Session n°7:
Women pioneering in the blue and green economies

Wednesday 25 February 2026

HIGHLIGHTS

About the collaboration UN Women and COLEAD

The collaboration between UN Women and COLEAD focuses on empowering women entrepreneurs in the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries and beyond. The South-South Series is specifically designed for women entrepreneurs and business leaders, providing a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, skill enhancement, market access, and networking opportunities.

Session n°7: Women pioneering in the blue and green economies

The seventh session of the South-South Series focused on **Women pioneering in the blue and green economies.** The session held on the 25th of February 2026 was a success! It attracted a great interest from all regions in the world. 400 persons registered to the session and accessed all information.
Moderated by Nina Desanlis-Perrin, Project Officer at COLEAD, and opened by Angela Davis, Program Specialist at UN Women Caribbean and Ines Bastos, Senior Expert Business Development at COLEAD, the session featured four accomplished women leaders from Africa, South America and the Caribbean. They shared their experiences in building and supporting the blue and green economies. The interactive Q&A session fostered an engaging dialogue between participants and speakers.
Finally, Alonso Bobes, Program Associate at UN Women Caribbean, outlined the key points and the next steps and opportunities for continued collaboration.
Find all information related to this session, including the recording, on Agrinnovators.

Meet our panellists

Tacko Ndiaye
Gender Team Leader, FAO

Dr. Legena Henry
Founder and CEO, Rum and Sargassum, Barbados

Rahel Heru
Founder and Managing Director, Damascene Essential Oil Processing, Ethiopia

María Elvira López
Impact Measurement and Reporting Manager, Conservation International

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Tacko Ndiaye – Gender Team Leader, FAO
Within the FAO, Tacko Ndiaye coordinates initiatives to mainstream gender and social inclusion in agrifood systems and rural development. Tacko emphasized the importance of recognizing and empowering women within agriculture to drive sustainable rural transformation. She highlighted persistent gender gaps, including limited access to land, finance, and decision-making, and stressed the need for targeted interventions that integrate women's perspectives into policies, programs, and investments. She also showcased initiatives promoting women farmers' visibility and leadership, such as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, underscoring that empowering women strengthens food security, climate resilience, and sustainable natural resource management.

Dr. Legena Henry – Founder and CEO, Rum and Sargassum, Barbados
As the founder and CEO of a renewable energy company in Barbados, Dr. Legena Henry leads innovations in sustainable biofuels and indigenous energy solutions. She discussed the challenges and opportunities of operating in male-dominated sectors, emphasizing how women's resilience, nurturing skills, and leadership contribute to business success. Legena highlighted the role of education and mentorship in inspiring young women, and the importance of early exposure through schools and universities to demonstrate viable career paths in the green and blue economies. She also shared examples of integrating sustainable energy technologies into communities while navigating technical and social barriers.

Rahel Heru – Founder and Managing Director, Damascene Essential Oil Processing, Ethiopia
As the founder and managing director of an essential oil processing company in Ethiopia, Rahel Heruy works with smallholder women farmers to combine inclusive agribusiness with forest conservation. She detailed initiatives supporting thousands of women in cultivating spices and coffee, creating income opportunities, and forming cooperatives that sustain forests while producing high-quality products for international markets. Rahel illustrated how empowering women through training, access to resources, and skill-building strengthens economic independence, promotes sustainable land use, protects biodiversity, and builds long-term community resilience.

María Elvira López – Impact Measurement and Reporting Manager, Conservation International
Within Conservation International, Maria Elvira López focuses on supporting women-led enterprises in sustainable blue economy ventures across Latin America and beyond. She highlighted the financial and systemic barriers women face in fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal resource management, noting that women-led businesses often outperform their male counterparts despite funding gaps. Maria emphasized the value of flexible investment, mentorship programs, and capacity-building initiatives, as well as South-South collaboration, to scale impact and increase women's participation in environmentally sustainable ventures globally.

Key highlights

Women play a critical role in leading the blue and green economies, contributing not only to economic growth but also to environmental conservation and community resilience. Their participation in agriculture, forestry, and coastal resource management enables sustainable livelihoods and strengthens local value chains. Despite facing systemic barriers such as limited access to finance, gender biases, and under-recognition of their work, women-led enterprises often outperform their male-led counterparts in efficiency, innovation, and profitability. Inclusive business models, cooperative approaches, and targeted skill-building programs enhance women's economic independence while promoting environmental stewardship, such as organic farming, reforestation, and biodiversity protection. Cross-sector collaboration, mentorship, training, and networking, including South-South knowledge sharing between regions, are essential strategies to amplify impact and scale women-led initiatives. Engaging young women early through education, volunteer programs, and visible role models fosters interest and builds the next generation of leaders in green and blue sectors. Overall, empowering women in the blue and green economies strengthens communities, supports sustainable resource management, and drives inclusive and resilient development globally.

Join the conversation on our Agrinnovators Forum to explore the questions raised during the session and share your own insights, experiences, and ideas with the community.
You have to create a profile to access the Forum.

Resources

- Publications

FAO. 2021. The impact of disasters and crises on agriculture.
FAO. The state of world fisheries and aquaculture.
Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. 2024. Using a sustainable food systems framework to examine gender equality and women's empowerment in aquatic food systems.
IFAD. 2022. These numbers prove that rural women are crucial for a better future.
Journal of the Indian Ocean Region. 2024. Counting women? Gendered sustainability and inclusivityfor an ocean accounting framework.
Regional Gender-Responsive Climate-Smart Agriculture and Food Systems.
UNICEF. 2024. Tackling gender inequality in a climate-changed world.

- Webinars

AgriCord. From vision to action: Gender transformative agriculture in practice. 5 March 2026: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/cAQapHsmSgy_e92FLizQQw#/registration
APAARI. Celebrating International Year of Women farmers 2026. 30 March 2026: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/mopXLGQmSBmrc_PW20Jy6A#/registration
Innovation Women Speak!: https://innovationwomen.com/webinars/?utm
UN Women-COLEAD South- South Series: Empowering and Growing Women-led Business.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV5hWpGiR940wWLfhb-X6vg_fyzwS7zkv

- Trainings

COLEAD training materials: https://training.colead.link/
ITU Academy. Green and digital entrepreneurship for women: https://academy.itu.int/training-courses/full-catalogue/green-and-digital-entrepreneurship-women
SheTrades Academy: https://learn.shetrades.com/
UN Trade and Development. eTrade for Women Masterclasses: https://etradeforall.org/et4women
UN Women training materials: https://portal.trainingcentre.unwomen.org/unw-catalog-mobile/

Coordination team for this Series:
UN Women Caribbean: Alonso Bobes – Program Assistant
COLEAD: Nina Desanlis-Perrin – Project Officer, Ahoefa Soklou – Project Officer

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