

# **Women Empowerment**

## **Volume 1**

**Political, Economic and Legal Empowerment:  
Initiatives from Different Countries**

Edited by  
**Anita Brandon**

**Series in Women's Studies**



**VERNON PRESS**

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# List of Acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Form</b>
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AICTE	All India Council of Technical Education
AIWC	All India Women's Conference
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BAOWE	Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs
BB	Bangladesh Bank
BBBP	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao
BC	Bank Correspondent
BCNM	Bank Correspondent Network Manager
BDT	Bangla Deshi Taka
BSCIC	Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation
BWCCI	Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CBSL	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CLF	Cluster Level Federations
CMSME	Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
CRP	Community Resource Person
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CSP	Customer Service Point
DAY-NRLM	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission
DDUGKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gramin Kaushal Yojana
DRR	Disaster Risk Resilience
EAP	Entitlements Assessment Plan
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDPs	Entrepreneurship Development Programs
e-NAM	e-National Agriculture Market
ERs	Elected Representatives
ERGs	Employee Resource Groups
EU	European Union
EWGs	Elected Women Representatives
FFP, 2014	Feminist Foreign Policy, 2014 (Sweden)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLEP	Funded Legal Education Program
FPOs	Farmer Producer Organizations
FRA	Forest Rights Act
G2C	Government to Citizen e-Services
GBSS	Gender Biased Sex-Selection
GBV	Gender-Based Violence

GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GoI	Government of India
GPs	Gram Panchayats
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
GS	Gram Sabha
HBW	Home-Based Workers
HNTA	HomeNet Thailand Association
ICTA	Information & Communication Technology Agency, Sri Lanka
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMA	Indian Military Academy
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
INR	Indian Rupee
JFPR	Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction
KGBVs	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalayas
LED	Light Emitting Diode
LRGs	Local Resource Groups
MBOs	Membership Based Organizations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MKSP	Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MoWCD	Ministry of Women and Child Development
MSDE	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
MUDRA	Micro-Units Development & Refinance Agency
MWCA	Ministry of Women & Child Affairs, Sri Lanka
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCDC	National Cooperative Development Corporation
NDA	National Defense Academy
NEDA	National Enterprise Development Authority, Sri Lanka
NFHS-5	National Family Health Survey-5, India
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
NHGs	Neighborhood Community Groups
NIESBUD	National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development
NIRDPR	National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, India
NISE	National Intelligence for Skills, Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship
NITI	National Institution for Transforming India
NMMS	National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship
NMR	Neo-Mortality Rate
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
NRO	National Resource Organization

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NSIGSE	National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education
NTFCs	National Trade Facilitation Committees
NWDP	National Women Development Policy, Bangladesh
OBCs	Other Backward Castes
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OTA	Officers' Training Academy
PAE	Participatory Assessment of Entitlements
PATAMABA	National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
U5MR	Under 5 Mortality Rate
UDHR, 1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
UN-CEDAW, 1979	UN-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979
UN CRC, 1989	United Nations - Child Rights Convention, 1989
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Women
USP	Unique Selling Point
VC	Village Council
VOs	Village Organizations
We Fi	Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative
WEAB	Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Bangladesh
WEDU	Women Entrepreneur Development Unit
WFUWO	World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations
WHO	World Health Organization
WPR	Worker Population Ratio
WRC	Women Resource Centre
WS	Ward Sabha
ZPs	Zila Panchayats



# Acknowledgements

This Volume is an outcome of the analytical and scholarly contributions of the esteemed authors who have contributed the thought-provoking chapters included.

The painstaking work of typing the editorial changes for Volumes 1 and 2 is the notable contribution of Ms. Jaya Sukhija, my praiseworthy assistant and friend.

The publishers, Vernon Press USA, are the prime movers and motivators who approached me with the invitation to edit a book on the theme of women's empowerment and accorded me this challenging opportunity in the first place. I am deeply grateful for their enabling support to help bring forth these two Volumes, covering nineteen inspiring chapters: eleven in Volume 1 and eight in Volume 2.

Last, but most important, are the readers, who will take pains to read and act upon the learnings from this volume and spread the good word, as well as the good work, to help realize the vision of gender equality by joining hands, hearts and minds for the empowerment of women and girls across the world!





# Foreword

**Dr. Ranjana Kumari**

*Director, Centre for Social Research, New Delhi*

The empowerment of women transcends the realm of ethical obligation; it constitutes a foundational pillar for the realisation of a just, inclusive, and sustainable global society. It is with both conviction and pride that I introduce *Political, Economic and Legal Empowerment of Women: Initiatives from Different Countries*, the first volume in an ambitious two-part anthology curated under the discerning editorial guidance of Ms. Anita Brandon. This work arrives at a critical juncture, where progress toward gender equity continues to confront entrenched structural barriers and uneven implementation across regions.

