

Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture

The YISA program Q2 2026 impact stories

March - May 2026



In partnership with

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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.

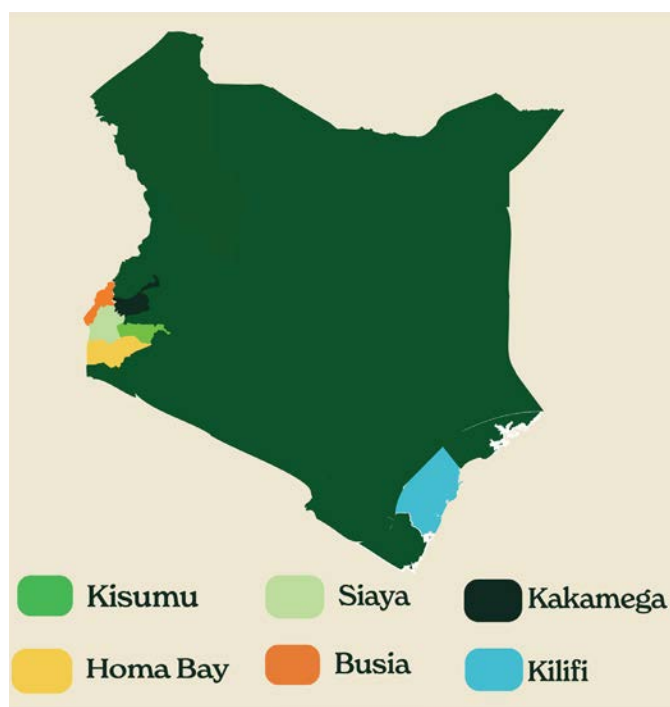
Kenya's aquaculture sector holds immense potential for economic growth, offering employment opportunities for young women and men. However, despite this potential, the sector remains largely untapped by young people due to challenges such as limited awareness, skills, access to resources like capital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



What we are doing

To address the issue and enable access to dignified and fulfilling work 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



(Bottom left) YISA program participant, Venessa Ominde
Photo: Farm Africa / Maurice Goga

Program value chains

Aquaculture

Mariculture

Soybean production

Black Soldier Fly production

Program progress update

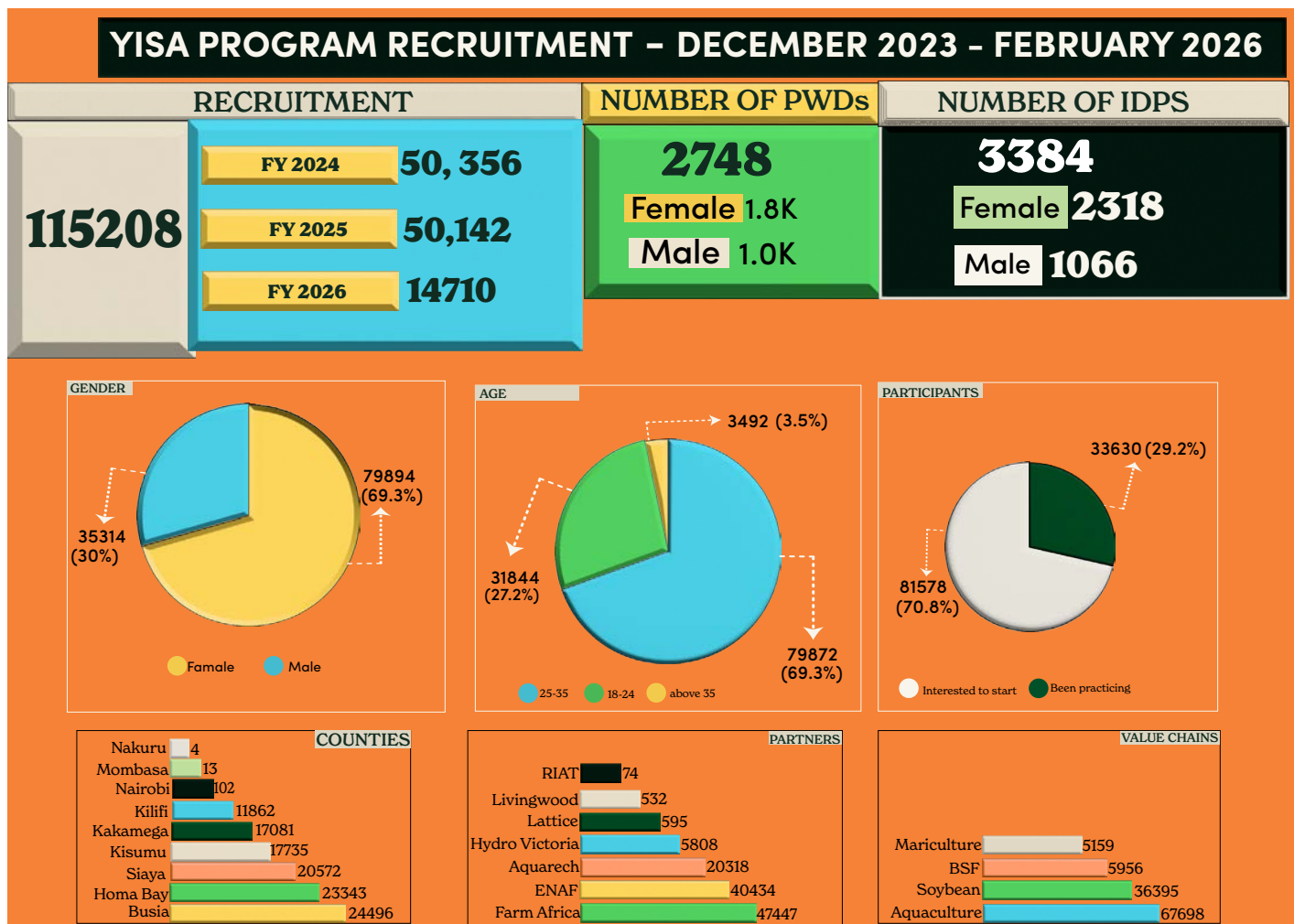
Launched in 2023, the program's goal is to create 150,000 jobs for young women (127,500) and men (22,500), including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and persons with disabilities in Kenya's aquaculture sector across Kisumu, Homa Bay, Busia, Kakamega, Siaya, and Kilifi counties.

In the first and second years of program implementation, which concluded in November 2025, the YISA program successfully reached 59,127 young people with work enabling interventions that included technical training, access to finance, entrepreneurship support, value chain development, market linkages and gender inclusion. Of these, 25,107 participants were trained in year one (December 2023–November 2024), while 34,020 were trained in year two (December 2024–November 2025).

