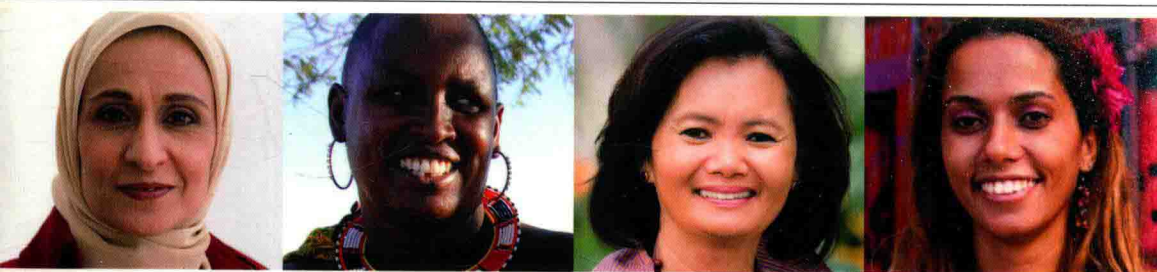


FOREWORD BY
HILLARY CLINTON

VITAL VOICES

THE POWER OF WOMEN
LEADING CHANGE AROUND THE WORLD



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VITAL VOICES

THE POWER OF WOMEN
LEADING CHANGE AROUND
THE WORLD

Alyse Nelson

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VITAL VOICES

*For the women whose voices have inspired, humbled, and
propelled us forward and to those still struggling to have their
voices heard*

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THE HONORABLE
HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

Founder, Vital Voices

IN 1995, DELEGATES FROM 189 NATIONS MET in Beijing for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. I stood before those gathered and said the time had come to break our silence.

No longer would we accept any separation between women's rights and human rights. No longer would discussions about "women's issues" take place unnoticed, in back rooms.

Vital Voices began as a government initiative during the Clinton Administration at a time of great change in the world. Many countries were emerging from conflict and repression, beginning the transition to democracy. Former Secretary and my friend, Madeleine Albright, and I, along with others at the State Department and the White House, believed it was critical that women have a role in shaping the futures that they would inhabit. We believed that if women were brave enough and strong enough to challenge the status quo and participate in politics, civil society, the economy, we should help them.

An idea that began in a small office at the State Department as the Vital Voices Democracy Initiative has grown into Vital Voices Global Partnership, an NGO with more than one thousand staff and partners worldwide, supporting the work of twelve thousand women leaders in 144 countries.

This organization and its mission are very close to my heart. I carry the lessons of Vital Voices with me every day. At the State Department, we are working hard to embed support for women's rights and advancement as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. Melanne Verveer, the co-founder of Vital Voices, is leading that effort as our Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues. And everywhere I go in the world, somebody from Vital Voices comes to see me. They tell me about a training program or a visit, an opportunity they had to advance their work even further.

Since 1995, it has become very clear that development stalls where women are oppressed, and accelerates where they are empowered.

We know that women make unique and critical contributions. They often see problems that others overlook. They are able to reach populations that others either cannot reach or do not care to do. And even when it seems that no opportunity exists, they still find a way.

The status of the world's women is not only a matter of morality and justice. It is also a political, economic, and social imperative. Put simply, the world cannot make lasting progress if women and girls in the twenty-first century are denied their rights and left behind.

The women leaders you will meet in the pages of this book hail from different cultures and parts of the world,

but they share important values and attributes. They each look for ways to make systemic change—to lift the lives of thousands, even millions of people.

These women embody a distinct, transformative model of leadership. After 15 years of experience, we know the multiplying effect we achieve when we invest in women who embody this model. Their actions initiate a positive chain reaction that quickly acquires an energy of its own.

At a time when millions of women worldwide are still denied their rights, still excluded from the public debates in their societies, still subjected to violence inside and outside of the family, still barred from schools, courts, markets, and public squares, it is even more remarkable that these women persevere.

Their courage has inspired others to stand with them despite the risks and the consequences—to believe in the possibility of a better future and their own ability to help build it. We must proclaim to the world, clearly and as one, that these women are heroes, their work is valuable, and their voices are vital.

This is not only an urgent foreign policy challenge. It is not simply a social justice issue, the most important in my view for the twenty-first century. It is a personal mission. And I am deeply honored to recognize and pay gratitude to those women who are on the front lines across the world who make each of us dare a little more, risk a little more, do a little more.

