

Educated choice: The best response to sex trafficking

From the Editors in the [August 11, 2009](#) issue

Most prostitutes do not make a conscious choice to go into that way of life. Many are led into it by a childhood experience of sexual abuse. Others turn to it as the only way to earn a living. Especially in the developing world, prostitution is often a means of survival. “I would rather die of HIV/AIDS” than starve, a 17-year-old girl in Uganda said. “Through sex I can at least buy basic commodities like salt, soap and sanitary pads.”

The articles by [Bradley Davidson](#) and [Linda Bales Todd](#) in this issue highlight the plight of women who have been forced into the sex trade, and the authors point to some efforts by nonprofit organizations and the U.S. government to combat sex trafficking and liberate women from the sex industry. The most effective response to sex trafficking, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe or the Americas, is to provide young women with economic alternatives. And the key to having economic alternatives is having an education.

The *Christian Science Monitor* recently reported on a program in Uganda that has had success in keeping girls from rural areas from being pressed into prostitution. The Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme (URDT) works with girls whose families make \$1 a day or less. The program teaches the girls business skills and acts as business adviser. One girl in the program learned about raising sugar cane and then was able to persuade her father to plant sugar cane as a crop. With the profits he was able to buy a small store. Meanwhile, she taught what she’d learned to other villagers.

Focusing on educating girls is not only a way to steer them away from prostitution. It is key to a broad range of social development. URDT founder Mwalimu Musheshe says that when you educate a woman, you end up educating an entire family. Educate a family, and you end up educating a village.

Research has shown that investing in the education and financial power of girls and women generates multiple social benefits. Better educated women have higher incomes and raise healthier children. They are more likely to be able to plan the size of their families, and they choose to have fewer children. Women are more likely than men are to use their earnings to support the health and education of their children. One study showed that women invest 90 percent of their income in their families, whereas men invest only 30 to 40 percent.

Investing in young women is the key not only to ending sex trafficking, it's the key to changing the world.