



Morison Global



International Women's Day

8 March 2022

# Breaking the Bias... Our Morison Global Female Leaders



Building Better  
Business Globally



## Introduction

The 2022 global IWD campaign theme is #BreakTheBias. This year we came together through two meaningful events to celebrate our women leaders and learn about the power and value of more diverse opinions and experiences. In addition, we interviewed over 20 women across 15 countries who are at various stages in their professional careers. They graciously shared their aspirations, trials and tribulations all of which are captured in this report. Their collective wisdom can help us learn about what we can do individually to lift each other up and #BreakTheBias. We thank each and every person who has contributed to this report.

The Global Executive Office



# International Women's Day 2022

International Women's Day is a global event which celebrates the social, economic, and cultural achievements of women, whilst marking a call to action for accelerating women's equality. The day has been celebrated worldwide for more than 100 years, with the aim of bringing together people to act for equality.

The colours of International Women's Day are purple, green and white. Purple signifies justice and dignity, green represents hope and white stands for purity.

Three central beliefs underpin and guide the purpose of International Women's Day, which we hope to achieve through this report:

- Identifying, celebrating and increasing visibility of women's achievements can help forge equality
- Strategic collaborations based on a foundation of shared purpose, trust and appreciation can impact positive change for women
- Worldwide awareness raising via meaningful narratives, resources and activity can help combat gender bias and discrimination to accelerate gender parity

The theme for International Women's Day 2022 is #BreakTheBias. People are encouraged to imagine a world without stereotypes or discrimination, a world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive, and where difference is valued and celebrated. This year's theme looks at the idea that we are all responsible for our own actions and in understanding this we can begin to take steps towards breaking the bias in our communities and workplaces.

Whether deliberate or unconscious, bias can make it difficult for women to move ahead. Knowing that bias exists is not enough, and action is required to make a difference. This is something that we explored with the contributors to our report, who are strong and powerful leaders in their own rights. If we demonstrate the power and value of more diverse opinions and experiences, it leads to more powerful decision making. Collectively, we can challenge and Break the Bias!

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## What does IWD mean to you?

'International Women's Day is a day for women around the world to purposefully celebrate, support and encourage one another as we continue to do our part as global citizens to leave a better planet for generations to come.' Although for different people, International Women's Day can mean a variety of personal things, one idea was clear amongst our members, and that was celebration. 'An opportunity to celebrate our strengths and appreciate all the hard work that we do.' A 'great occasion to celebrate past or present women of the world who were renowned for their achievements.'

However this celebration recognises not just the individual achievements of women, but also their value and importance 'in the progressive development of a family, country, global community [and] that the world could be a better place if women are empowered and allowed freedom to contribute their best in society.' Members noted that while 'we celebrate women all year round it is important to set aside a special day to highlight and celebrate the ways women are making a difference on critical issues.'

Something that resonated was the idea that the day should be used to 'reflect on the choices we make on a daily basis that affect the women in our lives. In particular, we should look for opportunities to inspire our daughters and the young women around us to feel confident and strong and to believe in themselves, that they can achieve success through hard work, regardless of their gender.' Beyond celebration, 'IWD means bravery, support and achievement.' 'It is a day for the appreciation of women, and gives this hero a little bit of courage to keep moving.' 'It's a chance to connect to other women, to give support to other women and to show what women can achieve.'

This connection 'opens up conversations that you may not usually have and empowers you to think about your own professional development. It also provides a platform to give personal recognition to those females who've had a direct impact on you, professionally or personally.' 'International Women's Day is a chance for Women to band together and appreciate and acknowledge the struggle we have all had and continue to have in the workforce for equality and the work we put into our lives to keep all the balls in the air.'

As a global association, our female leaders also pointed out the different struggles that women may have. It is important to 'acknowledge and appreciate women that fight this same fight from where they are, from what they do, from who they are. It is also a day to promote and appreciate the power of the bonds created between women, a power that can for sure, transform our world.'

After all, 'International Women's Day has at all times stood as a strong marker for the strength of womanhood. A time to reflect women struggles, sacrifices, accomplishments and leadership for the generation to come.'

## Reflecting on this year's theme #BreakTheBias, in your opinion, what is the bias and what does it mean to you?

While we know what the definition of bias is, it can have more personal meanings to the women who encounter it. For many, the bias means that 'women need to work harder in order to be recognised' or that people believe 'that we are not equal or deserve to be equal'. 'Bias stops women and girls (especially those in marginalised groups) from reaching their full potential, creating inequity and breeds discrimination.'



