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Special Edition on Women: Illuminating Progress

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SPECIAL EDITION ON WOMEN

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“From a global perspective, women have made progress. But by various measures of well-being, they have a long way to go. We also know that needs vary sharply even in the same country, and inequality in health and financial security remains an issue throughout the world.”

In the late 20th century, two groundbreaking events highlighted the need to empower older women: The United Nations sponsored the first International Day of Older Persons, and the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing.

Those watershed moments spread hope throughout the world. But the challenges they pointed to remain very much with us. So today, as we celebrate anniversaries of those inspirational events, we are publishing a special edition of AARP International's *The Journal*, dedicated to the theme of empowering women as they age.

From a global perspective, women have made progress. But by various measures of well-being, there is a long way to go. We also know that needs vary sharply even in the same country, and inequality in health and financial security remains an issue throughout the world. To give just one example, in the suburbs of Washington, DC, where I live, the life expectancy of a baby girl is 85 years. But if you were to drive a few hours to the nearby state of West Virginia, a baby girl is expected to live just to 73. That's a difference of 12 years of life, within just a few hundred miles.

Twenty-five years after the first International Day of Older Persons, certain observations can guide us forward:

- Empowering older women requires a long-term commitment with policies and strategies that recognize the diverse needs and multifaceted nature of the challenge. We must address issues of income, savings, health, education, and fraud and abuse, and understand that solutions to help one area can also help in others.
- We need better information to spotlight the problems facing older women in different societies. This must include more data from governments and international organizations, disaggregated by age and gender.
- Helping women, helps everyone. The majority of family caregivers are women, and helping provide income and respite can support their entire family.

Policymakers take note: Empowering older women on a global scale is unfinished business. In the following pages, you will find a wide range of insights and perspectives, from governments and NGOs to the business community, on the progress that has been made but also the work that remains to be done.

As we develop new ways to support women of all ages, we know that families across the globe will benefit.



Debra B. Whitman
CHIEF PUBLIC POLICY OFFICER, AARP

Debra Whitman, AARP's chief public policy officer, leads policy development, research, and global thought leadership to advance the interests of individuals 50+ and their families. An economist, Dr. Whitman is a strategic thinker dedicated to solving problems affecting economic and health security, among other aging issues. As staff director for the US Senate Special Committee on Aging, she worked across the aisle to increase retirement security, preserve a strong system of Social Security, lower health care costs, and protect vulnerable seniors. Dr. Whitman holds a master's and doctorate in economics from Syracuse University and bachelor's in economics, math, and Italian from Gonzaga University.

Women as Disruptors of Aging

Jo Ann C. Jenkins | CEO, AARP

As AARP's CEO, I'm fortunate to be following in the footsteps of one of our nation's great social innovators, Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, a retired high school teacher and the first female high school principal in California who founded AARP in 1958. After retiring as the principal of Lincoln High School in Los Angeles, Dr. Andrus began serving as a volunteer with the California Retired Teachers Association. She went to look up a former Spanish teacher whom she had been told needed some help. When she went to the address she had been given and knocked on the door, she was told that the woman she was looking for lived out back—in an old chicken coop. That was all the woman could afford after her food and medicine expenses were deducted from her \$40 a month pension.

Dr. Andrus was appalled and decided to do something about it. She was able to help the woman with glasses, dentures and some additional money to buy food. Then, with like-minded retired educators, she

began a campaign to get affordable medical insurance for retired teachers. At that time, most insurance companies assumed it was not financially sound to offer health insurance to older persons. When policyholders turned 65, they often found that their health and accident insurance was canceled, or that the premiums skyrocketed and were no longer affordable. But Dr. Andrus kept up the crusade.

In 1947, Dr. Andrus formed the National Retired Teachers Association, the forerunner to AARP. She began calling on insurance companies, urging them to develop a group health insurance plan for retired teachers. Over seven years she was turned down 42 times. But, her determination and diligence paid off. In 1955, Dr. Andrus finally found a company that would offer a plan to her members—creating the first group health insurance plan for people 65 and older in this country, a full decade before Medicare. The demand was enormous, and by 1957,

NRTA's health insurance program was an overwhelming success. It became so successful that the NRTA became inundated with requests from seniors across the country wanting to know how they could get health insurance for themselves. So, in 1958, Dr. Andrus founded AARP to make affordable group health insurance available to all older Americans.

Times have changed since Dr. Andrus began her crusade, but the role of women as leaders, innovators and role models for future generations has not; nor has the need to help and empower women to age successfully. Women today tend to live longer than men, are more likely to be primary caregivers to aging family members and friends, are more likely to need care and support as they age, are more likely to live alone, and generally have less in retirement savings and receive less in Social Security benefits.

And, yet, thanks to women leaders like Dr. Andrus, women today are living and aging better than ever

before. They are disrupting aging; demonstrating that our later years can be a time of growth. They are living proof that aging is about continuing to contribute to society and that women are not sitting on the sidelines, but are actively engaged in making life better for all members of society. By disrupting aging, they are changing the conversation in this country about what it means to grow older and, by the way they live, they are teaching younger women a new way to age.

About once a month, I have lunch with a group of girlfriends who range in age from their early 50s to mid-70s. As we sit and chat about what is going on in our lives, it always occurs to me that no one passing by our table would ever guess these women's ages. They all look fabulous, dressed to the nines in stylish outfits that reflect their exuberance for life.

It seems like every conversation is about plans for the future—upcoming trips, home renovations, adventures two years hence. We also share stories of struggles. But even then, a tone of optimism comes through that illustrates their clear sense that experience has value. Each one of them owns her age, not trying to be younger, but simply trying to be the best lawyer, doctor, teacher, business owner, lobbyist, grandmother, caregiver, or homemaker that she can be.

These women are realistic. They dish out straight talk and help each other face what's next. They know their needs are changing, and while they may not always like it, they face up to it. They are open to change and find strength in one another as they ponder downsizing, retirement and the unpredictable future.

Everyone in the group understands the rigors of family caregiving and recognize that they may need

help in providing care for a loved one. They also wonder who will provide care if and when they need it.

They love the idea of being up on the latest smart-phone or tablet, even though they may need help in figuring it out—but it's a learning experience they seek, not shun.

They are aware that as they get older, they will become more of a target for a scam or for identity theft, and they want to know how to protect themselves. And, they worry about increasing medical costs and how to meet them.

My girlfriends and I share these outlooks and attitudes with millions of women our age. Like most people, we're busy living our lives, curious about what the future will bring and doing our best to make the most of it. We're involved with our families, our friends, people in our communities. We don't stop and withdraw from society because we become a certain age. We understand that some aspects of life get a little tougher and some get a little easier as we get older, but it's all part of living, and we're determined to make the most of it.

Yes, times have changed since Dr. Andrus found that retired teacher living in a chicken coop, and thanks to her and others like her, women today have more opportunities to age successfully. At AARP, we are still on that journey that she began 57 years ago to fight for and equip people 50+ to live their best lives. I am proud to carry on Dr. Andrus' legacy. As more women take on roles as leaders, innovators, catalysts for change and role models for future generations, we will disrupt aging and empower more women to choose how they want to live and age in the future. ●



Jo Ann C. Jenkins

Jo Ann C. Jenkins
CEO, AARP

Jo Ann Jenkins is chief executive officer (CEO) of AARP. Prior to her appointment as CEO, she was the chief operating officer. Ms. Jenkins joined AARP in 2010 as president of AARP Foundation, AARP's affiliated charity. She previously served on and chaired the board of directors of AARP Services, Inc. Before coming to AARP, she was chief operating officer at the Library of Congress.

Older Women: A Global Snapshot

Today, there are half a billion women aged 60 and over around the world. With longer life expectancies, women comprise a larger share of the world's older population. Currently, older women outnumber older men by an estimated 66 million. Globally, women are more likely to be amongst the 'oldest old,' (85+) and are therefore more susceptible to age-related illness and financial insecurity over time. As the world's population continues to age, targeted action is required to address gender disparities and level the playing field for all.

Financial Security

While women are making important strides in the workplace, they face a number of employment challenges over the course of their lifetimes. Their participation in the labor market is lower than that of men's at every stage, and the gender gap is widest between ages 50 and 64. The result is greater financial insecurity in retirement.

Women's discontinuous careers pose the greatest threat to financial security. For example, women often serve as caregivers to their children, grandchildren, spouses, and parents, which requires them to leave the workforce or accept part-time work arrangements. This translates into shorter careers with fewer opportunities for advancement. The problem is exacerbated by income inequality, discrimination in the workplace, and the fact that women tend to work in lower skill, lower wage jobs.

According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, there is no country in the world where a woman earns as much as a man for

doing the same job. Globally, women earn 24 percent less than men.

As women grow as a percentage of the workforce, so too will the number of older women. Therefore, the challenges facing women will only compound if we do not take action. Policies available in some countries such as caregiving leave and grandparental leave are steps in the right direction, but there is still a great deal more to be done across the globe.

Health and Long-term Care

On average, women are more likely to require health and long-term care in retirement, though they are less able to access, or afford, either.

Women are more likely to be among the 'oldest old,' and inequalities in income and education mean that women are frequently unable to access the care and treatment they require, or attain the adaptive aids that make life easier.

Some health conditions which cause pain and disability in later life are

more prevalent in women. Globally, 64 percent of all blind people are women. While in developed countries, this is largely due to age, in low- and middle-income countries, poverty, restrictions on travel, lower levels of literacy, and a lack of family support means that many easily managed eye conditions go untreated.

Dementia also disproportionately affects older women, both in terms of prevalence and as a result of their role as caregivers. Women are more than two-and-a-half times more likely than men to be caregivers to people with dementia.

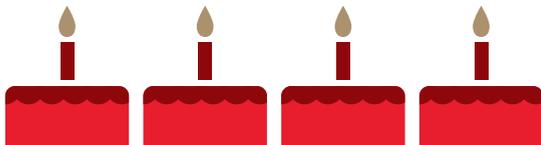
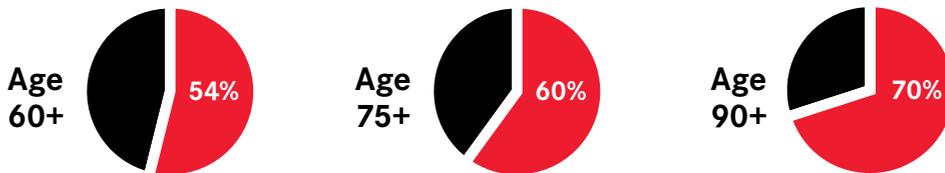
The lack of policies and political support for long-term services and supports disproportionately affect women who are more likely to use these services most and also provide unpaid care to others. Health and care systems need to adapt to an aging population to not put even more pressure on unpaid, female caregivers to fill the gap. ●

Demographics

Women outnumber men in older age groups and this imbalance increases with age.¹



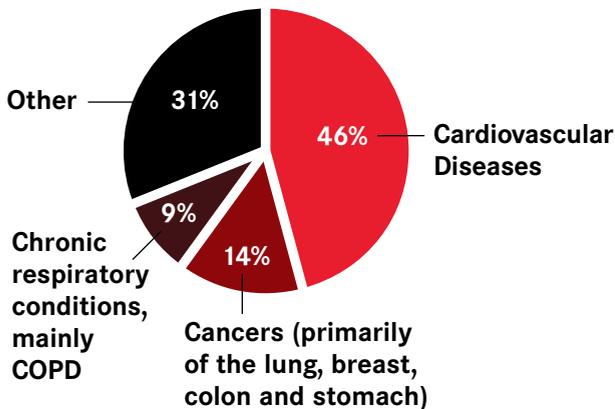
Women tend to live longer than men and so represent a higher proportion of older adults.²



Worldwide, women live an average of 4 years longer than men.³

Health Security

Cause of women's deaths globally:⁴



Privilege vs. Poverty

Privileged women may remain free of the health concerns that often accompany aging until well into their 70s and 80s. Others who endure a lifetime of poverty, malnutrition and heavy labor may be chronologically young but functionally "old" at age 40.⁵

Dealing with Dementia



Dementia causes 13% of years of healthy life lost among women over 60 years of age. Women with dementia also face an increased risk of depression and require substantial resources for care. Women are far more susceptible to developing dementia. Nearly two thirds of older people living with Alzheimer's disease are women. At the age of 65 women have a one in six chance of developing Alzheimer's disease compared with a 1 in 11 chance for men.⁶

Economic Security

Older women are more likely to become widows than older men.

