

Blue Empowerment Project

Final Reflection and Transition Workshop

Kilifi County

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Kilifi County
20th to 22nd January 2026



Preface

This report documents the proceedings and outcomes of the Blue Empowerment Project Final Reflection and Transition Workshop, a project team convening designed to reflect on the project's journey, assess its achievements, and outline pathways for sustainability and future collaboration. It captures the key reflections, perspectives, and strategic recommendations that emerged from the workshop, providing a record of the project's legacy and a foundation for future action.

The workshop brought the project team together to share experiences, lessons learned, and practical insights gained during the project's implementation in Kenya's coastal counties of Kilifi and Kwale. It also served as an important platform to discuss the transition of project activities, ensuring that the knowledge, networks, and progress made continue to benefit the coastal communities beyond the project's lifecycle.

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Contributors

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Opening Session

The workshop was officially opened with a word of prayer led by Bwana Tei.



Dr. Joel Onyango, the project lead and principal investigator (PI), officially welcomed the Blue Empowerment project team to the wrap-up and transition workshop and commended them for the strong turnout. The consortium project team members present were from the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Bahari Community Based Organization-Network (BCBON), Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI), Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KeMFRI), Kenyatta

University (KU), Seamoss Corporation, and the Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF).

He proceeded to describe the workshop design, intended to support collective reflection, reinforce closure readiness, and establish final sustainability arrangements for the project. Additionally, the workshop would also allow the project team to assess the progress made, validate remaining deliverables, capture key lessons, and ensure smooth institutional handover and sustained knowledge transfer.

Objectives of the wrap-up and transition workshop were to:

- Review major achievements, outputs, and transformation of stories across all workstreams.
- Finalize BEF governance, operations, and SACCO integration requirements.
- Identify and mitigate project closure risks.
- Develop a definitive action plan for outstanding deliverables.
- Document lessons learned and finalized the knowledge of legacy.
- Agree on transition plans, institutional arrangements, and post-project follow-up mechanisms

The workshop followed the below structured sessions:

1. Review of workstream progress and the status of over 80 project outputs
2. In-depth discussion on BEF sustainability, governance, and community ownership
3. Risk mapping and mitigation planning
4. Finalization of technical deliverables, including IMTA documentation
5. Review of outstanding deliverables and development of the project closure work plan
6. Harvesting of lessons learned and consolidation of the project's knowledge legacy
7. Transition planning focusing on institutional arrangements, community capacity, and communication pathways
8. Celebration and acknowledgement of team and community achievements

DAY 1: Reflection and Stock-Taking

Focus: Where we are and what we've achieved

Project Journey: Retrospective Overview

During the reflection exercise, the project team members shared their personal highlights and lessons learnt from the implementation of the Blue Empowerment (BE) Project focusing on technical, social, environmental, and personal impacts.

Overall, the Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) emerged as the most dominant takeaway, widely recognized for integrating fish and seaweed farming to enhance productivity, livelihoods, and environmental sustainability. Participants noted that the project significantly strengthened technical knowledge and practical application of water science, aquaculture systems, and supporting technologies such as the Fish Transport Unit (FTU).

From a technical and operational perspective, reflections highlighted the experimentation conducted on seaweed farming methods, which included rafting and off-bottom techniques. It was emphasized that while rafting yielded higher outputs, it was also more resource-intensive. Several operational challenges were aired, including regulatory requirements for permits, high operational costs due to cage placement in deep waters necessitating boat hire, safety risks requiring trained divers and proper protective gear, and inadequate equipment for cage security. Climate change impacts such as strong winds, high temperatures, and seaweed drift or breakage were also shared as key challenges affecting production by the project team.

The team then reflected on the project's social and economic impact, highlighting its role in empowering women within the community. Increased knowledge uptake on IMTA, value addition, and aquaculture practices were highlighted as the top contributors to the improved household incomes, employment creation at various levels, and enhanced family and community cohesion witnessed. In addition, the project strengthened women's agency, confidence, and leadership in blue businesses, shifting traditional gender roles and enabling women to take front-line positions in enterprise management.

The fish and seaweed value addition component in the project was another highlight as a major contributor to livelihood improvement. However, it was stressed that the need to strengthen marketing, market access, and product diversification to sustain blue enterprises beyond the project lifecycle.

From an environmental perspective, IMTA was recognized for enhancing biodiversity and supporting climate change mitigation, with seaweed farms attracting more fish and contributing to ecosystem balance. The project also influenced external adoption, with other organizations replicating or learning from BE's IMTA approach.

At a personal and institutional level, the project team reflected on how the project fostered their professional growth, hands-on learning, and the translation of theoretical knowledge into practice. Gender-responsive programming, inclusive training approaches, research activities, and innovation platforms such as hackathons were cited as key enablers of learning and impact. Several team members noted the recognition by county and national institutions as an indicator of the project's broader influence.

Work Stream Progress Reviews

Work Package 2: Agency and Coalition Building- Research and Practice by *Ken Odary, Eva Komba, Mama Fatuma, Mr. Tei and Field Officers*

The work under Work Package 2 was carried out within a triple threat context: persistent gender inequality, escalating climate change impacts on coastal livelihoods, and the lingering socio-economic effects of COVID-19. Addressing the Gap Women are central to processing and selling but are systematically excluded from decision making.

These overlapping pressures shaped both the urgency of the intervention and the limits within which communities, partners, and institutions could act.

Technical Approach

The project deliberately adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, positioning communities as co-researchers rather than passive beneficiaries. This shift was both methodological and political. It recognized lived experience and indigenous knowledge as valid forms of evidence.

Innovation was embedded through multi-criteria mapping, and co-innovation workshops, that enabled inclusive planning and collective prioritization.

Strategically, the work marked a transition from “working for women” to “working with women as leaders, producers, and decision-makers.” This shift shaped both program design and expectations around ownership and sustainability.

Building Evidence for Voice and Influence

One of the most significant outcomes was the creation of a scientific and narrative baseline for advocacy. Through life history surveys, journal articles, blogs, book chapters, and policy briefs, the project documented gendered barriers in seascape resilience and translated these into policy-relevant insights.

This evidence enabled engagement at higher decision-making levels, including: County Executives, and National Blue Economy dialogues. A key milestone was the development and submission of a policy note to the Kwale County Government, led by Mr. Tei and Mama Fatuma marking a shift from community-level concerns to formal policy engagement.

Strengthening Local Institutions

The project also contributed to strengthening the organizational independence of Bahari CBO. It began as just a name but grew through exposure, learning, and necessity. It has evolved into an organization capable of coordinating activities, engaging government actors, and envisioning post-project continuity. Coordination with other NGOs emerged as critical to avoiding duplication and community fatigue.



Eva Komba, Work Package 2 lead, sharing

Key achievements of Work Package 2:

Pillar 1: Generate Credible, Grounded Evidence on Gender Barriers and Seascape Resilience and Translate this Evidence into Policy-relevant Insights.

Through a combination of life history surveys, academic and practitioner-oriented outputs—including journal articles, blogs, and book chapters the project built a scientific and narrative foundation that elevated community experiences into formal knowledge systems. This evidence base enabled the project to move beyond documentation toward influence.

Policy briefs emerging from this research became critical tools for engagement, facilitating dialogue with decision-makers at the County Executive level and informing broader conversations within national Blue Economy platforms. These engagements helped position gender and inclusion as integral components of coastal resilience and economic development. A key milestone in this process was the development and submission of a policy note to the Kwale County Government, led by Mr. Tei and Mama Fatuma, marking a tangible shift from community-level advocacy to institutional policy engagement.

Institutional Strengthening

Beyond policy influence, the project contributed significantly to institutional development at the community level. Bahari CBO, which initially operated with limited formal structures, strengthened its organizational independence over the course of implementation. Through hands-on engagement, coordination responsibilities, and exposure to multi-stakeholder processes, the organization developed the capacity to manage activities, engage government actors, and envision continuity beyond project funding. This institutional strengthening positioned Bahari CBO not merely as an implementing partner, but as a future-facing organization capable of leading and sustaining operations in the coastal Blue Economy space.

Pillar 2: Operationalizing the Blue Economy through Physical Infrastructure

Under Pillar 2, the project translated policy ambition into tangible economic infrastructure. The establishment of model farms, rafts, and cage management systems provided practical entry points for communities to engage in climate-resilient livelihoods. These physical assets became learning spaces where technical skills, governance practices, and collective responsibility converged.

Community ownership was deliberately reinforced through Cage Management Committee trainings, which strengthened local governance structures around resource use and production. Rather than treating infrastructure as externally owned project inputs, the approach fostered shared accountability and laid the groundwork for sustainability beyond the project lifecycle.

Pillar 3: Capacity Building and Skills Transfer

Capacity building under Pillar 3 focused on shifting both skills and social norms. Training women in diving and coxswain roles positions traditionally reserved for men represented a direct challenge to entrenched gender roles within the Blue Economy. This transition from policy advocacy to embodied practice demonstrated how gender equity can be operationalized through skills transfer.

Leadership development extended beyond technical training. The project supported women's participation in Beach Management Unit (BMU) elections, linking economic empowerment with governance and decision-making power. Complementing this, peer-to-peer learning workshops emerged as critical spaces where women strengthened their confidence, voice, and collective agency, reinforcing leadership from within the community rather than imposing it from outside.

Community Dialogue and Social Change

Reflections highlighted that social change unfolded unevenly across counties, shaped by local political and cultural contexts.

In Kilifi County, there was strong receptiveness to women's empowerment, underpinned by active county government support. This enabling environment created positive prospects for post-funding sustainability, with women increasingly visible in economic and leadership roles.

In Kwale County, progress required more deliberate engagement with cultural norms and traditional leadership structures. County responsiveness was described as limited, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive programming and patient relationship-building to sustain momentum without undermining local social structures.

Across both contexts, cross-cutting challenges remained. Addressing youth unemployment emerged as a shared priority, as did the need for stronger coordination with other NGOs to avoid duplication, reduce community fatigue, and maximize collective impact.

Advocacy and Coalition Building

Advocacy and coalition building functioned as connective tissue between community realities and policy spaces. The project submitted targeted policy briefs to County Executive Committee (CEC) members for Fisheries, advocating for practical interventions such as pond stocking and the use of fish cages to strengthen local livelihoods.

