



# #BreakTheBias



International  
Women's Day

8 MARCH 2022



**|BDO**

# OUR PURPOSE

We all share one common purpose,  
**OUR WHY:**

***PEOPLE HELPING  
PEOPLE ACHIEVE  
THEIR DREAMS***

Embracing diversity and equality  
will help all our people:



Maximise their potential



Ignite their passion and achieve their goals

This must become an integral part of the  
BDO culture: collectively, we can all play  
our part in creating a gender-equal world.

# BDO'S BIGGEST ASSET IS ITS PEOPLE

I am proud to launch the third edition of BDO's International Women's Day Report.

Once again, I am inspired by the stories of women at BDO; how they have fought through bias and overcome challenges, and how they have been relentless in their pursuit of fairness and their career goals.

Where would we be as an organisation if these women, and all our female talents, did not **#BreakTheBias** and challenge themselves to be leaders in BDO and in the communities they work in? We must do better in recognising the talents of all our people and in helping them to develop their full potential. This is not only the right thing to do – it is also the smart thing to do, as an organisation rich in diversity will do better. Throughout our organisation, we must create a much easier path for all our people to grow, both now and in the future.

Our BDO purpose is *People helping people achieve their dreams*. When we apply that to our clients, we use the concept of 'design thinking' – a truly human-centred approach. In doing so, we work with them to understand what their value is and what their goals are. Then we help them to get there. Shouldn't we apply the same concept to our people as well; identifying their unique talents, understanding the challenges in their lives, discovering their dreams, and formulating a plan to help them get there?

We all carry unconscious bias, as you will read in this report. I am convinced that BDO (like any other organisation) will not be successful in addressing this unless we recognise the need to change and have a formal plan to do so. Let's develop not only a vision, but also formal strategies to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in all our ways of working. Let's learn from the experiences of our female leaders, help our people to recognise where their unique skills lie, build confidence through mentoring, and make leadership opportunities open to everyone. Let's recognise our people as the biggest asset in our organisation, create equal opportunities for all and **#BreakTheBias**.



**KEITH FARLINGER**  
BDO'S GLOBAL CEO

“  
Let's recognise our people as the biggest asset in our organisation, create equal opportunities for all and **#BreakTheBias**”

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# COLLECTIVELY, WE CAN ALL **#BreakTheBias**

Imagine a gender equal world

A world free of bias, of stereotypes  
and discrimination

A world that is diverse,  
equitable and inclusive

A world where difference  
is valued and celebrated

Together we can forge equality



# WHAT IS BIAS?

We all have bias.... and it impacts our perception and decision-making every day.

Bias can be conscious or unconscious, obvious or subtle, and work for or against both men and women. Gender bias is a specific preference or prejudice toward one gender over the other, with unconscious gender bias being defined as unintentional and automatic mental associations based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values, culture and/or experience.

Ultimately, bias is a form of discrimination and it affects three in four women in the workplace<sup>1</sup>.

Connecting to this year's International Women's Day global theme **#BreakTheBias**, let's explore some of the ways that bias can specifically impact women, and what we can all do on a practical level to address it.



## WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS ?

Learned attitudes or stereotypes that exist in our subconscious and can involuntarily affect the way we think and act.

## TYPES OF BIAS FACED BY WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE:

### Proximity bias

Remote working, as a consequence of Covid-19, has brought this type of bias (which particularly impacts working mothers) to the forefront. Read our article on page 14 to find out more.

### Maternity/Paternity leave

In the policies of many organisations, childcare is seen to be the sole domain of women. In those organisations where paternal leave is offered, there is often a reluctance from men to take it, due to the negative impact on career progression and pay experienced by women<sup>2</sup>.

### Language

Use of language or words normally attributed to a particular gender (e.g. Chairman) can exclude others and enforce gender stereotyping.

### Recruitment

A study revealed that both male and female managers are twice as likely to hire a man over a woman<sup>3</sup>.

### Promotion and mentoring opportunities

The glass ceiling phenomenon, in which artificial impediments and invisible barriers block women's access to top decision-making and managerial positions in the organisation.

### Affinity bias

Employers and hiring managers subconsciously gravitate towards people who they feel have the same interests, beliefs, and background. This represents a barrier to diversity and often leads to leadership (where women are generally under-represented) recruiting more (male) colleagues 'like them'.

<sup>1</sup> 50 Ways to Fight Bias, a bias training activity to combat the biases women face at work — Lean In

<sup>2</sup> How Childbearing Affects Women's Wages | NBER

<sup>3</sup> In Search of a Less Sexist Hiring Process (hbr.org)

## THE COST OF BIAS<sup>4</sup>

### Bias affects the bottom line

When employees experience bias, they become disengaged and their contribution/output declines. Research from Gallup estimates that active disengagement costs U.S. companies \$450 billion to \$550 billion per year.

### Recruitment

Companies who don't address bias fail to capitalise on the skills offered by women, leaving competitors to succeed in the current 'war on talent'.

### Retention

Those who perceive bias are more than three times as likely to say that they're planning to leave their current jobs within the year.

### Innovation

Those who perceive bias are 2.6 times more likely to withhold ideas and market solutions.

On an individual level, bias affects employee **confidence and wellbeing** – and also leads to higher levels of **absenteeism**.

## HOW CAN WE ADDRESS BIAS?

It is possible to overcome our biases – and being able to recognise bias is the first step. It's essential that we each educate ourselves to fully understand this complex topic. Only when we understand how we form opinions of individuals can we then reflect on our thought processes and self-correct in a meaningful way.

In addition, having the confidence to interrupt bias expressed by others is a powerful way to show meaningful allyship. Being an ally means owning your mistakes and observing how women experience bias through an intersectional lens.

“  
If we don't  
consciously include, we  
unconsciously exclude.”

Giselle Bodkin, BDO in Canada



<sup>4</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2017/10/26/new-data-reveals-the-hard-costs-of-bias-and-how-to-disrupt-it/?sh=6e3fc9da4595>

## METHODS TO ADDRESS BIAS:

**Communicate** – to educate and inform. Celebrate women employees, commit to smashing stereotypes. Participate in cause-related marketing.

Create **policies** to guide workplace culture – and uphold them. Identify and redraft policies and practices that represent barriers to the progression of women.

**Training** for all employees – onboarding of all staff should include mandatory **#BreakTheBias** training, with regular retraining thereafter.

**Mentoring.** When employees have senior-level advocates to help them advance their careers, the likelihood of perceiving bias drops 90%<sup>5</sup>.

**Recruitment.** Actively pursue under-represented groups and set targets for the achievement of gender balance at all levels. Have a visible talent pipeline for high potential women and high-performance women.

**Investment.** Appoint a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer and give them the time and resources to address the issue.

How we work and live has changed enormously due to COVID-19 pandemic and evidence suggests that this has created the opportunity for some types of unconscious bias to grow even deeper roots. The topic of bias is wide and far-reaching, and conversations around it can be exciting, challenging and sometimes fearful. Unpacking bias cannot stand alone as a project, it is a deep organisational journey; a journey that is essential to unlock talent and create an organisational culture that drives value and paves the way for a sustainable and successful future.

“

“There are an infinite number of conversations on bias which are yet to be explored. As a colleague, friend, parent, consumer and community member, these conversations are reflective, challenging, and at times overwhelming. In all cases, they are opportunities for me to learn and unlearn how my own conscious and unconscious bias shapes my everyday thoughts and actions.

