

REPORT

YALA T-LAB WORKSHOP REPORT II

29th - 30th May 2025

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Candela Resort, Siaya County



Organizations Present;

- African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS)
- Community Members
- County Government officials
- Egerton University
- Kaimosi University
- Kenya Wildlife Service
- Lake Agro Ltd
- National Lands Commission

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List of Acronyms

- NGOs - Non-Governmental Organisation
- CBOs - Community-Based Organisation
- ACTS - African Centre for Technology Studies
- KAFU - Kaimosi Friends University
- T-Labs - Transformations Laboratories

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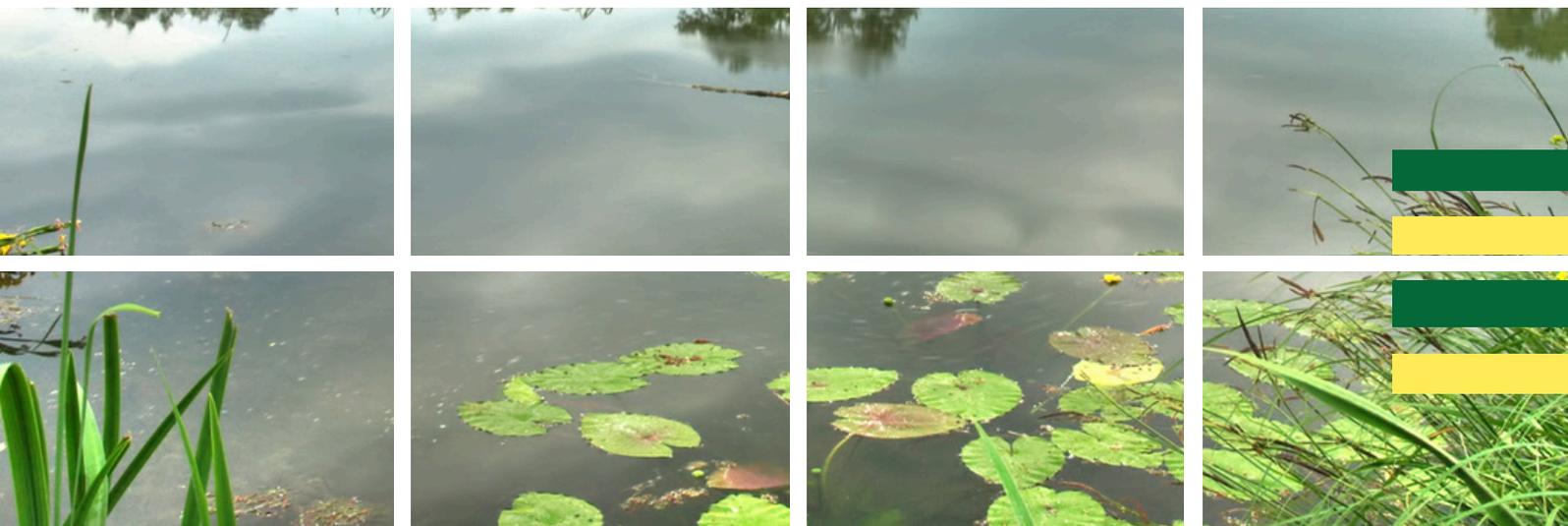
Executive Summary

The Yala T-Lab Workshop, held from 29th to 30th May 2025 at Candela Resort, Siaya County, brought together stakeholders, including community members, government officials, researchers, and civil society, to explore sustainable solutions for the Yala Wetland. Organized by Egerton University, the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), and Kaimosi Friends University, the workshop formed part of a broader case study under the theme "Water for Food." The study focuses on promoting sustainable wetland utilization and enhancing ecosystem services in the Yala and Kingwal wetlands within the Yala River Basin.

The workshop featured interactive sessions using tools such as the Three Horizons Framework to map current issues, envision sustainable futures, and explore feasible transition pathways. Key themes included biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, wetland-based enterprises, education and awareness, legal frameworks, and inter-agency coordination. Participants discussed five critical "seeds of change": Legal Advocacy and Policy Dialogue, Wetland Education and Outreach Programmes, Community-Led Restoration, Inter-Agency Coordination, and Papyrus-Based Enterprises.

Roundtable discussions involving diverse stakeholder groups helped assess the practicality of proposed solutions. Notably, inter-agency collaboration was seen as foundational, while education and legal enforcement emerged as crucial drivers. Proposed innovations such as the Wetland Monitoring and Management App (WMMA) demonstrated the growing role of technology in conservation. Community reflections and goal-setting activities encouraged accountability, with each participant committing to a personal action for change.

The workshop concluded with an implementation timeline categorized into short, medium, and long-term actions. Recommendations emphasized public-private partnerships, policy enforcement, capacity building, documentation of traditional knowledge, and coordinated governance. The workshop reaffirmed that sustainable wetland management requires inclusive, evidence-based, and collaborative approaches that balance ecological protection with community development.



Introduction

Wetlands are important ecosystems that deliver a broad range of ecosystem services essential for the livelihoods and well-being of communities living both within and beyond their boundaries. They play a key role in regulating water flow, recharging groundwater, storing and releasing water, mitigating climate change, and filtering nutrients and pollutants. Wetlands also hold high economic and cultural significance, providing water for domestic and agricultural use, supporting fisheries, and offering raw materials for construction and traditional crafts. Furthermore, they serve as critical biodiversity hotspots, offering habitat for globally threatened species such as biome-restricted birds and the endangered Sitatunga antelope.

Despite these immense benefits, wetlands such as the Yala Wetland face increasing threats from unregulated land use and agricultural expansion. These practices pose long-term risks to water quality and availability, biodiversity, fisheries, carbon storage, and ultimately, the livelihoods of communities that depend on them. Sustainable utilization of wetlands is therefore essential, not only to safeguard biodiversity but also to ensure food and livelihood security for current and future generations.

About the Project

In response to these challenges, Egerton University, the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), and Kaimosi Friends University have partnered to conduct a comprehensive case study focusing on sustainable wetland utilization under the theme “Water for Food.” This collaborative initiative explores two critical wetland systems within the Yala River Basin, Kingwal Wetland in Nandi County and Yala Wetland in Busia and Siaya Counties.

The project adopts a participatory, systems-based approach that actively engages researchers, local communities, policymakers, and other stakeholders. It aims to generate actionable, policy-relevant research insights and co-create transformational pathways for the sustainable management of wetland ecosystems. Through inclusive dialogue and knowledge exchange, the project seeks to strengthen understanding and drive collective action around water management.

Key objectives include:

1. Enhancing adaptive knowledge on sustainable water and wetland resource use;
2. Fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and co-learning;
3. Strengthening institutional capacities of policy actors to participate in water governance and implementation of solutions;
4. Supporting innovative, evidence-based policymaking and community-led practices for long-term wetland sustainability.

Through this initiative, the project envisions a future where wetlands like Yala and Kingwal are not only protected but are actively contribute to resilient livelihoods, ecological balance, and sustainable development in the region.

Workshop Methodology

The Yala T-Lab was designed to be a safe and collaborative space where people from across sectors, community members, researchers, civil society, and local government could come together and think differently about the future of the Yala Wetland. The workshop didn't just focus on sharing information; it created a shared journey of listening, imagining, challenging assumptions, and co-creating ideas for action.

