

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



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

Session n°3: Power in Connection: Collaborating & Networking for Women's Business Growth

Wednesday 21 May 2025 - 14:00-16:00 UTC

BIODATA OF PANELISTS

Isolina Boto –Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD



Isolina Boto is Head of Networks and Alliances at COLEAD, a non-profit association of private agri-business operators active in the European Union (EU), Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). Isolina has over 25 years' experience in agricultural development. She began her career at 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 in charge of the Brussels office of the Technical Centre for ACP-EU Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) (2004-2020), implementing policy initiatives related to ACP-EU cooperation in the agri-food sector. She has led agri-food projects aimed at supporting the capacity development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs and farmers' organizations in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. She has also developed agrotourism to link the agriculture and tourism sectors.

Natalia Buenahora – Private Sector Consultant, Digital & Entrepreneurship Regional Alliance, UN Women Americas and the Caribbean



Natalia Buenahora works at the UN Women Office for Latin America and the Caribbean as part of the Partnerships team, specializing in women's entrepreneurship, the digital divide, and the private sector. She is responsible for leading the www.TodasConectadas.org initiative, a collaborative platform led by UN Women, Microsoft, Mastercard, and Eidos Global, aiming to empower over 3.8 million women in Latin America and the Caribbean by providing free online courses, digital tools, and economic opportunities to enhance their digital skills, entrepreneurship, and participation in the digital economy. A lawyer by profession, she has served as a Human Rights Specialist at the OAS IACHR. She is an entrepreneur, mother, and overall caregiver.





Irasema Infante – Lead Sector Specialist, Trade & Integration, ConnectAmericas for Women, IDB

Irasema Infante is a Lead Sector Specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), with over 15 years of experience in regional development across Central America and Mesoamerica. At the IDB, she has led and supported initiatives in economic and social infrastructure, including the modernization of border crossings, regional electricity interconnection, institutional responses to migration, access to healthcare and livelihoods, and regulatory reform. She currently plays a key role in ConnectAmericas for Women, an IDB initiative aimed at expanding opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Latin America and the Caribbean through enhanced market access and business support. Before joining the IDB, Irasema worked at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Subsecretariats for Latin America and the Caribbean, and for North America. She also served as a research assistant at El Colegio de México. She holds a dual bachelor's degree in Political Science and International Relations with distinction from the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), and a Master's degree in International Relations from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.



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.

Nana Adjoa Sifa Amponsah – Founder, Guzakuza, Ghana

Nana Adjoa Sifa Amponsah is a Ghanaian social entrepreneur and advocate for women's economic empowerment in Africa, especially in agribusiness and agritech. She is the founder of Guzakuza, a social enterprise launched in 2015 to support women through training, mentorship, and investment opportunities. Its key program, the *Ignite Agribusiness Fellowship*, has trained hundreds of young African women. She also leads initiatives like *SheFarms*, *Women in Agribusiness Week (WAW)*, and the *Africa Women in Agribusiness Awards*. Nana co-founded *Yo!Gate Foods* and was President of the *Direct Impact Foundation* (2012–2015). She has held advisory roles with organizations like UN Women and GIZ. Currently, she is a director at the *London Centre for Agribusiness* and serves on advisory boards such as *Regen10* and the *Transformational Investing in Food Systems* initiative. Her work significantly advances sustainable agriculture and women's leadership across Africa.



Prisca Soko – Chair, African Women In Business, South Africa

Prisca Soko is a South African business leader and Certified Internal Auditor with over 24 years of experience in finance, auditing, and business development. She holds a Bachelor of Accounting Science (Honours) CTA from the University of South Africa and completed her articles with Deloitte South Africa. Her career spans roles such as Chief Financial Officer at Mpumalanga Parks Board and founder of businesses in the Oil & Gas, Electrical Engineering, and Manufacturing sectors in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. Prisca has served on numerous audit committees and boards across public and private sectors. She is a long-time member and shareholder of Women in Oil and Energy of South Africa (WOESA) and has been Group Business Development

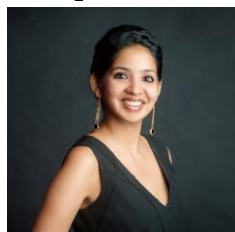




Executive for WOESA since 2014. In 2019, she became Chairperson of SADC-WIB (Women In Business), focusing on building networks and investment portfolios in sectors like agriculture and energy across the SADC region. She also chairs the African Women In Business organization. Prisca has received multiple honors, including the Women in Energy Leadership Award (2017) and Technology Women in Business – Business Woman of the Year (2007) from the South African Department of Minerals and Energy.

Mrinalini Venkatachalam – Regional Director, South East Asia, North Asia and Oceania, WEConnect International

As Regional Director for Southeast Asia and Oceania, Mrinalini (Minnie) provides support to WEConnect International by enhancing brand visibility and conducting outreach to women entrepreneurs and corporate buyers in Southeast Asia, East Asia and Oceania. Her region is probably the fastest growing for small and medium enterprises, including those that are women owned. There is a large diversity in types of products, particularly in the sectors of finished consumer goods, commodities and professional services. This has the potential to create mass appeal, especially amongst large established FMCGs and retail chains. Consistency in quality also allows these businesses to remain sustainable, thus providing employment and allowing communities to thrive. With experience spanning over a decade, Minnie has worked to bridge the gap between unmet social needs and service providers, giving large corporations, government agencies, community organizations and social enterprises the platform to create measurable social impact. She speaks regularly at schools, community events, corporate gatherings and conferences about the role that gender equality plays in achieving a more sustainable world for everyone. Minnie has been awarded the Singapore Women's Weekly's Great Women of Our Time Award in the Public Service and Education category and has been nominated as one of Cleo Singapore's 2016 top ten Changemakers.



This event has been created with the support of the Fit For Market Plus programme is implemented by COLEAD within the framework of Development cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), and the European Union (EU).

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the EU and the OACPS. Its contents are the sole responsibility of COLEAD and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the EU or the OACPS.