



IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

Session n°16:
Opportunities in cross-border value chains for Caribbean entrepreneurs
Thursday 27 February 2025

SESSION RECAP

About IICA-COLEAD Caribbean Agrifood Business Series

In June 2021, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and COLEAD launched the **Caribbean Agrifood Business Series** to showcase the innovations and successes of Caribbean farmer-led businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This series is part of the IICA-COLEAD collaboration aimed at developing a more sustainable and resilient agriculture sector in the Caribbean region. **The series highlights the contributions of entrepreneurs, farmers, agripreneurs, and SMEs to business models that are economically, environmentally, and socially viable.** Participants share their best practices, innovations, and technologies to help others embrace the opportunities offered by local, regional, and export markets. These regular sessions foster the exchange of best practices, networking opportunities, and business scaling strategies.

The latest Caribbean Agrifood Business session n°16 explored how **local entrepreneurs successfully expanded cross-border value chains** despite challenges. The discussion also showcased **support mechanisms from development partners**. The session drew **549 registered participants**, eager to learn more and access additional resources. On the day of the event, **174 participants from around the world** actively contributed, sharing insights and experiences.

Programme: [Link](#)

Biodata: [Link](#)

Recording of the session: [Link](#)

About cross border value chains

Cross-border value chains involve the production of goods or services, information, and capital across multiple countries, where various stages of the product's creation take place across borders. Crossborder supply chains involve a network of activities and processes among various parties, including manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, retailers, and consumers in different countries.

The global economy has increasingly shifted towards interconnected markets and regional integration, making cross-border value chains a pivotal aspect of international trade and business growth. The Caribbean region is no exception and countries have new opportunities to integrate into larger regional and international value chains and tap into cross-border value chains that foster economic growth, enhance business competitiveness, and facilitate sustainable development.

Key points discussed

- Opportunities in cross-border value chains for Caribbean entrepreneurs

Caribbean entrepreneurs can **expand market access, diversify products, and enhance competitiveness** by integrating into cross-border value chains. This reduces reliance on single suppliers or markets, **mitigating risks** from disruptions such as natural disasters, political instability, or logistical challenges, while also **increasing revenues** and business resilience.

Access to foreign markets offers valuable insights into **consumer trends, advanced technologies, and innovative production processes**, helping businesses refine their offerings and strengthen their global market appeal.

Adding **value to raw agricultural products** through **processing** boosts export potential while supporting **food security** through regional collaboration. Entrepreneurs can **leverage trade agreements** to access markets in the US, Europe, and beyond, while also benefiting from **regional trade within CARICOM**, cost-effective raw material sourcing, and supporting efforts to **reduce food import dependency**.

The **digital economy**, including **e-commerce, digital platforms, and software development**, creates new opportunities for Caribbean entrepreneurs to connect with **global markets, expand their reach, and increase economic impact**.

- Challenges and enablers for cross-border participation of Caribbean entrepreneurs

While cross-border value chains create opportunities for market expansion and economic growth, Caribbean entrepreneurs face challenges such as **complex trade regulations, logistical constraints, financial risks, and infrastructure gaps**.

High transportation costs, limited shipping routes, and inadequate port facilities hinder trade efficiency. Entrepreneurs must adopt smart logistics strategies, use digital solutions, and collaborate with key stakeholders to ensure smooth operations.

Access to financing remains a barrier, requiring **targeted financial products, trade finance, and partnerships with development banks**. Effective **currency risk management** is also essential.

Building expertise in international trade, logistics, and digital marketing is crucial. **Engaging with global partners, training programs, and business incubators** can enhance competitiveness.

Digital platforms and e-commerce are key enablers, **streamlining trade processes, reducing transaction times, and improving market access**. Investments in **digital and transport infrastructure** (ports, airports, telecommunications, and digital platforms) are critical to facilitating efficient movement of goods and services across borders to further support cross-border participation.

- Supporting Caribbean entrepreneurs in maximising opportunities in cross-border value chains

To successfully navigate global value chains, Caribbean entrepreneurs need **strong capacity-building programs, strategic partnerships, and supportive policies**.

Equipping entrepreneurs with expertise in **trade, logistics, international marketing, and digital transformation** is essential. Understanding **business culture and market access requirements** (e.g., packaging, labeling, food safety, and quality standards) and accessing international business networks will strengthen their competitiveness.

Leveraging support from development partners in the form of training, market insights, and technical assistance will help entrepreneurs **comply with international trade regulations, access business networks, and navigate cross-border transactions**. Successful entrepreneurs testify that these resources, many accessible for free, constituted an invaluable resource.

Strengthening regional collaboration and policy support was stressed by our panelists and audience as a key for entrepreneurship development. Caribbean governments, private enterprises, and regional institutions must work together to enhance regional value chains. Policy incentives—such as **tax relief, financial support, and streamlined trade processes**—can encourage greater participation in cross-border trade.

