

Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture

The YISA program Q3 Impact Stories

June - August 2025



In partnership with



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Contributors

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- Anne Nasumba – Hydro Victoria
- Priscillah Aketch – Aquarech
- Calvince Aunda –RIAT

Introduction

This issue highlights some of the stories of the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture, a partnership program with the Mastercard Foundation and consortium partners led by Farm Africa that aims to strengthen resilient livelihoods through innovative aquaculture practices, enabling work opportunities for young women and men.

Background

The surge in demand for fish in Kenya represents a promising avenue for economic expansion through the aquaculture sector. Fish consumption is rapidly increasing with population growth and a shift towards healthier protein sources.

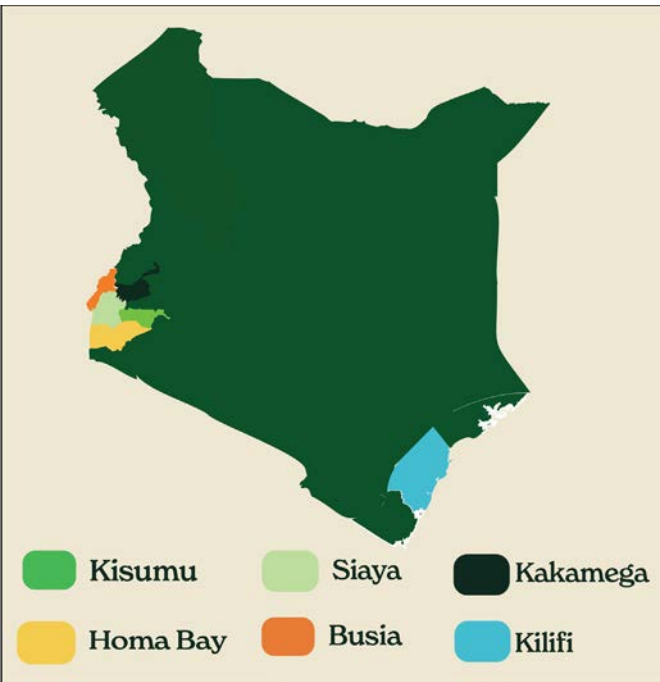
Kenya’s aquaculture sector holds immense potential for economic growth, offering employment opportunities for young women and men. However, despite this potential, the sector remains largely untapped by young people due to challenges such as limited awareness, skills, access to resources like capital and land, market constraints, and perception issues.



What we are doing

To address the issue and create employment opportunities for young people, the Mastercard Foundation in partnership with Farm Africa and consortium partners including Echo Network Africa Foundation, Lattice, Aquarech, Ramogi Institute of Advanced Technology, Hydro Victoria, and Livingwood Consultant Ltd is implementing the Empowering Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture Markets and Job Creation program also known as the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program.

Program counties



Program value chain

- Aquaculture
- Mariculture
- Soybean production
- Black Soldier Fly production

Program progress update

Launched in December 2023, the program’s goal is to create 150,000 jobs for young women (127,500) and men (22,500), including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and persons with disabilities (PWDs), in Kenya’s aquaculture sector across Kisumu, Homa Bay, Busia, Kakamega, Siaya, and Kilifi counties.

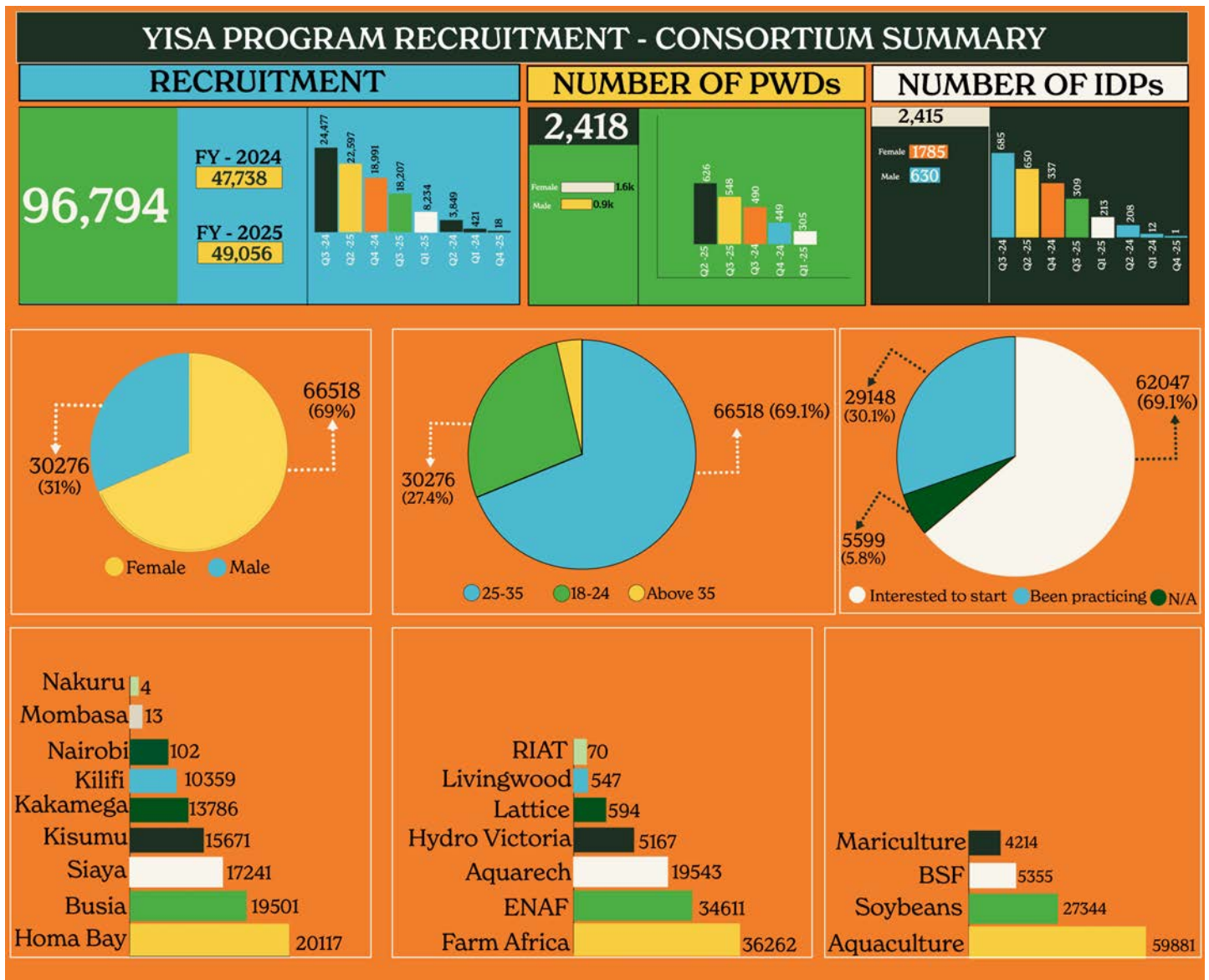
In the first year of program implementation, which ended in November 2024, YISA program successfully **trained 25,107** young women and men. In the second year of program implementation (December 2024 – August 2025), we have trained an additional **28,285** bringing the total cumulative number of participants to **53,392**. Of these, 73% are young women and 27% are young men. Of the total number of participants, **1,391** are persons with disabilities (PWDs), and **144** are internally displaced persons (IDPs).