They are also less likely to remarry.⁷ Widows invariably experience a reduction in income and are highly vulnerable to poverty.⁸

Older women are usually more vulnerable to discrimination.

This includes poor access to jobs and healthcare, lower pay, subjection to abuse, denial of the right to own and inherit property, and lack of basic minimum income and social security.⁹

Global Wage Gap

Women earn 76 cents on the dollar compared to men in similar jobs.¹¹



4. Age International
5. WHO
6. UNFPA
7. Age International
8. WHO

9. UNFPA
10. US Census Bureau
11. WEF
12. UNFPA
13. WHO

Caregiving

Older women around the world are also more likely than older men to be caregivers of children or sick relatives, particularly in families affected by migration or illness.¹²

Women are more than two and a half times more likely than men to be caregivers of people with dementia.¹³

“While we have seen positive trends in the advancement of women, there is a long way to go. Through smarter public policies that encourage education and support healthy lives, we can continue to level the playing field. We can better equip women and girls to live successful lives, because their success touches us all.”

Debra B. Whitman
CHIEF PUBLIC POLICY OFFICER, AARP

Older Women's Rights Are Human Rights: 20 Years after Beijing

Kathy Greenlee | ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR AGING;
ADMINISTRATOR FOR COMMUNITY LIVING, US DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

with

Cailin Crockett | SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR GENDER POLICY
AND ELDER RIGHTS, ADMINISTRATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING,
US DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The year 2015 brings a unique opportunity to further advance the human rights of women and older people. It also marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which called for specific progress toward gender equality on a global level. In the United States, 2015 also marks the 50th anniversary of the Older Americans Act, which was passed in 1965 at the urging of advocates for the independence and rights of older adults. This July, the White House Conference on Aging, which is held every decade, brought together older adults, advocates, and public and private partners to examine critical issues and policy initiatives on aging.

As the assistant secretary for aging, I have the distinct honor of bridging the worlds of domestic and foreign policy, as well as

gender and aging. As the world celebrates the progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, we are charting a new path for global development with the United Nations Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and it is critical that the interconnectedness of aging and gender be universally embraced.

Global demographics clearly illustrate this linkage. Worldwide, one in four women is over the age of 50. In the United States, 10,000 people are turning 65 every day, and by 2030, there will be 1.375 billion people worldwide over the age of 60. Around the world, older women outnumber men as they age, and the oldest old—generally defined as those 85 and older—are much more likely to be women.¹ Women are, and will continue to be, the majority of the older population.²

Across many key indicators of well-being in older age, including poverty status and exposure to violence, older women fare poorly compared with their male counterparts.³ When we look at the reasons behind poverty in old age for women, we see the same barriers to equality that women and girls encounter earlier in life: wage discrimination, unequal expectations of caregiving and raising children, financial exploitation, violence, and abuse. Gender disparities exist across the lifespan; they do not stop in later life. In fact, more often than not, the disparities are amplified as women age.

Despite this, older women are rarely visible in global gender policy, and aging is seldom discussed in the context of gender.

The Beijing Declaration was an exception. It recognized age

discrimination as a decisive barrier to women's empowerment and advancement, and it included a reference to the rising aging population.⁴ Accordingly, the Beijing Platform for Action specifically mentioned older women across six areas: women and poverty; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Recommendations for government and multilateral action were made in each of these areas, urging policy makers to recognize the human rights of women and girls throughout every stage of their lives.

It is disappointing that 20 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the particular commitments for older women are absent from the women's human rights agenda. For example, less than 6 percent of those surveyed in the 2013 World Health Organization (WHO) study on global violence against women were over the age of 50. In addition, one of the draft indicators for measuring the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for Gender Equality is data on the prevalence of violence against women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49.⁵ This age cut-off means that nearly one-quarter of the world's women will not be counted as part of the United Nations' agenda for the next era of global development. The age cut-off is due to limitations of existing data collection models, such as those based on the US Agency for International Development Demographic Health Surveys, which originated as a maternal and child health survey used for family planning programs.

We are charting a new path for global development with the United Nations Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and it is critical that the interconnectedness of aging and gender be universally embraced.

However, these surveys have come to play an important role in providing data for global development overall, and it is time for older adults to be counted in these surveys.

I am passionate about the issue of violence against older adults and their mistreatment. Elder abuse, including violence, neglect, or financial exploitation from a caregiver, intimate partner, or any other person with an expectation of trust, erodes the humanity in all of us. The more we study elder abuse, the more we understand that it predominantly affects women—and that's not simply because women outnumber men as they age.⁶ Domestic violence, which may begin in childhood and continue in marriage, is a common form of elder abuse. In some regions, extreme violence and abuse against older adults occurs as a result of local practices, such as the accusation of older women of witchcraft to deny them land rights, or to seize their property. Elder

abuse erodes the goals of aging: remaining independent and maintaining dignity.

It is no coincidence that the WHO finds that higher rates of elder abuse exist in countries where gender disparities between women and men are more acute; the cultural and social frameworks that marginalize women also tend to devalue older persons. It is imperative that future agendas for women's human rights intentionally include older women.

The United States has developed practical measures to address elder abuse both domestically and abroad. Catherine Russell, ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, leads the US Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, which defines violence against women and girls as occurring across the life cycle, and explicitly includes elder abuse.⁷ In 2010, the passage of the Elder Justice Act set an important

precedent for national efforts to prevent, detect, and prosecute elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It also established the Elder Justice Coordinating Council, which coordinates elder abuse work of the 12 federal departments and other government entities.

Recognizing the disproportionate impact of violence on older women, the lifelong impact of caregiving, and economic disparity, the White House Council on Women and Girls and the Office of the Vice President partnered with the White House Conference on Aging and my agency, the Administration for Community Living, to explore and encourage a lifespan approach to work on women's issues, from domestic violence to economic security. These important steps taken by the United States reflect the spirit of the original Beijing goals set forth 20 years ago and provide examples I hope others will use so that no one is left behind in the next phase of global development.

Since the landmark proclamation of "women's rights as human rights" at Beijing in 1995, advocates for global gender equality have made gains in advancing the notion that women's empowerment is an asset for development. So, too, is global aging. It is time we change the narrative based on the stereotype that as people live longer, they become burdens on their families and expenses on their nations' health systems. With the right policies and supports in place, older adults can—and do—make valuable contributions to their communities, economies, countries, and the world.

Delegates to the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing understood the intersection

between gender disparities and aging and carved out a place for older women in their platform. In celebrating progress, we must honor the commitments in the Platform that have gone unfulfilled. In the last 20 years, we have birthed a new generation of girls, and we have produced the next generation of elders. In continuing our work to honor the legacy of the Beijing Platform, we must celebrate them all. ●

¹ "Globally, women form the majority of older persons. Today, for every 100 women aged 60 or over worldwide, there are just 84 men. For every 100 women aged 80 or over, there are only 61 men." José Miguel Guzmán, Ann Pawliczko, Sylvia Beales, Celia Till, and Ina Voelcker, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and a Challenge* (New York: United Nations Population Fund and London: HelpAge International, 2012), 13.

² Ibid.

³ "In many situations, older women are usually more vulnerable to discrimination, including poor access to jobs and healthcare, subjection to abuse, denial of the right to own and inherit property, and lack of basic minimum income and social security." Ibid, 13. See also: <http://journal.aarpinternational.org/a/b/2014/06/2014-world-elder-abuse-awareness-day-older-women-and-poverty>.

⁴ "According to United Nations projections, 72 percent of the population over 60 years of age will be living in developing countries by the year 2025, and more than half of that population will be women." United Nations. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. 15 September 1995. Available from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

⁵ Technical report by the Bureau of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) on the process of the development of an indicator framework for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda. UNSC. March 2015. http://unngls.org/images/PDF/Technical_report_of_the_UNSC_Bureau_final.pdf

⁶ United Nations, *Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women* (New York: United Nations, 2013).

⁷ United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/196468.pdf>.



Kathy Greenlee

In 2009, Kathy Greenlee was appointed by President Obama as the assistant secretary for aging and administrator for community living of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Before her service at HHS, she served in Kansas state government for 18 years, including her service as Kansas secretary of aging.



Cailin Crockett

Cailin Crockett is special assistant for gender policy and elder rights at the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in the US Department of Health and Human Services, where she serves as international coordinator for ACL's global engagement on the human rights of older people.

Walking with Hope into the Future

Vanda Pignato | SECRETARY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION,
REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR

I would like to thank AARP for giving me the opportunity to write about a nation that, in my heart, is as important as my country of birth. It was in El Salvador where, by choice, I assumed the social commitment to fight for the most excluded and push for changes that lead us to justice and peace. I dedicate this article to the El Salvador that Monsignor Romero dreamed about.

Older Women in El Salvador

After ending a cruel and long civil war, El Salvador is still fighting to overcome poverty, gender violence, and social exclusion.

Like other Latin American countries, El Salvador is experiencing growth in the older population. Roughly 11 percent of El Salvador's population is age 60+.

In recent years, due to demographic changes, violence, and mass migration of young people, older adults have had to take on new roles. The last Census of Population and Housing estimates that at least 23 percent of Salvadoran families are run by older adults, 10 percent of whom are older women. There are significant



differences between male and female heads of households: while men exercise this role in the company of other adult family members, women do not have other support and usually lack benefits or income.

Older people do not have a decent pension. Only 20 percent of Salvadorans receive a contributory pension, and 5 percent receive a non-contributory pension. Because of this exclusion, at least 20 percent of older people work mainly in the informal sector (15 percent of men; 5 percent of women). It is further estimated

that at least 30 percent of these workers, particularly those ages 70+, perform unpaid caregiver work.

When it comes to education, 44 percent of older adults were considered illiterate (2007). This situation affects women more than men, at a rate of two to one. While mass literacy programs have reduced the illiteracy rate to 36 percent, El Salvador still must intensify efforts to ensure that older people have full access to education.

Let's examine the health disparities in El Salvador. The leading cause

of death in women is ischemic heart disease (10.27 percent), followed by diabetes mellitus (8.20 percent) and urinary system diseases (6.21 percent). Many of these diseases can first occur between the ages of 30 and 50, but more serious health complications can appear later in life. Therefore, health programs should be developed for younger people in order to prevent illness later in life.

Social Programs and Older Women: The Beginning of a New Hope

In 2009, the government created the new position of secretary for social inclusion. This role was designed to eradicate discrimination and promote social inclusion and participation of different population groups, in particular older adults and women.

In 2011, the secretary introduced two new programs targeting human rights: Ciudad Mujer (City Women), which provides comprehensive services that strengthen the exercise of fundamental rights, and Nuestros Mayores Derechos (Our Older Person Rights), which encourages institutions to provide specialized services for older people in order to improve their quality of life and ensure basic human rights.