When I was invited to share my thoughts on **#BreakTheBias**, I went into a million spaces in my heart and mind. My lived experience unlocked a deep vault of bias held and bias experienced. On deeper reflection, what I realised is that my experiences are both unique and intersectional, and these shape my self-belief and experience of the world constantly. Connecting to the global theme **#BreakTheBias**, my message is that breaking biases (unconscious and conscious), especially those related to women, is systemic work that requires deep understanding, a generous dose of bravery and formidable allyship.

To break the bias is to understand its many forms, create safe spaces to have conversations and to understand the intersectional biases facing women. Taking up the call to action from these conversations helps safeguard employees and organisations, allowing both to thrive.”

**Pam Gounder** is Senior Manager, People & Culture, at BDO's Global Office. She joined BDO in October 2021 and lives in Johannesburg.



<sup>5</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2017/10/26/new-data-reveals-the-hard-costs-of-bias-and-how-to-disrupt-it/?sh=6e3fc9da4595>

# THE HIDDEN CHALLENGES OF HYBRID WORKING

After two pandemic years, it is clear that the 'hybrid working' model is here to stay and employees have grown accustomed to flexible working.

Recent research reveals<sup>1</sup> that globally



of workers want to maintain a hybrid working model whereby more than half of their time is spent working remotely.



of workers have successfully created their own setup at home that allows them to do this effectively.

Evidence suggests that women are more likely than men to opt for (more) days of remote working, likely due to the fact that females tend to engage in more domestic responsibilities than males and are very often the primary caretaker. Working from home can allow colleagues to manage non-work responsibilities more easily, but this may come at significant professional cost – and creates new diversity, equity and inclusivity (DE&I) challenges for the organisation.

## VISIBILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Employees that are physically present can more easily build a good rapport with other colleagues and are likely to be more 'visible' to the wider organisation. This may create the perception they are more productive – a prime example of proximity bias. In reality, research indicates that remote employees are equally (or even more) productive than their office-based counterparts.



<sup>1</sup> Resetting Normal: Defining the New Era of Work 2021 – A survey of 14,800 workers performed by the Adecco Group: <https://www.adecogroup.com/future-of-work/latest-research/resetting-normal-2021/>

### WHAT IS PROXIMITY BIAS?

The notion that employees with close physical proximity to their team and leaders are more productive, leading managers to give preferential treatment to these workers over those working remotely.



**"Hybrid working will require leaders to define new ways to connect and interact, also to develop new rules of engagement."**

### OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND?

Physical presence can give employees an advantage with respect to social capital (the value derived from positive connections between people) and subsequent growth opportunities. Bias is a natural instinct. The people that we sit closest to and have built a more personal relationship with tend to be the people that we are likely to suggest and/or consider when it comes to new projects or growth opportunities. This outcome is often referred to as the 'in-house advantage.'

### RECOGNISING THE ISSUE

Although proximity bias existed before the pandemic, it now presents an even bigger challenge to organisations. According to Alison Hill, CEO of Australian leadership training organisation *Pragmatic Thinking* and author of *Work from Anywhere*, the first step for any organisation to take is to recognise that it's an issue. Leaders must now define new ways to connect and interact, and also develop new rules of engagement, ensuring that they connect with everyone in the team – regardless of whether they work remotely or not. Most organisations are still discovering what working practices work best, to ensure that remote workers are not neglected. What is clear, is that without careful consideration and action, hybrid working could be a double-edged sword that creates a new type of inequality that disadvantages remote-working women in terms of visibility, status and opportunity – and threatens the diversity and inclusion progress that many organisations have worked so hard to deliver.

# WOMEN AT BDO – HIGHLIGHTS & INITIATIVES<sup>1</sup>

The 2021 numbers are:

|              | <br>Partners | <br>Client-facing<br>staff | <br>Support<br>staff | <br>Total |
|--------------|---|---|--|--|
| EMEA         | 18%   | 49%   | 69%  | 50%  |
| AMERICAS     | 25%   | 50%   | 72%  | 51%  |
| ASIA PACIFIC | 22%   | 55%   | 67%  | 55%  |

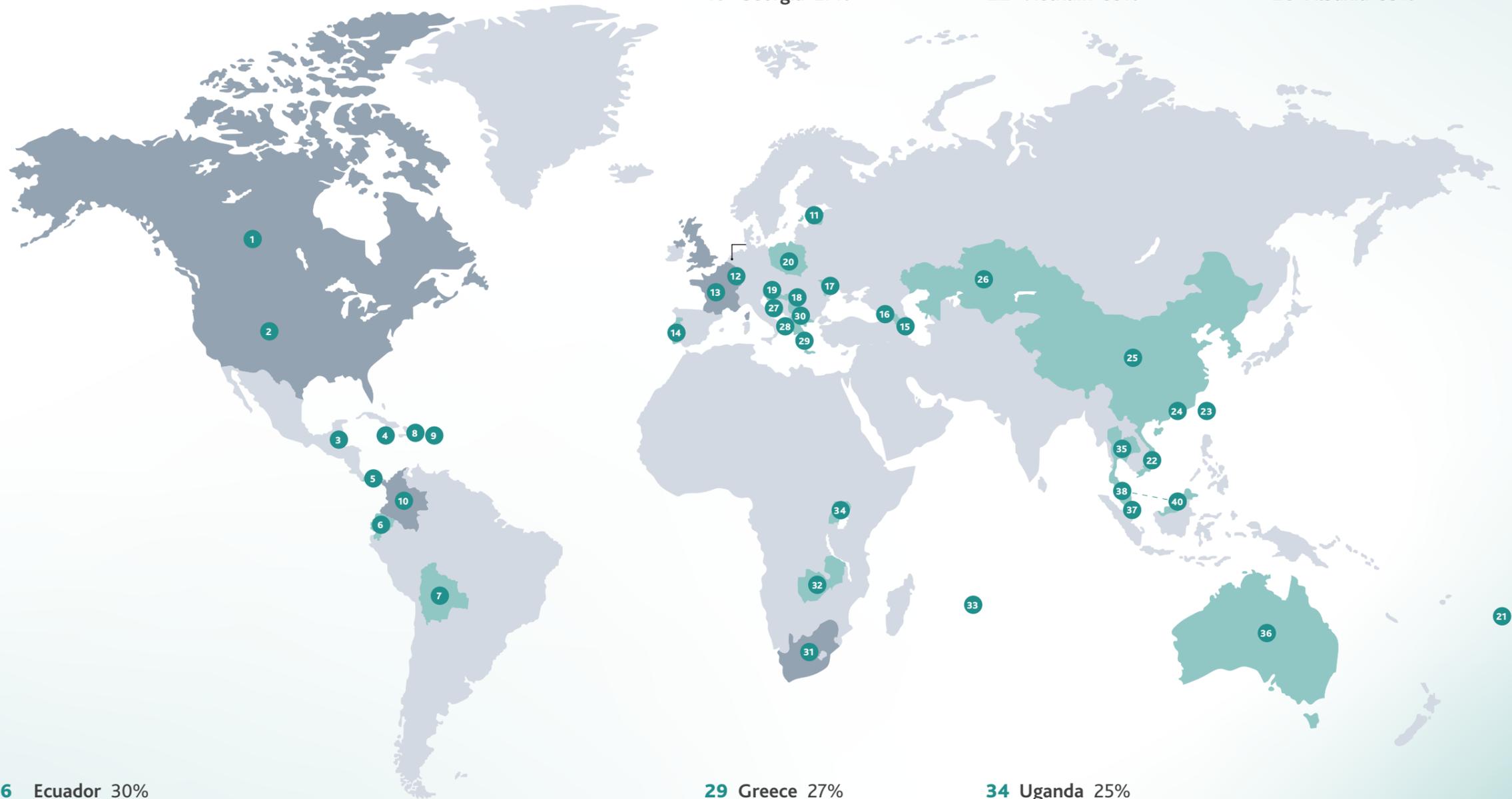


<sup>1</sup> Based on data for year ending 30 September 2021

# WOMEN AT BDO

Discover a few of the ongoing DE&I initiatives and interesting statistics

- Initiatives  
Click flags to find out more
- Female Partners %



- 1 Canada 26%
- 2 US 25%
- 3 Belize 67%
- 4 Jamaica 60%
- 5 Panama 38%
- 6 Ecuador 30%
- 7 Bolivia 25%
- 8 Dominican 60%
- 9 Puerto Rico 33%
- 10 Colombia 33%

