

South-South Series:

Empowering and Growing Women-led Business



UN Women-COLEAD

South-South Series: Empowering and Growing Women-led Business

Session n°1:

Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs: Strategies for building confidence, leadership skills, and overcoming gender bias

Wednesday 19 February 2025 – 14:00-16:00 UTC

BIODATA OF PANELISTS

Lana Athanaze – Founder, Éclat Nova Luxuries, Dominica



Lana is the founder of Éclat Nova Luxuries and brings 26 years of experience in banking and finance. Éclat Nova Luxuries was established in 2017 and manufactures organic and natural botanical skincare and eco-living products for homes and corporate spaces to include soaps, aromatherapy botanical massage oils, botanical clay facial masks and hair and body butters. The brand specializes in sustainable, botanical skincare, blending traditional and modern methods. Lana is committed to community empowerment, collaborating with small-scale farmers, the Kalinago community, and differently abled artisans.

Isolina Boto – Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD



Isolina Boto is the Head of Networks and Alliances at COLEAD, a non-profit association of private sector operators in the agrifood sector active in the European Union (EU), Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) regions. Isolina has more than 25 years of experience in agricultural development. She started her career with the European Commission and has also worked with various ACP embassies and NGOs in areas related to food security, rural development and trade. Before joining COLEAD, she was the Manager of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) Brussels Office (2004-2020) implementing policy initiatives related to the ACP-EU cooperation in the field of the agrifood sector. She has led agribusiness projects in support of capacity development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs and farmers organisations across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific and developed agrotourism aimed at linking agriculture and tourism sectors.

Alexandra Carter – Programme Analyst, UN Women MCO Caribbean



Alexandra Carter is a Program Analyst on Women's Economic Empowerment at UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) Caribbean. She works with business support organizations, financial institutions, and entrepreneurs to strengthen businesses that promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Her background includes expertise in gender, international food systems, and food sovereignty, as well as designing processes that foster meaningful participation and empowerment.



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Gayle Gollop – Programme Specialist, Private Sector, UN Women MCO Caribbean



Gayle Gollop is an attorney-at-law with over 15 years of experience in the development sector. Before returning to Barbados to serve as Special Advisor on Trade and Legal Affairs at the Caribbean Export Development Agency, she worked with the Pan American Health Organization and the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC. Throughout her career, she has gained extensive experience in supporting the development and competitiveness of the region's private sector. Passionate about the social and economic development of the Caribbean, she remains dedicated to advancing this mission. Gayle currently serves as the Private Sector Specialist for the UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean, overseeing initiatives across 22 countries and territories in the region.

Isiuwa Iyehen – Head of Office Caribbean, ad interim (a.i.), UN Women MCO Caribbean



Ms. Iyehen is currently the Deputy Representative and the Head of Office ad interim (a.i.) for the UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) for the Caribbean. She is responsible for the day-to-day management of the MCO, substantially contributing to the design, implementation, management and oversight of programmes and operations to ensure effective and efficient delivery of results. Prior to assuming the position of Deputy Representative, Ms. Iyehen managed the Economic Empowerment and Statistics portfolios for the UN Women MCO Caribbean. In that capacity, her technical leadership resulted in narrowing significant knowledge, research, and gender data gaps on violence against women and girls, the labour force, social protection, and unpaid care work in CARICOM. She has over 17 years of experience in international development and has served in various capacities within the United Nations system and non-governmental organisations. Ms. Iyehen has a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Swarthmore College.

Jeremy Knops – General Delegate, COLEAD



Jeremy Knops holds a master's degree in business engineering from the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management. Prior to joining COLEAD in 2009, he was involved in Guatemala with the daily operations of a farmers' cooperative exporting loquats to the EU and the US. He started to work for COLEAD as an expert in charge of matters related to private standards and certification for ACP producers and exporters of fruit and vegetables. Jeremy is an accredited coach for leadership and professional development. He was appointed as General Delegate of COLEAD in June 2019.

Fannie Perisha Gondwe – Founder and Executive Director, Perisha Agro and Packaging Enterprise, Malawi



Fannie Perisha Gondwe is a social entrepreneur dedicated to fighting malnutrition and empowering women in Malawi. Through Perisha Agro, she promotes biofortified foods like orange-fleshed sweet potato and supports rural women with seeds, land, and training to improve both nutrition and economic opportunities. She also challenges gender norms in agriculture by creating opportunities for women in fields where they have long been underrepresented, ensuring that 60% of her staff are women and encouraging female leadership. Her efforts have impacted over 800,000 households, expanded farm production, and created jobs for over 300 women and youth. Recognized globally, Fannie won the 2024 Women Empowerment Champion award and has been supported by initiatives like the Graça Machel Trust. With a goal to reach 2 million women and children by 2027, she continues to drive sustainable change in food security and gender equality across Malawi.

Christina Pooler – Owner, Zantarea Farms, Barbados

Christina Pooler is a third-generation agriculturalist and the owner of Zantarea Farms, a one-acre family-owned farm in Barbados. With over a decade of diverse experience in agriculture, project management, and community engagement, she is passionate about promoting regenerative and climate-resilient agriculture and fisheries through research, education, community outreach, and stakeholder involvement. Christina's background in building and civil engineering, computer science, and her recent Master in Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Management enables her to implement climate-resilient agricultural systems effectively on her farm. She was part of the 2022 cohort of the Young Leaders of America Initiative (YLA) and the third generation of The Inter-American Institute (IAI) Science, Technology, Policy (STeP) Fellowship in 2023. Christina recently concluded a yearlong fellowship with the NOAA-CERMES Climate Resilience Enhancement Programme (NCCREP), where she researched and conducted an experimental study on sustainable agriculture and climate resilience in Barbados. Currently, she is working with the Caribbean Research and Development Institute (CARDI) on the Sargassum Products for Climate Resilience in the Caribbean project, focusing on the development and evaluation of sargassum-derived products for potential integration into agricultural practices.



Patricia Zoundi Yao – Founder, Canaan Land, Côte d'Ivoire

Patricia Zoundi Yao is a dedicated social entrepreneur transforming rural communities through sustainable agriculture, financial inclusion, and women's empowerment. As the founder of Canaan Land, she equips women farmers with training, quality seeds, and technical support, helping them improve productivity and market access. She also launched QuickCash and Digital Hub, pioneering financial solutions that enable rural populations to conduct secure transactions without internet access. A leader in the SME Movement and Stanford Seed Program, Patricia actively promotes gender inclusion and economic empowerment, advocating for women's representation in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Her impactful work has earned her prestigious awards, including recognition by UNCTAD and the African Forum of Women Leaders, highlighting her role in bridging gender gaps and fostering inclusive growth across Côte d'Ivoire and Africa.



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