

COSME Project Newsletter

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF
COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS (COSME) PROJECT

AUGUST 2025

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Restoration in the Kaya

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Promoting a *Gender Responsive*
Climate Justice



Scan or click here to read more about Y1 COSME Impact Report.



Link to Y1 COSME Impact Report:
[eb0de1daae444235aaedf1f190fab57f](https://bit.ly/eb0de1daae444235aaedf1f190fab57f)

COSME PROJECT

Turning the Tide:

Women leading climate action on Kenya's coast

This report details how your support has raised awareness of the effects of climate change, identified key environmental risks and helped implement real solutions to protect Kenya's coastal communities.

With your help, 3,000 women are building the resilience of coastal ecosystems – and communities – in the face of climate change.

Together, we're turning the tide.

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An excited Project participant during a mangrove planting exercise on World Mangrove Day 2025 pre-event in Takaungu creek restoration site, Kilifi.

Scan or click here to read more about us.



www.plan-international.org/kenya

Project Manager's Foreword

Dear Partners and Stakeholders,

The Conservation and Sustainable Management of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Project exists to build resilient coastal communities by conserving and sustainably managing our coastal and marine ecosystems with biodiversity co-benefits. Together, we aim to strengthen livelihoods, protect vital biodiversity, and advance climate and gender justice where it matters most; in the daily lives of the people who depend on these resources.

As we mark the first quarter of Year 3, I am proud to share that the project has directly reached 38,656 individuals (97% of the cumulative Year 3 target), with a particular focus on women and youth in coastal Kenya. Notably, 2,379 women (79% of the Year 3 target) are now actively participating in 137 Gender Responsive Savings Groups (GRSGs) across 110 Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) groups, reflecting our growing footprint in gender-responsive restoration with biodiversity co-benefits.

None of this progress would be possible without the unwavering support from our Country Director, George Otim, our wider leadership team, and the direct and daily guidance of Eston Nyaga, Area Project Manager, whose commitment keeps our field teams focused and responsive to community priorities.

I also extend sincere appreciation to our funding partner, Global Affairs Canada, to Plan International Canada as our grant office, and to our implementing partners Cascadia Seaweed and the Jane Goodall Institute. Our collaboration with national government agencies, the County Governments of Kilifi and Kwale, and the communities themselves remains at the heart of every achievement. Your trust, local knowledge, and shared vision ensure that COSME's impact is meaningful, relevant, and lasting.

38,656

individuals directly reached by the project

2,379

women actively participating in 137 Gender Responsive Savings Groups.

“

Real change is only possible when we walk this journey together towards ensuring a Gender Responsive Climate Justice.”

Beryl Oduor

Senior Project Manager, COSME

This quarter, we have deepened our community-led community engagement, strengthened multi-level partnerships, and refined our technical approaches to gender responsive nature-based solutions with biodiversity co-benefits, improved livelihoods and intergenerational climate justice.

As we look ahead, we do so with renewed focus, shared responsibility, and the firm belief that real change is only possible when we walk this journey together towards ensuring a Gender Responsive Climate Justice.

We won't stop until we are all equal.
Warm regards,

Scan or click here to read more about us.



About COSME Project



WHO: The COSME project will work closely with 3,000 women to restore vital ecosystems and advocate for inclusion in climate solutions. Additionally, through activities like school clubs and trainings, 49,000 people – including **26,000 women and girls** – across 110 coastal communities in Kenya and Tanzania will take part in the project. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada and individual Canadian donors, and delivered in partnership with the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada and Cascadia Seaweed Corporation.



WHAT: COSME focuses on supporting communities, especially women, to better prepare themselves for the effects of climate change by promoting climate-resilient earning opportunities and by improving the health of the ecosystems they rely on.



WHY: The COSME project has three goals:

1. Women are better able to adapt to the effects of climate change, thanks to ecological restoration and sustainable nature-based businesses.
2. Local organizations, such as women's rights groups and youth groups, are equipped to bring their voices to regional and national forums, where they can demand inclusion in climate response plans and policies.
3. Women are able to exercise more agency in household and community decision making.