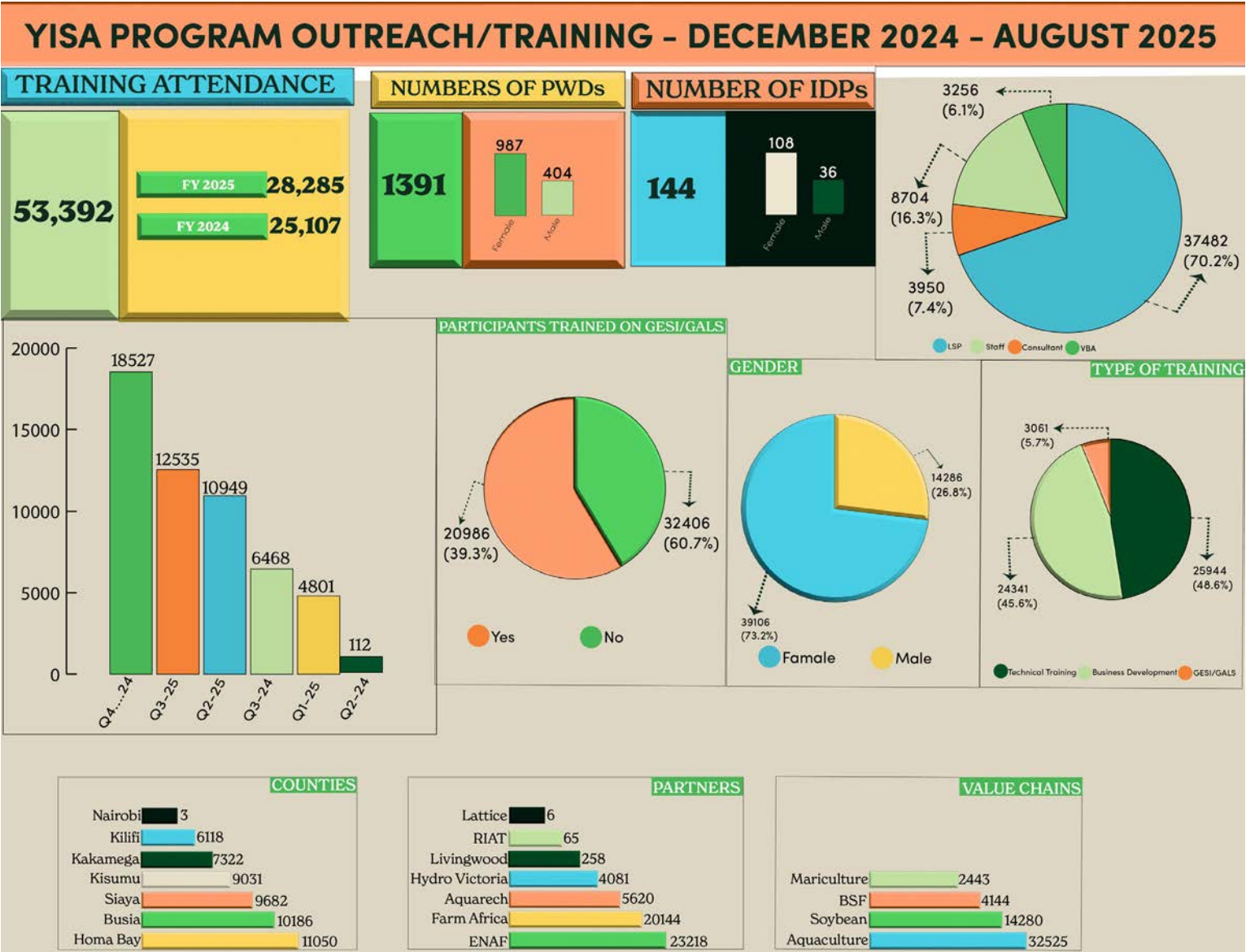
In the first year of implementation (December 2023 – November 2024), the YISA programme created **10,538** dignified and fulfilling jobs. By the end of the third quarter of the second year (August 2025), an additional **13,107** dignified and fulfilling jobs had been created, bringing the total cumulative number of jobs to **23,645** with young women accounting for 71% of the total jobs created across the aquaculture, mariculture, soybean production, and Black Soldier Fly (BSF) value chains.

96,794

young women and men recruited in the YISA program with 69% being young women.

