

RELEASE IN FULL

**From:** McHale, Judith A <McHaleJA@state.gov>  
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**To:** H; Verveer, Melanne S  
**Subject:** FW: Greg Mortenson Case's Fallout for Women

You've probably been following the Mortenson debacle but I'm forwarding this article in case you haven't seen it. Shows the potential damage to education for girls. If even some of this is true, which sadly seems to be the case, it is the ultimate in piggishness. Very sad.

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**Sent:** Tuesday, April 19, 2011 11:46 AM  
**To:** McHale, Judith A  
**Subject:** Greg Mortenson Case's Fallout for Women

### Greg Mortenson Case's Fallout for Women

#### Daily Beast

Michelle Goldberg

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2011-04-18/greg-mortenson-fraud-case-hurts-women-by-raising-doubts-about-girls-education/2/>

**Allegations by *60 Minutes* and others that the humanitarian star may be a fraud could spur doubts about his cause—building schools for girls—and trigger a drop in donations to the global effort, writes Michelle Goldberg. Plus, Howard Kurtz on Mortenson's publisher's investigation.**

After the devastating *60 Minutes* exposé of Greg Mortenson on Sunday night, it seemed like things couldn't get much worse for the once-lionized author of *Three Cups of Tea*. Then Jon Krakauer's 75-page *Three Cups of Deceit*, which is being published as a standalone story for Kindle, came out Monday. Meticulous and damning, it amplifies the *60 Minutes* story, painting Mortenson as a fraud and a fabulist, a kind of James Frey of aid work. "The image of Mortenson that has been created for public consumption is an artifact born of fantasy, audacity, and an apparently insatiable hunger for esteem," writes Krakauer. "Mortenson has lied about the noble deeds he has done, the risks he has taken, the people he has met, the number of schools he has built."

Schools, of course, are what Mortenson is famous for. His books, *Three Cups* and its sequel, *Stones Into Schools*, tell of how an abortive attempt to climb K2 led him to a remote Pakistani village, where he made a solemn promise to return and build a place for its children to learn. He ended up founding a charity, the Central Asia Institute, to build schools, primarily for girls, in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. But Krakauer shows that the organization has been haphazard and ineffectual, building fewer schools than it claims, and abandoning some that it has built so that they sit empty and unused. Worse, he reveals that much of the Central Asia Institute's budget is spent on promoting Mortenson's books—which sometimes means paying for him to travel by private jet—even though the group receives none of the book's royalties.

If this were just about one author's reputation, the story would have few repercussions outside the publishing world. But Mortenson is not just a memoirist—he's also the single most famous champion of the transformative power of education for girls in poor countries. If his downfall leads to skepticism about his cause, it would be not just a scandal, but a tragedy. "It raises cynicism about the role of nonprofits in general, because I think that all of us who are in this space now are going to have to prove ourselves or do that much more to re-engage with our public, especially those who are not already donors," says Shalini Nataraj, vice president at the Global Fund for Women. Adds New York Times columnist Nicholas

Kristof: "It's probably true that advocates sometimes exaggerate how easy it is to help. But I worry that the latest round of sour news will leave people thinking it's almost impossible to help."

This story will likely be an object lesson in disillusionment for hundreds of thousands of American and Canadian kids. Mortenson's Pennies for Peace program was designed to get kids involved in his venture, even urging them to donate their lunch money. As Krakauer reports, it's part of the curriculum in nearly 3,000 schools. "In 2009, schoolchildren donated \$1.7 million to Pennies for Peace," Krakauer writes. "But CAI's total 2009 outlay for the things P4P is supposed to pay for—teachers' salaries, student scholarships, school supplies, basic operating expenses—amounted to a paltry \$612,000. By comparison, in 2009 CAI spent more than \$1 million to promote sales of *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones Into Schools*, and another \$1.4 million to fly Mortenson around in chartered jets." Reports about Mortenson's alleged misdeeds come on the heels of Madonna's school-building debacle in Malawi, in which employees of her charity squandered millions without having anything to show for it. It wouldn't be surprising if many people, watching all this, decide that feel-good school-building programs are giant cons.



As it happens, among people who study foreign aid, the empty school is almost a clichéd symbol of ineffectual idealism. "Building a school is very popular," says Sandra Schimmelpfennig, a former aid worker who blogs at Good Intentions Are Not Enough. "It's a very tangible product. You can fundraise for it easily. There's a clear start and a clear end date, and a photo when you get done with it. One of the issues that comes up over and over again is that it has to be maintained once you build it. Very often there is no funding for maintenance. Do you have teachers that are going to be in there with the students? It's a huge issue."

This most assuredly does not mean, though, that Westerners shouldn't invest in education, especially for girls. "We have stacks of data that show what happens to girls' lives and their families' lives when they have an opportunity to go to school," says Jill Sheffield, president of Women Deliver, a global advocacy group devoted to investments in women's health. Family income goes up, infant and maternal mortality go down, and the health of children improves markedly. Even Lawrence Summers, no paragon of feminism, has written, "Educating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment in the developing world."

The problem is that simply erecting school buildings is far from enough. Teachers need to be recruited and paid. Textbooks need to be bought. Funds for maintenance need to be established. Parents need to be motivated to let their daughters go to school, which can be done in various ways—one program in Bangladesh that rewarded parents with cash payments doubled female school enrollment. These sorts of programs require local collaboration and sustained, long-term support. And that, it seems, is where Mortenson has failed. "CAI has become proficient at erecting schools off the beaten path, and Mortenson deserves praise for that," Krakauer writes. "But filling those schools with effective teachers and actually educating children turns out to be much more difficult than constructing schoolrooms. On this front, Mortenson has delivered far less than he has professed." Krakauer describes "ghost schools"—schools the Central Asia Institute built but then abandoned.

Mortenson became as famous as he did because people love the idea that one intrepid humanitarian can solve intractable problems in the world's most desperate places. Schimmelpfennig calls it the "White in Shining Armor" approach to development. It makes for good stories, but it usually doesn't work. In nearly every country in the world, there are people on the ground trying hard to improve things in their communities, and the most successful programs work through them. The Global Fund for Women, for example, takes applications for grants in any form and any language. It supports organizations like the Afghan Institute of Learning, which began by running underground girls schools during Taliban rule, and which has since trained more than 7,000 female primary school teachers. The problem isn't that the world of development lacks real heroes. The problem is that they're rarely the ones we hear about.

*Michelle Goldberg is a journalist based in New York. She is the author of The New York Times bestseller Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism and The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power and the Future of the World, winner of the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award and the Ernesta Drinker Ballard Book Prize. Goldberg's*

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