WHERE: In Kwale and Kilifi counties in Kenya. (Project activities led by the Jane Goodall Institute are taking place in the Tanga and Pwani regions of Tanzania.)



WHEN:
Mar 2023 – Dec 2027



4-K Club member of Vwevvesi Primary School in Kilifi on their farm.

Seeds of Change:

Planting Knowledge, Growing Resilience

Across Kenya's coastal counties, 4-K Clubs are giving children a chance to learn farming skills that are not only practical but also climate-smart. Through the COSME project, Plan International Kenya is partnering with these clubs in 65 schools across Kwale and Kilifi to promote an intergenerational climate justice through practical skills and support on climate resilient pathways. This approach goes beyond classroom lessons, sparking climate

conversations both in school and at home that help families find local solutions for climate justice.

Vwevvesi Primary is one of these schools, and for pupils like Elizabeth and Eucabeth, the changes have been clear and encouraging.

Before the project, school farming was basic. Small gardens did not always produce much, and many children had never learned about practices like composting or importance of water conservation.

“ We didn't really know how to make our gardens better or why we should reuse waste and carefully use the little water we have in school.”

— Eucabeth

With COSME's support, the school's 4-K Club now runs a lively poultry project and productive kitchen gardens. Pupils have been trained to do mulching and also how to turn



Excited 4-K Club members during a puppetry show on climate change.

chicken waste into compost, showing how farming can be circular and sustainable. The schools have also been issued with water harvesting tanks and classrooms have been fitted with water gutters to support in harvesting rain water. Additionally, the schools have received solvatten kits to support in water purification. New 4-K Club uniforms have also given them a sense of unity and pride.

“When we wear our uniforms, we feel proud to be part of something that helps our school and families.”

— Eucabeth

Puppetry shows on climate change have made a big impression, transforming abstract topics into stories that stick. “The puppet shows made us laugh but also taught us what happens if we don’t care for the environment. I still remember the main character Agugu Gaga speaking to us about trees and rain as well as the importance of the 3Rs of Reduce, ReUse and Recycle,” Elizabeth adds.

This progress has been supported by teachers who have been trained as 4-K club patrons and matrons using a national manual that was co-developed with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and enhanced by including sections on gender and climate change by Plan International Kenya.

“Integrating gender and climate change has helped us to instill gender-responsive climate awareness in children, planting the seeds of sustainable climate resilience at an early age. Breaking these topics down for children using puppetry further helped demystify ideas that used to feel too big.”

— Pascal, 4 K Patron,
Vwevvesi Primary School

What is perhaps most encouraging is how these lessons are already spreading beyond the school fence. Eucabeth now helps her parents who are also part of the COSME groups in

“The puppet shows made us laugh but also taught us what happens if we don’t care for the environment. I still remember the main character Agugu Gaga speaking to us about trees and rain...”

— Elizabeth

Kaya Chonyi grow vegetables at home. Elizabeth has started a kitchen garden at her grandmother’s house.

“I hope what we learn here doesn’t stop with us. I want more families in our village to try these ideas.”

— Eucabeth

For these girls, the skills they have gained mean more than better harvests, they are planting ideas, sparking family conversations, and helping their community adapt. Step by step, the COSME project is growing seeds of change that reach far beyond the classroom, nurturing a generation ready to sustainably care for their land and secure a greener future for all.



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/agugu-ga-ga-says-lets-save-earth-how-puppetry-took-lyrt-f/?trackingId=CU%2B%2B%2BXshxLCGq%2FOQv-kuoJw%3D%3D>

Emmaline's Path to Gender Justice



Community members from Takaungu during mangrove restoration exercise in an act of sisterhood. ↑

In many coastal communities across Kilifi and Kwale, women have long been excluded from restoration and decision-making efforts not by law, but by entrenched gender norms. Their days are consumed by unpaid care work: fetching water, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. These roles, passed down through generations, leave little room for participation in community activities.

