

## RE-VISIONING WOMEN, EMPOWERMENT, & GLOBAL POVERTY

by Mridu Markan

Betsy Teutsch, *100 UNDER \$100: ONE HUNDRED TOOLS FOR EMPOWERING GLOBAL WOMEN*. Berkeley, CA: She Writes Press, 2015. 182p. gloss. bibl. index. pap., \$29.95, ISBN 978-1631529344.

I'm getting ready to leave a small, dilapidated room in North Kolkata, India, where the water closet and wash basin are set against a wall of Bollywood superstar posters. I've just facilitated a successful meeting with brothel-based and street-based female sex workers who are partnering with the National HIV Programme to halt the HIV epidemic in the state of Kolkata. As a technical officer for the National Programme, I have met with these community representatives to review their estimates of the population's need for condoms, which will be provided free of cost by the Indian government. The HIV epidemic in India is concentrated, and female sex workers remain a high-risk group. As I leave the drop-in center, a sex worker comes to say goodbye, remarking, "Using condoms has made me appreciate my agency — it has empowered me!" Several years later, what still captivates me about this conversation is the nuanced understanding of how a simple idea, initiative, or solution can empower women and change the trajectories of their lives forever.

Today, as the world faces numerous conflicts and crises, empowerment of women is unanimously viewed as critical in achieving a better future for all. As we have reached the 2015 deadline for the UN's Millennium Development Goals,<sup>1</sup> it has become increasingly clear that women and girls need to be at the center of all national and global development initiatives and dialogues. But why should we focus on global women in development? One main reason would be what author, artist, and activist Betsy Teutsch refers to, in *100 under \$100: One Hundred Tools for Empowering Global Women*, as "the so-called Girl Effect" (p. xiii) — the idea that when girls are educated, marriage and childbearing get postponed and higher-skilled jobs are more likely to be obtained. This in turn promotes development, builds the economy, and ends the cycle of poverty.

Working through a gender lens, Teutsch has focused on poverty alleviation. Rather than limiting her work to one specific domain, she has courageously covered a range of realms to compile innovative and transformative ideas that improve the lives of women and their families, as well as communities, societies, and nations. The result is an ingenious and unique toolkit of a hundred simply designed, yet effective ways — each costing less than \$100 — to alleviate extreme poverty for women in the Global South. These

simple and replicable tools have been organized into eleven different sectors: general health, girls' and women's health, energy, water and sanitation hygiene (WASH), domestic technology, subsistence farming, construction, transportation, information and communication technology, financial inclusion, and legal tools. Teutsch dedicates the volume, which is published by She Writes Press, to "all who engage in Tikkun Olam — Repairing the World."

*100 under \$100* is eye-opening and compelling. Its concise and easy-to-understand writing style makes it a valuable resource for a wide audience of students, activists, feminist scholars, business entrepreneurs, community leaders, young change-makers, and development professionals. Emphasizing an individual's power to change the world, it fills the reader's heart with hope and inspiration. The pages are visually appealing, full of images of women and girls working toward attaining empowerment, and the photographs are carefully chosen to depict women as vibrant, strong, and action-oriented rather than as passive victims of situations. Despite the simple nature of the brilliant tools featured, implementation of those tools can present numerous challenges, but the author presents those realistically. The book's layout is engaging, with suggestions for reader engagement, ideas for the classroom, and action notes.

This volume provides a wealth of practical ideas for building the local capacity of a community. Some of the tools that personally resonated with me included these:

**Solar Ear:** This company in Botswana offers a \$50 hearing aid with solar-charged batteries, an affordable and environmentally conscious alternative to American hearing aids (p. 17).

**Bike-Powered Machines:** Global Cycle Solutions, based in Tanzania and run by medical engineer Jodie Wu, offers a bicycle-powered cell phone charger, a "detachable maize sheller" that the company boasts pays for itself in only one month, and other machines that can be connected to and powered by a bicycle (p. 40).

