empowerment of girls.

www.ncwge.org—The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE) is a nonprofit organization of more than 50 groups dedicated to improving educational opportunities and advocating for the development of national education policies that benefit all women and girls.

www.amnesty.org—Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights for all.

www.savethechildren.org—Save the Children is an organization that works to save and improve children’s lives in more than 50 countries worldwide.

www.unicef.org—The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet children’s basic needs, and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.

www.worldvision.org—Recognizing women and girls as critical partners in development, the Christian humanitarian organization World Vision works to equip, protect, and advocate for women in nearly one hundred countries.

A Message from New Video

New Video, a Cinedigm company, is a leading entertainment distributor and the largest aggregator of independent digital content worldwide. New Video’s Docurama Films is proud to offer *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* as part of its roster of acclaimed, award-winning documentaries. Here are ways in which grassroots organizers and home video consumers might utilize the DVD to spread the message of the film and benefit their organizations:

- **Affiliate Program:** New Video offers a free Affiliate Program that allows organizations or individuals to earn a 10 percent referral fee off every DVD purchased through a unique tracking link on their websites, social media properties, and signatures. (www.newvideo.com/about/affiliates) New Video is very hands-on with enrollees, helping them reach their highest potential within the program: calling out the “donation” from the program, messaging that purchasing directly supports the independent film community, etc.

- **Wholesale Orders:** Bulk orders start at just ten units (nonreturnable), with discounts increasing at tiered intervals. Great for fundraising incentives, membership premiums, etc.

- **DVD Giveaways:** New Video can offer a small quantity of DVDs for giveaways in exchange for promotion on social media and web properties

- **Member Discounts:** New Video can create unique discount codes for organizations to offer its members a discounted rate on the DVD

- **Social Media Engagement:** New Video can post or retweet organizations that are spreading the word about a release or engaging in a giveaway or screening event

Please contact Vanessa at vvarous@newvideo.com if you are interested in the above options.
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ITVS
Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds, presents, and promotes award-winning independently produced documentaries and dramas on public television and cable, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy® Award-winning series Independent Lens on PBS. ITVS receives core funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. Women and Girls Lead is a strategic public media initiative to support and sustain a growing international movement to empower women and girls, their communities, and future generations. To learn more, visit itvs.org/women-and-girls-lead

SHOW OF FORCE
Dedicated to creating feature documentaries and television series events of the highest caliber, Show of Force is known for dynamic, character-driven storytelling that consistently engages, entertains, and inspires. Show of Force is a media production company represented by CAA (Creative Artists Agency), with 20 years of combined experience and excellence between partners Maro Chermayeff and Jeff Dupre. They have produced over 20 hours of television and media content per year with a staff of excellent young producers and are the recipients of numerous awards and accolades for their work on both U.S. and international media broadcasts. Show of Force is the production company overseeing the multiple platforms of the Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide movement. To learn more, visit showofforce.com