KENYA MARINE AND FISHERIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE

FRESHWATER SYSTEMS

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ASSESS THE GENDER ROLES AND THEIR IMPACTS IN BLUE ECONOMY ACTIVITIES IN LAKE NAIVASHA TO SHARE FINDINGS FOR INFORMED DECISION MAKING



AUTHORS:

Waithaka, E., Loki, P., Mutie, A., Salima, O., George. T. (2026)

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KMFRI Headquarters
P.O. Box 81651 – 80100, Mombasa
Tel: +254 (041475151/4)
Email: ceo@kmfri.go.ke
www.kmfri.go.ke

KMFRI Naivasha Station
P.O. Box 837– 20117, Naivasha
Tel: +254 786 663 467
Email:naivasha@kmfri.go.ke

1. Introduction

Women and youth empowerment is a much-talked-about subject these days around the world, where both women and youth face enormous constraints in exercising their full potential. The core principle of this Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda is to "Leave No One Behind" by 2030. Obviously, inclusion of all is the very essence of these global goals of development. Documentation on the contribution of women shows how enabling women to play their full role in aquaculture and fisheries can boost production, alleviate poverty, and assist in the nutrition security of fish-dependent households (WorldFish 2016). This will be very helpful in addressing the constraining gender stereotypes. Globally, gendered divisions shape fisheries; men are more likely to control capture, fishing gear ownership, and formal decision-making structures, while women are more likely to work in post-harvest functions like processing, preservation, and marketing (FAO, 2020). According to (FAO, 2015), women are routinely left out of management and governance structures despite playing important roles in post-harvest fisheries operations in a variety of contexts, particularly in processing and marketing.

Many women have little influence over decisions about investments, resource management, or the money made from the fish trade.Though significant efforts have been initiated at various levels for promoting gender equity and mainstreaming gender discourse within the policy framework, there remains an evident gap between intent and the outcome, especially in the fisheries sector. Gender inequalities in economic growth and development can be barriers to shared benefits. This study emphasizes the significance of gender equality and highlights the challenges women and youth face in accessing opportunities. The findings are expected to bridge critical knowledge gaps, enabling more informed and just interventions that enhance both livelihood security and ecological sustainability in Kenya's blue economy. The study offers valuable insights for bridging gender gaps and achieving sustainable livelihoods in the fisheries sector.The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify and quantify the roles of men, women, and youth in fisheries and related economic activities (fishing, processing, transport, trading) along the shorelines of Lake Naivasha.
2. To investigate gender differences in access to resources, asset ownership, capital, and control of income in fishing households.
3. To examine how gendered roles shape vulnerability and resilience strategies to shocks such as drought, declining catches, and market fluctuations.

4. To generate and disseminate policy recommendations to support gender inclusive fisheries governance and decision-making.

2. Methodology

The study will be carried out along the shoreline of Lake Naivasha, covering all landing sites that vary in terms of size, market access, and community composition. The scope includes both household-level dynamics (division of labor, access, and decision-making) and institutional arrangements (BMU governance, market organization). The focus is on fisheries and associated value-chain activities. A comprehensive mixed study approach was undertaken targeting fish-dependent communities living around the five landing beaches (Banda, Karagita, Kamere, Oloidien and Tarambeta) along Lake Naivasha and are registered BMU members, approximately 750 members. The Kobo Collect tool was used for data collection and a structured and semi-structured questionnaire was used for key informant interviews with BMU leaders, community elders and Government heads in the sector, offering institutional insights in the fishing communities around the 5 landing sites. Data collected were entered in MS Excel pooled and subjected to various statistical methods for data analysis and presentation.

3. Key Results

Gender Roles & Responsibilities

The study found that fishing (57%), boat repair and gear mending (46%) were mainly male-dominated respectively, while fish processing (76%) and selling (41%) were mostly dominated by women respectively. Men have more influence on the decision pertaining on where to sell the fish (33%). Youth, on the other hand, play a significant

support role in fishing as either crew members or coxswain (28%) this also includes repair of boats, and the mending of fishing gear (19%). The study found that there is a low proportion of women who engage in fishing (4%) and the repair of boats and mending of gears (15%) (Table 1). The low number of women involved in fish harvesting is therefore consistent with wider global observations, where structural barriers and gender norms limit female participation in the sector. These findings also corroborate a study by (FAO, 2022) which argues that capture fisheries are traditionally considered a male domain due to cultural norms, physical demands, and high-risk exposure.

Table 1 Percentage (%) gender distribution in activities related to fisheries

Activity	Men (%)	Youth (%)	Joint (%)	Women (%)
Fishing	57	28	10	4
Fish Processing	7	5	13	76
Selling fish	27	9	24	41
Managing boats/gear	46	19	19	15
Deciding where to sell fish	33	12	32	23

However, the study found that there are activities that are jointly undertaken by men, women, and youths for instance, selling fish, deciding on the market, while those that are separately undertaken include boat repair and net mending. Previous studies showed that women were mostly involved in post-harvest functions like processing, preservation, and marketing (FAO, 2020) in the fisheries sector. However, there is a significant shift with more men and youth engaging in fish marketing.

