



# South-South Series:

## Empowering and Growing Women-led Business



### HIGHLIGHTS

#### Session n°1:

#### Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs:

#### Strategies for building confidence, leadership skills, and overcoming gender bias

*Wednesday 19 February 2025*

#### 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 online series is specifically designed for women entrepreneurs and business leaders, providing a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, skill enhancement, market access, and networking opportunities.

You can access the flyer here in [English](#) and in [French](#).

#### Launch of the South South series: Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs

The inaugural session of the South-South Series was focused on **Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs: Strategies for building confidence, leadership skills, and overcoming gender bias**. The session held on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2025 was a success! The session attracted a great interest from all regions in the world: **776 participants registered** to be involved in the initiative and receive the information and recording. On the day of the event, **297 participants** followed the session live with the majority coming from the Caribbean (28%) and from West Africa (36%).

Opened by Jeremy Knops, DG, COLEAD and Gayle Gollop, Private Sector Specialist at UN Women MCO, the session featured four accomplished women entrepreneurs in the agrifood sector from Africa and the Caribbean. They shared insights into their businesses, discussed the impact of gender bias on their entrepreneurial journeys, and revealed the strategies they have used to overcome these challenges. They also highlighted the crucial role of leadership skills in their growth and in empowering other women entrepreneurs and farmers.



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## Meet our women entrepreneurs



Christina Pooler,  
Owner, Zantarea  
Farms, Barbados



Fannie Perisha  
Gondwe,  
Founder, Perisha  
Agro, Malawi



Patricia Zoundi Yao,  
Founder, Canaan  
Land, Côte d'Ivoire



Lana Athanaze,  
Founder, Éclat  
Nova Luxuries,  
Dominica

### **Christina Pooler, Owner, [Zantarea Farms](#), Barbados:**

Christina is a third-generation agriculturalist and the owner of Zantarea Farms, a one-acre family-owned farm in Barbados. With over a decade of diverse experience in agriculture, project management, and community engagement, she is passionate about promoting regenerative and climate-resilient agriculture and fisheries through research, education, community outreach, and stakeholder involvement. Through education and partnership with other organizations, Zantarea Farms provides nutritious food while helping young entrepreneurs build their business in the agricultural sector. Christina's background in building and civil engineering, computer science, and her recent Master in Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Management enables her to implement climate-resilient agricultural systems effectively on her farm. She was part of the 2022 cohort of the Young Leaders of America Initiative (YLA) and the third generation of The Inter-American Institute (IAI) Science, Technology, Policy (STeP) Fellowship in 2023.

For Christina, women must mentor other women to foster their growth while also seeking mentors for themselves. This cycle of guidance and learning creates greater opportunities for both women and youth, strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### **Lana Athanaze, Founder, [Éclat Nova Luxuries](#), Dominica:**

Lana is the founder of Éclat Nova Luxuries and brings 26 years of experience in banking and finance. Éclat Nova Luxuries was established in 2017 and manufactures organic and natural botanical skincare and eco-living products for homes and corporate spaces to include soaps, aromatherapy botanical massage oils, botanical clay facial masks and hair and body butters. The brand specializes in sustainable, botanical skincare, blending traditional and modern methods. Lana is committed to community empowerment, collaborating with the small-scale farmers, Kalinago community, and differently abled artisans.

For Lana, leadership is about seizing opportunities and empowering others. It provides clarity on one's position and the steps needed for growth and self-improvement. She emphasizes the importance of staying true to one's journey while recognizing that success is not achieved alone—we thrive by surrounding ourselves with the right people.

### **Patricia Zoundi Yao, Founder, [Canaan Land](#), Côte d'Ivoire:**

Patricia Zoundi Yao is a dedicated social entrepreneur transforming rural communities through sustainable agriculture, financial inclusion, and women's empowerment. As the founder of Canaan Land, she equips women farmers with training, quality seeds, and technical support, helping them improve productivity and market access. She also launched QuickCash and Digital Hub, pioneering financial solutions that enable rural populations to conduct secure transactions without internet access. A leader in the SME Movement and Stanford Seed Program, Patricia actively promotes gender inclusion and economic empowerment, advocating for women's representation in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Her impactful work has earned her prestigious awards, including recognition by UNCTAD and the African Forum of Women Leaders, highlighting her role in bridging gender gaps and fostering inclusive growth across Côte d'Ivoire and Africa.