To guide this journey, we used a series of carefully selected approaches, each with a specific purpose aligned to the objectives of the workshop. These methods helped participants reflect on the past, assess the present, envision alternatives, and chart pathways for change. Each approach was used at a strategic point during the workshop, either to open space for creative thinking, prioritize options, test assumptions, or affirm commitments. The methods were sequenced intentionally, starting with visioning and scenario building, moving into thematic prioritization and deliberation, and concluding with personal reflection and forward planning.

Below is a description of each approach, outlining its purpose, rationale for use, and how it was applied during the workshop:

Three Horizons Framework: This activity was designed to open the workshop by guiding participants through a reflection on the state of the Yala Wetland, past, present, and future. The Three Horizons Framework is commonly used in systems thinking to help groups visualize change over time and identify transition pathways. In this case, it was chosen to ground the workshop in shared understanding and set a future-focused tone for the sessions that followed. Participants were grouped into mixed teams and invited to map out Horizon 1 (current challenges), Horizon 2 (emerging innovations), and Horizon 3 (their vision of a thriving wetland). They used flipcharts to sketch their insights and presented them in plenary. This helped surface systemic barriers, opportunities for change, and areas requiring further dialogue. The process also built continuity from the previous T-Lab held in 2024, enabling returning participants to reflect on progress since then.

Futures Wheel: Following the Three Horizons exercise, the Futures Wheel was introduced to guide participants in exploring the possible consequences of different wetland management scenarios. The purpose of this tool was to enable deeper systems thinking by mapping the cascading impacts of key decisions. It was selected for its ability to help participants visualize both direct and indirect effects of choices across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Participants were divided into small groups and assigned one of three scenarios: community-led, county-managed, or privately controlled wetland governance. Starting with their assigned model at the center of a large sheet, they identified first-order outcomes (e.g., improved infrastructure, restricted access), then expanded outward to consider second- and third-order consequences, such as shifts in livelihoods or institutional accountability. The exercise prompted reflection on trade-offs and synergies, and the visual maps produced were shared in plenary to compare and contrast scenarios.

World Café: The World Café was used to facilitate focused, theme-based dialogue across a broad group of participants. Its purpose was to deepen shared understanding of the five priority areas or 'seeds of change', identified during earlier sessions.

Five tables were set up, each covering a specific theme: community-led restoration, papyrus-based enterprises, policy and legal advocacy, wetland education, and inter-agency coordination. Participants rotated between tables in groups, contributing to structured conversations around the current status, challenges, indicators of success, and actions needed for each seed. Table hosts recorded key insights on flipcharts. A final plenary brought together these perspectives and allowed participants to synthesize ideas across themes.

20 Priority Game: To support value-based prioritization, the 20 Priority Game was introduced as an interactive tool to help participants rank criteria that matter most in selecting sustainable actions. Participants were given cards labeled with evaluation criteria, such as inclusivity, feasibility, innovation, and impact, and asked to discuss and score them in one-on-one exchanges. After the first round, cards were shuffled and passed on, allowing each card to gather multiple scores from different pairs. The activity went through four rotation rounds, after which cards were scored a final time and submitted. This produced a collective ranking of criteria based on group consensus and highlighted which values would guide the evaluation of proposed actions.

Vote with Your Feet: As participants began converging on priority themes, the Vote with Your Feet exercise offered a chance to test levels of agreement and spark dialogue around more contentious proposals. This tool was used to make divergent viewpoints visible and to facilitate open discussion without confrontation. Participants were asked to physically position themselves along a continuum line in the room, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', in response to provocative statements, such as 'papyrus-based enterprises should be prioritized over restoration.' Once in position, volunteers shared their reasoning. This helped others understand differing perspectives and led to clarifications and consensus-building. The activity energized the room and brought emotion and commitment into the deliberation process.

Roundtable Discussions: To transition from visioning to action, participants were organized into stakeholder-aligned roundtable groups to consider what ideas could be implemented and how. The purpose was to ensure that proposals from earlier sessions were grounded in local realities and informed by the experiences of specific actors, such as women, youth, county officials, and CSOs. Each group reflected on a set of guiding questions: What does this idea mean in our context? What would it take to make it work? What challenges might arise? Discussions were documented on worksheets, and key insights were shared in plenary. This allowed for nuanced input into the co-development of action strategies and highlighted both opportunities and constraints at the stakeholder level.

Goal-Setting Exercise: The final activity of the workshop centered on personal reflection and accountability. Participants were invited to express what they would stop doing, start doing, and continue doing in support of the wetland's sustainability. This tool was used to reinforce ownership and anchor workshop outcomes in individual commitments. Responses were written on cards or shared verbally in the group. The simplicity of the prompts allowed participants to connect their insights with personal behavior, institutional responsibilities, or community action. These reflections were collected to inform follow-up engagement and future capacity-building efforts.

Workshop Outcomes

This section presents the outcomes of the workshop as structured around the various approaches applied. Each approach served as an entry point into distinct thematic discussions and supported participants in surfacing locally grounded knowledge, testing assumptions, and co-developing ideas for action. The results reflect the collective insights and experiences that emerged through each method and how they contributed to shaping pathways for the future of the Yala Wetland.

Three Horizons and Futures Wheel: Visioning and Scenario Building

The session began with reflections on the February 2024 workshop, where participants explored the challenges and opportunities within the Yala Wetland ecosystem. Using the Three Horizons Framework, they discussed unsustainable current practices (H1), signs of emerging innovations and tensions (H2), and their shared vision for an inclusive, sustainable future for the wetland (H3). They also considered possible pathways to bridge these horizons.

In this follow-up T-Lab, participants revisited these visions and built upon them by exploring current interactions with the wetland, including livelihood practices such as fishing, beekeeping, local tourism, and artisanal use of papyrus. They also reflected on deep-rooted cultural connections and local naming of wetland areas, revealing strong place-based identities and stewardship.

These interactions revealed the urgency of tackling environmental degradation through locally led initiatives and highlighted key challenges and innovations already underway. Participants acknowledged numerous threats facing the wetland, such as loss of natural water filtration functions, declining fish stocks, and increased human-wildlife conflict. They also shared ongoing efforts to address these issues, including biodiversity conservation, education, restoration activities, promotion of sustainable fishing practices, and emphasis on inclusive ownership.

From these discussions, five emerging 'seeds of change' were identified as foundational to future interventions: Legal Advocacy and Policy Dialogue, Wetland Education and Outreach Programmes, Community-Led Restoration, Inter-agency Coordination, and Papyrus-Based Investments.

To anchor these reflections in present-day governance realities, participants examined institutional developments since the first T-Lab. Positive strides included the drafting of an ecological plan by Haki Itendeke, inter-county collaboration, and political goodwill to adopt land-use plans. However, challenges remained: lack of water control plans, unsustainable fishing practices, and political interference in land issues. Despite these, community-led restoration and aquaculture were highlighted as promising practices.

Building on this foundation, the Futures Wheel was used to analyze the long-term implications of different governance scenarios, including county-led, private sector-managed, and community-based models. Groups examined potential ripple effects of each approach through ecological, social, and economic lenses. These reflections revealed trade-offs and helped shape participant recommendations for more sustainable and equitable governance pathways for the Yala Wetland.

The workshop then transitioned to a deeper exploration of how local communities interact with the wetland in their daily lives.

