

# Information Brief

## Amplifying Voices in the Blue Economy through Media

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## Background Information

The Blue Economy is recognized globally as a key aspect for sustainable development with a high potential to contribute to Kenya's national GDP. The coastal counties of Kenya have been actively participating in various Blue Economy activities ranging from seaweed farming, mariculture, mangrove restoration and conservation as well as marine tourism. While women and local business groups are at the forefront of these climate smart initiatives, most of the time they are normally invisible. This is mainly due to a number of limitations such as limited access to technology, finances and decision-making platforms. These barriers tend to have a negative influence on the sustainability of their businesses which if well empowered could help improve livelihoods and promote economic growth.

To bridge this gap, the Blue Empowerment Project sought to conduct a media training, targeting the different women from Kilifi and Kwale counties. This is because, if media engagement is conducted effectively, it can serve as a tool for transforming the community groups from being passive into active story tellers and advocates. In addition, the training can serve as a platform for economic empowerment by helping the women expand the market access for their products as well as attracting new partners. Effective media engagement is a vital tool for transforming these community groups from passive participants into active storytellers and advocates. Through strategic use of both traditional and digital media, women entrepreneurs are able to demonstrate leadership in advancing sustainable livelihoods, attract critical investment, and enhance the resilience of their communities. In addition, the training would empower women to influence policies through sharing their stories which can help inform decision makers at both county and national levels. Moreover, with the women adding their voices to matters on the blue economy, this directly contributes to Kenya's vision 2030 and the Global Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 14; life below water.



### Key Messages

- Digital tools are enablers of scale; helping business units to communicate effectively, streamline operations, and accelerate sustainable business growth.
- Strategic media engagement should be prioritized as a tool for advocacy, influencing the public and shaping policy outcomes.
- There's a need to build agency into businesses responding to negative feedback and online harassment for protecting personal and business reputation, understanding when to engage constructively, report abuse, or disengage entirely.

## Methodology

The Media Engagement Training for Women and Communities in Coastal Kenya was held from 4 to 6 December 2025 and was guided by the Media Engagement Manual and the Facilitator's Guide. The training was designed to strengthen the capacity of women entrepreneurs and community groups in the Blue Economy to use media tools to promote their enterprises, share their stories and engage stakeholders.

The training adopted a participatory and practice-oriented approach, with facilitators adapting sessions to reflect the socio-cultural context of coastal communities and the availability of resources. The target participants included women entrepreneurs engaged in fisheries, seaweed farming and related micro and small enterprises, as well as community leaders and local stakeholders.

Key training themes included understanding different forms of media and their relevance for community enterprises, traditional and digital media tools, visual communication and storytelling, managing media inquiries and crisis communication, addressing online violence against women, using media for advocacy and tracking the impact of media engagement. These themes were delivered through short presentations, facilitated discussions, story-sharing activities, group work and hands-on practical sessions.

Participants practiced content creation using smartphones and widely used digital platforms such as WhatsApp Business, Facebook, and TikTok. Practical activities included capturing photos and videos, converting visuals into social media content, developing simple stories for digital platforms and designing advocacy and communication campaigns relevant to their businesses and communities. Role-play exercises were used to build confidence in responding to media inquiries and managing reputational risks, while group discussions addressed digital safety and strategies for dealing with online harassment.

The training used a combination of digital and non-digital materials, including flipcharts, markers, notebooks, printed handouts, smartphones and cameras. A laptop and projector were used for demonstrations. In line with the Facilitator's Guide, participants were encouraged to use available tools creatively in contexts where internet connectivity or equipment was limited, ensuring the training remained practical and accessible.

Learning and feedback were captured through interactive exercises, group reflections and debrief discussions. Participants shared their expectations, key lessons learned, anticipated challenges in applying media skills, and recommendations for improving future media engagement support for Blue Economy actors.

## Key Findings

The media workshop revealed a strong shift in how women participants perceive, engage with, and use media as a tool for visibility, business growth, and advocacy. However, a significant gap remains: the workshop identified that the full potential of digital media tools has not yet been realized in rural areas. Many participants expressed that while the desire to connect is there, a lack of technical "know-how" and digital literacy prevents them from navigating social media platforms effectively.

- 1. Strengthened Understanding of Storytelling and Digital Media.** Participants gained a clear understanding of the core elements of storytelling, with strong emphasis on how stories can be amplified through digital platforms particularly Facebook and WhatsApp. The sessions highlighted that effective storytelling goes beyond sharing information; it requires purpose, audience awareness, and consistent content creation for engagement.
- 2. Practical Skills in Visual Content Creation.** A major highlight was learning tips for great photos, especially using mobile phones. Participants learned how visual storytelling improves credibility, reach, and audience trust.
- 3. Leveraging Community Media and Local Radio.** Working with local radio stations emerged as a strong affirmative action. Women recognized community radio as an accessible and powerful platform to: Share local stories, Promote enterprises, Advance advocacy agendas This shifted perceptions of radio from a passive medium to an active tool for influence.
- 4. Digital Tools for Business and Communication.** The workshop revealed that while many participants were active online, online marketing was not being fully utilized. Sessions on mobile apps and digital tools bridged this gap. They went through Step-by-step guidance on social media visibility and profile setup, Creation of WhatsApp Business accounts by the end of the day with having Immediate sales reported by some participants through improved digital presence.