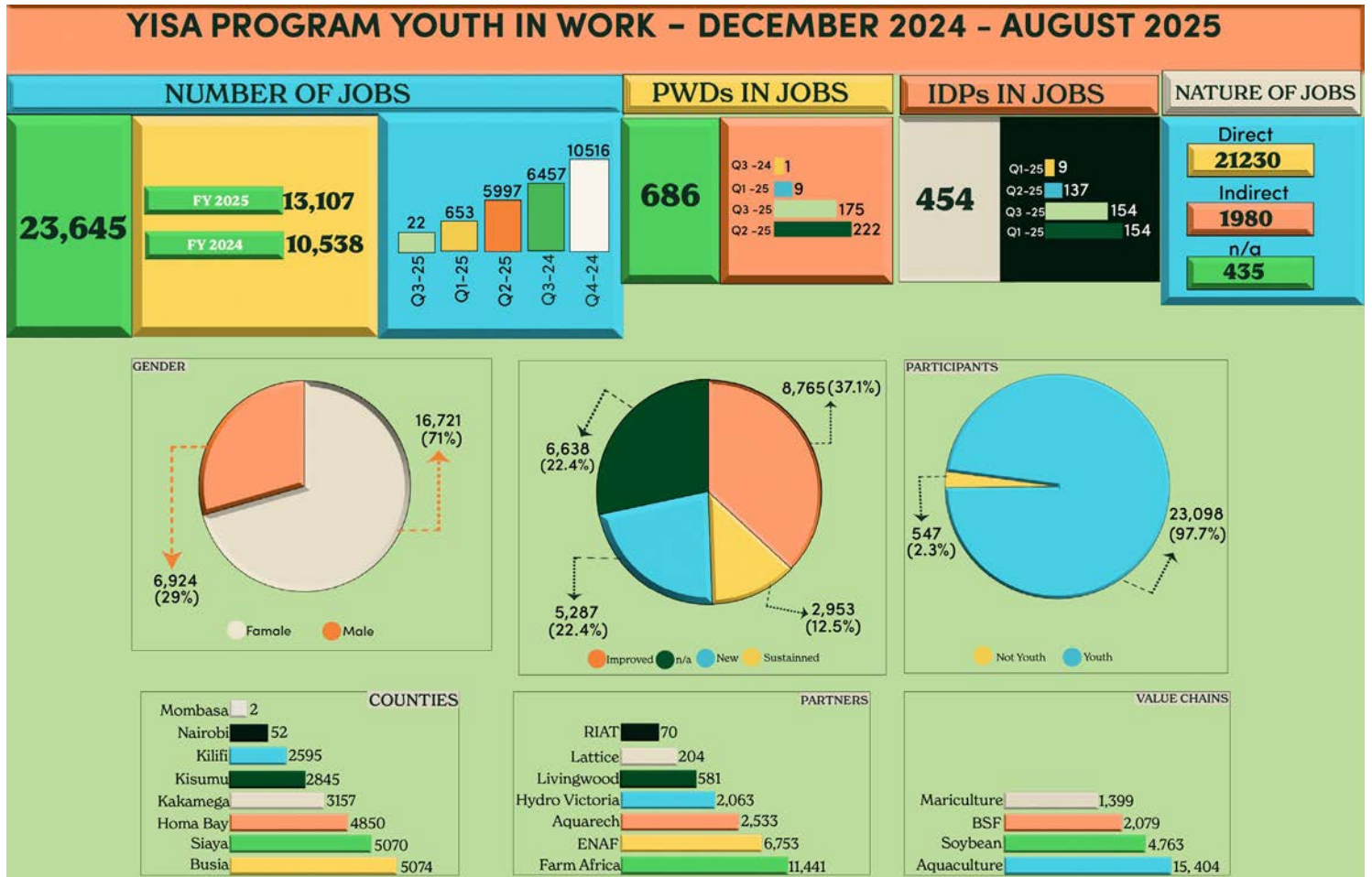
(Bottom left) Georgina Achieng, at the Billy Fish Eatery and Delicacies in Kisumu. Georgina is a YISA participant in Kisumu





53392

young women and men trained by the YISA program as at August 2025 with 61% being young women.



23,645

young women and men in work as at August 2025
with 71% being young women.

YISA program impact, goals and key interventions

Program impact	To enhance resilient livelihoods through innovative aquaculture practices to enable work opportunities for young women and men.
Program goal	To facilitate 150,000 inclusive, meaningful and dignified employment opportunities for young men and women as well as, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kenya's aquaculture sector.
Program's key interventions	- Outcome 1: Increase quality and productivity of fish (aqua and mariculture value chains) - Outcome 2: Increase opportunities for financially disadvantaged young persons (entrepreneurship development along the value chains through trainings) - Outcome 3: Growth of enterprises led or owned by financially disadvantaged young people (enterprise development through markets and finance linkages) - Outcome 4: Promote gender transformative approaches (deliberate linkages and training young women on leadership and governance.)

YISA program partners' key

Farm Afri-	Lead partner supports monitoring, evaluation and learning, technical expertise (aquaculture, mariculture, business delivery services, agronomy), builds capacity for key input market actors, and develops
Echo Network Africa Foundation	Establish a gender-responsive revolving fund to enhance equal access to finance for value chain actors, employ gender action learning system methodology to address gender barriers, and
Lattice	Train local service providers (LSPs) and ecosystem players to offer bundled services (input distribution, extension, produce aggregation). Establish a gender-responsive Challenge Fund to
Aquarech	Enhance the use of technology in farming systems and input access while developing viable market channels, such as franchise models, to help local fish traders (mama samaki) access quality fish for their
RIAT	Enhance collaboration between research and training institutions (eg RIAT, KEMFRI etc) to promote knowledge transfer and technology adoption to aqua value chain actors.
Hydro Victoria	Identify and build the capacity of black soldier fly (BSF) producers to boost the production of alternative protein sources for fish feeds.
Livingwood Consultants Ltd	Enhance the uptake of service delivered by LSPs by value chain players by connecting farmers to quality inputs, advisory services,

Frywell Model boosts fish traders' businesses



Hon. Farida Salim (in hijab) and Aquarech team posing for a group photo with YISA participants after a Frywell training and distribution of Frywell starter kits in Kisumu. Photo: Aquarech/Priscillah Aketch

The Frywell Model, introduced by Aquarech Ltd as part of the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) programme, is working to empower 20,000 young women in the western region of Kenya to generate dignified incomes through processing and frying fish.

