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

Session n°8:
Artificial intelligence for women entrepreneurs
Wednesday 15 April 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°8: Artificial intelligence for women entrepreneurs

The eighth session of the South-South Series focused on **Artificial intelligence for women entrepreneurs**. The session held on the 15th of April 2026 was a success! It attracted a great interest from all regions in the world. 456 persons registered to the session and accessed all resources.

Moderated by Alonso Bobes, Program Associate at UN Women Caribbean, and opened by Inês Bastos, Head of Networks and Alliances at COLEAD, the session featured four accomplished women leaders from Africa and the Caribbean. They shared their experiences in artificial intelligence by and for women. The interactive Q&A session fostered an engaging dialogue between participants and speakers. Finally, Nina Desanlis-Perrin, Project Officer at COLEAD, 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 panelists

Akoua Awoudja
Strategic Digital Transformation Advisor, GIZ, Togo

Kai Clarke
Founder, EthicAI Caribbean, Jamaica

Priscilla Wakarera
Co founder, Rhea, Kenya

Lisa-Marie LaVeau
Ambassador, Women in AI, Trinidad and Tobago

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Akoua Awoudja – Strategic Digital Transformation Advisor, GIZ, Togo
Akoua Awoudja focused on how artificial intelligence can serve as a practical tool for empowering women entrepreneurs, particularly in Africa, while highlighting the structural barriers that limit access and adoption. She explained that her work sits at the intersection of AI, data, and digital transformation, with a strong focus on improving the adoption of AI among women-led SMEs and strengthening data-driven decision-making in low-resource environments. She identified key challenges facing women entrepreneurs, including weak digital infrastructure, high costs of technology, limited access to finance, low levels of data and AI literacy, and systemic gender biases that reduce women's participation in the tech ecosystem and shape the design of AI solutions that often fail to reflect their needs. Despite these constraints, she emphasized that AI offers concrete opportunities, particularly in automating marketing content, improving customer engagement, supporting data analysis, and optimizing business operations such as inventory and client management. She gave practical examples of how generative AI tools can be used to create content, analyze sales data, and support forecasting, leading to gains in productivity, revenue, and market access. She also stressed the importance of starting with simple tools, focusing on real business problems, and progressively building skills. Her core message highlighted the need for stronger data and AI literacy, critical thinking, and ecosystem collaboration involving governments, the private sector, and incubators. Ultimately, she argued that women should not only use AI but also actively participate in designing and shaping it to ensure it becomes truly inclusive and context-relevant.

Kai Clarke – Founder, EthicAI Caribbean, Jamaica
Kai Clarke focused on how artificial intelligence is already shaping access to opportunity for entrepreneurs, while stressing that inclusion in AI is not automatic and must be intentionally built through governance and ethical design. Drawing on her experience as an AI governance and digital transformation specialist, she explained how she uses AI daily in her business to analyze complex regulations, draft policy documents, research global AI trends, and streamline client communications, enabling a small firm to operate with the efficiency of much larger organizations. However, she emphasized that access to AI tools alone is not enough, as these systems can reproduce or amplify inequalities if not properly governed. She highlighted persistent gender gaps in AI adoption and pointed to structural governance weaknesses in contexts like Jamaica, including the absence of accessibility standards, lack of bias audits or algorithmic impact assessments, and limited disability-disaggregated data. To address these issues, she introduced the JIAIS (Jamaican Inclusive AI Standards) framework, which includes inclusive data standards, a transparency registry for AI use, an independent audit office, and an AI equity fund to support inclusive innovation. She also presented the DISA (Disability Inclusion Scoring Algorithm), a tool for assessing AI systems based on accessibility, bias risk, transparency, and equity in data. Overall, her message emphasized that AI must be designed with accountability and inclusion from the start, ensuring women, especially those with disabilities, are protected, represented, and empowered within AI systems.

Priscilla Wakarera – Co founder, Rhea, Kenya
Priscilla Wakarera presented AI as a practical tool for transforming agriculture and empowering women smallholder farmers across Africa, drawing from her background as a soil scientist in Kenya. She described how her field experience revealed a major crisis: widespread soil degradation is reducing productivity for millions of farmers, while access to soil testing is slow, expensive and inaccessible, often requiring weeks of waiting and costly lab services. To solve this, she co-founded Rhea, a soil intelligence company that combines portable "Agripad" hardware, AI-driven machine learning models, and a WhatsApp-based chatbot to deliver fast, affordable, and localized soil analysis and recommendations. This reduces testing time from up to 14 days to under 48 hours and lowers costs to about $12 per test, while also making results accessible in local languages and offline-friendly formats. Beyond diagnostics, Rhea builds predictive soil datasets and supports climate resilience, regenerative farming, and better resource management. Priscilla also emphasizes a strong women-centered model: training women as field agents, creating income opportunities, and building credit-relevant data to improve financial inclusion. She highlighted that AI's true value lies in being locally designed, affordable, and co-created with users, enabling women not only to adopt technology but to become key actors in agritech innovation and sustainable food systems.

