

# Blue Empowerment Project

## Institutionalizing and Catalyzing Gender-Responsive Policies and Strengthening Collaboration and Coordination in Kenya's Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector

### Policy Dialogue Report: Kwale County



# Policy Dialogue Report Kwale County



Kwale Multi-Stakeholder Policy Dialogue Report  
Jacaranda Ocean Resort  
27<sup>th</sup> May 2025



## Acknowledgment

This work was carried out under the Blue Empowerment Project ‘Aquaculture of Seaweeds and Fish: Opportunities for Blue Economic Empowerment and Covid-19 Resilience of Fisher Women in Kenya’. The project is a collaboration between researchers and practitioners from the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI), Bahari CBO Network, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), Kenyatta University (KU), and Sea Moss Corporation. The overall aim of the project is to contribute to the tackling of barriers for the empowerment of fisher women in Kenya’s coastal region through adoption of climate-smart integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) of seaweeds and fish for improved livelihoods and resilience. The project partners appreciate the financial support from the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) under the Gender Equality in a Low Carbon World (GLOW) programme: [GLOW Programme](#)

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## Citation

Kalele, D.N., Ouma, N., Kimanga, F., Kopa, A. Binti, Ninyoha., Odary, K. 2025. Institutionalizing and Catalyzing Gender-Responsive Policies, and Strengthening Collaboration and Coordination in Kenya’s Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector. Kwale County Multistakeholder Policy Dialogue Report, 27 May 2025. ACTS Press

## Partners



This publication has been prepared as an output of the [Blue Empowerment Project](#) Kalele, D.N., Ouma, N., Kimanga, F., Kopa, A. Binti, Ninyoha., Odary, K. 2025. Institutionalizing and Catalyzing Gender-Responsive Policies, and Strengthening Collaboration and Coordination in Kenya’s Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector. Kwale County Multistakeholder Policy Dialogue Report, 27 May 2025. ACTS Press and has not been independently peer-reviewed. Responsibility for editing, proofreading, and layout, opinions expressed and any possible errors lies with the authors and not the institutions involved.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

<b>BE</b>	Blue Economy
<b>BEP</b>	Blue Empowerment Project
<b>BMU</b>	Beach Management Unit
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>CECM</b>	County Executive Committee Member
<b>CIDP</b>	County Integrated Development Plan
<b>CoK</b>	County Government of Kwale
<b>CoG</b>	Council of Governors
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>EIA</b>	Environmental Impact Assessment
<b>F&amp;A</b>	Fisheries and Aquaculture
<b>IMTA</b>	Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture
<b>JCMA</b>	Joint County Management Agreement
<b>KEMFSED</b>	Kenya Marine Fisheries Socio-Economic Development Project
<b>KES</b>	Kenya Shillings
<b>KMFRI</b>	Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute
<b>KIRDI</b>	Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>SDBE</b>	State Department for Blue Economy
<b>WP3</b>	Work Package 3



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Multi-Stakeholder Policy Dialogue on Institutionalizing and Catalyzing Gender-Responsive Policies in the Kenya's Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector was held on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2025 in Kwale County. The dialogue was organized as part of the Work Package 3 (WP3) under the Blue Empowerment (BE) Project by the project partners[1] to explore policy, governance and institutional mechanisms that promote gender equity and women's economic empowerment through the adoption of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA). The dialogue brought together 45 participants from national and county government departments, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, research institutions, cooperatives, and fisherfolk groups. The dialogue aimed to highlight the importance of prioritizing aquaculture and fisheries value chains in the County's development strategies and plans, discuss strategies for addressing gender gaps, enhancing women's agency and participation in the aquaculture and fisheries sectors, strengthened institutional and stakeholders' collaboration and generating actionable recommendations for policy, governance and institutional frameworks that support inclusive, resilient and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development in Kenya.

The dialogue generated key action areas and policy recommendations that would cultivate sustainable, resilient, gender and inclusive aquaculture and fisheries sector in the County. These include: amending fisheries and aquaculture policies to formally recognize seaweed farming, timely issuing of fishing and stocking licenses, women's inclusion in Beach Management Units (BMUs) leadership beyond administrative roles, adjustment of the seaweed price enhanced women's capacity and skills in marine safety, business, and value addition, enhanced collection of quality, gender disaggregated data, formation of a county's blue economy coordination taskforce to prevent cross-sector conflicts, such as environmental degradation from mining. The Kwale County Government, through the CECM, agriculture, livestock and fisheries expressed its commitment to review the county's fisheries policy draft with input from the dialogue and welcomed stakeholders to submit written recommendations to inform further legislative processes. The dialogue reaffirmed the importance of a multi-stakeholder community-driven engagement in stirring a robust and inclusive planning for the sustainability and inclusivity of Kwale's blue economy sector.