This initiative is providing women with starter kits that include an eco-friendly jiko (a charcoal or wood-burning stove), frying pan, strainers, cooking oil, salt, a matchbox, aprons and parasols and seed capital of KES 50,000 to establish and grow their fish trading businesses. Besides the trading kits and seed capital, the traders also receive hands-on training in hygiene and business development services.

"The Frywell Model will play a key role in closing the protein gap by increasing the

availability of fish for consumption, meeting the growing demand for fish protein, and creating employment opportunities for young women and men through the YISA programme," says Dave Okech, CEO of Aquarech.

For Linda, a mother of two, the Frywell Model has been life-changing. Like many young women fish traders taking part in the YISA programme, she had struggled to provide for her young family. "Before Frywell, I felt stuck. It was hard to think beyond the next meal, and my children's future worried me deeply. However, when I received the Frywell package, I felt like someone finally believed in me," she shares with a smile.

Today, Linda is thriving. What began as a small fish-frying business has grown into a stable source of income and, more

importantly, has reignited her spirit. The most profound impact, she says, is seeing her children benefit directly from her hard work.

“My firstborn is now in school. That was my biggest prayer, and Frywell made it possible. Knowing I can provide for them, that I can give them a better start, has brought back a spark I thought would be lost forever.”

Looking ahead, Linda harbours another powerful ambition, to complete her studies at Kenyatta University (KU). “I would like to finance my fees,” she explains. “I hope through my fish frying business, I can save enough to go back to KU and finish my degree. I want to show my children that anything is possible, no matter where you start.”

To date, 293 young women have been empowered through the model, turning opportunities in aquaculture into pathways for dignified and meaningful work. Their efforts have resulted in the sale of 9,710 kg of fish, generating KES 3.88 million in revenue. Beyond the numbers, these women are transforming their lives and fueling economic growth in Homa Bay, Siaya,



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Linda
YISA programme partici-

Millicent proves the value of YISA program to her community



Millicent Atieno and her father George Ochieng preparing the soybean harvest for threshing. Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga

When Millicent Atieno, a Village-Based Advisor was introduced to the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) programme and the potential of soybean farming, she felt a sense of relief. She viewed growing this protein-rich crop, which is used in fish feed production, as an opportunity to raise funds for her studies in Social Work and Community Development at Mawego National Polytechnic. However, her parents were not receptive to the idea.

“When I introduced soybean farming to my parents, they were not very supportive. My father, in particular, was not pleased with the idea as he did not know much about it, and he even refused to allocate me an acre for cultivation,” recalls Millicent.

Despite the setback, she did not lose hope. Even without her father’s support, she went ahead and leased an acre of land as a demo farm. With certified seeds and farm inputs provided by Farm Africa, she harvested six bags of soybeans. She

sold all six bags and, together with the money she earned from delivering training sessions, managed to pay her school fees for the last semester.

“From the proceeds I earned, I cleared my outstanding school fees without any support from my parents and used part of the money to lease another acre for this long rains season.”

Besides the hurdles of acquiring land for soybean farming, Millicent was able to recruit at least 100 young women and men to join the programme, where at least seven were supported by Farm Africa to set up soybean demo farms.

Community shift to soybean farming

After witnessing how Millicent and the other young people benefited from soybean farming, many other members of the community developed an interest in the program.

“We were supported in many ways, including training on soybean farming from land preparation all the way to post-harvesting. The results were amazing, to the point of attracting interest from the wider community, even among older people who are not eligible to join the programme. To my surprise, even my father developed an interest in soybean farming,” she narrates.

According to George Ochieng, Millicent’s father, he was reluctant to embrace the idea of soybean farming at first, believing it was similar to cotton farming, where farmers invested heavily but earned little to nothing in return.

“When Millicent told me about soybean farming, I was hesitant. I asked her about the benefits – was this not just like cotton farming, where I saw farmers toil only to end up unpaid even after delivering their produce? I was not convinced and saw no need to get involved in soybean farming,” he recalls.

Things took a new turn when George witnessed young women and men who had embraced soybean farming being paid when his daughter was carrying out aggregation.

“I saw those she had recruited weigh their soybeans and receive payment right in front of me in my house. At that moment, I questioned myself for not embracing soybean farming earlier. From then on, I promised that when the long rains season arrives, I would fully immerse myself in soybean farming,” says George

True to his word, when the long rains season arrived between April and May, George cultivated soybeans on a piece of land he had previously been leasing out. From it, he managed to harvest a good yield.

“I planted soybeans, harvested, and sold the produce. Beyond the income, I have also discovered other benefits. Soybean enriches the soil, especially when the leaves shed, which improves fertility,” notes George.

He adds: “The one-acre piece of land where I planted soybeans used to perform poorly under maize. From the same acre, I would harvest less than ten kilograms of maize in a season. However, the returns from soybeans are far

better. If I compare the two, I can confidently say soybeans are the way to go, and I plan to scale up in the coming seasons. It is far better than the maize farming I was struggling with and getting almost nothing in return.”

As well as recognising the benefits for soil fertility, he urges the community to embrace soybean farming due its readily available market where they can sell the produce and pay bills such as school fees.

For Millicent, seeing her father finally embrace soybean farming has been both fulfilling and motivating. What began as her personal struggle to prove the value of the YISA program has now turned into a family success story that has inspired their community.

“Since I finished school in March, I haven’t felt the pressure to look for a job every moment because this program has kept me very busy. I now have something meaningful to do that is also bringing me income, which is very encouraging.