Ciudad Mujer services are provided by six offices located throughout the country, through four modules: sexual and reproductive health, comprehensive care to gender violence, economic empowerment and advocacy, and child care. The latter is offered to mothers or caregivers, including older women.

At the time of this writing, Ciudad Mujer had treated a total of 229,903 women. Of these, 16,439 were older women. In order of popularity,



sexual and reproductive health services accounted for 54 percent of services, followed by economic empowerment (16 percent) and legal assistance (8 percent).

Improving income is a relevant issue in the lives of older women. At least 1,789 women received training courses for family enterprises, and at least 146 women were considered for grant loans for productive projects. This is a major challenge because the banking system generally does not provide these services to older people working in the informal sector.

When it comes to legal assistance, most women sought advice on identity issues resulting from a missing or destroyed birth certificate, or settlement errors. In these cases, women are usually referred to the most appropriate legal alternatives.

Ciudad Mujer also performs a number of services that best address older women's concerns: income assurance, proper health services, domestic violence prevention, respectful attitudes toward women, and nutrition counseling.

With regards to violence, there is a very low demand for this service from older women, even though they may experience it and seek alternative

treatments. Ciudad Mujer faces a big challenge with this issue because of the very specific characteristics that distinguish violence against older women from violence against other age groups.

The program Nuestros Mayores Derechos has also assisted about 70,000 older persons across the country. Some program highlights include the following:

- For the first time in El Salvador's history, 35,000 older adults received a noncontributory pension. Over half (58 percent) of the recipients were women, who mainly used the pension for family nutrition and health care.
- More than 29,000 older adults living in rural areas received medical attention from the Ministry of Health, including medical diagnoses, prescription drugs, health training, and increased emphasis on disease prevention.
- About 37,500 older adults benefited from literacy programs (66.7 percent women; 33.3 percent men).



- A new law promotes the right of identity for older people, a proposed new law targets older people, and the Organization of American States recently approved the Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons.
- Older adults have the opportunity to participate in new cultural programs at facilities with improved accessibility. More than 5,000 older adults have participated in the programs, which include dance, theater, music, and art.
- New strategies led to the improvement of 54 nursing homes across the country. Nonprofit organizations provided food delivery services, improved hygiene tools, caregiver training, and improved infrastructure and equipment.
- Community orchards provide opportunities for older people to grow a variety of products both for consumption and for sale. This project strengthens three

basic rights: to ensure an income for a decent living, to improve nutrition, and to encourage community participation.

- A training program focusing on basic care, crisis management, and mental health for women in caregiver roles recognizes that improving the life of older persons must start through improving the quality of life of family caregivers and the community.

A Path that Must Continue

The Constitution of El Salvador and international human rights treaties are clear in stating that all people have the same rights, free from any type of discrimination. However, an older woman faces many forms of discrimination that leave her in a precarious situation with an uncertain future.

Working toward achieving the rights of older women in El Salvador is a complex challenge: ignorance and fear of aging translate into poor services that do not respond well to the realities and needs of this population.

While the programs driven by the Secretary of Social Inclusion have opened new hope to strengthen the regulatory framework and improve the care of this group from a human rights perspective, there is still more work to do to reduce the inequities women face as the result of a long history of discrimination.

I want to thank all of these brave women that, even after a lifetime of discrimination, continue to embrace life with hope and strength. They are my inspiration to continue down this path. ●



Vanda Pignato

Vanda Pignato serves as secretary of social inclusion for the Republic of El Salvador, where she works to develop public policies to protect, preserve, and strengthen the human rights of traditionally excluded groups in the country. In 2011, she implemented the Ciudad Mujer program, which offers specialized services for women and seeks to make a positive impact on the well-being of all women. She was also named as chair of the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women.

Gender Equality in France

Claire Aubin | COUNSELOR FOR LABOR, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL
ISSUES, EMBASSY OF FRANCE TO THE UNITED STATES

France has the highest fertility rate in the European Union, as well as one of the highest employment rates of women with children: 84 percent of French mothers with one child under the age of 3 are working mothers.

France has a longstanding commitment to gender equality. It is an essential component of equality, one of the cornerstones of the French Republic. Our country played an active role in the preparation and unfolding of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 20 years ago. France has embraced the

Beijing agenda and is highly committed to its implementation.

In the past 20 years, France has stepped up its efforts to make gender equality a reality. A recent significant development was the 2014 adoption of the *“Loi pour l’égalité réelle,”* one of the most comprehensive pieces of French legislation ever passed to address inequalities between men and women in all key areas of life.

Gender equality policies in France are designed and implemented in a way that values freedom of choice: the aim is not to promote a specific lifestyle or family type. On the contrary: everyone, men and women alike, should be able to choose how they want to live, if and when to have children, and how to balance their time among work, family, private, and public life.

An Extensive Policy Framework to Help Reconcile Work and Family Life

France is recognized as being women- and family-friendly, with a high level of female participation in the labor market. This is largely due to its strong child care policy and to a generally positive image of working mothers.

Women in France are entitled to a 16-week maternity leave while receiving their full salary. Beginning with the third

child, the length of this leave is extended to 26 weeks. Men are also entitled to a fully paid paternity leave of 11 days in order to promote their involvement in parenting from the very beginning.

France has also developed a comprehensive, affordable system of high-quality child care and preschool services. Child care services represent 1.6 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Subsidized nurseries (*"crèches"*) managed by local authorities, businesses, or parent associations welcome infants from the age of 2 months. There are also registered child care providers (*"assistantes maternelles"*) who take infants into their private homes. Parents who chose the latter option or who prefer to hire a nanny to work in their own homes receive a monthly allowance, the amount of which varies according to the family's income.

Then, from the age of 2 or 3, children can start nursery school, a French institution that was established in 1881. Preschool is free and benefits 95 percent of children between the ages of 3 and 6.

All of these measures have worked well: France has the highest fertility rate in the European Union, as well as one of the highest employment rates of women with children: 84 percent of French mothers with one child under the age of 3 are working mothers. The child care system is not only a way to help parents reconcile work and family life; it is also a way to promote equal opportunities for children from lower-income families.

With an aging population, the care of dependent older parents is also becoming an increasingly important issue, and broader options are necessary. The French government recently passed a law providing for family leaves of up to 3 months, as well as a 21-day end-of-life support allowance, to help men and women care for dependent family members.

Free Choice for Sexual and Reproductive Health

Empowering women with the ability to control their sexual and reproductive life is fundamental to achieving gender equality. Contraception has been legal in France since 1967 and abortion since 1975. In 2013, France adopted legislation requiring the government to pay for all legal abortions, as well as contraception for girls between 15 and 18. For adult women, most contraceptives are reimbursed by the National Health Insurance Scheme.

The holistic French approach to reproductive health care has proved effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies, especially among teenagers,¹ while leading to an increase in the nation's birth rate. With nearly two children on average per woman, France has the highest fertility rate in the European Union. The quality of care is also reflected by the low infant mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio.

Promoting Equality in the Workplace

Women's participation in the labor force has continuously increased over the past 2 decades. It is currently 67 percent, up from 58 percent in 1990. The French government is committed to equalizing the male and female employment rate by 2025.

The first law on equal pay and gender equality in employment dates back to 1972. No fewer than 12 pieces of legislation were passed between 1972 and 2014. As in many other fields, the main issue is to make the law a reality. In 2014, France's gender wage gap was 14 percent, compared with 15.5 percent on average in the OECD countries.

Initiatives relating to the equal treatment of working men and women were hampered for a long time by a persistent

lack of awareness and commitment. That situation led to the establishment of enforcement mechanisms in 2010. Companies that do not show progress on workplace equality face monthly fines of up to 1 percent of their payroll. In addition, companies that fail to respect legal requirements in terms of gender equality cannot access public procurement processes.

Advancement toward Gender Equality in Decision Making

The French Constitution was amended in order to introduce the goal of gender parity in elective positions, as well as in social and professional responsibilities. After much debate, quotas were adopted to increase women's participation in key areas of decision making.

In 2011, it was determined that the number of women serving on corporate boards had to reach at least 20 percent by 2014 and 40 percent by 2017.² So far, results have exceeded expectations: in 2014, 56 percent of the board members appointed by large companies³ were women, bringing the total number of female board members to 30 percent, a higher number than required by law.

In politics, quotas for candidate lists for local elections dramatically increased women's presence in elected office: in 1999, women accounted for 27.5 percent of the members of regional councils⁴ in France. They account for 48 percent today. Moreover, women make up 50 percent of the current Cabinet.

This makes France the third-largest OECD country in terms of the number of female government ministers in 2015.

Work on Progress: From Legal Equality to Real Equality

Beyond legislation, addressing gender stereotypes is key to progressing toward real equality. Gender stereotypes in education and media is a new area of public awareness, debate, and policy development. The French broadcasting authorities have been tasked with improving the image of women in the media. Targets have been set and are monitored on a yearly basis.

Education is another area where it is possible to fight stereotypes early on. It starts with the training of teachers and continues with the students. In addition to programs that encourage more girls to enter technical and scientific fields, a pilot project was recently implemented in primary schools to educate young children on gender issues and counter gender stereotypes.

We might not yet have achieved perfect gender equality. But there is a strong political will, which is evident in recent results.

In the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum,⁵ France was one of the countries with the highest improvement relative to its score in 2006. It ranked 16th out of 142 countries and 1st in women's health and education.

As emphasized 20 years ago in Beijing, human rights are women's

rights and women's rights are human rights. France is determined to make this a reality on its own soil and will resolutely contribute, regardless of the challenges, to make it a reality all over the world. ●

¹ The teenage pregnancy rate in France is 3 per 1,000, while it is 4 times higher in Great Britain and 10 times higher in the United States.

² This applies to boards of publicly listed companies, as well as unlisted companies with more than 500 workers and average revenues or total assets of more than 50 million euros during the past 3 consecutive years.

³ More than 1 billion euros in capital.

⁴ Elected assembly of a region.

⁵ The Global Gender Gap Index ranks 142 countries on the gap between women and men on health, education, economic, and political indicators.



Claire Aubin

Claire Aubin is currently counselor for labor, health, and social issues at the Embassy of France to the United States. She was the French general rapporteur for the Fourth World Conference on Women and was then elected to the Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations, where she sat as the French representative from 1995 to 1997.

Women at the Center of Our Economic Activity

Muhammad Yunus | FOUNDER, GRAMEEN BANK;
DIRECTOR EMERITUS, GRAMEEN FOUNDATION

THIS UN WOMEN OP-ED APPEARED ONLINE ON OCTOBER 1, 2014, AT UNWOMEN.ORG. IT IS REPRINTED, BELOW, FOR THIS SPECIAL EDITION OF *THE JOURNAL*.

In the last 60 years or so, we have seen capitalism reach its peak. We have seen the socialist economies fall away and move rapidly towards capitalism. This has undoubtedly brought unprecedented wealth and prosperity in many parts of the world and to many people. At the same time, millions if not billions, have been left behind.

We have seen the deep financial crises grip the world economy since 2008 and we have seen huge numbers of people become unemployed even in the so-called prosperous countries of the West. These crises and the resulting social problems starkly show-up the failings of the global capitalist system. I believe these crises give us an opportunity to design things for the better.

Profit-centered business has not been able to solve human problems, and in some cases has made them worse. I have been advocating for the creation of social business, a non-dividend company to address human



problems, as the way forward. One of the features of social business is that it puts women at the center of economic activity.

Grameen Bank, which is the first social business that we embarked upon in 1976, today serves more than 8.4 million borrowers, 94 percent of whom are women, and is the only rural bank that is owned entirely by

its borrowers. It proved for the first time that the poor, and especially the women among them, were not only bankable but usually more bankable than the rich. More than 200 million people, mostly women, now have access to microcredit around the world, and studies show they have brought a host of positive impacts to their families and their communities.