For Patricia, women must occupy space to avoid being subjected to others' decisions. Change won't happen on its own, women must drive the change we wish to see, provoke it, dare to claim their place.

**Fannie Perisha Gondwe, Founder & Executive Director, *Perisha Agro and Packaging Enterprise, Malawi:***

Fannie Perisha Gondwe is a social entrepreneur dedicated to fighting malnutrition and empowering women in Malawi. Perisha Agro aims at improving the nutritional status of women and children under five as Malawi has high stunting rates (more than 37%). The company promotes biofortified foods like orange-fleshed sweet potato and supports rural women with seeds, land, and training to improve both nutrition and economic opportunities. The full-certified company has its own factory and packaging plant, works with 600 farmers under contract farming and has trained 6000 smallholders since 2017. She also challenges gender norms in agriculture by creating opportunities for women in fields where they have long been underrepresented, ensuring that 60% of her staff are women and encouraging female leadership. Her efforts have impacted over 800,000 households, expanded farm production, and created jobs for over 300 women and youth. Recognized globally, her impact on food security and women's economic independence has been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2024 Women Agri-preneurs of the Year Award.

For Fannie, women entrepreneurs must champion gender equality while continuously enhancing their skills. Embracing delegation, fostering inclusive growth, and mentoring the next generation are essential to creating a thriving and globally competitive business landscape.

## Key highlights

Despite their vital contributions to agricultural production food processing, and distribution, women in the agrifood sector (*42% of the global agricultural labor force*), often face gender-based challenges that limit their access to resources, leadership opportunities, and entrepreneurship. Cultural and societal norms frequently confine women to traditional roles, restricting their full participation in economic activities. Despite progress in gender equality, women entrepreneurs often face additional barriers, including limited access to funding, biases in business networks, and societal expectations. Empowering women in this sector is not only essential for their personal and professional growth but also critical for global food security, economic development, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

All entrepreneurs recognize that **leadership is fundamental** to building and sustaining a successful business. For women entrepreneurs, developing strong leadership skills is key to inspire teams, manage resources effectively, and navigate competitive markets. Leadership skills empower women to break through these challenges by advocating for gender-inclusive policies and equal opportunities in business, building strong networks and mentorship relationships to support growth and leveraging digital tools and innovative strategies to stay competitive.

Our four entrepreneurs, as many others, explained how they strengthened their leadership capabilities through investing in **continuous learning**, attending leadership training programs, workshops, and mentorship sessions which helped them to develop essential business skills. **Adopting a growth mindset** and viewing challenges as opportunities for learning and improvement helped them navigating complex business landscapes. Lifelong learning and skill development remains one of the most powerful ways to succeed and lead in the agrifood sector. Acquiring specialized knowledge and technical expertise (from production to marketing) equips women with the tools to make informed decisions, innovate, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

**Delegation and team empowerment** were highlighted as essential tools for fostering collective growth. This ties closely to the role of mentorship, which played a crucial part at various stages of the entrepreneurs' journeys. Both women and men provided invaluable guidance, encouragement, and practical advice, helping them navigate challenges, gain industry insights, and develop effective strategies for success. Learning from experienced

entrepreneurs empowers women to make informed decisions, build confidence, and drive sustainable business growth.

Engaging with like-minded entrepreneurs cultivates a strong sense of community while enhancing both personal and professional confidence. The importance of **networking** was strongly emphasized, as entrepreneurial networks serve as vital platforms for exchanging ideas, sharing best practices, and fostering innovation. Industry conferences, networking events, and women-focused business groups provide invaluable opportunities to build meaningful connections, leading to potential partnerships, collaborations, and new business ventures.