Lisa-Marie LaVeau – Ambassador, Women in AI, Trinidad and Tobago
Lisa-Marie LaVeau presented artificial intelligence as a powerful economic equalizer for women entrepreneurs, arguing that AI is reshaping how businesses operate, compete, and scale by enabling automation of repetitive tasks, improved customer insights, and stronger decision-making. She emphasized that these capabilities can significantly level the playing field for women-led businesses, particularly small and resource-constrained enterprises. However, she also highlighted key barriers that limit adoption, including insufficient access to AI education and digital skills, high costs and infrastructure gaps, as well as persistent concerns around data privacy, trust, and algorithmic bias. She stressed that AI systems can reproduce inequality if women and diverse communities are not adequately represented in their design and training data. For this reason, she framed ethics, governance, and inclusion as central pillars of responsible AI, calling for fairness, transparency, accountability, and stronger protection of user data. Importantly, she insisted that women must not only be users of AI but also active participants as designers, leaders, and decision-makers shaping its development. Her call to action focuses on investing in AI education for women entrepreneurs, building cross-sector partnerships, encouraging experimentation, creating mentorship and support networks. She concluded with a clear message that AI should not deepen inequality but instead close it, with women entrepreneurs placed at the center of this transformation.

Key highlights

- AI functions as a powerful economic multiplier for women entrepreneurs, increasing productivity, automating routine tasks, and enabling small resource-limited women-led businesses to operate at the scale and efficiency of much larger organizations.
- Major barriers to AI adoption include limited digital skills and AI literacy, infrastructure gaps, affordability constraints, and unequal access to quality data and training - barriers that disproportionately affect women in low-resource and informal economies.
- Practical applications of AI for women entrepreneurs include marketing automation, customer service tools (chatbots/WhatsApp systems), financial management support, predictive analytics, agricultural and soil intelligence systems.
- Context-specific and locally designed AI solutions are essential, with emphasis on tools built for real conditions such as low connectivity, multilingual environments, and smallholder or informal economies. AI tools co-created with users are more effective and more likely to be adopted.
- AI is not inherently inclusive; without intentional design and governance, it can reproduce or deepen existing inequalities related to gender, disability, and geography.
- Inclusion and governance are tightly linked, requiring bias audits, accessibility standards, transparency in algorithmic decision-making, representative datasets, and stronger participation of women and marginalized groups in both design and oversight of AI systems.
- Key priorities focus on building ecosystems that support women as both users and creators of AI through investment in digital skills, women-led innovation, mentorship, and cross-sector partnerships.

Artificial Intelligence apps for business operations

The panelists mentioned several AI apps that can support business operations: *Microsoft Copilot* (AI writing and automation), *Power Apps* (business workflow automation), *Power Automate* (task and process automation), *n8n* (open-source workflow automation), *Make* (app integration automation platform), *HubSpot* (CRM and marketing management), *Qwilr* (proposals and invoice creation), *Dovetail* (customer data analysis), and *GenSpark* (AI agent automation tool).

***Disclaimer**: The tools listed above were mentioned by the session panelists for illustrative purposes only. Their inclusion in this document does not constitute an endorsement, validation, or recommendation by UN Women or COLEAD. These tools have not been independently tested or evaluated by COLEAD. Readers are encouraged to conduct their own due diligence before adopting any of these tools.*

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

Boston Consulting Group. 2018. Why Women-Owned Startups Are a Better Bet.
Boston Consulting Group. 2025. AI at Work: Is Asia Pacific Leading the Way?
ECLAC. Caribbean Artificial Intelligence Readiness: An Exploratory Review.
IMF. 2024. Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work
Microsoft. 2024. AI at Work Is Here. Now Comes the Hard Part.
OECD. 2024. Policy Brief : Algorithm and Eve: How AI will impact women at work.
OECD. 2024. Who will be the workers most affected by AI?
OECD. 2025. Africa Capital Markets Report 2025.
UN. 2025. Artificial intelligence unleashed: Transforming the entrepreneurial scene in developing countries.
World Bank Group. 2025. Digital Progress and Trends Report 2025.

- Webinars

Diving into the world of AI: https://totheweb.com/learning_center/generative-ai-events
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/
Hadafi. Start and Grow Your Business: https://hadafi.potential.org
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/
University of Pennsylvania. AI For Business Specialization:https://www.coursera.org/specializations/ai-for-business-wharton

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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