When I look back, I would say that the silent revolution that we created through microcredit and social business in Bangladesh has been due in large part to the central role played by women in all these activities.

It is almost 40 years now since we began. We kept looking at the children of our borrowers to see what the impact of our work has been on their lives. The women who are our borrowers always gave topmost priority to the children. One of the “Sixteen Decisions” developed and followed by Grameen Bank borrowers was to send children to school. Grameen Bank encouraged them, and before long all the children were going to school. Many of these children made it to the top of their class. We began providing scholarships to meritorious students and education loans to those who attained higher education. These strides took place because the borrowers of the bank were women.

Over the years, we created a series of social business companies to address different problems faced by the poor in Bangladesh. Whether it is a company to provide renewable energy or a company to provide healthcare or yet another company to provide information technology to the poor, the main agent for change has been the woman.

When I look back, I would say that the silent revolution that we

created through microcredit and social business in Bangladesh has been due in large part to the central role played by women in all these activities. This is attested to the fact that the impact of microcredit has resulted not only in an increase in household income and household savings, but also an increase in women's empowerment, reduced maternal mortality, reduced child mortality, brought down family size, and ensured that millions of children have gone to school, creating a new generation very unlike the previous one. The experience of Grameen Bank and the social business is a microcosm of what can happen globally if we put women at the center of our economic and social activity.

The 20th anniversary of the ground-breaking 1995 Beijing Women's Conference is the appropriate time for us to reaffirm our commitment to continue to empower women, both economically and socially, not only for their sake but for the sake of the future well-being of our children and their children after that. ●



Muhammad Yunus

Muhammad Yunus is the father of social business and microcredit. He is the founder of Grameen Bank and more than 50 other companies in Bangladesh. In March 2012, *Fortune Magazine* named him “one of the greatest entrepreneurs of our time.” He is the recipient of 55 honorary degrees from universities across 20 countries and is one of only seven individuals to have received the Nobel Peace Prize, the US Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the US Congressional Gold Medal.

Equality for Women of All Ages

Toby Porter | CEO, HELPAGE INTERNATIONAL

The current attention given to gender equality and female empowerment, not least its inclusion as a standalone goal in the recently adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goal framework, is extremely welcome and long overdue. Ending and reversing multiple forms of discrimination against women is not only an essential step from a human rights perspective, but it will also make positive impacts on the wider health, education, and economic status of families and communities.

But how often do we see older women, or even women aged 50 and over, portrayed in the context of this global gender equality agenda? Can anyone argue anything other than hardly ever? Indeed, after a lifetime of gender-based discrimination, older women seem to be suffering the final indignity of being excluded from the movement to bring about the equality they have been denied throughout their lives, this time on account of age discrimination.

There is no excuse for this. Women aged 50 and over already account for 23.6 percent of the world's female population. Yet, they seem almost entirely invisible within discussions on gender equality in both the developed and the developing world. Development discourse in particular offers little to older women, as does the public imagery associated with programming on gender equality and women's empowerment in the global south.

Women aged 50 and over are not even being counted. Data sets both confirm and reinforce the exclusion of older women. For example, Demographic and Health Surveys simply stops collecting data on gender-based violence for women at age 49. This is despite documented evidence that women of all ages may be subjected to violence, neglect, and other forms of abuse—some specific to their age—and may be deprived of basic goods and services.



The accumulation of gender-based discrimination over a lifetime, intersecting with discrimination based on old age, can have a devastating effect on older women's lives in multiple ways.

Let's take health, for example. Multiple pregnancies and poor support in childbirth, compounded by disadvantage and inequalities in early life (e.g., lack of access to health care, inadequate nutrition and schooling, and lower income levels), contribute to poor health outcomes for many women in low- and middle-income countries. Reproductive health problems, including incontinence and other conditions specifically associated with poor maternal health care or female genital mutilation in childhood, have been shown to continue into advanced age.

But older women face specific health challenges as well. As many more women are living decades beyond menopause, there is an increased risk of hormone-related conditions, such as osteoporosis and associated fracture, while other lifestyle factors increase risk of heart disease

and stroke. As HelpAge International has often observed, the diagnosis and management of common noncommunicable diseases like cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, which disproportionately affect older people, are poor across the developing world, despite population aging which increases the number of people at risk. Women's longer life expectancy makes this of particular concern to older women.

When it comes to income, older women also tend to pay a financial price for the accumulated impact of gender discrimination. Throughout every stage of life, women represent a disproportionate percentage of the workforce of caregivers and informal sector workers who contribute a vast—yet unacknowledged—amount to their communities, families, and economies. Women are often actually penalized for this role in their social status—a phenomenon referred to as the “care penalty.”

Those women who do work outside the home are likely to earn less than men, a gap that only widens with age. The fact that women often have reduced access to

Twenty years ago, the 1995 Beijing Declaration at the end of the Fourth World Conference on Women recognized age discrimination as one of the factors contributing to the barriers to women's empowerment and advancement.

paid work, receive lower wages, and are more likely to work in the informal sector means they have less opportunity to gain any meaningful pension entitlements. Large gender gaps are evident in pension benefits, with the largest gaps for women with children. Women also have less access to land and other assets than men. In India, 60 percent of women have no valuable assets to their name, compared with 30 percent of men.

The likelihood a woman will experience widowhood on account of longer life expectancy is amplified in many developing countries by social norms that dictate marriage at an early age for women. Global population data sets show women clearly outnumber men in every age category after 49. One obvious consequence of this is that older women are significantly less likely than older men to be able to count on their spouses for home-based care in their later years.

Widowhood can further pose a major transitional change for many older women, coupled with financial threats. In many countries and communities, discriminatory laws, policies, and attitudes toward widows can seriously disadvantage women's access in older age to material, financial, and natural resources.

Violence against women tends not to stop in older age. Instead, it becomes less visible. In Central Asia, older women report very high levels of shame in being

subjected to violence by their children, typically characterized by physical and financial abuse. Older women experience rape in conflict settings. Focus groups conducted by HelpAge International have consistently revealed painful and private patterns of abuse, and revealed high levels of mental, financial, and physical abuse in a range of settings.

As stated earlier in this article, data systems that record sexual and physical violence against women are most often limited to the age range of 15-49, perpetuating a long-discredited notion that violence is perpetrated only on women of childbearing age.

Very little data are collected on older women's gendered experience of abuse, including financial and emotional violence or neglect. This critical information gap conceals patterns of violence against postmenopausal women, resulting in their subsequent exclusion from prevention and rehabilitation policies and programs.

So what needs to be done? Twenty years ago, the 1995 Beijing Declaration at the end of the Fourth World Conference on Women recognized age discrimination as one of the factors contributing to the barriers to women's empowerment and advancement. The challenges that older women face were referenced in eight places in the declaration under health concerns, reproductive and sexual health issues, laws against gender

discrimination in the workplace, and policies and programs on HIV/AIDS, as well as information, programs, and services to help women understand and adapt to the changes associated with aging. In December 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reaffirmed the need to address the concerns and rights of older women with the introduction of General Recommendation 27 on older women and protection of their human rights.

But despite this victory, overall progress is slow. Substantive equality for older women is far from being a reality. Specific examples of this neglect are the following:

- The 2015 analysis of 131 member states' national implementation reports for the Beijing Declaration 20-year review revealed that only 21 reports (16 percent) made any reference to older women or aging.
- Older women were wholly missing from the debate about the achievements of Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.
- While there has been broad acknowledgment across civil society groups that the Sustainable Development Goals framework should be inclusive of older women, the language of the outcome document is less inclusive than the language of the Beijing Declaration 20 years ago, which talked about "women and girls of all ages." While the SDG framework has been a significant and welcome step forward for older people,

on gender we must consider anything less than Beijing essentially regressive.

HelpAge International welcomes the strong focus on women and girls as a global development priority, but we believe older women fall within an unwitting but serious blind spot. We therefore want to see much higher visibility of older women in national and global data sets, and much more systematic efforts to ensure their inclusion in development planning and programs.

The three priorities that global and national policy makers must focus on are as follows:

1. Commitment to and investment in collection, analysis, and publication of data on women beyond reproductive age
2. Building the evidence base around the specific nature and prevalence of violence, discrimination, and other abuses that millions of women currently experience in later life
3. Age-inclusive development and humanitarian planning, policies, and programs supporting and promoting older women's health and economic, social, and political empowerment, and reducing abuse of older people.

Quick and concrete progress across these three priorities should not be difficult. The most important first step is recognition and understanding that age discrimination, like gender discrimination, is widespread, deep-rooted, and harmful.

HelpAge International would love nothing more than to see these two forms of discrimination tackled together, so that we can all work together to achieve equality for women of all ages. ●



Toby Porter

Toby Porter is the chief executive of HelpAge International, a global network of organizations working to help older women and men claim their rights, challenge discrimination, and overcome poverty in older age. In June 2014, he joined the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Aging for 2014-16, and represented HelpAge International at the 2014 and 2015 annual meetings of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Women in Government: A Slow March Toward Progress

Laura A. Liswood | SECRETARY GENERAL,
COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS

The legitimacy of any government demands the full representation of both men and women.

When asked if I think there is a glass ceiling for women in politics or business, I frequently say, “there is no glass ceiling; it is just a thick layer of men.” This is most true in government, both for those who are elected to political office, such as parliamentarians or heads of state, and those who are appointed, such as ministers in cabinet.

How much progress has been made for women in the political arenas, and what challenges do they continue to face? Perhaps more importantly, why should it matter if there is representational disconnect between the people in power and the people they represent?

In 1994 and 1995, I made it my mission to interview every living female president and prime minister in the world. My reasons for pursuing this goal were twofold: I wanted to attend the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing, and the Center for Women in Politics at

Rutgers University had published the first-ever study on US state legislator gender differences in legislative styles and constituent interactions. I wondered whether these data would translate if we elected a woman president in the United States. What might change?

I requested interviews with all 15 women leaders who were then or had been president or prime minister, and not one turned me down for an interview. Well, Margaret Thatcher asked me to “come back after you have met everyone else.” Lady Thatcher was as good as her word, and I interviewed her after meeting the other 14 leaders. My cumulative efforts resulted in a book and video documentary, *Women World Leaders, 15 Great Politicians Tell Their Stories*. More importantly, these women leaders created a Council of Women World Leaders, which has 59 members and is affiliated with the UN Foundation. Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė is its current chair.

Progress has occurred. There are more women heads of state and government than ever, though usually no more than 15 or so sitting at any one time. According to UN Women, the number of women in ministerial posts has now reached 17.2 percent, up from 16.1 percent in 2008. The number of women in parliaments is at a record high of 21.8 percent, likely fueled by the increasing number of countries that impose affirmative quota mechanisms.

UN Women and the InterParliamentary Union also report an increase in the number of women holding ministerial portfolios in the nontraditional ministries such as defense, foreign affairs, and environment versus the more typical social affairs, education, and women's affairs positions. Margot Wallström, former chair of the Council's Ministerial Initiative, and now foreign minister of Sweden, has even adopted a groundbreaking "feminist foreign policy." And of course, at 59 years of age, the fabulous managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, is comfortable challenging both financial and gender perceptions.

Progress can be found, but one has to ask about the pace of that progress. According to Saadia Zahidi, author of the World Economic Forum's highly informative Gender Gap Report, it will take at least 80 more years to come close to gender parity, perhaps even longer for political participation. According to the 2014 Gender Gap Report, only 21 percent of the political empowerment gap has closed when looking across 134 countries. Compare this figure to 60 percent closure of economic gaps, 92 percent closure of education gaps, and 96 percent closure of health gaps.