*International Women's Day has at all times stood as a strong marker for the strength of womanhood.*

**Pudmanee R Beeharry**  
Morison Mauritius

Members recounted examples of bias such as the fact that ‘in a number of countries, women are still excluded from decision making.’ In the accountancy profession, a common theme is that ‘women cannot deal with numbers, are not leaders and are far too emotional.’ ‘Sometimes women are not viewed in a workplace as someone who can go all the way up in their careers.’ To break the bias here ‘career opportunities, promotions, pay raises, mentorship and sponsorship opportunities [must be] available to everyone and given to people based solely on performance and qualifications.’

There were references to unconscious bias, and how it is ‘an unconscious influence in our decision making, explained by stereotypes, education, culture.’ This referred particularly to gender bias, described as ‘the tendency to prefer one gender over another. It is a form of unconscious bias and this, for example, happens when more male candidates are recruited over females because of family commitments.’ ‘There is a glass ceiling when it comes to promoting women leaders. Women should be provided with equal opportunity to develop themselves to their full potential.’ This is where difficulties can lie, as it becomes an innate issue.

Some referred to more specific occasions, noting that if ‘a decision is only facilitated following a need to highlight the difference between him or her rather than primarily in response to the value that is added, then a bias definitely exists and needs to be broken.’

However, all our members were positive about the collective effort of breaking the bias. ‘It’s important for us to celebrate our differences, our quirks, what makes us ‘us’. We should live in a world that’s free of stereotypes and discrimination. We should live freely and openly, without worry or fear of judgment.’ ‘Breaking the bias fosters a culture where differences and individuality are celebrated, which ultimately means that new ideas are brought to the table and creativity grows. But most importantly, breaking the bias will empower our women and girls, show them that they are equals, that their contribution matters and they can make a difference, and that they can do so without fear of retribution.’

There was agreement that ‘To break the bias means to be aware of one’s own biases, to transform one’s attitude towards gender stereotypes and to create systems designed to eliminate bias.’ It is a personal decision to fight for a collective goal.

## Can you share an example of a time you have broken the bias inside or outside of the workplace?

Whilst most are aware there is a long way to go to achieve gender equality, many of our members have already been taking steps to break the bias. Some have broken the bias in their personal lives. ‘I was one of the first young women to train in martial arts when I started 30 years ago (I was the only girl in the club then).’ ‘I’ve encouraged the participation and representation of females in sporting activities.’

These are things to be passed down within families. ‘Having been raised in a traditional European household, gender bias influenced all decisions, including decisions made by my parents as well as the community opinions. Men and women each had a defined role and we had to live within those limitations. Today, I raise my daughter to believe in herself and in her abilities, that through hard work she can succeed and achieve all her aspirations, regardless of her gender.’

Professionally many are in positions of leadership. One member is currently ‘training a team of men with their Marketing Plan. At first, they were surprised that I was leading the training sessions, however with time they have appreciated



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**Jodie Fardoe**  
Fortus



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**Sandra Ataman**  
McCarney Group

my knowledge and guidance.' 'There have been some meetings where men have been surprised that a women was the expert.' Others 'chaired various boards and mentored countless male and female young professionals'

Some workplaces have taken steps to ensure equality. 'We recruit a lot of female candidates and offer very flexible conditions, including working from home.' 'I break the bias every time I hire a candidate and read their resume to make a decision on whether I'll interview them before I read their name or the school they attended.' 'I think biases are broken everyday when the gender distinction remains unspoken, the less the distinction is made, the more equal things become. In the workplace, the only thing that matters is the value you bring and how you treat people. With my teams, being female or male is never a consideration, except in consideration of someone else's needs per time.'

Firms 'seek for a balance between personal and professional life, so that our female employees can continue their career in our company when having children (part time contracts, remote work) because we need to adapt our way of working to the evolution of the world.'

## **As we reflect on the last two years, and how life has changed, are there opportunities for women that have come from / that will come from the pandemic?**

Almost all our women agreed that opportunities have come from the pandemic, the key change being flexibility. Not only has this 'given many women the opportunity to prove themselves and show their employer how flexible we can be' but 'allows us to not have to take a step back or a break for family and continue to move forward in a career in a less rigid and male-dominated manner.' 'This shift could embolden women when they make requests for flexible working, so that their responsibilities out of the work place don't impact their career.'

Lots referred to the opportunities that had opened up due to remote working, seeing it as 'a great opportunity to combine personal lives and professional careers, to avoid exhausting journeys and be more efficient.' 'The prevalence of remote working may provide opportunities for those women with childcare responsibilities to balance home/work life more effectively - benefitting their own wellbeing and productivity for the organisations they work for.'