Participants engaged in a discussion on how they interact with the Yala Wetland and its resources in their daily lives. Various roles and livelihoods were highlighted, reflecting the diverse ways in which communities depend on the wetland. Some individuals identified themselves as fishermen, operating in ponds and lakes, while others are involved in local tourism as tour guides, showcasing the beauty and cultural significance of the wetland. There were also educators present, who focused on raising awareness about the importance of wetland conservation.

Papyrus reeds were noted as a valuable resource used for crafting traditional items such as baskets and hats, supporting local artisanal economies. Additionally, participants mentioned involvement in biodiversity monitoring and economic activities like beekeeping, which contribute to both environmental stewardship and livelihood improvement.

The session also emphasized the strong cultural connection to the wetlands, with participants naming various wetland areas using local names such as “Risamba,” “Thithia,” “Otodo,” “Ridende,” and “Sotet.” These names reflect the deep-rooted knowledge and identity that the communities have with their surrounding environment.

From these discussions, emerging seeds of change identified from the first workshop were mentioned, laying a foundation for future interventions and collaborative action. These include: Legal Advocacy and Policy Dialogue, Wetland Education and Outreach Programmes, Community-Led Restoration, Inter-agency Coordination, and Papyrus-Based Investments.

Thematic Prioritization through the World Café

With a clearer understanding of community experiences and governance contexts, participants engaged in an interactive World Café session to identify and refine priority areas for action.

Participants were divided into five groups, each assigned to discuss one of the five identified priority areas for Yala Wetland sustainability. The groups later rotated to the other priority areas, allowing for the exchange of additional ideas and the enrichment of each discussion.

The groups discussed two key guiding questions:

- **How would you prioritize the five areas and why?**
- **How will we know that the area of priority is successful?**

Group I: Community-Led Restoration.

This area was ranked lower in priority compared to others. The group noted that restoration efforts can only succeed if the community fully understands the value of the wetland, which fosters a sense of ownership. Success in this area would be indicated by: increased land acreage under restoration, sustainable use of fishing equipment, improved water quality and quantity, and increased wildlife populations.

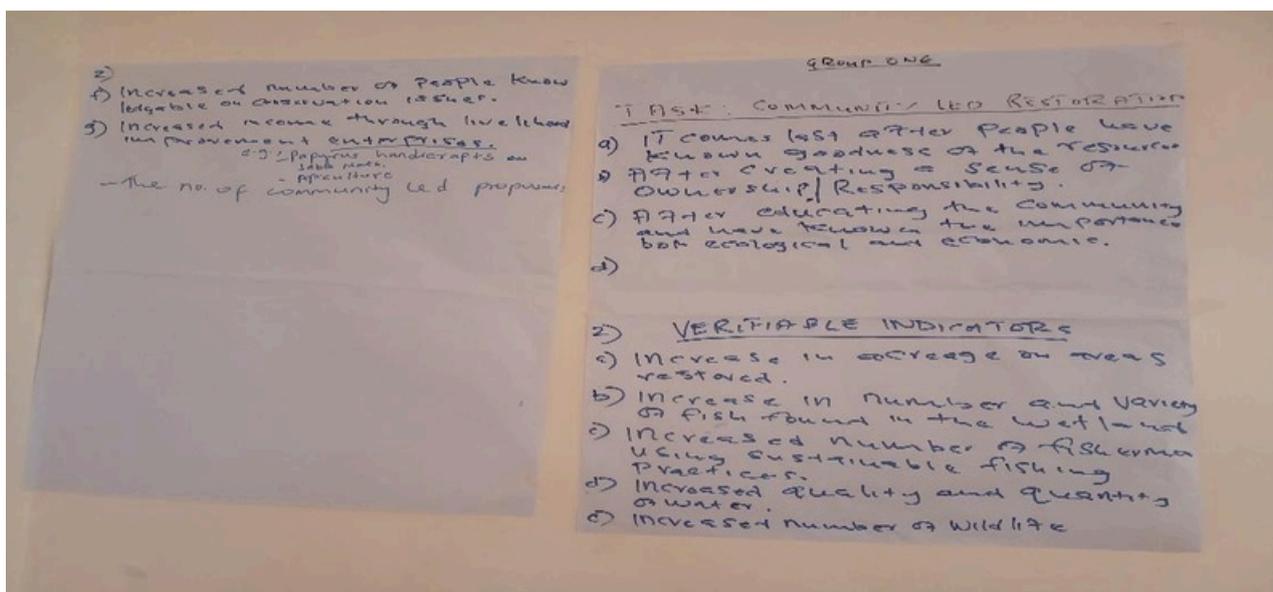


Figure 1: Community ownership as the key to successful wetland restoration

Group 2: Papyrus-Based Enterprises.

This was ranked low as a priority area. The group emphasized the need to first restore the wetland ecosystem before investing in enterprise development. In addition, robust legal frameworks and guidelines are essential to ensure the sustainable use of papyrus resources. This area would be deemed successful when there is: increased production, job creation within the industry, improved livelihoods and infrastructure, development of carbon markets, and enhanced value addition.

Group 3: Inter-Agency Coordination.

This area was identified as a critical enabler of effective wetland management. It ensures collaborative planning, resource sharing, and harmonized interventions across sectors. Indicators of success include: the existence of joint reports and collaborative frameworks, regular stakeholder meetings with good attendance, approval and implementation of the land use plan by both Siaya and Busia counties, and fewer stakeholder complaints and conflicts.

Group 4: Wetland Education and Outreach Programmes.

Ranked as the highest priority, this area was considered the foundation for all other interventions. An informed community is more likely to adopt sustainable practices. Success indicators include: increased use of appropriate fishing gear, community engagement in tree planting and climate-smart agriculture, implementation of local restoration initiatives, and adoption of government policies at the community level.

"We must stop educating people about wetlands and start educating through them," a University Researcher.

Group 5: Legal Advocacy and Policy Dialogue.

This area was viewed as a critical structural component, offering clear roles, responsibilities, and frameworks to guide action. It also supports conflict resolution and promotes public awareness. Success would be reflected by: reduced community conflict over wetland use, the existence of functional reporting and grievance mechanisms, increased funding and support for advocacy efforts, more legislative instruments developed, and more frequent sensitization and public dialogue sessions.