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[1]The African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI), Kenyatta University (KU), Bahari CBO, SeaMoss Corporation, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KEMFRI)

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# 1 Background

Fisheries and aquaculture sectors are significant to Kenya's economy, source of livelihoods, food and nutrition security for majority population. Although women play an important role in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, particularly in the post-harvest stages of the value chain, they remain marginalized and discriminated, with the sector remaining mainly male-dominated. Women, in all their diversity, continue to face marginalization and discrimination that hinders their full participation in economic opportunities, access to resources and decision-making processes related to the management of fisheries resources. Gender-based discrimination not only impacts women directly but also imposes a significant drawback on the sectors development through productivity losses, inefficiencies and lost opportunities for innovation and women entrepreneurship. These gaps are intensified by socio-economic and cultural barriers coupled with institutional and governance frameworks that have not mainstreamed gender perspectives in guiding inclusive sector development. Promoting gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sector is crucial to break the existing barriers that can enhance inclusion in sustainable and equitable access and utilization of related resources for improved productivity and economic returns (FAO, 2017). Integrating gender perspectives as a cross-cutting aspect of policies, institutions, programs, and investments will avert the exacerbation of inequalities and imbalances between men and women who rely on fisheries for their livelihoods.

The Blue Empowerment (BE) project, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), aims to promote sustainable livelihoods and gender empowerment in coastal communities through the adoption of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA). The IMTA of seaweeds and fish presents a promising socio-technical innovation for sustainable development and women empowerment in coastal Kenya. However, successful adoption of IMTA hinges on institutional frameworks, policies and governance systems that support its integration. As part of the project, the work package (WP3) has been exploring socio-technical pathways, policy and institutional frameworks that can support gender equity and women's economic empowerment through IMTA adoption. The WP3 has conducted several activities including: i) literature reviews to analyze drivers and barriers to sustainable, inclusive development with specific bearing on gender equity and women's economic empowerment in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors ii) Engaging diverse actors including community members and experts, to review sustainability, policy, and governance dimensions that can support optimal gender-transformative socio-technical pathways for mariculture development in coastal Kenya using a multi-criteria mapping (MCM)[1] approach iii) Policy analysis guided by a gendered-policy analysis framework to document gender considerations in sector specific policies and strategies, unravel gender and social inclusion gaps and structural barriers facing women's involvement in fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

Stakeholder insights from the MCM workshop showed that engendering[2] blue economy policies was the most preferred policy option which would enhance women economic and social transformation, break social-cultural barriers to allow women harness benefits from the utilization of ocean resources. As a follow-up to the findings from the MCM workshop, an extensive policy review was done using a gendered policy analysis framework. The analysis revealed that most of the Kenya's fisheries and aquaculture policies, strategies and plans lack gender-specific objectives, actions, targets and indicators, hindering the policies' effectiveness in promoting inclusive and equitable empowerment in the sector. On the other hand, a few policies include measures to ensure women's inclusion and participation in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes, thus limiting their influence in the development of the blue economy sector.

To this end, the BE project partners in partnership with the county government of Kwale organized a multistakeholder policy dialogue that aimed to provide a platform for; evidence-based policy advocacy and engagement to disseminate the insights garnered from the policy reviews and stakeholder insights, explore policy innovations and strategies that can address the structural barriers, challenges and gaps to gender equity and inclusion in fish and aquaculture and catalyze expansion of opportunities for economic empowerment for diverse women in aquaculture and fisheries sector in Kenya.

[1] Multi-criteria Mapping Approach (MCM) is an interactive, multicriterial appraisal method designed to map diverse perspectives in the anticipatory appraisal of complex policy issues, especially around emerging technologies

[2] Engendering policies refers to the process of integrating a gender perspective into the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, strategies, and programs

## 1.1 Objectives of the Dialogue

1. Highlight the importance of integrating aquaculture and fisheries as key sectors in the County Development Plans (CIDPs) in Kwale County.
2. Discuss strategies and mechanisms for addressing gender gaps, strengthening women's agency, and participation in aquaculture and fisheries in Kenya.
3. Strengthen county's institutional and stakeholders' collaboration and coordination in fisheries and aquaculture sector.
4. Discuss potential pathways and formulate policy recommendations for engendering fisheries and aquaculture policies in Kenya.

## 1.2 Participation

The policy dialogue brought together a total of 45 participants drawn from a range of institutions, stakeholders/actors and communities engaged in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in Kwale (Attendance list - Annex 1).

## 1.3 Dialogue Sessions

The dialogue was organized around four sessions (opening session and remarks, interactive presentations, plenary and group discussions and a closing session/wrap-up). A detailed agenda is in Annex 2.

# 2 Welcome and Opening Remarks

The moderator, Ms. Eva Komba, the BE project gender lead started off proceedings by inviting the participants to the dialogue, setting a warm and inclusive tone, and inviting opening remarks from the speakers.

## 2.1 Opening Remarks by Jabiri Mwangungu, Bahari CBO Network Chairperson

Mr. Mwangungu started his opening remarks by giving a brief background of the Bahari CBO and its role in community empowerment along the Kenya's coast. He also gave a highlight of the key components of the BE project stressing the aspects of the integrated aquaculture systems and the cooperative development and their significance in enhancing women's economic empowerment.

Mr. Mwangungu extended a warm invitation to participants to experience Kwale County, celebrating its vibrant culture of hospitality, gender empowerment, and strong community networks. He proudly cited Governor Mama Achani as a symbol of local commitment to women's leadership and empowerment. He further highlighted Kwale's unique strengths, including fresh coastal foods, beautiful hotels, and a thriving local economy. His speech emphasized the importance of networking, collaboration, and teamwork as essential drivers for transformative change in the sector.

