



South-South Series:

Empowering and Growing Women-led Business



Session n°7:

Women pioneering in the blue and green economies

Wednesday 25 February 2026 – 14:00-16:00 UTC

[Online \(Zoom\)](#)

Live interpretation in English, French and Spanish

The collaboration between UN Women and COLEAD targets entrepreneurs in the Global South. The South-South Series are tailored for women entrepreneurs and business leaders, aiming to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, enhance business skills and market access, and promote networking.

1. Context

Women play a central yet often under-recognized role across blue and green economy value chains, from agri-food systems and sustainable fisheries to circular and nature-based enterprises. The *green economy* refers to economic activities that promote environmental sustainability, low-carbon growth, and resource efficiency, while the *blue economy* encompasses sustainable use of ocean, freshwater, and coastal resources for economic growth, livelihoods, and ecosystem health. In climate-vulnerable contexts, women entrepreneurs face multiple challenges, including exposure to climate shocks, limited access to finance and markets, and unequal care responsibilities. Despite these barriers, they are key drivers of innovation, resilience, and environmental stewardship.

Globally, women represent over 43% of the agricultural labour force but own less than 15% of agricultural land. In fisheries and aquaculture, women make up around 50% of the workforce, mainly in pre- and post-harvest activities, yet remain largely invisible in policy frameworks and value chain governance¹. Structural barriers continue to limit women's access to resources, decision-making, decent work, and economic returns in both blue and green economy sectors².

Climate change is not gender-neutral. Its impacts, including extreme weather, food insecurity, and livelihood loss, disproportionately affect women, particularly in climate-vulnerable coastal and rural communities³. Blue and green economies offer critical pathways for climate resilience and inclusive growth, yet women's contributions in fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture, and nature-based solutions remain undervalued. Highlighting these contributions and enabling South-South knowledge exchange can strengthen women's economic empowerment and inform more inclusive policies and practices across regions.

2. Blue economy: opportunities & constraints for women

Women play critical but frequently invisible roles across fisheries and aquaculture value chains, particularly in pre- and post-harvest activities that are often informal, low-paid and

¹ IFAD. 2022. [These numbers prove that rural women are crucial for a better future.](#)

² FAO. [The state of world fisheries and aquaculture.](#)

³ UNICEF. 2024. [Tackling gender inequality in a climate-changed world.](#)



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unrecognised⁴. Structural constraints, including limited access to markets, data, finance and formal worker status, continue to restrict women’s economic participation in the blue economy. At the same time, a growing number of initiatives are leveraging digital technologies, cooperative models and market-based solutions to improve visibility, strengthen women’s economic participation and support more inclusive and sustainable value chains.

Across regions, initiatives are emerging that enhance traceability, support women’s entrepreneurship, facilitate access to financial services and strengthen market linkages for small-scale fisheries and aquaculture actors. For example, the ABALOBI initiative in South Africa demonstrates how fisher-designed digital tools can increase the visibility of women’s labour, support the formalisation of economic identities, improve traceability and unlock access to higher-value markets⁵. By documenting women’s contributions along the value chain, such models can enhance livelihoods and income stability while strengthening women’s agency, recognition and engagement with financial institutions and public authorities.

3. Green economy & agri-food systems: women as change agents

Women and small-scale producers often lack agency in food systems and face disproportionate burdens in agricultural and food processing tasks, limiting productivity, income opportunities and participation in higher-value segments of the green economy⁶. Structural barriers (unequal access to land, resources, technology,...) undermine women’s resilience and economic empowerment in agri-food systems⁷. The United Nations has declared 2026 the *International Year of the Woman Farmer*, recognising women’s essential roles across agrifood systems and promoting action to close gender gaps and strengthen women’s livelihoods worldwide.

Alongside these constraints, initiatives are emerging that support women’s entrepreneurship and climate-smart practices across regions. For example, the Regional Gender-Responsive Climate-Smart Agriculture and Food Systems project in the Caribbean equips women-led agricultural enterprises with climate-smart technologies, business skills, and market linkages, enabling them to increase productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and generate sustainable livelihoods⁸. By fostering these innovations, women are positioned as key drivers of green economic transformation and inclusive, resilient food systems.

4. Way forward

This session will spotlight women-led enterprises as drivers of innovation and resilience in blue and green economies, moving beyond policy discussions to highlight practical business models. Through South–South exchange, it will:

- demonstrate how women entrepreneurs turn climate and sustainability challenges into viable, resilient, and market-oriented opportunities,
- showcase tools and models that help women overcome barriers to finance, markets, and recognition across value chains, and
- highlight how policies, partnerships, and support ecosystems can enable the scaling and replication of women-led innovations in the blue and green economies.

⁴ Journal of the Indian Ocean Region. 2024. [Counting women? Gendered sustainability and inclusivity for an ocean accounting framework](#).

⁵ ABALOBI.

⁶ Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. 2024. [Using a sustainable food systems framework to examine gender equality and women’s empowerment in aquatic food systems](#).

⁷ FAO. 2021. [The impact of disasters and crises on agriculture](#).

⁸ [Regional Gender-Responsive Climate-Smart Agriculture and Food Systems](#).

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Agenda

Moderator: *Nina Desanlis-Perrin, Project Officer, COLEAD*

14:00-14:10 Introduction to the session

14:10-14:20 Welcoming remarks:

- *Angela Davis, Program Specialist, UN Women MCO Caribbean*
- *Ines Bastos, Senior Expert Business Development, COLEAD*

14:20-15:30 Panel on experiences from women pioneering in the blue and green economies

- *Tacko Ndiaye, Gender Team Leader, FAO*
- *Dr. Legena Henry, Founder and CEO, Rum and Sargassum, Barbados*
- *Rahel Heruy, Managing Director, Damascene Essential Oil, Ethiopia*
- *Maria Elvira Lopez, Impact Measurement and Reporting Manager, Conservation International*

15:30-15:50 Q&A

15:50-16:00 Way forward: *Alonso Bobes, Program Associate, UN Women MCO Caribbean*



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