- 11 Estonia 75%
- 12 Luxembourg 26%
- 13 France 25%
- 14 Portugal 28%
- 15 Azerbaijan 50%
- 16 Georgia 27%
- 17 Moldova 75%
- 18 Macedonia 50%
- 19 Slovenia 56%
- 20 Poland 28%
- 21 Samoa 33%
- 22 Vietnam 33%
- 23 Taiwan 47%
- 24 Hong Kong 30%
- 25 China 29%
- 26 Kazakhstan 33%
- 27 Croatia 38%
- 28 Albania 33%

- 29 Greece 27%
- 30 Serbia 33%
- 31 South Africa 34%
- 32 Zambia 33%
- 33 Reunion 50%
- 34 Uganda 25%
- 35 Thailand 56%
- 36 Australia 33%
- 37 Singapore 50%
- 38 Malaysia 27%

# OUR FEMALE LEADERS

Interviews



 **GISELLE  
BODKIN**



 **ERNA DWI  
IGA**



 **KLEOPATRA  
KALOGEROPOULOU**



 **BRENDA  
DUNCAN**



 **ANGELA  
EDWARDS**



 **ANDREA  
BRUCKNER**



 **WON-KYUNG  
CHOI**



 **TERESA  
MORAHAN**



 **SALI  
PRABHU**



 **LUZ  
VASQUEZ**

**#BreakTheBias**

## INTERVIEW WITH GISELLE BODKIN

Chief Inclusion & Diversity Officer,  
BDO in Canada

#BreakTheBias

### WHO IS GISELLE?

Appointed last year as Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officer at BDO in Canada, Giselle has always been a true advocate of diversity. She has more than 18 years of experience as a partner within the firm. As the mother of two young women, she fully understands the challenges of working mothers. She has been driving one of the DE&I pillars in the firm and has actively championed them becoming a founding member

of Velocity, a women's leadership development programme. She has volunteered on many boards and is currently the Chair of the Women's Intuition Campaign at the Georgian College in Ontario, raising funds for (mostly single) women in need, who may otherwise miss out on the opportunity to achieve their academic and career goals.



### THIS IS GISELLE'S STORY:

"I grew up in a typical household with a stay-at-home mum and a working dad – both very kind and generous. When I was 8 years old, my parents became foster parents. At times we would have four extra kids in the house. We were an active family and whether we took skiing lessons or went swimming, we were all treated the same. My parents encouraged us all to get an education and a good job. Whenever I came home to talk about my accomplishments at school, my father would say to me: "Tell me what you did for someone else and be proud of that". I am extremely grateful for these life lessons; for showing me how to give back and shaping me as a person. They have also helped in my career, providing me with a different perspective and allowing me to think outside the box."

“**When you walk in a room, make sure people know you are there. You have a voice!**”

(Words of wisdom from Giselle's mother – advice she has never forgotten)

## GISELLE BODKIN, continued

### HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Bias is something that we all have, but we may not always recognise it in ourselves or admit to it. Unconsciously, we tend to assume/judge that all people in a particular group are the same.

I personally don't know anyone, especially women, that has not been affected by bias. As a 'sporty' young girl, my grandmother would call me a tomboy. In my professional life I have been told that female partners are better at administrative jobs, whereas male partners are better at business development. Even as an experienced partner, it has been suggested that a younger female partner should take my place for a sales pitch – yet the role of the older male partner was never questioned.

In most organisations, the C-Suite remains dominated by men, who are likely to have some bias against women and have traditional values that may not sit well with today's talented young women. When I started my career, there were no female partners.

I had a wonderful male mentor who believed in me and created opportunities, allowing me to attend and participate in business meetings with clients, bankers and lawyers. When I got pregnant, I was actually afraid to tell my boss because I thought it would set me back on my goal to become a partner. An example of my own personal bias, formed by observing challenges faced by other women. In fact, through open dialogue we 'broke the bias'. Together we created a plan where I could have more flexibility, work more from home, keep my contacts with clients and stay connected. This was something quite unusual at the time.

Later, in my early 40's I asked for partnership. Instead, I was offered a raise. Dialogue again proved essential and I voiced that I didn't want the raise, I wanted partnership. Ultimately, all partners agreed to vote me in, as they appreciated my candour, honesty and passion."

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS NOW?

"When women improve their confidence, take charge of their careers and demand career developing opportunities – and then perform and impress C-Suite leaders – this will inevitably reduce gender bias.

In most cases, biased comments are not made to intentionally cause hurt or damage. I will regularly ignore bias, but when the comment is hurtful, I apply the 24h rule. Under this, I will first reach out to a friend or a mentor to discuss the comment – and then respond after that. I would advise every women to have allies in their corner, particularly those women who are in the early stages of their career. Find a good mentor who will help you navigate the challenges and advance your career. Every Olympian has a coach!

Identify your unique talent. What do you bring to the table? Once you have identified the added value you bring to the organisation, you will have the confidence to be seen, to let people know what you are capable of and to hold your leaders accountable to provide you with new opportunities."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"In my new role as Chief Inclusion & Diversity Officer, I believe it is essential that we have a distinct strategy around this topic, that we engage diverse teams, that we continue to raise awareness and have clear diversity metrics in place. As a team we can make the change. As a team we can **#BreakTheBias.**"

## INTERVIEW WITH IGA ERNA DWI SETYANINGRUM

Partner, BDO in Indonesia

#BreakTheBias

### WHO IS ERNA?

"I'm a Partner and the Head of Business Services and Outsourcing, at BDO in Indonesia. In addition, I have more than 20 years of experience as a tax consultant.

I'm now based in the capital Jakarta, but I was born and raised in a small town far away the city. With just one small bag and no other belongings, I came here to start my professional life – determined to 'be someone' and achieve something."

### HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"In Indonesia, leaders are always male, a situation heavily influenced by religion and cultural traditions. I am Balinese myself. Being part of the Balinese ethnic minority – we are only 1.7% of the total population – has added an extra layer of complexity and challenges.

Women need to do so much more to succeed as leaders. It's still common for women to be limited to low-income roles and become full-time homemakers as soon as they marry and have children. I have three children aged 18, 14 and 9 years – two boys and one girl. I never gave up on my dreams. I'm already #BreakingTheBias!"



