DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – HALF THE SKY

HTS - Introduction & Chapter One

After viewing “The Girl Effect” videos, choose ONE of the following topics for your response:

1. What 3 points would you include in a Thesis that argued the case that education of girls is essential for economic development in poor countries?
2. In traditional societies, how does a girl’s age influence her ability to make independent choices? At what age does “everything change” - and why?
3. Contrast the roles of men (and their impact on women) in traditional and modernized societies.

HTS - Chapters 2 & 3 (pages 23-60)

1. The authors describe two broad approaches (on p. 26) to dealing with brothels and child sex trafficking: (a ) legalization/regulation; or (b) trying to reduce these practices by using a “big stick” approach. Which approach do you favor? Why?
2. In your opinion, do any women or boys enter prostitution willingly? If so, why? If not, what kind of threats or other measure keep them in the sex trade against their will? Why do these threats work?
3. You’ll find this quote on p. 54: “Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or to teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry.” Why do the authors speak so highly of the social entrepreneur as opposed to large bureaucratic organizations?

HTS - Chapter 4 & 5 (pages 61-92)

1. On p. 64-67, Ethiopian rape victim Woineshet is told by a judge to marry her kidnapper, in order to avoid a blood feud. When traditional cultural values clash with human rights, is it
possible to change the culture? Describe the role the Ethiopian Women Lawyers’ Association (and other groups) played in restoring Woineshet’s sense of worth.

2. Two of the heroes in Chapter Four are Zoya and Mukhtar (p. 68-79). Their lives reflect the many complexities of inter-cultural change. How are these two situations similar? How are they different?

3. The Old Testament (Deuteronomy 22:13-21) recommended stoning of women who lose their virginity before marriage. How have such cruel religious beliefs been reversed in the past?
HTS - Chapters 6 & 7 (pages 93-130)

1. Mahabouba (in Chapter 6) was a teenager in Ethiopia sold to a 60-year-old man who made her his third wife. The first wife beat her savagely. She was able to run away when she was seven-months pregnant, and tried to have the baby by herself—but the baby got stuck in the birth channel, and died. Is there any point in this story where this tragedy might have been prevented? How?

2. The high rate of child-birth mortality in the developing world is due to three factors: (a) poor maternal health; (b) lack of education for girls (causing many to give birth when they are too young); and (c) deep-seated discrimination against women, expressed in many ways in many cultures. UN Deputy Secretary General Asha-Rose Migiro asks: "Would the world stand by if it were men who were dying just for completing their reproductive functions?" Which of the three causes of death in child-birth is most urgent, in your opinion? How would the attitudes of men have to change in order for the lives of children to be saved?

HTS - Chapter 8 & 9 (pages 131-165)

1. 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?

2. Muslim nations are among those in which women are most severely disadvantaged; the authors directly address the question of whether Islam is misogynistic (p. 150). Is religion part of the reason for the oppression of women? Is it part of the solution?

3. Gender-based violence is a broad issue. What small, tangible steps would you first take to help end this phenomenon in your own community?

HTS - Chapters 10-11 (pages 167-203)
1. Discuss the thorny problems raised in chapter ten, “Investing in Education” (pp. 167–78), and the ways that Ann Cotton has succeeded in addressing many of these issues with her Camfed project in Zimbabwe (pp. 179–83).

2. Is it surprising to learn that when men control family spending, more is spent on beer and prostitutes, and when women are in control more is spent on food and education (pp. 192–194)? How should aid agencies deal with this fact?

3. In chapter 11, WuDunn and Kristof put forth microfinance as a means of empowering women in rural, poverty-stricken areas. The story of Pakistani Saima Muhammad illustrates how microcredit can turn lives around. Think about several side-effects of women’s economic power (for example, health, education or political power). Summarize and analyze one or two stories in this chapter which illustrate these side-effects.
1. Is purchasing fair trade items effective in alleviating the suffering of those involved? Or, is it detrimental for U.S. shoppers to demand safe work environments in developing countries? How does this compare to Westerners speaking against other human rights violations (i.e. foot-binding)?

2. Kristof and WuDunn recommend three specific steps for immediate action: (a) $10 billion to educate girls in Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan; (b) efforts to iodize salt, to raise intelligence of babies, even before they are born; (c) a $1.6 billion campaign to eliminate fistula (caused by genital mutilation of child-bearing women) and improve care, to prevent deaths of infants and mothers in childbirth. Which plan of action do you think would be most effective...and why?

3. Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce worked tirelessly to expose the truths about the cruel and gruesome conditions endured by the slaves in the British slave trade (pp. 235–36). Their work is a model for the political effectiveness of bringing atrocities to the forefront of the public mind and conscience. What realities were brought to light for you, as you read this book? What kinds of actions personally do you think would be the most effective against today's human trafficking?