“What excites me most is that this work contributes to community development, which is what I studied and have always been passionate about it. I can see that we are developing together as a community. The young people are joining the program, and even older people are showing interest in soybean farming because of its benefits. Selling soybeans is much easier and more profitable compared to crops like beans, where even selling a full bag can be a challenge.”

With many farmers willing and ready to embrace soybean farming, Millicent lamented the lack of a threshing machine, which could save a lot of time at harvest time.

“The main challenge I face in soybean farming is during harvesting, where I have to rely on manual methods that are very time-consuming. However, if we could access a threshing machine, this problem would be solved and we would save a great deal of time,” she explained.

She urged the YISA program partners to consider extending the program beyond the six counties, saying: “Because this is a five-year programme running until 2028, I would urge that it be extended for more years so that it can reach other people in areas where it has not yet covered. For example, I have received calls from people in Migori asking me, ‘Madam, how can we get these trainings and how can we benefit?’ This shows that even those outside the current areas need

Casual laborers turn to fingerlings production for a better tomorrow



Maryann Mwambua and David Mwangi feeding the fry in one of the nursing units Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga

In Siaya, Kenya, a group of young women and men who once worked as casual laborers at Daraja Aqua Fisheries have transitioned into fingerling (young fish) production to build a sustainable future. Their journey has been made possible through the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program, implemented in collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation and consortium partners led by Farm Africa.

The 15 former casual labourers, led by their chairperson, Mary Mumbua, came together to form the Daraja Aqua Fisheries Self-Help Group. Their goal was to tap into the existing gap in the supply of fingerlings and create a reliable source of income.

"We are a group composed of young women and men. We seek to empower young people and the community around through the production of fingerlings. The group was formed in 2022. We were all working as casual laborers in the parent company, Daraja Aqua Fisheries. We wanted to create something of our own – something that would empower us and provide a sustainable livelihood," explains Mary.

The group joined the program after coming across an advert on social media posted by Livingwood Consultancy Ltd, one of the YISA program's implementing partners. "Livingwood were looking for local service providers, and soon after, they visited us at Daraja Aqua Fisheries to conduct a needs assessment for our group. That's how we became part of the YISA program as a nursing unit," recalls Mary.

Since joining the YISA program, the group's capacity in fingerling production has been greatly strengthened through a series of training courses. These have covered hatchery management, project management, nursing healthy fingerlings, best feeding practices, and marketing strategies, equipping the members with skills to run a successful enterprise.

"Through the training, we are mastering new skills in hatchery production. The marketing sessions have also helped us a lot. After gaining exposure during the Siaya County exhibition, we were able to connect with new people who showed interest in buying our fingerlings, and this has boosted our sales," Mary shares.

Beyond technical training

"One of the greatest strengths of the YISA program has been its holistic approach. Through Livingwood, we were connected to a local service provider who offered us regular extension services, mentorship and coaching. These efforts not only built our technical skills but also deepened our understanding of aquaculture," Mary explains.

With this support, the group renovated outdated ponds and hatcheries, expanded their membership by bringing in more young people, and scaled up their operations.

"We increased our fingerling production from 30,000 to 50,000. Improved practices led to a 10% reduction in mortality rates, and we reached new markets while forming partnerships with other hatcheries. We even launched youth-led branding efforts to give our group greater visibility. Today, we operate five ponds and are in the process of leasing more to meet the rising demand," she adds proudly.

Support from the Challenge Fund

One of the most significant milestones in the group's journey was securing support from the Challenge Fund, a turning point that brought their aspirations within reach.

"A particularly proud moment for us was when we received Challenge Fund support. It enabled us to acquire much-needed equipment, including pond liners, hapa nets, predator nets, weighing scales, graders, PPE kits and fish feeds. These investments greatly enhanced our efficiency and sustainability. It felt like a dream come true watching our vision take shape with the right tools in hand," Mary recalls.

Despite their impressive progress, the Daraja Aqua Fisheries Youth Self-Help Group continues to face hurdles that affect their operations.

"Our journey has not been without challenges. One major issue we still struggle with is the lack of water quality testing equipment, which directly affects the survival rates of our fingerlings. Nevertheless, we are not waiting for someone else to fix it. As a group, we agreed to make monthly contributions to build financial sustainability and set aside funds for purchasing water quality monitoring tools. We also conduct regular needs

assessments to guide our next steps and ensure we're growing in the right direction," Mary explains.

Daraja Aqua Fisheries Youth Self-Help Group remains focused on sustaining and scaling the progress they have made so far.

"Looking ahead, our focus is to further increase our sales and market reach, lease additional ponds to boost production, and strengthen our internal systems to ensure accountability and long-term success. We believe in transparency, planning and the power of young people," she states.

Mary also offers a message of encouragement to fellow young people: "To my fellow young people, I say this with all sincerity: take initiative. Opportunities like YISA exist, but it is up to us to step forward and make the most of them. We have the energy, the creativity and the drive; it is just a matter of believing in ourselves and acting on our dreams."



Maryann Mwambua and David Mwangi feeding the fingerlings in one of their ponds at Aqua Daraja. Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga



Aqua Daraja aquaculture production farm Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga



Aqua Daraja hatchery units Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga

Challenging societal norms with Black Soldier Fly farming



Venessa showcases her BSF larvae feeding process to Shadrack Kiplimo, BSF Technical Manager at Hydro Victoria Photo: Hydro Victoria/Anne Nasumba

Venessa Ominde, a graduate of Renewable Energy and Environmental Physics, has embraced a unique path in sustainable farming. Agriculture has been a tradition in her family for generations and now Venessa is combining her academic background with modern, eco-friendly farming practices. She grows vegetables and fruits, breeds rabbits, and pioneered the farming of Black Soldier Flies (BSF), transforming waste into valuable resources.