Nordic countries such as Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are at the top of the rankings. In fact, the world's first female president hails from Iceland. President Vigdis Finnbogadóttir shared the story of the time she spoke to young children during her presidency, and they believed that only women could be president while men had to ask for the same permission!

Given the lack of closure of political gaps, there are still barriers and challenges for women in government, whether elected or appointed. Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox's seminal books *It Takes a Candidate* and

It Still Takes a Candidate show that men run for political office more often than women do, and men receive more party support than women.

The authors found that, in the United States, 59 percent of men and 43 percent of women have considered running for office. While women would consider running for a school board, men have their sights set on the governor's office. In some parts of the world, cultural barriers persist, as do legal barriers such as not having the right to vote or run for office. Even the mere challenging of cultural norms by seeking a voice in the public sphere can put a woman's personal safety at risk.

Men are seen as more entitled to be in the public sphere than women. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and the Media looked at thousands of general-rated movies and found that crowd scenes were 86 percent men and 14 percent women. This is a subtle cue that men's proper place is in the public space and women's proper place is in the private world.

Men do not lack for confidence in their perception of ability to lead or entitlement to centrality of power, something that sociologists refer to as "positive illusion." When asked to pick a body type that most closely resembles their own, men picked a body type two times more attractive than their own. Women, on the other hand, picked a body type two times less attractive than their own. Men tend to overestimate their abilities by 30 percent, while women underestimate their abilities. However, overconfidence can have a dark side, leading to takeovers, overreaching financial risks, or engagement in violent "shock and awe"-style conflicts.

Most of the women I interviewed said they were over scrutinized for their dress, hair, voice, and body type rather than their policies. Almost 20 years after my initial interviews, former prime minister of Australia Julia Gillard was famously bombarded by misogynist and sexist comments by her opponent and the press.

Our archetype of what leaders look like is generally male, not female. To this day, men are seen as the white knight to the rescue and women are to be rescued like Cinderella. As the research organization Catalyst says, the mindset is still "think leader, think male." But that mindset is changing.

Older women are a source of tremendous power in the political and government sphere, even more so than in the corporate world.

Why does gender parity in the political and governmental process matter? Some might argue that men can represent universal issues, and perhaps some men can. However, the legitimacy of any government demands the full representation of both men and women. This is often the argument for quotas, and though they may be controversial, they are helping what I call “hurry history.” They move cultures in a way that “natural progression” does not seem to be able to do.

Women and men do experience the world differently. For example, 72 percent of Australian senior executive men think much progress is being made for women in corporations. Seventy-one percent of senior executive women disagree with that statement. Women in most societies live a different life than men; women in power can bring those experiences to bear.

MIT researchers such as Esther Duflo have evaluated the impact of requiring one-third of all local council seats in India be reserved for women. Over time, with this critical mass, budgets have shifted toward more funding for health care and

education. Interestingly, the preference for sons over daughters goes down when women are seen as more influential in society.

I firmly believe that older women are a source of tremendous power in the political and government sphere, even more so than in the corporate world. Women don’t age out in politics and government. In fact, they are often seen as experienced, confident, and worldly, with energy to focus on their passion. When faced with overly confident men, they mentally roll their eyes and move on. Former female presidents and prime ministers like Mary Robinson of Ireland, Tarja Halonen of Finland, Jenny Shipley and Helen Clark of New Zealand, and Vaira Freiberga of Latvia are all now working on issues of global importance, particularly focused on women and girls, human rights, and the environment. They hold major positions of power at the UN and other international organizations. As senior leaders, they are on the world stage acting with confidence and using their experience and entitlement to lead, and strong voice to improve society. ●



Laura A. Liswood

Laura A. Liswood is the secretary general of the Council of Women World Leaders, composed of women heads of state and government. Previously, she was managing director of global leadership and diversity for Goldman Sachs. She holds a BA, MBA, and JD, and is the author of the books *The Loudest Duck*, *Women World Leaders*, and *Serving Them Right*.

Data: Beyond Information to the Human Voice

Vanessa Liston | COFOUNDER AND CEO, CIVIQ

The United Nations (UN) Post-2015 Development Agenda has sharpened the global focus on the need for more comprehensive data on issues related to aging and older people.

As demographics are shifting toward a large increase in the proportion of the population that is 60+ by 2050, aging is becoming an important factor to include in policies for achieving sustainable societies. To address this new demographic challenge, decision-making bodies are calling for a “transformative agenda for official statistics”¹ that leads to significant improvement in the breadth and depth of statistics on aging at national levels as well as *new and alternative data types*. New data can supplement official data to support policy and program development and respond to the future needs as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

This “transformative agenda” is a valuable opportunity to expand the knowledge base on older people and older women in particular.

Yet, in producing more data and statistics, it is important that we also transform the way we think about and use this information. Current data paradigms are focused on information about older people in the form of statistics on households, income, health, isolation, and other variables. These data are seen as an important tool for decision makers to understand needs and progress on key development and social indicators. However, if we assume the situation of perfect and complete scientific data, we are still left with many gaps in getting from data to policies and programs that improve these indicators. One of the most important gaps in this respect is knowledge on public opinion. Public opinion has a particular relevance for older women, as it is a significant contributory factor in discriminatory and/or exclusionary practices and policies. In addition, for complex policy issues such as aging, where there are competing interests and demands on resources, public opinion plays a critical role in achieving sustainable policy.

FIGURE 1: DATA FOR POLICY PROCESSES



One of the most important advances we could therefore make for more effective policy using scientific data is a radical revision of the way we understand and measure public opinion. Currently, survey methods help us understand the frequency and distribution of particular attitudes, but they do not improve our understanding of how people perceive and think about issues. Indeed, the limitations of random-sampled surveys have been acknowledged by research bodies such as the Pew Research Center, which is innovating new types of public opinion knowledge including YouGov’s panel surveys. This innovative drive, together with the transformative agenda for statistics, provides a unique opportunity to extend the data paradigm with new knowledge to support the inclusion and empowerment of older people.

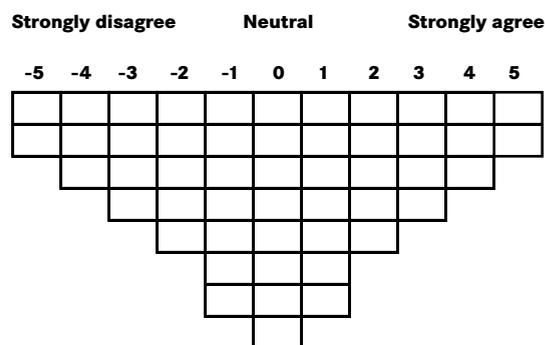
With this new knowledge, we could advance from a place where objective data are the primary focus of data collection to a new stage where empirical visibility of the subjective human voice is also prioritized. With subjective knowledge, we could ask: What are the rich and complex ways people perceive their circumstances and those of others? How can we engage these different perspectives to problem solve and co-create innovative policy? How can we learn from data and information on social perspectives shared across regions over time? These questions can be addressed using a methodology that studies subjectivity—Q-method.

Transparency on Social Perspectives

Q-method was developed in 1953 by physicist and psychologist William Stephenson² to study people’s subjectivity or perspective. It is, in his words, a “scientific, objective approach to the investigation of self.”³ The method demonstrates how a person’s viewpoint can be “observed” by individuals engaging in an activity that draws out how they think about the issue at hand. This activity is the relative ranking of a representative sample of statements (40–60) from a flow of public opinion that has captured *all possible* opinion types that could be expressed on that issue. To identify the full range of social perspectives on an issue, a diverse set of stakeholders⁴ (15–20) rank-order the statements relative to

each other in a particular bell-shaped distribution (see figure 2) that is scaled (for example, from -5 to +5).

FIGURE 2: SAMPLE Q-SORTING BELL-SHAPED GRID



The way each stakeholder ranks the set of statements is known as a “Q-sort.” Once data collection is completed, commonality across the sorts is analyzed using correlation and by-person factor analysis. In other words, the investigator looks for ways participants sorted the statements similarly. From this, it is possible to identify shared perspectives (e.g., where participants ranked the completely diverse range of statements similarly). These patterns are interpreted and validated with participants to define a particular perspective on an issue that is expressed as a narrative. In addition to revealing social perspectives, the method also reveals which statements generate the most consensus or dissensus on the issue studied.

In this way the Q-method qualitatively explores subjectivity while using quantitative techniques to find the underlying structure in the opinion data. Through its method and philosophy, it brings out the natural structure of opinion as it exists without prior frames—such as those used in surveys—that limit what can be discovered. Because the method uses opinion statements, it is directly relevant to harnessing the latest opinion shared on social media such as Twitter and Facebook, while complementing these data with multiple other sources.

FIGURE 3: SAMPLE VISUALIZATIONS OF DATA ON FOUR PERSPECTIVES (RINGROAD, ECONOMIC, SUSTAINABILITY, DEMOCRACY)

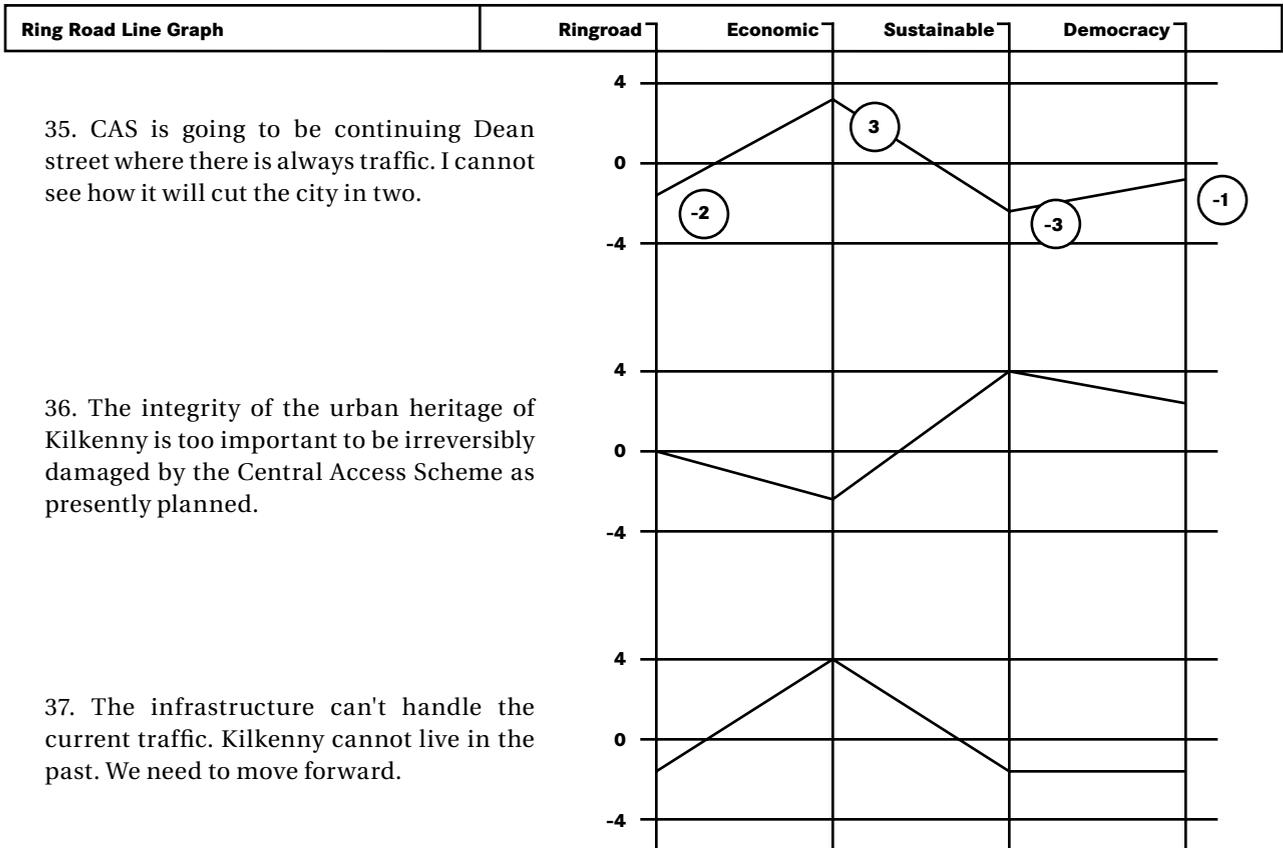


Figure 3 provides a sample of a new type of information that can be derived from this analysis method, using data derived from a study on a controversial road development in Ireland.⁵ In this example, we see represented, in a scale from -4 (disagree) to 4 (agree), how participants sharing different perspectives responded to two of the 43 statements on the controversy.

