



YALA WETLAND T LAB INFORMATION BRIEF

**Synthesis of Key Learnings from the
Visioning (Nov 2023) and Consolidation
(May 29–30, 2025) Workshops**



**YALA WETLAND T LAB
INFORMATION BRIEF**

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Introduction

The Yala Wetland is among Kenya's most significant freshwater wetlands providing critical ecosystem services including water regulation, biodiversity conservation, fisheries, papyrus resources, cultural values and climate resilience (Kemunto, 2018). Over recent decades the wetland has experienced escalating pressure from agricultural expansion, informal land conversion, unsustainable fishing practices and fragmented governance (Thenya, 2006). These pressures undermine water quality, species habitats and the livelihoods of communities that depend on the wetland.



Figure 1: Group photo during the TRANSPATH workshop in Siaya on sustainable wetland management

In response to these challenges, [Egerton University](#), the [African Centre for Technology Studies and Kaimosi Friends University](#) convened a Transformations Laboratory, (T Lab,) for the Yala River Basin under the [TransPath Project](#). The T-Lab aims to provide an inclusive, evidence-informed, and action-oriented platform that brings together diverse stakeholders to co-design just transition pathways for sustainable wetland use. Its approach is to anchor technical expertise in local knowledge and lived experience, generate feasible policy and practice options, and foster shared accountability for implementation.

This brief synthesizes findings from two T Lab workshops. The first workshop in November 2023 focused on problem framing and the generation of candidate 'seeds of change'. The second workshop held on 29–30 May 2025 tested and prioritized those seeds, clarified practical options, and produced a phased implementation roadmap. The brief is aimed at policymakers, program designers, researchers and funders who require concise, research-oriented evidence to guide decision making in the Yala landscape.

Methodology

The T Lab applied a participatory action research approach that combined futures methods, deliberative dialogues, and practical prioritization exercises. The emphasis was placed on process learning and co-creation rather than on primary ecological measurement.

The workshops convened a diverse range of actors including representatives from the county governments of Siaya and Busia, national agencies such as the Kenya Wildlife Service, the National Lands Commission, and fisheries departments, researchers from Egerton University and Kaimosi Friends University, civil society and community based organizations, private sector representatives, and local community members including fishers, artisans, and farmers. Gender and geographic representation were deliberately ensured through targeted roundtables for women, men, and Busia stakeholders.

Different methods were used across the two workshops to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and to build consensus around feasible actions. Workshop One (November 2023) employed the [Three Horizons framework](#) to distinguish between current unsustainable practices, emerging innovations, and a desirable future state. [The Futures Wheel](#) was also used to examine the consequences of alternative governance scenarios. Workshop Two (May 2025) employed [World Café dialogues](#), a [twenty-priority scoring exercise](#), [Vote with Your Feet](#), and targeted roundtables to refine and prioritize seeds of change, develop indicators, and sequence actions.

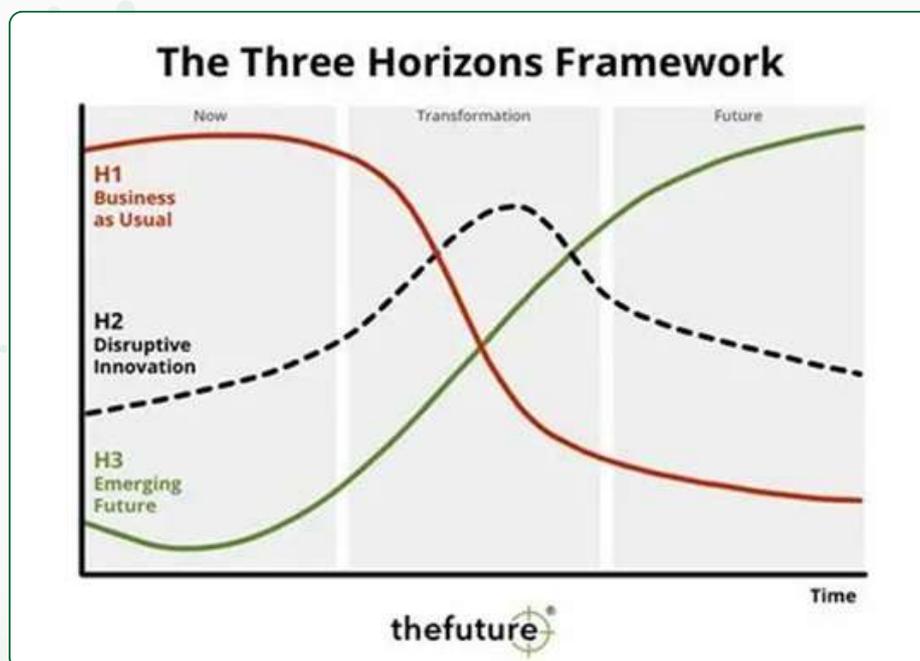
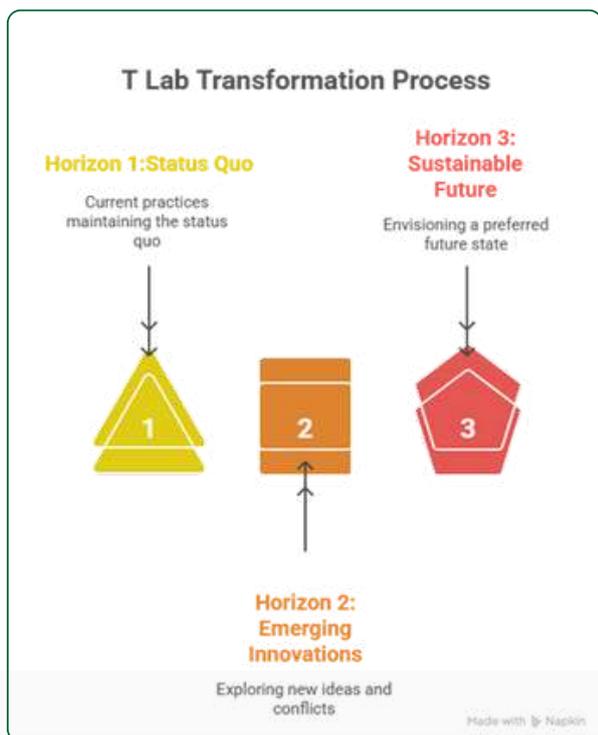