By fostering **skills, partnerships, and supportive policies**, Caribbean entrepreneurs can seize new opportunities, expand their businesses, and integrate successfully into global markets.

Meet the businesses and entrepreneurs

Karibbean Flavours, Trinidad and Tobago

Karibbean Flavours is a leading manufacturer and exporter of premium quality sauces, seasonings, spices, and other condiments based in Trinidad and Tobago. Their products are crafted using traditional recipes and methods, ensuring that each item reflects the true essence of Caribbean cuisine. The company also offers a variety of essences, such as almond, aniseed, banana, and cherry, which are popular among customers for their versatility in cooking and baking.

Ravi Sankar, Managing Director, presented the company. He is a seasoned entrepreneur and the Managing Director of RHS Marketing Limited, the company behind the Caribbean Flavours brand. With a deep passion for food innovation, he founded RHS Marketing in 1995 and has since expanded its product range to over 100 locally manufactured spices, sauces, condiments, and beverages. Under his leadership, the company has grown from a small local business to an international exporter, reaching 26 markets across the Caribbean, North America, Canada, and the UK. His strategic vision and commitment to quality earned RHS Marketing the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber's Breakthrough Exporter of the Year award in 2021. Beyond business, Sankar is a mentor and advocate for local manufacturing, continuously working to elevate Caribbean products on the global stage. With plans to establish a new manufacturing facility, he remains dedicated to driving innovation and expanding the reach of Caribbean flavors worldwide.

Varross NV, Suriname

Established in 2003 in Paramaribo, Suriname, Varross N.V. began as a pork slaughterhouse and has since expanded into a full-scale meat processing and distribution company. The company offers a diverse range of products, including pork, beef, and processed meats. With its own slaughterhouse, sausage factory, import division, distribution network, and quality control department, Varross ensures the highest standards of hygiene and product excellence. Headquartered at Paramaribo, the company operates with a dedicated team of professionals and generates an estimated annual revenue of \$1.8 million.

Gyanti Tjon A Loi, Process Engineer presented the company. Gyanti has a background in animal production & health technology. She specialises in optimising production processes and ensuring high-quality standards in meat processing. At Varross, Gyanti plays a key role in overseeing operations at the company's slaughterhouse and meat processing plant, where fresh cuts and value-added products are produced. Gyanti is passionate about innovation, efficiency, and sustainable practices in the agrifood sector. With a strong focus on quality and continuous improvement, Gyanti contributes to Varross's mission of delivering premium meat products to both local and international markets. Gyanti is committed to strengthening cross-border value chains, driving growth for Varross and the Caribbean agrifood sector.

Cocoa Sainte Lucie, St. Lucia

Founded in 2015, Cocoa Sainte Lucie is an artisan bean-to-bar chocolate company in Saint Lucia. Its product line has expanded to include various dark chocolate percentages, truffles, and chocolate-covered nuts, gaining both local and international recognition.

Maria Jackson, Founder and Director, founded Cocoa Sainte Lucie. As the island's first female chocolatier, she crafts gourmet dark chocolates using locally sourced, organically grown cocoa beans. Her passion for chocolate-making began during her tenure as a pastry chef at a top resort, where she immersed herself in the art of chocolate production. Committed to community development, Maria collaborates closely with local farmers, ensuring they receive fair compensation and fostering sustainable agricultural practices. Maria Jackson's dedication to quality and community has positioned her as a prominent figure in Saint Lucia's burgeoning chocolate industry.

Meet our partner organisations supporting entrepreneurs

International Trade Centre (ITC), represented by Ben Morrison, Associate Programme Officer

The **International Trade Centre (ITC)** is a joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations, dedicated to supporting the internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). ITC's mission is to foster inclusive and sustainable economic development through trade. They provide a range of services to entrepreneurs, including capacity building, market intelligence, and trade facilitation. ITC empowers entrepreneurs to navigate international markets, improve competitiveness, and adhere to global standards. Notably, ITC has developed online market analysis tools such as the Export Potential Map, Investment Map, Market Access Map, Procurement Map, Standards Map, and Trade Map, which offer valuable insights into global trade dynamics. In the Caribbean, ITC is actively involved in enhancing value chains through the **EU-Caribbean Regional Food Security Programme**. This program focuses on strengthening agriculture and fisheries value chains at local and regional levels, promoting food security, and supporting small businesses through trade. ITC's efforts include capacity building, market and investment

linkages, and promoting innovative and sustainable practices in the blue economy. These actions demonstrate ITC's commitment to empowering entrepreneurs and fostering sustainable economic growth through trade.