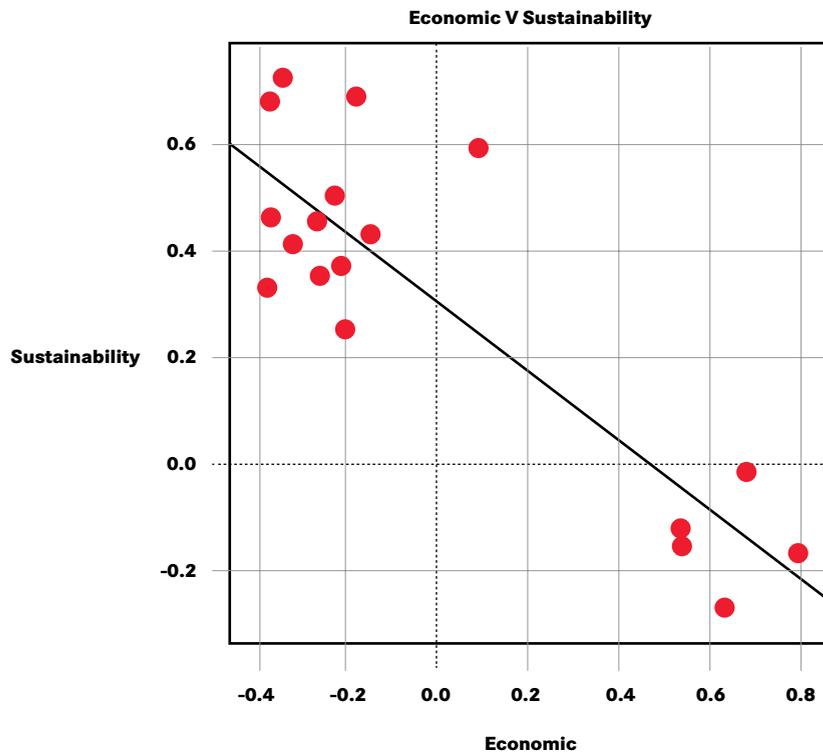
In figure 4, we provide a simple bubble graph of how strongly the participants identified with the various perspectives (factor loadings). The X-axis represents affinity for the economic perspective and Y represents affinity to the sustainability perspective. One circle represents one stakeholder.

Readers now might question the validity of this knowledge with such a small sample size. Yes, the Q-method uses a small sample size that represents the

most diversity in opinion statements and stakeholders. It does not claim to represent a population. However, it has been shown that increasing the number of participants in the study beyond that which represents maximum diversity in stakeholders does not change the underlying structure of opinion uncovered. For this reason, the Q-method is a very cost effective and elegant method for identifying the full diversity of social perspectives on an issue.

A further innovation of this method is that it reports social perspectives without reference to or concern for the frequency with which these perspectives are held in a larger population.⁶ As such, Q-methodology is particularly empowering for minority groups, such as older women who may not always be able to make their voices heard. For this reason, the method is already

FIGURE 4: STRENGTH OF PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION ACROSS PERSPECTIVES



Vanessa Liston

Vanessa Liston is cofounder and CEO of CiviQ, a company delivering innovations in public participation and deliberation through open data. She holds a PhD in political science from Trinity College, Dublin, and publishes regularly in international journals on development issues, deliberative democracy, Web 2.0 technologies, and political system innovation.

being used across environmental, education, health, and policy fields to provide transparent mechanisms for inclusive dialogue on social issues.

However, despite the potential of this method for social development and policy, there is very little awareness of Q-method among the policy-making community and public in general. A huge opportunity lies in mainstreaming this knowledge-creation process through social, government, and business organizations and by openly sharing the findings via public opinion databanks. Such knowledge on subjective understandings of the world can not only lead to better policy and more inclusive dialogue, but can also enable us to put the human voice, in all its diversity, at the center of policy and development processes in a new way.

For older women in particular, the potential of this method to make their perspectives visible, reveal prejudices and myths, as well as promote effective participation in policy development is compelling.

The opportunity is now there with the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the transformative agenda on official statistics, to promote the engagement of this new knowledge type and to innovate further. ●

- ¹ UNESCO Forty Sixth Session Report of the Secretary General on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics (17 December 2014) UN Doc E/CN.3/2015/5.
- ² Stephenson, William (1953) *The Study of Behavior: Q-Technique and Its Methodology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
- ³ Stephenson, William (1952) 'Old Age Research'. *Operant Subjectivity* 34, no. 4: 217– 233.
- ⁴ An analysis of perspectives on care, for example, could include, in addition to the older people, health professionals, home caregivers, family members, and policy makers, depending on the question being examined.
- ⁵ A narrative describing each perspective, together with perspectives' highest and lowest ranked statements, is available at <http://opinion.civiq.eu/news/kilkenny-central-access-scheme-analysis>.
- ⁶ Although it is not the focus of Q-method, the distribution of perspectives can be estimated in a population using a "Block survey."

Diversity in the Aging Workforce: Why Older Women Matter

Alison Monroe | CEO, SAGECO

Susan Jackson-Wood, 62, was national training manager with the Australian operation of UK cosmetics company Yardley London, where she had worked for 23 years in a variety of management roles, when the company withdrew from Australia in 1998. Adelaide-based Jackson-Wood was 47 at the time and convinced that employers were not interested in employing an older woman, irrespective of her experience.

"I suddenly felt invisible," she recalls. That's when she decided to start her own training and professional development business, until 2004 when she joined business association Business South Australia as a sponsorship and partnership executive. Her interpersonal and relationship skills, as well as her ability to connect people were essential attributes of the role. And it's what she loved to do.

As the oldest person on her team she quickly decided not to fall into the trap of thinking the old ways are the best ways. "Those days [of being in charge] are over, but there's still a lot I can contribute," she says. "I had to tell myself that it's a different time and that the people I was working with have incredibly strong skills and qualifications that I never had. I'm not trying to compete with them."

True to her training background, Jackson-Wood believes in the importance of professional development. She self-funded her participation in a 10-month leadership development program run by the Leaders Institute of South Australia. "I really need to be doing something to keep the sparks going," she explains.¹

Susan is a shining example of thousands of older women in Sageco's circle of colleagues and participants. Each story is different. As a specialist in providing aging

workforce solutions to hundreds of organizations in Australia and New Zealand since 2004, we have learned the importance of recognizing that older workers are a diverse group. One size does not fit all—particularly when it comes to older women.

In terms of workforce participation, women ages 55 and over make up the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. We participated in a research project in 2013, Older Women Matter, with the Diversity Council of Australia that applied both an age and gender lens to existing academic and industry research to get to the heart of why older women matter.

Older female workers (defined as ages 45+) are a critical segment of Australia's workforce. Their employment participation has increased significantly in the last few decades and now makes up 17 percent of Australia's workforce. This is a global trend, but Australia still lags behind comparable countries.

Governments are interested in increasing the workforce participation of older women because of its effect on gross domestic product. Businesses benefit because of sustained job performance, high motivation levels, high reliability, improved staff retention, and the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and skills over working lives. Gender diversity research indicates businesses can experience a range of benefits from a workforce that is inclusive of women, including reducing attrition; enhancing innovation, group performance, access to target markets and financial performance; and minimizing legal and reputational risks.

But most importantly, older women benefit. For older women, paid work provides access to greater

Gender diversity research indicates businesses can experience a range of benefits from a workforce that is inclusive of women, including reducing attrition; enhancing innovation, group performance, access to target markets and financial performance; and minimizing legal and reputational risks.

financial security as a consequence of having an independent source of income, as well as enhanced social support, satisfaction, self-esteem, and mental and physical health. With life expectancy in Australia increasing to more than 84 years for women, and close to 70 percent of older female workers rating their health as good or excellent, many older female workers are at their peak.²

A Framework for Action

Sageco's approach is always about conversations and taking action. This framework was not only borne out of the extensive Older Women Matter research, but out of our niche experience with hundreds of successful organizations in managing the risks, challenges, and opportunities of an aging workforce. This framework is not exclusive to women; many of the strategies are

applicable to older men. However, within this framework are tailored actions that organizations can take to increase and enhance the participation of older women in their workforce. Here are some examples of what can be done.

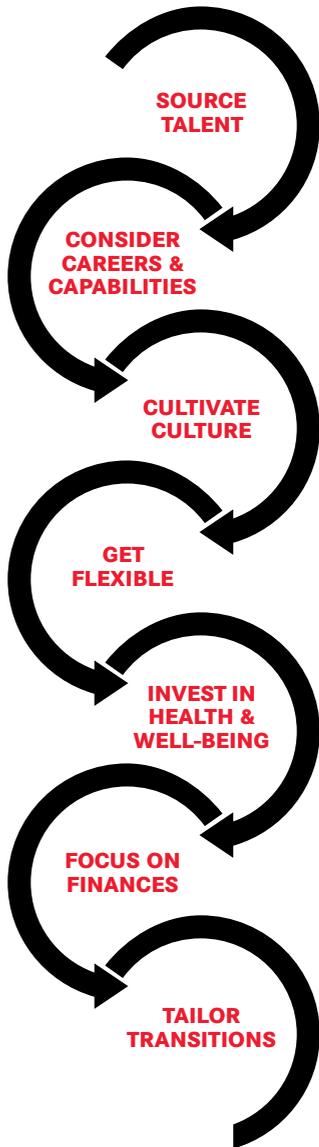
Source talent

- Check your recruitment practices for “gendered ageism.” Is a younger female more likely to win a close to entry level position than an older female? Are you assuming that because a woman is older she is overqualified?
- Value skills and experience that women have gained outside the workforce. Running a household or being a caretaker or a volunteer requires extraordinary skills that are transferrable to a work setting.

- Look past interrupted work histories. Many women have breaks from their career due to parenting and caring responsibilities. Periods of unemployment do not necessarily indicate a disinterest in work or a career failure.
- Look to your existing talent. Provide opportunities and flexible working options for the older women already in your workforce.
- Diversify your recruitment messages. Use descriptors that value experience, life skills, long service, or multiple careers.

Consider careers and capabilities

- Provide training courses at all employee life stages. Research shows that older women are twice as likely to participate in training courses as their male counterparts.



- Review career models for gendered ageism. An older woman who has had several career breaks may be looking for promotional opportunities when she's 55. This is often considered quite late in any given career model paradigm.
- Take a life stage view of capabilities. Recognize informal qualifications.

- Provide flexible development options, centering on family-friendly scheduling and locations.

Cultivate culture

- Create a specific employee value proposition for older women that might take flexible work, career opportunities, and financial well-being into account.
- Make older women visible. Represent older women in visual materials that demonstrate leadership in your organization.

