

AQUA CONNECT

The Women and Youth
Economic Empowerment
in Fisheries Programme
Newsletter
(July-September 2025)



**TURNING LOCAL
FISHERIES INTO ENGINE
OF JOBS AND GROWTH**

LAUNCHED
JUNE 2024



Jobs



Youth



Empowerment

AfCFTA+
TradeMark Africa+
Mastercard Foundation



240,000+
Work Opportunities



\$100M+
In Fish Trade by 2028

5 YEARS
Programme

Turning the tide for women and youth in Africa's fisheries trade

In June 2024, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat and TradeMark Africa (TMA), in partnership with Mastercard Foundation, launched the five-year Women and Youth Economic Empowerment in Fisheries through Inclusive Market Access Programme to create more than 240,000 work opportunities and increase fish trade by at least \$100 million by 2028.

The programme focuses on equipping women and youth with skills, finance, digital tools and market access to trade more profitably in a sector where structural barriers have prevented their optimal participation. It also seeks to reduce trade barriers, improve logistics and strengthen AfCFTA's coordination through the newly created Private Sector Unit (PSU). Partners, including Lattice Aqua, KilimoTrust and MSC Global Consulting, are supporting implementation across seven countries.



Editorial Message from Programme Leadership



Themba Khumalo



Anataria Uwamariya

Africa's fisheries sector offers pathways for delivering decent and sustainable jobs for women and youth

By Themba Khumalo, Director, Private Sector Unit, AfCFTA Secretariat and Anataria Uwamariya, Director of Business Competitiveness, TMA

Africa's fisheries sector sustains over 12 million livelihoods and generates more than \$22 billion annually. Yet its full potential remains untapped, particularly for women and young people who dominate post-harvest processing and small-scale trade but face structural barriers that limit their potential. The Women and Youth Economic Empowerment in Fisheries Programme, launched in June 2024, aims to address this issue.

Implemented in seven countries in East and West Africa, including Cabo Verde and Comoros, and at 11 strategic border points, the programme is equipping women and youth with skills, financing and pathways into formal markets under the AfCFTA, while addressing safeguarding, logistics and digital linkages to make trade more inclusive. By centring these groups, the programme also supports the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade and contributes to more resilient food systems.

This newsletter highlights the programme's milestones and aspirations through stakeholder engagements and stories of resilience and growth in the fisheries value chains.



Women and youth at Rabira landing site at Apida Beach in Homa Bay County, Kenya - where fish is a lifeline for their livelihoods and nutritional needs. Photo Credit: Elizabeth Gathu, MSC Consulting.

Reflections from AfCFTA's Private Sector Unit on Opportunities in Fisheries Value Chains

Aquaculture's promise in propelling women and youth to success

With 71% of Africa's landmass bordered by coastline, the continent's fisheries sector holds vast potential to drive economic diversification and food security and inclusive trade. The Women and Youth Economic Empowerment in Fisheries through Inclusive Market Access Programme is taking early steps to harness this opportunity across Tanzania (including Zanzibar), Zambia, Uganda, Nigeria, the DRC, Comoros and Cabo Verde.

Consultative workshops in Tanzania and Zanzibar brought together policymakers, development partners, traders and cooperatives to identify value chain interventions. Stakeholders have highlighted the sector's capacity to stimulate the blue economy, expand cross-border trade and create opportunities for women and youth.

In Zanzibar, the fisheries sector supports about 50,000 fishers, while seaweed farming involves over 23,000 farmers,

producing 14,000 tonnes annually. High fish consumption, which is double the African average, underlines its role in nutrition and livelihoods. Investment in landing sites, cold chain facilities and processing hubs is expected to further boost growth.

Entrepreneurs like Irene Iraba, in her twenties, co-founder of Healthy Seaweed Company, and 25-year-old Nisha Masoud, founder of East Coast Seamoss Co. Ltd., are already demonstrating the sector's promise. Both are creating jobs for women, tapping into export markets, and eyeing AfCFTA opportunities, despite challenges with financing, certification, and technology.

Their stories reflect why targeted interventions in fisheries are important.

By: Masego Rethabile Maika, Analyst – PSU



Stakeholders at the Zanzibar national forum in July 2025

In-Country and Regional Programme Highlights

This quarter, the programme broadened its outreach to better understand the realities of fisheries value chain actors and shape strategies to unlock the sector's potential.

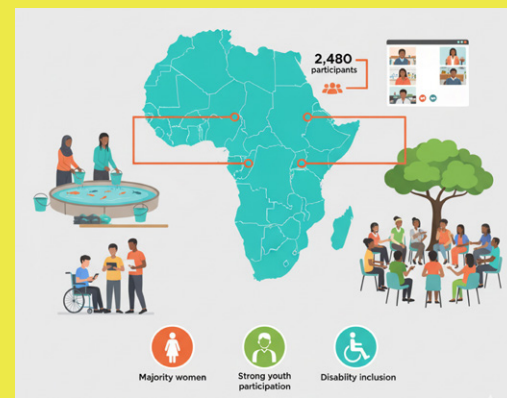
From Kampala to Kisumu, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Lusaka, the programme convened governments, traders, fishers, researchers, youth and women leaders, private sector players and civil society.