The pandemic for many has created a fresh start for equality. 'It has levelled the playing field for all employees as everyone is now working remotely and employers had to recognise that work can be done at all different hours of the day regardless if you are a working mother or a single man.' 'As we get back to business and start to rebuilt a 'new normal', we have opportunity to create an equal playing field for all regardless of gender, to build an inclusive and supportive infrastructure that will tear down the barriers that had previously held women back. We have a unique opportunity to re-invent office culture to make gender bias a thing of the past.'

'The last two years are proof that, although with challenges, we in fact are able to handle several things at a time, while also handling and taking care of ourselves. We have this natural ability to adapt and be creative, to embrace change in a more friendly way, even when this change means that our world is upside down.'



*We have this natural ability to adapt and be creative, to embrace change in a more friendly way, even when this change means that our world is upside down.*

**Maria Villamar**  
Acofi Villamar & Asociados

## What advice would you give to those starting out in the profession?

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*Be more open minded, and never accept the role that other people's bias would project onto you. Talk about your skills, your worth.*

“

*Find out your true passion and fearlessly work towards the goal.*

“

*Love the profession you practice, love yourselves and be at the service with values and ethics.*

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*Know that you bring to the table much more than a client or a project or a bill, you bring your knowledge, your skills, your essence and that deserves to be acknowledged and rewarded.*

“

*Be brave and confident and you will succeed, everyone has mistakes, mistakes are good if we learn from them.*

“

*Be confident in yourself and in your abilities, but recognise and accept that, in this profession, there is a lot of hands-on learning that takes place in the first few years, learning that was not attainable through textbooks. I encourage you to align yourself with positive role models within the accounting industry who can empathize and provide you advice as you navigate your way through this profession.*

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*To not give up. We have to climb the ladder and trust in the process. Thankfully there is more awareness about gender equality and work life balance nowadays.*

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*If you never try, you'll never know.*

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*In the workplace, you are a professional before you are male or female, show us what you have got. Your input and value will speak for you.*

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*Lead by example. Even small changes make an impact on others. Call out casual sexist tropes and office 'banter'. Challenge inappropriate behaviour wherever you see it.*

**84%**  
believed more  
could be done in  
the accountancy  
profession to  
support women

## What do think can be done?

Here our females highlighted the need for support. Gender equality requires more than just agreeing that women are equal, but support to empower and encourage. 'Provide equal opportunities to both junior and senior levels in terms of professional development and to encourage female involvement in leadership and management roles.' 'I would like to see more support given to women to help them overcome the unconscious bias that they face. Possibly through training and mentoring opportunities.'

Many pointed out that this needs to start sooner. Women should be supported in 'acquiring higher and better education' so that they are able to be somewhere for 'whatever qualification she possesses and not to fill a gender equality quota.'

Our females want women to feel confident in their resiliency 'by offering more inspirational sessions, having role models and for women leaders in the firm to share both their success stories and failures.' It was pointed out that in the accountancy profession 'the number of women included at leadership levels is significantly lower than that of men. Considering there are more women graduating from the accounting programs than men, something happens along the way that discourages women from continuing in this profession. We have been talking about this issue for many years, yet it persists. This means that we have not done enough to support women in the accounting profession. We need to convince our women that they belong in this profession, that there is a place for them around the boardroom table and that they do fit in well at the leadership level.'

Finally, it is important to celebrate gender differences, and use them to our advantage in the workplace. We should 'create more opportunities specifically for women in leadership roles and cultivate an environment that supports those individuals who embody our values, and ensure that they have the tools they need to succeed.' Ideas such as 'empowerment and coaching programs that really accompany women in their journey to discover what motivates them and what they want to be and accomplish.' This then 'endorses the journey of finding in themselves the knowledge, the skills and the power to become the best version they can be in any role of their lives.'

## What do you find is most important to working professionals today? Are priorities changing?

All our women agreed that what is important has shifted somewhat. 'I think priorities are changing in terms of both cultural and business contexts, mostly driven by women and their decisions to manage change.' There was an emphasis on personal growth, with people beginning 'to place higher value on the personal cost to that growth and self-actualisation.' Many referenced 'flexibility in work hours, perks that include family time, an improved quality of life.' 'Mental wellbeing - work/life balance. I think this is coming to the fore, as it should. The magnifying glass is on how people are feeling, inside and outside of work, and Covid has had a part to play in society 'opening up''

Beyond this desire for a work-life balance, many also referenced the need to feel motivated. 'I believe working professionals are not just after their pay-check but thrive to feel appreciated by their employer. They look for a challenge and want to feel motivated.' Priorities have changed to include 'proper training on professional and social grounds, motivation at work and team-building activities.'