“

**"The first step to fulfil your dream is to quit talking and start doing. One real action is better than a thousand of ideas."**

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## IGA ERNA DWI SETYANINGRUM, continued

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"BDO is an incredibly supportive organisation. My own team is around 70% female, including 2 Associate Directors, and around 20% have children. I strongly encourage my own team to challenge stereotypes and I support them to do what is right for them, rather than what society has traditionally expected them to do. It can be possible, with the right programmes and support in place, to build a career regardless of religious and cultural traditions or family responsibilities."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"We very much support flexible working, which helps many working women to #BreakTheBias and continue working after marriage and after having children. Our firm has a dedicated 'young mothers programme' in place. We're working hard to promote open discussion – so our 'soon-to-be' mothers understand there is no reason to resign."

My team have the professionalism to keep delivering high quality work and maintain happy clients, and that's what matters. It's essential for the firm to support everyone in the team, and to develop a culture where colleagues support each other. It's also important to be transparent and set expectations for ourselves and for our clients."



# INTERVIEW WITH KLEOPATRA KALOGEROPOULOU, ILP, BDO in Greece

## WHO IS KLEOPATRA?

"I am currently the International Liaison Partner (ILP) and the ethics and independence leader at BDO in Greece. I'm a certified public accountant and sit on the supervisory board of the Certified Public Accountants. I'm the first woman to have occupied that position in the 60-year history of the institution. I'm also qualified under the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

I studied business management, followed by my first master's degree in financial management and control in the UK and a second master's degree in international risk management in Paris, where I later worked for three years. I'm also the proud mother of two little girls aged six and nine.

Our firm joined BDO in 2015, but I've worked in this sector for more than 15 years. The firm was originally my father's practice, so I've grown up within the business."



## HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Well, I think that at some point in time we all encounter bias in our lives. My first experience was while living abroad, as a foreign person in a different country.

Often, when I told people I was Greek, I would immediately receive comments like 'Oh, you people are so lazy!' or 'Oh, Greeks are never punctual!'. It was very frustrating having to deal with stereotyping of this nature.

Later, I experienced relationship bias when I returned to Greece and started working in my father's practice. I was very quickly judged as 'the daughter of the boss' – which was not how I wanted to be considered. As an audit junior, I was desperate for my managers to treat me in the same way as everyone else and teach me how to do the work correctly.

At first, they would be quite reluctant to talk to me as a subordinate, simply because they thought they would get into trouble with the boss. On the contrary, the boss never wanted me to be favoured. It took quite some time to overcome this.

The most challenging form of bias however came from much older, male clients when I started undersigning as an engagement partner. They demonstrated strong bias, from an age perspective and also due to my gender. In meetings, I could sense disbelief in what I was explaining to them and they were reluctant to make the adjustments I was suggesting, especially if there were changes in the accounting standards. They would often call the previous auditor to confirm that what was I was saying was correct."

# #BreakTheBias

**"To fight bias it is essential to have in your mind what you want and to make it very clear to others that you intend to pursue it."**

## KLEOPATRA KALOGEROPOULOU, continued

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"Don't be afraid to claim your right to a better position or a higher salary. The difference between the pay of women compared to men, particularly from manager level upward, can be considerable. Male employees tend to be much more assertive about what they want and most

of the time they eventually get it. I think many employers are more receptive to the demands of men for fear of losing them, whereas it is not expected that a female employee will actually resign and look for something else."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"We are extremely proud to say that we almost have a 50/50 split of male and female colleagues in our firm – and not only in the junior levels of our profession, but also as Partners.

To some extent, this is the legacy of my father, who from the very beginning worked with female partners. He only cared about having the right people to do the work, not whether they were male or female. This has served to show the rest of the organisation what is possible, and it's become part of our culture. Now, when the CVs come in, we look at the qualifications and the experience of the applicant, not whether they are male or female.

Training is really important in helping women to navigate challenges in the workplace. For example, the global BDO New Partners Leadership Programme or the Next Generation Leaders Programme. Learning soft skills like communication – e.g. how to express yourself to different stakeholders – is essential to overcoming bias. The programme is also a great way to build a global network of contacts, each with great ideas and energy, and delegates can use the experience to drive positive change and empower others in the organisation."



# INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA EDWARDS

Partner, BDO in New Zealand

#BreakTheBias

## WHO IS ANGELA?

"I am a woman of Maori descent; the indigenous people of New Zealand. That culture is very much part of who I am – as a person, as a mother, and as a partner in the Northland area. We are very connected with the land and with our family.

My father was Maori and my mother was Caucasian. Unfortunately, she passed away when I was just 4 years old so I was raised by my father's sister within our extended family. As a consequence of not having my parents close by, I grew up to be a very independent young girl, exposed to a lot of diversity, but also to bias.

We did not have a lot. I don't think I had a new set of clothes until I was a teenager. The family's money would rather go on 'experiences'. Education was considered very important.

My youth wasn't the easiest, it was hard for me to find my own path in life. I actually dropped out of school at age 16, going on unemployment benefits.

When my Aunt found out about it, she made me take a job at a bank, starting at the bottom, doing basic admin work.

I became a mother at 21, eventually having 4 daughters and 2 beautiful grandchildren. As a young mother, I became a qualified homeo-botanist. After my 3rd daughter was born, I realised I had still not found what I was searching for, and I decided to take a holistic healing course. That was a pivotal point in my life. I realised that I wanted to be an accountant – and that was the real start of my professional career. I secured my first job in accountancy with BDO in 2002.

20 years later, I am a Partner at BDO Northland, I sit on the National Board of BDO New Zealand, I am the Maori Business Sector Leader and I'm an active member of other Boards and volunteer groups."



## IN MĀORI IT IS SAID:

Ko Whakataha to maunga  
Ko Waitang te awa  
Ko Ngāpuhi to iwi  
Ko Ngaitawake-ki-te-tuawhenua te hapū

## TRANSLATED:

Whakataha is my mountain  
Waitangi is my river  
Ngapuhi are my people/tribe  
Ngaitawake-ki-te-tuawhenua is my sub-tribe

## ANGELA EDWARDS, continued

### HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED BIAS?

"The grief and hurt for Maori caused by colonisation remains and the flow-on effect has created inequalities and bias. Having a non-Maori look with Maori values has led to experiencing bias from both sides. Rather than focus on the negative I focus on the positive, as I have been able to walk in both worlds, open doors and bridge the gap. In all negative statistics, on topics such as education, justice, health and employment, Maori people are the most prominently featured group. There is still perception in some groups that we are not equal and racial bias persists. For example, when a Maori walks into a shop, the owner will observe him or her more closely than they would a person from another ethnic group.

Yet, there is progress. People are more interested in Maori culture and there is a resurgence of the Maori language. It's very much part of the history of New Zealand. But it takes time."

I have also encountered gender bias. As a working mother, I was told that work should come before family. As much as I love my job, my family is what matters most. I have demonstrated that it is perfectly possible to combine it all – and still do a really good job.

And, as one of the few women at the Board table, you are sometimes less heard in group discussions than your male colleagues. Your ideas are more easily brushed over. However, as more women are starting to take up leadership positions, that is certainly changing too."

“Use your voice. It doesn't have to be a loud voice – but make it a constant one.”

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"Choose your battles – you can't win every time.

Remain genuine and keep your integrity and the integrity of others intact. If you deliver your message in a positive way, it will have a lot more impact.