- 5. Managing Media Engagements and Inquiries.** Women shared real case studies where they had previously been misrepresented or negatively portrayed by the media. These discussions shaped learning around handling media inquiries effectively in Use of appropriate language, knowing when to clarify, escalate, or disengage, Managing client communication during media exposure.
- 6. Navigating Negative Feedback and Online Harassment.** The workshop addressed **negative feedback, criticism, and online harassment**, issues many participants had experienced but lacked tools to manage. Practical strategies were shared on: Responding calmly and professionally, protecting personal and business reputation, knowing when to engage, report, or disengage.
- 7. Media as a Tool for Advocacy and Policy Influence.** Discussions on advocacy revealed that many women had already engaged in informal advocacy without recognizing it as such. Through shared examples, participants learned how to intentionally collaborate with media to influence policy and advance community agendas. Participants demonstrated an increased ability to: Map out advocacy campaigns, define goals, audiences, and messages, Choose the right content and communication channels and clearly ask for what they need from decision-makers
- 8. The "Data Poverty" Barrier to Advocacy.** The workshop identified that "Data Poverty" the high cost of internet bundles relative to income is a primary reason why rural women disengage from digital advocacy. Participants revealed that they often prioritize "WhatsApp-only" bundles, which limits their ability to access broader information on platforms like X (Twitter) or LinkedIn where policy conversations often happen.
- 9. Language and Literacy Alignment.** A significant finding was the language barrier in digital interfaces. Most social media business tools are in English, while the primary language of trade and advocacy for these women is Kiswahili or local dialects. Participants noted that they feel more confident using media when content is localized, suggesting that "Media Empowerment" must also be a "Language Empowerment" process.
- 10. Peer-to-Peer "Digital Champions."** The sessions revealed that women learn technical skills faster through horizontal peer learning than through vertical expert-led training. The workshop identified "Digital Champions" younger or more tech-savvy women within the fish/seaweed groups who naturally stepped in to help older members navigate apps, suggesting a sustainable model for future scaling.
- 11. Information Overload and Verification Skills.** With increased digital access, participants expressed concerns about "Fake News" and misinformation regarding market prices and scammers. The workshop identified a missing skill set: digital verification. Women need tools to distinguish between credible buyers and online scammers to protect their aquaculture investments.

## Implication of Findings

There is a need for continued training on media engagement, alongside simplified and accessible tools that allow participants to practically build their technical know-how. Strengthening these skills will support effective advocacy, raise awareness, and improve overall communication. Several key considerations that should be taken into account to ensure these efforts are impactful Include:

- 1. Strengthening storytelling and content creation capacity at community level.** Institutions should invest in continued training on storytelling techniques and purposeful content creation tailored for digital platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp can improve engagement and audience reach.
- 2. There's a need to promote strategic engagement with traditional media like local radio and TV stations.** Supporting women to intentionally collaborate with community radio stations as an accessible platform for enterprise promotion, community storytelling, and advocacy increases success of their business.
- 3. Digital tools assist scaling business growth.** Expanding capacity-building efforts on the use of mobile applications and digital platforms for communication, online marketing, and customer engagement is paramount in creating awareness of businesses.

4. **There's need to Institutionalize step-by-step support for setting up and optimizing social media.** To improve social media visibility and business profile setup on WhatsApp Business will assist to sustain digital sales outcomes.
5. **There's a need to build an Agency in handling media inquiries, negative feedback and online harassment and representation.** Training of women on managing media interactions, including use of appropriate language, clarification processes, escalation mechanisms, and narrative control. As well as Developing guidance and practical tools to help women respond professionally to criticism, manage online harassment, and protect their personal and business reputations.
6. **Priority should be given to enhancing advocacy and shaping policy through media engagement.** Support women to design and implement intentional advocacy campaigns by defining clear goals, identifying target audiences, selecting appropriate media channels, and articulating clear asks to decision-makers.

## Recommendations

To build on the gains from the media engagement training and address the gaps identified, sustained capacity-building should be prioritized. Follow-up trainings and mentorship sessions can allow women to strengthen their digital skills over time. Short refresher clinics and community-based practice sessions can help participants move from basic use of platforms to more strategic and consistent media engagement.

A community-led digital support model should be strengthened by formalizing the role of peer “Digital Champions.” These individuals can provide ongoing technical support within their groups, reduce reliance on external trainers and ensure knowledge is shared across age and literacy levels. This approach also supports inclusion for women with limited digital access. Partnerships with local radio stations and community media outlets should be institutionalized. Regular radio segments featuring women entrepreneurs, seaweed farmers and fisheries groups can enhance visibility, attract buyers and amplify advocacy messages. County governments and development partners can support airtime and content production to sustain this engagement.

Practical guidance on managing online risks should be expanded. Women require clear protocols for handling misinformation, online scams, harassment and negative feedback. Simple tools for verifying buyers, documenting abuse and reporting harmful content should be integrated into future training and resource materials.

In addition, digital inclusion challenges related to language and data costs should be addressed. Training materials and digital guides can be translated into Kiswahili and local dialect. Media engagement should be linked to structured advocacy processes. Women's groups should be supported to document their stories, generate evidence on their enterprises and present clear policy tasks to county and national decision-makers. This will strengthen their role not only as entrepreneurs, but also as contributors to policy conversations on the Blue Economy.

## Conclusion

The media training was a success, having equipped the participants with a deep understanding of the power of their voice and how to use it, as well as being equipped with practical digital and media skills for their use. Moreso, the training enabled a critical shift from a fear of media engagement to a position of informed confidence and agency. Participants not only gained practical, immediately applicable digital skills such as content creation and platform management but also underwent a mindset shift, recognizing their own voices as powerful assets for business growth, advocacy, and policy influence. As the training came to an end, the women left with clear action plans, active platforms and renewed motivation, ready to amplify their impact and drive meaningful change as strategic communicators in the Blue Economy.

## Further Readings

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