[Technological Solutions Limited \(TSL\)](#), represented by [Dr. Andre Gordon](#), Managing Director

Technological Solutions Limited (TSL), established in July 1996 and led by Dr. André Gordon, offers a comprehensive suite of technical services, including food safety, quality assurance, occupational health and safety, auditing, training, production systems design, and analytical services. Recognised internationally as a Thermal Process Authority since 1997, TSL has been instrumental in enhancing food safety and quality systems across the Caribbean. The company has built a strong reputation for assisting organisations in navigating the complexities of global competition and exportation. TSL's laboratory was the first in the Caribbean to receive ISO accreditation, reflecting its commitment to excellence. The company's dedication to quality and innovation has significantly contributed to the advancement of the agribusiness sector in the Caribbean's region.

Few resources from the organisation:

- [Food safety and quality systems in developing countries : export challenges and implementation strategies](#) (2015)
- [Food safety and quality systems in developing countries . case studies of effective implementation](#) (2017)
- [Food safety and quality systems in developing countries : technical and market considerations](#) (2020)
- [Market & technical considerations for spices: Nutmeg & Mace case study](#) (2020)
- [Value Chain and End Market Analysis of Ginger, Turmeric and Pimento in Jamaica](#) (2023)

[Compete Caribbean \(CC\)](#), represented by [Nayaatha Taitt](#), Programme Coordinator

The Compete Caribbean (CC) is a private sector development program dedicated to stimulating economic growth, increasing productivity, and fostering innovation and competitiveness across 13 Caribbean countries. Launched in 2012, CC delivers innovative and practical solutions that promote economic inclusion and position regional products and services competitively in the global market. The program focuses on enhancing productivity and innovation in private sector firms, as well as improving the business and innovation climate through regulatory and institutional reforms. By providing technical assistance and expert advice, CC aims to empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow, innovate, and access new markets, thereby contributing to inclusive green economic growth in the Caribbean region. Through these initiatives, CC plays a pivotal role in driving sustainable economic development and competitiveness in the Caribbean.

Resources [other organisations]

1. Reports, articles and studies

Caribbean Development Dynamics (2025) : joint report by OECD and IDB focusing on competitiveness and cross-border value chains : https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/caribbean-development-dynamics-2024_a8e79405-en.html?utm

Resilient Value Chains in the Caribbean (2022) : IDB Invest publication exploring sustainability in Caribbean value chains : <https://idbinvest.org/en/publications/resilient-value-chains-caribbean>

How do entrepreneurial firms establish cross-border relationships? A global value chain perspective (2014): examines how small enterprises engage in cross-border alliances using a global value chain framework: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10843-013-0111-3?utm>

Inclusive Global Value Chains Policy Options for Small and Medium Enterprises and Low-Income Countries (2016):
https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2017/04/inclusive-global-value-chains_glg62482/9789264249677-en.pdf

Strengthening Caribbean Supply Chains: A Path to Resilience (2025). strategies to enhance supply chain resilience in the Caribbean, focusing on logistics, technology integration, and regional collaboration : [Strengthening Caribbean Supply Chains: A Path to Resilience - CaribbeanFocus](#)

Enhancing and Capturing More Value from the Caribbean Community's Value Chains by Don Charles (2019). This book provides a comprehensive analysis of value chains in the Caribbean, including agriculture, maritime, and hydrocarbon industries : [978-1-5275-2815-4-sample.pdf](#)

2. Training and Certification Programs

COLEAD e-learning platform : <https://training.colead.link/>

IICA training: <https://seed.iica.int/>

Certification Programme on Value Chain Development by ITC-ILO, this program builds skills for analysing and designing value chains : https://www.itcilo.org/courses/certification-programme-value-chain-development-vcd-moving-analysis-action?utm_ . (Next cohort : 9 June–26 September 2025)

CEFE Caribbean Entrepreneurship Institute: experiential learning for Caribbean entrepreneurs to manage cross-border value chains: https://cefecaribbean.com/?utm_

Compete Caribbean + (CC+) Cluster and Value Chain Call: CC+ seeks clusters and value chains to enhance Caribbean competitiveness : https://www.competecaribbean.org/opportunities/cc-cluster-and-value-chain-call/?utm_

Empowering Regional Value Chains by the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation : capacity-building efforts and partnerships with local SMEs to promote sustainable economic development : [Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation](#)

Opportunities and challenges for MSMEs in Caribbean cross-border e-commerce by ECLAC: this online course trains policymakers in good practices to improve the capacities of MSMEs to participate in cross-border e-commerce : [Opportunities and challenges for MSMEs in Caribbean cross-border e-commerce | Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

Masters in International Trade Policy (MITP) by the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy, and Services at the University of the West Indies : it equips participants with the skills and knowledge to navigate and shape the evolving trade and sustainability landscape : [Enhancing Trade Training in CARICOM as an Imperative for Sustainable Development – SRC](#)

Organisers of the series:

COLEAD: <https://www.colead.link/>

IICA: <https://iica.int/en/>

Coordination team for these series:

IICA: Allister Glean, Roxanne Waithe, Shontelle Sealy

COLEAD: Isolina Boto, Ahoefa Soklou, Nina Desanlis-Perrin



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