Finally, do what you love. When you're passionate about your job, there isn't much that you can't accomplish."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"BDO in New Zealand has a very extensive flexibility policy. That works really well and is highly appreciated by all colleagues – not just women. The offices are very family oriented. In our Northland office, kids are allowed to come in at any time. This allows our working parents to be a lot more efficient in the way that they organise themselves.

The organisation also allows people in senior roles – even at partner level – to work part-time, should that fit their lifestyle better. By making these initiatives open to everyone, we're helping all our people to have the same opportunities, changing expectations across the board and stepping up to **#BreakTheBias**."

## INTERVIEW BRENDA DUNCAN

Managing Partner, BDO Eastern Caribbean

#BreakTheBias

### WHO IS BRENDA?

Brenda was born, educated and trained in the UK before moving to Saint Lucia in 1990 to further her professional career and personal aspirations. She joined BDO in 2009 and is now the Managing Partner of BDO Eastern Caribbean. Brenda shares her experience and advice below.

### THIS IS BRENDA'S STORY:

"I obtained my BA in Accounts, Finance & Economics at the University of Essex, with the same dream as my male counterparts – to become a partner in a professional service organisation. In the 1990's, there were hardly any female partners in the UK accounting firms, let alone a female partner of colour. Even the progressive (as I thought they were) service organisations still had a very long way to go in this respect, so I made the decision to move to Saint Lucia, in pursuit of the career I had set my heart on.

In 1996, following a lot of hard work and dedication, I became one of the youngest partners in the Eastern Caribbean with the then Coopers & Lybrand, where I remained the only female partner in St. Lucia for several years.

In 2009 I transitioned my practice and joined BDO. By 2017 I became the Managing Partner, covering the Eastern Caribbean area. In the beginning, I was very cognisant of the fact that the partners in my team were older than me and very experienced and therefore micro-management was not required. My role evolved (and continues to do so) to meet the changing demands of the business world. I continue to challenge and re-invent myself and my leadership style with a strong focus on active engagement with my colleagues."



**"Build the confidence to voice what need. You should never be made to feel less because you need more flexibility."**

## BRENDA DUNCAN, continued

### HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Bias is part of human nature. It is often expressed unconsciously and in many cases there is no ill-intention behind it. For example, at the beginning of my professional life I was standing in the elevator of an audit firm when a man asked me whose secretary I was. I am sure many other women have faced similar scenarios.

Work/life balance and flexibility are extremely topical at the moment. I am the proud mother of two fantastic daughters. One is a young working mum who, especially during the pandemic, has struggled to make it to the office whilst the nursery is closed. She is also unable to participate in late afternoon meetings – all the while feeling guilty for not being able to spend enough time with her child. These are the daily realities of working mothers, which can lead them to be subjected to unconscious bias in the workplace.

Nearly every organisation now talks about the importance of a healthy work life balance, about offering more

flexibility, about a hybrid work model – but are leaders really making the necessary changes to allow those with caring responsibilities to work more flexibly, without it having a negative impact on their opportunities? Only time will tell how this may affect their career progression.

Build the confidence to voice what you need. You should never be made to feel less because you need more flexibility.

In my own organisation, I personally encourage open communication so that collectively, we always find a solution that works. Some women have young children and will only start working at 9:30 am. Others may have a sick child at home and need to reorganise their timetable. Flexibility comes with a bond of trust. Our leadership team empowers all employees to work flexibly, and this has really benefited mental health in our organisation. It's a win-win situation that can be the pivot to reducing unconscious bias."

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS NOW?

"I will always try to lead by example. When confronted with bias, stand your ground and handle it professionally. You don't need to smile everything away. Raise the point that you want to make, but don't spend your life fighting. Instead, run with the skills that you have and be as successful in your role as possible."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"It's essential to have good diversity, equity and inclusion metrics in place, but it's equally important that these are analysed and followed with concrete action to address the many areas where bias can exist. For example, a company may have a balanced gender ratio, but it also needs to ask why so many young female employees seek alternative opportunities before reaching partner level. Are we doing enough to attract and retain a diverse range of young talent? Do we give everyone the flexibility to combine a career with a family life, and give everyone the same opportunities?"

Inclusivity, equality and diversity should be a must on every board agenda."

## INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA BRUCKNER

Member of the Board of Directors,  
BDO in Germany

#BreakTheBias

### WHO IS ANDREA?

Currently a member of the Board of Directors of BDO in Germany, Andrea has an impressive career history. Responsible for Capital Markets, Sustainability, IT and Quality Management, alongside teams including Human Resources and Marketing, she is a master in multitasking – a constant theme throughout in her life.

### THIS ANDREA'S STORY:

"As a young girl I wanted to be an archaeologist – which is quite different from what I do today! I realised quite quickly that my original dream to follow this very niche career was not likely to become reality, so I decided to study tax advisory instead. I could not have made a better decision – I realised quite quickly how exciting and versatile a career in tax advisory could be. I kept wanting to know more and seized every opportunity that I could, with an additional 8-semester 'Business & Social Economy' course paving the way for the next step in my career.

I became one of the first female audit assistants with AWT Horwath GmbH (now part of BDO Germany) and later became the first female partner there. I was also the first woman to become Chair of the German Institute of Auditors management board. I hope that in some way I helped to open doors for many talented women thereafter."



“**As a woman, perseverance is key. Don't give up. If you really want it – go for it.**”

## ANDREA BRUCKNER, continued

**"In the workplace, we should focus on the content of the message, not on the gender of the person who said it and how it is said."**

### HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Has any woman never encountered bias? I remember vividly that as a young Partner signing mandates, people confused me more than once with a secretary.

I have always worked hard and continue to do so. It's a fact that women sometimes need to do 'more' to be taken seriously. When I had my daughter in 1998, my colleagues wondered how I would make it all work. Only one week after giving birth to her, I was back in the office for meetings – with the baby in a stroller next to me. I felt the need to prove to my male colleagues that I could do it. A lot has changed since then. Fortunately, nowadays there is a lot more understanding and support.

Another bias relates to communication. Women communicate differently to men. Many times I have been told that I am 'too emotional' for merely using a different tone of voice and demonstrating empathy. In the workplace, we should focus on the content of the message, not on the gender of the person who said it and how it is said."

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS NOW?

"These days, 'work-life' balance has jumped to the top of everyone's agenda, and I welcome this. However, the fact remains that in order to achieve your career goals, you need to be willing to invest a lot of energy and effort – especially as a woman. Without passion and motivation, it's an impossible task.

Personally, I believe that Covid-19 has brought new challenges. With new hybrid work models in place, it is possible that many women may

decide to primarily work from home 'because of the children' – with the job shifting to become something that is done 'on top'. Companies and working mothers need to avoid accidentally falling back into the trap of this 'traditional' behaviour. My advice for any woman would be: Discuss your professional aspirations in life with your support system – your spouse, your family, or your friends. Find the help you need to make it happen."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"At BDO in Germany, we have a lot of different nationalities in our various teams and diversity is very much part of our culture. The organisation firmly believes that gender diversity is an important factor of business success, as a diverse workforce brings diverse ideas to the table.

In order to keep on attracting as diverse a staff as possible, we are very keen to offer the best possible working conditions to everyone. For instance, we offer a lot of flexibility, especially for working parents (both men and women), so all our colleagues can organise their workload as efficiently as possible.

We have also developed a female leadership programme. Due to Covid-19, this has been temporarily paused, since programmes of this type require in-person contact. However, this will be re-started as soon as possible and will no doubt help many women to advance in their careers.