Figure 2: The 3 Horizon Framework

Data was collected through multiple channels including workshop notes, flipcharts, written commitments by participants, scoring matrices, and [Yala workshop report](#). The analysis relied on thematic synthesis of these records to identify convergent priorities, enabling conditions, and practical actions. The results of the twenty-priority scoring exercise were further analyzed to rank options and shape the phased roadmap for implementation

What the T-Lab Process Did

The T Lab process created a shared narrative of the challenges facing the Yala Wetland, examining current practices that maintain the status quo (Horizon 1), exploring emerging innovations and conflicts (Horizon 2), and envisioning a preferred sustainable future (Horizon 3) (Figure 2).

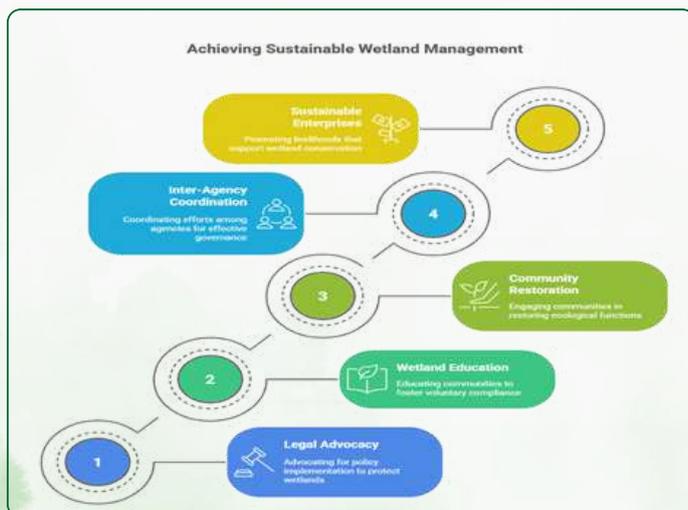


This exercise gave participants a common language to articulate both problems and opportunities, which in turn strengthened ownership of the transformation agenda.

Through this dialogue, the workshops generated and refined a set of “seeds of change” that represent practical entry points for action. These included legal advocacy and policy dialogue to ensure implementation of existing frameworks, wetland education and outreach as the foundation for voluntary compliance, community led restoration to rebuild ecological functions, inter agency coordination as the keystone of governance, and the promotion of sustainable enterprises such as papyrus value addition and other wetland-based livelihoods.

Figure 4: 3 Horizon in Practice

The process also stress tested these seeds using participatory prioritization exercises that asked participants to rank options, debate feasibility, and agree on indicators of progress. This culminated in the development of a phased roadmap for implementation, sequencing actions into immediate priorities (0–6 months), medium term measures (6–24 months), and longer term transformations (2–5 years and beyond).



In addition, the workshops surfaced enabling innovations that can strengthen accountability and adaptive management. These include the Wetland Monitoring and Management Application (WMMA), a community reporting tool for real time environmental feedback, and a proposed Wetland Resource Centre to anchor training, applied research, and knowledge sharing. Together, these innovations complement the seeds of change by embedding monitoring, learning, and capacity building into the transformation process.

Key Highlights of the T-Lab Process

- Built a shared narrative of challenges, current practices (H1), innovations/conflicts (H2), and a preferred future (H3) for the Yala Wetland.
- Generated and refined 'seeds of change' spanning: Legal advocacy & policy dialogue, Wetland education & outreach, Community-led restoration, Inter-agency coordination, and Papyrus-based/wetland enterprises.
- Stress-tested seeds via participatory prioritization and mapped a phased implementation plan (0–6 months, 6–24 months, and 2–5+ years).
- Surfaced enabling innovations including the WMMA for real-time reporting and a proposed Wetland Resource Centre for training, research, and knowledge sharing.