At the national level, the project-maintained visibility and influence through representation in stakeholder meetings, donor working groups, and major sector platforms including the Mombasa Show and the Blue Economy Summit, in partnership with Elsie and team. These engagements supported policy coherence, strengthened networks, and ensured that community voices and gender considerations remained present in broader Blue Economy conversations.

Comments from WP2 Presentation

What happened with the planned training for women divers and coxswains, and why did it stall?

Participants recalled that the County Government had committed to supporting the training, and that KEMSFED had previously led Phase 1 training 700 men and only one woman. There

“Agency is not only for the people. The county must also have agency to respond to its people. Real change happens when government and community agency converge.” Eva Komba

is now an opportunity for Phase 2, with World Bank Group support, where Bahari could proactively follow up to ensure women’s inclusion if county collaboration is secured.

A major barrier identified was the cost of travel and accommodation in Mombasa, which disproportionately affects women.

As discussed, programs must be more responsive to lived realities: Training could be decentralized

Operational Challenges and Hidden Labour

Field officers and Bahari staff reflected candidly on the intensity of the work. Beyond their assigned work packages, they supported multiple project components often beyond their scope of work and without leave. Their responsibilities included:

- Monitoring the planting, drying, transport, storage, and measurements of varying aspects within the project.
- Administrative duties such as vouchers, banking, and procurement.

Their management reliance on Mama Fatuma and Mr. Tei effectively positioned them as supervisors, adding to their workload. Governance challenges also surfaced. The IMTA committee leadership proved difficult to mobilize outside formal seminars. Despite this, approximately 90% of planned activities were completed, reflecting strong commitment under constrained conditions.

Several systemic constraints were highlighted:

- Lack of boats for seaweed and fish farming
- Absence of seaweed technicians for monitoring and harvesting
- No seed banks to enable recovery after strong winds
- Limited markets for seaweed and value-added products (e.g., shampoos)

Value addition training focused largely on fish, leaving seaweed processors without equipment such as powder machines and dryers.

Permitting was another major obstacle. While ministerial approval was eventually obtained, interactions with fisheries officers revealed uneven enforcement particularly when compared to larger actors such as WorldFish.

Work Package 3: Mapping Socio-Technical Pathways *by Dr. Dorcas Kalele*



Work Package 3 focused on identifying and mapping socio-technical, institutional, and policy pathways that support the adoption and upscaling of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) in coastal Kenya. The work package examined how governance systems, policy frameworks, and stakeholder dynamics influence technology uptake, with a strong emphasis on gender equity and women's economic empowerment within the Blue Economy.

Activity 1: Multi-Criteria Mapping (MCM)

A multi-criteria mapping workshop was conducted in Kwale County, bringing together 46 stakeholders from community groups, government institutions, academia, NGOs, private sector, and project partners. The participatory process assessed governance, policy, and technology pathways for IMTA uptake using environmental, social, economic, and gender-responsive criteria.

Key findings from the workshop indicated a strong preference for hybrid governance systems that combine community participation with state support, contingent on clear role definition and equitable benefit-sharing. There was consensus on the need to strengthen gender responsiveness in blue economy policies, although community participants emphasized integrating changes within existing frameworks, while experts favored broader policy reforms.

In terms of technology, IMTA and seaweed farming emerged as the most preferred options. However, community members showed greater confidence in seaweed farming due to familiarity, while IMTA was viewed as innovative but requiring further demonstration and validation. Discussions further highlighted that technology adoption is closely linked to market access, profitability, and technical feasibility, including species selection and production systems.

Cross-cutting issues included persistent socio-cultural barriers limiting women's participation, the need for diversified livelihood strategies beyond aquaculture, and concerns regarding sustainability beyond the project lifecycle. Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of partnerships, market linkages, and digital tools to enhance visibility and commercialization.

The activity resulted in a comprehensive [MCM proceedings report](#), providing an evidence base on preferred governance, policy, and technology pathways, including insights on gender inclusion, market systems, and sustainability considerations.

Activity 2: Gendered Policy Analysis

A gendered policy analysis was undertaken to assess the extent to which fisheries and aquaculture policy frameworks in Kenya integrate gender equality and inclusive development. The analysis reviewed key national and county-level policies and was informed by MCM findings.

The review established that while gender is acknowledged across policies, its integration remains largely superficial, with limited operationalization through clear targets, indicators, or implementation mechanisms. Institutionalization of gender-responsive approaches was found to be weak, with gaps in implementation frameworks, resource allocation, and monitoring systems.

Women's participation in policy processes and decision-making structures remains limited, constraining their influence in the sector. Additionally, policies inadequately address access to resources, finance, technology, and capacity development for women. A notable disconnect was observed between policy provisions and sector realities, particularly in relation to key livelihood activities such as seaweed farming. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems, including lack of gender-disaggregated data, further limit accountability and progress tracking.

Output: [Advancing Gender Equity in Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Development in Kenya: A Gendered Policy Analysis](#)

Activity 3: Multi-Stakeholder Policy Dialogues

Multi-stakeholder policy dialogues were convened in Kwale and Kilifi Counties to validate research findings and co-develop actionable, gender-responsive policy pathways. The dialogues brought together government representatives, community leaders, researchers, private sector actors, and development partners.

The discussions reaffirmed that gender considerations remain weakly institutionalized within existing policy frameworks, with limited actionable provisions. Stakeholders also highlighted fragmented institutional coordination across the sector, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies.

Women's participation in governance structures, including decision-making platforms such as BMUs, was noted to be low, despite their active role in the value chain. Persistent barriers to accessing resources, finance, training, and markets were identified as key constraints to scaling aquaculture initiatives.

The dialogues further underscored the need for context-specific and inclusive policy approaches that reflect local realities, integrate indigenous knowledge, and support diverse livelihood strategies. Importantly, the value of multi-stakeholder engagement platforms was emphasized, with stakeholders recommending their institutionalization to strengthen collaboration, continuous learning, and sustained policy influence beyond the project lifecycle.

Outputs:

1. [Policy Dialogue, Kilifi County](#)
2. [Policy Dialogue, Kwale County](#)

Work Package 4: Optimising Gender-Transformative Fish–Seaweed IMTA Systems by Dr. Linus K'Osambo

The work package focused on the optimization of an Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) system that combined rabbitfish and seaweed within a gender-transformative, climate-resilient, and circular economy framework. The discussions herein underscored circularity as the foundational principle of IMTA, positioning nutrient reuse, biodiversity enhancement and ecosystem balance at the center of system design.

The speaker articulated integrated aquaculture as a three-way solution that simultaneously advances social inclusion, economic viability, and environmental sustainability, contributing to climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience. The integration of fish and seaweed was highlighted as a low-carbon production system with strong potential to empower women and marginalized groups through participatory research, low-investment entry points, and inclusive value chains. Notably, the IMTA principles are not geographically restricted and can be adapted across diverse aquatic environments.

System Design, Environmental Performance and Risk Reduction

Key technical discussions focused on optimizing IMTA designs to minimize environmental impact while enhancing productivity and resilience. Majority of the emphasis was placed on:

- Synergistic interactions between marine species
- Risk reduction especially on ecological and economic through diversification
- Products and income diversification

During the baseline of the BE project, suitability mapping and transect analyses were used to assess environmental conditions, site characteristics, and system feasibility. In addition, comparative analyses of IMTA designs examined the use of different fish cage and seaweed

raft structures, materials (including high-density pipes), joinery techniques, and the role of specialized expertise in improving durability and performance under marine conditions.

Scaling Pathways and Technological Innovation

The discussions featured horizontal and vertical scaling pathways for IMTA, including the integration of different fish and seaweed species. Technological innovations such as real-time sensors, drones, automation, and remote monitoring systems were discussed as enablers of more intensive and data-driven IMTA operations. Vertical upscaling strategies included:

- Feed development and optimization
- Fingerling breeding and selection
- Trial hatchery initiatives, including ongoing work on marine tilapia in Kilifi

Discussions highlighted the importance of species acclimatization, environmental suitability, and improved understanding of local ecological conditions to reduce mortality and improve stocking outcomes.



Dr. Linus K'Osambo, Work Package 4 Lead, Presenting.

WP4 Field Implementation and Lessons from Practice

The practical implementation experiences from Kijiweni, Kibuyuni, and Mwazaro provided critical learning insights. These included:

- IMTA cage assembly challenges related to marine conditions, structural integrity, and material durability
- Intertidal seaweed farming constraints, including strong wave action, fishing interference, and spatial planning conflicts
- Pond-based fish farming challenges, notably mortality, access constraints, and regulatory barriers

Material science emerged as a cross-cutting theme, with discussions on future design improvements that balance resilience, cost, and regulatory compliance.

Governance, Policy and Advocacy

Governance and policy barriers were identified as key constraints to IMTA optimization and scaling. Participants emphasized the need for coordinated advocacy, engagement with county governments, maritime authorities, and environmental agencies, and alignment with national frameworks such as EMCA. Ensuring meaningful community participation in policy development and review processes was highlighted as essential to avoid exposing communities to regulatory and tenure-related risks.

Inclusive business models and Co-innovation

The work package strongly emphasized the development of community-centered and socially inclusive business models. Cooperative enterprises, SACCOs, and shared-benefit structures were identified as mechanisms to ensure equitable benefit distribution, while professional management structures could support daily operations and financial accountability.

Co-innovation was highlighted as a foundation for technology upscaling, enabling communities to identify entrepreneurship and livelihood opportunities across the IMTA ecosystem, anticipate risks, and develop locally appropriate mitigation strategies.

Value Addition, Incubation, and Market Development

Value addition and business incubation emerged as critical components for sustainability. The Blue Incubation Platform at SolCoolDry was highlighted as a hub for training in fish value addition, research, innovation, and enterprise development. Training sessions in Kwale and Kilifi covered good manufacturing practices (GMPs), food safety standards, hygiene, and certification requirements.

Challenges related to equipment, certification, branding, pricing, and intellectual property were identified, reinforcing the need for continuous capacity building that integrates both technical and business skills.

Sustainability and the Blue Green Nexus

Discussions concluded by situating IMTA within the broader Blue–Green Nexus and national aquaculture development agenda. Post-project sustainability was framed around co-innovation, co-ideation, and long-term institutional and community ownership, ensuring that IMTA systems continue to evolve beyond the project lifecycle.