Venessa's journey into BSF farming began with curiosity sparked during a screening of the COP27 international climate conference. This introduction to BSF farming, an environmentally friendly practice that upcycles waste into nutrient-rich animal feed and high-quality manure, ignited a passion. "BSF farming is purely cyclic," she explains, "There's no wastage. I turn waste into high-nutrient larvae for animal feed and frass; a nutrient-rich organic fertiliser."

To kick off her venture, Venessa invested in a small-scale BSF setup using her savings from part-time online work. She constructed a 4x2

meter greenhouse from recycled materials, sourced food waste from local markets, and began nurturing her first generation of flies. Her initial attempts were full of challenges. Heat stress led to losses in her greenhouse, and local market suppliers charging for waste she once collected for free. But Venessa's resilience never wavered. She adjusted her setup, partnering with a busy hotel in Kakamega for a sustainable waste exchange.

The impact of Venessa's work extends far beyond her own farm. Her venture has created 14 jobs for local young women and men, who help in running day-to-day operations as well training other BSF farmers. Through the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program training and access to the challenge fund, she created a feed line for tilapia, catfish, and poultry consumption, selling over 1.5 tonnes of feed so far. She also set up six raised fishponds and has reached over 1,200 farmers across 13 counties, providing them with practical BSF farming tools, training and new market opportunities.

One of the key hurdles Venessa faced was gaining acceptance for BSF farming among her peers

and within her community. Despite the clear benefits of BSF as a high-protein, eco-friendly feed source, many young women in her area were hesitant to get involved, often due to societal norms and family concerns. “Compatibility with social norms has been our biggest challenge,” she says. “But we are working to change that by showcasing our practice at agricultural fairs and collaborating with government and NGOs to educate communities.”

However, the results speak for themselves, as Venessa explained: “We are seeing fish and poultry farmers save 20% to 35% on commercial feed costs, and their livestock are reaching market weight faster,” Venessa reports. “It’s satisfying to know we’re making a tangible difference.”

Looking ahead, Venessa is focused on growth. She plans to deepen market penetration within Kenya, explore new regions, and enhance the value of BSF products through innovations like BSF cake, oil and specialized animal feeds which she has begun to explore through feed formulation. Her vision is to empower more young farmers to recognize the hidden wealth in organic waste, helping them turn what is often discarded into a sustainable source of income. Venessa’s advice to other young farmers reflects her journey: “Rome wasn’t built in a day. As Haruki Murakami said, ‘Everybody has to start somewhere’. Take your first step and remember that perfection comes with time. Your future is in your hands, and with dedication, anything is possible.”



Venessa Ominde BSF producer holding an eggie – a breeding site for the BSF. Photo: Hydro Victoria/ Anne Nasumba

182

metric tonnes of black soldier fly larvae (BSFL) produced by program participants under BSF value chain.

169,499

grams of BSF eggs sold by participants program participants under BSF value chain.

Soybean farming brings smiles to persons with disabilities in Busia



Everlyne Namu, the chairperson of Amase Persons with Disability Group in Busia at her store in Amase centre. Photo: Farm Africa / Maurice Goga

The Amase Disability Group in Busia, Kenya is celebrating a bumper harvest of nearly 500 tonnes of soybeans, a protein-rich crop used to produce fish feed.

This is the group's second harvest of soybeans, after embarking on its production in 2024 when they joined YISA program and received support from Farm Africa in land cultivation and farm inputs.

Their first harvest of five tonnes significantly improved their livelihoods and motivated them to submit a successful application to the program's Challenge Fund, enabling them to significantly expand production.

Over the years, the group, which formed in 2013 with the aim of improving the livelihoods of its members, has engaged in table-banking initiatives. However, they previously struggled to sustain activities due to harsh economic conditions.

Now, prospects are a lot more positive, as the group's chairperson, Everlyne Namu, explained: "In the second season, the group received a grant of KES 1.5 million, which significantly contributed to the 500-tonne harvest. The results are clear: our members are happier, and many young

people who assist us have found employment opportunities through the YISA program."

Thriving against odds

Besides cultivating soybeans with the Amase Disability Group, Everlyne, who is visually impaired, defied the odds by leasing and cultivating one acre of soybeans on her own, from which she harvested 700 kilograms.

The proceeds from the sale brought significant relief to her life. She was able to clear pending school fee arrears and used the remaining balance to lease the same piece of land for the short rains season, with planting set to begin in September.

"I thank the Mastercard Foundation and Farm Africa for supporting persons with disabilities like me. Through their help, I have been able to pay school fees for my three children, one in college and two in secondary school. In addition, I have bought a sheep and paid the landowner for the piece of land I leased ahead of the short rains planting season," she remarks.

She attributed the respect she now enjoys in the community to the YISA program, noting that before its introduction, persons with disabilities

like her were often looked down upon in her community as having little to offer. Thanks to the program, however, their status in the community has been uplifted.

She remains determined that through soybean production she would be able to fend for the family and keep her children in school. “My children have been in school throughout the two terms. I am only left with the fees for the third term,” she says.

Cutting the cost of production

Everlyne hopes to buy a second-hand motorcycle to reduce the cost of transporting soybeans from her farm to her homestead. “During this harvest, I spent KES 3,000 on transportation. From the proceeds of my next harvest, I intend to set aside some funds to purchase the motorcycle,” she explains. She also hopes to buy iron sheeting and bags of cement to renovate her house.

Before joining the YISA program, life was challenging for Everlyne and her family, who solely depended on income from leasing out a small piece of land. “Before the program, I survived by leasing my only piece of land to provide for my family. The money I received went into paying school fees for my children, feeding the family and meeting other household needs. It was never enough, and at some point, I was forced to sell all my cattle,” recalls Everlyne.

She urges the Mastercard Foundation and Farm Africa to continue supporting persons with disabilities (PWDs) so that they can enjoy equal opportunities and feel fully included in society, free from discrimination. At the same time, she urged PWDs to move away from depending on handouts. She explained how shifting her own focus from handouts to soybean production has greatly improved her lifestyle.