By the end of quarter two of year three (December–May 2026), an additional 6207 young people had been reached through program interventions bringing the total cumulative number of participants to 65,334.

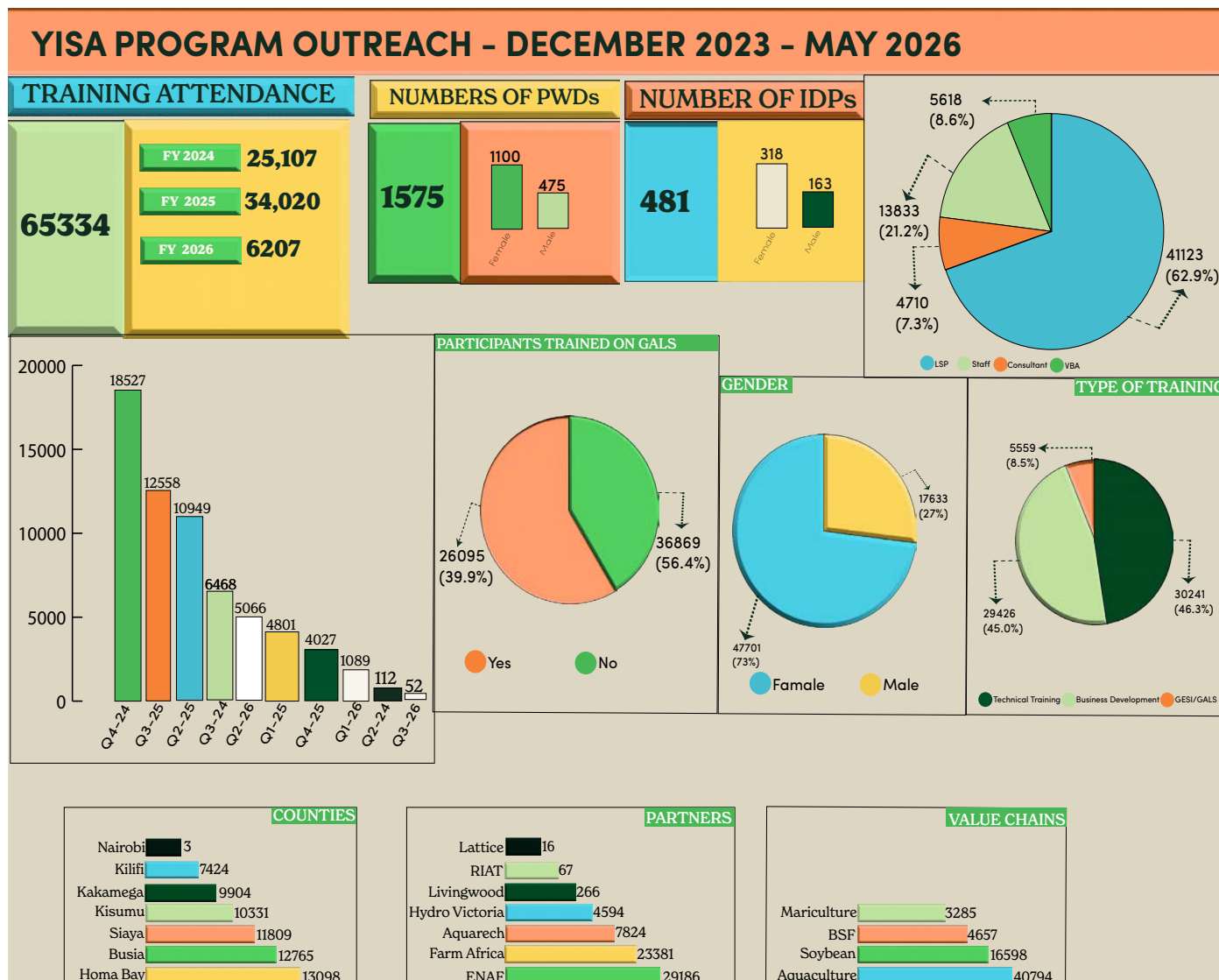
Participation in the program reflects a strong emphasis on reaching young women. Young women account for 73% of participants, while 27% are young men. The program has also made deliberate efforts to promote inclusion, with 1,575 program participants are persons with disabilities and 481 are internally displaced persons.

To date, the program has created work enabling opportunities for 56,381 young women and men across the aquaculture, mariculture, soybean production, and Black Soldier Fly (BSF) value chains.