Income, Decision-Making & Access to Resources

The study found that the average monthly income for the fishers, boat repairers, and net menders ranges between Kshs 15000-20,000, while the average income is Kshs 17,500. Male dominance in decision-making and on income use is still very evident, with the study revealing that males dominate by 48% followed by women at 28% while joint decision-making at a partly 21% (Table 2).

This implies that we still have gender disparities at the household level when it comes to decisions making on household incomes.

Table 2: Decision on income use

	Respondents (%)
Jointly	21
Men	48
Women	28
Other	4
	100

The study found that both women and men have access to credit and loans; however, women still encounter barriers to obtaining credit due to traditional and cultural barriers, among others, and because this gender justice remains elusive (Figure 3).

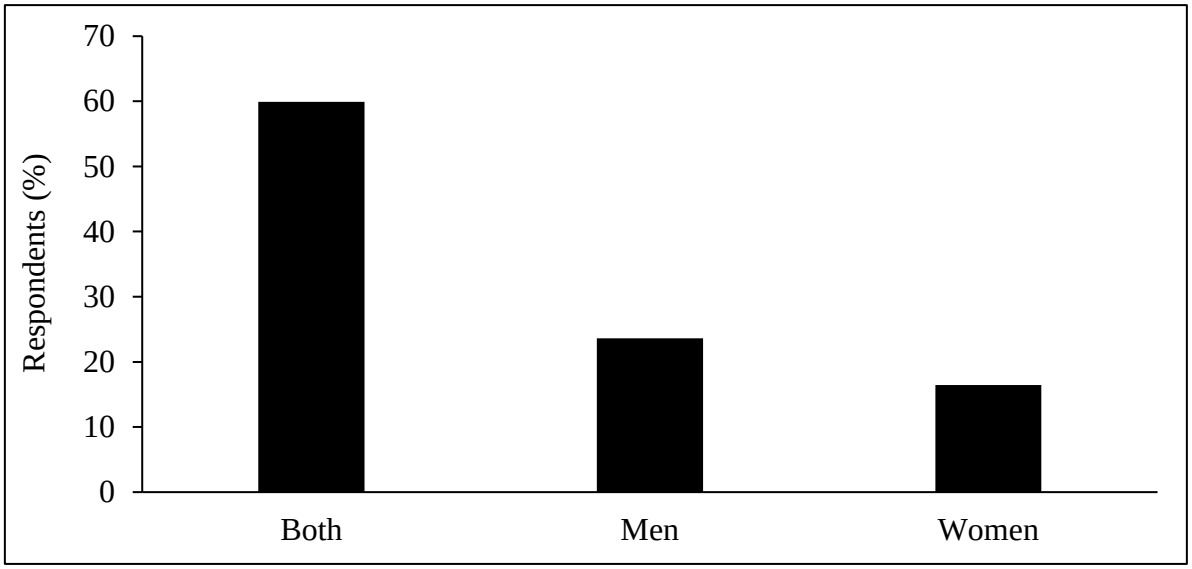


Figure 1: Access to credit or loans

Men, women, and youth participate in BMU meetings as registered members at (95%) representation (Table 3). Women and youth are under-represented in leadership positions e.g BMU leadership positions and decision-making processes in the face of an institutional framework on gender inclusion. With men's representation being at 50%,

followed by women(16%) and youth at (1%). Women and youth are usually given minor positions such as secretarial roles and membership to various committees like security and welfare (Table 4).

Table 3: Participation in leadership positions

	Respondents (%)
Both	31
Men	50
Women	16
None	2
Youth	1

Shocks, Coping, and Adaptation Strategies

Majority of the respondents indicated that they had experienced drought, insecurity or low catch in the past year and looked for adaptation strategies by diversifying their livelihoods in response to such shocks. Seeking alternative livelihoods (58%), borrowing money (24%) rationing food in their houses (12%), migration to other places in search of greener pastures (6%) (Table 5).

Table 4 Coping Strategy during drought, insecurity, and low catch

Coping Strategy	Respondents (%)
Alternative jobs	58
Borrowing money	24
Food rationing	12
Migration	6

The study found that both men and women have different coping and adaptation strategies during periods of scarcity. For instance, during periods of low fish catch, women are more affected because most rely on fish trading and

processing as their main livelihood. They cope by doing menial jobs, small businesses (like selling vegetables and fruits. Food rationing at household levels, depending on spouses' income, joining women group chamas, or buying fish from other beaches. Some even opt to migrate temporarily but mainly survive on whatever little catch is available.

Men, on the other hand, cope by engaging in alternative jobs (casual labour), migrating to other fishing grounds, or doing illegal fishing in other areas. They have more flexibility and more alternative income sources compared to women.

Key Informants Discussion

Gender roles

Fishing is a male-dominated activity, with few men participating in trade. Women, however, dominate in processing and trade, while youth are underrepresented in these roles across all five beaches. Support activities like net mending, boat repair, and fish transportation are dominated by both men and youths, with few women participating at Tarambete beach. Joint activities undertaken by both genders include fishing, trading, processing, net mending, transportation, marketing, and handling of fish.