These are just two examples of our efforts to be regarded as a great employer for all genders, and I am proud to say that these are already paying off. In 2021, BDO in Germany was recognised as the best employer in the professional services sector by *Focus magazine* and we continue to successfully attract new talent to our organisation."

## INTERVIEW WITH WON-KYUNG CHOI

Assurance Partner, BDO in Korea

# #BreakTheBias

### WHO IS WON-KYUNG?

"I am a Risk Management Partner at BDO in Korea. I accumulated over 15 years of audit and Risk Management expertise whilst working for PwC in Korea, before joining BDO in Korea in 2016 as the Head of Quality & Risk Management – where I was the first female partner. I am also a member of the Ethics Investigation Committee of the Korean Institute of Certified Public Accountants. ('KICPA').

I am a mother, although my children are now young adults. When they were young, however, I was very fortunate to have a supportive family who made it possible for me to also pursue my career."

**"Be yourself. There is no need to be someone you are not. Women need to capitalise on their inherent strengths and demonstrate their worth."**

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## WON-KYUNG CHOI, continued

### HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"In Korea, we all share the same culture and language. However, there are still important gender and generation gaps.



For me, bias occurs when we fail to acknowledge each other's differences. People tend to talk to people with similar interests or a similar background, instead of seeking to discuss and understand different views and perspectives. Especially gender bias seems to be intensified by a lack of open communication. Increasing women's rights does not reduce male rights, on the contrary, it results in new opportunities for both men and women.

In traditional Korean society, when children were born, women would leave their jobs and devote themselves to childcare. Having a career was not considered a priority.

Nowadays, we see positive evolution. Most women now have a proper education and are increasingly considered for career roles, including in leadership. When I joined BDO, there were not many women in senior positions. Nowadays, women are more able to pursue every kind of opportunity.

With COVID-19, we often work from home. This brings with it the risk that some working mothers may be pulled back into the traditional role of being a mother and caretaker first, because COVID-19 makes it difficult for children to go to school normally. It is essential that we continue to allow women to choose the role and career they want and that those who choose to work remotely do not fall victim to new types of bias. I sincerely hope that the fact that the responsibility for childcare lies with both parents, will be institutionalised in a policy."

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"Being a working woman (particularly a working mother) brings with it many challenges. Bias in the workplace adds an extra level of complexity to what is already a difficult task for many. Surround yourself with allies both at home and at work, for support. Be clear about your objectives and don't be afraid to share them. Take one step at a time and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.

I would like to tell our young talents who struggle to continue their career: "Remember the sentence 'Those who endure will win', and 'do not give up even if it is hard'". Every moment of life is important, but even if you develop your career

a little slower than other colleagues, take your time! Opportunities will come again at some point. However fast or slow, do not forget your goals and never give up on your dreams.

Be yourself. There is no need to be someone you are not. Women need to capitalise on their inherent strengths and demonstrate their worth."

Finally, don't ever forget the joy of working. It is important to have a big goal, but you should not sacrifice too much to achieve it. Trust yourself, take care of yourself, constantly challenge yourself, and take a step forward with the people around you."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"Organisations need to look at the way that they operate and address areas where bias occurs, offering training, support and encouragement for all colleagues to be given the same opportunities and treated equally. If we acknowledge and respect our differences, we should be able to **#BreakTheBias.**

At BDO in Korea, we offer a lot of flexibility, so our female talents feel supported to grow within the organisation. I am very proud to be part of the BDO family, which is taking the lead in creating a future where people naturally coexist and work together."

# INTERVIEW WITH TERESA MORAHAN

Partner, BDO in Ireland

#BreakTheBias

## WHO IS TERESA?

"I'm a Partner, Head of Audit, Head of the Technology Sector Group and a member of the Leadership team at BDO in Ireland. I've been with BDO for 24 years, having originally trained in a small practice before joining BDO four years into my career. Currently, the majority of my work focuses on regulated businesses and international business within the technology sector."

## HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Most people are now aware of the pressures that many working women face in terms of childcare, but I think that other types of external challenges and responsibilities are less commonly talked about or considered. For example, I'm not married, and I don't have any children. This often leads people (both men and women) to make assumptions about my personal priorities and commitments, both inside and outside the office. In fact, I'm the primary carer for a member of my family and also enjoy a full and active life outside of work. We all need to broaden our awareness, acknowledge that everyone has different challenges, and avoid this type of unconscious bias."

The message that I give to the younger women joining our organisation is that it is possible to be a woman, to have responsibilities as a carer, and be successful in your career – with the right support system behind you.

When I joined BDO there were no female partners in the Dublin practice and the senior management team was very much male. At that time, the organisation hadn't been exposed to female partners or leaders, so whilst it wasn't intentional, I think that a level of unconscious bias was likely to 'keep things the way it's always been.'



“Be heard. A certain level of visibility is necessary.”

## TERESA MORAHAN, continued

Since then, there has been considerable progress in this area and it's essential that this continues – to prove that women can and do give the same level of commitment and dedication to roles.

More equality in terms of parental leave is also helping to shift the bias away from women. I also believe that, to some extent, bias exists within myself and within us as women. Bias isn't just something projected by others. Sometimes we put up our own barriers, perhaps as a consequence of our experiences. Women often lack confidence in themselves. We question whether we are good enough to be at the table and express our voice alongside our male counterparts.

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"Some older, traditional businesses can represent a challenge to women working in this sector, because historically, a grey haired, middle-aged man would have been their idea of the best person for the job.

It is well documented that women tend to pursue jobs that they are over-qualified for, whereas men will actively pursue a role despite meeting only part of the specified criteria.

I've been very fortunate during my time at BDO. When the position of Head of Audit became available within the practice, it wasn't allocated on the basis of length of service, or age, or gender. At the time, I was in my mid-forties and there were other partners with many more years of experience. I was appointed based on my skills being the best match for the role, and this is an important illustration of bias barriers coming down."

There has been a great deal of progress in the last 20 years, but when faced with bias it's important to recognise and acknowledge it, and not be afraid to challenge it. It's essential to earn their confidence."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"In terms of bias against women in opportunities and promotion, I think there's now a conscious effort being made to ensure that the female population is better represented in senior roles. However, the perception of 'the glass ceiling' still exists and many women do leave the industry before reaching the top of the profession. To address this, we've introduced a female mentorship programme within the practice this year – to show women that there is a path to opportunity and to guide them along it. This has been a really positive experience. Importantly, male colleagues have also been involved in the programme – it's not just females supporting females. It's essential to encourage and develop male allies to help bring about positive change.

COVID has brought about positive change in terms of flexible working/remote working. It has opened up people's minds to the possibilities and proved that this is a viable option. It has shown everyone (and in particular, women) that there are now different working options available to help individuals balance external responsibilities alongside a fulfilling career.

That said, we are conscious that access to people on a more relaxed basis e.g. 'the water cooler moments' and lunch connections can be lost when working remotely. Spending time with colleagues is really important and we are conscious that 'proximity bias' could have a negative effect on women in particular.

A certain level of visibility is important so that you can be 'seen' as someone who delivers and be front of mind for career enhancing opportunities.

At BDO in Ireland we have a diversity and inclusion (D&I) committee, and they address all types of bias (gender, sexual orientation, cultural etc). It's a group made up of multicultural individuals from across the firm, both male and female, and it's been in place for two years. Initiatives like this are now really important in attracting people into the business. Candidates want to see that, as an organisation, you're aware of these topics, that initiatives are in place and that senior members of staff fully support them. I recently recruited a female team member from overseas and this proved to be a key part of her decision to join us.