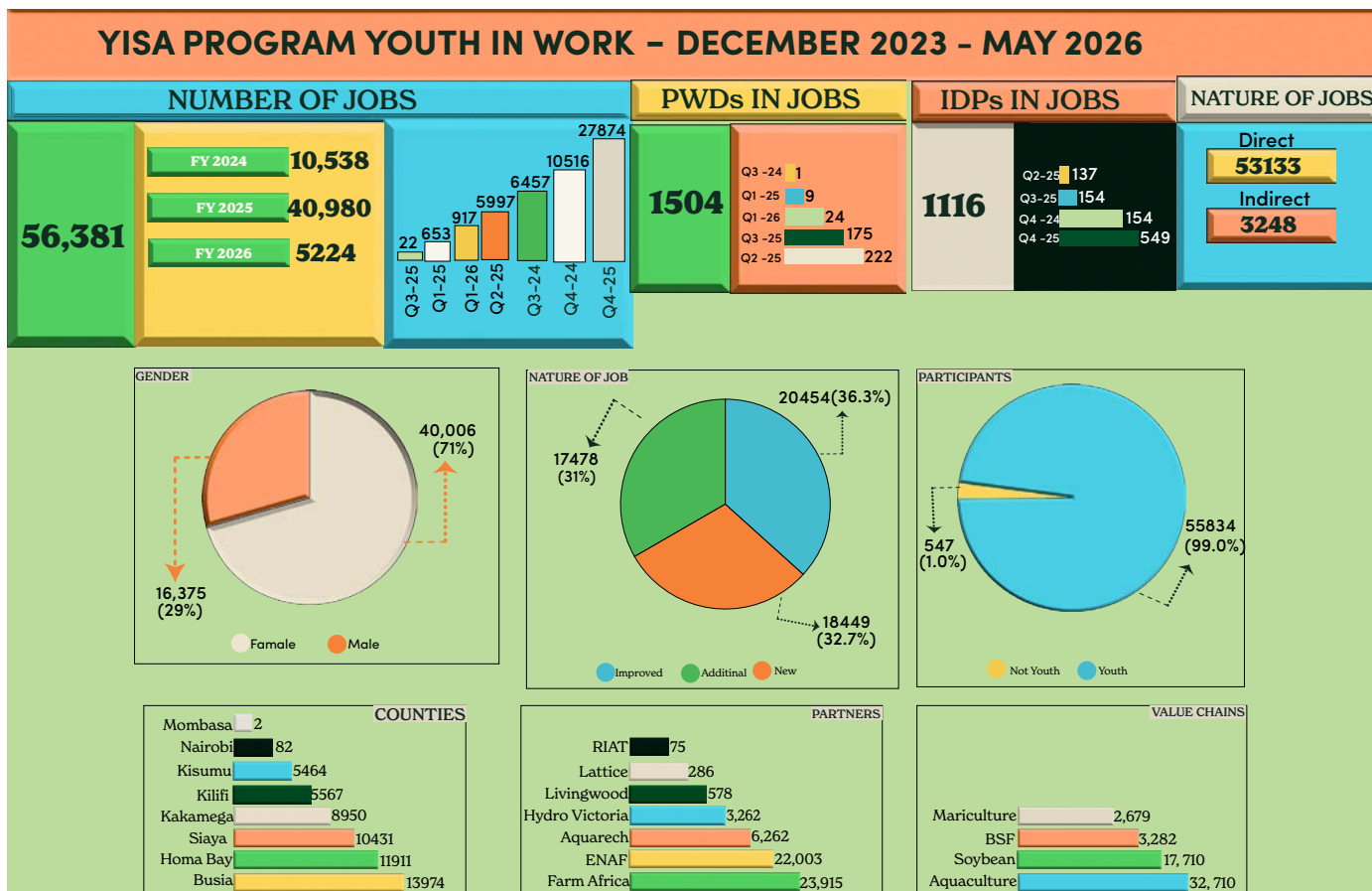
115,208

young women and men recruited
in the YISA program with 69.3% being
young women.



65,334

young women and men who have
been taken through work enabling
interventions, 73% being young women.



56,381

young women in work as at May 2026
representing 71% of the total number
of youth in work.

YISA program impact, goals and key interventions

Program impact	To enhance resilient livelihoods through innovative aquaculture practices to enable access to 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 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 activities

Farm Africa	Lead partner supports monitoring, evaluation and learning, technical expertise (aquaculture, mariculture, business delivery services, agronomy), builds capacity for key input market actors, and develops last-mile distribution models.
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 strengthen market actors' capacity in gender-transformative approaches.
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 ensure equal access to finance for value chain actors.
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 businesses.
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 services delivered by LSPs by value chain players by connecting farmers to quality inputs, advisory services, and markets.

12 Ponds, one vision: Mercy's story of growth



Mercy carrying out sampling of the fish harvested. Photo: Livingwood Consultants Ltd /Nancy Omondi

At 26, Mercy is a fish farmer, producer and Local Service Provider under the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program. She manages Winner Gift Fish Farm, where 12 ponds now support not only her household but also create opportunities for other young people in her community.

However, her journey into aquaculture was not always defined by progress.

Before joining YISA, Mercy balanced fish farming with horticulture and poultry keeping, constantly moving between activities just to survive.

"I was doing many things at once, but none of them was giving me real stability," she explains.

"Fish farming was there, but I didn't have the knowledge to make it work."

Limited technical skills led to low productivity, inconsistent harvests and unreliable income.

"There were times I would harvest fish and still not have enough to meet my needs. You plan, but things don't go as expected," she recalls.

When even basic needs were a struggle

Without a reliable income, even basic responsibilities became difficult. Paying school fees required constant adjustments, while long-term plans had to be postponed.

"You find yourself delaying things, hoping next time will be better. Even going back to school felt impossible at that time," says Mercy.

Although the farm existed, it did not yet provide security. It was work, but not a pathway to a better future.

Mercy's turning point came when she joined the YISA program. Through structured training and hands-on mentorship, she began to understand aquaculture in a completely different way.

She learned how to stock ponds properly, monitor fish growth, manage risks, and run her farm as a business.

“The training opened my eyes,” she says. “I started to see that this is something I can control if I do it the right way.”

The transformation was not only technical but also mental.

“Before, I was just working. Now, I am managing,” she says confidently.

The impact

The results soon followed.

During a recent harvest, Mercy worked with one pond measuring 300 square meters, stocked with 1,000 fingerlings. Despite challenges such as predators, especially birds due to the lack of hapa nets, she harvested 800 fish weighing 1.25 tons.

“When I saw the results, I was really encouraged,” she says. “It showed me that what I learned is working.”

For Mercy, this was more than increased production; it was proof that her efforts could finally translate into predictable outcomes.

“Now I can look at my pond and know what to expect. That gives you confidence,” she adds.

A new reality at home

At home, the changes are clear and deeply felt.

Fish farming is now Mercy’s main source of income, enabling her to meet household needs more consistently. She can pay school fees on time, provide for her family, and plan without the constant financial pressure she once faced.

“Life is different now,” she says. “I don’t struggle the way I used to.”

One of her proudest achievements has been resuming her education.

“I had stopped my studies because I did not have the means, but now, through fish farming, I have been able to go back to college. That is something I am very proud of,” says Mercy.

What once seemed out of reach is now part of her reality. “Now I am not just working for today, I am building for tomorrow,” she remarks.

The impact of Mercy’s progress extends beyond her own household.

She now employs five young people permanently and offers additional opportunities during harvesting periods.

“I know how it feels to struggle, so I try to involve other young women and men,” she says.

Her farm, once small and uncertain, has become a source of income and hope for others in her community.

Providing extension services to other farmers

As a Local Service Provider under the YISA program, Mercy is also supporting other farmers by sharing knowledge and guiding them on better aquaculture practices.

“What I didn’t know before is what I now help others understand,” she explains. “I don’t want them to go through the same challenges I faced.”

She also values collaboration among farmers.

“When farmers come together, we learn faster,” she says. “You don’t have to struggle alone when you can share ideas and solutions.”

At 26, Mercy is not only running a productive farm but also helping shape a path for others to follow.

Her journey reflects a broader truth: with the right support, aquaculture can move beyond subsistence and become a reliable, income-generating enterprise.

Her message to other young people is simple and grounded in experience.

“Fish farming is a good opportunity. If you take it seriously and learn, it can change your life.”

Looking across her ponds today, Mercy no longer sees uncertainty. She sees progress, stability and possibility.

“The biggest change is that now I have direction,” she says. “I know where I am going.”

From waste to wealth: How Christopher is transforming BSF and livelihoods in rural Kisumu



Christopher at his BSF production unit with a pack of eggies (egg-laying planks) in his hands Photo: Hydro Victoria /Anne Nasumba

In the quiet village of Burlowo in Northwest Kisumu, what many once dismissed as waste is now powering livelihoods, creating jobs and inspiring a new generation of young agripreneurs.

At just 29 years old, Christopher is emerging as a champion of sustainable aquaculture and circular agribusiness. A trained chemistry and biology teacher, he is the founder of Aderofarms Karateng', a growing enterprise integrating black soldier fly (BSF) farming with catfish production, poultry keeping, pig farming, African Leafy Vegetables (ALVs) and beekeeping.

But Christopher's journey did not begin with success.

Searching for a sustainable solution

Before joining the YISA program, Christopher mainly relied on poultry and vegetable farming to earn a living. Like many young agripreneurs, he struggled with the rising cost of commercial feed, which made it difficult to expand his business sustainably.

"As a businessperson, I needed a solution that would reduce production costs," Christopher explains. "BSF farming offered exactly that, using organic waste, which is readily available."

His turning point came through training conducted by Hydro Victoria under the YISA program. Through technical training, mentorship and exposure to sustainable aquaculture

practices, Christopher discovered the potential of black soldier fly larvae as a low-cost, nutritious alternative feed ingredient for fish and poultry production.

The program not only equipped him with technical skills but also changed how he viewed agribusiness opportunities within his own community.

Building a circular agribusiness model

Armed with new knowledge and confidence, Christopher constructed a refined BSF production unit using locally available materials. He then began mobilizing organic waste from institutions around Kisumu.

Today, he partners with Ciala Resort, which supplies up to 700 kilograms of organic waste three times every week. He also works with Ojola Girls School to recycle accumulated food waste into valuable feed resources.

“During the BSF training sessions, we learned that waste is everywhere, but we needed to ask where exactly ‘everywhere’ is,” he says. “We approached Ciala Resort and showed them how working with us would also reduce their waste management costs.”

With support from Hydro Victoria through the YISA program, Christopher received starter larvae, crates, nets and continuous mentorship that helped stabilize production within three months.

Creating jobs and opportunities for young women

Beyond improving his own livelihood, Christopher’s enterprise is creating meaningful opportunities for others in the community.

His farm currently employs four women and collaborates with a community-based organization comprising 67 women, 42 of them young people, who are actively involved in producing African Leafy Vegetables using organic fertilizer generated from BSF frass.

One of the most transformative lessons Christopher gained through YISA was the importance of gender inclusion in agribusiness.

Today, women are playing a central role in

production, value addition and income generation within the enterprise.

Reduced costs, increased incomes

Integrating BSF into his farming system has significantly reduced operational costs across his enterprises.

By supplementing poultry feed with BSF larvae, Christopher has reduced commercial feed use by 15 percent.

“Before BSF, we used 10 kilograms of commercial feed per 100 birds. Now we use seven kilograms and supplement the rest with live larvae. That difference is what has allowed me to increase my income and even start constructing my home.”

Through linkages created within the YISA program, Christopher also piloted catfish farming, where BSF larvae are now used as feed from the third month of production onward.

Meanwhile, the consistent supply of frass has boosted vegetable production, especially spider plant (Sagaa), while increased flowering attracted bees, inspiring the establishment of 15 beehives.

The farm’s first honey harvest produced 74 kilograms, all of which sold out immediately, with customers already placing advance orders for the next harvest cycle.

Changing community perceptions

When Christopher first introduced BSF farming in Burlowo, many community members associated the larvae with dirt and poor hygiene.

“Here, BSF larvae are called ‘kute,’ something people believe belongs in the pit latrines,” he recalls. “People were skeptical at first. But after visiting the farm and seeing the clean setup, they started asking for samples to try with their chickens.”

Today, attitudes are changing rapidly.

Farmers are increasingly adopting BSF as a cost-effective and nutritious feed supplement, while young people facing unemployment are beginning to view the enterprise as a practical business opportunity.

Putting Burlowo on the map

Christopher's work is now attracting attention far beyond his village. Aderofarms has hosted learning visits from organizations and stakeholders interested in sustainable aquaculture and circular economy practices.

"Burlowo is a small village whose name loosely translates to 'a hole in the land,'" Christopher says with a smile. "When vehicles started coming here regularly, people realized something important was happening."

The impact is also visible within the local food system. Residents who once travelled nearly 20 kilometers to Kibuye Market for vegetables can now access fresh produce locally through frass-supported farming systems.

Looking ahead

Despite the progress, Christopher still faces challenges, particularly transportation of organic waste and expanding production capacity to meet growing demand for BSF larvae, frass and training services.

Looking ahead, he hopes to establish additional BSF sites, expand participation of young people in sustainable aquaculture, and eventually venture into BSF oil production.

His vision aligns strongly with the mission of the YISA program: creating dignified and fulfilling work opportunities for young women and men through sustainable aquaculture.

His message to fellow young people remains simple but powerful:

"Start where you are. Waste is available. BSF farming can change your life, your income and your community."



A proud Christopher poses in front of his ongoing house construction project Photo: Hydro Victoria/ Anne Nasumba.



Christopher at his fishpond at Aderofarms Photo: Hydro Victoria/ Anne Nasumba.



Christopher feeding his poultry using BSF larvae at Aderofarms. Photo: Hydro Victoria/ Anne Nasumba.



Beehive section at Aderofarms. Photo: Hydro Victoria/ Anne Nasumba.

From fish trader to aquaculture entrepreneur: how YISA helped Deborah Ramona scale Aimba Aquafarm



Deborah (left) with one of her employees at her fish depot in Luanda. Photo: Lattice / Emmanuel Mayuka

During a visit to Aimba Aquafarm in Siaya County, we met Deborah Ramona, a renowned fish aggregator whose determination and entrepreneurial spirit have transformed a modest fish business into a thriving aquaculture enterprise.

For the past six years, Deborah has been engaged in fish aggregation, supplying fish to customers across western Kenya. What began as a small venture in 2019, financed through personal savings, has grown into a business that supports livelihoods, creates employment, and contributes to the local

aquaculture value chain.

"I established the business in 2019 with a little starting capital from my savings. At the onset there were challenges, but the business grew as the years progressed. We had built demand for Aimba Aquafarm's fish," recalls Deborah.

Despite building a loyal customer base, Deborah faced major obstacles that threatened the growth of her business. The lack of cold storage facilities meant she constantly battled fish spoilage, resulting in losses and limiting her ability to meet market demand. At the same time, the high cost of fish feeds constrained production in her cages.

“Clients wanted a consistent supply. I had the cages and the fish, but no freezers to keep fish fresh between harvest and sale, no cooler boxes for transport, and no weighing scales for accurate orders. Every day was a race against spoilage,” she says.

A turning point through the best fish farmers competition

While searching for opportunities to strengthen her business, Deborah learned about the ‘Best Fish Farmers Competition (BFFC)’, an initiative aimed at identifying and supporting innovative fish farmers and students in Kenya’s aquaculture sector.

“I learnt about the BFFC from other fish farmers in Siaya. When I attended the competition, I submitted Aimba Aquafarm’s business details. Months later, I was informed that my business had qualified for the YISA program Challenge Fund,” she recounts.

That single application became a turning point.

Through the YISA program and the Lattice Challenge Fund, Deborah received technical training on water quality management, feeding practices, fish health management and farm management. More importantly, she received critical post-harvest handling equipment.

“Through the YISA program, my business received a lifeline. They supported me with post-harvest handling equipment, including freezers, cooler boxes and weighing scales. I also received fish feeds, which helped me increase production,” she says.

Growing a business and creating jobs

The support enabled Deborah to expand her production capacity and improve operational efficiency. Before receiving support, she operated only 10 fish cages. Today, she owns 25 cages of varying sizes, significantly increasing her ability to meet customer demand.

“Through the support I received from the program, I was able to grow my business. After selling the fish, I reinvested the profits and added more cages. I now have 25 cages and can meet customer demand more consistently,” she

explains.

The growth of Aimba Aquafarm has extended far beyond cage expansion. Deborah has established fish depots in Luanda, Sabatia and Bungoma, expanding her market reach and bringing quality fish closer to consumers.

The business has also become a source of employment for many young people and women within the community.

“In my three depots, I have employed three people in Luanda, three in Sabatia, and three in Bungoma. At the farm, I have ten employees and one driver. I also work with between 20 and 30 women who collect fish from me and sell them. In the evening, they return with the payments and earn income to support their families. Bodaboda riders also benefit because they handle fish deliveries for our customers,” says Deborah.

Transforming livelihoods

Today, Deborah is no longer worried about fish spoilage or the high cost of feeds. The business generates sufficient income to support her family, educate her children and assist her parents.

What started as a small fish aggregation business has evolved into a thriving aquaculture enterprise that supports dozens of livelihoods across western Kenya.

With her sights now set on building a nationally recognized aquaculture brand, Deborah’s journey demonstrates how targeted investments, technical support, and entrepreneurial determination can unlock growth and create opportunities for entire communities.

Her message to aspiring entrepreneurs is simple:

“Do not wait for big money to start. Use what you have and begin from there.”

A future reimagined: how Amina Katana transformed her life through YISA



Amina Katana frying at fish frying point in Kilifi.

In the quiet village of Mgandini in Kilifi County, Amina Katana's story reflects the resilience of many young women striving to overcome hardship and create a better future for their families. Her journey into adulthood took an unexpected turn when she left school early to raise her first child as a single mother. Faced with limited opportunities and the heavy burden of responsibility, Amina returned to her family home, where she found both the comfort of her mother's support and the harsh reality of an unstable household income.

The challenge of survival became even greater following the passing of her father. Determined

to help sustain the family, Amina's mother introduced her to fish mongering — a trade deeply rooted in the coastal economy and a vital source of livelihood for many households in the region. Although the small business enabled Amina to contribute to family needs, limited working capital kept her trapped in a cycle of subsistence, unable to expand or improve her income.

A turning point through the YISA program

A major breakthrough came in December 2024 when the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program reached her community through the Echo Network Africa Foundation (ENAF). Through the program, Amina and members of the Amkeni

Widows Group participated in intensive Business Development Service (BDS) training designed to strengthen entrepreneurship among young women and men in aquaculture value chains.

The training equipped Amina with practical skills in record-keeping, profit calculation, customer management and business planning, transforming her perspective on her enterprise. For the first time, she began to see fish trading not merely as a survival activity but as a business with the potential for growth and long-term stability.

The YISA program also introduced Amina to the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), a community-led empowerment approach that promotes inclusive economic participation and household decision-making. Through the Vision Journey Map, Amina was encouraged to think beyond daily survival and develop a clear vision for her future and that of her children.

“Through the trainings in business management and the Vision Journey Map, I learned to set goals for my life and plan the steps to reach them. Now I see clearly where I want to go,” Amina shares.

Unlocking opportunity through financial inclusion

The impact of the program became even more tangible when the Amkeni Widows Group accessed a KES 200,000 Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) facilitated through the YISA program by ENAF. The fund was designed to improve access to affordable financing for young women who are often excluded from conventional financial systems.

With a personal loan of KES 20,000, Amina was able to significantly expand her fish business. Before accessing the loan, her limited capital allowed her to handle only 5–10 kilograms of fish per day. Today, she manages between 15 and 20 kilograms daily, increasing both her sales and household income.

The growth of her business has strengthened her family's economic security and improved the wellbeing of her children. As a mother of two, Amina now relies on her enterprise as the primary source of livelihood for her household, enabling her to consistently provide food, school fees and other basic needs.

“I am very grateful to ENAF and the YISA program for giving me an interest-free loan that helped grow my fish business. Without this support, it would have been very difficult to increase my capital,” she says.

Building a future beyond survival

Today, Amina's journey is no longer defined by hardship alone. Through the support of the YISA program, she has transitioned from struggling for daily survival to building a pathway toward long-term economic independence. Guided by the Vision Journey Map, she is now saving towards purchasing land and constructing a permanent and secure home for her family.

Her story demonstrates the transformative impact of combining entrepreneurship training, inclusive financing and social empowerment approaches to unlock the potential of young women in aquaculture-dependent communities. By investing in women like Amina, the YISA program is not only strengthening individual livelihoods but also contributing to more resilient households and inclusive local economies.

Amina's success now serves as a source of inspiration within her community, proof that when young women are equipped with the right skills, financial tools and opportunities, they can transform small businesses into sustainable enterprises and create brighter futures for the next generation.



Gender Responsive Catalytic Fund- Revolving Loan Fund



KES 276M

Total disbursed
(95% of approved)



11,575

Total participants reached with RLF



83%
Recovery rate

Year	Approved (KES)	Disbursed (KES)	Disbursed %	Participants reached	Recovered KES
Year 1	143, 778,061.35	126,914,604	88%	5,305	2,202,556
Year 2	146, 898,174.42	149,205,845	101.6%	6,270	69,590,239
Total	276,120,449	276,120,449	95.0%	11,575	71,792,795

Strengthening soybean production through the Village-Based Agent (VBA) model



Ambrose Kipkorir, YISA program Agronomy Officer with Juliet (VBA) in Homa Bay County and program participants during a field monitoring visit by the officer. Photo: Farm Africa / Maurice Goga.

The Village-Based Agent (VBA) model is a community-led approach through which the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program delivers interventions within the soybean value chain to participants at the grassroots level. The model selects and trains specific participants who then act as Village-Based Agents, offering last-mile bundled services to fellow farmers within their communities during and after the program implementation.