## 2.2 Opening Remarks by Mr. Githaiga Moses, Principal Officer, State Department of Blue economy (SDBE)



Mr. Githaiga opened his remarks by commending the participation of diverse actors in the dialogue, emphasizing that the multi-stakeholder approach reflected the collaborative spirit essential for driving a meaningful transformation in the blue economy sector. He further acknowledged the persistent gender disparities within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors that had historically marginalized women and other vulnerable groups.

He further acknowledged the persistent gender disparities within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors that had historically marginalized women and other vulnerable groups. He affirmed that the SDBE was actively spearheading necessary measures to address the gaps, empower women and promote inclusivity through gender-responsive policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms. He highlighted the ongoing efforts at both the national and county levels to mainstream youth and gender in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. He made reference to the 'Draft Kenya National Aquaculture Policy, 2025', which recognizes gender disparities and includes measures to promote gender equity in access to finance, integrating fish and seaweed value chains which are particularly relevant for women's participation. Furthermore, he commended the efforts to engender governance structures through enforcement of the two-thirds gender rule in the leadership and membership of Beach Management Units (BMUs). In his conclusion, reiterated that the policy dialogue was critical and timely in shaping effective, inclusive and transformative policies and governance for the blue economy sector in Kenya. Notably, he informed participants that the theme for the 2025 Madaraka Day celebrations focus was on the blue economy and maritime affairs, underscoring the sector's national significance.

## 2.3 Opening Remarks by Mr. Mbarak Mapapa, County Director of Fisheries

Mr. Mapapa officially opened the workshop on behalf of the County Executive Committee Member (CECM) for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries. He started his remarks by acknowledging that despite the persistent challenges, particularly regarding gender disparities, in fisheries and aquaculture sector in the county the fisheries department had made some efforts to ensure women's participation in leadership and decision making within the BMUs, as well as the broader inclusion of women representatives in the BMUs governance structures. While acknowledging the effort of the development partners, he made reference to a recent dialogue facilitated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) that emphasized the role of gender responsive policies as a key pillar in sustainable fisheries management. He further indicated that whereas there are projects and initiatives focusing on women empowerment, persistent gendered gaps exist especially due to unequal benefit sharing among traders. He however, pointed out that there are emerging initiatives targeting seaweed farming where women were likely to benefit. In his conclusion, he urged the need to document from the dialogue, tangible next steps with action areas, and clear timelines for enhanced accountability and effectiveness in implementations of the required interventions for driving gender-responsive policies and inclusive growth in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in Kwale.

## 3 Presentations

The session was moderated by Ms. Eva Komba. She invited the presenters who gave their overview of the BE project, status of the fisheries and aquaculture sector development in Kwale county and an overview of the gaps and opportunities from a gendered review of policies respectively. She called for an interactive session where the participants would provide inputs and ask questions in relation to the presentations that would be made.

### 3.1 Overview, Rationale and Achievements of the BE Project

The presentation was done by Dr. Joel Onyango, ACTS. Mr. Tei, Chairperson of Bahari CBO, gave a brief introduction of the BE project, highlighting the role of the six project partners. He indicated that the Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) technology being promoted by the project coupled with value addition in the seaweed value are promising avenues for enhanced sustainability in the aquaculture and fisheries sector development.



Dr. Onyango gave a highlight of the project’s rationale, emphasizing its unique role in addressing the experienced challenges such as reduced fish capture, diminished catch weights, and the marginalization of women in deep-sea fisheries, exacerbated further by the COVID-19 pandemic. He thus noted that the IMTA technology was identified and positioned as an innovative solution to economically empower women in aquaculture by bringing the sea closer to them and an avenue for facilitating “pesa mfukoni” (money in the pocket). He further expounded that the project comprised of four main strands: a life history survey aimed at identifying community champions in Kwale and Kilifi; the development of hatchery systems to support farmers; the implementation of recommendations from multi-criteria mapping (MCM) and research activities; and transformative empowerment efforts that have either initiated or accelerated women’s involvement in leadership roles. On this note, the chairperson of the IMTA group shared experiences on the benefits of cage farming, indicating that optimization of the technology had revealed that raft systems offered higher yields compared to off-bottom methods. He cited some of the project’s achievement included optimization of the IMTA technology and business models, training initiatives on gender and advocacy, business skills, IMTA practices, and value addition.

In his conclusion, Dr. Onyango, noted that education and capacity building remained key pillars of the BE project, as exemplified by the support extended to master’s students like Norah Ouma (A Masters student at Strathmore University) pursuing Masters In Public Policy and Management and Faith Kimanga who had recently completed her MSc. in Development Studies at the Technical University of Mombasa. As part of amplifying the project’s transformative technologies and impact, the communications team had adopted innovative knowledge dissemination methods including documentary production.

## 3.2 Status of Fisheries Development in Kwale County

*By Mbarak Hassan Mapapa*

He introduced the presentation by outlining the core functions of the county fisheries department, which include co-management, sustainable fisheries through the BMU Regulations of 2014, licensing support, and capacity building.