I believe that everything is possible. I come from a rural area in the west of Ireland. I didn't go to one of the best fee-paying schools in the country and my family does not have a background in professional services, yet here I am as a Partner in a large practice. If you want to achieve something, set your mind on it, build your capabilities and be willing to work for it.

Opportunities are there for us if we want to take them. It is possible to **#BreakTheBias."**

## INTERVIEW WITH LUZ VASQUEZ

Americas Regional Coordinator,  
BDO Global Office

#BreakTheBias

### WHO IS LUZ? ?

"I am the second child of a family with 4 children. I have 2 sisters and a brother and I was born and raised in Colombia. Mom and dad gave us the best home we could ever ask for. I am not talking about luxury, I am talking about having a place where we always felt safe, loved, and had their support to be who we wanted to be. They both taught us great, solid values, such as to always do what is right, support each other, help others, and be respectful and friendly. We followed their example!

I met my husband during high school, and we have now been married for 30 years. We have two wonderful sons who mean the world to us. We moved to Canada, in search of a better future, when they were just babies. Canada has proved to be the best choice that we could have made. It's a country of immigrants where diversity is normal, yet there is a strong sense of belonging."



### WHAT DOES 'BIAS' MEAN TO YOU?

"When a child is born, they are free of any kind of bias, yet as astute observers of the social world, it is gradually learned from what they see and experience, from what other people say and do. This is why it often feels normal and acceptable – even when that shouldn't be the case."

**"We have the right to speak up. If a woman feels disrespected or slighted because of another person's bias, she should respectfully, but firmly, tell them how she feels."**

## LUZ VASQUEZ, continued

### HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY BIAS IN YOUR PERSONAL AND/OR PROFESSIONAL LIFE?

"Yes, both personally and professionally. I think the first instance is an example is an example of bias-based harassment, based on my gender and perhaps also my ethnic origin. I was in college and a professor failed me in one of the most important subjects because I refused to join him to have my papers graded outside the university, outside class time. When I refused, he said: "You haven't realised that I'm the one with the power here and you, you just made the worst mistake of your life." No matter how hard I worked, I was prevented from advancing to the next semester. I'm very happy that these days, women dare to call out this type of inappropriate behaviour.

Also, after moving to Canada I did not speak English. Interacting with people was the way I learned this new language – yet there was a degree of language bias. While volunteering and participating in different school committees, I was elected Chairwoman of the School Council. A member of the council was extremely rude because of my accent. To me, speaking English with a foreign accent was a sign of bravery! I tried to master a new language, and was not afraid to make mistakes."

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

We have the right to speak up. If a woman feels disrespected or slighted because of another person's bias, she should respectfully, but firmly, tell them how she feels. This gives the person the opportunity to think about what they have said or done and correct their behaviour going forward.

**"Bias is generalisation. Don't allow anyone to put you in a box."**

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"It is important to have clear and strong diversity and inclusion policies, followed by action to provide opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, race, religion, etc. This creates an environment of equality and respect. Where there is equality and respect, there is growth!

It is also important to value each person for their work – regardless of their personal characteristics. I think a lot has been done to close this gap, but there is still a lot to do!"



## INTERVIEW WITH SAILI PRABHU

Manager, Forensic Advisory Services  
BDO UAE

#BreakTheBias

### WHO IS SAILI?

Saili started her career as a chartered accountant with BDO in India, specialising in tax, before going on secondment to Dubai and later taking the opportunity to move into forensic advisory services at BDO UAE.

### THIS IS SAILI'S STORY:

"The secondment to Dubai was originally for a period of six months and I grabbed the opportunity to experience a different culture and the prospect of a better work/life balance. I like challenging myself with situations that push me out of my comfort zone. The prospect of moving to a new country, away from the comfort of my family and friends, may have been intimidating to some, but for the 23-year-old me, this was an exciting opportunity to experience a new lifestyle and gain an international exposure. I was then offered a permanent role at BDO UAE and when the firm decided to move into forensic advisory services, I was thrilled to have the chance to be involved in setting up the practice. This of course came with its own challenges, but it's been a great experience so far and the last two and a half years have been very, very fulfilling."



“**Young women will still be told ‘you’re a woman, you should get married.’ Nobody tells you ‘you’re a woman, you should be the CEO of the company.’**”

## SAILI PRABHU, continued

### HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED BIAS?

"Whilst some parts of the Middle East are still behind other countries in terms of giving women opportunities in leadership or management roles, this is less of an issue in Dubai. Dubai is very open, with lots of opportunities for both men and women. Women make up around 40% of our firm – and this number continues to increase. Culturally though, based on my experience dealing with clients and other companies, it seems that Emirati women work mainly in the public sector and rarely in private organisations. That said, several of the Emirati women do lead key initiatives in the country and are a part of the UAE's cabinet. This plays a vital role in dealing with number of foreign and domestic issues pertaining to UAE.

Bias is more prevalent in India. Although there has been tremendous progress, it's still a patriarchal society. For example, it's still not socially acceptable for a woman working at a corporate firm to work late and travel home alone at night – whereas for a man this would be perfectly ok.

However, India is now evolving to become a country with women leading political parties, multinational companies and starting their entrepreneurial journeys – all whilst taking care of their (often large) families and children.

BDO in the UAE, it's more about talent and hard work rather than your gender, your culture or your ethnicity – although age bias can represent a challenge. I've sometimes had the impression that, at first, senior clients have felt uncomfortable taking advice from a 28-year-old... and a woman at that. However, this is easily resolved by proving that you do have the right knowledge and experience to deliver the standard of service that they expect.

My parents are doctors, and my mother is the medical director at a government hospital in Mumbai. Fortunately, I was raised to be independent, and my parents have always pushed me to do what I want to and not worry about the opinions of others.

I have also had the privilege of being mentored by very strong women from a very young age. I have grown up watching my mother, my teachers back in school and even my managers when I started my career, break stereotypes and manage both family and professional life efficiently and not let bias of any kind affect their ambitions."

### HOW SHOULD WOMEN RESPOND TO BIAS?

"I've always known what I want and I'm very opinionated. I'm not afraid to speak up and put forth my opinion – even if it's to a senior person. Opportunities are often not presented on a platter. I don't live by a rule book and hence throughout

my career I have pushed myself forward and have not been afraid to try different things just because I'm a woman. I've always made it clear that I am here to learn and that I will perform to the best of my ability in any given situation."

### WHAT CAN FIRMS DO TO ADDRESS BIAS?

"Our firm has a very good initiative, whereby the whole organisation receives regular updates on changes in the diversity of the firm and news about women moving into managerial positions.

Whilst we don't have an 'official' diversity, equality and inclusion officer, the women in the organisation have created their own community and initiatives to help support other women to succeed.

We now have many women in Manager/ Associate Director roles and it won't be long before we have female Partners too!

It's really important that the people at the top of an organisation step up to address bias, but it's equally important for women to push themselves forward to be able to grow. It works both ways."

# OUR MALE LEADERS

Interviews



 CLEMENT CHAN  
CEO



 MARK STEWART  
CEO



 ARNAUD NAUDAN  
CEO



 DIEGO QUINJANO  
CEO

## #BreakTheBias

# BDO'S MINDSET

CLEMENT CHAN

CEO, BDO in Hong Kong

"I am proud to say that BDO in Hong Kong is one of the front runners in terms of gender diversity, compared to our peers. Women represent 30% of our equity partners and 55% of our staff.