A Village-Based Agent is a trained and empowered community member who acts as both a change agent and a service provider, supporting farmers with practical solutions that improve productivity and market access. Through this model, VBAs play a critical role in ensuring that program benefits reach more farmers in a sustainable, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

By strengthening local capacity, the VBA model promotes knowledge transfer, service delivery and community empowerment. VBAs are equipped with the skills, tools and resources needed to support fellow farmers through a range of integrated services that strengthen the soybean value chain.

Bundled services delivered through the VBA model

VBAs provide a range of integrated services that support farmers and strengthen soybean production within their communities. Soybeans are a high-protein crop used to produce animal feed, including fish feed. These services include produce aggregation and market linkages, last-mile extension support, farmer training and capacity building, mechanization and land preparation services, last-mile input distribution and weather index insurance solutions.

For Juliet, a Village-Based Agent (VBA) based in Homa Bay County, the YISA program has become a powerful vehicle for empowering young people and strengthening soybean production within the community. Through the VBA model, she provides training on good agronomic practices, supports produce aggregation and links farmers to reliable markets.

According to Juliet, participants have embraced the training and are actively applying the knowledge and skills gained to improve their farming enterprises.

“The fact that farmers can access this knowledge free of charge through the YISA program is a great motivation. In most cases, such training opportunities come at a cost. The program has also enabled farmers to access quality seed varieties, particularly SB-19, which performs very well in this area,” says Juliet.

She points to the story of Rehema as one of the many examples of transformation resulting from the program’s interventions.

“Before joining the YISA program, Rehema was already growing soybeans, but after undergoing the training, she adopted improved farming practices and expanded her production.

“She now cultivates two acres of pure-stand soybean and uses recommended pest and weed management techniques, unlike before when she relied on traditional methods such as hand weeding with a hoe. As a result, her yields have increased significantly. She is among the many participants who have experienced the positive impact of the YISA program,” Juliet explains.

For many farmers, the VBA model has transformed the way they produce and market soybeans.

Nancy, a YISA participant from Homa Bay County, says the program has addressed many of the challenges farmers previously faced, from production to marketing.

“Before the YISA program, we used to grow soybeans using traditional methods such as broadcasting seeds to save time. However, after receiving a series of trainings from Juliet, our local VBA, we adopted improved farming practices such as planting pure soybean stands instead of mixed cropping, row planting, proper spacing

and effective pest and weed management,” says Nancy.

The adoption of these improved practices has significantly increased her productivity.

“When I was using the broadcasting method, I would harvest only five to six bags per season. After applying the knowledge gained through the training, I can now harvest up to 20 bags per season,” she adds.

Beyond production, VBAs also equip farmers with critical post-harvest handling and marketing skills to reduce losses and improve returns.

“We have also been trained on proper harvesting, handling, storage and preservation of soybeans to minimize post-harvest losses and maintain quality until the crop is ready for the market,” recalls Nancy.

Working closely with off-takers, VBAs aggregate produce and connect farmers to ready buyers, eliminating one of the biggest challenges soybean farmers previously faced.

“We used to grow soybeans, but finding a market for our produce was always a challenge. Sometimes we would store our harvest for a very long time while waiting for buyers, which affected our income and planning,” says Nancy.

Through the YISA program and the support of their local VBA, farmers now have direct access to structured markets and timely payments.

“With the coming of the YISA program, our VBA links us to ready markets, making it easier to sell our produce. Once the soybeans are delivered, payment is made instantly through M-Pesa, which has greatly improved our cash flow and confidence in soybean farming,” she adds.

Soybean aggregation through youth-led market systems

Access to reliable markets was one of the key challenges facing smallholder farmers. To address this gap, the YISA program, through Farm Africa, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with GreenWells Company to provide a structured market for soybeans produced by YISA participants.

Under this partnership, VBAs aggregate soybeans from smallholder farmers and supply them to GreenWells Company, creating a reliable market channel and ensuring farmers receive fair and timely payments for their produce.

The company currently works with 21 VBAs who aggregate soybeans and other crops, including sorghum, maize and beans, from farmers across the region. Through this youth-led aggregation model, VBAs serve as a critical link between producers and buyers, reducing transaction costs and strengthening farmers' bargaining power.

The partnership between GreenWells Company and the YISA program has strengthened soybean aggregation and improved the quality of produce supplied by smallholder farmers.

"Through the VBA network, we can aggregate quality produce promptly and consistently meet buyer orders. Working with farmers under the YISA program has enabled us to achieve greater consistency in both the quantity and quality of soybeans supplied to the market," says Bernard Juma, CEO of GreenWells Company.

He added: "We have witnessed significant improvements in product quality because the program works closely with smallholder farmers and VBAs throughout the entire production cycle. Farmers receive training on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), enabling them to access quality seed, use appropriate inputs and adopt recommended farming techniques."

The VBA model positions Homa Bay County as a leading soybean producer in Kenya

According to Kennedy Opiyo, Director of Agriculture, Homa Bay County, the VBA model under the soybean value chain in the YISA program has positioned Homa Bay County as the leading producer of soybeans in Kenya.

"When you talk about the VBA model, I would describe it as very ingenious because, for any intervention to succeed, you have to work with people who are already established at the grassroots level. The model identifies individuals who are proactive and influential within their communities and who already work with groups

of farmers," notes Kennedy.

One of the greatest strengths of this model is its sustainability. Even in the absence of the project, a VBA can continue operating within the same framework.

"The model also introduces a business dimension, meaning that a VBA is not just a farmer but also an entrepreneur. This business aspect makes the model more sustainable because it creates incentives for continued service delivery beyond program support," says the Director of Agriculture.

He added: "Another reason the model works is its multiplier effect. Once you empower a VBA, it becomes their responsibility to empower other farmers. A single VBA may work with 300, 500 or even 700 farmers. Instead of reaching every farmer directly, the programs reach them through the VBA network."

According to the Director of Agriculture of Homa Bay County, the county now stands as the leading soybean producer in Kenya thanks in part to the YISA program.

"When you look at our figures in terms of soybean production in Homa Bay before 2023, and soybean production in Homa Bay in 2026, we can actually quote very credible statistics. For example, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics puts Homa Bay at number one in Kenya in terms of soybean production, and this goes back to produce made in the year 2024 and 2025, that is post coming of the YISA program. And largely speaking, I would say that it is one of the many projects that have actually uplifted soybean production, because one, it reached to the very groups that are energetic, the very groups that are determined, that is the young women and men and they have really picked it very well," remarks Kennedy.