He gave an overview of the county’s Fisheries development projects across Kwale County, implemented through partnerships with various stakeholders, including 23 active Beach Management Units (BMUs) with notable landing sites at Tsunza, Funsu, Mkunguni, and Mwapee. Other significant infrastructure includes Shimoni port, the Mwazaro seaweed store, an anchovies (dagaa) processing facility equipped with drying racks and heating areas, and the Kibuyuni hybrid ice plant. He further highlighted the county’s efforts to support fisherfolk He further highlighted the county’s efforts to support fishermen through the KEMFSED program, noting that 60 boats were distributed, equipped

with 15- to 40-horsepower engines an expansion from previous support, which only provided 40-horsepower engines. through the KEMFSED program, noting that 60 boats were distributed, equipped with 15- to 40-horsepower engines an expansion from previous support, which only provided 40-horsepower engines.

Additionally, there were 36 operational fish ponds and ongoing seaweed training programs facilitated by partners such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Plan International. He stressed that strengthening BMU governance was one of the county’s priorities, with 14 out of a targeted 15 BMUs currently managed effectively. The governance framework includes plans for a Joint County Management Agreement (JCMA) roadmap, with several plans already approved and endorsed. Further, community participation has been emphasized prior to the implementation of any projects, underscoring the importance of inclusive engagement. He recommended enhancing value addition for fisheries products and gave an indication that the World-Wide Fund (WWF) had expressed interest in supporting seaweed production initiatives.

He highlighted some of the key gaps and challenges in achieving resilience and sustainability in fisheries and aquaculture sector including but not limited to inadequate market linkages with the existing cooperatives[4], post-harvest losses, lack of institutional collaboration and coordination, and low quality of research data attributed to limited capacity for enumerators.

He put forth some recommendations that could be adopted such as enhancing marketing strategies for seaweed and other fisheries products to ensure financial sustainability and harmonization and coordination of operations/protocols among partners to avoid duplication, optimizing resource allocation.

Mr. Mapapa concluded by recommending that all stakeholders needed to work collaboratively in the identification of the gaps and potential solutions, in addition, there was a need to integrate research partners in the stakeholder mapping tool to strengthen data-driven interventions.

## Participants Contributions

- Bahari CBO had developed a stakeholder mapping tool to support collaboration/coordination efforts.
- Despite the registration of BMUs as cooperatives to facilitate marketing of their produce, Kibuyuni cooperative still faced challenges. Kibuyuni Seaweed Cooperative was highlighted as a significant project scheduled for inauguration by the president.
- Participants emphasized the need for formulating a comprehensive investors' policy to guide partnerships, investments, and private sector involvement in the blue economy sector.
- There was need to equip and enhance women's skills and capacity in deep-sea diving and coxswain as currently, these skills are only at the dispensation of men, reinforcing gender disparity in marine-related roles.
- As part of women's empowerment, it was critical to support them in acquisition of the required licensing. This would reduce incidents of harassment from coastguards and legitimize their operations in the fisheries sector.
- There was an increased decline in seaweed yields attributed to the negative impact of previous dredging activities along the coastline.
- A concern was raised on the bureaucracy in the acquisition of necessary permits and associated complex and lengthy procedures which had led to inefficiency services thus discouraging community groups, particularly small-scale fishers.

## 3.3 Gaps and Opportunities from a Gendered Review of Fisheries & Aquaculture policies

*By Dr. Dorcas Kalele, ACTS*

The presentation was drawn from the BE project's work package 3 mainly focused on the exploration of socio-technical pathways, policy, governance and institutional frameworks that can support gender equity and women's economic empowerment through IMTA adoption. The presentation aimed to present findings from the WP3 activities including literature reviews and various stakeholder engagements with key focus on the multi-criteria mapping (MCM) workshop (aimed to review sustainability, policy, and governance pathways that can support optimal gender-transformative socio-technical pathways for mariculture development in coastal Kenya).

Findings from the MCM workshop identified two priority policy pathways which include i) engendering blue economy policies to intentionally address the barriers faced by women and marginalized groups in the sector and ii) integration of new and emerging policy directions into existing frameworks to enhance alignment, consistency, and impact. The MCM workshop findings, led to an in-depth thematic content policy analysis guided by a gendered-policy analysis framework, to assess key national and county-level sector policies, strategies and plans, to understand gender and social is considered in fisheries and aquaculture sector development in Kenya.



[4] Kibuyuni is currently the only cooperative actively engaged in marketing

The analysis sought to address two key questions a) Do fisheries and aquaculture policies include gender considerations that recognize gender factors and barriers to equal, inclusive (women) and sustainable sector development? b) Do the policies and strategies give indication of adequate measures and instruments to address these underlying factors resulting in the barriers for inclusive and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development in Kenya? A gender-analysis matrix framework to assess how gender was integrated using thematic content analysis. Six policies, strategies and plans were considered in the review (Table 2).