This exclusion is especially clear in ecological restoration; like mangrove conservation where men are often seen as the decision-makers and women as labor, if involved at all. Yet, women bear the brunt of climate-related impacts such as flooding, prolonged droughts, and dwindling resources. Despite this, their voices have rarely shaped how these challenges are addressed.

That is the reality we set out to shift through the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems (COSME) project's Gender Justice Journey (GJJ).

By creating space for honest reflection and inclusive dialogue, the GJJ helps communities examine how gender roles limit participation, and how change can begin from inside out. To date, over 2,337 women have participated in Gender Justice Journey sessions, with more than 78% successfully completing all three training modules.

As a Gender Justice Journey Facilitator, I have had the privilege of walking with these women, listening, guiding, and witnessing deep, often quiet transformation.

“When a woman realizes her voice matters, it's like watching a dam break, quiet at first, then unstoppable.”

Community members from Takaungu during mangrove restoration exercise.

— Emmaline



By Maryam S. Abdalla, Gender Justice Journey Facilitator, Takaungu-Kilifi



Scan QR for more information.



Emmaline, a member of Upendo (Affection) Women Group, is one of the women I have accompanied along this journey. In her early 30s and a mother of three, she was raised in a world that told her what her place was and what it wasn't.

“I was brought up to serve, to stay silent, and to follow for survival,” she told me once, softly, but clearly.

As a girl, Emmaline had dreamt of becoming a teacher. But at 12, her father ended her schooling, declaring that “girls don't need learning, they need a home.” By 17, she was married off; by 20, she had three children; and by 25, she had stopped imagining anything different.

That's where she was when we met her at the beginning of our Gender Justice Journey. She listened quietly during the early sessions, always at the back, taking in every word. Her silence was not from lack of thought; it was the residue of years of being told not to speak.

Then one day, she stood up. Her hands trembled as she glanced at her daughter playing beside her. “I want her to have options I never did,” she said. Her voice cracked, but her message was clear. That was her turning point, a moment of individual conviction that ignited in her a need for change from within.

From there, Emmaline moved into the relational stage of her journey. She started having difficult but necessary conversations at home with her husband, with her neighbors, with the women in her group. Supported by her peers and encouraged by a growing sense of agency, she began to unlearn the silence she had been taught. With her husband walking beside her as her ally and with support from the project that engaged men through GJJ trainings and peer sessions the journey became lighter. Today, her husband sometimes stays home with the children so Emmaline can attend trainings or join mangrove restoration work; a big shift from the days when her role was only to stay home.

Through the GJJ's male engagement efforts, in participating households, 53% of men including Emmaline's husband have taken up roles such as child-minding and domestic work, freeing women to engage in leadership and livelihood activities with 94.4% of project participants attesting to the importance of supporting women because they face barriers men do not.

With growing support, Emmaline consistently started attending community meetings and other community-based activities. She spoke to local leaders and in community meetings about girls' education and women's inclusion in environmental work. She challenged old ideas with grace and strength, reminding others of truths they had forgotten, using different methods including edutainment — emphasizing the fact that women are not just caregivers, but changemakers. This propelled her journey into a structural shift.

Today, her influence reaches even further, impacting not only herself but her ecosystem. She is at the forefront of mangrove restoration efforts, a step further into her journey that now spans into the ecological level. Emmaline now leads a local women's group that has been part of mangrove restoration in Takaungu with over 60,000 mangroves planted, protecting Takaungu's shoreline from degradation. Additionally, as part of the biodiversity co-benefit, the group has launched a honey-harvesting initiative that provides income for local families. What Emmaline and her peers have built goes beyond restoration; it's solidarity. They are not just healing the land; they are healing generational silences, transforming once-silent voices into voices of hope.

In our most recent conversation, Emmaline said something that still echoes in me:

“This isn't just for my daughter. It's because I know my worth and yours too.”

Her journey shows what the Gender Justice Journey is from the inside -out; starting from within, expanding through relationships, shifting community norms, and ultimately transforming systems including the ecosystems we live in. What is unfolding in Takaungu is more than community restoration; it is climate justice in motion. Women like Emmaline are not only building resilience in the face of rising tides and shifting seasons, but also, they are helping lead the way. The mangroves they have planted are restoring biodiversity, anchoring coastlines, and creating sustainable futures. And for the first time, women are not watching from the sidelines but are shaping the outcomes and standing to benefit from them.

“As we look to the future, we must ensure that women remain at the center of climate action, not just as participants but as decision-makers and key beneficiaries of the ecological and economic gains that come with inclusive restoration. Because when women rise, ecosystems heal and when restoration includes everyone, resilience becomes possible for all.”

— Maryam, Gender Justice Journey Facilitator

How **60 Chicks** Sparked a Forest of Change!

In the far corner of Vanga, Kwale County a dry, rugged land on the border of Tanzania women have little to rely on but each other and the land that sustains them. Life here is harsh; water is scarce, and opportunities are few. But the Gonja Forest remains a lifeline. Its rich biodiversity is not just a resource but a shield, helping families cope with a changing climate.

That is why the women of Tumaini Caregivers group are working together to restore this vital forest and build resilience for their families. Through the COSME project by Plan International, they have learned how to run Gender-Responsive Saving Groups (GRSGs) practical training that helps them manage money, access loans, and hold each other accountable.

In Vanga, these savings groups have become a safety net. More than 84.2% of local groups made up mostly of women are now trained in GRSGs. Along Kenya's coast, over 96 groups saved more than Ksh.6.5 million in 2024, showing what's achievable when communities walk together.

Tumaini Caregivers group has 42 members contributing to restoration of about 24.7 hectares of the Gonja Forest with 20 actively saving in GRSGs, with Ksh. 25,000 saved and eight loans issued.

For Selinah, this training opened doors she had never dreamed of. “I borrowed Ksh 6,000 and bought 60 chicks. I was so scared they'd all die,” she says. Six did, but the rest thrived. She sold 30 chickens at Ksh 700 each, repaid her loan, and borrowed them again to grow her dream. Her second round brought her 100 chicks. “Only 60 survived, but this time I sold each for Ksh 1,000. That money did more than I ever imagined,” she says. With her profit, Selinah helped her husband revive his struggling shop and opened her own small shop at home, a goal she once thought impossible.

“Before, we worried every day about school fees. Now my daughter is back in high school. We can plan for her future.”

— Selinah

For Mjeni, another member from Tumaini Caregivers, the group's power goes far beyond money. Through Gender Justice training, the group has learnt how best to support each other from the inside out, right from household level to community level. “It keeps us disciplined and united. We lift each other up. No one is left behind,” she says.

Together, these women are restoring their confidence as they restore the forest that keeps them and their families safe. “We are more than just a saving group,” Selinah says. “We are sisters. And together, we can do anything.”

With plans to grow their group fund to Ksh.250,000 this year, the members of Tumaini Caregivers group dream bigger than ever. “I'm not afraid anymore,” Selinah says.

I know I can grow because I'm not alone.”

— Selinah

We are sisters. And together, we can do anything

— Selinah



Selinah, Standing - right, during a community dialogue on GRSGs.

Walking the Gender Justice Journey Together



By Dennis Mwanzia,
Project Coordinator,
Gender Equality and
Inclusion

Over the past year, the Gender Justice Journey (GJJ) methodology has proven to be more than just a structured training approach it has become a real catalyst for change within our Natural Resources-based (NBs) groups and seaweed farming communities. What started as facilitated conversations on gender equality and social norms is steadily transforming into lived realities that are reshaping how women and men work, lead, and relate to one another.

One of the most encouraging shifts has been the growing participation of men as allies in advancing gender equality. Traditionally, women in our coastal communities have shouldered the double burden of unpaid care work and income-generating activities such as seaweed farming and restoration of mangroves. These responsibilities often went unrecognized and unsupported, leaving women stretched and undervalued. Through the GJJ sessions, however, men have been engaged in open discussions on roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics. The results are visible; men are now supporting their spouses in household duties and also stepping up as champions of change within their groups.

