



SHAPING AN INCLUSIVE INTELLIGENCE ERA

WOMEN DRIVING THE NEXT WAVE OF AI INNOVATION

ADSW X WISER DIALOGUE
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Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence is transforming economies and industries, driving innovation and unlocking new opportunities in areas such as energy, climate solutions, healthcare, education and finance.

For sectors such as energy and sustainability, where AI is increasingly central to infrastructure, resilience and investment decisions, inclusive leadership will be critical to ensuring that innovation delivers shared value.

However, as AI adoption accelerates, its benefits are not being experienced equally, with persistent gaps in access, representation and participation across genders.^{1,2,3}

Against this backdrop, the ADSW x WiSER dialogue explored how women are contributing to the development and deployment of AI, and the role they can play in ensuring that innovation delivers economic value, societal benefit and sustainable impact.

This report examines the challenges facing women in AI today and the opportunities to ensure better representation across AI decision making and implementation. It concludes with five recommended actions for shaping an inclusive intelligence era.

Event Overview

On Wednesday, 24 June 2026, ADSW and WiSER convened the dialogue *Shaping an Inclusive Intelligence Era: Women Driving the Next Wave of AI Innovation* during London Climate Action Week. The roundtable brought together over 20 representatives from across government, venture capital, technology, sustainability, diplomacy, academia and entrepreneurship.

Challenges

The discussion highlighted that women lack sufficient participation and influence across the AI ecosystem today, with structural and cultural barriers limiting inclusive AI leadership.

Women are Already Shaping AI, but Remain Underrepresented

Women are already contributing to the development, application and scaling of AI to accelerate innovation and solve practical challenges across sectors and communities.

Despite this reality, women remain underrepresented in many of the decisions shaping AI’s development. Research shared during the roundtable highlighted that women represent around 22% of AI professionals globally and hold fewer than 14% of senior executive positions in AI.¹

Structural and Cultural Barriers Remain

The discussion identified several interconnected barriers limiting women’s leadership in AI. Participants noted that access to capital remains shaped by predominantly male investor networks, which can make it more difficult for women founders to secure visibility, build investor confidence, and access the funding needed to scale. Research reinforces this challenge, showing that only 2.3% of global venture capital investment went to all-female founding teams in 2024.⁴

They also highlighted persistent gaps in the support systems that enable women to move from research and early-stage innovation to commercialization, including mentorship, investor readiness and pathways to market.

Culture and visibility were also recurring themes. Participants reflected on the continued prevalence of male-dominated tech cultures, a broader awareness gap around emerging careers in AI and the lack of senior female role models. Several participants observed that women are often doing exceptional work, but this doesn’t always translate to public visibility and recognition within AI ecosystems.

The Risk of Exclusion

Participants agreed that AI has the potential to be a leveler or a divider. Without representative data, inclusive governance and equitable access, AI risks reinforcing existing inequalities rather than addressing them. This concern is reflected in United Nations research, which found that 44% of 133 AI systems assessed demonstrated gender bias, while more than a quarter exhibited both gender and racial bias.⁵

Examples from Egypt and Kenya illustrated how underrepresented groups can be excluded from the benefits of AI because of limited connectivity, digital access or language barriers.



Opportunities

By strengthening women’s contributions across the AI ecosystem — from design through to development, governance and application — emerging technologies will be better positioned to drive inclusive and sustainable growth.

Increasing Women’s Influence in AI Decision Making

The discussion emphasized that representation should be measured not only by participation, but by influence. There is a significant opportunity to increase women’s representation in AI decision making, ensuring that women have greater influence over the development of AI-led innovations.

But, as AI becomes increasingly embedded across economies and society, it’s important that women’s contribution extends beyond the technology itself. Women’s influence must shape every part of the AI ecosystem — across infrastructure, investment, governance, sustainability and communications — to ensure that AI systems are inclusive and reflective of the communities they serve.

Participants also acknowledged that women’s influence extends well beyond the workplace, shaping households, communities and the wider economy. Increasing their influence in AI decision-making therefore has the potential to generate broader social and economic benefits.

Unlocking the Next Wave of Innovation

Women already represent a significant proportion of STEM students and PhD researchers, creating a strong pipeline of future AI talent. Strengthening pathways from academia into industry and entrepreneurship, supported by greater awareness of roles, access to investment and professional networks, presents an opportunity to translate this expertise into the next generation of inclusive AI innovation.

Participants identified investment as one of the greatest opportunities to accelerate inclusive innovation. The UK Government’s Female Founders is one example of an initiative that demonstrates how targeted programs can connect founders with investors, providing a model for greater collaboration between the UK, UAE and other international partners.

