Business Canvas Model: Inclusive Business Training Models for Coastal Fisher Women in Kwale and Kilifi County

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Key Messages

- Sensitization and awareness program on the Business Model Canvas among women running small-scale businesses along the Kenyan Coast.
- Benefits and challenges of a business canvas model in small-scale businesses.
- Strategies for developing competitive business models for scale small-scale businesses for women
- The info brief proposes the adoption of inclusive business models in women-led businesses to ensure their sustainability and profitability.

Background Information

Coastal fisherwomen in Kenya, represent a significant population facing gender-based challenges. One of these challenges revolves around the creation of sustainable and easy-to-manage and scale businesses. With the increasing opportunities that come with the blue economy and the need for women's empowerment, coming up with optimal and sustainable ways of creating and managing small businesses can help improve lives and promote economic growth. It is worth noting that, setting up and building a business is not an easy task and many small-scale businesses are normally set up for survival purposes, without putting into consideration the strategies for continuity and long-term development (Frick and Ali, 2013; Febrilia *et al.,* 2022). This always leads to businesses not being competitive, not growing their revenue and so they end up collapsing (Hamdana, 2021). Therefore, to ensure that these small-scale businesses are sustainable, there is a need for proper planning and this can be achieved by using the Business Model Canvas. However, many small-scale businesses are not aware of this model. The Business Model Canvas can simply be defined as a management strategy that is used for planning innovative business concepts, infrastructure, and finances (Febrilia *et al.,* 2022). This analytical tool was first introduced by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) and it has been internationally accepted in the world. The BMC is designed on a single canvas made up of 10 interrelated segments or blocks, that can visually be presented (Braun *et al.,* 2021). These ten major building blocks comprise customer segments, value propositions, revenue streams, channels, customer relationships, key activities, key resources, key partners, cost structure, and impact (Yulia *et al.,* 2020). This model helps businesses to design and evaluate strategies that can be used, to give the businesses a competitive advantage in the industry or market. Generally, the model helps improve all the 10 segments. In addition, existing businesses can still use the model, to improve and also develop foundations for improvement (Swatsy, 2015).

In this regard, the Blue Empowerment Project sought to gain information and understand the existing business models being utilized by the Coastal fisherwomen in Kwale and Kilifi Counties and to identify the weaknesses of the businesses through the lens of the BMC. This would ensure that the women are empowered effectively, their businesses become profitable and they stop being marginalized (Kaminski *et al.,* 2019).

Methodology

A recent survey under the Blue Empowerment project which seeks to tackle barriers to the empowerment of fisherwomen in Kenya's coastal region through the adoption of climate-smart integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) of seaweeds and fish for improved livelihoods and resilience was carried out in Kwale and Kilifi counties, a total of 50 self-help groups presented their existing business models. This was done through Focused Group Discussions, where the women were taken through the 10 segments of the BMC namely; customer segments, Value proposition, Marketing, Distribution, Activities in business, Key resources, Partnerships, Costs, Revenue, and Impact.

Thereafter, the participants were given time to have a look at their existing businesses which ranged from seaweed farming, apiculture, mangroves conservation, poultry farming, fisheries products, entertainment, and retail shops. The participants used the 10 segments of BMC that were presented in a single poster. During this activity, the members filled up all the 10 elements of the BMC which was followed by presentations of the key things they do under each segment for their businesses.
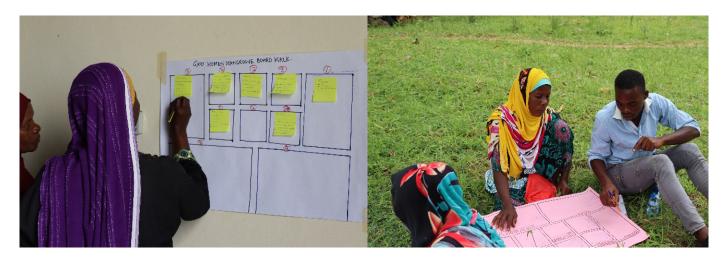

Figure 1: Participants interacting with the Business Model Canvas

Key Findings

Business Model Canvas is critical in the formation and running of small-scale businesses. First and foremost, it provides a simplified holistic view of their businesses (Mustaniroh *et al.,* 2020). With such a feature, business owners can understand and interact with fundamental components such as customer segments, channels, and customer relationships among others. From the presentations, the small-scale business owners raised a number of issues such as;

• Lack of financial access and poor record keeping

• Lack of marketing skills and digital literacy

• Unpredictable markets

• Low profit margins

• Lack of technical know-how among others.

For example, if it is marketing skills, the facilitators would try and identify some of the key marketing strategies that the individual business groups had not captured and help them identify them. This was important because the strategies would help improve their businesses and cause them to stand out.

In addition, the participants acknowledged that their understanding and awareness of the BMC increased during the practical exercises among themselves and the facilitators.

The participants also acknowledged that the training was very informative, and they were optimistic that they would use the new knowledge to mitigate the gaps they had identified while using the ten segments of the BMC. Finally, by providing the coastal fisherwomen with training, the project seeks to increase their potential for entrepreneurship, empowering them to establish sustainable enterprises and support the growth of their communities' economies.

Implications of the Findings

Based on the above-mentioned findings, it is evident that developing competitive business models for small-scale businesses for women should be anchored first on effective sensitization and awareness programs which was evident during the interaction, that they had not come across the BMC.

- Prior knowledge of the business model components and terminology is critical to its implementation. Also, the model serves as a framework instead of a prescriptive standard. In this regard, the model lacks detailed guidance on how to implement and execute different business operations.

- In addition, inadequate information on fundamental aspects of businesses might affect users' ability to translate the canvas into action (Mustaniroh et al., 2020). As a result, they might resort to assumptions and hypotheses that in the end may lead to inaccurate or irrelevant real-world outcomes.

In order to help the small-scale businesses, the posters that the community groups had populated under each segment of the BMC, were collected and were used to generate four business units that would be used in the implementation of the Integrated multitrophic aquaculture project.

Conclusions

- The Business Model Canvas is a simple and inclusive model that can be used to empower coastal fisherwomen in small-scale businesses and therefore, they should be encouraged to adopt and integrate it in their businesses.

- The model can be implemented across different types of businesses regardless of the industry or customer groups. This was true, considering we had different self-help groups running different businesses that participated in the training.

- Since the model is built on a visual representation of critical business components, it will be much easier to educate a higher percentage of coastal women on how to use it to create competitive and efficient small-scale businesses.

This means that the training the women received, should not be one off, but should be accompanied by a series of monitoring and evaluation sessions and frequent meet-ups of the different business units that were formed, to ensure that they are implementing the model effectively.

Further Readings

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Author information

This series of briefs summarizes findings of a project entitled "Aquaculture Of Seaweeds And Fish: Opportunities For Blue Economic Empowerment And Covid-19 Resilience Of Fisher Women In Kenya" undertaken by researchers and practitioners from the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya Industrial Research And Development Institute (KIRDI), Bahari CBO Network, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), Kenyatta University (KU), and Sea Moss Corporation. The overall aim of the project is to contribute to the tackling of barriers for the empowerment of fisher women in Kenya's coastal region through adoption of climate-smart integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) of seaweeds and fish for improved livelihoods and resilience.

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