Key priorities emerged across all engagements: reducing high fish feed costs, harmonizing policies and standards, strengthening market linkages, removing non-tariff barriers, improving access to finance and expanding cold chain infrastructure.

Addressing these challenges will be critical to driving inclusive growth and building resilient, sustainable fisheries value chains across Africa.

Outreach Targets

By the end of the reporting period, the programme engaged 2,480 participants across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. Women were the majority, with strong youth participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Trainings focused on aquaculture, post-harvest handling, financial literacy and tips on post-harvest costs, digital opportunities to connect traders to regional markets.



“2,480 participants across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. Women were the majority, with strong youth participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities.”

Cross-Border spotlights and partnerships

The programme is fast-tracking investments in cold chains, aggregation, and trade corridors to strengthen fisheries value chains. In Zambia, support to the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET) led to the launch of new chapters in Siavonga, on the Zimbabwe border, and Kasumbalesa, on the DRC border. Siavonga is focused on production while Kasumbalesa targets trade, both now linked by a functional cold chain system.

In Uganda, national trade fairs and the World Aquaculture Safari created platforms for women- and youth-led enterprises to showcase value-added products. In Kenya and Tanzania, piloting innovations such as EcoSav Bags and Solar Ice Water Dispensers has reduced losses and operational costs, proving them to be scalable and practical for small-scale actors.

News Spotlights

Busia eyes fisheries transformation as County leadership and TMA deliberate on partnerships

On 17 September 2025, deliberations between Busia County Governor Dr Paul Otuoma and TMA set the tone for a renewed push to unlock the county's fisheries potential. Discussions focused on strengthening collaboration with women and youth to build decent and sustainable livelihoods along the value chain. Key challenges highlighted included limited access to finance, gaps in fingerling quality, high feed costs, and fragmented policies. Safeguarding concerns were also raised, with a call to create safer trading spaces for women and youth.

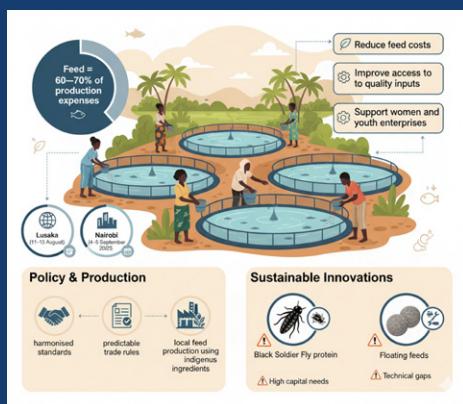
Digital systems could cut barriers and costs in Africa's fish trade

At the Intra-African Trade Fair 2025 on 5 September, fisheries stakeholders urged a shift from policy to practice



High-level panel convened by AfCFTA dissected role of digital tech in supporting inclusive trade in fisheries - Photo Credit - AfCFTA.

in digital trade. A high-level panel on the role of digital technologies in supporting inclusive trade in fish and fish products, convened by the AfCFTA Secretariat through the Fisheries Programme, explored how digital tools can expand markets, build resilience and accelerate AfCFTA implementation. Moderating the discussion, Eze Ugoalah, Head, Implementation Deployment, Pan-African Programs at the Mastercard Foundation, reaffirmed the Foundation's commitment to ensuring that women and youth fully benefit from opportunities within the fisheries sector.



Fisheries stakeholders deliberate on measures to lower the cost of fish feed

The high cost of feed, accounting for 60–70% of production expenses, remains a major barrier to the growth of Africa's fisheries and aquaculture.

At forums in Lusaka (11–13 August) and Nairobi (4–5 September 2025), stakeholders called for priority measures to reduce costs and improve access to quality inputs, especially for women and youth-led enterprises.

They identified harmonised standards, predictable trade rules and increased local feed production using indigenous ingredients as major priorities. Sustainable options, such as Black Soldier Fly protein and floating feeds, were viewed as viable but hindered by high capital needs and technical gaps.



Group Photo at the National Fisheries Forum in Lusaka Zambia on 12 August 2025



Maxwell Lorogoi, a Lattice community facilitator under the fisheries programme and a trader in Turkana County. Photo Credit: Maxwell Lorogoi.

The Stories of Change

Kamarinyang Aqua Park's transformation from idle ponds to thriving fish farms

Until March this year, 78 fishponds at Kamarinyang Aqua Park in Busia, Western Kenya, lay idle due to a lack of financial literacy, organisation and management systems. This changed after 130 community members, including women, youth and persons with disabilities, received training from MicroSave Consulting and African Women in Fisheries and Blue Economy Kenya.