Everlyne Namu, the Chairperson Amase Group for Persons with Disabilities(left) and group secretary Abigael Odunga weeding out grass in the soybean plantation in Alupe, Busia County. Photo: Farm Africa / Maurice Goga.

4,846

acres of land under soybean cultivation by YISA participants during the 2025 long rains season

2,423

metric tonnes of soybean harvested during the 2025 long season.

“I thank the Mastercard Foundation and Farm Africa for supporting persons with disabilities like me. Through their help, I have been able to pay school fees for my three children, one in college and two in secondary school. In addition, I have bought a sheep and paid the landowner for the piece of land I leased ahead of the short rains planting season.”

Everlyne Namu
YISA program participant

Maryanne's success in aquaculture



Maryanne Mboya taking record of fish harvested during fish harvesting from their three ponds. Photo: Aquarech/Priscillah Aketch

Maryanne is part of a new wave of young Kenyans reshaping their careers in partnership with the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program. While many of her peers are still figuring out their next steps, she has already charted her path in a growing sector: fish farming.

Her journey began in 2022, almost by accident. She had watched others try aquaculture but never imagined herself wading into it. Then, she attended an Aquarech training session. Something stirred.

"I was curious," she says, "I wanted to understand how it worked and whether it could change my life. More than anything, I wanted a way to earn an income and make sure families around me could access nutritious food."

That curiosity prompted her to join the YISA program, which provided her with more than just information. It also gave her tools, confidence and a community.

She learned how to manage ponds, keep records and feed fish sustainably. Through Aquarech's network, she accessed affordable fingerlings (young fish) and quality fish feed, easing the daunting first steps of her aquaculture journey.

Maryanne hit bumps along the road. Feeds were expensive, and every farmer knows the heartbreak of fish mortality. Each challenge tested her resolve.

"There were days I thought I couldn't do it," she admits. But she had support. Local service providers visited regularly, guiding her through setbacks. The Aquarech app also became her pocket mentor, helping her track growth and expenses.

Her turning point came when she received a grant from the program challenge fund. With it, she treated and restocked her pond, bought feeds, and prepared for her first big cycle. It was an investment of faith.

After eight months, the moment she had been

waiting for arrived: her first harvest.

“Eight months is a long time,” she says with a laugh. “But patience is everything in fish farming. When I finally saw the results, it was worth every single day of waiting.”

Her fish sold quickly to Fish Farmilia shops and local traders. With the income, she immediately reinvested, restocking her pond with confidence. This time, she was not just hopeful but experienced.

Her success rippled outward. Her siblings, inspired by her determination, joined her, and today they manage three fish ponds together. She has created eight jobs on her farm, giving other young people in her village an opportunity to learn, earn and believe in their own potential.

The impact on her own life is undeniable. With her earnings, Maryanne now helps pay school fees for her siblings and supports her household. Her once modest dream has turned her into a role model for her community.

In a field often seen as a male dominated field, she stands proudly as proof that aquaculture is a viable and empowering career for young women.

As she gazes over her ponds, she reflects with gratitude. “Thank you to Aquarech, Lattice and the other YISA program partners who supported me. Because of you, fish farming has transformed my life.”

“I wanted to understand how it worked and whether it could change my life. More than anything, I wanted a way to earn an income and make sure families around me could access nutritious food.”

Maryanne Mboya

YISA program participant



Young men supporting in the harvesting of fish. Photo: Aquarech/Priscillah Aketch



Grading of the fish harvested. Photo: Aquarech/Priscillah Aketch



Maryanne's brother grading the fish harvested. Photo: Aquarech/Priscillah Aketch

Boutique to agripreneur: Cynthia's journey



Cynthia Agnes sieving the harvested soybean. Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga

When Cynthia Agnes from Kisumu was referred to the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program by a friend during the recruitment of Village-Based Advisors (VBAs), she had no idea how much her life was about to change through the programme.

Before joining the program, Cynthia was running a boutique in Ahero town. Though she had studied agriculture, the lack of employment opportunities for young people pushed her into the boutique business. "The boutique business was there, but it wasn't doing well. Some days I wouldn't even sell anything," she recalls. "When the YISA program came in, it opened my eyes to farming as a business. Unlike the boutique, farming gave me real results."

Through YISA, Cynthia was trained in the production of soybeans, a high-protein ingredient

used to make fish feed. As well as good agricultural practices, she learnt about post-harvest handling, gender mainstreaming, life skills and more.

As a VBA, her role involves recruiting young people, especially young women and persons with disabilities, into the program and training them on everything from planting to harvesting and linking them to available markets.

To get her started, the program supported her with inputs for a demo farm. She went beyond that, investing in her own land as well. The results were impressive: "I had two acres of demo farms, which gave me 1,600 kilograms of soybeans: about 800 kilograms per acre. I sold 1,400 kilograms and earned KES 112,000. The rest I kept as seed for the long rains season this year. I did not take the money anywhere. I reinvested all of it into expanding my production to nine acres,"

Cynthia explains.

This season (March – June), she is harvesting again, expecting to harvest about seven to eight bags per acre. Alongside farming, Cynthia continues to train young people and women, many of whom she also employs on her farm during planting, weeding and harvesting. “The program has made me not just self-reliant but also an employer. I’m no longer looking for a job, I’m creating jobs,” she says with pride.

Cynthia’s ambitions, however, go far beyond her own farm. She is in the process of registering her business as an aggregator, with the goal of setting up a soybean aggregation center and, eventually, a processing company. With more than 120 young women and men already recruited under her guidance, she sees the vast potential in her community.

“In Ahero, after the rice season, farms are left idle. If farmers adopt soybean production, we can achieve high yields and strong markets. My dream is to aggregate soybeans from farmers and supply them directly to off-takers. One day, I want to own a processing plant that will add value to all the soybeans from this region,” she says confidently.

Cynthia is deeply grateful for the YISA program and its partners, particularly Farm Africa. “Soybeans were being grown before, but this program made us see it as a business, not just farming. I am several steps ahead now, and it’s because of the knowledge and opportunities I gained here,” she notes.

Her message to other young people is simple but powerful: “Let us not dwell only on white-collar jobs. There is money in farming. Through this program, you get not only training but also opportunities like access to markets and financial support, like the revolving loan funds to support production. Farming is dignified work, and you will never be disappointed if you commit to it.”

With her vision, determination and the support of the YISA program, Cynthia is steadily transforming from a small-scale farmer into a leader in soybean agribusiness, proving that agriculture holds vast opportunities for Kenya’s young people.



Cynthia threshing the harvested soybean. Photo: Farm Africa/ Maurice Goga



Cynthia winowing the harvested soybean. Photo: Farm Africa/ Maurice Goga.



Freshly harvested soybean. Photo: Farm Africa/ Maurice Goga.

“My dream is to aggregate soybeans from farmers and supply them directly to off-takers. One day, I want to own a processing plant that will add value to all the soybeans from

Cynthia Agnes
YISA program participant

Cage culture offers opportunities for young women and men



Members of Anyanga Smartcage Farmers making a cage. Photo: RIAT/Calvince Aunda

At least 20 young women and men participating in the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program have joined forces to establish the Anyanga Smartcage Farmers group and start fish cage farming at Anyanga beach in Kisumu.

According to Sharon Adhiambo, 24, who was a chapati (flatbread) vendor in her community before joining the YISA program life was full of uncertainty, and she knew she needed a change to build a better future as she worked hard to make ends meet. “Before joining the YISA programme, I was selling chapatis, but my stock was never enough to keep customers coming back,” Sharon explains.

The group was able to venture into fish cage farming thanks to the earnings they received during the training.

“We decided to save the money we used to earn allowances during training, and that is how we started our cage farming project. We pooled our resources to stock the fingerlings,” Sharon explains.

They now manage a fish cage stocked with fingerlings (young fish) and expect to harvest 30,000 fish by September.

“We are very hopeful because when we sell the fish at a minimum of KES 100 each, it could bring

in a total of KES 3 million for our group,” Sharon says.

The upcoming harvest marks a major milestone for Sharon and her team. It is the moment they will see their hard work pay off and create lasting change in their lives. This project not only promises financial growth but also creates jobs and empowers young people in their community.

“The biggest impact of the YISA program has been job creation. Being part of Anyanga Smartcage Farmers has given me hope that my life will be much better,” she says.

Sharon is growing confidence and her improved business skills have allowed her to dream bigger and plan for long-term success.

With the support and training from YISA, Sharon successfully expanded her food business and embraced aquaculture as a new source of income. She is now a vital part of a growing industry in her region, contributing to economic development and empowering young people around her.

“I am so happy with this program. It has made me feel proud and given me hope for a brighter future,” she concludes.

Former teacher leads soybean farmers' cooperative



For years, teaching was his calling. After completing his Early Childhood Development (ECD) training, Daniel Ngere knocked on the doors of several schools, hoping to secure employment. But despite applying countless times since 2009, he was never shortlisted. “I tried from 2009 up to date. I have not managed,” he reflects.

Disappointed but not defeated, he turned to farming, a path he had walked since finishing college. When the YISA program was introduced in his community, he saw an opportunity to pursue farming not just as a fallback, but as a profession.

The program is promoting the production of soybeans, in order to increase both farmers’ incomes and the availability of this protein-rich ingredient used in the production of fish feed.

“Through this program, I saw the importance of soybean production. That is why I decided to avoid the teaching profession and become a farmer,” he explains.

During the first year of program implementation, he combined farming with providing services, using his motorbike to transport soybeans for other farmers. Soon, he became one of the lead farmers in the program, setting up a demo farm where others could learn to grow soybeans. Though he only managed three acres in his first season, the results were life-changing. Through these activities, he earned KES 170,000 more than he had ever made from teaching or boda boda transport.

Careful with his earnings, he and his wife sat down to draw up a budget. “The first percentage, 10%, was God’s tithe. Then I saved 20%. I used

some for school fees, invested in goats and poultry, and the rest I put back into farming,” he says. From five goats, his herd has now grown to 12, alongside a thriving poultry project.

Encouraged, he expanded his soybean production from three acres to five. With his current harvest, he expects to make close to half a million shillings. “Before, I used to do everything alone as a family. Today, I can hire community members for labor. The program has not only employed me, it has also created jobs for others,” he says with pride.

The programme has also equipped him with vital skills in gender awareness, financial management, and gender training. He no longer spends money without consulting his wife, and decisions are made jointly thanks to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) training. “We were trained that you cannot be rich in a community where people are poor. We have to uplift one another,” he shares.

Beyond his own farm, he has become a key figure in cooperative development. As chairperson of Lambwe Farmers’ Cooperative, which now has 261 members, he is helping farmers fight against intermediaries, access certified soybean seeds and negotiate better prices for the soybeans produced. “Through the cooperative, farmers will get the right seed, and access inputs, and even loans at just 1% interest. We are also planning to establish our own soybean processing factory in Homa Bay County,” he says.

Soybeans, he believes, are the future. Unlike maize and beans, they withstand drought, floods and heavy rainfall. “Whether there is drought or heavy rain, soybean still does well. It is a resistant crop,” he explains. Even with market fluctuations, he sees great potential — especially if farmers unite and access quality seed.

His advice to fellow youth is simple: “Don’t just wait for white-collar jobs. Farming pays. Join groups, access revolving funds, and help yourself first before asking for help. There’s money in the soil.”



Some of the YISA programme participants who were supported with starter kits under the Frywell model. Photo: Aquarech/ Priscillah Aketch



YISA program: Quarter three impact stories

The YISA program quarter three impact stories provides up-to-date insights into the progress of program implementation and highlights impactful stories from the field.

Cover Photo: Philster Anita, removing chaff from soybean grain. Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga..

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