Table 2: A Brief of Reviewed Policies, Strategies and Plans

Name of the policy/strategy	Gender Consideration
<p>Fisheries Management and Development Act (2016) Currently being revised- Fisheries Management and Development Bill of 2023</p>	<p>The policy establishes the Kenya Fisheries Services (KFS). It directs the conservation, management and development of fisheries and other aquatic resources to enhance the livelihood of communities dependent on fishing. It outlines the shared roles of national and county government in the management and development of the sector. The focus is mainly on management of fisheries/aquaculture development with considerations on the need to integrate gender representation (to close the gap for women) in the different institutions charged with management and development of the sectors.</p>
<p>State Department for the Blue Economy and Fisheries- Strategic Plan (2023 -2027)</p>	<p>The strategic plan seeks to fast track the development/review of the necessary policies, laws and regulations to create conducive environment for investment and facilitate sustainable management and development of the blue economy sector by prioritizing the development of marine capture fisheries and aquaculture including seaweed farming by building the capacities of the local fishers through training, provision of modern fishing facilities and promotion of joint ventures with local and international investors for deep sea fishing in Kenya's EEZ and rehabilitation of fisheries infrastructure (landing sites, fish processing plants, fish ports, fish markets etc.) to address the challenge of post-harvest losses and facilitate value addition. The policy mentions gender once in relation to alignment with SDGs on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, but with no additional mention of how this translates in the sectors development process.</p>
<p>Kenya Fisheries Service Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Fish for Food, Health and Wealth</p>	<p>The plan notes that it aligns with SDGs and Africa Union goals to ensure gender equity and equality i in access to fisheries and aquaculture resources.</p>
<p>Draft National Aquaculture Policy Kenya (2023-2033)</p>	<p>The policy provides a framework for addressing the challenges facing the aquaculture sub-sector to ensure that it is ecologically sustainable, internationally competitive and generates socio-economic benefits for the Kenyan people. The policy objective is to upscale aquaculture production and increase productivity; promote value addition, develop functional market systems, promote innovative financing mechanisms to support research and investments, coupled with development of technologies and innovations for increasing aquaculture system.</p>
<p>National Fisheries Policy, 2020</p>	<p>National Fisheries Policy 2020 offers the strategic direction on develop, harness, manage and regulate capture and culture fisheries in a responsible and sustainable manner. The policy notes it is guided by principles of equity and equality, adopting people centric and participatory approaches; and mainstreams gender and maintains inter-generational equity. Current welfare and social protection programs will be streamlined and further strengthened to provide adequate safety nets to all categories of fishers, fish workers and their families through Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme (DBTS). Convergence of schemes with other welfare schemes will be undertaken. It notes that gender equity as well as mainstreaming will be made integral part across fisheries and aquaculture value chain for socio-economic well-being of women.</p>
<p>Kwale CIDP 2023-2027</p>	<p>Kwale County CIDP has prioritized enhancing marine fisheries productivity in the County including provision of fishing technology and equipment such as boats, construction of fish ponds and in related capacity building. Promotion of seaweed farming is a priority of the county, and this is to be done through support to increase production by distribution of necessary inputs and increase number of seaweed farmers. In addition, there is ambition to increase number of BMUs and to enhance their governance capacities to enable better management of the resources for sustainable sector development. Gender equity is recognized especially inclusion of women and youth but considered mainly under social services including a general reference to economic empowerment, but under the fisheries sector, target is explicit and implicit about men.</p>

### **Below is a summary of the key gendered structural and policy gaps identified:**

- Absence of gender-specific objectives, targets, and indicators across policies, undermining the ability to track progress toward equitable outcomes.
- Limited inclusion of women in policy development and decision-making, both at national and county levels.
- Lack of dedicated budget lines or resource allocation mechanisms for gender-responsive programming. For instance, Kwale CIDP omits mention of seaweed an economic activity largely sustained by women.
- Minimal attention to gender-responsive technology and capacity building, with few strategies integrating inclusive access to skills development, innovation, and financing.
- While fisheries and aquaculture policies and strategies acknowledge gender inequalities, they lack gender-specific objectives, actions, targets and indicators, hindering the policies' effectiveness in promoting inclusive and equitable empowerment in the sector.
- Few policies include measures to ensure women's inclusion and participation in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes, thus limiting their influence in the development of the blue economy sector.
- Existing policies lack adequate budgetary support and robust mechanisms to ensure effective gendered resource distribution necessary to meet targets, as well as the necessary monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess gender outcomes in fisheries and aquaculture development.
- The policies fail to integrate gender-responsive deployment of technology, skills and capacity building measures informed by the evidence on the barriers a, missing opportunities to leverage women's role and potential in utilization of ocean resources.

