OVERVIEW OF THE EDITION

IMAGINING THE NEW ECOSYSTEM

MIRIAM TAYLOR (PhD) is the Director of Partnerships and Publications at the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute. She is Managing Editor of *Canadian Issues* and *Canadian Diversity*.

Created in collaboration with The Women's Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, this special edition of *Canadian Diversity* entitled, "Canadian Women Entrepreneurs: Towards a Diverse, Inclusive and Innovative Ecosystem", arises in connection with the Women's Entrepreneurship Conference (now postponed until March 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). The issue outlines the structural challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in different fields and from diverse communities; exposes the need for further research into disaggregated data; and explores innovative approaches to correcting existing inequities in the system for the benefit of the economy as a whole.

In their introduction, Wendy Cukier, Suzanne Gagnon & Tania Saba, point to the ways in which the current social and economic framework limits the full potential of women entrepreneurs. They call for a systemic approach based on understanding the distinct needs and challenges of women so as to determine the interventions required to allow women full inclusion in an ecosystem that fosters innovation and success.

The issue is divided into three sections:

- The Reality of Women in Business;
- An Evolving Ecosystem; and
- The Path to Inclusion.

Section (1) opens with an article by Ingrid C. Chadwick and Alexandra Dawson outlining five common misconceptions about women and entrepreneurship. Pointing to the inaccuracy of such misconceptions is important in itself, but in their exposé the authors succeed in revealing the nature of the structural constraints that are at the root of these stereotypes – an essential first step if we are serious about changing attitudes and perceptions. A second article, by Zohreh Hassannezhad and Shannon Pestun, consists in a very thorough overview of the different models and types of financing available to women entrepreneurs. The article includes a consideration of the systemic and cultural barriers women encounter in seeking and obtaining financing and identifies emerging approaches and initiatives seeking to facilitate access to funding.

Section (2) examines women's entrepreneurial activities in the spheres of global trade, technology and agriculture. In their article on the challenges and opportunities faced by Canadian women entrepreneurs in global trade, Clare Beckton and Janice McDonald go beyond exposing the important challenges faced by women entrepreneurs engaging in international trade to highlight the great potential for the economy as a whole of opening up the pathways for women in the import/export world.

Considering the barriers to women's technology entrepreneurship, Jaigris Hodson, Shandell Houlden, Chandell Gosse,

and Laura Lefevre point in their literature review to women's perceived lack of legitimacy in technology entrepreneurship, a space that continues to be dominated by a male-centric culture. They recommend that "initiatives be introduced at multiple levels, so that problems of culture, access to resources, education, and changes in policy," all be addressed. The building of more tools and the creation of educational opportunities are all essential, according to the authors, to facilitate equal access for women, particularly those in the more precarious budding gig economy.

In an article on women entrepreneurs in agriculture, Gina Grandy, Christie Newton and Amber Fletcher reveal how little is known about women entrepreneurs in the agricultural industry and deplore how often the contributions of these women are overlooked and overshadowed. They identify barriers in the areas of financing, networking, training, and work-life balance. They point to the essential importance of understanding the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women, and accounting for intersectionality and territorial differences, if we are serious about bringing women out of the margins. Indeed, the underrepresentation of women is exposed by the authors as a missed opportunity, as women's new insights and innovative practices enhance not only the industry itself but represent significant social and economic gains for society as a whole.

Section (3) examines the intersectional challenges faced by Indigenous, Black and Immigrant women entrepreneurs and identifies the steps that must be taken to allow them to flourish and contribute to their full potential. Despite a plethora of barriers, explain Ashley Richard and Samantha Morton, Indigenous entrepreneurship is growing at twice the rate of that of non-Indigenous women. However, additional support is lacking and sorely needed. Such programming must be developed with a respect for cultural norms and preferences. Empathy and relationship building, for instance, are key elements in the implementation of any successful program aimed at Indigenous women entrepreneurs.

Nadine Spencer and Jodi-Ann Francis-Walker identify structural factors that limit the growth potential of Black entrepreneurs, such as access to financing, lack of social capital, limited intergenerational wealth and the scarcity of role models. One of the keys to breaking through the limitations imposed by such barriers, explain the authors, is to move away from tendencies to homogenize the Black community. Unless we take fully into account "the differences in culture, historical experiences, and challenges faced by those born in Canada versus those who immigrated to Canada, who also have distinct cultural identities and experiences," we will never understand the dynamics of the Black experience. Building capacity early on by providing access to mentoring, coaching and sponsorship that are culturally appropriate is vital. Fostering the creation of a pool of aspiring young entrepreneurs will add to the repertoire of available mentors in the community. Like other experts, the authors bemoan the limited availability of disaggregated data, so essential to addressing problems at their root, particularly as regards women entrepreneurs in the Black community.

In their article on the barriers to entrepreneurship for immigrant women, Guang Ying Mo and Ruby Latif also evoke the burden of structural barriers and propose the need for a multileveled approach allowing immigrant women to move beyond challenges to accomplish their goals across the entire ecosystem, from capacity training to networking, from policies to culture, from language to technology.