Participants also recognized the potential for the UAE to continue building its position as a global hub for AI and sustainability by supporting female founders, encouraging investment and fostering international partnerships.

Designing AI for Everyone

Participants emphasized that inclusive AI cannot be achieved through technical adjustments alone. It requires a shift in how AI systems are imagined, designed, tested and governed from the outset.

This begins with more representative data but extends beyond data diversity. AI systems must be shaped by the lived realities, languages, priorities and constraints of the communities they are intended to serve. Without this, technologies risk reinforcing existing inequalities, particularly for women, underserved communities and populations whose experiences are often underrepresented in digital systems.

Participants also highlighted the importance of widening access to AI in practical terms. Connectivity, affordability, local language tools, digital skills and trusted governance frameworks are all essential to ensuring that communities are not only users of AI, but active participants in shaping how it is applied.

A more inclusive intelligence era will therefore depend on moving from representation to participation. AI systems must be developed with diverse communities, tested in real-world contexts, and guided by governance models that reflect social as well as technical priorities. This approach can help ensure that AI is not only more equitable, but more relevant, trusted and effective in supporting sustainable progress.

Visibility as a Catalyst for Change

Visibility emerged as one of the most immediate opportunities identified during the discussion, with participants recognizing it as one of the simplest and most achievable actions that organizations and individuals can take today.

Creating more visible role models by celebrating the women already shaping AI today is essential to inspiring the next generation of innovators and leaders. This can be enhanced by greater collaboration across professional networks, with women actively supporting one another and amplifying success stories.

Storytelling is central to this. As AI systems increasingly learn from publicly available information, sharing expertise, speaking publicly and celebrating women’s achievements all help build a richer and more representative body of knowledge, enabling future AI systems to better recognize and reflect women’s contributions.

Recommended Actions

Shaping an inclusive intelligence era requires system-level action across industries, regions and communities. The following recommendations outline some of the steps that organizations and individuals can take to embed inclusion into AI design, development and deployment.

Expand Access to Capital and Commercial Networks

1

Strengthen the ecosystem supporting women-led AI innovation by connecting academia, industry and investors. Founder networks, peer mentoring, business coaching, investor readiness support and targeted funding can help more women turn research and ideas into commercially successful AI businesses. Collaboration across organizations and international markets will further strengthen pathways and accelerate innovation.

Build Inclusive Talent & Leadership Pipelines

2

Businesses should support women at every stage of the AI talent pipeline. This means increasing awareness of early AI career opportunities to encourage more women to apply for these roles, adopting skills-based practices (across hiring, promotion and pay decisions) so that women are fairly represented and recognized, and investing in mentoring programs to support women’s progression into AI-based leadership roles.

Increase Visibility of Women Leading AI

3

Organizations should actively raise the profile of women leading AI through speaking opportunities, thought leadership, media engagement and internal recognition. Increasing visibility not only creates role models and builds awareness of career opportunities but it also helps provide more representative information for AI systems to learn from.

Embed Inclusion into AI Design

4

Organizations should embed inclusion throughout AI design and development by using representative datasets, maintaining human oversight, and applying external guidance on inclusive AI. At the same time, they should ensure that those who are responsible for AI design and development reflect diverse backgrounds.

Strengthen Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

5

Multi-stakeholder collaboration — across government, industry, academia, and civil society — is essential to ensuring that inclusivity is embedded throughout the AI ecosystem. By working together, stakeholders can advance inclusive approaches that extend beyond the capabilities of any single organization, sector or discipline.



Conclusion

Women are already making important contributions across AI, yet there is an opportunity to increase their influence over how AI is designed, governed, funded and deployed. Expanding women's access, participation and influence will be critical to shaping a truly inclusive intelligence era.

Achieving this will require coordinated, collaborative action to embed inclusivity across the AI system — from investment decisions to career pathways — while improving the visibility of women's contributions.

By ensuring that diverse perspectives shape the future of AI, the next wave of innovation will be better positioned to distribute benefits more evenly across society.



References

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³Women’s access to and participation in technological developments, UNESCO, [Women’s access to and participation in technological developments](#) [accessed on 15 July 2026]

⁴Women in VC & Startup Funding: Statistics & Trends, Founders Forum Group, [Women in VC & Startup Funding: Statistics & Trends \(2025 Report\)](#) [accessed on 15 July 2026]

⁵AI is getting women wrong as gender bias persists, data reveals, UN, [AI is getting women wrong as gender bias persists, data reveals](#) [accessed on 15 July 2026]

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