*In the workplace, a woman is a professional before she is a woman, she is there for whatever qualification she possesses and not to fill a gender equality quota.*

Tyna Adediran  
Pedabo



'Priorities have evolved, independently from gender: organisation of working time, working from a distance, quality of working environment.' It is also important to note how this shift in priorities affects not only the female workforce. 'Since more people work from home sometimes it's hard to stop the workday - people work more than they ever did. We need to learn how to balance better in semi-virtual environments.'

This is especially true for the younger generations. 'Priorities are changing with Millennials and GenZ - they value their life outside of work and experiences in life over money.' 'It seems the expectations of millennials and Gen Z are quite different than those of previous generations. Previous generations valued promotion and compensation. Today's working professionals value flexibility, connectedness, and purpose. Working professionals are our future leaders and we need to understand their values and expectations in order to engage and retain them.'

'I think we have definitely learned to value having a job and learned to take care of it but also we learned the value of having time to do different things, to being able to work but also taking care of ourselves and doing what we like, the value of connecting with people, of having relationships that contribute to our life and the best version we want to build, we learned to value our physical spaces both at home and at the workplace. In the end I think we learned to value people, including ourselves, from a different perspective and with more kindness.'

## What are the top priorities when it comes to challenging and advancing gender equality and diversity at a senior level?

There was mass agreement that within businesses, there is a responsibility among senior leaders to support the advancement of gender equality. Our women advocated for 'access to career advisers and mentors who can provide on-going mentoring and coaching for professional development.' 'We must constantly reiterate the importance of personal development as well as skills enhancement on the job. Women who desire to sit in senior level management positions should be competent and capable of withstanding the demands of the positions, and this can be achieved through trainings and development sessions.'

'Everything starts at the top - there must be buy-in from the leaders. Next, we must continue to build culture, one of inclusivity, belonging and mindset. We should ask ourselves, when women look at those in leadership, do they see a place for them, do they believe that they will fit in? Finally, de-biasing our systems, changing our processes so that unconscious biases are not influencing our decisions.'

Finally, we were reminded of the limitations of promoting women without cause. 'I am not a proponent for advancement of women for the sole purpose of quota catch-ups. Where a woman is talented, promote her, equip and empower her to do even greater things, create opportunities for her to showcase her strengths and make a difference.' Instead dedicate time to training and supporting women and opening up opportunities.



*I think priorities are changing in terms of both cultural and business contexts, mostly driven by women and their decisions to manage change.*

Afwaz Alkhuzam  
Alkhuzam & Co.

**60%**  
have directly  
experienced  
gender  
inequality at  
work

## What do you believe can be done?

To finish, we asked our female leaders what they think the next steps should be going forward for the accountancy profession. International Women's Day exists not only to celebrate female achievements so far, but also campaign for greater change.

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*There is a long way to go. The number of women in senior leadership roles in this industry is improving, but it's not enough. Women need a seat at the table to drive the diversity agenda and to truly make a difference.*

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*Provide equal opportunities and involvement of women in accountancy at all levels, flexible work policy and gender pay equality.*

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*That professional associations disseminate events that recognise and value the contribution of women in the practice of the profession.*

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*More female super stars need to be identified and mentored to become partners in CPA firms - this has be done while giving them better ability to balance work and family life*

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*The accounting field should invest in some activities to catch them young.*

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*Developing plans and programs that allow women to be seen as much as men. Creating training platforms lead by and directed to women.*

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*Recognise that executive boards are so male dominated and understand why that is. Why aren't there equal ratios, and so many men in leadership positions compared to women. Make changes to address this.*

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*More accounting bodies and professional firms should adopt the diversity and women inclusion policies. This might take some time but as implementation gets better every year, we get closer to a world of gender equality.*



# Contributors

We would like to thank all contributors to the report for your genuine words.

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## Research methodology

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Morison Global wanted to celebrate International Women's Day 2022 in a meaningful way, with two events and a thought leadership piece. This report is built out of contributions from 24 individuals in 15 countries. This truly highlights the diversity of our members, both senior and junior, who have shared their successes and experiences, allowing us to celebrate inclusive and genuine leadership on a global scale.

The Morison Global Executive team reached out to female contacts within the association, with a set of interview-style questions for their direct contributions. In some cases the questionnaire link was circulated to other members of internal leadership teams. All contributions were welcomed and include professionals in all roles and at all levels. The resultant report uses interview-style questions to explore the personal and professional journeys of our contributors.

While 15 different countries are represented, we have found no material differences in responses with respect to culture or region. The report brings to light consistent themes and looks at how we can continue to break the bias in the accountancy profession in the future. We hope you have enjoyed reading this as much as we enjoyed reading the contributions; we have much to celebrate!

## Get in touch

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