



# **Teach a Woman to Fish: Overcoming Poverty Around the Globe**

*Ritu Sharma*

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As the old axiom goes: "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime." But teach a *woman* to fish, and *everyone* eats for a lifetime. In this firsthand account, Ritu Sharma shares how women can, and are, overcoming the forces that keep them in poverty. She chronicles her travels through four countries—Sri Lanka, Burkina Faso, Honduras, and Nicaragua—and the intimate interactions she had with the women living there. Sharma's story not only details her experiences, but also looks at the broader systems that prevent women from leaving poverty behind. From lack of property rights and government corruption to the scarcity of basic infrastructure like roads, these women are restricted by the external limitations placed upon them. Sharma draws from her experiences to frame a larger exploration of how Americans can be instrumental in helping women break free of restrictive systems and begin to facilitate women's upward mobility. Written in her engaging personal voice, *Teach a Woman to Fish* provides an insider's look at women in poverty, how Washington works, and how change *really* happens—from the United States to the rest of the world.

## Teach a Woman to Fish: Overcoming Poverty Around the Globe Details

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Author : Ritu Sharma

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Ritu Sharma**

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## **From Reader Review Teach a Woman to Fish: Overcoming Poverty Around the Globe for online ebook**

### **Amanda says**

I actually really liked this book. Ritu Sharma highlights grassroots movements, but still works hand-in-hand with governmental organizations; she suggests ways to support women without alienating men (Chapter 8 actually has one of the best and most concise descriptions of how improving women's situations in the world also improves the situations of men that I have read); and she suggests ways for individuals to help in any way that they can, without implying that any one person should try swoop in and solve the problem of poverty themselves. This is no "us-against-them" narrative, but rather a story of small communities working together to improve the situation for everyone. It does get a little repetitive at times, especially with the "How to Help" chapters at the end of each highlighted area, but the content is pretty good overall.

\*In compliance with FTC guidelines, I disclose that I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.\*

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### **Bridget Coila says**

Excellent book for anyone interested in global issues. This book goes in depth into three separate regions of the world to look at issues that affect the women there and solutions that local women in those areas have come up with. The emphasis is very much on the idea of local women developing plans and programs that truly benefit their communities- and the book gives some insight into the political and cultural things that act as barriers to success.

The author also presents ways that people can help beyond simply donating to charities (and also mentions reasons why some charities and types of aid aren't necessarily helpful in the long run) - things like contacting representatives to get governmental support for programs that really do work and paying attention to your purchases with regard to where they came from.

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### **Peggy says**

What is the best way to lift communities in developing countries out of poverty? This book is much more than just another story of an American working within a non-profit organization. What sets this book apart is the focus on empowering women to make their voices heard. Much of the book tells stories of women from Sri Lanka, Nicaragua, Honduras and Burkina Faso who work tirelessly to feed their families, provide education for their children and speak out for the rights of women. Equally inspiring is the work of the author to link US foreign aid to gender issues around the world. This book makes a compelling case for the United States to take a renewed interest in using diplomatic strategies and international aid to break the cycle of poverty through the empowerment of women. The author also offers very practical tips for US citizens to make their voices heard on this issue. Highly recommended for everyone concerned about world-wide poverty and gender issues.

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## **Sue says**

This book is a wonderful book about an organization that serves women who are in poverty around the world. It is a book that essentially is promoting this organization more than it is about the women's stories. I think the writer wants you to believe in the value of her organization and their needs (which are great) yet I would have been more interested in the stories than the organization.

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## **Karen Thompson says**

Comments on Teach a Woman to Fish by Ritu Sharma. This author is to be admired and praised for her dedicated efforts to deal with poverty among women, particularly in developing countries. The reader learns about an amazing number of women's groups, already organized but lacking the sophistication to qualify for funding they desperately need. She has suggestions for ways the US and European countries could help but are not doing so. Ritu's relationships with the women her organization, Women Thrive, works with are heartwarming and encouraging. We need a whole army of Ritus to push for a deeper awareness of women in poverty. I am blessed to have read this book.

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## **Carol says**

If you are woman and want to change the world for the better, this is a great book to learn from. Teach a Woman to Fish: Overcoming Poverty around the Globe by Ritu Sharma reveals what she has learned from many of her experiences to improve the chances of survival of poor women and children. She started Women Thrive six years before the terrible tsunami in Sri Lanka and stepped into help. At first all the many statistics and charts were too much to digest but when she started to tell the personal stories of the women, the book became alive, much more real and compelling.

She tells of her experiences and interviews with women. Women Thrive International and others have tried to help in Sri Lanka, Burkina Faso, Honduras and Nicaragua. What can we do as consumers? She tells how to challenge the businesses to have them re-examine whether the goods were produced under ethical conditions and to promote change. She gives the lessons that she has learned and the importance of starting up organizations with rules at the very beginning and what those are. She tells of the impossible living conditions in Internally Displaced (IDP) camps. Also how to insure that women have more control in their lives. Often they are at the mercy of men in control of money, supplies, and whether they get to keep their children if the marriage falls apart. Rape and physical abuse are very common.