Get flexible

- Flexible work is a key enabler for the participation of older women. Many older women care for grandchildren, children, and their own parents. Factor senior care into flexible offerings.
- Provide caregiving leave. Even better, provide paid caregiving leave.
- Use technology to support flexible work.
- Create a flexible work campaign targeted at older women, and ascertain what they want when they consider flexibility (e.g., a later start to the workday, an earlier finish to the workday, buying extra leave).

Invest in health and well-being

- Each life stage requires a tailored approach for supporting health and well-being. For older women, this might include mental health issues such as anxiety or depression and physical health issues

such as diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, cancer, and menopause.

- At the same time, it's important to challenge health stereotypes. Women are living longer and aging well, and close to 70 percent rate their health as good or excellent. Older women are less likely to experience work-related injuries and the least likely group to take days off due to illness or caregiving.
- Factor older women into safety initiatives. Review physical load and ergonomic design.
- Consider shift lengths and leverage flexibility to support well-being.

Focus on financial well-being

- Financial circumstances play a key part in encouraging women to exit, remain in, or reenter the workforce. Career breaks, the lack of early access to superannuation schemes, and pay equity contribute to this.
- Include financial well-being in your employee value proposition and tailor financial planning assistance to ensure it recognizes the financial circumstances of older women, particularly those who are divorced, separated, single, or widowed.
- Support industry-wide pay equity. The gap in Australia is 17 percent.

Tailor transitions

- Provide a framework to help older women make decisions about

their future. It could be a productive and positive transition to retirement or imagining the next 5-10 years of working life. The framework should include holistic support in the areas of identity, money, career, health, relationships, and planning for the future.

- Develop a specific retention strategy for older women that includes initiatives such as financial well-being and flexibility.

Envisaging a Productive and Positive Future

Since 2004, we have been privileged to work with thousands of older women through our organization-sponsored Envisage seminars. The Envisage framework is a holistic framework that supports decision making for the future—personal identity, money, career, health, and relationships. In our experience, this single half-day intervention has provided life-changing moments for many women whose careers have been shaped by social, economic, and environmental factors not experienced by their male counterparts or the generations of women following them. This baby-boom generation of women was often denied educational opportunities, forced to stop working once married, excluded from superannuation schemes, and took long career breaks to raise children.

We are always buoyed by participant feedback such as the following: “As a single woman, I really appreciated the fact that this seminar acknowledged that not everyone approaching retirement is the same (i.e., has a partner and children). The course has given me a good perspective about planning for a future where I have to rely on myself to safeguard

my future, and where being single means I need about 70 percent of the funds a couple needs. It was a good sanity check. I would definitely recommend this course.”

“I realized that despite talking the talk about retirement, I was quite possibly in denial until I attended the Envisage program. I then realized that the other people in the room were my age, and what we were discussing was something that was soon going to affect us all in some way or other—some sooner than others. I was one of the sooner rather than later mob. I realized it was serious stuff that I had to really think about. What was I going to do with myself when work was not the place I had to go to every day? What would I think of myself and what would my husband want when I retired? Were we even thinking we might want the same things? It was time to talk and sit and think. Thank you—you made me do this. I keep my little book beside my bed to remind me that this plan is something that is ongoing. When I think of something new, I write it in my book, so it's there for me to refer to.”

Being prepared to examine the challenges of the aging workforce with a diversity lens allows us to tailor solutions that cut through much of the rhetoric. We encourage any organization to take that bit of extra time and pilot a few initiatives. You might be surprised at the difference you can make. As an employer of many older women, we at Sageco can put our hand on our heart and say that they really do matter. ●

¹ Originally published in “Age Shall Not Weary Them,” Leo D’Angelo Fisher, BRW Online, June 19, 2013, <http://www.brw.com.au/>.

² “Older Women Matter: Harnessing the Talents of Australia’s Older Female Workforce,” Diversity Council Australia, last modified 2013, <http://www.dca.org.au/dca-research.html>.



Alison Monroe

Alison Monroe is CEO of Sageco, provider of specialist solutions to support people through organizational change. She has directed a number of industry first career and aging workforce projects, including the Australian Federal Government Corporate Champions program, the New South Wales (NSW) Government Mature Workforce Retention Project, and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games career transition. She was a founding director of Sageco in 2004 and was appointed as a director to the HREXL board in 2013. She is the president of the NSW Equal Employment Opportunity Practitioners Association and a Workplace Gender Equality Agency pay equity ambassador.

Beyond the Bottom Line: Benefits of Employee Gender Diversity

Michel Landel | CEO, SODEXO

Research in the past decade has shown clearly that corporate policies that promote diversity and gender balance are not just the right thing to do—they also tend to make companies more likely to outperform their peers, ultimately boosting the bottom line.

Case closed, as traditional economic theory would argue.

But should the bottom line really be a company's only focus? As CEO of Sodexo, I've been making an argument for working to ensure that our workplaces are more equitable and diverse—in other words, that they include a balance of women and men, a range of ages, multiple races and nationalities, different levels of physical ability, and a mix of sexual orientations—and that leaders are developed from among this broader pool, based on their ambition and talent. Such workplaces are better

places to be, with a bottom line that encompasses the human factor as well as other metrics.

The economic environment has forced many companies to try to squeeze more profits from fewer resources, using rationalization and measures of efficiency and productivity to continue to grow. But this puts tremendous pressure on employees. There's a new crisis emerging: These efficiency measures are tapped out. Workers and systems have been pressed to their limits, and companies that want to continue to grow need to find another resource to drive that growth.

At Sodexo we believe that one new, largely untapped resource for growth is quality of life. At Sodexo, we consider it the key factor in our company's growth and performance, one that benefits both

individuals and the organization, and it's our *raison d'être*. We've structured our whole business offering around improving our customers' lives, providing services that help them improve their work-life balance, such as cleaning, childcare, food service, and assisted living. We want our employees to benefit from our quality-of-life mission, too. Their jobs should not only support them and their families financially, but also help them to live more fulfilled lives.

I believe strongly that inclusion and diversity are two of the foundations for this kind of change in the workplace, and I'm particularly inspired by the benefits that can come from raising more women to leadership positions.

Research from the Harvard Business School tells us that, among the school's MBA graduates, women

and men have similar abilities and don't differ much in their ambitions for their lives and careers. They agree that meaningful, satisfying work and opportunities for job growth are important to them. Research from McKinsey had similar findings about women's ambitions: among senior and midlevel managers, 79 percent of women and 81 percent of men said they have the desire to reach a top-level position. And yet around the world today, women hold only 14.6 percent of senior leadership roles, and only 8.1 percent of women are top earners.

This discrepancy can't be explained away by the myth that women are opting out of the workplace in great numbers to pursue full-time motherhood. The Harvard study found that only 11 percent of its baby boomer and generation X subjects had left their jobs to care for young children. And, in the majority of those cases, "opting out" was not an apt description. Many of the women had left the workplace only reluctantly, after finding that motherhood had diminished their prospects for career advancement.

The usual name for this issue is the "glass ceiling," but it appears that a better metaphor would be a leaky pipe—the flow of talent to the top jobs "leaks" women at every level.

To look at this problem, in 2002 I appointed Dr. Rohini Anand to be Sodexo's chief diversity officer, a senior position that reports directly to me. To patch this leaky pipe of skilled and ambitious women, her key focus has been on ensuring that our company's culture, hiring practices, and policies are conducive to elevating both women and men to leadership positions and retaining women in those roles. We

Women and men don't differ much in their ambitions for their lives and careers. They agree that meaningful, satisfying work and opportunities for job growth are important to them.

also support flexible scheduling, a workplace policy that benefits both genders but is particularly helpful to women, since they usually assume an outsized responsibility for work that takes place outside the office.

The cornerstone of our gender strategy is the Sodexo Women's International Forum for talent (SWIFt), an advisory board made up of 20 senior women executives representing 12 nationalities. SWIFt's mission for the past 6 years has been to promote the advancement of women into the most senior operational roles at Sodexo, with a goal of having 25 percent female representation in the company's top 300 management positions by the end of this year. While we still have to make massive progress, I'm pleased to say we've now reached that goal. In addition, women make up 38 percent of our board of directors, 42 percent of our middle managers, and 43 percent of our global executive committee.

This composition changes the way we work and make decisions. Because men and women have different ways of leading and approach

problems differently, they complement one another. A Harvard Business Review study that compared men and women on 16 business leadership skills found that women rated higher on collaboration, integration, and connecting to a world view—all critical characteristics for leading in a global economy. I've also noticed that women are less afraid to ask for explanations, which frees men to do the same and makes for a more constructive work environment.

About half of our teams worldwide now have a gender balance in their leadership that we consider ideal: 40 to 60 percent women. So we conducted some research of our own earlier this year to see how that achievement in gender balance has benefited our company. We looked at data from 50,000 of Sodexo's managers in 80 countries, including every Sodexo entity with 25 or more employees, from the C-suite on down the line. We found that management teams in the gender-balanced "zone" of 40 to 60 percent of either gender had more consistent organic growth, better client

Management teams in the gender-balanced “zone” of 40 to 60 percent of either gender had more consistent organic growth, better client retention, a stronger brand image, and higher gross profits.

retention, a stronger brand image, and higher gross profits. But the results weren't purely financial: the study also revealed that teams with gender-balanced management scored much higher in measures of employee engagement.

I consider that last item, employee engagement, the key performance indicator for Sodexo. Engaged employees talk positively about the company, provide better customer service, and are committed to staying with us. They are more content and more creative—likely to be our best source of innovation and new ideas. They work actively toward our success. What could be better for a company's long-term health?

Indeed, what could be better for an employee? Work provides the financial resources that raise people's living standards—and, to a point, income is related to happiness. But work can do so much more. It gives people a sense of calling and purpose—key ingredients for lifelong satisfaction—and allows them to stay connected and active

throughout their lives. The inclusion practices at Sodexo create a culture that respects differences and recognizes the importance of individuals and the diverse experiences each person brings. This is a source of pride for employees and contributes further to their overall well-being, throughout the course of their lives. When they are happy with their work, employees have no desire to retire, even if they are financially able. This applies to women in particular, who sometimes get a slower start on their careers because of early-life childcare obligations. Many of these women are still making their greatest contributions when they're well past traditional “retirement” age.

Shifting our focus to the well-being of women and men certainly is the morally correct choice. But I am pleased and hopeful that, in this case, ethics align perfectly with economics. Quality-of-life improvements are the new frontier for business and societal improvements, and I am humbled by the scope and importance of this mission. ●



Michel Landel

Michel Landel has been CEO of Sodexo, a multinational provider of food and facilities management services, since 2005. He champions programs that contribute to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of Sodexo's 80 host countries, as well as diversity and quality-of-life improvements for Sodexo's 400,000-plus employees.

Women on Boards

Mary Goudie | MEMBER, HOUSE OF LORDS; FOUNDER, 30% CLUB

Research has shown that 30 percent is the golden number that it takes to have the voice of a minority group heard in its own right, as opposed to solely being the face representing a minority group.

Companies are learning to embrace both male and female energy in their quest for excellence. In the United Kingdom (UK), all-male boards in Britain's largest firms are increasingly a rarity, because companies today know that this is neither smart nor profitable.

In November 2009, a focus on diversity brought Helena Morrissey, chief executive officer of Newton Investment Management Limited, and me together. With diversity at the executive level, it seemed that however hard one company tried, there was little sign of a breakthrough and only 10 to 15 percent of senior roles were being filled by women.