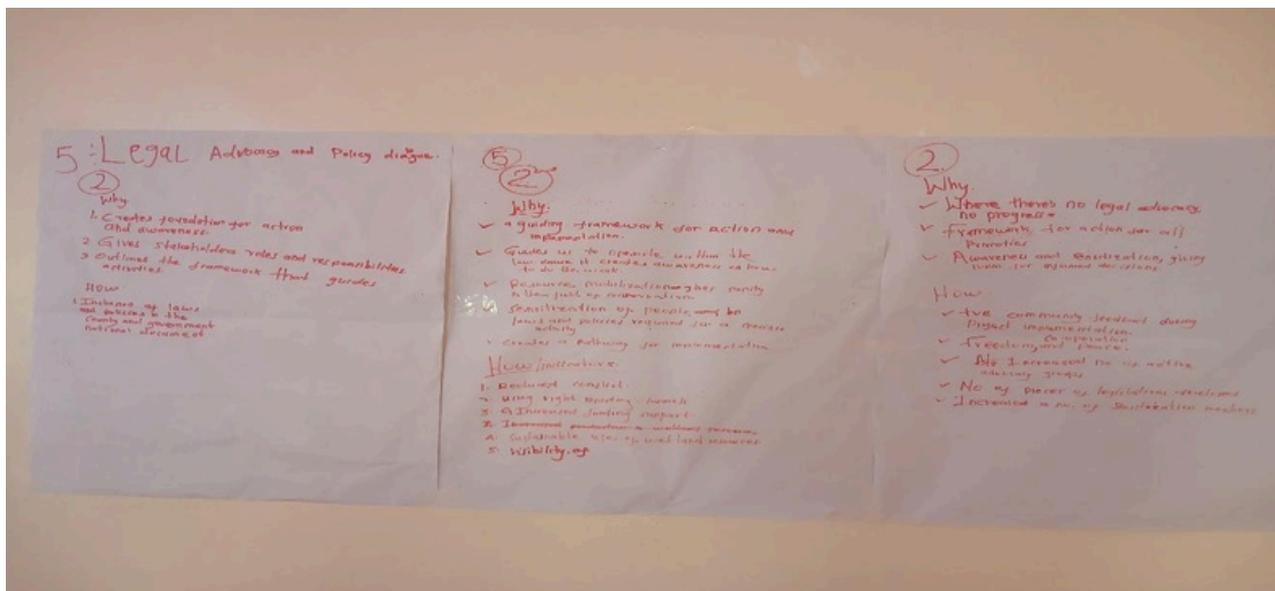


Figure 2: Legal frameworks and policy dialogue enable structured action, awareness, and conflict resolution.

"Legal frameworks and policy dialogue enable structured action, awareness, and conflict resolution."

Peer Learning through the 20 Priority Game

Following the World Café, participants used an interactive ranking exercise to deepen their reflection and surface shared values on sustainability criteria.

This session involved interactive discussions where each participant paired with another for five minutes to share insights on the measures that promote sustainability across the five key priority areas. They then ranked each criterion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. After the initial discussion, participants exchanged cards and sought out new partners they had not interacted with earlier in the workshop to continue the dialogue and administer a second score. In the next round, two participants familiar with each other switched cards without engaging in discussion. Each participant then approached a third, previously unengaged partner to discuss the criteria area and provide a third score. For the final round, cards were exchanged once more, and each participant sat with a card that contained three existing scores. Based on their own judgment, they then added a final score. The participants holding the final cards submitted the total scores, which were tallied and ranked from the lowest to the highest.

A chart showing the criteria score

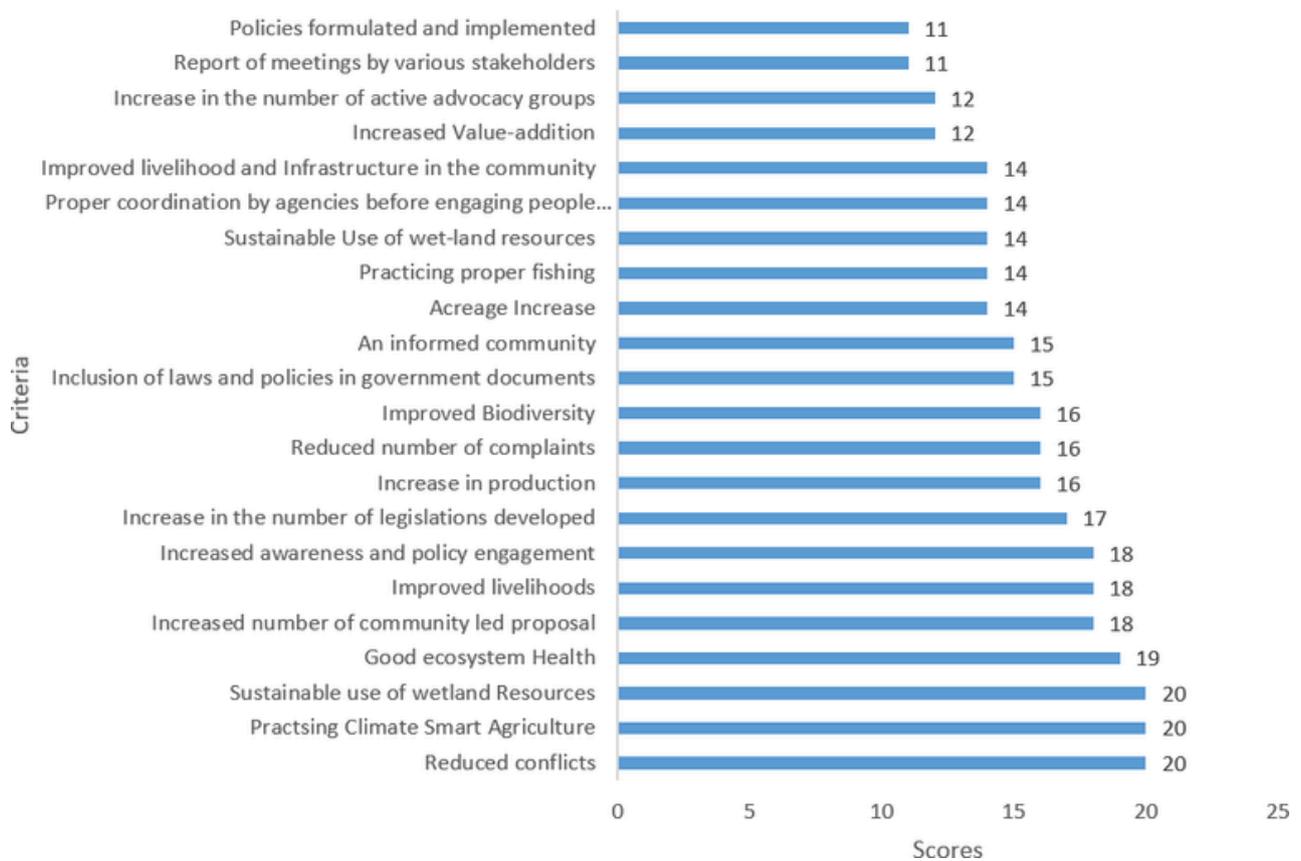


Figure 3: Criteria score chart

Reframing Priorities through Participatory Voting



Figure 4: Participants engage in a 'Vote with Your Feet' activity to express and debate top-ranked priorities through interactive positioning.

To challenge and expand on the findings from the 20 Priority Game, participants took part in a dynamic voting session that allowed them to physically express and negotiate their positions. “Vote with Your Feet” was an interactive, movement-based strategy where participants physically position themselves along a continuum line to represent their opinions on the best ranked criteria.

This approach encouraged individuals to visually and actively express their perspectives, compare them with others, and engage in discussions to understand the diverse reasons behind differing viewpoints. This voting was based on the top three categories from the 20 priority game, and the results were as follows:

Papyrus-Based Enterprises: Business alone cannot address the complex challenges facing the Yala Wetland. Frequent and unregulated visits to the wetland can disrupt the delicate ecosystem, and without a clear policy framework, such ventures are not sustainable. However, participants proposed renaming this seed of change to “Sustainable, Planned, and Continuous Research-Based Wetland Enterprises in Partnership with Other Stakeholders.” With this revised approach, emphasizing research, planning, and collaboration, a selected group voted in favor, recognizing its potential as a vital and sustainable seed of change.

Inter-Agency co-ordination: This was strongly criticized as an inhibiting seed of change. A major challenge in policy development within the county government has been the lack of cooperation among officials, often driven by hidden agendas. As a result, well-crafted policies rarely make it to the county assemblies for approval.