**Eco-Briquettes:** "[These] might look like mud pies, but they are serious business, creating high-quality, clean fuel from waste." As an alternative option for cooking fuel, Eco-Briquettes are more efficient than firewood and can be made by hand (p. 42).

**Treadle Water Pumps:** KickStart International's \$30 "Money Maker Hip Pump" allows women and children to more easily irrigate their farms by replacing hand-operated or diesel-fueled pumps with a "light-weight, female-friendly design" (p. 82).

**Bottle Bricks/Ecobricks:** Andreas Froese, a German architect, along with Susanne Heisse, founder of Pura Vida, discovered a way to use plastic bottles filled with dirt or trash to build homes and schools. Teutsch points out that "[b]ottle brick construction is community-based, creating shared structures" (p. 98).

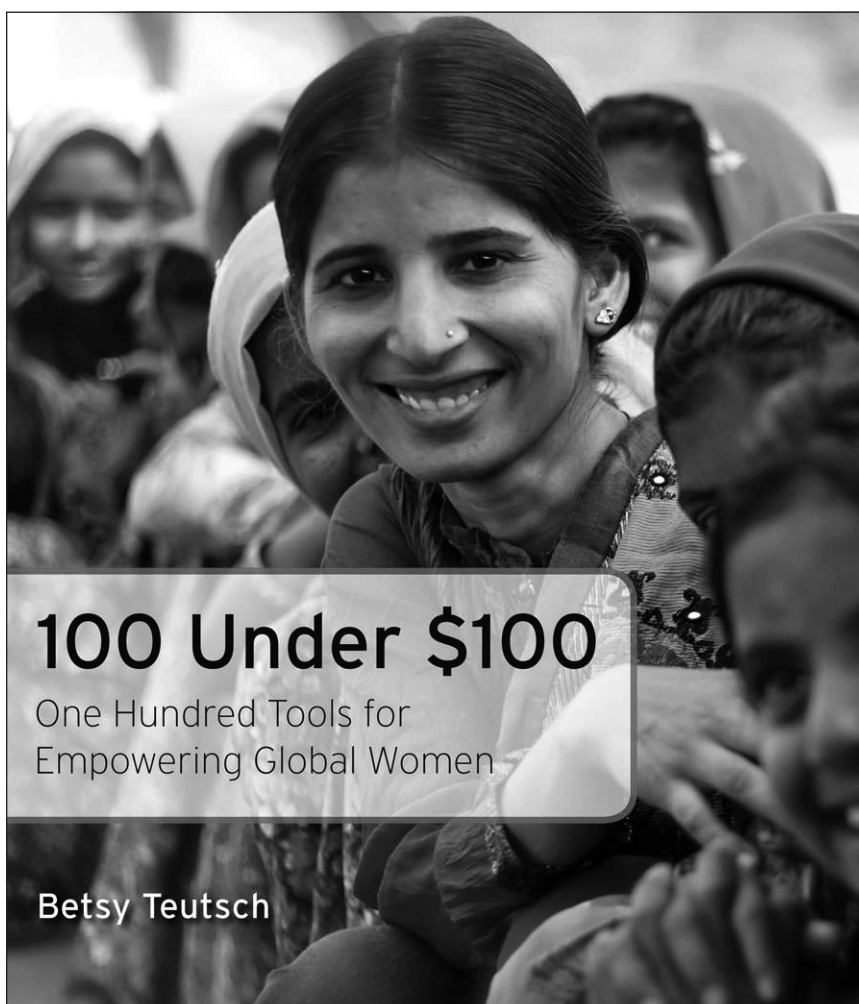
Initiatives like these and the many others described in the book will encourage readers to start doing their own part to help alleviate poverty in the world and make a meaningful impact. These low-cost solutions, rather than re-inventing the wheel, have the potential to disentangle the world's most pressing problems. *100 under \$100* is a welcome contribution to effective praxis. Gender scholars and

community practitioners especially will find Teutsch's work lucid, informative, and enlightening.

Note

1. "The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 — form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions." Read more about the MDGs at [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

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