The stories of the women's struggles are the riveting part of this book. You want to step into the book and help them. In some cases the amount of courage and strength that these women display is monumental.

I highly recommend this book if you want to help poor women in our world and learn the best ways to do it. You can help even if you don't set up an organization like she did. There are so many ways that she sets down to help and make a big change in women's lives.

I received this book as a won from LibraryThing as a win but that in no way effected my thoughts or feelings

in this book.

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### **Larissa says**

I am amazed at the stories Ritu Sharma shares in this book. Too often campaigns set up to help impoverished people only focus on the horrors and not the strength, wisdom, and courage it takes to make it in those situations.

"Teach a Woman to Fish" chronicles women and women's advocacy groups in three parts of the world - Sri Lanka, Honduras and Nicaragua, and Burkina Faso. In each of these places women have come together and men have come together to support them. This is not a man-hating book. She does not speak down to men or demonize them. I have read other reviews that consider this a soft approach, but I think it is a strong one. Not all men (even in developing parts of the world) are cruel, evil rapists and often they are this way because they are taught to be. Organizations like Women Thrive empower women to show their men that they are more than housekeepers and child bearers and Sharma shows us in her book that often women gain the respect they deserve by this approach.

On the aid money - yes this country gives billions of dollars in aid to developing countries around the world. Yes, we have many problems here that need to be addressed. Does that mean we should not help impoverished people in need? No! We are all human and we are all in this together.

I would recommend that everyone read this book in some capacity. It is uplifting and highlights ways in which we can make a difference in the lives of people everywhere. It's not about helping one "side" or the other. Men and women or our country and their country. It's about empowering the entire human race to be better so that everyone is elevated.

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### **Stephanie Curran says**

Please everyone read this book and get involved in befriending sisters around the world and advocating for justice.

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### **Michelle says**

This is a great book about what an integral part women are to raising the living standards in poverty-stricken countries. I loved the personal stories the author shared about different women in three distinct regions of the world; it was great to see in real-life situations what a huge difference can be made just by making a few resources available to women.

I also thought it was great that at the end of each section the author included a chapter on "What you can do for \_\_\_\_\_ country". Those few pages turned this book from a feel-good, what-if read into a way that anyone can help from anywhere in the world. Many similar books tell the reader about similar situations but without knowing how to help, the book is just a nice read. Ritu Sharma has done all of the leg-work to allow the reader to become an "armchair activist". Many people I know are very willing to help but don't know where

to start and are too busy with their daily lives to take the time to research. The author's suggestions, guidelines, and form letters make it easy for even the busiest person to take some time out of an afternoon to help make a difference.

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway; I'm so glad I did because I truly enjoyed it and learned a lot!

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### **Kim Overstreet says**

Author Ritu Sharma is a co-founder and president of Women Thrive Worldwide, a nonprofit advocacy organization based in Washington D.C. In a highly readable, first person voice she discusses issues facing women around the world. To illustrate their challenges, she focuses on visits to Honduras and Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, and Burkina Faso. Along with the story of each visit, Sharma describes obstacles the women face, programs governments and NGO's are implementing to help, and the bureaucratic roadblocks often encountered along the way. She describes easy things busy readers can do to help such as buying fair trade goods and writing letters to congressmen. The impoverished women themselves are the true heroes of Teach a Woman to Fish and reading their stories was my favorite part of the book.

The author's conversational tone and phrasing took me a bit to get used to; it is almost as if the book is transcribed directly from conversations. After reading 60 pages or so, I was settled in, and it no longer served as a distraction.

This would make a great book club pick. After reading each section, I really wanted to discuss it with someone. My family is probably tired of listening to me go on and on! Sharma's book is highly readable, interesting, and a great way to raise your social consciousness.

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### **Tanya Fernandes says**

It's quite evident that this book is a patient culmination of rigorous activism and advocacy.

In the fight for half the world's population, I wonder why there is not a more fervent cry to action. Have we lulled ourselves into a bubble of acceptance that it is okay for half the population to suffer from mindless oppression, senseless violence and systematic poverty?

These heated questions are what we all tend to pose, debate and then push to the back burner and let them simmer in silence until the next instigating event.

Ritu's voice and temperament however is very contrary to the one outlined above. She takes us on a journey with her through Sri Lanka, Honduras, Nicaragua and Burkina Faso. Here we are introduced to remarkable women with painful memories and dogged upbringings yet their lives, the daily tolls and triumphs are a standing testament of the strength of women.

Their voices may not be loud and commanding but their actions are sure are. Their reach is astounding for it not only influences the inner realm of their families but it also extends beyond – to the local grassroots

organisations that gather to inspire women to work to build a better home, to demand the rights they deserve and to act for the welfare of their children and communities.

Ritu's voice is refreshing and inspiring. Her organisation's voice to ensure the voices of women are heard from far and wide is a sounding cry that the fight is not done yet. That when we all rally together we can stand up for what's right; the fight is never lost until we say so.

