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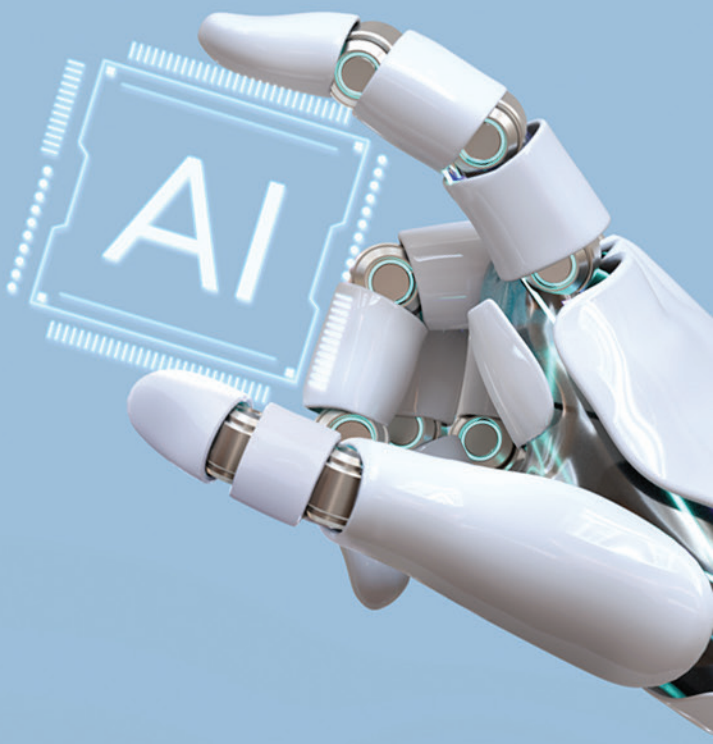
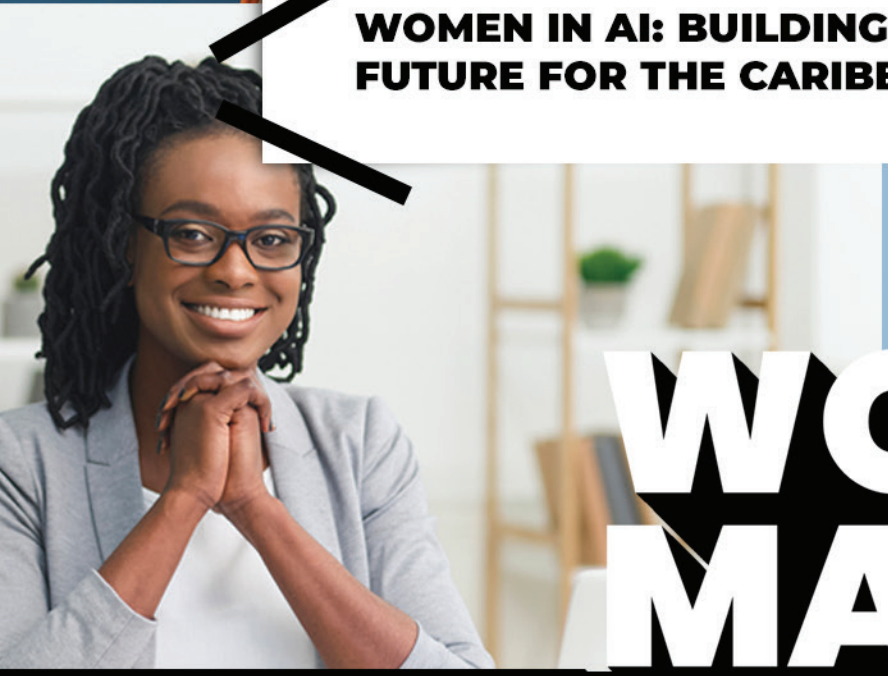


WOMEN IN AI: BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE FOR THE CARIBBEAN



WORK MATTERS COLUMN

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Women in AI: Building an Inclusive Future for the Caribbean

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"AI isn't the future—it's the present. The question is, will Caribbean women be at the table or on the menu?"

Artificial Intelligence is no longer on the horizon; it is already woven into our daily lives. It dictates what we watch, shapes how we work, and influences decisions about everything from healthcare to hiring. And yet, as this transformative technology accelerates across the Caribbean, one critical question remains, "Are our women being included or left behind?" Caribbean women are educated, resilient, and resourceful. They dominate classrooms, drive informal economies, lead households, and hold the fabric of society together in countless seen and unseen ways. However, when it comes to emerging technologies like AI, their presence is still too small, their voices too faint, and their access too limited. Inclusion is not just about who uses AI. It's about who gets to build it, who shapes its rules, and who benefits from its reach. If we are serious about inclusive development, Caribbean women must be active participants in designing, deploying, and governing AI technologies, and not just passive consumers. In order for this to happen, we must start with access. It is impossible to talk about inclusion in AI without addressing the persistent digital divide across the Caribbean. Many women, especially in rural and underserved communities, still struggle with unreliable internet, unaffordable devices, and limited digital literacy. Closing this gap must be a regional priority. Governments should invest in widespread, affordable broadband, subsidize digital tools for low-income households, and build community tech hubs where women can safely access the internet and learn. Next, we must reimagine education. It's not enough to teach children how to use apps. They must understand how algorithms work, how data is collected, and how technology can shape society. Girls must be encouraged from a young age to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and schools must incorporate AI and digital ethics into curricula. From primary school to university, we need to plant the seeds of curiosity and confidence in the minds of our future innovators. For women who are already out of school, community-based training can be beneficial. Accessible, practical programs that teach AI skills like data labeling, chatbot building, and digital entrepreneurship, can be delivered through libraries and NGOs. They must be flexible, culturally relevant, and designed with women's realities in mind. It is also necessary to build pathways into the tech workforce to support women's participation in STEM. That means mentorship programs, internships, scholarships, and partnerships with regional and international tech companies. Employers must move beyond token representation and commit to hiring, retaining, and promoting women in AI-related roles. More importantly, women must be included in governance and policy-making around AI. If we want ethical, fair, and transparent technologies, we need diverse perspectives shaping them. Governments must ensure that national AI strategies are gender-responsive and inclusive. Finally, we must invest in culture change. Far too often, women are subtly (or openly) discouraged from entering tech spaces. They're told it's too hard, too technical, or simply "not for them." We need visible role models; Caribbean women in AI who are leading boldly and unapologetically. We need stories of success, stories of failure, and stories of women who dared to try. Including women in AI is not about charity or optics. It is a matter of economic resilience, social justice, and regional competitiveness. Diverse teams create better, more ethical, and more effective technology. If we want AI to work for all of us, it must be built by all of us. So let us imagine a different future. A future where a young woman in Trinidad and Tobago learns to build an AI tool that predicts crop diseases, helping her farming community thrive, or where a tech founder in Barbados secures funding to develop an app that helps children with learning disabilities. Where Caribbean women are not just users of AI, but leaders, creators, and change-makers. This future is not a dream. It is a choice. We can

choose to replicate old systems of exclusion in a new technological era, or we can choose inclusion by design. We can choose to let AI widen inequality, or use it to close gaps that have existed for far too long. To every policymaker, educator, employer, and community leader reading this, your role is critical. Build the infrastructure. Fund the programs. Open the doors. And to every Caribbean woman reading this, you belong in tech. You belong in AI. You belong at the front of the AI revolution. This future includes you, because you are the future. Let's not wait for permission. Let's lead.