Key takeaway

The discussion therein demonstrated that optimized, gender-transformative IMTA systems, grounded in circularity, innovation, and inclusive governance, offer a scalable pathway for resilient aquaculture, livelihoods, and climate-responsive development.

Work Package 5: Knowledge Products and Communication *by Dr. Anne Maundu and Fiona Makayoto*

This work package focused on promoting knowledge translation, dissemination, and learning to support the uptake and upscaling of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) systems and climate change strategies among local communities in Kilifi and Kwale counties. Accomplishments were obtained in different areas including;

Capacity development

The work package contributed to capacity development by supporting postgraduate students working on policy, IMTA systems, and the seaweed value chain from planting through to commercialization. Inclusivity was strengthened through the engagement of both local and international students, including participants from China and Scotland, with deliberate attention to age and gender dimensions in seaweed production. Internship opportunities were hosted through ACTS under the Blue Empowerment project, and academic outputs were generated in the form of journal articles and book chapters.

Training and Skill development

Training activities focused on strengthening inclusive business models in Kwale and Kilifi counties to address enterprise management challenges faced by community groups. These trainings generated multiple knowledge products, including blogs, information briefs, and visually captured materials. Targeted training was also delivered to women-led SACCOs operating within the blue economy sector, resulting in information briefs, media outputs, a revised training manual that incorporated participant perspectives, and the development of a facilitators' guide.

Media Engagement and Knowledge Dissemination

Media engagement formed a core component of the work package and aimed to amplify the voices of women and community groups involved in the blue economy. Participants were supported to articulate their ventures and ideas in public forums, including conferences, and were trained on the use of digital platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp for enterprise promotion. As a result, several SACCOs established and actively managed Facebook pages to market their activities. In addition, a Blue Empowerment documentary was produced capturing activities across multiple work packages, with both English and Swahili narration to enhance accessibility and audience reach.

Showcasing and Public Engagement

The work package supported the showcasing of project outputs through national and regional platforms, including the Blue Empowerment Fund Exhibition at the Agricultural Society of Kenya Mombasa International Show and the Kenya National Research Festival, where an IMTA demonstration was featured alongside a keynote address. Project findings and activities were further disseminated through institutional newsletters, including the Kenyatta University Research, Innovation and Outreach newsletters of July 2023 and 2025, as well as the ACTS quarterly newsletter.

Branding and Platform Updates

Branding and visibility efforts included the production of branded merchandise such as t-shirts, books, flyers, reports, mugs, and lesos. Project activities were consistently shared across ACTS digital platforms, including LinkedIn, X, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and YouTube. Engagement with mainstream media resulted in documentation of the official IMTA launch being featured on KBC and Citizen TV, alongside radio episodes and published news articles.



Dr. Anne Maundu, Work Package 5 Lead Sharing

Impact Realized by the Work Package 5

Digital Inclusion and Enterprise Growth

The work package enhanced digital inclusion and enterprise growth among women-led SACCOs, with four SACCOs actively using WhatsApp Business and Facebook to support their business development.

Knowledge Institutionalization and Accessibility

Research outputs were institutionalized through the publication of two formal book volumes, ensuring long-term access to knowledge generated by the project. Information accessibility was strengthened through wide dissemination across digital and print platforms, including blogs, websites, and information briefs.

Capacity Strengthening and Visibility

Both institutional and individual capacities were reinforced through targeted training interventions, while public awareness and project visibility were significantly expanded through mainstream media engagement, exhibitions, and national forums. The work package also supported academic mentorship through the onboarding and successful graduation of a master's student.

Lessons Learnt

Indigenous Knowledge and Co-Creation

The integration of indigenous knowledge emerged as a critical factor for improving community uptake and ownership of project outputs. Evidence from the work package demonstrated that knowledge adoption is stronger when communities actively participate in generating and validating content rather than acting as passive recipients.

Digital Branding and Continuous Engagement

The work package highlighted the importance of digital branding and visibility, with community enterprises benefiting from professional branding approaches such as websites, logos, and strategic business identity development. It also underscored the need for continuous engagement, repeated messaging, and consistent follow-up, as one-off dissemination efforts were insufficient to achieve sustained behaviour change.

Reflections on Scaling

Asset Management and Ownership

Asset ownership and management were identified as important enablers of scaling, with the transfer of physical assets such as tents and IMTA structures to women and community groups strengthening local enterprise anchoring and sustainability.

Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Indigenous Contexts

Socio-cultural barriers, including entrenched norms, stereotypes, and traditional beliefs, continue to influence how business management is perceived and practiced. In indigenous community contexts, these dynamics often determine whether community-led initiatives are able to scale successfully or remain limited in scope.

Work Package 6: Investment Readiness - Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF) status and sustainability plan *by Victor Omondi, Christabel Mukubwa, Betty Mohe and Benard Simiyu.*

Work Package 6 focused on building the financial and institutional foundations required to sustain and scale the gains of the Blue Economy (BE) project beyond the funding cycle. The investment readiness component was designed to move communities from project-supported activities to self-sustaining, investable enterprises, anchored in collective financial structures, climate resilience, and inclusive growth.

At the center of this approach was the strengthening of Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations (SACCOs) as aggregators of capital, platforms for enterprise growth, and entry points for blended and external financing.

As part of this work package, four SACCOs were established and formally registered, with certificates secured:

- 2 SACCOs in Kwale County – Tushirikiane and Jitihada

- 2 SACCOs in Kilifi County - Kilifi Kaskazini and Kilifi Kusini

These SACCOs were positioned as primary vehicles through which project beneficiaries would access financial services, enterprise support, and future investment opportunities.

In 2024, SACCO leadership training was conducted, covering:

- Cooperative governance
- Financial literacy
- Risk management
- Credit management

The training outputs included a facilitator guide manual, ensuring continuity of learning and internal capacity development within the SACCOs. To further strengthen institutional readiness, SACCOs were supported with;

- Core policy documents
- A standardized financial template to guide record-keeping, reporting, and financial decision-making.

The overarching aim of Work Package 6 was to sustain and advance the gains of the BE project across five key dimensions:

- Technology adoption
- Inclusion and equitable access to finance
- SACCO integration into value chains
- Climate resilience
- Long-term enterprise growth

This was operationalized through deliberate efforts to:

- Manage and grow pooled SACCO capital
- Deploy revolving loans targeted at climate-resilient enterprises
- Attract external and blended financing, reducing reliance on grant funding

To anchor investment readiness within a strong governance framework, a Blue Economy Fund (BEF) Governing Board was established. The Board draws its membership from representatives of partner organizations within the BE project and is mandated to provide strategic oversight, accountability, and fiduciary guidance.

Functional Units under the BEF

The BEF was structured into dedicated units to support integrated and scalable operations:

- 1. Financial Services and Fund Management**
 - a. Oversight of pooled capital, revolving funds, and financial accountability
- 2. SACCO Support and Integration**
 - a. Strengthening SACCO operations and linking them to enterprise and logistics systems
- 3. Enterprise and Value Addition**
 - a. Supporting product development, processing, and market readiness
- 4. Research, Policy, and Advocacy**
 - a. Generating evidence to inform investment decisions and policy engagement
- 5. Digital and Innovation**
 - a. Developing digital platforms for training, market access, and monitoring
- 6. Partnerships and Resource Mobilization**
 - a. Attracting donors, investors, and blended finance partners



Victor Omondi making a presentation on Work Package 6's progress

Programmatic Rollout and Early Results

Several programs were rolled out under WP6 to translate investment readiness into practice. These included support for women to establish and grow their own enterprises, with early engagement showing promising uptake.

To date:

- 5 fishponds have been enrolled into the program
- 4 in Kilifi County
- 1 in Kwale County
- Enterprise focus areas include:
 - Fish and seaweed products
 - A marine tilapia hatchery
 - Recirculatory Aquaculture-Based Systems (RAS)

However, some components remain at early stages. Fingerling production has not yet commenced, and FFTU services are currently operating at a low level, indicating areas requiring further investment and technical support.

Systems under Development

Key systems and tools are still under development, including:

- The BEF master document and budget
- Feedback from the BEF demo platform

The digital platform is structured around several core sections:

- SACCO Hub
- Training
- Marketplace
- Donor Portal

Looking ahead, all BEF beneficiaries will be SACCO-based, reinforcing collective ownership and accountability. In the long term, each SACCO is envisioned to host its own e-commerce space, expanding direct market access for members.

SACCOs as Aggregators and Growth Engines

Within the WP6 model, SACCOs function as aggregators of production, finance, and logistics. Through the BEF SACCO Integration Unit:

- Transportation and logistics are coordinated
- Businesses are linked to markets and buyers
- SACCOs advance BEF objectives by generating product flow and enterprise opportunities

This integrated approach positions SACCOs not only as financial institutions, but as drivers of enterprise growth, climate resilience, and long-term sustainability beyond the project cycle.

Work Package 7: Optimise market linkages and business incubation *by Betty Mohe, Elsie Wanjiku, Julia Mumba and Josephine Obondo*

Work Package 7 focused on strengthening market linkages, value addition, and business incubation to ensure that IMTA products translate into viable, income-generating enterprises, particularly for fisherwomen. The work package aligned with the project's objective of promoting economic independence through post-harvest management, enterprise development, and strategic private sector engagement.

The approach combined market survey and analysis, business incubation, and pilot testing of value-addition techniques. Market surveys were conducted to identify potential market linkages for IMTA products, assess consumer preferences, analyze market trends, and map key value-chain actors, including distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and competitors. Four market

surveys covering four IMTA product categories generated evidence to guide product positioning and market entry strategies.

Business incubation was delivered through targeted workshops, including an incubation session hosted at the SolCoolDry business incubation center. These sessions provided hands-on training in post-harvest handling, fish value addition, product development, packaging, branding, pricing, and marketing. Pilot testing of value-addition techniques was undertaken with women participants, focusing on fish value-added products for markets in Kwale and Kilifi. A total of eight value-addition training and pilot activities supported participants to test processing methods and market responsiveness.

In addition to technical training, business skills development formed a core component of WP7. Sales and marketing sessions were conducted, and the incubation hub was made available to women entrepreneurs for product development and testing. Data collected through these engagements contributed to improved understanding of enterprise readiness and market dynamics. The work package generated several knowledge products, including a fish value-addition processing manual, a seaweed value-addition training manual, a mapping study report of distributors and wholesalers (ongoing), and a contribution to a book chapter on modelling fish value addition and business incubation within the Blue Empowerment framework.