# 30%

Female equity partners



# 55%

Staff

For the past three decades, the character, merits and experience of a person have always been our focus, rather than ethnicity or gender. We uphold a very open recruitment policy, resulting in a diverse workforce, including people from Europe, South-East Asia, China and Japan. We also equally welcome colleagues with disabilities.

With regard to working parents, we offer parental leave to mothers and fathers, and a private room is available for women to express milk in a comfortable and safe environment, should they wish to do so.

## "We are confident in the outlook for Hong Kong"

In Hong Kong, it is very common to have domestic help in the home. This undoubtedly makes it a lot easier for working women to pursue their careers. In addition, we have a relaxed and very open policy around flexible working. The pandemic has clearly demonstrated that remote working is possible.

However, we currently face a different kind of bias, with a considerable effect leading to a net migration out of Hong Kong during 2021. This has significantly impacted all professions and industries, yet we remain positive in the knowledge that Hong Kong has and will continue to be resilient as a leading financial centre in the region and globally.

BDO in Hong Kong applies a holistic approach and is working with all stakeholders in maintaining the positivity to retain our talented professionals including an appropriate gender and ethnic diversity. We are confident in the outlook for Hong Kong and continue to seek better ways of working – including closer collaboration with our colleagues at BDO in China.



CLEMENT CHAN

# BDO'S MINDSET

MARK STEWART

CEO, BDO in South Africa

"At BDO in South Africa, we all firmly believe that diversity is good for our people – and good for business."

We are committed to supporting our professional women and driving their success through a range of women's inclusion strategies. These include professional development activities and social networking events and offer BDO women in all professional roles the opportunity to support each other, speak candidly and share advice about real business issues. At every level, BDO women are supported in building relationships and creating well-defined career paths.

We seek to address gender bias via our policies and employment practices. We are transparent about our remuneration models, and these do not differentiate by gender. Every year we publish the remuneration of our female staff compared to our male staff in our Transparency Report, as well as well as statistics on the number of men and women at at each employment level in the organisation.

We have a dedicated diversity, equality and inclusion programme called 'Balance for Better'. The #BalanceForBetter campaign is not simply positioned as a women's issue, it's a business issue. For this reason, the terms of reference of all our internal committees should clearly indicate that gender balance is a requirement.

Creating work environments that are flexible and supportive, as well as professionally rewarding, is very important to us. It is this balanced approach that helps our people achieve their dreams – and ultimately delivers better solutions for our clients."

**"Creating work environments that are flexible and supportive, as well as professionally rewarding, is very important to us."**



MARK STEWART

# BDO'S MINDSET

ARNAUD NAUDAN

CEO, BDO in France

"Diversity has always been a very important topic for me."

In 2021, I was implementing concrete initiatives and plans to make sure that diversity, equity and inclusion is very much part of the agenda of our board.

Our data shows some positives, but we can do a lot better. In 2021, 62% of our staff were women, but admittedly, only 25% of our Partners are female. We need to understand why our female talents find it hard to grow in our organisation. We are currently working on a piece of research with research agency BIP France to address this.

To realise our ambitious growth plans, we need to have a diverse workforce – and this must also be reflected in our leadership positions. Richness in diversity will bring new ideas, views and insights to the table, ultimately creating high performance teams and better decision making.

Internally, we are developing 'high potential' initiatives and career plans for women. Externally, we are discussing a potential partnership with HEC in Paris for a 'Women in leadership' programme, that will allow women in our organisation to better collaborate, interact and build relationships with other talented women in the sector.

We may have more to do, but I'm confident that these steps will give our female colleagues the support and confidence they need to discuss their growth aspirations and drive our diversity progress."

**"To realise our ambitious growth plans, we need to have a diverse workforce – and this must also be reflected in our leadership positions ."**

ARNAUD NAUDAN



# BDO'S MINDSET

DIEGO QUIJANO

CEO, BDO in Colombia

**"The main mission and responsibility that we have as people in our society is to think about how we can grow and become better individuals, friends, co-workers, partners, siblings and children.**

How can we achieve this? By leading! And now is the time to do it.

We believe that the cultural and economic growth of society is a direct result of fair, unbiased and equal treatment. For this reason, we have drawn up a strategic plan based on sustainability. The plan is rooted in the growth of people, and this cannot be achieved if women are not represented.

In 2019 we began the transformation process in our firm, and as part of this, we decided that our leadership would be steered by women, to illustrate with action (not words) that gender equality is an essential part of our organisation.

Currently, 60% of our Board of Directors are women, and women occupy 45% of leadership and administrative roles (this includes directors, managers, and partners).

We are also looking beyond titles and have created a comprehensive strategy that will allow all the women in our firm to develop and pursue their personal and professional goals. We've created a career plan designed to encourage the promotion of women in each of the different categories in our service lines. In fact, 61% of promotions in 2021 benefited women.

Quality of life is also important in our organisation, which is why the women in our firm have their own soccer tournament, cycling team and marathon team – all sponsored by BDO in Colombia. These initiatives do not only benefit women. By creating a meeting point between families, and being visible in the community, they also promote gender equity and inclusion in our wider society.

Discrimination in society must become a thing of the past. Regardless of race, gender, personal or cultural beliefs, we all have a place in BDO in Colombia and we will continue to work towards closing social gaps. In my role as Managing Partner of the firm, I am committed to helping our global organisation to lead in our markets, whilst at the same time recognising the role that we can play in addressing issues in our society, such that our clients and collaborators feel represented by a socially responsible and sustainable firm. It's time for us to lead."



DIEGO QUIJANO

# RESOURCES

## QUIZ 1

Quiz: What do you know about unconscious bias?  
– shrm.org

Unconscious bias in the workplace occurs when individuals make judgments at least partially influenced by gender, race or other factors without realising they have done so, usually based on societal stereotypes or their own personal experiences. Take this quiz to test your knowledge of unconscious bias.

## ARTICLE 3

7 takeaways from Netflix's first-ever 'Inclusion Report'  
– Ongig Blog

An in-depth look at internal Netflix diversity, through with a race, equality, and inclusion lens.

## PROGRAMME/WORKSHOP 2

50 ways to fight bias, a bias program to support women at work  
– Lean In

A free digital programme from Lean In, designed to empower all employees to identify and challenge bias head on. It also provides materials everything you need to prepare for and run a successful workshop in your firm.

## BOOK 4

The leader's guide to unconscious bias  
– Pamela Fuller, Mark Murphy and Anne Chow

Our brains are constantly filtering, sorting, and using shortcuts to handle the overwhelming amount of information we receive each day. And those shortcuts are often where unconscious bias slips in. Left unchecked, unconscious bias can impair our decision making and limit the performance, innovation, and opportunities of those we manage—sometimes in contrast to our most deeply held values. This book outlines how to reframe bias, cultivate connection and create high-performing teams.

## #BreakTheBias – Our principles

- 1 Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- 2 Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
- 3 Ensure the health safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- 4 Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- 5 Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- 6 Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- 7 Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

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Reference: A snapshot of 350 companies in the G7: This study highlights G7 countries' laws and policies that are impacting the lives of women, provides a snapshot of the implementation status of Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) implementation of the largest 350 companies in the G7, and illustrates that WEPs signatories generally perform better on gender equality than non-WEPs signatories.



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