

## Policy Brief

# Advancing Gender Equity in Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Development in Kenya: A Gendered Policy Analysis

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## Key policy messages

- 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 and missing opportunities to leverage women's role and potential in utilization of ocean resources
- There is need to ensure appropriate gender-transformative policy instruments and requisite resources, including budgets accompanied by monitoring and evaluation systems to attain gendered positive impacts as part of sustainable sector development.
- Integrating gender equality and inclusion into sectoral policy frameworks that can drive the needed structural changes and gender transformation can benefit from connecting with broader national and sub-national agendas on women empowerment to guide better analysis and interventions at the sector level.

*This series of briefs summarizes findings of a project entitled "Aquaculture Of Seaweeds And Fish: Opportunities For Blue Economic Empowerment And Covid-19 Resilience Of Fisher Women In Kenya" undertaken by researchers and practitioners from 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.*



## Background

The potential for sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture sectors, including the untapped resources along Kenya's vast coastal regions and the exclusive economic zone, in driving national economic development, is receiving renewed attention through the government-led Blue Economy initiative[1]. These sectors support diverse economic activities and are an important source of livelihood for many communities living along the ocean and lakes (FAO, 2021). While the sectors contribute only about 0.5% to the gross domestic product (GDP), they are a frontier for stimulating transformative and inclusive socio-economic development in Kenya. Notably, the sectors have created direct employment for over 60,000 fishers, and an estimated 1.2 million people directly and indirectly along the value chain (FAO, 2020). Moreover, fisheries and aquaculture contribute to the nutritional demands of the country because fish is a crucial source of animal protein. While capture fisheries have been the most important source of fish, with dwindling stock, aquaculture and mariculture are expanding to meet the growing demand for fish (FAO,2018). Aquaculture and mariculture offer immense opportunities for sustainable and inclusive development in Kenya. Mariculture provides a broad range of value chain options, such as fish, shellfish, and seaweed, though its development has remained low. The government at the national and county level has expressed commitment to stimulate the growth of mariculture to feed its population and exploit opportunities for international markets as part of the Blue Economy framework. The sector's sustainable growth entails pursuing inclusive pathways that integrate socio-economic and environmental dimensions. The Blue Economy governance landscape recognises the potential of the blue economy resources for sustainable socio-economic development. However, there is limited integration of gender considerations in the current policies and institutional frameworks to enable an inclusive trajectory in sustainable sector development.

## Role of policies in gender inclusive and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development

In Kenya, like many other countries, the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are male-dominated. This is despite the significant role that women play in the sector, mainly focused on near-shore and post-harvest activities. Women in their diversity remain marginalised and discriminated in fully participating in diverse economic opportunities, and in decision-making processes related to the management of fisheries resources, thus not equitably benefiting from the sectors. Gender-based discrimination not only impacts women directly but also imposes a significant drawback on the sector's 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. Thus, to promote[2] gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, it is crucial to break the existing barriers, enhance inclusion in sustainable and equitable access and utilisation of related resources for improved productivity and economic returns (FAO, 2020).

[1] Kenya's Blue Economy is endowed with aquatic and marine spaces, spanning oceans, seas, coasts, lakes, rivers, and underground water

[2] Gender equality is a state in which women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities and entitlements in civil and political life and its achievement

To steer the sectors development, the Kenya’s national and county governments have developed several policies to provide the enabling environment to steer sustainable and inclusive sectoral development. Integrating gender perspectives as a cross-cutting aspect of policies, institutions, programs, and investments will avert the exacerbation of existing inequalities and imbalances in different groups of people including men, women, youth and persons living with disabilities who rely on fisheries for their livelihoods.

This policy brief presents a synopsis of findings from a gendered-policy analysis which sought to document the extent to which existing policies and strategies in the fisheries and aquaculture sector create an enabling environment for inclusive, equitable and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development. The insights are made to inform policy considerations for advancing sustainable marine aquaculture development in Kenya.

### Methodology

The review was guided by a gendered-policy analysis framework to assess sector policies, strategies, and plans to understand how gender and social considerations are integrated into fisheries and aquaculture sector development in Kenya. The two key questions that the analysis sought to address were 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? We reviewed relevant national and sub-national level policies, strategies and plans related to fisheries and aquaculture development and applied a gender-analysis matrix framework to assess how gender was integrated using thematic content analysis. Seven policies, strategies and plans were considered in the review as summarised in table 1, additionally 2 cross-sectoral frameworks were considered.