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### **Josiana says**

Thought-provoking, consciousness invoking. Prior to reading I was skeptical about the book; but I wanted to hear what she had to say, thus suggested it as a book for my feminist book club. Ms. Sharma's writing, at times can be a little odd when she tries to personalize her writing. But being from another culture myself this is likely due to an attempt to decrease the formality of her writing; OR, writing as she would speak and interact with the reader if they were face to face instead. She raises questions that, I, as a multi-racial individual who straddled at least three cultures the majority of her life have struggled with. Most questions she provides, yields possible answers. Ms. Sharma, attempts to solve global poverty in a manner that is meaningful to those impoverished NOT the traditional American style that most American's try to solve global problems with: "American-ize them". Her perspective is right on target and definitely worthy of reading and entertaining alternate ways that we think of world issues our selves. For me it has provoked greater mindfulness as a consumer.

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### **Siria says**

Ritu Sharma is president of Women Thrive Worldwide, a nonprofit based in Washington D.C. *Teach a Woman to Fish* is an account of Sharma's work in four different developing countries—Sri Lanka, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Burkina Faso—as she advocates for women's rights and access to economic development. It's an interesting book, but one very definitely pitched at the average middle-class American who knows little to nothing about global issues or feminism. The specifics of Sharma's work are interesting, but there are no new ideas presented here. The prose style is also pitched at a level which seems very calculatedly designed not to scare off Middle America—the word 'feminism' is used once in the book, the word 'feminist' twice, and Sharma is very keen to stress "not *all* men, etc"—that it all comes across as sort of chummily inoffensive. This approach also gives rise to sections like this, when encouraging people to get in touch with their representatives in Congress about global women's issues (which, to make clear, I do think is a wonderful idea):

If you're not sure who your senators and representatives are, don't feel bad. It's really confusing to keep track of who's who when you're trying to remember to call the doctor, change the laundry, pack the kids' different lunches, and put together that PowerPoint for your board meeting in your head.

Ugh. I'm sure it wasn't intentional, but the way this is framed comes across as more than a little "oh, your poor lady brain", and it's not the only spot where I noticed weird, gender-essentialist undercurrents in the book. I think it also makes it clear that despite the recurrent #notallmen theme, Sharma doesn't anticipate

many men voluntarily purchasing and reading this book.

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### **Sarah says**

I enjoyed reading this because I studied Public Health and have had a particular interest in how to help women globally. It is a well written account of NGO work done throughout the world and provides good perspective into the lives of women that are and sometimes are not benefitting from programs funded by the U.S. To learn more or keep abreast of the changing advocacy for women around the world view the following link. <http://www.womenthrive.org/teach-woma...>

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### **Story Circle Book Reviews says**

Ritu Sharma, co-founder of Women Thrive, has written a stunning account of her travels through Sri Lanka, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Burkina Faso—countries where her organization has worked with grassroots women's groups regarding poverty issues. Sharma's narrative includes a powerful collection of stories about the women from these four countries who have been learning how to overcome the forces of poverty. She also takes readers "one step further than other books that have popularized global poverty issues" by raising awareness "to the broader systems that prevent women from leaving poverty behind."

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "women reinvest about 90 percent of their income in their children rather than in themselves..." That being said, Sharma's underlying mantra throughout her narrative holds true: "When you teach a woman to fish, everyone eats. Development aid projects that overlook women miss their best opportunity to end the cycle of poverty."

Sharma first takes readers into Sri Lanka a year after the 2004 tsunami devastation. The information she shares is heartbreaking, since the majority of those who died as a result of the tsunami were women and children. Empowering Sri Lankan women and girls to move on is a daunting task because of the many forces that keep them impoverished, such as a dictatorial government system and a society that is ruled by men. In order for them to survive it is imperative for mothers to work from home. Girls either enter the exported labor force working as maids in the Middle East, or live in deplorable conditions so they can work in Export Processing Zone factories.

Next on Sharma's journey are the countries of Honduras and Nicaragua. Although they are known for their coffee and dairy products, respectively, the women who largely tend the land, like Sri Lankan women, have no voice. While there are encouraging stories, such as one organization that created three thriving businesses, the downside is that Nicaragua is riddled with violence toward women and children—the biggest force that keep them in poverty. "Violence is an injustice that multiplies injustice," Sharma says, adding, "I believe it's the unquantifiable impacts of violence that are most profound."

Finally, heading to the western portion of Africa to Burkina Faso, Sharma's concern in this arid country is two-fold: to check the status of girls' education and women's subsistence farming. It is crucial for girls to build their educational opportunities since their greatest threat to poverty is childhood marriage. Concurrently, subsistence farming for women is tricky since they can only work with land that belongs to their husbands. The fact that many marriages are polygamous and have no legal standing only exacerbates the situation.



Amid the disheartening as well as immensely encouraging stories, Sharma does not mince words. Her writing aptly reflects each woman's heart cry for empowerment. An interesting addition to her narrative is her personal 72-hour experiences of living on a dollar a day. Of prime importance is her impassioned plea for readers not only to understand the truth behind poverty, but also to take action. Sharma cites very specific ways to address each country's needs.

Incredibly poignant and eye-opening, *Teach a Woman to Fish* goes beyond the "must read" category. Readers will turn into activists by the close of her book.

by Anita Lock  
for Story Circle Book Reviews  
reviewing books by, for, and about women

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