Betty Mohe presenting the progress of work package 7

Key Learnings and Opportunities

The market surveys identified emerging opportunities beyond traditional food markets, notably the potential use of seaweed for fertilizers and animal feeds, as well as high-value cosmetics and personal care products. Seaweed value addition in Kenya remains limited compared to Tanzania and Zanzibar. There is strong regional demand for diversified seaweed-based products.

Key challenges included the high cost of value-addition processing, limited access to specialized equipment, and constrained entry into established B2B and B2C markets such as hotels and supermarkets. These findings highlighted the need for continuous training, mentorship, and follow-up support, particularly in packaging, branding, and market access.

Opportunities moving forward include positioning SACCOs as collective enterprises for producing and selling value-added IMTA products, strengthening export and regional market networks, promoting digital platforms for wider market access, and building partnerships with retail outlets and processors.

BE Project Outputs Tracking

The project outputs produced during the implementation period were reviewed within the respective work package groups to provide updates on progress, assess the quality of work completed, and identify outstanding gaps requiring attention. The review discussions focused on key areas of implementation, including **agency and coalition building efforts, IMTA technical deliverables, knowledge products and documentation, as well as monitoring, evaluation, finance, and compliance outputs**. The status of the outputs discussed across these areas is presented below.

Title / output	Document Type	Status	Responsible	Date
Life history documentation	Book Chapter	Under review	Ken Odary	10/02/2026
Africa progressive communication – MOA (IOT device installation on raft)	Agreement	Photos available	Mr. Tei	23/01/2026
Partnerships with Kwale and Kilifi county governments, CDA & equity bank	Partnership engagement	Engagement ongoing	Eva Komba	Complete
OP-ED: <i>seaweed business – how to bring more women into the economy</i>	Article	Published (Business Daily)	Eva Komba / Ken	Complete
Policy note and meeting with CECM, kwale county	Policy note	Photos and videos available	Ken Odary	23/01/2026
WIOMSA: unlocking pathways for a thriving blue economy	Advocacy event	Photo documentation available	Ken Odary	Complete
Fisheries license advocacy	Advocacy activity	Photos available	Ken Odary	02/02/2026
Mobilization guidelines	Guideline	Draft	Eva Komba	02/02/2026
Male engagement strategy	Strategy	Draft	Eva Komba	02/02/2026
Women’s economic empowerment coalition framework	Framework	Draft	Eva Komba / Jabiri	02/02/2026
Advocacy training session	Training report	Report available	Eva Komba	23/01/2026
Seaweed multi-stakeholder forum	Forum	Documentation pending		
Africa land policy conference paper	Conference paper	In press	Ken Odary	
Community dialogue report	Report	Pending consolidation		
Global affairs Canada roundtables	Event documentation	Photos and report available		

World ocean day presentation	Presentation	Slides available	Ken Odary	
Off-bottom seaweed planting (Kwale)	Demonstration activity	Implemented; documentation pending		
Quarterly bulletins (Q2 & Q3)	Bulletin	Drafts pending consolidation	Norah	02/02/2026
Multi-criteria mapping workshop proceedings	Infobrief	To be published	Dorcas K.	
Fish value addition training	Manual & Facilitator Guide	Under review	Stella	
Transect analysis and suitability mapping	Infobrief	To be submitted	K'Osambo	
Seaweed value addition training	Manual	Awaiting layout	Julia	
Seaweed farming training manual	Manual	Awaiting layout	Julia	
KIRDI design and fabrication of FTU	Technical Brief	To be submitted	Victor O.; K'Osambo	
Stakeholder mapping: desktop review	Report	To be submitted	Julia	
Driving change in Kenya's blue economy: outcomes from BE workshop	Blogpost	To be submitted	Anne M.	
Market survey	Report	Under review	Betty M.	
Hatchery manual	Manual	Under review	Victor O.	
Comparative evaluation of <i>Eucheuma denticulatum</i> productivity in floating raft systems	Journal Article	Under review (PASJ)	Anne M.	
IMTA installation	Manual	Gap – needs development	K'Osambo; Victor O.	
Partnerships and collaborations: inland IMTA systems	Technical Brief	Gap – needs development	K'Osambo	
Baseline Survey Report: Gender Analysis of the Fish & Aquaculture Sector in Kwale & Kilifi	Report	Completed	Benard S.	
BE Project: Monitoring & Evaluation FGDs and Business Units Coaching	Report	Completed	Benard S.	
Overview of consortium partners collaborating on the BE Project. <i>ACTS BE Project. (2022). BE Consortium on the Project</i>	Documentation	Completed	Benard S.	

BE Project Documentary in English & Kiswahili Narration	Documentary	Completed	Benard S.	
About the Project- Documentary shorts: Overview of the BE Project, its inception, objectives, partners and areas of intervention: <i>ACTS BE Project. (2025). About the project</i>	Documentary	Completed	Benard S.	
Voices from the Community-Documentary shorts: Community members share experiences, challenges and benefits from the BE Project interventions: <i>ACTS BE Project. (2025). Voices from the community</i>	Documentary	Completed	Benard S.	
IMTA Official Launch- Documentation of the official launch of the IMTA initiative under the BE Project (KBC). <i>ACTS BE Project. (2025). IMTA Official Launch</i>	Media documentation	Completed	Benard S.	
Blue Empowerment Project PIC Meeting	Meeting documentation	Completed	Benard S.	
BE documentary still photos	Photo documentation	Completed	Benard S.	
Mini mid-line survey report	Report	To be submitted	Benard S.	
Investment readiness assessment	Report	To be submitted	Benard S.	
Quarterly BE project activities bulletin-Q1, Q2, Q3	Bulletin	To be submitted	Benard S.	
Project progress review meeting reports	Report	To be submitted	Benard S.	
Annual technical reports	Report	To be submitted	Benard S.	
Annual audits	Financial report	To be submitted	Pheles N.	
Annual financial reports	Financial report	To be submitted	Pheles N.	
Semi-annual financial reports	Financial report	To be submitted	Pheles N.	

Budget review updates	Financial documentation	To be submitted	Pheles N.	
Due diligence report	Compliance report	To be submitted	Benard S.; Pheles N.	
Inception workshop minutes and report	Meeting report	To be submitted	Benard S.; Pheles N.	
Environmental impact assessment (EIA) report	Report	To be submitted	Benard S.; Pheles N.	

Key Observations and Agreed Actions

The review highlighted that a substantial number of project outputs had already been completed or were in advanced stages of preparation, particularly within the areas of advocacy, partnerships, and media documentation. Several technical and knowledge products were under review or awaiting publication and layout, indicating steady progress toward the finalization of project deliverables.

The team noted that some outputs, particularly advocacy activities and community engagements, were well documented through photographs and field records. However, it was agreed that these materials should be further developed into structured advocacy products, including visual stories, flyers, and short multimedia content, in order to strengthen communication of project outcomes and impact.

In addition, the team emphasized the need to consolidate various advocacy and engagement activities into coherent narrative outputs, including policy-oriented materials such as policy briefs, advocacy guides, and learning summaries that can inform decision-making processes within the blue economy and coastal governance sectors.

From an implementation and reporting perspective, partners were encouraged to prioritize the completion and submission of all pending outputs. It was unanimously agreed that all outstanding submissions would be finalized by 13 February 2026, with particular emphasis placed on the timely preparation and submission of financial reports using the standardized reporting templates provided.

Overall, the review reaffirmed that the outputs generated through the project provide a strong foundation for policy engagement, knowledge dissemination, and future scaling of integrated seaweed–fish aquaculture initiatives, while also strengthening collaboration among project partners and stakeholders.

The Day 1 session was concluded at 5:00 PM EAT.

Day 2: Priorities, Risks, and Sustainability

Focus: What remains and how we deliver

Day 1 Recap by Dr. Joel Onyango

The day began with a reflective recap session facilitated by Dr. Joel Onyango, who invited participants to pause and collectively reflect on the journey so far. Participants were asked to share one thing they remembered most from the previous day, one area that required clarification, and one aspect they wished to appreciate.

What stood out most was a collective reflection on the project's impact, tracing where the project began, the milestones achieved over the four-year journey, and the tangible changes experienced within the community and among project implementers. Participants recalled how the project has transformed livelihoods, strengthened leadership, and expanded opportunities while also prompting reflection on the work that still lies ahead as the project winds down.

There was strong emphasis on the challenges encountered and the resilience shown in overcoming them. These included operational and contextual challenges such as disruptions from human activities (including fishing and boat movements affecting seaweed farming), procurement constraints, and the realities of working within complex social and environmental systems. Special recognition was given to the commitment and effort of individuals, including Mama Fatuma and Mr. Tei, whose dedication symbolized the broader team's perseverance.

Participants reflected deeply on learning and growth, highlighting lessons drawn from implementation, collaboration across work packages, and the importance of asset management, knowledge management, and addressing social norms and attitudes. The interconnectedness of the work packages was repeatedly emphasized, with reflections on how each component contributed to broader project outcomes and sustainability goals.

Several reflections centered on women's agency and leadership, noting increased confidence, participation, and decision-making power among women. A powerful example shared was the leadership journey of women such as Mwandazi, now serving as Treasurer of the BMU, illustrating how the project has supported meaningful shifts in leadership and voice.

The group also recalled key highlights related to marketing, market linkages, and sustainability, particularly under WP5, noting how these efforts are critical to ensuring that project gains endure beyond closure. Participants appreciated the transformative stories, the scale of outputs achieved over 80 outputs within four years and the clarity provided by presentations that mapped the remaining work and final targets.

Overall, the reflections painted a vivid picture of a project defined by growth, challenge, achievement, and unfinished business a journey that has delivered significant impact while reinforcing the importance of sustainability, self-reliance, and strategic closure.

Something that Needed Clarification

What are the key submission deadlines (13th vs 30th). All documents requiring design layout and copy editing must be submitted by 30th. Outputs that do not require these services should be submitted by 13th.

How are value-added fish and seaweed products priced? Pricing strategies were covered during the initial fish value-addition training, including analysis of competitors, production costs, and expected profit margins. Based on local market analysis, indicative prices shared included fish sausages at KES 60 and fish samosas at KES 50.

How will the seaweed backlog be addressed?