Access and control over resources

There are no restrictions on accessing fishing grounds, landing sites, and markets. However, Men dominate in ownership of boats, fishing gears, and processing equipment across all the beaches. Women and youths have equal opportunities in accessing resources such as credit facilities, ice and storage facilities.

Leadership and decision making

Women and youths are well represented in leadership roles, holding positions such as secretary, treasurer, committee representatives, patrol leaders, welfare leadership, and storekeeper. However, they are given more roles than youths and are more responsible.

Cultural beliefs and barriers

Some of the cultural beliefs that hinder women and youth from participating in fisheries activity include the belief that women sitting on a fishing vessels when experiencing their menses or holding a fish by the tail can be a bad omen and might brings bad luck to the fish catch of the day.

Policies, programs, and support mechanisms from the government, donors and NGOs

Boats, fishing gears, life jackets, and the construction of bandas, pit latrine, modern fish processing and cold storage facilities are some of the programs supported by the county government. The national government (KeFS), Coast guards and KMFRI on the other hand have been providing support through conducting regular patrols on fishing grounds and provision of personal protective equipment. Conducting research on fish stock assessment and monitoring water quality respectively. Kenya Maritime Authority has been conducting training and capacity building programs on sea safety, survival techniques, training of coxswain and first aid techniques.

Opportunities

Empowerment through capacity building and training, sensitization programs e.g. (fishing gear technology, mending of nets and boat repairs) to women and youths to harness their potential in the fishery sector including mainstreaming gender studies and gender equality within the fisheries sector were some of the opportunities identified from the study.

In that regard government to explore possibility of providing incentives to women and youth by offering them credit facilities to expand their businesses and to enable them to start alternative livelihoods and Improve access to resources and subsidy programs to empower women and youth in the fishery sector.

General Observations

The study found that fishing boats were mainly owned by men, while women dominated in fish trade. However, both men and women participate in negotiating the prices. Fish from Lake Naivasha are mostly sold fresh, with a small proportion fried for the distant market. It was observed that women and youth are all visible in leadership and management roles of BMU.

Key constraints observed

Lack of cold storage facilities, poor road infrastructure, market space, land ownership, water hyacinth, fish scarcity, prices control of fish, illegal fishing, theft of gears, water hyacinth, lack of market for fish, Lake back-flow, lack of infrastructure, lack of official landing site are some of the constraints sited in the fishery sector.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The fisheries value chain exhibits a distinctly gendered division of labour. Men dominate fishing and transportation, undertaking demanding and high-risk activities such as navigating the lake, setting gear, and moving fish from landing sites to markets. Women, by contrast, are central to post-harvest processing, engaging in cleaning, drying, sorting, and packaging fish, as well as small-scale selling in local markets. Their work ensures continuous fish supply and preservation, especially in the absence of cold-chain facilities. Youth play flexible, supportive roles such as assisting in transport, processing, or gear maintenance, depending on household needs and opportunities.

Gender disparities are further reflected in access to productive resources and income control. Men own and manage most fishing assets including boats, nets, and transport equipment which gives them economic leverage and influence over household fishing income. Women have limited access to capital and gear, confining them to low-investment but labour-intensive post-harvest work that yields lower financial returns. Their participation is further constrained by limited storage space, lack of ice, and inadequate market infrastructure. Youth also face restricted economic autonomy due to minimal asset ownership and reliance on adults.

The study found that both men and women have different coping and adaptation strategies during periods of scarcity. For instance, during periods of low fish catch, women are more affected because most rely on fish trading and processing as their main livelihood. They cope by doing menial jobs, small businesses (like selling vegetables and fruits), food rationing at household levels, depending on spouses' income, joining women group chamas, or buying fish from other beaches. Some even opt to migrate temporarily but mainly survive on whatever little catch is available.

Men, on the other hand, cope by engaging in alternative jobs (casual labour), migrating to other fishing grounds, or doing illegal fishing in other areas. They have more flexibility and more alternative income sources compared to women. Overall, the emerging results show that gender roles significantly shape access to opportunities and participation in economic activities, while men dominate high-return roles. women sustain the value chain through post-harvest labour while Youths, occupying transitional roles face the challenge of limited ownership and decision-making power. Addressing these gendered inequalities is crucial for strengthening inclusivity and resilience of fisheries-dependent communities in the region.

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About KMFRI Naivasha:

Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute Naivasha is research station hosted by the State Department of Fisheries and the Blue Economy at Karagita centre. Our role is to carry out aquatic research on Lake Naivasha and its environs with an aim of advising management and guide in policy formulation on the sustainable management of the resources.



KMFRI Naivasha is currently focusing on:

- Assessing the impact of protection on the fishery of Lake Naivasha.
- Monitoring water quality parameters and possible sources of pollution on Lake Naivasha.
- Assessing fish stocks, distribution and abundance and factors influencing productivity on the fishery in order to inform management and policy formulation.