This volume presents a rich and multidisciplinary compendium of case-studies drawn from diverse geopolitical contexts—including South Asia, Latin and North America, the Caribbean, Ukraine, Europe, and Africa. It synthesises perspectives from academia, policy design, and grassroots mobilisation, thereby offering a rare and nuanced convergence of theory, praxis, and lived experience. The text is thoughtfully structured into four interrelated domains: (1) political empowerment at the grassroots level; (2) critical assessments of gender parity progress; (3) economic empowerment through women's entrepreneurship ("Shepreneurship"); and (4) the recognition of women's empowerment as an intrinsic human rights issue.

Case studies such as India's decentralised governance model through the *Panchayati Raj* system, Sweden's implementation of feminist foreign policy, and post-conflict women's mobilisation in Ukraine exemplify the importance of intersectional, context-specific strategies. These narratives elucidate how systemic inequities intersect with cultural and historical realities to shape women's access to agency and authority. Importantly, the chapters underscore a paradigm shift wherein women are no longer passive recipients of developmental interventions, but rather active architects, implementers, and evaluators of transformative change.

As the global community advances toward the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and specifically toward the fulfillment

of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls), this volume emerges as both a call to action and a strategic resource. It urges policymakers, researchers, and civil society actors to adopt replicable, scalable, and gender-transformative frameworks informed by empirical evidence and rooted in local contexts.

I commend Ms. Anita Brandon for her editorial rigour and commitment to elevating grounded and diverse narratives. May this volume stimulate informed discourse, inspire collaborative action, and reinforce the collective endeavour to ensure that every woman—regardless of geography, status, or circumstance—is equipped with the power and opportunity to shape her destiny.

Dr. Ranjana Kumari  
*Director, Centre for Social Research*  
*New Delhi*  
*25 July 2025*

# **Prologue: Introduction to the Book- Volumes on Women Empowerment: Inspiring Initiatives from Across the World**

**Anita Brandon**

*Editor*

The aim of these two volumes is to create a multiplier spread-effect for accelerating efforts for women's empowerment and gender equality in pursuance of SDG-5 of UN-SDGs: Agenda 2030 for a better world. These volumes are living testimonies of empowering women and girls and showcase live examples for emulation and replication, and are not intended to focus on pursuing research into theories of women's empowerment and gender equality.

The present collection of inspiring initiatives chosen from across the world, captured from five major continents – Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America, and drawn from over a dozen countries, is an effort to share nineteen beacon examples of women's empowerment, presented in two volumes, with four sub-themes covered in each volume, as follows:

## **Volume 1: Political, Economic and Legal Empowerment of Women: Initiatives from Different Countries**

Volume 1 includes eleven chapters under four sub-themes, advocating the way forward for empowering women, sharing the political, economic and legal measures set in motion, as proactive gender responsive governance initiatives taken by different countries. Out of the eleven chapters included in Vol. 1, six are by scholars from India, while another five are from scholars from countries like Ukraine; the South Asian Region-covering evidence from Bangladesh, India, Bhutan and Sri Lanka; the United States of America (USA); Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Region-covering three countries: St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados; and lastly, in the concluding chapter-case studies of Rwanda, India and Sweden are showcased.

**The four sub-themes covered in Vol. 1 are as follows:**

- **Theme 1: Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots** - Showcasing three powerful case studies from India in Chapters 1, 2 and 3.
- **Theme 2: Stocktaking of Women Empowerment Efforts** - Covered in Chapters 4 and 5, women's empowerment innovations from India, and in Chapter 6, the state of gender equality implementation in Ukraine.
- **Theme 3: Economic Empowerment of Women: Developing 'Shepreneurs'** - In this section, Chapters 7 and 8 cover initiatives in the South Asian region and Bangladesh in particular. Chapter 9 presents efforts in the USA for enhancing entrepreneurial success among women through mentoring, and Chapter 10 covers strategies for women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean Region-covering case studies from three countries of this region.
- **Theme 4: Women Empowerment for Gender Equality: A Human Rights Issue** - This includes the concluding Chapter 11, which explores iconic case studies from Rwanda, India and Sweden, exemplifying gender equality as a human right.

## **Volume 2: Women Empowerment for Gender Equality: Diverse Initiatives from Across the World**

This volume presents eight chapters under four sub-themes, to share exemplary efforts to empower women of different social categories, cross-sections and in challenging contexts. The eight chapters cover cross-cultural learning from empowering initiatives to promote gender equality in the regions of Asia, Africa and the United States of America. Three chapters in this volume are by Indian scholars, and five chapters bring forth scholarly insights from Iran and the Middle East Countries, Nigeria, Bangladesh, the USA and Kenya.

**The four sub-themes under which the eight chapters are presented in Vol. 2 are as follows:**

- **Theme 1: SDG-5: Women Empowerment for Gender Equality** - Chapter 1 is included under the theme, which undertakes a stocktaking of some countries in Asia and the Middle East, from the Author(s) in Iran-on the four key criteria of gender gap reports of the World Economic Forum, advocating inclusive and culture-specific criteria for measuring gender gaps.
- **Theme 2: Health and Well Being for Women Empowerment** - Includes Chapter 2 on women's reproductive health outcomes and correlates in rural India, based on an empirical study.

- **Theme 3: Empowering Women in Different Social Categories** - This theme covers five chapters, from Chapter 3 to 7, with diverse social categories of women and contexts from Nigeria, India, Bangladesh and the USA.
- **Theme 4: Strategies to Empower Women through Social Media** - The concluding Chapter 8 of this volume showcases the empowering impact of social media on women entrepreneurs in Kenya, to scale up their business and enhance virtual activism on African women's issues.

### **Concepts and Terms used in these Volumes (based on Global Policy Documents)**

**Women Empowerment:** This term was introduced at the 1985 Third UN International Women's Conference in Nairobi, where it was defined as a redistribution of social power and resources in favor of women, aiming to equip women with equal access to opportunities, economic independence, freedom from violence and the prohibition of gender disparity.

Ten years later, the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, came up with the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, as the global agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality-flagged in twelve critical areas of concern, and adopted unanimously by 189 Countries. These 12 critical areas of concern with strategic objectives and actions included: Women and Poverty, Education and Training of Women, Women and Health, Violence against Women, Women and Armed Conflict, Women and the Economy, Women in Power and Decision Making, Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights of Women, Women and the Media, Women and the Environment and the Girl Child. The Beijing Platform for Action, 1995, situates Women Empowerment and Gender Equality as Women's inalienable human rights and promotes gender equality as an issue of universal concern for realizing equality, development and peace for all humankind.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, Women Empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home and their ability to influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women – the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 SDGs to create an equal, just and secure world, with SDG-5 focus on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

**Feminism:** Present-day feminism is a struggle for the achievement of women's equality, dignity and freedom of choice to control their lives and bodies within and outside the home.

**Gender:** Connotes the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is determined by genetic factors, gender is a socio-cultural construct of identity that is learned and varies across cultures. Gender is relational and refers to the relations between women and men, patterned by social norms and cultural traditions, perpetuated across generations through the socialization process.

**Beyond the Binary:** The LGBTQIA+ community recognizes that gender is a spectrum, not a binary, and there are many gender identities beyond male and female. Many people identify with genders that fall outside of this binary framework of male/female. LGBTQIA+ is an abbreviation used to include people with different sexual orientations, e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and more.

**Sex:** Refers to the biological characteristics that differentiate and identify humans as females and males.

**Gender Equality:** Describes the concept that all human beings, both women and men, as well as people with different sexual orientations (LGBTQIA+), are free to develop their capabilities and make life choices, without the limitations set by rigid gender roles, stereotypes and social prejudices of gender-legitimate behaviors. It implies that the biological identity of being born female or male shall not hinder their realization of rights, resources and opportunities.

**Gender Equity:** Implies that women and men, as well as people with different sexual orientations, are treated fairly according to their needs for development. A gender equity development goal would require built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of different genders.

**Gender Perspective/Gender Lens:** This can be defined as a focus that brings a framework of analysis to assess how women and men, and people with different sexual orientations, affect and are affected by policies, programs and strategic actions. A gender perspective takes into account—gender roles, social and economic relationships and needs, access to resources and opportunities and constraints imposed by society or culture on women, men and people with different sexual orientations, impacting their right to development with differential growth trajectories.

**Gender Analysis:** It entails a systematic examination of the different impacts of development, policies, programs and laws on women and men, and people with different sexual orientations, necessitating the collection of sex-disaggregated

data and gender-specific information about the issues and communities being studied.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** Is a strategy for integrating the concerns of women and men and people with different sexual orientations, as a basic pre-requisite in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs, so that gender equality is promoted and strengthened.

**Gender Budgeting:** Implies a process of integrating a gender perspective in all stages of policy making, including legislation, policies and programs, planning and allocating resources to promote gender equality, implementing, concurrent review and impact assessment. It is an affirmative measure for promoting gender equality through gender responsive budgets, based on gender gaps and needs.

**Gender Gap:** The gender gap is the difference between men and women in terms of their access, participation, rights, remuneration, or benefits. It can be seen in social, political, cultural, and economic areas. The gender gap is a sign of gender inequality. The Global Gender Gap Index Report, brought out annually by the World Economic Forum, with country rankings, measures the gender gap in four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.

**Intersectionality:** Refers to how gender interplays with race, class, caste and ethnicity to create multiple layers of oppression or empowerment. It is a sociological analytical framework for understanding how groups' and individuals' social and political identities result in unique combinations of discrimination and privilege. Examples of these factors include: gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disability, height, physical appearance, age and weight. These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing.

The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, in 1989. She used the term to describe how different social categories, such as race, gender, and class, interact to create unique experiences of discrimination and oppression. Her work focused on the experiences of Black women, arguing that their experiences of discrimination are not simply a sum of racism and sexism, but a unique form of oppression that arises from the intersection of these two factors. Crenshaw coined the term in her 1989 essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racist Politics".

**Patriarchy:** This is a social system legitimizing the power of men over women, based on the idea that men are superior to women. In this social

system, the social, economic and political institutions give men power and exclude women, creating and perpetuating gender inequality.

The present Volumes on Women Empowerment have selected case studies of replicable merit, covering the strategic priorities of: increasing women's participation in political and public life—as documented in the first three chapters of Vol. 1; promoting gender responsive innovations as captured in Chapters 4 and 5 of Vol. 1; enhancing women's role in peace, security and gender equality as captured in Chapter 6, Vol. 1 relating to gender equality implementation in Ukraine; strengthening women's economic empowerment, evidenced in Chapters 7 to 10 under the theme of developing 'Shepreneurs' in Vol. 1; and the concluding Chapter 11, Vol. 1 exemplifying gender equality and human rights as a legal-political approach based on the three iconic case-studies from Rwanda, India and Sweden. The case studies in Vol. 1 showcase inspiring efforts from India, South Asia, Bangladesh, Ukraine, USA, Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Region, Rwanda and Sweden.

In Volume 2 the case-studies included, cover gender gap analysis on the four key criteria of the World Economic Forum, for appraising the status of some countries in Asia and the Middle East, Chapter 1; women's reproductive health outcomes in rural India, Chapter 2; five impactful case-studies, Chapters 3 to 7, on empowering women in different social categories from Nigeria, India, Bangladesh and the USA, covering different ethnic and age categories of race, caste, class, elderly and immigrant women in different country contexts. The concluding Chapter 8 in Vol. 2 validates the empowering impact of social media on women entrepreneurs in Kenya.

The prime motto of the nineteen case studies showcased in these twin Volumes on Women Empowerment is to bring among the readers a conscious realization that gender equality achievement depends on each one of us—we are all part of the solution. From the governments proactively giving policy and legislative support for women empowerment, to the private sector, the CSOs and NGOs advancing women's rights, to academic and research bodies and the media studying and documenting women empowerment efforts and to the parents and teachers who instill in children values of gender equality, we are all key actors in this century, to end all forms of gender discrimination and violence. Let us therefore commit to making gender equality a living reality by empowering all women and girls across the world, as our common agenda for action on SDG-5. It is a time for collective and committed action to achieve gender equality and not merely dwell, reflect on and critique the theories related to its conceptual framework.

A focused introduction to Vol. 1 with Chapter details follows ahead.

A focused introduction to Vol. 2 with Chapter details is given in Vol. 2.



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# About the Contributors

**Chapter 1** is authored by Dr. George Mathew, who is the Chairman of the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, India. He has also been the Founder Director of this Institute since 1985. With a Ph.D. in Sociology from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, his areas of specialization are: local governance, grassroots democracy, decentralization, gender equity and human rights. His main publications: (i) Communal Road to a Secular Kerala, (ii) Panchayati Raj from Legislation to Movement, (iii) Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India (1994, 2000, 2013), and (iv) Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Governance: Field Studies from Rural India. His research papers are published in national and international journals and books. Dr. Mathew has been serving on various committees and commissions constituted by the Government of India, State Governments and international organizations. Based on a true story, he produced the film “*Swaraaj: The Little Republic*,” which won the Gold Medal for the Best Film on Social Issues (2002) from the President of India, for its strong depiction of women’s empowerment in rural India.

**Chapter 2** authors are: Dr N.V. Madhuri, Ms. Sweety Pandey and Dr. Vanishree Joseph.

- Dr N.V. Madhuri has been Associate Professor and the Head of Centre for Gender Studies and Development at the NIRDPR, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad and is presently on deputation to the Central University of Hyderabad as a Faculty member in the Department of Sociology. She has her Master’s and Ph.D. in Sociology. Her research interests include: Gender and Governance, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender and Nutrition, SHGs and Women Empowerment, Livelihoods, etc. She has undertaken research at the national and international levels and has published widely.
- Ms. Sweety Pandey is an independent researcher who works on development issues. She is a faculty in Center for Gender Studies at NIRDPR now.
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