Questions for *Half the Sky*

Intro:
1. Comment on this quote: “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.

Chapter 6 Maternal Mortality – One Woman a Minute
1. Why does the world appear indifferent toward maternal health and childbirth injuries such as fistulas (incontinence caused by obstructed pregnancy)?
2. Fistulas cost $300 to repair and about 90 percent of them are repairable however the vast majority of women who suffer fistulas are impoverished peasants who are never taken to a doctor. What can be done to eradicate this problem?
3. How is it that Fistula patients are the modern-day leper? “Helpless and voiceless.” “Female, poor and rural?”
4. The World Health Organization estimates that 536,000 women perish in pregnancy or childbirth in 2005 – approx. One woman per minute. Why is there great disparity in maternal health across the globe from the safest place in the world to give birth:
   a. Ireland 1 death per 100,000 live births
   b. US 11 per 100,000
   c. South Asia 490 per 100,000
   d. Sub-Saharan Africa 900 per 100,00
   e. To the least safe, Sierra Leone 2,100 per 100,000?
5. What impact do conservative pro-life political sentiments have on US policy toward maternal health?
6. Why is it that thinking outside the box, sometimes is the best solution – such as providing uniforms to girls to keep them in school thus delaying marriage and pregnancies?

Chapter 7 Why do Women die in Childbirth?
1. Why do women die in Childbirth? Consider the following reasons mentioned:
   a. Biology,
   b. Lack of schooling,
   c. Lack of rural Health systems,
   d. Disregard for women – a woman’s issue.
   Are these reasons the same or different in the US?
2. What role does cesarean section have in ensuring maternal health? Consider the study of a fundamentalist Christian church in Indiana whose members eschewed doctors and hospitals. Their mortality rate rose to 872 per 100,000 live births.
Chapter 8  Family Planning and the “God Gulf”
2. There has been a “gag” rule that prohibits any foreign aid from the United States be spent on an organization that has any link to abortions including counseling women about abortion options. What ramifications does such prohibition have against maternal health? The spread of aids?
3. What is the link between education and family planning?
4. Why does the book claim that AIDS is often a disease of gender inequality?
5. Why should religious organizations work towards acting on social justice AND individual morality? Is this equally apropos within the US as well as abroad?

Chapter 9  Is Islam Misogynistic?
1. A large percentage of honor killings and genital cuttings occur in predominantly Muslim countries. What basis do these practices stem from? What would be a healthy and productive way of having a discussion about the connection or lack thereof?
2. Muslims note that such conservative attitudes have little to do with the Koran and arise from culture more than religion. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How are gender roles in Muslim countries complex?
3. Conservative Muslims require strict adherence to modest dress. Does covering one’s head impinge upon women’s rights?
4. Who are the Islamic feminists such as Fatema Menissi? What do they believe?
5. Why do western women feel sorry for Muslim women?
6. If a nation’s growth and development potential rooted in the status and role of women, then what is the future for predominately Muslim nations?

Chapter 10  Investing in Education
1. Educating girls is one of the most effective ways to fight poverty. Schooling is often a precondition for girls and women to stand up against injustice. Do you agree with this statement? Can you provide some examples?
2. Of the 115 million children who have dropped out of elementary school, 57% are girls. In south and West Asia, 2/3rds of the children who are out of school are girls. What are some reasons why girls drop out of school? (The book mentions deworming, need to manage menstruation, iodize salt, paying them-bribes) Are these valid reasons?
3. Do you believe that Educating women can fundamentally shift societies or does it only tinker with the culture, religion, and family relations?
4. What role does and should foreign aid play in educating women world-wide?

Chapter 11  Microcredit: The Financial Revolution
1. The chapter begins with the story of Saima Muhammad from Pakistan. Saima received a $65 loan and began an embroidery business. With her earnings
she paid off the family debts, kept her daughters in school, renovated the house and bought a television. Is this story common? How widespread is the microcredit revolution in the developing counties?

2. Do economic improvements by women lead to improved family relations?
3. What unique hurdles exist in Africa for women to start businesses?
4. Why do microloans work better for women than men? Do women tend to manage money differently than men?
5. Does economic independence for women lead to other benefits for them? Improved health? Greater Political involvement?

Chapter 12 The Axis of Equality
1. In what ways has China emerged as a model for equity in gender issues? How was it able to overcome long entrenched misogynistic traditions such as female infanticide, foot bindings and concubines?
2. Mao proclaimed that women hold up half the sky. How have gender roles changed in China since the cultural revolution?
3. The book claims that sweatshops give women a boost despite poor wages, long hours and sexual harassment. Is this true?
4. The book compares China with Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide (which left 70% of the population female). How is Rwanda empowering women. Can the policies of China be exported to other countries? Is it remarkable that Rwanda now has the largest number of female political leaders (55% vs. 17% in US)
5. Murvelene Clarke from Brooklyn NY started donating to Women for Women International. She was paired with Claudine, a 27 year-old rape survivor from Butare Rwanda. How can charitable contributions impact the donor as much as the recipient? What criteria should one look for in a charity to determine which causes are worthwhile?

Chapter 13 Grassroots vs. Treetops?
1. What is Female Genital Mutilation? What countries is it most common in? How many women are subject to this practice?
2. The United Nations and many nations have outlawed the practice of FGM yet it persists. Why?
3. What health concerns are associated with FGM?
4. “Everybody has to change together or you will never marry your daughter” Why is this sentiment critical in the efforts to eradicate FGM? Why are westerners not credible leaders in the campaign to end FGM? Why does it need to be a bottoms-up change?

Chapter 14 What Can you do?
1. In what ways is the crusade to help women like the crusade to end slavery?
2. Why is the strongest argument to empower women the pragmatic economic argument?

3. Would you agree with the author’s assessment of the four main principles:
   a. Build coalitions between liberal and conservatives
   b. Resist the temptation to oversell. Use credible statistics.
   c. Helping women doesn’t mean ignoring men.
   d. American feminism must become less parochial.

Would you add or delete any of these key points of assistance?

1. How imperative is it to address women’s issues in rich countries as it is in poor countries (such as child prostitution)?

2. What can we do to be part of the movement?