The BCBO team, with support from Julia from Seamoss, will assist in offsetting the backlog by the end of the month, ensuring timely processing.

When will seaweed be used as a raw material for value-added products? Seaweed value-addition activities are scheduled for the second week of February (9th–13th), focusing on processing seaweed as a raw material for diversified products.

What is the status of financial and technical reporting? Technical reports should clearly outline activities and outcomes (e.g. stocking activities by Bahari CBO), while financial reports must directly link expenditures to activities. Reports should also capture transactions up to 31st December, including the final 15 days of the reporting period.

How will marketing and commercialization challenges be addressed? A strategic marketing approach will be adopted, including:

- Mapping potential clients and establishing MOUs for both dry seaweed and value-added products
- Assessing supply versus demand
- Addressing logistics (transportation, branding, packaging, pricing)
- Defining a competitive edge (e.g. organic positioning, product uniqueness)
Producing in bulk and targeting wholesalers and resellers were identified as key strategies to improve profit margins.

What is the status of KEBS certification and production permits? KEBS certification and branding remain critical requirements for market entry. Production can be supported through facilities such as the Business Incubation Hub and Kibuyuni Industries, which can produce for registered seaweed farmers at a cost, once standards are met.

Will production for Bahari CBO be conducted at the same facility as the cooperative, and is there a risk of conflict? Bahari CBO has strong technical expertise in value addition, with an experienced team already in place. However, entry into the market is currently constrained by regulatory and branding requirements, specifically the need for KEBS certification and approved branding. Without these, products cannot be legally commercialized.

Kibuyuni Seaweed Cooperative and Mwazaro BMU are affiliate members of BCBO, and production can be negotiated and carried out using existing machinery and facilities at a cost. In addition, Kibuyuni Industries has the capacity to produce for any registered seaweed farmer;

the key gap remains compliance with KEBS standards, rather than technical production capacity.

From a governance perspective, it was clarified that as a CBO, BCBO cannot operate a profit-making enterprise. To function commercially, there is a need to establish or transition into a separate registered company, enabling lawful business operations. Once this structure is in place, attention must be given to volume, quality, consistency, certification, and supply contracts to ensure market competitiveness.

Strategically, Bahari will adopt an Original Product Manufacturer (OPM) model, specializing in core products such as seaweed powder or gel, which can then be used as raw material for branded end products and diversified value chains.

What challenges exist with the IMTA cage system and materials? Challenges related to material science and marine conditions were acknowledged. While current cages are functional, future improvements will require exploration of cost-effective, durable materials, pricing controls, and potential policy advocacy on aquaculture equipment and materials.

Is there data to show that the IMTA system is economically sustainable post-project? While the ideal IMTA circularity has not been fully achieved, key biological and ecological learnings were realized. Evidence shows improved fish feed diversity and biodiversity. Economic returns, though not fully realized, can be demonstrated at a theoretical and experimental level, providing a strong foundation for future investment.

What is the distinction between donations and investment, and how should future financing be approached? Investment pathways will be done through contract arrangements and impact investment models that generate returns while delivering social and environmental impact. For donations, the Site has a donation section that enables anyone to donate at any amount. Participants proposed adopting flexible, inclusive mechanisms, including the use of multiple currencies (e.g. KES) and an *African Harambee-style* approach to avoid exclusion and enhance local ownership.

To strengthen local identification with the platform while retaining a global outlook, it was recommended that the initiative adopt inclusive branding and localisation strategies, including developing a clear, resonant tagline that speaks to both community and international audiences.

Following the exhibition, should Bahari continue focusing on cosmetics or diversifying into additional seaweed products? Based on strong engagement observed during the exhibition, Mr Jabari agreed that it is crucial for it Bahari to have a diversification strategy. Expanding multiple seaweed-based product lines will help mitigate risk, ensuring that if one product line underperforms, alternative value chains can cushion the enterprise. Diversification into new frontiers was therefore endorsed as a key sustainability strategy.

Appreciations and Reflections

Reflection from the principal investigator, Dr. Joel Onyango, highlighted the project as a learning experience in adaptive implementation, understanding what works, what does not, and how to deliver impact within limited resources. While not all objectives were fully achieved, particularly the complete realization of a fully operational IMTA cage system the project

achieved significant outcomes under challenging realities, ultimately exceeding expectations in several areas.

What began as an output-driven design evolved into a multi-dimensional intervention, particularly in advocacy. Initial work on women's solidarity expanded organically into partnerships, policy engagement, infrastructure development, SACCO mobilization, and membership tracking, with 75 women enrolled and impactful engagement from institutions such as the Coast Development Authority.

Appreciation was also expressed for the complexity of managing a diverse consortium, bringing together scientists, practitioners, policymakers, and communities, and enabling them to recognize shared value. A recurring highlight was hearing directly from beneficiaries, whose testimonies affirmed the project's real-world impact.

Despite constraints including natural and environmental factors affecting experimental setups the project demonstrated strong interdisciplinary commitment and collaboration across departments. Participants recognized the brilliance of the scientific and implementation teams, and the project's ability to evolve responsively over time.

Looking ahead, there was a shared desire to influence policy gaps in the Blue Economy space, strengthen gender-responsive policy engagement in Kwale and Kilifi counties, and strategically link emerging opportunities beyond the BEF framework into the project's sustainability plan.

Overall, participants concluded that while the project may be closing, the impact, learning, partnerships, and empowerment outcomes achieved provide a strong foundation for continued collaboration and long-term transformation

Lessons Learned Harvesting *World Café-Style Rotating Discussions*

Station 1: What Worked? (Success Factors and Innovations)

- Good leadership.
- Formation and implementation of SACCOs.
- Good funds management.
- Teamwork between communities and partners.
- Starting with KEBS certification, trade marketing to greatly protect women.
- Complementary mix of technology, policy, education, and building an organization.
- Bahari CBO/Shimoni: strengthening program management and gender support at Bahari; collaboration and invitation of other partners.
- The transdisciplinary composition of the project team.
- Detailed concept notes.
- Teamwork.
- Availability of funds.
- Continuous stakeholder consultations.
- Entry through a community-based approach.
- Institutional approach, partnerships, and ownership in work packages.

- Community engagement.
- Teamwork.
- Collaboration.
- Absorption and understanding of new IMTA technology.
- Good organization of the project.
- Partnership.
- Capacity building.
- Community engagement.
- Positive attitude and the spirit of teamwork from partners; clear goals, deliverables, and timelines (e.g., IMTA Tech – KIRDI and Knowledge Management – KU).
- Community goodwill.
- Technical skills and capacity amongst the project team.
- Diversified and targeted expertise within the team.
- Allocation of work packages to teams with the right expertise to deliver.
- Knowledgeable team in the areas of focus.
- Room for communication and consultation.
- Collaboration among certain work packages (2 and 3).
- Taking time to stay longer.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement throughout the project.

Station 2: What didn't? (Challenges and adaptive responses)

- ❖ Leveraging on partners and stakeholders the project was engaged in; for instance, when the project car broke down.
- ❖ An establishment of incubation platform for capacity building
- ❖ Use of community power to get fingerlings because of long licensing requirements
- ❖ Hiring boats and establishment of IMTA committee
- ❖ SACCO establishments
- ❖ Replanning and innovations and cooperations
- ❖ Collaboration to solve changes that resulted to the project failing
- ❖ Consultation measures among team members
- ❖ Realizing that even though the project was targeting women, we had to involve men who were instrumental in ensuring smooth roll-out of the project.
- ❖ Actively listening and taking up recommendations from the community. For instance, reimbursements strengthened the trust the community had in the team.
- ❖ The use of flights instead of SGR after complaints were raised regarding long travel hours.
- ❖ Improved internal communication also among work packages
- ❖ The changes made trying different approaches to the IMTA seaweed rafts more so their materials.
- ❖ Division of labor.
- ❖ Having plan B despite the existing challenges.

- ❖ The change of obtaining the target species, i.e. rabbit fish fingerlings, which was solved by using marine tilapia in land-based ponds.
- ❖ Moving meetings from hotels to tents or social halls as seen in the women conference
- ❖ Stocking ponds with prawns instead of milk fish.
- ❖ Inclusion of a net to prevent the loss of formulated feeds at the IMTA cage.
- ❖ Additional partnerships targeted, e.g. with APC, to operationalize the cage.
- ❖ Adapting to the business angle with the BEF is one of the best moves made. It has given the SACCOs an opportunity to do business.

Station 3: What's transferable? (Scalability and replication)

- The consortium and partners
- IMTA Design and Technology
- Advocacy (Government, Community and Private Sector)
- Partnerships & Networking
- Research (Gender)
- Information knowledge and skills
- Value addition knowledge
- Hatchery Operations
- Fingerlings Transport Unit (FTU) Operations
- Training, meetings and technology uptake and skills
- Cultivation of marine tilapia and prawns
- Quarterly bulletin of project activities
- Entrepreneurship
- Market Linkages and Financial Literacy
- Administrative traits
- The project documentation
- Extensive due diligence at proposal writing stage
- Community Engagement
- The sustainability Plan
- Partnerships blend for effective interaction
- Seaweed Value Addition and Market Linkages
- Business Model with SACCOs
- Gender Training
- Good relations and collaboration amongst the project team members
- Coaching and mentorship

Station 4: What's next? (Emerging opportunities and recommendations)

- ◆ Marketing techniques for the communities
- ◆ Increased Fish farming
- ◆ Community Empowerment and sensitization on gender issues

- ◆ Investments in Fish and Seaweed value chains
- ◆ Partnerships for different Technologies
- ◆ Entrepreneurship Aspect
- ◆ Sustainable markets for the seaweed products
- ◆ Value addition of products
- ◆ Technology Optimization
- ◆ Policy and investment opportunities
- ◆ Diversification of IMTA technology post fish and seaweed
- ◆ Scale-up of IMTA to different regions and ecosystems
- ◆ Different types of seaweed cultivation (long line etc.)
- ◆ Commercialization of seaweed products
- ◆ Handbook for Advocacy and Agency
- ◆ Expand local market for value addition of fish and seaweed products
- ◆ Saccos
- ◆ Aquaculture Revolving fund
- ◆ Development of village/community incubation hubs
- ◆ Feed production from seaweed and local agro-produce
- ◆ Blue-Green Nexus (Marine and inland aquaculture interaction)
- ◆ Patenting value-added products from Bahari CBO
- ◆ Circularity techniques with IMTA in different Ecosystems
- ◆ Supporting Saccos and expanding the businesses originating from this project
- ◆ Participating in other county and national processes (MSP, SOP, and master plan) to shape and influence outcomes for visibility and advocacy
- ◆ Fully stock the incubation hub with equipment, especially for seaweed
- ◆ Pitch our project models to other donors for expansion and replication
- ◆ Trainings in marketing
- ◆ Branding and certification of fish and seaweed value-added products
- ◆ Increase use of mainstream media
- ◆ Commercialization of the FTU
- ◆ Effective production of fingerlings in the hatchery unit
- ◆ Manufacturing of feeds for marine fish species in locally available materials
- ◆ Manufacturing of fertilizer from seaweed and other locally available materials



Images of the lessons learnt harvesting session

Deep Dive: Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF)

The principal investigator, Dr. Joel Onyango, presented the proposed Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF), which is the sustainability vehicle of the Blue Empowerment (BE) Project. It was presented as a spin-off initiative designed to sustain, advance, and scale the gains achieved under the BE Project, including technology adoption, inclusive approaches, SACCO integration, market linkages, and climate resilience.

It was highlighted that the key distinguishing feature of BEF is its SACCO-centered model, with operations anchored in SACCOs established through the project and any other SACCOs operating within the blue economy value chains.

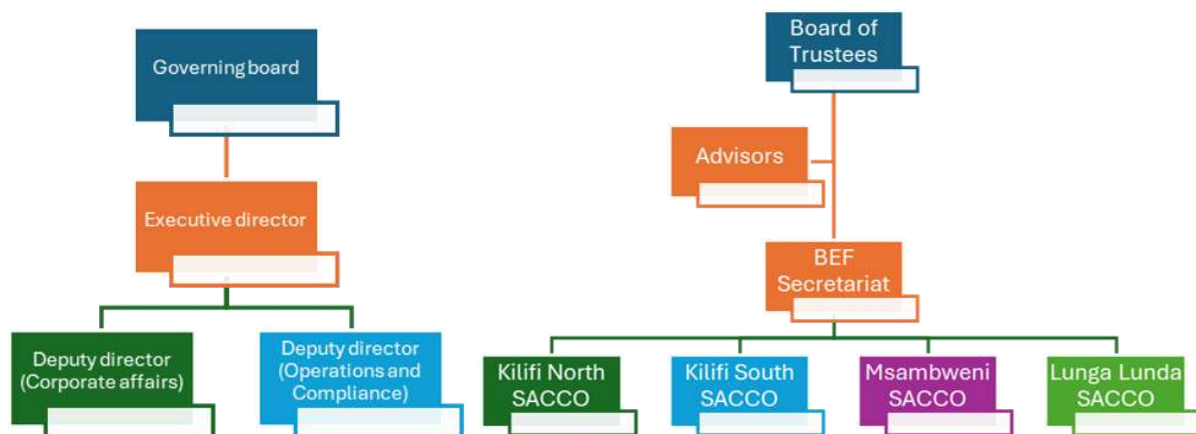
BEF will serve to:

- ❖ Manage and grow pooled SACCO capital
- ❖ Deploy revolving loans for climate-resilient enterprises
- ❖ Ensure participatory and transparent
- ❖ Attract external and blended financing

BEF's Governance Structure

The Fund has established a Blue Empowerment Fund Secretariat (BES), governed by a Multistakeholder Board of Trustees who are SACCO representatives, government and private sector representatives with a democratic SACCO shareholding structure.

The governance and management structure will be lean and effective, comprising various positions as shown in the figures below:



BEF's Operational Procedures

Within the Directorate of Operations and Compliance, there are six departmental units for effective operations of the Fund. The units are:

1. Financial Services and Fund Management Unit.
2. SACCO Support Integration Unit
3. Enterprise and Value Chain Development Unit
4. Research, Policy and Advocacy Unit
5. Digital and Innovation Unit
6. Partnership and Resource Mobilization Unit

It was reported that the Acting BEF Secretariat agreed that, at this initial stage of the Fund, the priority units would be the Partnership and Resource Mobilization Unit, and Enterprise and Value Chain Development Unit.

The figure below illustrates the structure of the Directorate of Operations and compliance of the BEF.

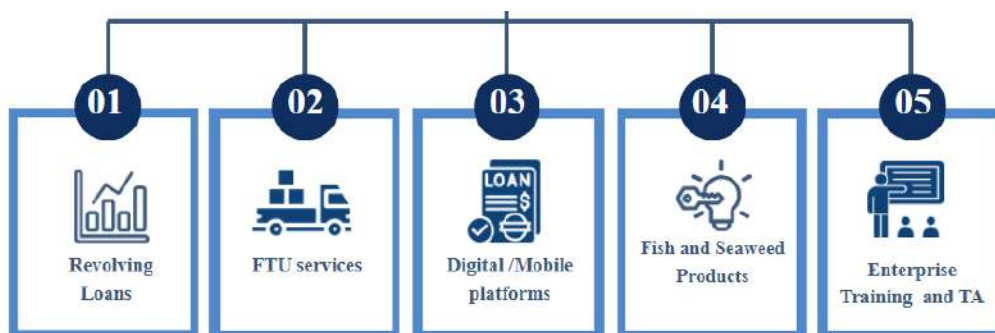


Blue Empowerment Fund's Offering

BEF's offerings will be both products and services that will be another source of getting revenue for the fund while contributing to the blue economy and empowering the coastal community.

The products and services offered will be:

- Fish fingerlings
- Fish value-added products
- Seaweed Products
- Revolving Fund Loans
- Fingerlings Transport Unit
- Enterprise Development Training
- Technical Assistance
- E-Commerce Platform



BEF's Financial Sustainability Model

It was clarified that the Blue Empowerment Fund BEF will not provide direct financing to beneficiaries. Instead, it will operate through a revolving loan model. The Fund will draw on four revenue streams, comprising both commercial and non-commercial funding sources.

The revenue streams are as follows:

1. **Loan Repayments:** Revolving loans are issued at affordable interest rates from SACCO members.
2. **Sales of the Offerings:** Sales from fish and seaweed products, including fingerlings, seaweed value-added products
3. **Blended Finance Partnerships:** Co-investment opportunities through grants, blue bonds, impact investing, and philanthropy capital.
4. **Service Fees:** This is from digital dashboards, mobile savings/loan platforms, and enterprise training, as well as services on fingerlings transportation

BEF's Capital Requirements

The estimated capital requirement for the Fund is USD 3.6 million over a three-year period. Planned expenditures are projected at USD 950,000 in Year 1 (2026), USD 1.4 million in Year 2 (2027), and USD 1.3 million in Year 3 (2028).

Expenditure allocation is structured as follows:

- Equipment and Supplies (31%)
- Personnel and Travel Expenses (28%)
- Revolving Funds (26%)
- Capacity Strengthening (2%)
- Indirect Costs (13%).

BEF's Impact Goals

The Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF) aims to achieve the following targets in support of growing Kenya's blue economy: reaching over 5,000 MSMEs across the coastal region; onboarding more than 15 SACCOs into the Fund; supporting over 100 fish and seaweed

farmers; facilitating the harvest of over 168 tons of fish and seaweed; training more than 900 entrepreneurs; and enabling the production of 200 tons of fish feed.

For capital providers, BEF aims to:

1. Reduce the risk of informal sector loans attracting new clients.
2. Using alternative credit data enables smarter lending decisions.
3. Contribute to cashless banking minimizes the need for physical visits.

For BE Sector Entrepreneurs, BEF aims to:

- a. Offer non-collateral loans for the “*low-income individuals*.”
- b. Boost financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs.
- c. Support building credit history and scores.
- d. Build a centralized mobile platform that is interoperable.

Project Team's Feedback, Ideas and Suggestions towards the Blue Empowerment Fund

The team provided constructive feedback to strengthen the design, governance, and operationalization of the Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF) as a long-term sustainability mechanism.

The key suggestions emphasized the need for a more balanced sectoral focus, with participants recommending that the fund be expanded beyond fish value chains to explicitly include those around seaweed. It was also proposed that the operational structure be streamlined as merging certain roles will enhance efficiency.

From a gender and social inclusion perspective, it was recommended that a community representative be integrated into the BEF Secretariat, and that the fund benchmark with institutions such as COMRED and One Acre Fund, particularly on engagement with marginalized groups.

The project team underscored the importance of strengthening SACCOs and consortium partnerships to amplify collective voice and bargaining power, and to ensure stronger linkages between earlier phases of the BE Project and the forthcoming BEF Phase. The need to streamline the regulatory framework governing BEF operations was also highlighted.

Operational discussions noted that the fund intends to maintain a physical presence at Kenya's Coast, and that roles and responsibilities of consortium partners within BEF require further clarification. ACTS was acknowledged as the current host institution, covering initial establishment costs, with an understanding that co-hosting arrangements by other partners would carry financial implications. A strong asset utilization and sustainability case to support approval should be established.

The participants reaffirmed that BEF is not a project phase but a long-term entity. To support this transition, it was suggested that by the close of the workshop, clarity be reached on what each partner contributes to and gains from BEF. In addition, the governing board was encouraged to adopt a co-creation approach in refining its masterplan blueprint.

More so, updates were provided on the status of BEF SACCOs. In Kilifi, SACCOs have approximately 200 members each; registration has been completed, and about 50% of members have paid their share capital. In Kwale, Msambweni and Lunga Lungu, SACCOs also have approximately 200 members each; registration fees have been paid, though share capital mobilization is still ongoing. It was emphasized that all members of the SACCO should be actively engaged in blue economy enterprises.

To enhance impact financing opportunities, the team highlighted the need for gender profiling within SACCOs, positioning BEF for impact investment, grants, and donations. This exercise will be supported by Eva Komba and aligned with an upcoming Equity Bank training targeting over 2,000 rural women and community members, in which the BEF SACCO members can be involved.

Clarifications were provided on governance and compliance issues, including the status of SACCO documentation, legal requirements, and the revolving fund arrangements for current beneficiaries. It was confirmed that BEF works primarily through SACCOs, with infrastructure and equipment held at their level, and that individual beneficiaries must be members of the SACCOs. For Sharia-compliant concerns, it was clarified that interest charges are structured as management fees.

The BEF Secretariat confirmed that Faith Kimanga serves as the Kwale representative, supporting ongoing coordination. The Secretariat further emphasized that, as the project transitions, leveraging partnerships remains central to BEF's growth and sustainability.

Risk Mapping and Mitigation

The project team held a breakout session to identify and map potential risks during the project closure phase and the post-project phase. Following group discussions, the teams presented the identified risks, proposed mitigation measures, and the corresponding responsible consortium partners, as summarized below.

Risk	Mitigation measure	Responsible
Financial and asset risk	- Any money remaining will be refunded back to the donor - A proposal with clear guidelines on how to dispose the project asset - Assets are disposed of according to donor regulation.	ACTS
Community blames due to unmet expectations	- Conduct community engagement for the closure process to make them understand the achievement of the project and the misses. - Indicate the sustainability plan of the project initiatives.	BCBO
Community disinterest and lack of cooperation	- Engage the community to understand the long benefit – long-term income gains - Be honest about there being no funds available to cover reimbursement - Invite community members who have relevant successful experiences.	ALL

	– Setting guidelines for post-project engagement – Exclude them in future project engagement	
Community dissatisfaction	– Communication and dissemination – Documentation – Community engagement – elaborate project closure guideline – Conduct a tour of the project sites – Strengthen agencies	KU
To partners; continuous partnership without defined roles within BEF as previously defined under work package	– There should be well defined roles, and responsibilities – Structuring the collaboration/partnerships within the BEF masterplan through frameworks and policies.	BEF
Market instability	– Providing quality products that can top the charts over other producers. – Better packaging of the products, such as shower gels. – Promoting product diversification – Drafting a market strategy and curating it to the current market sector. – Creating focused awareness of the products – Make better use of social media platforms to market their platforms. Posting regularly on the pages, delve a significant amount of time to curating and posting	BCBON
Drawback to the economic gains for women	– Integrate them into the BEF to promote continuity. This will ensure they make use of trainings; skills and knowledge. – An engagement session with the community involved at the end as a means of exit by the BE project partners. – Encouragement for continued peer training among the women and community member	BEF ACTS BCBON
Job loss	– Making use of taught knowledge, skills and/or experience such as entrepreneurship, commercializing the knowledge i.e. trainer of trainers (ToT), marketers, production, e-book development, etc.	All members
Income disruption	– Support the partnerships and resource mobilization unit of the BEF	All
Agency of women affected by the lack of a seaweed policy	– Advocacy -through the BEF policy advocacy component. – Involving a representative from the BEF in the stakeholder's forum	BEF
Community engagement	– A good sendoff /closure engagement to motivate the community and with the county govts – Revenue generated from the cages to be prioritize (Community jobs created) – Have sustainability Champions to Share the sustainability plan with community and	BCBO/ ACTS IMTA Committee BCBO/ ACTS /Sacco Integration -BEF team

	chairpersons of SACCOs/business units to ensure change is gradual – M and E strategy (Follow ups and BMU meetings)	
Environmental cage and ponds abandoned Environmental degradation	– Cage management committee in place to help with cleaning, security and management of the Cages – Foster community ownership with a system where the local benefit from the assets – Continued stocking to ensure operational continuity	BCBO BCBO/KIRDI BEF/SACCOs/BCBO
Incomplete deliverables	– Using BEF as a sustainability vehicle – Commitments and regular follow ups with different teams – Set up tight deadlines within teams – First approval processes – Capacity support /strengthening – Involve county govt in handover (exit) to hand hold community in the sustainability of the gains	BEF Work package leads ACTS
Underutilization of gained skills if not transferred, e.g. Value addition, marketing, etc.	– Encourage peer learning and mentorship	SACCO Leads
Knowledge loss	– Reporting to the community – Develop learning materials like manuals to support skill transfer – Incentivize them through opportunities within BEF – BMU capacity building sessions where the tot practice - Embedded in BMU constitution – Use skills to be proactive in social transformation through more projects and grants	TOT Reps /sacco leads KU/ACTS BCBO/ SACCO LEADS
Main objective of IMTA not being met, not enough documented data	– Document the experimental standards of practice to aid in scaling – Committee to continue stocking the cages and ponds – Monitoring and evaluation for the stocked cages and ponds	KIRDI/ACTS BCBO BCBO/BEF/ SACCOs



Images of the risk mapping and mitigation discussion session by the project team

Day 3: Transition, Celebration, and Closure

Focus: How we hand over and what we leave behind

Recap Session

During the Day 3 Recap session, it was guided by the question, "For the past two days, I would have loved to hear..."

The project team shared the following responses and questions, to which for some clarification was given:

Response 1: The IMTA potential for women's empowerment and transformation through the use of ocean resources, backed by data

IMTA, as a functional system, has the potential and capacity to improve lives. It is proven in other systems due to its circular nature. It is a socially inclusive system, accessible to communities and different sectors, and it assures community access as it is not a deep-sea venture.

The importance of IMTA as a pathway for transformation has largely been through income generation. However, one of the key challenges faced is licensing for stocking the cages. The policy landscape has been the biggest setback.

Getting fingerlings from the wild is not sustainable; supporting systems such as hatcheries have been useful. We were not able to generate enough data to fully prove the transformation concept. Beyond the research question, the key concern remains whether IMTA is economically viable. Converting investment into production and value addition has been difficult. We therefore need more data to prove this.

Response 2: Impression of the donor on our progress and performance, and whether they have plans to continue support

IDRC, represented through the Programme Officer, expressed satisfaction with the project's progress. However, they do not have additional resources to continue funding the project, and we may need to seek another funder.

Response 3: Positive effects of gender advocacy in enabling project success

Gender advocacy has created partnerships and spaces to influence policy in a gender-transformative way. We are now part of the Seaweed Policy Space Technical Working Group, where we can push for actions that improve outcomes for women and other groups, such as persons with disabilities (PWDs), and address their needs.

There is increased appetite from government to work with women in other regions, and some level of commitment has been shown through invitations to collaborate. In publications, there is growing interest in gender products such as policy briefs and a national business case for women's financing, grounded in the realities of how women participate.

Partnership opportunities such as the GAC, if coupled with Work Package 3 on policy, can help influence decision-making through data, capacity, and advocacy. There are emerging opportunities within government that we can collaborate with to increase support.

Supporting grassroots organizations such as Bahari Kwale Women Finance and building capacity for organizations working on women and gender rights through data and partnerships remains key. We should retain these capacities and use them to lay the groundwork for carrying the gender agenda forward.

Response 4: Extension to complete project deliverables

As of last year, approximately 90% of the budget had been utilized. There are no additional funds to finance further activities, and therefore no extension.

Response 5: Best model farms for seaweed and how to actualize and recommend the best seaweed farming method for communities with high production

Response 6: Bahari's other projects and lessons being learned

Current initiatives include collaboration with the Association for Progressive Communication on IoT device support. If implemented well, and if women anchor data monitoring, the project objectives can be achieved.

Partnerships with Tuwajani Wajane, who have a similar model, offer learning opportunities, particularly around their SACCO model and how they work with similar target groups. Lessons will also be drawn on how to push implementation effectively.

Response 7: Sourcing another donor to fund and enhance the Blue Empowerment Project

This would include IMTA system setup and educational tours as part of the sustainability plan.

Response 8: Persistent gender issues

Gender issues are still present, especially in Kwale, particularly around agency.

Response 9: "Nipe Nikupe" and creative approaches to enhance visibility

As knowledge continues to grow, approaches such as *Nipe Nikupe* can motivate communities to seek information and help spread awareness of the work done. Producing information in different formats such as arts and drawings illustrating IMTA can enhance visibility and uptake.

Response 10: What we currently have

Response 11: What we need to look for

Response 12: What comes next after BEF

Clarification is needed on whether there are additional activities beyond BEF and what role the partners will continue to play

Response 13: Continued partnership if new opportunities arise

- **Bahari:** There is strong familiarity and significant ground covered together. The collaboration worked well. There is interest in establishing a community of practice to continue engagement and support beyond the project.
- **Blue Empowerment Initiative:** Discussions are needed on governance—whether or not funding is available and agreement on priorities and structure.

- **Kenyatta University (KU):** The collaboration has been strong, and there is willingness to continue working together. BEF remains within KU's support areas, including custom-led trainings and SACCO support. KU is open to student placements, attachments, and volunteer opportunities.
- **KIRDI:** Collaboration has been positive since project inception. Although interactions were limited, appreciation was expressed, and there is willingness to work together again. KIRDI brings strengths in innovation, technology transfer, and support through innovation hubs and BEF.
- **KEMFRI:** Willingness to continue collaboration, particularly in research and innovation.
- **ACTS:** The partnership has been strong. ACTS is open to future collaboration opportunities and recognizes the team's strengths.

Strong partnerships are essential, particularly as most interventions are now channeled through counties. Counties are converting groups into businesses, creating sustainability spin-offs for development and enterprise. KIRDI's role in innovation and technology transfer will be key in supporting this transition.

Response 14: Project staff at Bahari

There are still staff at Bahari, including cage and pond technicians. Clarification is needed on whether there is any budget allocation to sustain them before project closure and before fish sales begin.

Response 15: Publication timelines

Is there an opportunity for continued publishing at Bahari until August? All publications must be completed by the end of the year. Any work done after 13th February will not be included in the project report.

Response 16: Budget to foster partnerships post-project

There is interest in continuing partnerships, even on a voluntary basis, to maintain visibility as pioneers in the Blue Economy space. ACTS and several other partners have expressed willingness to remain engaged.

Response 17: Closure of the project

There is no additional budget allocation for further meetings. A community closure meeting will be held, and continuation beyond that will depend on the willingness of partners to keep working together.