The training equipped them with financial and group management skills, enabling members to reorganise into smaller teams, each taking ownership of specific ponds.

They introduced a contribution system of KSh 100 (approximately \$ 0.80) every two weeks to fund operations. By June 2025, 30 ponds had been stocked with tilapia and catfish, marking a turnaround in just three months.

With improved accountability, access to finance and an inclusive structure, the Aqua Park is now on a path to boost fish farming and local livelihoods. "Financial literacy has helped us move from just keeping fish to managing money, investing wisely, and building wealth together," said Christopher Baati Isiya, the park's chairman.

How tailored training is redefining fish handling in Turkana, Kenya

In Kalokol, on the shores of Lake Turkana in northern Kenya, fish trading has always been part of daily life. But traditional practices such as drying fish on sand compromised quality and reduced traders' earnings. That began to change when Maxwell Lorogoi, a trained community facilitator and fish trader, introduced elevated drying racks after receiving training from Lattice Aqua on best aquaculture practices. The simple innovation led to cleaner fish, higher market value and better returns for the community.

Maxwell also embraced digital platforms, posting fish for sale on Facebook. His first post generated three sales, demonstrating how small innovations, both practical and digital, can unlock new opportunities for local traders.



Drying fish on raised fish racks after program intervention. Photo Credit: Maxwell Lorogoi, community facilitator in Turkana County.



Maxwell Lorogoi, displays the day's catch of Nile Perch from Lake Turkana. Photo Credit: Maxwell Lorogoi.



Regional study calls for urgent action to drive inclusive growth

A Fish Market Characterisation Study by Kilimo Trust shows that fisheries contribute up to 3% of GDP in East Africa and support over 9 million people. Yet, intra-EAC fish trade accounts for 2% of exports, constrained by fragmented policies and weak infrastructure. The study calls for investment in storage and processing facilities, harmonised policies and tailored financing to unlock the potential of the target groups in the sector.



Strategic Partnerships

Partnerships remain central to impact delivery. This quarter:

- MicroSave Consulting (MSC) engagements with financial institutions such as Equity Bank Uganda, Stanbic Kenya, and Nile Microfinance to unlock fisheries credit products.
- Kilimo Trust's grassroots partnerships with processors' groups, cooperatives, and youth-led SMEs across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.
- Lattice Aquaculture, in collaboration with Healthy Seaweed Café and MyFish, supported value addition and sustainable aquaculture for women and youth in Tanzania.
- Lattice partnered with Impuls Africa to work with feed ingredient producers on aggregation and export and strengthen regional supply chains.

UNLOCKING OF AFRICA'S FISHERIES TRADE POTENTIAL

KEY STATS



CHALLENGES



FRAGMENTED POLICIES



WEAK INFRASTRUCTURE



LOW PROCESSING & STORAGE CAPACITY

RECOMMENDATIONS



INVEST IN STORAGE AND PROCESSING FACILITIES



HARMONISE FISHERIES POLICIES ACROSS EAC



INCREASE TAILORED FINANCING FOR TARGET GROUPS

Digital Trade and Policy Corner

Progress continued in harmonising trade policies and strengthening systems:

- Simplified cross-border trade protocols are being advanced along priority corridors.
- A gender-disaggregated trade database (ProData) under development to track women and youth participation in fisheries.
- Policy roundtables being organised to address barriers and unlock new regional opportunities.

Safeguarding and Inclusion

Ensuring safe and inclusive participation is central to programme delivery. This quarter included:

- Safeguard training for partners and community actors
- Facility improvements to ensure safe spaces for women and youth
- Youth-centred design integrated into programme activities to reduce risks and enhance engagement



Embedding inclusion and resilience in governance structures



Support for small-scale fisherfolk to adopt innovative solutions such as cage aquaculture, solar drying, cold chains, and efficient feed systems.



The Programme focus on integrating producers into structured nodes of the fish value chain. Priority areas include market linkages, digital platforms, SPS compliance, and regional trade facilitation under the AfCFTA framework.

In Photos



Women at the Bahari Seafood processing facility in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, preparing seafood for export. Photo Credit: Elizabeth Gathu (MSC Consulting).



Community facilitators in Mwanza, Tanzania, admire smoked fish at a post-harvest management training designed to equip them with skills to share with local participants in June 2025. Photo by Anthony Kasota (Lattice).



Visiting a seaweed farm in Zanzibar to gather insights that strengthen the program's broader work on economic empowerment for women and youth across marine and coastal value chains in July 2025. Photo Credit: MSC Consulting.



Community facilitators in Tanzania participate in a Training of Trainers session to equip them with skills to cascade knowledge to fish value chain participants in June 2025. Photo by Anthony Kasota (Lattice).



Programme participants at a value chain and financial literacy training during an interventions mapping workshop in Mwanza, Tanzania. Photo by Elizabeth Gathu (MSC Consulting).



Implementing Partners:

