

International Women's Day

GENDER EQUALITY CONTRIBUTES TO STRONGER ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVED LIVES

The global pandemic has impacted everyone. But studies show that women, and especially those living in vulnerable and marginalized communities, have suffered most.

Globally, women account for 54 per cent of job losses. Representing 70 per cent of health-care workers, they have a higher risk of contracting the coronavirus. As COVID-19 closures and restrictions have been rolled out, the burden of unpaid and domestic care has fallen harder on women, extracting both a social and economic toll.

Gale Lee has witnessed "how women have borne the brunt of the global crisis, how the disproportionate effect of the pandemic has eroded advances towards gender equality," says the director of International Services for Asia, Americas and the Caribbean for the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO), a Canadian economic development organization committed to gender equality and enabling women's economic empowerment. "It's almost like kicking the ladder out from under someone. They were on the way up, but suddenly the ladder has been pulled away."

Established in 1967, CESO has had programs in over 120 countries, working through its volunteer advisers, senior-level professionals who provide mentorship and advisory services. CESO is guided by "a core principle of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development," says Ms. Lee. Through its endeavours, including its new flagship international program, Accelerating Women's Empowerment (AWE), CESO "promotes equal participation of women as agents of change."



Maty Ka, CESO trainee, was inspired to implement CESO's 'global goals' into the activities of her small agricultural company in Senegal (left). Participants gather at the City of Dakar's Centre for Professional Training and Improvement of Municipal Staff (CEFOPPEM) in Senegal for an online training course on sustainable development led by CESO adviser Anny Jalbert. PHOTOS: MATY KA AND CIFAL DAKAR



“Gender equality is more than an inherent human right. It contributes to building stronger, inclusive economies, resilient communities and improved lives for everyone.**”**

Gale Lee

Director of International Services for Asia, Americas and the Caribbean for the Canadian Executive Service Organization



inherent human right," says Ms. Lee. "It contributes to building stronger, inclusive economies, resilient communities and improved lives for everyone."

By ensuring access to resources, cultivating women's agency, and building their skills and leadership abilities, "we bring out the inherent capabilities and power in women and give them the confidence to carry forward," explains Ms. Lee. CESO's work also strengthens the public sector, working with governments, creating awareness about disparities, developing gender policies and effecting systemic change.

In Canada, CESO connects with Indigenous women, facilitating their advancement as entrepreneurs and community leaders, says Ms. Lee. Through one-on-one mentoring, CESO advisers offer "the whole gamut of training and guidance in project management, finance and strategic planning." The goal, says Ms. Lee, is to strengthen small and medium-sized businesses, build capacity and drive sustainability.

Pivoting as a result of COVID-19, and during periods of limited physical contact and travel bans, CESO is delivering programs virtually, providing e-mentoring, online workshops and support, notes Ms. Lee. Even as the pandemic drags on, CESO continues to improve prospects for women through the development of innovative and creative income-generating opportunities, such as e-marketing, e-commerce and e-tourism.

But recovery from the widespread disruption and dislocation wrought by the global threat of COVID-19 will need to be fought on a massive front, says Ms. Lee. "CESO has always embraced a co-ordinated global action. As Canadians, we want to share best practices and lessons learned to help lift others out of less fortunate situations. We're stronger when we work together."

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FEMALE TECH LEADERSHIP

Sometimes, when she sits down with potential partners to explore collaborations designed to advance the data and AI capabilities of their firms, gender bias creeps into the discussion, says Rogayah Tabrizi, co-founder and CEO of the data science startup Theory+Practice. "In one meeting, a senior leader actually told me that his team had been betting on whether I would know the technical details," she recalls. "I decided to keep it light and told him jokingly that this was baby stuff compared to my work on the ATLAS detector at CERN."

While the comment made the man chuckle, Dr. Tabrizi's reference to her work at CERN was no joke – she has a degree in particle physics as well as a PhD in economics. The preconception about women in tech – and women in corporate leadership positions in general – "is a numbers game," she believes. "And visibility can change things."

This motivates Dr. Tabrizi, a member of the Forbes Tech Council, to speak out about women in tech. She recently read that only a small number of female founders have led their startups to an IPO. "The article named the 22 women founders of companies listed in the New York Stock Exchange," she says. "It's inspiring to learn what these women have achieved, but I also know that 22 are not enough."

Encouraged to follow in the footsteps of these role models, Dr. Tabrizi is also urging both male and female champions to increase their efforts to "lift women up."

GENDER JUSTICE FOR ALL IS OUR RALLYING CRY



BY PAULETTE SENIOR, President and CEO, Canadian Women's Foundation

A year since the first pandemic lockdowns in Canada, it's clear that this crisis has been a gendered one.

The shock of the pandemic has shaken 30 years of gender equality gains and deepened pre-existing inequalities for diverse women, girls and gender-diverse people nationwide. From economic security and freedom from violence to quality of life and human rights, we're in a tenuous position.

As Canada marks International

Women's Day, we move into an uncertain future when it comes to gender equity.

We all have a role to play in charting the way forward and taking barrier-breaking action.

IT'S TIME TO SUPPORT AND INVEST IN GENDER JUSTICE

American legal scholar and civil rights activist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 to give voice to Black women's experience of race and gender barriers. The concept has helped us address how different people face different kinds of barriers at large. In the context of the pandemic, we see the disproportionate impacts on not only women as a group but on women with disabilities, Black and racialized women, senior women, migrant women and more.

And gender justice today means

attending to the unique needs of all women and gender-diverse people, at every intersection of their identities. It's time for us to band together and make moves to address the gender pay gap, to end gender-based violence, to build affordable and accessible housing and childcare, to end systemic racism and discrimination.

In the words of one of our founding mothers, the Honourable Rosemary

Brown, "Until all of us have made it, none of us have made it."

Change starts with you. How will you act? How will you ask leaders to be accountable?

Visit canadianwomen.org for three ways to make moves for gender justice and help stop the reversals in equality gains this International Women's Day and beyond.



Theory+Practice CEO Rogayah Tabrizi

IMAGINE GENDER JUSTICE

In 1991, the Canadian Women's Foundation was founded by visionary women to put Canada on a fast track toward gender equality.

In 2021, the shock of the pandemic has shaken 30 years of gender equality gains.

From economic security and freedom from violence to quality of life and human rights, women, girls, and gender-diverse people are in a tenuous position.

We need you to help double down on the efforts and build gender justice in Canada today.

Take action this International Women's Day: canadianwomen.org



Fati from Burkina Faso is running her own soap business and providing a better life for her children after receiving entrepreneurial skills training from her CESO Advisor.

By sharing the right expertise and experience, CESO empowers people, businesses, communities and institutions to drive economic development and improve lives.

Join us to make a difference.
ceso-saco.com/volunteer



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STRONGER ECONOMIES FOR BETTER LIVES

CESO gratefully acknowledges financial support from Global Affairs Canada.

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