We decided to see if there was an appetite for a large, concentrated push to increase the numbers and issue of women on boards. Helena also realized that at the time, there was no accepted measurable goal of reaching improved numbers which would increase the

decision-making power of women on corporate boards. However, research has shown that 30 percent is the golden number that it takes for the voice of a minority group to be heard in its own right, as opposed to solely being the face representing a minority group. Hence, the idea of the 30% Club was born.

The 30% Club was launched in 2010 with the goal of achieving 30 percent women on Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 boards by the end of 2015. Women now account for 23.5% of FTSE 100 board members, up from 12.5% in 2011.

Upon the launch of the 30% Club, 10 founding chairmen from FTSE companies were aligned with the club in reaching its goals; today there is representation from more than 100 FTSE companies. The 30% vision and goal is not only good for the image of these FTSE companies, it also adds to their bottom line: profit.

Parallel to this development, a UK government task force led by the former UK Trade Minister, Lord Davies, published an independent report, “Women on Boards,” making 10 recommendations and forming a blueprint for voluntary business-led change. Mandatory quotas were not recommended. The 30% Club also does not believe that mandatory quotas are the right approach in order to realize meaningful and substantial change.

Five years on, Helena is still in the driver’s seat as founding chairman. Alongside her, Brenda Trenowden leads the 30% Club in our global markets as our global chair, reflecting the increased reach and scale of the campaign. The main drive of the 30% Club is still to increase the number of women on boards, but equally important is balancing the gender gap from school to boardroom; with various initiatives, such as speakers for schools, scholarships, cross-mentoring schemes, and working closely with governments to ensure that they are on track to balance equality.

The world was becoming aware of the number of advantages to having women on boards. Senior women in companies possess a huge level of industry knowledge, skill, and experience. Overlooking these women for board positions would be turning your back on a huge pool of untapped talent. Having more women on boards broadens the corporate diversity of thought, and brings varying perspectives to both corporate and global issues in the boardroom. In addition, corporate boards should be representative of the companies that they govern. If women have the expertise to manage and operate in a corporation, then their voice should be represented in the boardroom as well.

The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing made it clear that women’s rights are human rights. Hillary Clinton delivered a speech at that conference stating, “We are the primary caretakers for most of the world’s children and elderly—yet much of the work that we do is not valued—by economists, not by historians, not by popular culture, and not by governments.”

Like the 30% Club, women and girls have come a long way. More women and girls receive full-time education. Many do, and more still should, go on to higher education. In many parts of the world, girls who are not in education can end up as child brides at 10 and 11 years old and later sold on when they are no longer of use. We cannot leave the talents and expertise of half the world’s population behind. Closing the gap on women’s engagement in the labor market and entrepreneurship could lead to the gross domestic product gains of up to 40 percent.

There are other ways that women’s participation is vital. There is also a growing body of evidence to support the fact that women’s participation in conflict resolution leads to sustainable peace. Naturally, I would say, women have an ability and skill for peace resolution. That is why United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – which stresses the importance of women’s participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping – and successive resolutions, are important to help ensure that women, peace, and security are on the agenda for international organizations and governments across the globe. ●



Mary Goudie

Baroness Mary Goudie, a member of the British House of Lords, is a global advocate for the rights of women and children, and an expert strategic adviser to global organizations on corporate social responsibility policy. She is a founding member of the 30% Club steering committee, which aims to influence chairmen to bring more women onto UK corporate boards, and is currently expanding globally.

SPECIAL FEATURE

A Landmark Event for Women

Looking back on a critical moment for gender equality

Myrna Blyth | EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, AARP



PHOTO: UN PHOTO/YAO DA WEI

It was exhilarating. It was exhausting. It was glorious. It was grueling. I am recalling the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held 20 years ago this September in Beijing. It was the largest conference the UN had ever organized, attended by 17,000 delegates, but that was just the start.

The World Conference was supplemented by a second huge gathering, the NGO Forum on Women in Huairou, where 30,000 delegates from nongovernmental organizations gathered in a small town 35 miles northeast of Beijing. The forum's carnival-like tent city was erected at the end of a long and dusty road that turned to mud in the nonstop rain. In Chinese culture the feminine spirit is associated with water. It is usually very dry in Beijing in September. According to the Chinese, the constant rain was caused by the feminine energy emanating from the more than 40,000 women who came together there.



PHOTO: LIN PHOTO/WILTON GRANT



I was an official American delegate to the UN Conference, part of a delegation of around 70 soggy women, often seen wrapped in plastic ponchos, who attended the official meeting and breakaway sessions as well as the gathering of the NGOs in Huairou. China was the only nation that had bid on the opportunity to host the conference, perhaps to polish its international image after the suppression of protests in Tiananmen Square. The Chinese seemed unprepared for the hordes of opinionated women—and a few men—that arrived. They were especially perplexed and irritated by those at the NGO Forum, including the very vocal anti-Chinese Tibetan activists. I remember the military police carried white sheets on the handlebars of their motorbikes, ready to cover up any outbreaks of bra-burning protesters. This, of course, never happened; women

with umbrellas were constantly holding them over the heads of teenage soldiers who were drenched by the rain.

Still, those young soldiers were tough and implacable. I remember standing with Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala and Jane Fonda outside a tent in Huairou trying to get into a meeting. The guard would not let us in, even when we tried to explain that Secretary Shalala was an important US government official. Finally a member of the embassy staff rushed over and picked Donna up and over the barrier. Jane and I were left outside, dripping wet, and had to go to the CNN tent to dry off.

Besides the weather, lack of communications for the delegation was another problem in this pre-cell-phone, pre-Facebook era. Iris Burnett, who headed

“Women in the audience who had struggled so long in their work to protect women were responding. There was a huge crescendo that built to sustained applause at the moment when she issued that call for the whole world that “‘human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights.’”

communications, recalls, “It occurred to me that given the difficulties it would be good to be able to identify the official delegation. Colorful T-shirts with ‘Official Delegate’ in large print across the back would solve that problem. The T-shirts were printed in the US and shipped to us via an old friend. They were inexpensive, and so I figured no one at the White House or the State Department would make a fuss. The first T-shirts were presented to Mrs. Clinton and the heads of the delegation. Then I started to pass them to other delegates and also people who had been helpful to us. All of a sudden some forgettable character from the State Department started to yell about how we were committing some kind of violation by giving them to people who were not on the delegation.”

“You have got to be kidding me,” I yelled back. ‘Don’t you have anything better to do than monitor a T-shirt?’ But then I looked at the shirts and realized that there was a printing mistake. Instead of reading ‘Official Delegate,’ they read ‘Official Deleatde.’ ‘Is there anyone in this room who is an “Official Deleatde?”’ I asked. Nope. So all the Official Deleatdes put on their shirts and had a great laugh.”

Meeting with women from 189 countries was fascinating. Madeleine Kunin, then assistant secretary of education, says, “Visually it was extraordinary, the colors, the attire, the women’s faces. There were women who were totally veiled so that you could only see their eyes. But they were there. I remember one woman who had cups hanging from her dress, and her concern was water, that the world needs water. Women are traditionally the water bearers. She was very prescient.”

Veronica Biggins, a member of the delegation’s leadership, recalls the visceral shock of some of the women’s stories. “You can know something about what happens to women around the world, but it is different sitting with someone who has had the experience, who has lived it every day of her life. I remember being with a group of women from Africa talking about female circumcision and about girls being married when they are age 6 or 7. You realize things that you take for granted a huge percentage of women in the world never have.”

Marjorie Margolies, the deputy chair of our delegation, explains that the American delegates were careful not to impose Western ideas on the others, but to listen and seek consensus. “I think we accomplished a lot in breakaway sessions, especially about violence against women,” she says. “I remember in one session a woman talked about how in her village there was a man who beat his wife every night. All the other women in the village surrounded his hut and said to him, ‘Give her a break, beat one of us.’ It shamed him. It was a starting point. Since the conference, a lot has been accomplished about violence against women and domestic abuse. Many countries now realize it is not a personal or a cultural matter but a crime, and there are now laws.”

For many the highpoint of the event was first lady Hillary Clinton’s memorable speech. Melanne Verveer, who was Mrs. Clinton’s chief of staff, believes it was a moment that has influenced many lives, including her own. “It was a long, difficult road for Hillary to get to the conference. There were critics here on the right and left. But she was determined to speak, because she believed that what she said was important to the women of

the world and to the women of the United States.” Melanne continues, “We were backstage to the right of the podium and as we listened we began to hear how her words were having an astounding impact on the men and women in the audience, especially during her renditions of the abuses that women experience like domestic violence, rape, trafficking of women and children, and girls not being educated and not being valued. Women in the audience who had struggled so long in their work to protect women were responding. There was a huge crescendo that built to sustained applause at the moment when she issued that call for the whole world that ‘human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights.’”

Twenty years later, it is fair to ask what was accomplished at the conference. The Beijing Platform for Action, which was agreed upon by all 189 countries (but with a few provisos by many, including the US), created benchmarks for achieving women’s empowerment and advancement as an investment for societies. Linda Tarr-Whelan, a delegation member who became the US representative to the Commission on the Status of Women, feels that it was extremely significant that at the conference there was, for the first time on a world stage, the acknowledgement that women are vital to a nation’s economy and to its future.

And Donna Shalala, now CEO of the Clinton Foundation, insists the conference has led directly

to major, measurable progress in women’s rights: Primary education for girls is now almost universal, she says. Maternal health care has seen vast improvements. And, perhaps most important, 95 percent of the 56 national constitutions written since 1995 guarantee gender equality.

I left Beijing feeling the power of sisterhood among women from many nations, but also feeling very lucky to be an American woman. My most sustaining memory is a very personal one. Each delegate had the chance to be the official representative of the United States during one of the sessions of the conference, and as a US delegate at a UN meeting you sit between a representative of the United Kingdom and a representative from Uruguay. I remember at the session I attended the representative of the United Kingdom was an aristocrat, Lady something or other. The representative from Uruguay was the wife of a government official. And there I was, sitting between them, the granddaughter of very poor Hungarian immigrants. I know how amazed my grandparents would have been. I know how proud my mother, who was born in England, and my father, who went to work when he was only 13, would have been. I had been chosen to represent the United States at a world conference not through an accident of marriage or birth but through my own accomplishments, which was true for every woman on our delegation. And all I could think was *only in America!* ●



Myrna Blyth

Myrna Blyth is the senior vice president and editorial director of AARP Media, overseeing *AARP The Magazine*, the largest circulation magazine in the world; the *AARP Bulletin*; AARP’s website and book department; and AARP Studios. Previously, she was editor-in-chief and publishing director of *Ladies’ Home Journal* for more than 20 years, and founding editor-in-chief and publishing director of *More Magazine*.

AARP International

AARP is the world-renowned social change organization with a membership of nearly 38 million people aged 50 and over. Through its international office, AARP places issues related to population aging on the global agenda, elevating the opportunities and addressing the challenges of demographic change.

AARP International connects international stakeholders in all sectors of society to protect the vulnerable, strengthen communities, and enable all people around the world to pursue their goals and dreams. The office serves as a key contributor to the global conversation on aging, placing best practices and policies in the public domain and identifying innovations from around the world with applicability in the United States.

Through established relationships with international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Commission, and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as with individual governments, civil society, and the business sector, AARP International brings together a wide range of voices to provide focus on ensuring financially secure and productive lives for all people as they age.

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AARP aims to help people live longer, healthier, more financially secure and productive lives by identifying the best ideas and practices on key policy issues. We convene international opinion leaders and policy makers to share their expertise and develop research on health and long-term care, older workers and retirement income, and livable communities. Through our international program, AARP fosters this global collaboration and, in the end, acts as a collaborator and catalyst to governments and decision makers in all sectors to help address and favorably shape the social and economic implications of aging worldwide.