**Inclusive and intergenerational approaches** are important in the agricultural sector which needs engaging both young women and men, driving innovation and sustainability in the industry. Establishing long-term, trust-based relationships with smallholders—who are predominantly women—not only strengthens local communities but also drives enterprise growth and resilience.

**Building confidence** is not just about self-belief—it’s also about breaking societal barriers and challenging biases, seeking mentorship, and cultivating supportive networks. At the same time, systemic change—through legal reforms, organizational policies, and male allyship—is essential for creating a more equitable environment where gender bias is actively dismantled.

The South-South Series Webinar highlights the urgent need for sustained efforts in addressing gender disparities in entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs must be equipped with the necessary resources, skills, and networks to succeed in competitive markets. Strengthening leadership capacities, advocating for policy reforms, and fostering an inclusive economic environment are crucial steps in ensuring sustainable development and economic empowerment for women-led enterprises.

**The series promises to be a transformative platform, fostering collaboration and empowerment across continents.**

**Recording of the session:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCWTvcCkqV8>

**Coordination team for these series:**

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COLEAD: Isolina Boto, Ahoefa Soklou, Nina Desanlis-Perrin



## Gender-related glossary terms

### **Gender**

Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, as are other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis including class, race, poverty level, ethnic group, sexual orientation, age, etc.

### **Gender bias**

Making decisions based on gender that result in favoring one gender over the other which often results in contexts that are favoring men and/or boys over women and/or girls.

### **Gender equality (equality between women and men)**

This refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

### **Gender blindness**

This term refers to the failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of men/boys and women/girls are assigned to them in specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and backgrounds. Projects, programs, policies and attitudes which are gender blind do not take into account these different roles and diverse needs. They maintain the status quo and will not help transform the unequal structure of gender relations.

### **Gender (or sexual) division of labor**

This is an important concept in basic gender analysis that helps deepen understanding about social relations as an entry point to sustainable change through development. The division of labor refers to the way each society divides work among men and women, boys and girls, according to socially-established gender roles or what is considered suitable and valuable for each sex. Anyone planning a community intervention needs to know and understand the division of labor and allocation of assets on a sex-and-age disaggregated basis for every community affected by development interventions. Within the division of labor, there are several types of roles: Productive roles, Reproductive roles, Community managing role, Community politics role, Triple role.

### **Gender discrimination**

Gender discrimination is defined as: "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the

political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” [United Nations, 1979. ‘Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women’. Article 1]

Discrimination can stem from both law (de jure) or from practice (de facto). The CEDAW Convention recognizes and addresses both forms of discrimination, whether contained in laws, policies, procedures or practice.

### **Gender norms**

Gender norms are ideas about how men and women should be and act. We internalize and learn these “rules” early in life. This sets-up a life-cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping. Put another way, gender norms are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time.

### **Gender roles**

Gender roles refer to social and behavioural norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. These often determine the traditional responsibilities and tasks assigned to men, women, boys and girls (see gender division of labour). Gender-specific roles are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions. Like gender itself, gender roles can evolve over time, in particular through the empowerment of women and transformation of masculinities.

### **Empowerment of women and girls**

The empowerment of women and girls concerns their gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. This implies that to be empowered they must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment), but they must also have the agency to use these rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions (such as is provided through leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions).

### **Transformational leadership**

Transformational leadership enhances motivation, morale, and performance by inspiring and empowering followers. This leadership style fosters a strong sense of identity and connection to the organization’s vision, encouraging individuals to take ownership of their work. Unlike traditional forms of “transactional leadership,” transformational leadership is not based on a “give and take” relationship, but on the leader’s personality, traits and ability to make a change through example, articulation of an energizing vision and challenging goals. These leaders are seen as moral exemplars, working towards the collective success of the team, organization and broader community.

