

# Information Brief

## Amplifying Impact through Advocacy: Bridging Project Teams' Knowledge and Action for Blue Empowerment in Coastal Kenya

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## Background Information

The Blue Economy sector in Coastal Kenya presents significant opportunities for sustainable economic growth, particularly through marine-based activities such as seaweed farming and aquaculture (Mujigua 2020). Maximizing these opportunities requires effective advocacy to enhance broader community participation in these value chains. Advocacy is instrumental in driving social and policy transformation, especially in contexts like Kenya's coastal blue economy, where entrenched systemic inequalities restrict access to resources, economic opportunities, and spaces for meaningful participation in decision-making (Rasowo et al., 2020). It involves engaging inclusively with marginalized communities to amplify their voices and concerns. Effective advocacy thus encompasses speaking out with and for others, navigating power structures, and recommending actionable reforms to create enabling environments where coastal communities can thrive socially, economically, and environmentally. This approach fosters a collaborative dialogue that applies pressure to effect change while proposing evidence-based solutions aimed at achieving more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Therefore, advocacy addresses critical issues such as gender disparities, governance gaps, and exclusion from economic benefits, thereby promoting frameworks that empower vulnerable groups and enhance community stewardship of marine resources.

In Kenya's coastal region, fish and seaweed value chains are highly diverse. Fishing has traditionally been viewed as a male-dominated activity, while women and marginalized groups are primarily involved in processing and trading fish purchased from fishermen. The seaweed sector has seen notable progress compared to the fisheries sector, with women playing a significant role across the value chain, from the farming phase to processing. Despite that, women continue to face barriers that constrain their full participation in Kenya's coastal blue economy (Kimanga, 2025).

Addressing these challenges and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities requires strengthened advocacy efforts, particularly among researchers and project teams working in Kenya's coastal blue economy region.

These teams that observe the constraints and disparities firsthand are therefore uniquely positioned to champion community needs and influence decision-making. Building their advocacy capacity enhances researchers' and project teams' ability to inform policy, mobilize stakeholders, and promote research uptake, which contributes to effectively narrowing the gap between evidence generation and actionable change.

### Key Messages

- Despite the growth in the blue economy sector, it continues to face significant challenges in bridging the gap between research and policy, incorporating culturally relevant approaches, and advancing gender-responsive advocacy.
- The advancement of women's leadership and involvement in seaweed and aquaculture value chains can be achieved through the implementation of effective advocacy strategies.
- The collaborative efforts among communities, researchers, and institutions, grounded in evidence-based advocacy, enhance policy influence and empower grassroots mobilization for inclusive development.
- A research-advocacy nexus is instrumental in influencing policies at local and national levels and can be used as a tool to advance research findings into actions.

## Methodology

In the light of this realization, the partners of the Blue Empowerment Project which includes the [Africa Centre for Technology Studies \(ACTS\)](#), Bahari Community-Based Organization (CBO) Network, [Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute \(KMFRI\)](#), [Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute \(KIRDI\)](#), SeaMoss Corporation Limited, and [Kenyatta University](#), organized an Advocacy Training Workshop as a strategic intervention for the project team.

The training aimed to strengthen the BE project team's ability to link scientific research work with effective advocacy and equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to mobilize and engage stakeholders, improving the uptake of research findings. It focused on deepening the team's conceptual understanding of advocacy, strengthening their grasp of the research–advocacy nexus for evidence-informed decision-making, aligning advocacy efforts across institutions, and promoting cross-learning. Additionally, the workshop introduced the project team to a range of advocacy tools and products designed to support effective dissemination.



**Figure 1:** The BE Project Team in session at the Advocacy Training Workshop

## Key Findings

Advocacy involves raising critical issues with relevant authorities and going beyond simple noise-making to actively speaking out. It is the intentional act of supporting a cause or proposal with the aim of driving meaningful change (Henderson & Pochin, 2001). Advocacy efforts seek to advance justice by influencing policies, systems, structures, and practices, as well as shaping attitudes and mobilizing and educating citizens (World Vision International, 2016).

The training sessions clarified the distinction between advocacy and activism, including the roles of an advocate versus an activist. The project team gained a clear understanding of these concepts, alongside the core elements and principles that underpin effective advocacy.

Key types of advocacies that are most relevant and impactful for advancing Kenya's coastal blue economy were identified. The BE project team assessed which advocacy approaches are best suited to drive the project's objectives and found that gender advocacy, policy advocacy, and sectoral advocacy emerged as the primary types, with professional advocacy serving as the best form for achieving the project's goals and causing impact.