### **From the analysis, the following recommendations were put forth:**

- Strengthen gender mainstreaming across all relevant F&A policy frameworks.
- Develop and apply gender-disaggregated data to inform planning, resource distribution, and program targeting.
- Promote inclusive governance structures to enable the participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in decision-making spaces.
- Institutionalize mechanisms that challenge and transform discriminatory social and cultural norms affecting women's full and fair participation.
- There is need to strengthen gender mainstreaming into existing policies, strategies and plans. Implementation of gender responsive policies will address discriminatory barriers, promote women's full participation in the utilization of ocean resources, thus creating equal opportunities in leadership and hence propagate equality in harnessing benefits from the fish and aquaculture sector value chains.
- There is a need to support generation of gender disaggregated data that informs documentation of gender-specific challenges and opportunities in the fish and aquaculture sector. This evidence-based approach can inform gender-specific targeted policy interventions.
- Governance and decision-making processes related to fisheries resources should be inclusive and participatory, allowing women's voices to be heard and considered especially in resource management and shaping fisheries and aquaculture policies and strategies.
- Aquaculture and fisheries policies, strategies and plans should integrate mechanisms to address discriminatory social and cultural norms and practices especially those that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and obstacles to women leadership. Special attention should be natured to ensure that legal frameworks constitute mechanisms to protect women rights, ensure their voices are heard, and they are included in key leadership positions that can inform their full participation in shaping the sector.
- Access to resources and services: Policies need to ensure equitable access to resources and services, develop gender-sensitive programs to facilitate access to information, credit and technology.
- There is need to ensure appropriate gender-transformative policy instruments and requisite resources, including budgets accompany policies accompanied by monitoring and evaluation systems to attain gendered positive impacts as part of sustainable sector development.

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## Plenary Discussion: Analysis of Current Trends in Gender Equity and Inclusion in Kenya's Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector- Kwale County

This session was moderated by Kenneth Odary, BAHARI CBO. He indicated that the session was made to elicit views from the participants on the topical issues in fisheries and aquaculture sector in Kwale County, with key focus on barriers and opportunities to gender equity and inclusion.

The following were highlighted as the key topical issues;



### 1. Growing recognition of women's involvement, but limited data:

There's an implicit acknowledgment of women's involvement in fisheries and aquaculture, especially in fish processing, marketing, and potentially in emerging aquaculture like seaweed. However, the explicit mention of the lack of gender-segregated data and gender blind/neutral policies highlights a significant gap in systematically recognizing and quantifying women's contributions. This lack of data hinders targeted interventions and accurate policy formulation.

**2. Focus on value addition and cooperatives:** The discussions point to value addition (e.g., anchovies) and the formation of cooperative in Kibuyuni as current trends. This is further reinforced by the Kenya Fish Marketing Authority's (KFM Authority) move to establish cooperatives within BMUs, indicating a strategic push towards collective action and market access, which can significantly benefit women.

**3. National Government-Led Infrastructure Development:** The presence of National government initiatives such as KEMSFED that "donated 62 boats and supported the construction of 36 ponds" signals significant public sector investment in the sector. These large-scale infrastructure projects can be foundational for increased production.

**4. Existing governance structures:** The mention of existing 23 BMUs and a focus on strengthening governance and BMU objectives suggests an existing framework for local management. These structures, if made more inclusive, could serve as platforms for women's participation.

**5. Addressing specific challenges for women:** There is a likelihood that fishing, seaweed and other women's activities linked to conservation will be affected by emerging threats such as climate change and dredging. This raises the need for compensation frameworks especially for women's livelihoods. Actors can begin to raise awareness of specific negative impacts on women and a call for redress. Similarly, amplifying the utility of the cage to women implies a focus on technologies that can empower women even during climate risks and emerging threats such as dredging.

**Some of the key barriers to gender equity and inclusion that were highlighted include the following:**

**1. Invisible women contributions and data gaps:** The most striking barrier is the lack of gender-segregated data and gender blind/neutral policies. This invisibility means women's roles, contributions, and challenges are not adequately understood or addressed in policy and programming. Their labor, especially in post-harvest activities, is often uncounted and undervalued.

**2. Limited access and control over resources:** Phrases like women lacking access and control and licensing challenges point to systemic issues preventing women from owning or managing productive assets like boats or obtaining necessary permits to fully exploit the Ocean. The observation reinforces the male dominance in primary production and market access.

**3. Dependency trap syndrome:** Emerging discussion, suggests that even when benefits are intended for the community, they may not effectively reach women or are captured by others, leading to a "trap" resulting in women remaining economically disadvantaged and almost permanently dependent on men and men dominated structures.

**4. Socio-cultural and economic constraints:** The vulnerabilities women face impact their ability to safeguard their products or earnings and prevent them from participating in offshore fishing or other sea-based activities. For instance, the challenge in accessing essential inputs like quality seaweed seeds in Gazi, Msambweni for aquaculture. Besides inability to access appropriate fishing gear, such as boats, disproportionately affects women more due to their limited financial capacity or social networks.

**4. Inadequate private sector involvement:** A critical barrier observed is the limited involvement of private sector in the sector despite the County's efforts to engage with partners/donors. This suggests a reliance on external funding rather than sustainable, market-driven growth. Without robust private sector investment, opportunities for scaling up women's enterprises, market linkages, and job creation remain limited.

**5. Coordination challenges in the sub-Sector:** The discussion explicitly highlighted limited coordination and collaboration among various institutions involved in the sub-sector, with County seeking assistance to better coordinate the sub-sector. This fragmented approach can lead to duplicated efforts, inefficient resource allocation, and a lack of holistic planning, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups like women who rely on coherent support systems.

**6. Underrepresentation in decision-making:** While BMUs exist, the discussion does not explicitly state women's robust representation or influence within them. The male dominance in fishing and marketing suggests existence of a parallel power bodies/structures influencing decision-making linked to fish and seaweed aquaculture.