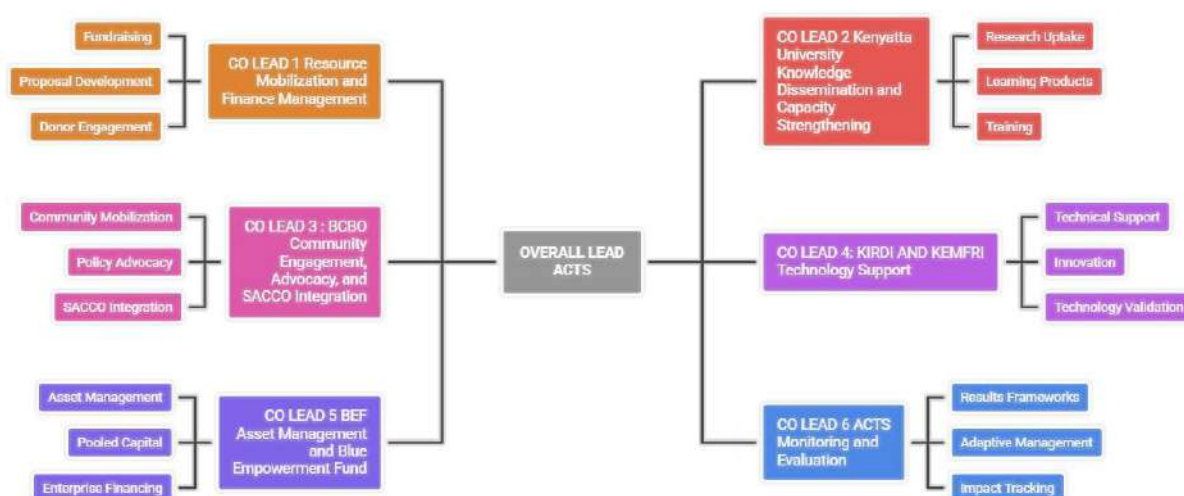
Response 18: IoT system implementation

Some support has been secured to implement the IoT system. The aim is to install devices in the cage to collect data on parameters such as temperature.

Proposed Governance Frameworks post Project Implementation Phase

Roles/Actors	Activities	Timeline
ACTS	Resource mobilization – to advance and support the activities. Mapping of proposals Mapping out of proposals. Preparing response	Continuous
Bahari CBO	Community engagement – capacity building (virtual) TOT/ Peer learning	Quarterly
ACTS, KU	Monitoring and Evaluation – To track status of targets and indicators Volunteer	Quarterly
Bahari CBO	Partnership management – organize engagements (virtual) Develop MoUs Mapping stakeholders Summaries of reports and updates.	Quarterly
Bahari & ACTS, KIRDI, Sea Moss	Asset management – develop guidelines for usage and handover.	
BCBO, KIRDI	Policy and advocacy - To follow up on permits and licenses	
KEMFRI, ACTS, KIRDI	Technical and research - Proof of concept	

Blue Empowerment Initiative Governance Framework



How to Strengthen the BE Initiative Governance Structure

1. **Streamline leadership structure:** Condense Co-Lead 1 and Co-Lead 6 into a single, clearly defined function to reduce duplication, improve accountability, and speed up decision-making.
2. **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Explicitly include sea moss activities under the M&E co-lead to ensure they are tracked alongside other value chains, with clear indicators for productivity, inclusion, and resilience.
3. **Expand the project portfolio:** Increase the project portfolio to reflect the full range of ongoing and emerging initiatives, ensuring alignment with strategic priorities and available capacities.
4. **Institutionalize regular monitoring:** Establish quarterly check-ins as a formal requirement to review progress, address bottlenecks, and adjust implementation plans in real time.
5. **Clarify resource mobilization targets:** Define clear proposal development targets (number of proposals, timelines, and thematic focus areas). Regularly assess submitted, successful, and pending proposals by lead to measure performance and refine strategy.
6. **Strengthen technical and research integration:** Include proof-of-concept development under the Technical and Research co-lead to ensure innovations are tested, validated, and supported before scaling.
7. **Embed policy frameworks:** Integrate policy frameworks within Community Engagement and Advocacy to ensure that grassroots actions are consistently linked to policy influence and institutional change.
8. **Leverage partnerships for visibility and fundraising:** Include partnership documentation under publicity and marketing, focusing on impact storytelling and transformation narratives to strengthen resource mobilization and public communication. This should be anchored under Co-Lead 2.
9. **Enable flexible co-lead support:** Allow co-leads to invite additional technical or support persons into their dockets where gaps or specialized needs arise, without bureaucratic delays.
10. **Clarify the role of the lead:** Define the lead role as a convening and coordination function that facilitates collaboration across work streams, rather than limiting or centralizing authority.
11. **Improve coordination mechanisms:** Establish an online coordination platform (e.g., WhatsApp or similar) to enable continuous interaction between the lead and co-leads for information sharing and joint problem-solving.
12. **Adopt a tiered collaboration structure:** Create a core leadership group, with each co-lead supported by smaller working units to enhance efficiency and ownership.
13. **Clarify ACTS responsibilities:** Clearly identify who within ACTS is responsible for leadership and SACCO integration to avoid ambiguity and ensure continuity.
14. **Integrate BEF with finance and resource mobilization:** Position BEF as an integrated mechanism that brings together resource mobilization and financial management, rather than treating these as separate functions.
15. **Assign resource mobilization to BEF:** Make resource mobilization a core function of BEF under Co-Lead 5, with clear accountability and performance tracking.
16. **Establish an executive structure:** Borrow from Model 2 to define an executive structure with clearly articulated functions and decision-making authority.
17. **Explicitly define Business Development (BD):** Establish Business Development as a standalone function, rather than subsuming it under asset management.

18. **Align asset management and BD under BEF:** Integrate asset management with resource mobilization and business development under BEF leadership for coherence and efficiency.
19. **Manage the transition to BEF:** Maintain ACTS leadership for the next two months, followed by a structured transition of responsibilities to BEF.
20. **Strengthen private sector engagement:** Embed business development and entrepreneurship, including sea moss value chains, within private sector engagement strategies.
21. **Provide end-to-end BDS support:** Deliver Business Development Services (BDS) both upstream (initiative-level support) and downstream (enterprise-level growth and sustainability).
22. **Clarify BEF's role as a fund:** Recognize BEF as a financing vehicle distinct from implementation, while allowing it to subcontract technical and operational support where necessary.



Project Team members sharing their feedback

Final Reflections and Way Forward

1. Evolution of project partnership and onset

The journey that began in 2022 demonstrated how collective action can influence coastal livelihoods. During the early stages, the team navigated varying dynamics and tight timelines, yet the delivery of agreed outputs reflected steady progress. As one team member observed, *“From the project’s start, our collaboration has been successful, with all challenges being addressed collectively,”* which helped the team move beyond initial obstacles. The subsequent addition of funds was viewed as an indication of donor confidence in the work being undertaken on the ground and in the direction the project had taken.

2. Lessons learned in strategic implementation

A key lesson emerging from implementation was the value of collective resilience. Challenges were addressed through shared solutions rather than individual responses, strengthening coordination across actors. The team also noted that community-led initiatives benefit from visibility, which can support independent resource mobilization and reduce reliance on project funding alone.

3. Gender Transformation and Community Leadership

Changes in women’s roles within the marine sector were a central feature of this phase. Observations indicated a shift from small-scale participation toward greater involvement in leadership and decision-making at community level. One participant noted that *“the women have transformed by gaining skills to manage their small business, participate in leadership, and gain confidence.”*

These changes were supported by practical adjustments in project management, including budgeting for childcare to enable women’s participation in meetings and market-related activities. Such measures reduced barriers to engagement and supported women’s ability to operate within competitive economic spaces.

4. Integration of research and field application

The project provided a link between academic work and field-based applications. For several researchers, it created space to test concepts in practice while engaging directly with communities. One reflection stated that *“it was a great journey, starting out as a student and then being able to set up an experimental setup aligned with my concept.”* This interaction between researchers and communities strengthened knowledge generation in areas such as aquaculture and the blue economy, while grounding research in lived experience.

5. Institutional growth and local visibility

Local institutions strengthened their capacity through involvement in data generation, coordination, and community engagement. As a result, organisations such as Bahari CBO increased their visibility with government agencies and other partners. It was noted that the organisation *“has developed visibility due to the project”* and is now *“proceeding with resource mobilisation through proposal calls.”* These developments suggest that project outcomes will continue to be carried forward through more capable and connected local institutions.

Way Forward and Strategic Growth

The transition from a project-based mindset to a sustainable national economic service defines the next phase of this journey. The focus now shifts toward a strategic Blue-Green Nexus that connects marine systems with terrestrial opportunities. The goal is to ensure that seaweed and fish production are integrated into the wider economy rather than treated as isolated projects. This involves scaling the results to other regions and using established value-addition platforms to build new enterprises.

To achieve this, the team intends to share ideas across different regions and develop mutual benefits between inland and coastal waters. This includes using seaweed for the production of fish feeds to create a functional loop between sectors. By benchmarking success in areas like Western Kenya and applying it to coastal initiatives, the initiative aims to build an interconnected system that supports both technology transfer and economic development.

Sustainability will also depend on the continued cultivation of a talent pool. The plan is to involve more students in developing new instruments and research models for the marine space. There is a clear potential to change lives by focusing on secondary and tertiary innovations that benefit the marginalized. The vision for the future is a continuous process where the relationship between aquaculture and innovation yields both economic growth and career paths for specialists.

The strength of the future lies in the partnerships and masterplans already established. The transition from a small start to a larger initiative shows that goals are reachable through steady commitment. As was stated during the final session, *"all big events start with small seeds, tiny initiatives that build a wholesome impact."*

Workshop Closure

Following comprehensive deliberations on all agenda items, the three-day Final Reflection and Transition Workshop for the Blue Empowerment Project was formally concluded with closing remarks delivered by the Co-Principal Investigator, Dr. Linus K'Osambo. In his remarks, Dr. K'Osambo reflected on the project's origins, recalling the proposal development process in response to the Call for proposals in 2020. He highlighted the journey from conceptualization to implementation, noting how the project evolved into a flagship initiative advancing inclusive and sustainable blue economy pathways. He expressed deep appreciation to the consortium partners for their technical contributions, collaboration, and commitment to achieving the project objectives.

Dr. K'Osambo underscored the project's impact in strengthening coastal women's livelihoods, enhancing community capacity, and advancing Kenya's blue economy agenda through innovation, inclusion, and climate-resilient aquaculture systems such as IMTA. He also commended the project team and community partners for their resilience, adaptability, and ownership throughout the project lifecycle. In closing, he encouraged consortium partners and stakeholders to sustain the momentum built through the project, particularly through the Blue Empowerment Fund (BEF) and other transition mechanisms and reaffirmed the importance of continued collaboration to scale impact beyond the project period.



Images of some project team members receiving certificates of appreciation for their contribution to the BE project.



A group photo of the Blue Empowerment Project Team.



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