An assessment of the project team's previous advocacy approaches was conducted, followed by the introduction of an advocacy toolbox to enhance the team's skills with practical resources enabling them to transform knowledge and community concerns into organized influence in tangible ways. The tools covered include education and awareness-raising, stakeholder mobilization, research, policy-change campaigns, policy dialogues, demonstrator projects, capacity-building for advocacy and response, non-violent protests, petitions, formal correspondence, use of traditional and social media, coalition building, campaigning, and influencing or lobbying efforts.

It was also evident that there is need to introduce advocacy strategies at the project planning phase to encourage the project team to understand the need for advocacy, channels of advocacy, and the significance of advocacy in project implementation.

Establishing this capacity among the team members instills courage and confidence in not only communicating project outcomes and recommendations that influence policies and promote the desired change but also actively following up to implementation.

An Advocacy Process Cycle was presented to guide project teams in implementing strategic advocacy campaigns. The cycle consists of five key steps:

- **Step 1:** Problem Identification and Root Cause Analysis.
- **Step 2:** Setting the Advocacy Goal.
- **Step 3:** Developing Targeted Messaging for Each Audience.
- **Step 4:** Building an Action Plan with Specific Tactics and Timelines
- **Step 5:** Measuring Progress and Success

The project team acknowledged that their understanding of effective formal advocacy was strengthened through practical exercises connecting BE project activities to advocacy strategies.

## Implication of Findings

Based on the above-mentioned findings, it is evident that advocacy training for project teams catalyzes more informed, impactful, and inclusive advocacy efforts that drive systemic change, improve stakeholder engagement, and support sustainable and equitable development in Kenya's coastal blue economy contexts.

Implications drawn from the findings are:

- **Strengthened capacity for targeted advocacy:** The conceptual clarity on what advocacy entails versus activism equips project teams to adopt more strategic, focused, and sustained methods to influence policy and program changes that support gender-responsive Blue Economy initiatives. This understanding prevents diffusion of efforts and promotes more effective advocacy campaigns grounded in cause-driven mobilization.
- **Effective use of advocacy tools:** Enhanced skills in developing policy briefs, opinion pieces, and targeted communications empower project teams to influence decision makers and stakeholders with clear, evidence-based messages. This leads to greater visibility of issues and practical solutions, improving buy-in and responsiveness from policy and industry actors.

- **Research-driven community empowerment:** By integrating scientific research into advocacy efforts, partners foster community ownership and bridge the gap between knowledge production and practical application. This participatory approach enhances the relevance and sustainability of Blue Economy interventions, ensuring that advocacy outcomes translate into marketable and profitable products that can improve coastal livelihoods.
- **Prioritization of gender inclusivity:** Emphasizing gender responsiveness directly addresses historical exclusion of women, equipping advocates to push for policies and programs that promote equitable opportunities. This focus supports social justice goals and strengthens the overall resilience and diversity of the coastal Blue Economy sector.
- **Research-advocacy nexus:** This nexus explores the linkages between research and advocacy emphasizing the centrality of research-informed advocacy in bridging knowledge and action. This nexus also offers synergies for knowledge translation and dissemination in simple and accessible policy-relevant language, while also incorporating the most effective communication strategies and platforms based on community or stakeholder needs, improving outreach and uptake.

## Conclusion

Advocacy is both science and art and requires evidence, strategy, and skill. The process is sensitive to context, culture, social norms, and dynamics. In the case of the BE project, advocacy must balance scientific innovation in aquaculture with grassroots mobilization and policy engagement. The integration of BE priorities and the research-advocacy nexus reinforced the fact that advocacy is only effective when pegged on evidence and aligned with systemic challenges. The training provided the project team with theoretical grounding and practical tools, producing action plans that directly address barriers to women's participation in coastal economies.

The Advocacy Training Workshop has demonstrated that strengthening the capacity of project teams is critical for bridging the gap between research and actionable change in Kenya's coastal blue economy.

By clarifying advocacy principles, introducing practical tools, and providing structured frameworks for strategic campaigns, advocacy trainings empower project teams to engage stakeholders, influence policy, and integrate gender-responsive approaches effectively. Leveraging the research-advocacy nexus, blue economy project teams are in a better position to translate knowledge into tangible community benefits, promote inclusive participation in marine value chains, and advance sustainable and equitable development across the coastal region.

Outcomes from the advocacy training signify the importance of sustained advocacy to translate research into policy, amplify marginalized voices, and secure inclusive development. It is recommended that maintaining the momentum requires continuous collaboration, monitoring, and adaptive strategies responsive to emerging challenges in the blue economy. This underscores the central role of advocacy in amplifying impact, fostering evidence-based decision-making, and ensuring that interventions in the blue economy are socially, economically, and environmentally transformative.

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