

A POWERFUL NOISE BACKGROUND:

BACKGROUND

Women and girls are the most impoverished, discriminated-against group in the world. Consider the following:

- Of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty around the globe, 70 percent are women and girls.
- Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, yet earn only 10 percent of the income.
- Women produce half the world's food, yet own only 1 percent of its land.
- Women make up two-thirds of the estimated 876 million adults worldwide who cannot read or write; and girls make up two-thirds of 77 million children not attending school.

In most societies, women face discrimination, exploitation and exclusion that limit their access to resources and assets. This disempowerment is a universal factor in extreme poverty. Rather than working with women as victims of poverty, more and more non-governmental organizations are working to empower marginalized women to challenge and change the contexts in which they live. Women's empowerment offers a pathway out of extreme poverty and toward dignity and security – for women, their families and whole communities.

Women in the developing world cannot lift themselves up alone; they need the support and solidarity of women in developed nations to do so. Movements like this have historically proven to give a voice to the voiceless and create substantial and long-lasting societal change. One need only look to the women's suffrage movement in the United States more than a century ago and the civil rights movement of the sixties as examples of what can be accomplished through the strength of solidarity. Because the majority of the world's poor are women and girls, the success of this women's empowerment movement is vital to achieving the UN Millennium Development goal of halving poverty by 2015.