Based on the discussions, the following emerged as the key opportunities that could be leveraged to enhance gender equity and inclusion:

**1. Leveraging value addition and enhanced market linkages:** The emphasis on value addition and the Kenya Fisheries Marketing Authority (KFMA's) move to establish "cooperatives within BMUs" present a significant opportunity. Women are often heavily involved in processing, and supporting their role in value-adding activities (e.g., improved processing techniques, product diversification) coupled with enhanced markets' linkages through cooperative models can significantly increase their income and economic empowerment.

**2. Targeted aquaculture development:** The large-scale investment in construction of 36 ponds provide an opportunity to specifically design aquaculture initiatives with women in mind, ensuring they have equitable access to training, inputs, and ownership of these new production systems. The utility of the IMTA cage to women points to the potential of specific technologies for women's empowerment.

**3. Policy and data reform:** The recognition of the lack of gender-segregated data and gender blind/neutral policies is itself an opportunity. This awareness can drive the development of gender-responsive and transformative policies, collection of gender-disaggregated data, and the establishment of gender-specific indicators to monitor progress and ensure accountability. Coordination of data capture of the sub-sector specifically offers a pathway to address this.

**4. Strengthening governance and inclusion:** The ongoing efforts to strengthen governance of BMUs and the move to establish cooperatives within them provide a direct avenue to intentionally include women in leadership and decision-making roles within these units. This would give them a voice in local fisheries management and resource allocation.

**5. Facilitating private sector engagement:** Recognizing the limited involvement of the private sector as a barrier opens the door for strategic interventions to attract private sector investment. Enhancing incentives, public-private partnerships, and clear regulatory frameworks can encourage private sector participation, creating market-driven opportunities, jobs, and value chains that are inclusive of women, particularly in processing, marketing, and aquaculture.

**6. Improved coordination:** The stated coordination challenges and the County's desire for assistance in this area present a crucial opportunity. Establishing a well-coordinated multi-stakeholder platform that explicitly includes women's groups and advocates can ensure that efforts are synergized, resources are efficiently utilized, and gender considerations are integrated across all initiatives in the blue economy sector.

**7. Compensation and livelihood restoration:** The noted need for compensation for women affected by climate risks and emerging threats highlights an opportunity for implementing social safeguards and restorative justice mechanisms that specifically benefit women whose livelihoods are likely to be impacted by disasters or development projects.

**8. Addressing specific barriers:** Specific issues like "license challenges" and "seaweed seed bank issues" creates concrete avenues for intervention. Streamlining licensing processes for women and ensuring equitable access to quality inputs can directly remove existing barriers.

In closing the session, the moderator pointed out that the critical next steps in actualizing an inclusive and gender responsive fisheries and aquaculture sector would involve intentional gender-responsive policy formulation, strengthening institutional coordination and collaboration mechanisms, attracting inclusive private sector investments, and ensuring that women are not just beneficiaries but active participants and decision-makers across the entire fisheries and aquaculture value chains.

## 5 Breakout Session: 'From Dialogue to Action'

This session was moderated by Ms. Norah Ouma, ACTS. The session aimed to formulate actions that would guide towards a sustainable and inclusive fisheries and aquaculture sector in Kwale. The participants broke away into four discussion groups and brainstormed on the four questions listed below. The groups then presented their deliberations to the plenary, from which key points were identified and listed under each question as below;

### What does an ideal Kwale County fisheries and aquaculture sector look like?

From the discussion, participants proposed a vision of a sustainable, inclusive, and community-driven fisheries and aquaculture sector. They emphasized equitable access to marine resources, strengthened local participation in decision-making, gender equity, and improved livelihoods through responsible blue economy practices. The sector was imagined as co-managed by communities, government institutions, the private sector, and civil society actors.

### What are the pathways to achieving that vision?

To achieve this vision, participants identified several key pathways. These include the implementation of spatial planning and pollution control measures, decentralization of blue economy services to community level, and enhanced education and awareness creation. The establishment of knowledge-sharing platforms, financial literacy programs, value addition initiatives, and promotion of gender-inclusive leadership were also noted as strategic actions. Strengthening stakeholder collaboration and encouraging participation in public forums were seen as critical enablers for transformation.

### What are the challenges and barriers?

Participants highlighted a number of barriers impeding progress in the sector. These include weak legal and institutional frameworks, limited collaboration among actors, inadequate financing, and poor enforcement of policies. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, low education levels, and lack of access to accurate information were also cited. Additionally, political interference, corruption, and insufficient community representation in governance structures were recognized as persistent challenges.

### What are the key actions and opportunities for transformation?

The discussions underscored the importance of coordinated, multi-stakeholder action to unlock the sector's potential. Participants called for stronger partnerships between community members, local leaders, government agencies, NGOs, and research institutions. Enhancing accountability mechanisms, investing in community-led training and capacity building, and improving access to timely and reliable information were identified as key actions. These efforts, if well-supported, can drive inclusive and sustainable transformation in Kwale County's fisheries and aquaculture sector.

