

# Information Brief

## Co-Innovation Lab: Promoting Women's Inclusive Enterprise Development for Access to Blue Economy Resources

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## Background Information

Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) is a forward-thinking approach to aquaculture that promotes sustainability, environmental preservation, and economic viability by combining different species in a mutually beneficial ecosystem. The cultivation of seaweed is a key component contributing to ecological and economic advantages, such as carbon sequestration and enhanced water quality. However, it faces challenges related to gender equality and women's empowerment, as women's historical role in seaweed cultivation often faces barriers.

This information brief provides a thorough examination of inclusivity within Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) farms, emphasizing fair and equitable participation across diverse demographic segments. It scrutinizes the hurdles, potential advantages, and proposed strategies for promoting inclusivity in IMTA operations within the community. Through this review, a spotlight is cast on the challenges and opportunities inherent in fostering an inclusive environment within IMTA practices, aiming to enhance participation and representation across demographic spectrums i.e. the youth, middle-aged women, and men. By addressing these aspects comprehensively, this brief seeks to underscore the importance of inclusivity as a cornerstone for sustainable and community-centered IMTA farming practices. Furthermore, IMTA-based platforms analyse this data in relation to gender dynamics and cultural impacts across three specific cohorts: women aged 35 and above, young women (youth), and men aged 35 and above.

### Key Messages

- Support needs vary by age and gender: older women seek capacity building, youth need business and market training, while older men face resource gaps, low awareness, and political interference.
- There is a need for sensitization, incentives, and fair role allocation to address existing disparities.
- Group dynamics play a crucial role in ensuring equitable participation in IMTA farm management.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore various facets of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA). The research integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to gain a well-rounded perspective on IMTA. The survey intentionally targeted three distinct demographic groups involved in IMTA farming (women above 35 years, women between 18-35 youth), and Men between 25-40, with each group having a minimum of 5 -7 members each.

It entailed a crafted questionnaire was employed to gather precise information concerning IMTA farm access, ownership, entrepreneurship, and business development. These questionnaires included 5 sections dedicated to mobility, ownership, key requirements, limiting and enabling factors, solutions to challenges, and recommendations for various aspects of IMTA, including seaweed and fish post-harvest processing, the creation of new business opportunities, and effective business management strategies.

## Key Findings

The Co-Innovation and Co-Ideation for Women Access to Blue Resources, Enterprise Development, Groups Development, and Inclusivity is paramount to ensure sustainability and success of IMTA adoption and it's governance. The consensus reached across all groups underscores the significance of these five key objectives in shaping the trajectory of IMTA practices. This includes:

### Women below 35

Participants recognized the importance of sensitization, incentives, and fair role allocation to address existing disparities. Moreover, they also emphasized the crucial need for implementing policies and programs that promote gender equity within seaweed and fish farming groups. They underscored the importance of addressing gender biases and cultural norms that hinder women's active participation and highlighted that such measures are essential during the implementation phase to create an inclusive and supportive environment.

### Women over 35

Participants recognised that achieving success requires fairness, equal resource distribution, and transparent collaboration, ensuring no exploitation. Sustainability efforts focus on environmental protection through beekeeping and mangrove planting. Economic growth depends on proper data management, income generation, and education. However, women face challenges such as exclusion from decision-making, early marriage leading to poverty, and legal barriers to their rights. Empowerment requires legal and constitutional support, marriage certificates, and targeted financial aid. Rural women are often excluded from discussions due to cultural norms and conflicting meeting schedules. Training in swimming, boat operations, and access to freezers, cold storage, and marketing support are essential for value addition. Economic empowerment of women helps reduce domestic conflicts, though cultural barriers and negative influences remain. Solutions include inclusive funding, flexible meeting arrangements, effective monitoring and evaluation, and building women's confidence through awareness and education.

### Men

Men recognised that implementing existing gender policies, including the one-third gender rule, is essential for ensuring equity and inclusion. Women should have access to ocean resources and financial policies that support their participation in fisheries and aquaculture. While both men and women are involved in public participation, efforts must be strengthened to ensure adequate female representation. Accountability, advocacy, and lobbying are crucial for policy enforcement, fostering a sense of ownership among all stakeholders. Gender-sensitive approaches should be based on needs assessments and aligned with national policies. Integrating beneficial cultural practices into policies, educating women on their rights, linking them to support institutions in cases of gender-based violence, and equipping them with conflict resolution skills are key actions. Additionally, scaling up IMTA (Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture) technology can provide women with alternative food and income sources, enhancing economic resilience.

### Overarching lessons

- Gender Biases and Cultural Norms (leadership roles, division of labor)
- Skills and Education Gaps
- Organizational Structure -Group dynamics (better coordination and defined roles)
- Limited Market Access (Insufficient marketing knowledge within the industry, Difficulty in promoting seaweed products to a broader consumer base The need for targeted strategies to expand market reach)
- Access to finance(SACCOs , table banking)

Additionally, the participants emphasized the significance of capacity-building programs, especially those aimed at equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge for successful engagement in seaweed and fish farming. They acknowledged that empowering women through targeted training initiatives is a key component in enhancing their contribution to the sector.

## Implication of Findings

Based on the above-mentioned findings, it is evident that gender inclusivity initiatives and capacity building are matters that are paramount for access and ownership of IMTA following the responses gathered from the survey group.

- Need for sensitization(inclusion), incentives, and equitable role allocation to bridge these disparities in regard to i.e. age, disability, gender.
- Policy advocacy (Implement policies and programs and new constitutions).
- Labor division (Youth).
- Provision of equipment (inclusive, and equitable IMTA practices).
- Support from external entities such as NGOs and government bodies.
- Income diversification (Sacco's, table banking).
- Capacity building for equity in IMTA and Seaweed Farming (trainings).
- Business training and market penetration.
- Fair pay distribution models.
- Collaboration and knowledge-sharing among groups and BMUs.
- Introducing markets for immature seaweed.
- Need for accommodative management structures for disabled individuals, women with children, and comprehensive analysis of different IMTA methods.

## Conclusion

IMTA as a sustainable climate resilient aquaculture farming method will have enormous benefits to the community and Measures to be enforced to streamline the ease of use majorly rely on capacity building and training, policy advocacy, and institution support.

Understanding the need to establish agency and access for women to ensure the sustainable adoption of IMTA With provision of inclusive and equitable equipment will enhance the participation of diverse groups in IMTA activities.

## Further Readings

Gopal, N., Hapke, H.M., Kusakabe, K., Rajaratnam, S. and Williams, M.J., 2020. Expanding the horizons for women in fisheries and aquaculture. *Gender, Technology and Development*, 24(1), 1-9, DOI:10.1080/09718524.2020.1736353

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