To address bureaucratic barriers, participants suggested embracing technology to create transparent and verifiable systems. They also emphasized the need for practical and transparent inter-agency coordination and collaboration, noting that differing interests among agencies often hinder progress. The bureaucratic nature of government institutions continues to be a significant obstacle to effective implementation and sustainable development.

Wetland Education and Outreach programmes: This was unanimously identified by nearly all participants as a crucial seed of change. One participant emphasized that without government incentives, the initiative is unlikely to succeed. Participants were encouraged to make use of available local resources rather than relying solely on external parties for solutions. “Use your own resources to empower yourselves”, Prof. Kitaka

Legal Advocacy and policy dialogue: Participants unanimously agreed that the effective implementation of existing legal frameworks is a critical seed of change. While the policies and laws are already in place, their enforcement remains weak. Strengthening implementation mechanisms was seen as essential for ensuring accountability, guiding sustainable actions, and achieving meaningful progress in wetland conservation efforts.

Seed of Change	Suggested Seed of Change Name Revision
Community-Led Restoration	Community-Led Restoration
Papyrus-Based Enterprises	Sustainable, planned and continuous research based wetland enterprises in partnership with
Inter-agency co-ordination	Practical, transparent inter agency co-ordination
Wetland Education and Outreach programmes	Wetland Education and Outreach programmes
Legal Advocacy and policy dialogue	Legal Advocacy and policy dialogue

Table 1: Refined Seeds of Change spanning restoration, enterprise, coordination, education, and advocacy

Ranking criteria

A total of 23 participants voted on the most preferred seed of change that best supports the top three sustainable criteria identified earlier. This was followed by group discussions on the selected options. After a five-minute deliberation within each group, representatives presented their justifications for the votes cast.

A pie chart showing votes on the Seeds of Change

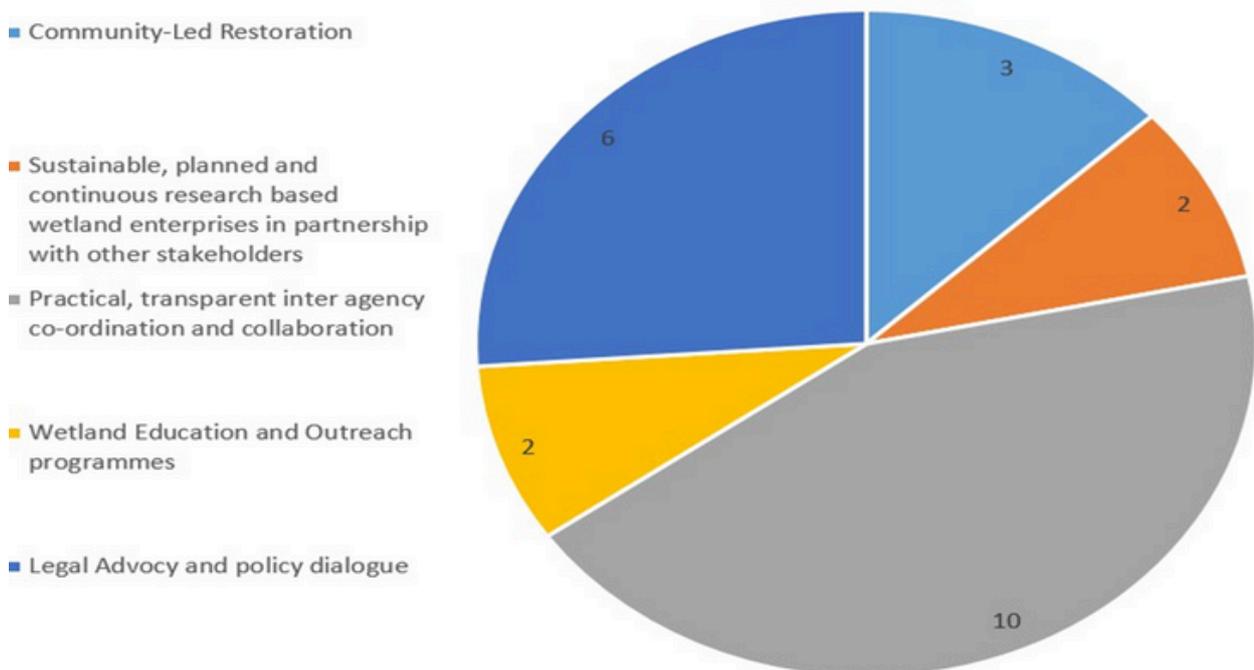


Figure 5: Chart showing votes on Seeds of Change

During the group discussions on the seeds of change, practical and transparent inter-agency coordination and collaboration emerged as a foundational enabler, referred to by participants as “the mother of everything.” It was also emphasized that for any activity related to wetland sustainability to succeed, existing laws and frameworks must be properly coordinated and understood at all levels. These laws, which promote sustainable use of wetland resources, are already in place; however, there is a significant gap in public awareness and understanding of them. Participants strongly underscored the urgent need to educate the entire community about the relevant legal frameworks, available resources, and the ecological and economic significance of the wetlands.

The importance of cross-county collaboration was also highlighted, with participants citing the current cooperation between the Siaya and Busia County Governors as a critical driver of progress. They noted that without such coordinated efforts, initiatives such as ongoing research would stall.

From an economic perspective, participants observed that businesses have long existed within the wetland communities, serving as a vital source of livelihood. There was widespread agreement that the wetlands hold immense economic potential that must be harnessed sustainably. However, it was also acknowledged that the wetland is a degraded resource; restoration must be prioritized, as none of the proposed criteria or interventions would be meaningful if the ecosystem continues to decline.

The discussion affirmed that legal implementation, education, inter-agency collaboration, and sustainable economic use are interlinked pillars essential to achieving lasting change in the Yala Wetland ecosystem.

“Everything else may be in place, but without law and order, it will all collapse. Even in the beginning, God gave us laws to guide every living being”, Participant

Stakeholder Perspectives from Roundtable Discussions

To facilitate deeper engagement and gather diverse perspectives, participants were divided into five distinct roundtable groups based on their affiliations and community roles:

- Siaya Community – Women
- Siaya Community – Men
- Busia Community
- Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs)
- Private Sector and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Each group engaged in structured roundtable discussions focused on assessing the practicality of the prioritized pathways for the sustainable use of the Yala Wetland. Participants reflected on key guiding questions, including:

How practical are the prioritized pathways for achieving sustainable use of the Yala Wetland?

What would we need to do, in policy, enterprise, community management, education, and coordination, to achieve the desired vision of each option?

Siaya Community – Women



Figure 6: Women call for water access, enterprise support, and skills training to drive wetland sustainability and local livelihoods.

Women participants identified several key actions necessary for sustainable wetland management and the improvement of community livelihoods. A major priority was the channeling of water to support farming activities, which would enable year-round cultivation and reduce dependence on erratic rainfall.

The women also emphasized the value of organizing as community-based enterprises to strengthen collaboration, enhance bargaining power, and promote inclusive participation in conservation and economic activities. They called for capacity strengthening in farming, weaving, and fishing, recognizing that improved skills and knowledge are vital for the sustainable use of wetland resources.

Furthermore, they stressed the importance of marketing, value addition, and restoration efforts, which should be undertaken in partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders. These actions were viewed as critical pathways for achieving both environmental conservation and economic empowerment in the Yala Wetland landscape.

“We are restoring not just trees but trust”, Women’s group leader

Siaya Community – Men

There was a pressing need to educate the community on the best practices for the sustainable use of natural resources. Conducting economic evaluations of these resources was essential to understand their true value. Additionally, promoting alternative sources of livelihood can reduce pressure on the wetland ecosystem. Restoration efforts must be prioritized to recover depleted resources, while the protection and proper management of swamps should remain a community-driven initiative. Lastly, maintaining existing infrastructure within the swamps was crucial to support long-term sustainability.



Figure 7: Men urge community education, resource valuation, and infrastructure protection to ease pressure on wetlands

Busia Community

During the discussions, participants emphasized the critical need for effective information and knowledge sharing within the community. It was noted that factual and accurate information must be relayed in local dialects to ensure accessibility and widespread understanding. A current legal case involving the community was cited as an example of how ignorance had previously been exploited. This has since prompted the initiation of localized training sessions to build awareness and empower community members to defend their rights and natural resources.

In terms of ecosystem restoration, participants highlighted ongoing efforts to identify degraded areas within the wetland. Restoration activities primarily involve the replanting of papyrus and the protection of certain zones to allow for the natural regeneration of wetland vegetation. These actions are supported by ecological land-use practices, including routine biodiversity monitoring, which serves to guide sustainable land management.

The concept of Indigenous Community Conservation Areas (ICCAs) was also discussed. These community-led zones involve representation through elders and leaders to ensure inclusive decision-making and protection of the wetland's biodiversity.

To enhance public awareness, local radio talk shows are being utilized as a platform for disseminating conservation-related information and encouraging sustainable practices.

Furthermore, participants underscored the importance of diversifying economic activities to reduce pressure on the wetland. Suggested alternatives include beekeeping, basketry, and ecotourism, all of which provide income opportunities while promoting environmental stewardship.

Lastly, the need to form strong synergies and networks with relevant agencies was identified as a matter of urgency. Participants expressed concern that the current lack of coordination among stakeholders is hampering progress and called for immediate action to streamline partnerships for more effective conservation and sustainable development outcomes.

“These agencies are never present, but we are changing that narrative”, Edwin

Private and CSOs

To ensure the sustainable use and conservation of the Yala Wetland, participants emphasized the need for immediate and strategic interventions. One of the top priorities identified was the implementation of existing land use plans already developed for both Busia and Siaya counties. These plans offer a structured framework for guiding development and conservation efforts, and their operationalization is seen as a critical step toward long-term wetland sustainability.

Participants also recommended the adoption of conservation agriculture as a sustainable farming method that maintains soil fertility, reduces environmental degradation, and promotes climate-resilient livelihoods. This practice, if well integrated, can contribute to both food security and ecological health in the wetland area.

The promotion of public-private partnerships (PPPs) was identified as a key strategy for mobilizing resources and expertise. Engaging the private sector through collaborative models can support the development of sustainable enterprises, infrastructure, and conservation projects within the region.

To build community resilience and support long-term development goals, the creation of an endowment fund was proposed. Such a fund would be instrumental in strengthening community capacity through investments in education, skills development, and essential infrastructure, particularly for wetland conservation.

Participants also urged the embracing of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by private companies operating in or around the wetland. CSR initiatives should prioritize environmental protection, social welfare, and sustainable development programs that directly benefit local communities.

The establishment of a Wetland Resource Centre was proposed to serve as a central hub for training, research, knowledge sharing, and stakeholder engagement. This center would support both local and national conservation efforts while creating a platform for ongoing community education.

Another key recommendation was the documentation of indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge. Participants highlighted that local communities possess valuable insights into sustainable wetland use, passed down through generations. Capturing and integrating this knowledge into formal conservation strategies would enhance their relevance and effectiveness.

Finally, participants proposed the promotion of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes. By offering financial incentives to communities and individuals who protect and manage ecosystem services, PES can strengthen local stewardship and align conservation efforts with socio-economic benefits.



Figure 8: Private actors and CSOs push for land use plan enforcement, partnerships, and a Wetland Resource Centre to sustain gains

Government Agencies

To achieve the sustainable use and management of the Yala Wetland, a range of strategic actions was proposed. One of the key priorities is the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices that are climate-smart, environmentally friendly, and capable of enhancing food security without compromising the ecological balance of the wetland.

In addition, participants emphasized the need to promote value addition for wetland-based products. This includes processing and packaging of agricultural and natural products to improve market access and increase income for local communities. Such value chains can significantly contribute to the economic empowerment of households dependent on wetland resources.

The conduct of regular Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and risk assessments was also underscored as a critical step in ensuring the success of interventions. These assessments will help in tracking progress, identifying challenges, and informing adaptive management strategies.

Civic education was highlighted as essential in raising awareness about wetland conservation, laws, and sustainable practices. Educating the public will empower them to take an active role in the protection and responsible use of natural resources.

There is also a strong call to formulate and review policies through evidence-based research, ensuring that decisions are informed by data and grounded in local realities. This approach will strengthen policy relevance, legitimacy, and effectiveness.

Participants recommended strengthening partnerships between the government and the private sector to mobilize resources, scale up innovations, and enhance service delivery in wetland conservation and development.

The adoption of appropriate technologies was encouraged as a way to improve resource efficiency, support sustainable enterprises, and enhance conservation outcomes. This includes the use of remote sensing, climate information services, and eco-friendly production technologies.

Another critical recommendation was to encourage public participation in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes. Inclusive approaches are vital for the ownership, accountability, and sustainability of interventions.

There was also a strong emphasis on fostering partnerships with institutions of higher learning. These collaborations can support research, innovation, knowledge dissemination, and capacity building for local communities and policymakers.

Lastly, there is a need to define land rights and ownership clearly to avoid conflicts and promote equitable access and use of resources. It also calls for the promotion of community livelihoods through wetland-based enterprises such as ecotourism, beekeeping, sustainable fishing, and handicrafts, which provide alternative income sources while conserving the ecosystem.

Digital Innovation: Wetland Monitoring and Management App (WMMA)

In 2010, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) conducted a comprehensive valuation of the Yala Swamp, estimating its worth at approximately Ksh 8.3 billion. This valuation considered various economic and ecological activities, including fishing, ecotourism, biodiversity conservation, crop farming, and livestock grazing. The study highlighted the wetland's immense value to local livelihoods and regional sustainability. With the increasing penetration of mobile technology in the region, there is an emerging opportunity to leverage digital tools for wetland conservation and management. In response to this, stakeholders have proposed the development of a Wetland Monitoring and Management App (WMMA). This innovative mobile application aims to enhance real-time data collection and monitoring by enabling users to capture images, report their location, and log the coordinates of areas where environmental observations are made. The information can then be accessed via both web and mobile platforms by relevant authorities and stakeholders for timely decision-making, enforcement, and public awareness. The WMMA is expected to support community-led conservation efforts, improve transparency, and strengthen the overall governance of the Yala Swamp ecosystem.

“Yala Wetland is one resource with many interests,” Prof Julius Kipkemboi

Co-Creating an Implementation Roadmap

This session involved assigning a realistic timeline to each of the identified criteria, based on stakeholders' perspectives on when these actions could effectively take shape. The aim was to map out a phased implementation plan, aligned with stakeholder capacity and priorities. Participants collaboratively envisioned the most appropriate timeframes for the full implementation of the sustainable practices, with a strong emphasis on the five identified seeds of change. The agreed-upon timelines serve as a strategic guide for prioritizing actions and allocating resources accordingly.



Figure 9: A chart showing implementation timeframes for sustainable practices, starting from 0–6 months.



Figure 10: A chart showing implementation timeframes for sustainable practices, starting from 6 months - 2 years

0-6 Months	6 Months - 2 Years	Over 5 Years
Working together as a Community	Strictly Improve fisheries	Restoration of Degraded sites and species
Marketing	Development and Implementation of wetland policies	Establish payment for Ecosystem services
Promotion of value addition	Clear Zonation of Land Use Areas	Introduce an Endowment Fund
Sustainable Agricultural Practices	Advocacy and Policy influence	Resource Mobilization
Improved livelihood and Diversification	Implementation of Proper land use plan	Ecological land use management
Embrace Corporate Social Responsibility	Review, formulate and Implement inclusive policies	Policy Enforcement
Adoption of conservation Agriculture	Information and knowledge Sharing	Review, formulate and implement Inclusive policies
Capacity strengthening on weaving, farming & fishing	Wetland Restoration	Information and Knowledge sharing
Wetland Resource Centre	County led management to restore and protect species	Capacity Building and Development
Encourage continuous Research & Technology Transfer	Establish payment for Ecosystem services	Encourage Public Private Partnerships
School mentorship programmes	Resource Mobilization	M&E, Audit risks and Assessment
Education and Awareness Creation	Ecological land use management	Research, report valuation of wetland resources
Habitat Restoration	Develop Nature Based Enterprises	Encourage Continuous Research & Technology Transfer
Resource Mobilization	Develop alternative livelihoods	Awareness Creation and Sensitization
Ecological Land Use Management	M&E, Audit risks and Assessment	
Encourage Public Private Partnerships	Encourage Public Private Partnerships	
M&E, Audit risks and Assessment	Collaboration between the national and county government agencies	
Review, formulate and implement Inclusive policies	Channeling water to allow farming	
Information and Knowledge Sharing	Collaboration on management of wetland	
Capacity building and Development	To form synergies and networks	
	Encourage continuous Research & Technology Transfer	
	Documenting Indigenous and Traditional Sustainable Knowledge	
	Education and Awareness Creation	

Table 2: Stakeholders map phased timelines for implementing five key seeds of change, guiding strategic action and resource allocation.

“We have started looking for a human-based solution, such as cage fishin,g because we as people have failed to protect our natural resources”, Samuel Oketch Onunga – Fisheries Officer, KeFS

Personal Commitment and Goal Setting

This session involved assigning a realistic timeline to each of the identified criteria, based on stakeholders’ perspectives on when these actions could effectively take shape. The aim was to map out a phased implementation plan, aligned with stakeholder capacity and priorities. Participants collaboratively envisioned the most appropriate timeframes for the full implementation of the sustainable practices, with a strong emphasis on the five identified seeds of change. The agreed-upon timelines serve as a strategic guide for prioritizing actions and allocating resources accordingly.

The workshop concluded with a five-minute personal reflection exercise, where each participant was invited to identify one specific action they would commit to in support of achieving a sustainable Yala Wetland. This reflective session was framed around three prompts: “I will stop,” “I will continue,” and “I will start.” Participants shared their commitments in writing, fostering a collective sense of responsibility and reinforcing individual roles in promoting sustainability. This closing activity not only encouraged accountability but also served as a powerful reminder that positive change begins with personal action.

“In development, there is no competition but collaboration”, Prof Julius Manyala

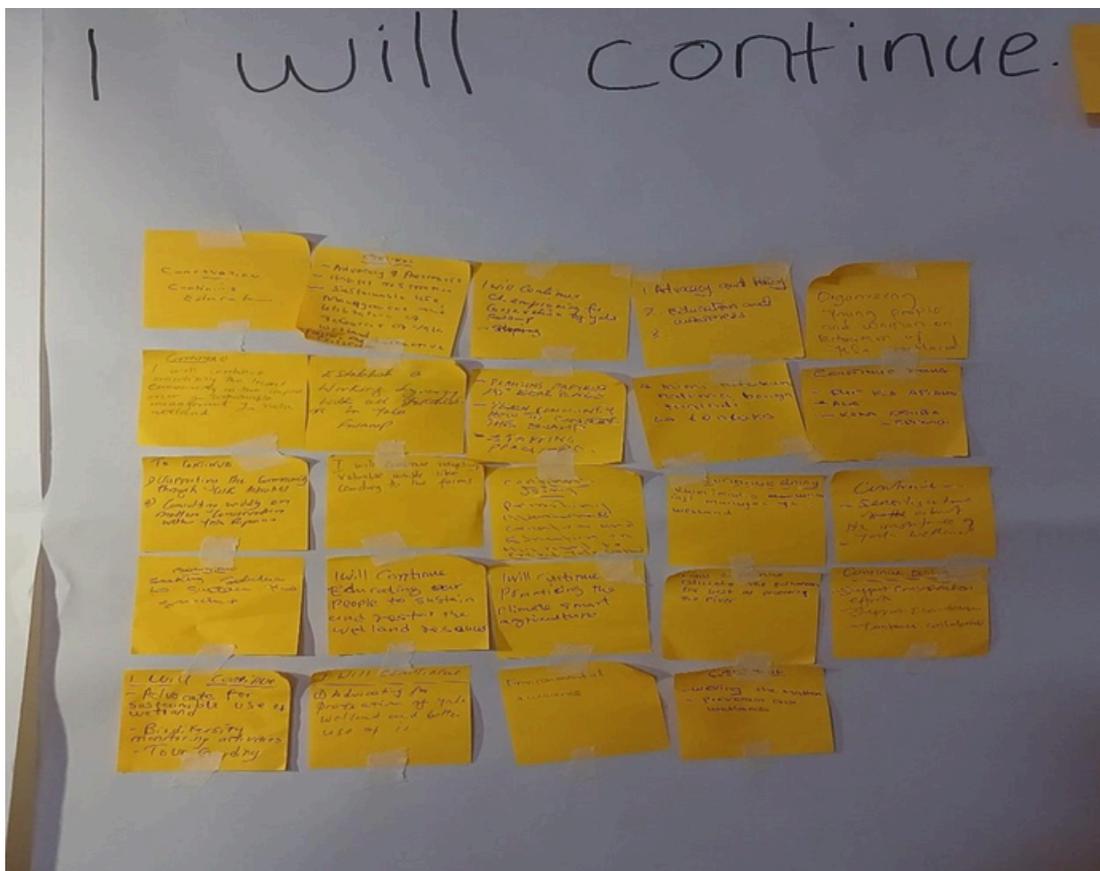


Figure 11: A chart showing what community members will continue doing

Key Findings

1. Community members have deep cultural and livelihood ties to the Yala Wetland, underscoring the importance of locally grounded and inclusive solutions.
2. Education and awareness are foundational to all interventions; without them, conservation and restoration efforts are unlikely to succeed.
3. Inter-agency coordination is both a key enabler and a major barrier—success depends on transparent and harmonized governance.
4. Legal enforcement and policy implementation lag behind existing frameworks, limiting sustainable management.
5. Sustainable enterprise development must be backed by restoration, planning, and clear guidelines to avoid exacerbating ecological pressure.
6. Technology—such as the proposed Wetland Monitoring and Management App (WMMA)—offers new opportunities for transparency, monitoring, and local accountability.
7. Participants demonstrated strong ownership and commitment to change, illustrated by their individual goals and proposed community actions.