INTRODUCTION

IN OCTOBER 2008, WHEN THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC meltdown was on the front page of every newspaper, a story caught my attention; it was, quite possibly, the first solution-oriented story I'd seen about the crisis. After declaring bankruptcy, the government of Iceland tapped two women to rebuild the financial system. A government official noted that after the banking empire collapsed, "women are taking over . . . to clean it up."¹ Audur Capital, which is managed solely by women, was the only private equity fund untouched by the crisis²; and in the midst of economic chaos, Icelanders elected Johanna Sigurdardottir—a woman—as prime minister.

As I read on, I thought the solution to the situation in Iceland made perfect sense. Through my work with Vital Voices, I know firsthand countless stories of women leading the charge throughout the world. There are the women of Rwanda, who rose from the ashes of genocide to rebuild their country, which as of 2011 boasted the only female-majority parliament in the world³ and one of Africa's fastest-growing GDPs.⁴ Or the young congresswoman in Peru, who at the tender age of twenty-eight publicly demanded an account for the increase in poverty and human rights violations

perpetrated with impunity during Alberto Fujimori's regime. There are many stories like this in every region, country, and community of the world—stories of women stepping up as leaders in times of crisis, whether financial, humanitarian, or otherwise.

For generations, women around the world have been pleading for equality on grounds of fairness. After all, women make up slightly more than half the global population. While these sentiments and the language of fairness bolster the argument for justice, there are more broadly compelling reasons for women's full participation. As women gain greater access and opportunities, their collective participation generates a kind of societal change unlike anything the world has ever seen. In some of the most difficult times, in many of the most dangerous places, women are taking on and chipping away at the world's most serious problems.

The people of Iceland weren't the only ones making the connection between women and economic development. A few months earlier, in March 2008, Goldman Sachs's chairman and CEO, Lloyd Blankfein, had announced the historic investment of \$100 million over five years to provide women in emerging markets with a business and management education—an initiative they call "10,000 Women." This commitment was preceded by Goldman Sachs's "Women Hold Up Half the Sky" report, which made an economic argument for investing in women of the developing world.⁵ More impressive than the size of the gift was the clear and visible commitment from the top. Goldman Sachs saw this not only as the right thing to do; they understood that it was a smart investment in the sustainability of their business.

At the launch event at Columbia University in New York, I looked out at the enthusiastic crowd: women—but also, a sea of men in dark suits. *Clearly*, I thought, *a new day has come*.

...

Back in 1995, when I first started working on global women's issues, the constituency for these issues was not so broad. You couldn't read Nicholas Kristof's impassioned *New York Times* columns highlighting international heroines on the front lines of change. There were few books or articles written on the topic. We had no language, and very little research to speak of, to articulate the critical role of women in building a better world. On the contrary, most news stories depicted women as victims or vessels, in need of pity or protection. Up until the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, where then-First Lady Hillary Clinton proclaimed, "women's rights are human rights," women's issues had been tangential, at best, to the foreign policy agendas of most governments.

Only a few brave voices had made the case for the advancement of women as a path to development and democracy. Harvard professor and World Bank economist Larry Summers' 1994 study, *Investing in All the People: Educating Women in Developing Countries*, highlighted the increased economic returns from investing in girls' education.⁶ Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argued that nothing was more important to the development of nations than the contributions of women. Even in 1995, with just a few influential advocates and little data, it was clear to some

that in a new era of globalization, countries would find it difficult to make economic or social progress if 50 percent of their people—their greatest natural resource—remained untapped and held back from contributing at their full potential.

Just like Sen and Summers, Hillary Clinton saw that investing in the untapped potential of the world's women was the quickest route to advancing sustainable peace, democracy, and economic development. In 1997, fueled by the energy of 55,000 women leaders from around the world gathered at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing, the First Lady returned home to the United States, and with then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright initiated the Vital Voices Democracy Initiative within the State Department. The mission was bold: to promote the advancement of women's leadership as a U.S. foreign policy goal, and to make visible the connection that those states promoting women's rights were the same states exhibiting an unwavering commitment to democratic and progressive ideals. In the late 1990s, this was a radical concept.