## 6 Key Takeaways from the Dialogue

The in-depth discussions from the dialogue generated critical insights essential for guiding practical actions that would influence practice and policy dimensions in fisheries and aquaculture sector not only in Kwale county but at the entire nation at large. The insights were grouped into four key thematic areas including policies and regulations, budgeting and resource allocation, capacity building and training, gender disaggregated data, decision making processes, and institutional coordination and collaboration.



*Group Discussions*

### 1. Harmonization of Policies and Regulations

- Need to review current blue economy-related policies to include seaweed and offshore aquaculture as priority areas within marine spatial planning and county integrated development plans (CIDPs). This is a priority given the significance of seaweed value chain in enhancing women's livelihood, the high level of women's participation, and yet the value chain remains under-recognized in county's planning frameworks.
- Need to regulate seaweed pricing, with stakeholder's input, to reflect real production costs and promote fairness. The current pricing at KES 21/kg was indeed unsustainable.
- Need to clarify and harmonize the licensing process for both fishing and stocking to reduce administrative delays that result to revenue loss for fish and aquaculture value chain actors. Participants cited licensing bottlenecks as a major barrier to consistent engagement in aquaculture and marine ventures.

### 2. Gender-responsive budgeting and inclusive resource allocation

Embed gendered targets in blue economy projects and programs. This will enhance achievement of gendered and inclusive outcomes in trainings, implementation of aquaculture grants, infrastructure allocation, cooperative support schemes.

### 3. Inclusive capacity building and training programs

- Roll out and upscale county-led training programs on fish and seaweed value addition, financial literacy, and business planning, targeting women and youth.
- Develop affirmative training programs targeting women and youth for leadership roles and marine technical certifications (e.g. deep-sea diving, coxswain licensing). The need for this was highlighted through examples where only men qualified for coxswain roles, despite women's interest.
- Institutionalize marine rescue and life-saving training as a requirement for individuals operating in sea-based value chains (e.g., seaweed farming, cage aquaculture).
- Allocate resources to develop accessible learning materials (manuals, toolkits) in Kiswahili and local languages.

#### 4. Inclusive decision-making processes

There was need to streamline frameworks for inclusive public participation (e.g. during CIDP, policies formulation/review, budget allocations, and BMU elections etc.) ensuring women, youth, and BMU representatives are included.

#### 5. Enhanced mechanisms for gender disaggregated data

- Need to establish a standardized methodology for data collection and reporting system, across BMUs and county fisheries department offices, with clear gender-disaggregated indicators.
- Training community-level data enumerators to enhance consistency and data quality, particularly for under-documented value chains like seaweed.

#### 6. Institutional Coordination and Collaboration

- Establish a County Blue Economy Coordination Taskforce bringing together fisheries, environment, mining, and infrastructure departments, to ensure activities in mining are not acting as a barrier to aquaculture – Women lost fish as they were poisoned by pollutants from dredging.
- Align development partner programs and donor funding under a County Blue Economy Investment Plan to minimize duplication of efforts and maximize impact.
- Conduct environmental impact assessments (EIAs) collaboratively before mining, tourism, or port development projects are approved to safeguard fisheries.

## 7 Dialogue Wrap-up / Closing Remarks

Mr. Roman Shera, the County Executive Committee Member (CECM) – Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, gave the workshop’s closing remarks by extending appreciation to all the workshop’s participants for their contributions in the dialogue. He emphasized the importance of convening such inclusive multi-sector stakeholders’ forums, where communities can engage in open, one-on-one dialogue around shared concerns and opportunities in the blue economy. He acknowledged the deep interdependence between communities and natural ecosystems, stating that the blue economy sector gives rise to important socio-ecological linkages that define livelihoods in the coastal region.

He reaffirmed that the blue economy must remain a community-driven process, stressing the importance of giving attention to the lived experiences of communities especially women and small-scale producers in shaping inclusive and responsive policies.

Mr. Shera noted that the county hosted more than 20 active seaweed farming groups, highlighting the sector's strong potential and the conducive environmental conditions for seaweed cultivation.



He pointed out that the county government had taken initial steps to institutionalize blue economy governance by drafting a **‘County Fisheries Bill’**, which had already been submitted to the County Assembly for consideration as a legal framework to support sustainable fisheries development. He encouraged the workshop participants to submit their recommendations formally, noting that such inputs would be vital in finalizing policies and aligning them with community priorities. In closing, he reaffirmed the County Government’s commitment to inclusive, participatory development by stating **“We will walk together as County Government and collaborate with all of you.”**

Dr. Dorcas Kalele thanked all participants, project partners, moderators, panelists, and presenters. He informed all participants that a report will be developed, reviewed and disseminated by ACTS. In addition, a summary of the policy issues will be developed and packaged as policy recommendations to be shared with the national policy actors and other actors for action. She called for continued partnership in other dialogues and projects organized by any of the stakeholders represented.

# Annexes

## Annex 1: Concept note and Agenda



Concept Note: BE Policy Dialogues



Kwale Policy Dialogue Agenda

## Annex 2: Participant List



Kwale Participant List

## Annex 3: Presentations



Multistakeholder Meeting



Policy Dialogue Introduction



Fish & Aquaculture Policy Review

## Annex 4: Photos

Kwale Policy Dialogue Photos



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