**Table 1: Overview of Policies, Strategies and Plans Reviewed**

Name of the policy/strategy	Overview and gender consideration
<a href="#">Fisheries Management and Development Act (2016) Currently being revised- Fisheries Management and Development Bill of 2023</a>	<p>This is the main policy that directs the conservation, management and development of fisheries and other aquatic resources to enhance the livelihood of communities dependent on fishing and to establish the Kenya Fisheries Services. 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><a href="#">State Department for the Blue Economy and Fisheries- Strategic Plan (2023 -2027).</a></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</p> <p>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><a href="#">Kenya Fisheries Service Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Fish for Food, Health and Wealth</a></p>	<p>KFS was established by the Fisheries Management and Development Act of 2016. It is mandated to conserve, manage and develop the fisheries resources in Kenya. The plan notes that it aligns with SDGs and Africa Union goals to ensure gender equity and equality in access to fisheries and aquaculture resources.</p>
<p><a href="#">Draft National Aquaculture Policy Kenya (2023-2033)</a></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><a href="#">National Fisheries Policy, 2020</a></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.</p> <p>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><a href="#"><u>Kilifi County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) 2023-2027</u></a></p>	<p>This CIDP provides the framework within which development projects and programs will be implemented in Kilifi County for a period of 5 years. In relation to fisheries and aquaculture the plan seeks to address challenges of low fish production and limited marketing, linked to poor governance of related natural resources and limited access to necessary inputs and financing sustainable development of the sector as a key contributor to food and nutrition security and improved livelihoods. There is no gender consideration related to fisheries and aquaculture development in the county, with the different roles of women and men in the sector and related opportunities and threats not recognized.</p>
<p><a href="#"><u>Kwale County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) 2023-2027</u></a></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 Beach Management Units (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>

## Findings

### Recognition of gender issues in sector policies and strategies

Generally, the reviewed policies recognised the need to address gender gaps in the aquaculture and fisheries sector in Kenya, with some explicitly noting the gender-specific challenges. For instance, the draft National Aquaculture Policy Kenya (2023-2033) has indicated the need to integrate gender equity with a particular focus on women along the aquaculture development. The policy further mentions the need to develop transformative innovative technologies to improve aquaculture efficiency, with specific attention to integrating women and youth into the aquaculture sector. Additionally, other areas that are noted for attention include access to finance, the development of extension services, and education opportunities and capacity building programs. The National Fisheries Policy (2020) mentions gender mainstreaming as integral across the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, zooming in on fish processing and value addition as key to the socio-economic well-being of women who dominate these nodes of the value chain. The State Department for the Blue Economy and Fisheries- Strategic Plan (2023-2027) mentions the need for gender equity in the sector in line with aspirations of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the African Union (AU) agenda, but not grounded in the sector.

### Unravelling gendered structural barriers in policies and strategies

While there is recognition of the gender issues in the policies, it remains only in mention, without further examining the structural barriers in the sector that impact women and men differently, which then can inform the approaches to address the noted inequalities. The considerations included in the contextual and strategic analysis in the policies are cursory, with no explicit and critical understanding of gender barriers that may have kept women in their diversity on the margins of the sector. There is no inclusion of gender-disaggregated data to show how and where the different genders participate in the sector, which would show levels of inclusion. Most of the policies are blind to the gendered pattern of drivers that shape women's and men's unequal participation in and benefit from the sustainable development of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, including in coastal regions. Notably, entrenched social and cultural norms, practices and structural barriers continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes and discrimination that hinder women's access, participation and decision making in the utilisation of ocean resources, and in benefitting from advances in technology and other emerging opportunities. This is despite the progressive advocacy efforts to break these barriers. The draft national aquaculture policy makes the most attempt to recognise and point to areas of interventions that can redress these structural barriers to actualise gender equality. Noting the need to promote gender-sensitive practices to increase equitable access to productive resources and markets, enable equitable financing, develop targeted capacity building, skills development and training opportunities for women and promote research and innovation to address gender specific challenges and opportunities in the sector.

**Gendered and Inclusive governance** to enhance sustainability, resilience and inclusion, governance systems and structures in access, utilisation, management and benefit sharing of ocean and marine resources, the diverse needs of the vulnerable and marginalised communities or groups must be considered.

From the analysis it is evident that most of the policies reviewed don't take this into consideration. The Fisheries Management and Development Act (2016) gives a directive on establishment and membership of BMUs, indicating that more than two thirds of the BMUs membership shouldn't be of the same gender and consideration should be made to have youth and persons with disabilities included. However, the mention of the two thirds gender rule does not clearly state the role of women in the BMUs or strategies that will enhance women's voice, power and agency in the governance of the BMUs. The fact that women are under-represented in decision-making processes and leadership roles is a critical challenge that need to be addressed. This would need to articulate the types of policy instruments and tools that could enable this to be actualized and enable a stronger voice and role of women in governance of resources that can also enhance economic empowerment.

Furthermore, social and cultural norms in coastal regions favor and encourage men leadership, thus women have continuously been underrepresented in leadership and decision-making processes, thus remaining excluded, their voices not heard, and priorities in the sector e.g., Seaweed production has remained peripheral. Structural barriers prevent women from expressing their desire to participate in leadership and management roles, even when such opportunities are provided for in the legislation and institutional frameworks. The gender imbalances and under-representation of women in decision-making and resource management positions remain a pervasive issue that continues to limit women's voice and influence over critical decisions in the sustainable development of fisheries and the aquaculture sector in Kenya and the region (Miedema et al., 2018).