From untapped ponds to youth-led opportunity: how YISA is transforming mariculture in Kilifi



Mariculture Technical Lead, Martha Muteti (second-left) along with members of Ihaleni Kakuluni Self-Help Group led by Claris (second-right). Photo: Farm Africa / Maurice Goga

Along the shores of Nzombere Village in Mnarani Ward, Kilifi County, once underutilized intertidal ponds managed through traditional practices are becoming a platform for empowerment, leadership and economic opportunity of young people.

The story of the Ihaleni Kakuluni Self-Help Group demonstrates how the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program is helping young people unlock the potential of mariculture while strengthening community cohesion and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

Founded in 2011, Ihaleni Kakuluni Self-Help Group was initially composed mainly of elderly community members. With the introduction of the YISA program, however, young women and men were intentionally integrated into the group, creating opportunities for intergenerational

learning and shared leadership.

The group initially focused on mangrove restoration along Kilifi Creek. Over time, support from various development initiatives enabled members to venture into small-scale mariculture activities, including the farming of prawns, crabs and milkfish.

Before YISA: limited opportunities and underutilized resources

Before joining the YISA program, the group's mariculture activities remained small-scale and largely subsistence-based. Production was constrained by limited technical knowledge, poor pond management practices, inadequate access to quality fingerlings, and low investment

capacity.

Through YISA, the group received technical training on pond construction and management, and crab, milkfish and prawn farming, as well as support with production inputs, including fingerlings and feeds.

“The YISA program has really helped us. Before this program, as young people, we did not know how to construct these ponds. Today, we know how to feed, when to feed, the right quantities to use, and how to manage the ponds effectively,” recalls Claris Zawadi Secretary of Ihaleni Kakuluni Self-Help Group.

The support extended beyond training. The group received 2,500 prawn fingerlings, which were stocked in a 30 by 40 meter intertidal pond.

“We expect to harvest them around September and earn approximately KES 150,000,” adds Zawadi. A turning point came for James when two officers from the YISA program visited the area, recruiting young people to join the program.

The impact of GALS training

To strengthen youth leadership and gender inclusion, YISA introduced the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), equipping participants with tools such as the Vision Journey Map, Gender Balance Tree, Challenge Action Tree, and Empowerment and Leadership Map.

The training has transformed leadership structures within the group. Prior to YISA, leadership positions were predominantly held by elderly men. Today, young women and men actively participate in decision-making.

“Before YISA, there were no young people or young women in leadership positions. Today, many young women and men have taken up leadership roles. I am the group’s secretary, and our vice-chairperson is also a young woman,” says Zawadi.

The impact of the training extends beyond the group and into participants’ households. GALS has helped challenge traditional gender norms and promote shared decision-making within families.

“Through the GALS training, women in the group have been given opportunities to take on different responsibilities. Even at home, when

I shared what I had learned with my husband, he supported my participation in the group and allowed me the opportunity to engage fully in these activities,” recalls Zawadi.

She also notes significant changes in household financial management.

“Before the Happy Family Tree training, I had little involvement in decisions on how my husband’s income was spent. After the training, I explained the importance of discussing household budgets together because I also contribute financially. Today, we make decisions jointly,” she explains.

The program’s ripple effect in Nzombere village

The benefits of the program extend far beyond the group’s members. Community members are increasingly engaged in mariculture-related activities, creating additional economic opportunities within the village.

“Community members have also seen the benefits of this program. We often engage them to supply crablets, allowing them to earn an income. We also involve them in mangrove restoration activities along the creek,” says Zawadi.

The group’s success has generated interest among other young people in the area, demonstrating that mariculture can provide a viable pathway to employment and sustainable livelihoods.

Diversification and sustainability

Beyond crab and prawn farming, the group has diversified its activities to include oyster farming, seaweed production, beekeeping and continued mangrove restoration.

Looking ahead, members plan to reinvest earnings from mariculture into expanding and strengthening their enterprise. One of their key priorities is repairing a dilapidated boardwalk and constructing a training center that can generate additional income by hosting training activities and learning visits and constructing new ponds.

The group believes that these investments will not only increase their income but also create a sustainable hub for aquaculture learning and community development.

How Barrack turned one cage into five through YISA's interventions



Barrack feeding the fish in one of his cages at Obaria beach in Homa Bay County. Photo: Lattice / Emmanuel Mayuka

After graduating with a diploma in clearing and forwarding and with no work opportunities coming his way, Barrack turned to fish cage farming at Kamolo Beach in Homa Bay County.

“After graduating from college, I realized that employment opportunities in Kenya were very limited. Because I could not find a job, I decided to venture into fish farming as a form of self-employment. When I started the business, I began with just one cage,” says Barrack.

Despite venturing into fish cage farming, Barrack had little knowledge on the venture.

“I had challenges when starting out. First, I had to wait a long time since this is a long-term venture,

harvesting only comes after about a year. I started with just one cage, which meant that even after a full cycle, I would have to wait another year for the next harvest, making the process quite demanding.

“My intention was to scale up the business, but that wasn’t possible. The income from a single cage was not enough to cover both operational costs and my family’s needs, along with other personal expenses.”

Then came YISA

Barrack first learned about YISA and the Lattice program through two extension officers from Bay Rice Farm. They came to Kamolo BMU with information about the program, and Barrack applied. He was selected as one of the program participants; a turning point he describes with clear gratitude.

Then came the Challenge Fund

During the training Barrack was informed about the Challenge Fund, a funding opportunity within the YISA program that supports the enterprises of young women and men in the form of grants.

Barrack was able to apply for the Challenge Fund and thereafter had the opportunity to take part in the business incubation offered by the program, where he was trained on good farming practices.

“Through the program, I’ve gained knowledge on water testing, water quality, oxygen levels, and acidity; things we didn’t understand before. I have also been trained on better farming practices, including stocking rates, proper feeding, and feed quality,” he recalls.

From one cage to five cages

After the incubation, Barrack received KES 180,000 in fish feeds and KES 100,000 in financial support and used it to expand his operation to five cages. With three cages already in operation; two measuring four by four meters and one six by six meters, Barrack used those resources to build an additional six by six meter cage, bringing his total number of cages to four. He has since leased a fifth cage, expanding his operation significantly.

The impact of YISA

Because of the YISA program interventions, the business has an average revenue of KES 100,000 per cycle. As a result, Barrack has now created work opportunities for other young people from his community.

“I have employed two full-time workers, a young woman and a young man who help me with the operations of running and maintaining the cages. Also, during the peak periods like harvesting, I usually engage more casual laborers. I harvest three tons of fish in every cycle” remarks Barrack.

He added: “My children are also in school, and my household is stable. The farm that once could not sustain one family now sustains several,” jovial Barrack remarks.