### **Women’s economic empowerment**

Gender equality in the economy refers to the full and equal enjoyment by women and men of their economic rights and entitlements facilitated by enabling policy and institutional environments and economic empowerment. Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of gender equality that refers both to the ability to succeed and advance economically and to the power to make and act on economic decisions. Empowering women economically is a right that is essential for both realizing gender equality and achieving broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, and improvements in health, education and social well-being.

## Resources

### - Publications

Janina Sundermeier, 'It just seems that they don't act like men': The influence of gender role stereotypes on women's entrepreneurial innovation activities, *Journal of Business Research*, Volume 185, 2024, 114902, ISSN 0148-2963.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296324004065?via%3Dihub>

FAO. 2023. The status of women in agrifood systems – Overview. Rome.

<https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5060en>

Bullough, A., Guelich, U., Manolova, T.S. *et al.* Women's entrepreneurship and culture: gender role expectations and identities, societal culture, and the entrepreneurial environment. *Small Bus Econ* 58, 985–996 (2022).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-020-00429-6>

Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (2021). Gender Stereotypes and their Impact on Women Entrepreneurs Survey Report Exploring the Experiences of Women Entrepreneurs in Low and Middle Income Countries.

[Gender-Stereotypes-and-Their-Impact-on-Women-Entrepreneurs-2021.pdf](https://www.cherieblairfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Gender-Stereotypes-and-Their-Impact-on-Women-Entrepreneurs-2021.pdf)

Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (2021). Women Entrepreneurs: Surviving the Pandemic and Beyond - Annual Audit of Women Entrepreneurs in Low and Middle Income Countries.

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UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2016). Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment. UN Secretary.

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/hlp-wee-report-2016-09-call-to-action-en.pdf>

Unnikrishnan, Shalini, and Blair, Cherie (2019). Want to Boost the Global Economy by \$5 Trillion? Support Women as Entrepreneurs. Boston Consulting Group.

<https://web-assets.bcg.com/b6/c1/b3795db946059626f4c58d193608/corporate-africa-advancing-gender-equality.pdf>

EmpowerHer Report 2023, Gender-based violence and the economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship - <https://empow-her.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EMPOWHER-RAPPORT- ETUDE-2023-EN-WEB.pdf>

Addressing Gender Barriers to Entrepreneurship and Leadership Among Girls and Young Women in South-East Asia, 2021: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/8036/file/Gender%20barriers%20report.pdf>

Les femmes dans l'entrepreneuriat 10 recommandations pour l'intégration de la dimension de genre dans votre organisation 2023 : <https://www.pulse-group.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/fowose-guide- francais.pdf>

New UN report reveals chronic bias against women over last decade: [New UN report reveals chronic bias against women over last decade](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2023/07/new-un-report-reveals-chronic-bias-against-women-over-last-decade) | UN News

In Uganda, increasing agricultural productivity and build resilience to climate change risks: [Empowering women, protecting the earth](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2023/07/empowering-women-protecting-the-earth) | UN Women – Headquarters

EntreprenHER programme empowers women entrepreneurs in Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa: [EntreprenHER programme empowers women entrepreneurs in Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2023/07/entreprenher-programme-empowers-women-entrepreneurs-in-botswana-namibia-and-south-africa) | UN Women – Headquarters

- **Webinars**

EiT Food How to include gender aspect in the agrifood entrepreneurship programmes:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ziyv6-yMTXY>

Gender Responsive Projects and Policies in Agriculture : [https://www.ccacoalition.org/events/webinar-gender-responsive-projects-and-policies-agriculture?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ccacoalition.org/events/webinar-gender-responsive-projects-and-policies-agriculture?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

- **Trainings**

Professional Fellows Program - Advancing Young Women in Agribusiness : [https://aap.isp.msu.edu/current-programs/professional-fellows-program/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://aap.isp.msu.edu/current-programs/professional-fellows-program/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

An activity to help you combat the biases women face at work:  
<https://leanin.org/gender-bias-cards/grid/sets>

UN Women training materials:  
<https://portal.trainingcentre.unwomen.org/unw-catalog-mobile/>



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