

# Food for Thought - January 2012

## Girls Need Protection to Reach their Potential

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"Whereas mankind owes to the child the best it has to give..." *Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution 1386 (XIV) of 10 December 1959*

### Theme for January: The Power of Activism

In 1948, the newly-formed UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in response to the atrocities of World War II. The Declaration was intended as a "road map to guarantee the rights of *every individual everywhere*."<sup>1</sup> Yet in 1989, world leaders realized that a separate declaration of rights explicitly for children was necessary because of the special protections that children need.<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child incorporates the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social—in contexts specific to minors. Born to parents without the means to care for them properly, into cultures with harmful beliefs and practices, into communities where education is undervalued and/or underprovided, children become victims to circumstances beyond their control, and often their human rights are violated. Because girl children in such environments are seen at best as of little value, and at worst as a burden to the family, girls are even more likely to be denied their right to a safe and protected childhood. The practice of selling girls into bonded servitude is a particularly harsh example. For a meager sum (\$25 to \$50 a year), parents sell their daughters to wealthier families, where they become slaves: working from dawn till late at night, performing chores beyond their capacities, denied the chance to go to school or even to spend time being a child, often abused by their landlords, with their negligible wages paid directly to their parents.<sup>3</sup>

"Gender is a crucial determinant of whether a child goes to school or becomes a child labourer." *Joining forces against child labour: Inter-agency report for The Hague Global Child Labour Conference of 2010*

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." (History)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. "UNICEF - Convention on the Rights of the Child."

<sup>3</sup> Magnier, M. 2010.

A lack of family planning leads impoverished families to have more children than they can care for, and in many societies girls come with the added expense of a dowry when the time comes for her to be married. So the opportunity to not only earn the money for a girl's labor, but also to have her care become another family's responsibility, is a tempting proposition for desperate parents. "Renting" out daughters to pay off debts or as collateral for a loan is also seen as a viable option.<sup>4</sup> Because of the connection between household vulnerability and child labor, organizations like the Nepal Youth Foundation work to make alternative options available to families to discourage them from resorting to the sale of their daughters. Microloans, fixed assets, and conditional cash transfers (distributions of money to families based on specific requirements, e.g. sending their children to school) have been effective in reducing the instance of child labor and trafficking.<sup>5</sup>

Still, easing a family's financial constraints is only one front in the battle to end child trafficking and its negative impacts. Addressing the underlying cultural assumptions that legitimize child trafficking and labor in parents' minds is an even more important area of focus. Nepal Youth Foundation enlists the girls they've rescued to raise public awareness of the horrors of their living and working conditions and the human rights they are being denied. At a very basic level, simply publicly shaming fathers for selling their daughters is an effective tool.<sup>6</sup>

Until the practice of selling girls into bonded servitude is completely eradicated, a third challenge persists: addressing the complex needs of the girls who have returned. They are illiterate and uneducated, too old to easily start formal schooling; they lack job skills and even basic life skills; they've suffered mental, physical, and/or sexual abuse and are unable to assert themselves. Not only will they face immense difficulty in establishing a stable, independent adulthood, but they also remain extremely vulnerable to further trafficking. NYF rounds out their crucial programming by providing "bridging" classes that help returned girls catch up so that they can join school at the appropriate level, vocational training to provide job skills, training in leadership and communication, and opportunities to become active in their communities by speaking out against this practice and helping other returned girls.



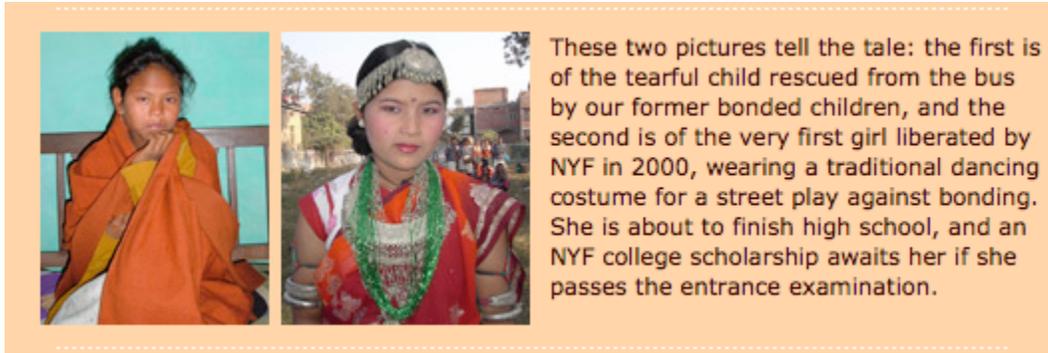
All children--boys and girls, in every corner of the world--deserve a safe and protected childhood. In the developing world, girl children are especially vulnerable, but also have tremendous potential to become agents of change in their families and communities. It is our responsibility as adults to provide them with a safe space and time to reach that potential.

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<sup>4</sup> Rosati, et al. 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nepal Youth Foundation



These two pictures tell the tale: the first is of the tearful child rescued from the bus by our former bonded children, and the second is of the very first girl liberated by NYF in 2000, wearing a traditional dancing costume for a street play against bonding. She is about to finish high school, and an NYF college scholarship awaits her if she passes the entrance examination.

Nepal

Foundation - The Indentured Daughters Program | Freeing Nepali Girls

Youth

## Millennium Development Goals



*The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight objectives designed by the UN to improve social and economic conditions in developing countries by the end of 2015. Each month we focus on the MDGs impacted by our theme and our monthly featured project. This month we highlight:*

### **MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education**

To ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. NYF works to ensure that girls returned from servitude are given the opportunity to access the primary education they were denied.

### **MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

To eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. NYF offers college scholarships to program participants. Allowing girls to access post-secondary education will increase the number of

women in paid, non-agricultural employment, and the number of women in positions of political power - two sub-goals of MDG 3.

"The persistence of child labour is systematically undermining progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal's (MDGs) which embody basic human rights, particularly rights to Education (MDG 2), Gender Equality (MDG 3) and health via protection from HIV/AIDS (MDG 6)." *Joining forces against child labour: Inter-agency report for The Hague Global Child Labour Conference of 2010.*

## Questions for Discussion

1. The practice of *kamlari*, or selling girls into bonded servitude, is illegal in Nepal, yet it continues regardless. Do you think officials are unwilling or unable to enforce the law? Why do you think the public awareness campaigns are effective where the threat of the law is not?

2. Do you feel that the rights of the child are well-protected here in the US? Why, or why not? What could be done to better protect them?

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