### **Devising policy instruments and tools for gender equity and women's empowerment**

Some of the policies show intent to streamline initiatives geared to support economic empowerment within the aquaculture and fisheries sectors, particularly for women and marginalized groups, and articulate the modalities for actualizing the intention. For example, the National Fisheries policy indicates that the government is keen to promote economic empowerment of women through enhanced support to women cooperatives, women self-help groups, and women-friendly support schemes. Some aspects of inclusion have been noted, especially on the provision of welfare programs and the provision of adequate safety nets to all categories of fishers and fisher folks through the provision of the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme (DBTS).

However, most of the policies, plans and strategies show limited and unclear targeted interventions to support gender empowerment. An example is the State Department for the Blue Economy and Fisheries Strategic Plan (2023 - 2027), which mentions the intent to promote access to productive assets like land and credit but does not address the specific barriers to gender equity and social inclusion in economic sectors. The Kwale CIDP (2023-2027), sets to introduce supportive policies to enhance human capital, including women's empowerment. However, the policies don't outline a defined framework of identified priorities and hence difficult to determine the precise measures to support gendered empowerment. Additionally, whereas some gender demographics are provided, they do not offer detailed insights into gender dynamics within specific sectors.

### **Gender gaps in technology and innovation- policy failures?**

Technology and innovations are key enablers for enhanced intensive and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture development. This is especially essential, in the face of the continued decline in capture fisheries. Inadequate gender-sensitive technology and information has further exacerbated the vulnerability of women, hence without adequate policies to support women-centered technologies, it is difficult to introduce technological innovations aimed at women's economic empowerment. Compared to men, women face greater access and use barriers related to infrastructure and technology in the sector. Whereas research and innovation, including technology advancement to improve fisheries and aquaculture profitability is a clear priority, the proposed interventions to deliver and make them available (e.g. fishing gear, boats, coolers and other equipment) don't recognize the barriers women have to contend with, and as currently devised will exacerbate gender inequalities.

### **Aligning policies, strategies for gender equity- Cross-sectoral considerations**

Leveraging on cross-sectoral policies and strategies that are intended to drive gender equity as a national agenda can enable sector specific policies to better align and be responsive to the barriers that are stacked up mainly against women cross-sectorally. For instance, the Women-Economic-Empowerment-Strategy-2020-2025 intends to support women's participation in fisheries economic empowerment, including integrating affirmative action in programmes and policies, and intervention for women access to financing/credit, market access and markets information, training and capacity building in the fisheries sector. But how these link to the sector specific policies is not clear.

Additionally, the national Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda for Inclusive Growth (2023-2027), is assertive in integration of strategic interventions that support women's empowerment in the blue economy. The strategy has mentioned key priorities that support increase in the number of women trained on gender issues in the blue economy, increasing the number of women associations which will boost employment opportunities for women in the green and blue economy. The Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) for Inclusive Growth (2023-2027) recognizes the different challenges in the sector and the need for new technologies but hasn't mentioned in terms of gender lens (guided by any policy as of date); operationalizing the Blue Economy. The BETA further acknowledges the importance of enhancing participation, representation, and the adoption of technology to boost production, particularly in emerging sectors like seaweed cultivation. However, it lacks alignment with other policies within the broader framework of the Blue Economy draft.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Fisheries and aquaculture sectors are pivotal for inclusive and sustainable development. It is thus imperative to leverage emerging trends and opportunities for gender-responsive empowerment. This gendered policy analysis has demonstrated that while most existing policies and strategies recognized the need to stimulate an enabling environment for gender equity including consideration for gender-targeted interventions, this is in a limited manner. The policies fall short in their integration and understanding of the gender disparities rooted in cultural, social, and economic factors that stifle women's full participation in the development of the sector.

Effort is needed to ensure policy development and interventions clearly define the gender-responsive specific actions that can address existing inequalities and support women's empowerment in the fisheries and aquaculture. The benefits of mainstreaming gender into the fisheries-aquaculture frameworks for inclusive and sustainable development are thus invaluable. Embracing gender-inclusive policies will essentially empower communities in harnessing technological and social innovations, strengthen women's collective voice and participation, overcome social and cultural barriers, empower women as agents in decision-making and leadership, thus charting a transformative course towards gender equality, economic empowerment, and sustainable growth.

### **Policy Recommendations**

1. There is a 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 utilisation of ocean resources, thus creating equal opportunities in leadership and hence propagate equality in harnessing benefits from the fish and aquaculture sector value chains.
2. There is a need to support the generation of gender disaggregated data that informs documentation of gender-specific challenges, needs, perspectives and opportunities in the fish and aquaculture sector. This evidence-based approach can inform gender-specific targeted policy interventions and investments.
3. 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.
4. 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's leadership. Special attention should be natured to ensure that legal frameworks constitute mechanisms to protect women's rights, ensure their voices are heard, and they are included in key leadership positions that can inform their full participation in shaping the sector.
5. 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

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