



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

Session 8: Artificial intelligence for women entrepreneurs

15 April 2026





AI & Women's Entrepreneurship

At the intersection of data, innovation, and entrepreneurship in Africa—how artificial intelligence can become a powerful tool for empowering women entrepreneurs.

SESSION: AI & WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

My Background & My Work

As an expert in artificial intelligence applied to the digital economy, I work at the intersection of data, innovation, and entrepreneurship in Africa, with a focus on women's empowerment. I conduct research on these topics and publish articles on **Maestria**.

I also collaborate with international organizations, civil society groups, and businesses to support the implementation of AI-based solutions, enhance business performance, and build inclusive digital ecosystems.

AI Adoption

Facilitating AI adoption by startups and SMEs, particularly those led by women, by removing technical and cultural barriers.

Data Utilization

Leveraging data to improve decision-making and support the sustainable growth of African businesses.

Low-Infrastructure Contexts

Develop approaches tailored to local realities, particularly in environments with limited digital infrastructure.

These initiatives result in improved productivity, a better understanding of markets, and enhanced skills among women entrepreneurs in the strategic use of digital tools and AI.

1. Major Challenges for Women in the Global South

In the Global South, women entrepreneurs face deep-rooted structural barriers that hinder their access to and adoption of artificial intelligence technologies. These constraints directly limit their ability to experiment with, adopt, and deploy AI on a large scale within their businesses.

Limited Digital Infrastructure

Insufficient access to the internet and technological equipment in many regions, creating a structural digital divide that disproportionately affects women entrepreneurs.

High cost of technology

AI tools and related technologies remain financially out of reach for the majority of women-led SMEs, which often have limited resources.

Limited access to data

The lack of usable, structured data is a major obstacle to the effective use of AI, which fundamentally relies on the quality and availability of data.

Lack of data literacy

Limited proficiency with data and AI prevents many women from taking advantage of available tools, even when they have access to them.

Systemic biases

The underrepresentation of women in tech roles and persistent systemic biases reduce their visibility, access to networks, and opportunities within the digital ecosystem.

2. Concrete Opportunities Presented by AI

Despite these challenges, AI creates tangible and accessible opportunities for women-led SMEs. Three areas of application stand out in particular for their immediate and measurable impact.



Marketing Automation

Automated generation of content and marketing campaigns using AI tools. Concrete example: using AI tools to produce marketing content, resulting in **significant time savings** and a strengthened digital presence.

3x

Productivity gains

Increased capacity for content creation and data processing.



Customer Data Analysis

Leveraging customer data to improve sales and better understand markets. Example: analyzing simple data via **Excel + AI** to identify sales trends and adapt the product offering accordingly.

↑Revenue

Revenue

Increased revenue through improved customer insight.



Operations Optimization

Improving inventory management and customer relations through intelligent automation. These optimizations free up time to focus on strategy and business development.

100%

New markets

Access to new digital markets that were previously inaccessible.

3. Current Practices & Best Practices

Uses Observed in the Field

Women entrepreneurs adopting AI today focus on three main categories of use, accessible even with limited resources:

- **Content creation**
Producing content for social media and external communications, reducing the time spent on creation.
- **Automated Customer Support**
Deployment of chatbots and automation tools to manage customer interactions efficiently and continuously.
- **Basic data analysis**
Use of simple tools to extract insights from available data and guide business decisions.

Recommended best practices

Field experience reveals four fundamental principles for the successful adoption of AI in women-owned SMEs:

01

Start simple

Start with accessible generative AI tools before gradually increasing complexity.

02

Solve a concrete problem

Identify a real, measurable business problem before introducing an AI solution to ensure a tangible return on investment.

03

Train gradually

Build teams' skills gradually, respecting each team's learning pace.

04

AI as a decision-making tool

Integrate AI as a decision-making tool, never as an end in itself—people remain at the center.

4. Key Skills & Training

To fully leverage AI, women entrepreneurs must develop a foundation of core skills. Addressing these gaps requires educational approaches tailored to African realities.



Data Literacy

Understanding, interpreting, and using data to make informed decisions. This skill is the essential foundation of any effective AI initiative.



AI Literacy

Understanding the true capabilities and limitations of AI to use it effectively, without falling into the traps of overpromising or excessive mistrust.



Critical Thinking & Data-Driven Decision-Making

Developing the ability to question AI results and make decisions based on data rather than intuition alone.

How to bridge the gaps?



Targeted programs for women

Develop training programs specifically designed for women entrepreneurs, taking into account their constraints regarding time, mobility, and financial resources.



Practical approaches (learning by doing)

Prioritize learning through practice and hands-on experimentation rather than theoretical training disconnected from real-world realities.



Local & Contextualized Resources

Access educational resources adapted to local contexts, in local languages, with examples drawn from African realities.



Mentoring & personalized support

Receive personalized support from experienced mentors to overcome the specific obstacles inherent in each entrepreneurial journey.

5. The Role of Ecosystems

Women's digital inclusion cannot rely solely on female entrepreneurs. It requires a coordinated effort by all stakeholders in the ecosystem, across several complementary levels of action.



📌 **Concrete examples:** Innovation hubs and acceleration programs dedicated to women, targeted digital training initiatives, and networking programs connecting women entrepreneurs with AI experts.

6. Toward a More Inclusive AI

The challenge goes beyond simply using existing tools. For a truly inclusive adoption of AI, we must fundamentally rethink how these technologies are designed, developed, and deployed.

Democratizing Access

Make AI tools accessible to all women entrepreneurs, regardless of their income level, geographic location, or level of technological education.

Involving Women in Design

Include women from the earliest stages of AI solution design to ensure these tools truly meet their needs and reflect their realities.

Developing inclusive datasets

Build representative and diverse datasets to reduce algorithmic biases that systematically disadvantage women and populations in the Global South.

Women as creators of AI solutions

Encourage and support women so that they become not only users, but true **creators and developers** of AI solutions tailored to their contexts.

“Women shouldn’t just *use* AI—they must become **key players in its design and development.**”

Summary: Roadmap for Action

From identifying challenges to envisioning an inclusive AI, here are the key steps to turning opportunities into tangible impact for women entrepreneurs in Africa.



This roadmap illustrates a logical progression: you can't skip steps. Infrastructure and skills are the foundations without which no sustainable adoption is possible. It is by building these solid foundations that women entrepreneurs will not only be able to use AI, but also become its architects.

Short term

Adopt simple tools, solve a concrete problem, begin training teams in the basics of data literacy.

Medium term

Structure company data, automate key processes, join specialized networks and support programs.

Long term

Become a creator of AI solutions, contribute to the design of inclusive tools, and inspire the next generation of African women in technology.

AI for Women's Empowerment

Artificial intelligence represents a historic opportunity for women entrepreneurs in Africa—provided that the entire ecosystem commits to making this revolution truly inclusive.



Challenges to Overcome

Infrastructure, costs, skills, and systemic biases remain real obstacles that require coordinated and ambitious responses.



Ecosystem to mobilize

Governments, the private sector, incubators, and hubs must work together to create the conditions for inclusive and sustainable adoption.




Opportunities to Seize

Automated marketing, data analytics, operational optimization: productivity and revenue gains available today.



A vision to embody

African women as creators, designers, and leaders of tomorrow's AI—not just users, but architects of the digital future.

 **Find my research and publications on these topics on MaestrIA**—a platform dedicated to AI applied to the African digital economy and women's entrepreneurship.



Thank you

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