Recommendations

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the Yala Wetland and realize the full potential of identified interventions, the workshop generated the following key recommendations:

1. **Strengthen Legal Implementation and Policy Enforcement:** While several supportive policies and legal frameworks exist, weak enforcement continues to hinder progress. Counties should prioritize implementing the already developed Land Use Plans and promote policy dialogue through evidence-based research to strengthen legitimacy and public buy-in.
2. **Promote Community Education and Awareness:** Education emerged as a top priority across all stakeholder groups. Structured community awareness programs on wetland laws, sustainable practices, and biodiversity importance are essential. Educational content should be disseminated through local dialects, schools, community radios, and outreach events.
3. **Institutionalize Inter-Agency Coordination:** Stakeholders must foster transparent, practical collaboration between national and county governments, community-based organizations, NGOs, and the private sector. Establishing clear mandates, joint planning mechanisms, and regular review forums will reduce overlaps and build synergy in wetland governance.
4. **Support Livelihood Diversification and Sustainable Enterprises:** The community must be supported in exploring alternative, eco-friendly livelihoods such as beekeeping, ecotourism, and value addition of papyrus products. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) and endowment funds should be established to provide financial and technical support to these enterprises.
5. **Promote Sustainable, Research-Based Wetland Enterprises:** Support the development of wetland-based enterprises such as papyrus products, ecotourism, and sustainable aquaculture that are guided by continuous research and environmental planning. These businesses should be implemented in partnership with government, academia, the private sector, and community stakeholders to ensure they are ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially inclusive.

6. Invest in Knowledge Sharing and Innovation: Establish a Wetland Resource Centre in Siaya and Busia as a hub for training, research, and information sharing. Leverage technology through the Wetland Monitoring and Management App (WMMA) to enable real-time tracking of environmental changes and increase accountability.
7. Document and Integrate Traditional Knowledge: Indigenous practices offer sustainable solutions grounded in local experience. These should be documented and incorporated into modern conservation strategies, ensuring inclusivity and cultural relevance.
8. Encourage Long-term Planning: Actions should be prioritized and aligned with short, medium-, and long-term implementation timelines. Key strategies include ecosystem restoration, ecological land-use zoning, and payment for ecosystem services to incentivize conservation.

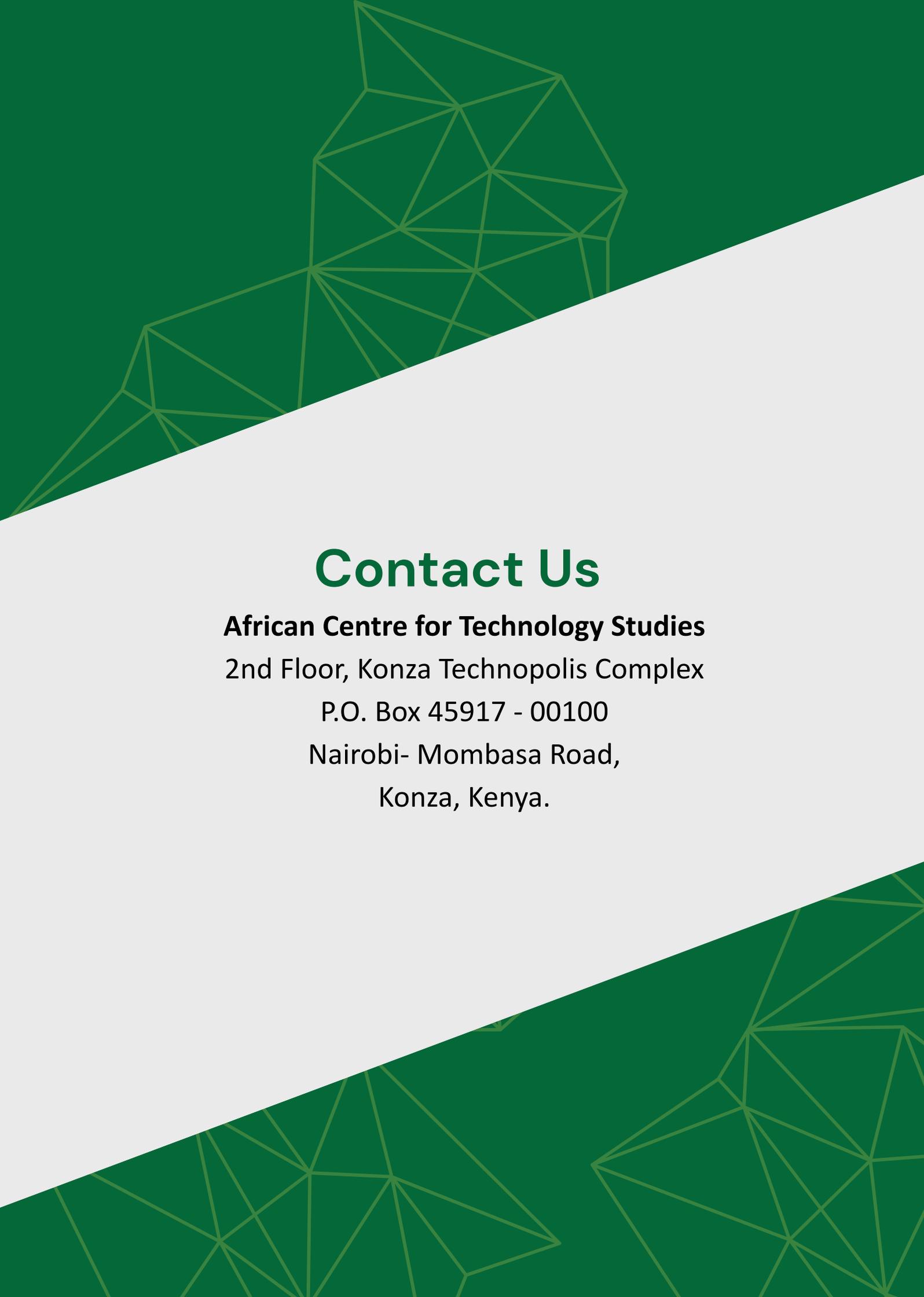
Conclusion

The Yala T-Lab Workshop reaffirmed the importance of wetlands as ecological, economic, and cultural assets whose sustainability depends on collaborative stewardship. The multi-stakeholder engagement process underscored the complex interplay of environmental degradation, governance challenges, and socio-economic pressures impacting the Yala Wetland. Despite ongoing threats such as

land use, weak policy enforcement, and limited coordination, the workshop highlighted clear opportunities for transformation.

Participants collectively identified actionable "seeds of change", including policy advocacy, education, restoration, inter-agency coordination, and enterprise development as key pillars for sustainable wetland management. The need for community empowerment, cross-sector collaboration, and the integration of traditional and scientific knowledge was a recurring theme. Tools such as the Wetland Monitoring and Management App offer promising pathways to strengthen data-driven governance and public participation.

By aligning efforts around shared goals, establishing clear implementation timelines, and holding each stakeholder accountable, the workshop laid a strong foundation for driving impactful change. Moving forward, success will depend on continuous engagement, adaptive planning, and long-term commitment from all stakeholders to ensure that the Yala Wetland thrives as a model for sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and resilient livelihoods.



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