The bigger picture

Barrack’s story is not unique to Homa Bay. Across YISA’s intervention zones, young people locked out of formal employment are building viable

livelihoods in the fisheries sector, with the right training, the right inputs and a program that backs them before the market will.



One of the fish cages owned by Barrack. Photo: Lattice/ Emmanuel Mayuka.

“My children are also in school, and my household is stable. The farm that once could not sustain one family now sustains several.”

Barrack Onyango
YISA program participant

Beyond the normal fish value addition: the business hidden in fish remnants



Laura at the fish market having collected the remnants of fish which she uses as a raw material in fish feed production. Photo: Livingwood Consultants Ltd/ Nancy Omondi

At busy fish post-harvest handling sites, piles of fish remnants often lie scattered after the best fish are sorted and shipped out. They attract flies, produce foul odors, and symbolize loss: of value, income and opportunity. Most people hurry to clear them away, keeping them out of sight and out of mind. Laura, too, once walked past them like everyone else.

Today, she sees them differently. What many considered waste has become a valuable resource in her hands. She now organizes, processes and transforms fish remnants into a high-demand ingredient for fish feed within the aquaculture value chain, turning an overlooked problem into a thriving business opportunity.

Laura's journey began when she joined the Youth in Sustainable Aquaculture (YISA) program as a Local Service Provider (LSP). At the time, she was not operating an aquaculture-related enterprise and had not identified fish remnants as a viable business opportunity.

Through a structured profiling process, Laura was selected and onboarded as an LSP, formally positioning her within the aquaculture value chain. This marked the beginning of a transformation that would change not only her livelihood but also her perspective on value addition and sustainability.

The program exposed her to business development services (BDS), mentorship and coaching, as well as market-oriented thinking, which reshaped her view of available resources.

What many considered waste, Laura began to see as an untapped opportunity with the potential to generate income, reduce losses and contribute to a more sustainable aquaculture ecosystem.

From training to enterprise

Livingwood Consultants Ltd's technical team provided Laura with targeted coaching focused on enterprise structuring, aggregation, handling standards and market positioning. During one focused technical session, she was introduced to a practical pricing model that enabled her to calculate costs, profit margins and business sustainability. What once seemed like a scattered activity quickly evolved into a structured enterprise.

"I used to see the piles and think they were useless. After the training, I understood that farmers are always looking for affordable feed ingredients. That is when I decided to organize this properly," she recalls.

Laura began by collecting fish remnants from processing points. In some cases, she receives the material in exchange for offering cleaning services, while in others, she purchases the remnants at KES 45 per kilogram. She then grinds and processes the material before selling it at KES 65 per kilogram to fish farmers who use it in feed formulation.

"I was not sure at first if farmers would accept it. But when they started coming back for more, I knew it was working," says Laura.

YISA's impact on Laura's business

The transformation in Laura's enterprise is both visible and measurable. From handling no fish remnants at baseline, she now manages 60 kilograms per month. Since engaging with the YISA program, her enterprise has grown by 50%.

Today, Laura earns an average monthly income of KES 117,000, generating a net profit of approximately KES 24,000 after expenses. What was previously overlooked and thrown away is now sustaining her livelihood and strengthening her economic independence.

"I never imagined this could become my main source of income," she says. "Now the business

supports me, and I can plan for the future."

The impact extends beyond Laura herself. Before YISA's intervention, she employed no one. Today, she directly engages two young people who previously worked as casual dried fish off-loaders, surviving on irregular wages tied to unpredictable truck arrivals. Each now earns KES 6,000 per month through more stable and structured roles within the enterprise.

Their responsibilities have evolved beyond manual labor. They now support grinding, packaging, record-keeping and customer coordination, gaining practical business skills and a deeper understanding of enterprise operations.

"Before, I was just waiting for trucks to arrive," one of the young people explains. "Sometimes we worked, sometimes we didn't."

"Now I understand the business," he adds. "I know the customers, the prices, and how to calculate profit. It feels different."

Ripple effects across the aquaculture value chain

The impact of Laura's enterprise extends far beyond her own business. Today, 50 fish farmers regularly purchase her processed product for use in feed formulation. By incorporating the ingredient into their feeding systems, farmers have reduced feed costs by nearly half compared to previous expenses, easing one of the largest financial burdens in aquaculture production.

"Feed was our biggest expense. When we started buying from Laura, our costs reduced significantly. It has made production more manageable," share one of her customers.

As a result, 40 farmers have reported improved production performance linked to more consistent and affordable feed inputs. By making lower-cost feed ingredients available within the community, Laura's enterprise is strengthening productivity at the pond level while retaining value within the local economy.

"When feed becomes affordable, you can maintain proper feeding," one farmer notes. "That improves fish growth."

Environmental impact

The environmental benefits are equally significant. Fish remnants that once accumulated as organic waste at handling sites are now being reintegrated into the aquaculture cycle as productive inputs. This has reduced waste disposal challenges, improved sanitation around landing and processing sites, and contributed to cleaner working environments.

Instead of contributing to environmental pollution, the material now supports a more circular and sustainable aquaculture system.

“Even the landing sites are cleaner now,” Laura says. “People appreciate that the waste is no longer piling up.”

Challenges and future plans

Despite the progress, Laura remains realistic about the challenges ahead. The availability of raw materials depends heavily on fish harvesting volumes, and fluctuations in supply continue to pose the main operational challenge. However, with structured pricing systems and an established customer base, the enterprise has built a stable foundation for growth.

“Sometimes supply goes down. But now I plan ahead and communicate with my customers,” she explains.

Laura’s ambitions extend beyond processing fish remnants. Within just four months, she has saved KES 35,000 toward purchasing a feed mill. Her vision is to move into complete fish feed formulation, a step that would significantly expand production capacity and create additional employment opportunities for young people within the community.

“My goal is to buy a feed mill and produce complete fish feed,” she says confidently. “If I can do that, I will employ more youth and grow this into something bigger.”



Fish remnants used that Laura uses to in make fish feeds. Photo: Livingwood Consultant Ltd / Nancy Omondi.



Fish feeds made from the fish remnants. Photo: Livingwood Consultant Ltd / Nancy Omondi.

“My goal is to buy a feed mill and produce complete fish feed,” she says confidently. “If I can do that, I will employ more youth and grow this into something bigger.”

Laura
YISA program participant

Risper Adoyo, a fish trader and recipient of the RLF in Kisumu. Photo: ENAF/Antony Kariuki



YISA program: quarter two impact stories

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

Cover photo: YISA program participant Venessa Ominde briefing a team from the Foundation and YISA program partners on the significance of BSF within the fish value chain. Photo: Farm Africa/Maurice Goga

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