

South-South Series:

Empowering and Growing Women-led Business



Session n°9:

Engaging men as partners and champions of women's empowerment

Wednesday 10 June 2026 – 14:00-15:45 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 entrepreneurs are central to economic growth and innovation, yet they continue to face systemic barriers that limit their participation and leadership. Across sectors, women often encounter unequal access to finance, technology, networks, and markets. Globally, women own roughly one-third of small and medium-sized enterprises, yet they receive only a small share of available business credit, and are underrepresented in leadership positions, holding less than 30% of senior management roles¹.

Beyond these structural challenges, women also bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Globally, women spend 2.5 to 10 times more time on unpaid care activities, such as childcare, eldercare, and household chores, compared to men. This imbalance directly limits their ability to dedicate time to business development, networking, and skill-building.

In sectors like agrifood, women constitute over 40% of the workforce and play critical roles across production, processing, and marketing. Yet access to resources remains unequal: less than 15% of agricultural landholders are women, and women farmers are less likely to access finance, technology, and markets². Their contributions are essential for productivity, food security, and resilience, and greater inclusion is needed to ensure women-led enterprises can fully thrive.

Beyond sector-specific impacts, the broader economic case for gender equality is compelling. Empowering women is not only a question of fairness but also of efficiency and resilience. The exclusion of women isn't just a social issue; it's an economic loss. Evidence suggests that closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship could add USD 5 trillion annually to global GDP³, as increasing the number of women-led businesses would boost job creation, innovation, and community development.

Broader analyses indicate that eliminating gender discrimination in laws and economic participation could raise global GDP by over 20%⁴, demonstrating the profound economic and societal benefits of gender equality. Achieving this potential requires more than programs targeting women alone; it depends on engaging men as partners, allies, and champions.

¹ International Labor Organization. 2019. [The business case for change](#).

² IFAD. 2026. [Rural women, from investment to impact](#).

³ World Economic Forum. 2025. [Digital inclusion: How to unlock the \\$5 trillion opportunity for women entrepreneurs](#)

⁴ World Bank. 2024. [New Data Show Massive, Wider-than-Expected Global Gender Gap](#).



2. Men as partners: opportunities and challenges

Engaging men as partners in women’s empowerment presents both significant opportunities and challenges. In many agrifood settings, social norms assign a higher status to men, who continue to hold greater decision-making power over resources and opportunities, positioning them as key actors in enabling or constraining women’s empowerment. By actively supporting women, men can play a key role in expanding their access to resources and services, facilitate equitable decision-making, and model inclusive behaviors. They can advocate for finance, technology, and market access, promote shared household responsibilities, and champion inclusive policies and workplace practices. By doing so, men not only support individual women entrepreneurs but also strengthen business ecosystems, value chains, and communities⁵.

Challenges remain, particularly in contexts where traditional gender norms shape expectations and perceptions of authority and leadership. Men may fear that supporting women’s empowerment threatens their own status or may simply be unaware of the broader benefits of equitable participation. Effective engagement requires culturally informed strategies that position men as allies who share in the benefits of inclusive growth, improved business performance, stronger communities, and more resilient households, rather than as overseers of gender initiatives⁶.

Inclusive approaches that engage men have demonstrated multiple positive outcomes. When women’s participation in decision-making and leadership roles increases, organizational performance improves, and households and communities experience greater economic stability. In agrifood systems, men’s support for women-led enterprises can enhance productivity and income generation, strengthen access to resources and markets, and promote fairer profit sharing. Across sectors, men’s advocacy and allyship can open doors to opportunities for women entrepreneurs, helping to shift gender norms and create more equitable and resilient business environments⁷.

For gender equality to become reality, men and women must work together as partners, recognizing that empowerment is not a zero-sum game. Joint engagement helps challenge entrenched gender norms and stereotypes, aligns incentives across households and organizations, and ensures and creates stronger, more resilient communities and businesses.

3. The way forward

This webinar will highlight practical strategies and examples of men’s engagement in support of women entrepreneurs. Through South–South knowledge exchange, the session will demonstrate how men can actively support women-led enterprises and challenge restrictive gender norms; showcase tools, programs, and models that enable men to be effective allies in finance, leadership, and market access; and highlight policy, partnership, and ecosystem approaches that allow men’s engagement initiatives to scale across sectors and communities.

By positioning men as partners in women’s empowerment, this webinar aims to foster inclusive business environments where women entrepreneurs can thrive. Together, we can unlock growth, innovation, and resilience: for women, men, and entire communities.

⁵ ICRW. 2018. [Gender equity and male engagement: it only works when everyone plays.](#)

⁶ UNDP. [Masculinities and engaging men for gender equality.](#)

⁷ OSCE. 2025. [Engaging Men on Gender Equality](#)

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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, Head of Networks and Alliances, COLEAD*

14:20-15:20 Panel on experiences in engaging men as partners and champions of women's empowerment

- *Sue Ann Barratt, Caribbean Male Action Network, Trinidad and Tobago*
- *Melissa Wong Oviedo, Equimundo, Peru*
- *Mwansa Mungela, FAO, Zambia*
- *George Kporye, Golden Exotics Limited, Ghana*
- *Judy C. Deterville-Jacob, Sandals Resort, Saint Lucia*

15:20-15:40 Q&A

15:40-15:45 Way forward: *Alonso Bobes, Program Associate, UN Women MCO Caribbean*



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