More than a decade after Vital Voices' founding, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton routinely addresses the intertwined nature of women's rights and U.S. foreign policy. Challenges once sidelined as "women's issues" have moved into the mainstream, especially with the world's attention focused on economic recovery and development. This makes sense, given that women, collectively, are the fastest-growing economic force in the world, controlling over \$20 trillion in spending globally.⁷ The Asia Pacific region alone would gain

\$42–\$47 billion per year if women had greater access to job opportunities.⁸

The reality is that women's progress is global progress. In societies where women have equal access to education and political rights, governments are more open and free, and younger generations are healthier and better educated. The United Nations has found that women in developing nations reinvest up to 90 percent of their income in their families and communities, as opposed to the 30–40 percent that men reinvest.⁹

From a development standpoint, women are what economists call a growth reserve, meaning that there is still tremendous economic potential that has gone untapped. *The Economist* estimates that over the past couple of decades, women have contributed more to global GDP growth than have new technologies or emerging economic heavyweights India and China.¹⁰ The United Nations finds that women do 66 percent of the world's work¹¹, and for the first time in history, as of 2010 women constitute a majority of the workforce in the United States.¹² Businesses and governments alike are formulating strategies to channel women's energy to generate prosperity for all.

Simply stated, women have become the emerging market. And that brings some new players to the table. As recently as 2005, if someone had asked me what I thought would be the fastest, most effective way to advance women and girls globally, I would have said it was for governments to turn their rhetoric on these issues into measurable action. Of course, government action is still sorely needed, yet I've

come to understand that the private sector can be just as powerful. When corporations enter the ring, aligning their philanthropic endeavors with their core business strategies, they can change the game for women in the communities where they operate. Companies have the incentive and the reach to inspire a cultural shift that positively impacts the lives and livelihoods of women and their families, and that sends a powerful message to governments and citizens about the value of women.

Each year more corporations announce large-scale initiatives to capitalize on women's untapped economic potential. In 2011, Coca-Cola's chairman and CEO, Muhtar Kent, unveiled his company's "5 by 20 Initiative" to provide economic opportunities to five million women by 2020. And that same year, Walmart launched their "360 Initiative," the largest, multibillion dollar corporate commitment to date, to buy products for the company's supply chain from women-owned businesses around the world. Media titan Tina Brown has boldly used her platform at *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast* to channel new attention to women's organizations.

These are indisputable signs of progress. Those of us working on global women's issues have a new vocabulary, a growing body of research, and greater understanding. We have more partners and more advocates than ever before. In 2007, World Bank president Robert Zoellick declared gender equality as "smart economics," launching a four-year gender action plan to increase women's access to land and greater economic participation.¹³ Two years later, President Barack Obama appointed Melanne Verveer, Vital Voices co-founder and chair emeritus, as the first

ever ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues, with a direct line to the secretary of state. And a few years after that, he made history with the first Executive Order instituting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to rally the U.S. government around the critical role that women play in building peace and preventing conflict.¹⁴

In 2010 the United Nations created "UN Women" to accelerate gender equality and hold member states accountable; former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet was appointed as its first leader. And the following year, former French finance minister Christine Lagarde was the overwhelming choice to lead the International Monetary Fund, becoming the first woman to head a multilateral financial institution. Leaders across the globe have condemned violence against women for its devastating impact on individuals, communities, societies, and even the economy. And multilateral institutions have linked women's participation in the political process to good governance.

Yet with all of the progress, there is still a long way to go. Women's full economic potential is far from realized. A majority of the world's women do not legally own, control, or inherit property, land, or wealth.¹⁵ Women have less access to credit, education and training, technology, markets, mentors, networks, and protection under the law.¹⁶ Too frequently, as a result, they are unable to start and grow small businesses. As of 2012, women-owned businesses represent less than 1 percent of sales to large, multinational corporations.¹⁷ Notwithstanding their constituting a majority of university students globally, women's formal labor force participation hovers around 51 percent globally, as opposed to men's at

78 percent.¹⁸ Even the economic advances of women will only be sustainable if they are reinforced by increased access to social and political opportunity.

The United Nations estimates that 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not considered a crime.¹⁹ Staggeringly, one out of every three women in the world will be a victim of violence in her lifetime.²⁰ Although two-thirds of countries around the world have laws in place to combat violence against women, in most cases those laws are rarely enforced, well resourced, or even taken seriously.²¹ Violence against women and girls—in the forms of human trafficking, harmful cultural practices, rape as a tactic of war, and domestic violence—is one of the single greatest factors holding women back. If we as global citizens don't address the inequity of restricted access or the scourge of gender-based violence, women's potential will go unrealized and whole communities will stand to lose. In fact, in environments where women get an equitable share, opportunities and prosperity are increased for all.

Vital Voices was established with that premise in mind, that improving one group's access to opportunity doesn't mean denying possibility to another. At the dawn of the millennium, Vital Voices left the State Department and became a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization, rebranding itself as the Vital Voices Global Partnership. Then Senator Hillary Clinton reached across the political aisle to engage Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and former Republican Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker in this mission, and together they became our honorary cochair. Though we were blessed with an impressive and influential, bipartisan