

Report Brief

The Blue Empowerment Fund Exhibition at the Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) Mombasa International Show

Jomo Kenyatta Showgrounds in Nyali, Mkomani, Mombasa, Kenya: 1st - 6th September 2025

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Key Learnings

1. Product Preferences & Demand

- * Fine powder (No.1) is preferred over coarser version (No.2).
- * There is demand for powder soap, Omo-like detergent, and kitchen liquid soap.
- * Lavender soap color should be changed to purple (not pink), and its scent should be less masked.
- * Perfumed soap should be clearly labeled on the packaging “as perfumed”
- * Seaweed baby oil (similar to Cussons) is a product of interest—smaller packages preferred.
- * Shampoo and lotion packages should be downsized for better consumer uptake.
- * Seaweed capsules and DIY seaweed face masks are in demand.
- * There is interest in demonstrating the soap manufacturing process.
- * We could consider offering a discount on the flower soap until we finalize improved packaging.

2. Packaging & Product Presentation

- * Improved repackaging is needed for powder soap, seaweed flower, and seaweed soap.
- * Smaller bottles are needed for product testing and sampling.

3. Educational Opportunities

- * IMTA (Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture) is a topic of high interest; knowledge uptake is needed.
- * Inquiries were raised about the investment costs required for a commercial production setup.
- * DIY face mask making is seen as both a product and an interactive learning/sales opportunity.

4. Training & Capacity Building

- * There's a need for training support from KIRDI (Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute), especially regarding incubation programs.
- * KIRDI/KEBS has indicated interest in partnership anytime BE project is gathering the community for training & capacity building. This is to provide a platform for them to offer trainings on regulatory compliance for value added products

5. Need for more efforts with marketing.

There's need for a physical store or shelf in Mombasa. We should also make cards, or pamphlets with avenues for people to reach to partner, support etc

Key Challenges

1. Compliance & Certification. Seaweed powder and soap requires official certification for compliance and market access.

2. Marketing Materials The marketing could definitely be improved, particularly in providing more attractive materials like one-pagers or more engaging promotional items (e.g., cool flyers, brochures, or posters). This would help in creating a stronger visual presence and message.

3. Booth Location. It wasn't in the prime location to get most coverage of the right stakeholders.

Key Recommendations

WP1 – Project Management

- Engage a third-party logistics partner to secure prime booth locations at exhibitions.
- Streamline vendor coordination by using a single event management firm.
- Provide imprest funds for on-the-ground flexibility.

Insights

- Strategic booth location significantly affects visibility and stakeholder engagement
- On-the-ground representatives are vital for real-time decisions and cost management.

WP2 – Profiling Barriers

- Hire compliance consultants to profile barriers around KEBS/KIRDI certification early.
- Document regulatory and market-entry requirements for seaweed-based products since Lack of certification is a key barrier to scaling seaweed powder and soap products.

WP3 – Mapping Socio-Technical Pathways

- Conduct research on how certification, consumer perception, and technical barriers influence adoption of seaweed products
- Partner with universities or think tanks to analyze adoption pathways.

Insights

- Certification challenges affect both consumer trust and investor readiness.
- Socio-technical insights can guide training, packaging, and market entry strategies.

WP4 – Optimising Technology

- Partner with KEBS for product testing, incubation, and regulatory compliance training.
- Introduce improved packaging technology and downsized containers for shampoos, lotions, and soaps.

Insights

- Technology upgrades in packaging directly influence consumer uptake.
- Certification requires technical alignment with national standards.

WP5 – Knowledge Translation, Dissemination & Learning

- Engage a branding/communications agency to create brochures, flyers, posters, and digital campaigns.
- Demonstrate the soap-making process as an interactive learning tool.
- Use more visuals and interactive demos increase awareness and sales.
- Use newsletters, email updates, and social media to translate project results.
- Create an information card and number for the project.

WP6 – Market Linkages

- Partner with retailers and distributors to establish permanent product shelves in Mombasa.
- Use discount strategies for low-performing products (e.g., flower soap until repackaging is complete).
- Expand into eco-tourism and wellness markets with seaweed capsules and DIY face masks.
- There's need for physical retail presence increases consumer access and product uptake.
- Market linkages are necessary to scale beyond exhibitions.

WP7 – Investment Readiness

- Bring in financial advisory firms to improve investor presentations.
- Align certification and compliance milestones with investment pitches.
- Develop investment briefs that highlight profitability and community impact.
- Certification gaps reduce investor confidence.
- Packaging, compliance, and branding improvements make products more investment-ready.

WP8 – Building Coalitions

- Convene partnerships with KEBS, KIRDI, county governments, and private sector players.
- Engage third-party conveners to formalize collaborations through MoUs.
- Leverage coalitions for training, capacity building, and market access.

Insights

- Multi-stakeholder coalitions reduce duplication and accelerate compliance support.
- Coalitions can align technical, financial, and policy actors under a unified vision.

Key Learnings & Recommendations On Logistics

✓ Start

- Clear Financial Communication: Share upfront financial needs About On-the-Ground Finances and timelines to avoid confusion.
- On-the-Ground Representative: We should assign someone physically present to coordinate vendors and provide accurate estimates (Multiple vendors were also constantly raising their prices, adding uncertainty to the budget.)
- Miscellaneous Cash/Imprest Fund: Provide imprest or a small flexible budget for unforeseen expenses(i.e extra tables batteries, chairs).It felt inefficient to keep paying only for planned items.
- Early Communication for Events: Notify the comms team early for exhibitions to allow timely content creation and visibility outputs.
- Marketing Strategy Focus: Highlight seaweed and fish farming alongside the Blue Empowerment Fund for stronger storytelling.If it weren't for the IMTA model cage, I think people would've missed our booth entirely, thinking we were just a SACCO.
- Blue Empowerment Visibility: Provide a dedicated contact card and link to website/LinkedIn for follow-ups.
- Call-to-Action at Booths: Encourage social media (i.e Youtube, linked in) follows through small incentives (stickers, wristbands).
- Need for a visitors book to collect contacts.

● Stop

- Unclear Vendor Coordination: Avoid relying on multiple vendors with shifting prices; streamline sourcing.
- Last-Minute Printing: Prevent delays in designing and printing brochures, flyers, and banners.
- Delayed Decision-Making: Reduce long response gaps (e.g., 5 days with no feedback) which hinder planning.

🔄 Improve

- Finance Timelines: Provide clear payment schedules,clear understanding of when to expect payments.
 - Vendor/Booth Budgeting: Factor in booth decoration and branding costs upfront when exhibiting the project..
 - Location Logistics: Book accommodation close to event venues to cut transport costs and save time especially if it's on reimbursement basis.
 - Team Collaboration: Encourage joint planning and idea-sharing before events to reduce individual struggles.
 - After invoices and receipts are submitted, it would be more efficient for the finance team to directly handle vendor communication. Their involvement would add urgency and ensure timely processing."
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Positive Observations

- **Attendance**

More than 70 people visited our booth, which significantly increased the visibility of the Blue Empowerment project and related initiatives. This level of engagement highlights the importance of having strong marketing materials and showcases for action for future events.

- **Team Bonding and Contribution**

This was an amazing team. Everyone contributed in different ways, from sweeping floors (shoutout to Abdalla) to wiping tables (Peter). The collaborative atmosphere made the whole experience more enjoyable. We laughed more than expected, and that really made the event feel like a shared team effort.

- **Responsive ACTS Team**

The ACTS team was incredibly responsive, picking up calls every time I reached out. This should be the standard, but it was especially reassuring considering the importance of timely communication.

- **Sale of products**

We were able to sell products to the general crowd. The conversion rate from lead to sales was high due to general positive market uptake

- **Showcase of BE project**

It was valuable to increase the awareness of the project and understand the different consumer needs, as well motivation of the uptake of the different products

Next Steps.

- Increase the efforts of Market Linkages.
- Increase awareness of the blue Empowerment project: Through Newsletters, email messaging etc to different stakeholders.
- Need for a physical store shelf in Mombasa to increase the reach of products.