Figure 3: Group discussions on building pathways for future action

Five Key Learnings from the Two Workshops

- 1. Coordination is the keystone.** Transparent inter-agency coordination across Siaya and Busia counties, MDAs, CBOs/CSOs, academia and private actors enables every other lever, law enforcement, restoration, enterprise development, and education, to succeed. Cross-county political goodwill must translate into shared plans, joint reviews, and clear mandates.
- 2. Education drives voluntary compliance and stewardship.** Community awareness, delivered in local dialects through schools, radios, and outreach, raises understanding of wetland laws, sustainable practices, and the economic/ecological value of wetlands, fostering behavior change and reducing reliance on punitive enforcement.
- 3. Enforcement + planning must walk with livelihoods.** Policy enforcement, clear land-use zoning, and boundary demarcation are necessary but insufficient without viable livelihood options. Diversification (e.g., beekeeping, ecotourism, sustainable aquaculture) and skills development make compliance feasible.
- 4. Restore first, then grow enterprises sustainably.** Yala is a degraded system. Priorities include habitat restoration, ecological land-use management, and payment for ecosystem services. Nature-based enterprises should be research-guided and phased to avoid over-extraction.
- 5. Local knowledge + digital tools improve governance.** Documenting indigenous knowledge, strengthening community monitoring groups, and deploying the WMMA can improve transparency, rapid response, and public participation. A Wetland Resource Centre can anchor training and data stewardship.

What Changed Between Workshops

Theme	Workshop 1 (Nov 2023)	Workshop 2 (May 2025)
Shared Framing & Seeds	Three Horizons & Futures Wheel mapped problems, preferred futures, and early seeds of change	Seeds were refined, prioritized, and tied to concrete criteria and roles via World Café and scoring
Governance	Weak enforcement, unclear tenure, fragmented communication, emerging land-use plan committees	Cross-county collaboration visible, political goodwill in Siaya, emphasis on practical coordination and clear mandates
Ecology & Livelihoods	Overfishing (e.g., illegal nets), habitat loss, pollution, ideas for alternative livelihoods emerging	Active restoration (tree planting), cage aquaculture in Yimbo, and a stronger push for sustainable enterprises
Knowledge & Tools	Call for documentation and capacity building, interest in youth education.	Proposed Wetland Resource Centre and WMMA app for real-time reporting and accountability

Seeds of Change: Evolution from Workshop 1 to Workshop 2

Seed of Change	Workshop 1 (Nov 2023) Framing	Workshop 2 (May 2025) Refinement	Indicators of Success
Legal Advocacy & Policy Dialogue	Need to enforce existing laws and clarify land use	Shifted to legal implementation and enforcement with emphasis on coordination and accountability	Reduced conflicts, functional reporting, improved enforcement
Wetland Education & Outreach	General awareness raising and youth education	Elevated to top priority ; expanded to outreach in local dialects, schools, and radio	Widespread community understanding, voluntary compliance, reduced illegal practices
Community-Led Restoration	Proposals for papyrus replanting, tree planting, habitat restoration	Restoration before enterprise growth ; introduction of Indigenous Community Conservation Areas (ICCAs)	Increased land under restoration, improved biodiversity, cleaner water
Inter-Agency Coordination	Weak coordination identified as a barrier	Reframed as practical, transparent coordination supported by digital tools (WMMA)	Regular joint reports, functional forums, fewer conflicts
Sustainable Enterprises	Suggested papyrus-based enterprises, alternative livelihoods	Renamed as sustainable, planned, research-based enterprises developed through partnerships and phased carefully	New jobs created, sustainable resource use, increased incomes

Seeds Linked to the Roadmap (Timeline View)

Seed of Change	0–6 Months (Quick Wins)	6–24 Months (Medium-Term)	2–5+ Years (Long-Term)
Legal Advocacy & Policy	Awareness of existing laws; initiate conflict resolution mechanisms	Strengthen enforcement through inter-agency platforms	Institutionalize transparent governance agreements
Education & Outreach	Launch school & radio campaigns in local languages	Integrate wetland curriculum; mentorship programs	Accredited training; community knowledge hubs
Community Restoration	Begin papyrus/tree planting; peg sensitive zones	Scale ICCAs; expand restoration corridors	Consolidated habitats, improved biodiversity
Coordination	Set up inter-agency forum; pilot WMMA reporting tool	Operationalize Resource Centre; publish WMMA dashboards	Long-term cross-county agreements and coordination
Sustainable Enterprises	Skills clinics (papyrus, beekeeping, aquaculture)	Incubate enterprises with PPPs and PES pilots	Mature eco-enterprises, ecotourism, certified products

Who Does What (Illustrative)



Immediate Next Steps (90 - 180 Days)



Conclusion

The Yala T Lab demonstrates that inclusive, theory informed and practice-oriented engagement can produce feasible pathways for wetland sustainability. Early investments in education and coordination are the most reliable means to create momentum. Legal implementation and ecological restoration then create the conditions for sustainable, research informed enterprises. Integrating traditional knowledge with appropriate technology such as community reporting tools strengthens accountability and adaptive management.

Next steps include constituting the bi county coordination forum, launching a twelve-month education programme, piloting the WMMA and initiating three flagship restoration blocks linked to demonstration enterprises.

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