Through the GJJ sessions, men have been engaged in open discussions on roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics. The results are visible; men are now supporting their spouses in household duties and also stepping up as champions of change within their groups.

In seaweed farming, this shift is particularly significant. Seaweed farming has long been considered “women’s work,” but the GJJ has helped challenge this stereotype. Men are now more willing to support women in farming activities whether by assisting with drying racks, transporting seaweed, or simply ensuring women’s safety at sea. This change is improving productivity, reducing women’s workload, and strengthening household incomes. Importantly, it also signals a collective recognition that sustainable livelihoods are everyone’s responsibility, not just women.

Similarly, in natural resource restoration groups, especially around mangrove planting and forest management, the GJJ has encouraged men and women to reflect together on how equality and inclusion strengthen conservation outcomes. Men who once stood at the margins of “women’s meetings” are now vocal participants, bringing their peers along while creating space for women to lead. These changes are not just symbolic—they are practical shifts that promote teamwork, fairness, and sustainability.

The journey is far from over, but what is clear is that gender justice is no longer an abstract concept. It is becoming embedded in our daily practices, our group decisions, and our family lives. The Gender Justice Journey has shown that when women and men walk together listening, sharing, and supporting one another the path towards equality is not only possible but also deeply rewarding.

Spoken word by **CAROLINE KITI**,
Community member from Kaya Chonyi
restoration site

A Letter to Nature...

Kando ya msitu wa mwarakaya Nyota zikingaa
ndoto nyingi, zikikua na kufaa
Piani ikafika na mwanga wa matumaini
ikaweka ahadi zikawa hai
Tushikamane, tuiuvane tuangaze msitu wetu.

Watu wengi walikosa njia
Elimu ikawa ndoto V.S.L. Jinsia na msitu kufika
Piani ikafungua milango na maarifa
ikaungana na wadau kutimiza ndoto za uhakika
Tushikamane, tuiuvane tuangaze msitu wetu.

Lipo tuko hapa twashukutu kwa juhudi zenu
Elimu imetufungulia uimwengu mpya
Tunajivunia kwa Schemu ya G.F.A
Tunatoa shukrani na juhudi kupendelea
Tushikamane, tuiuvane tuangaze msitu wetu.

Tuunganishe mikono tuimarishe maisha yetu
Tudumishe G.F.A. kuwa mfano kwa wengine
Tufanye mwarakaya yetu kuwa kielelezo
Tushikamane tuiuvane tuangaze msitu wetu.

Scan or click here to hear more about Caroline's story.
<https://youtu.be/hJLtnZakjto>



Nature's Embrace

Spoken word by Nancy Karugi,
Project Officer-NRM, COSME Project

Communities Must be at the Center of Kenya's Climate Finance Shift

The global climate finance landscape is shifting rapidly from grants and aid to market-based mechanisms like carbon trading. While this evolution promises scale, it also exposes serious gaps in equity and access. At the Africa Climate Summit in 2023, President William Ruto captured this moment bluntly:

“The current climate finance architecture is failing adaptation... We must shift to sustainable market-based solutions like carbon trading.”

— President William Ruto

At the Africa Climate Summit in 2023, President William Ruto underscored the urgency of reforming a “failing” climate finance architecture, pointing to carbon markets as a necessary alternative. That message was echoed at COP 28 and the Africa Energy Forum. But the implementation has been uneven. Global support is weakening. The Loss and Damage fund proposed at COP 29 has stalled, and overseas development assistance is projected to drop by 20% in 2025. For countries like Kenya, where 79% of climate finance needs rely on international contributions, that's a major concern.

Locally, we are already seeing funding shortfalls with Kenya's Financing Locally-Led Climate Action (FLLoCA) program having its 2024 budget slashed by almost half following the withdrawal of USAID support. Communities already burdened by climate shocks like the 2024 floods in Kwale County, which caused KSh.400 million in damages are being pushed to find alternative financing pathways.

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and carbon-linked conservation offer a



By Lilian Wandaka,
Project Officer,
COSME Project,
Plan International
Kenya

40%
The Carbon Markets Regulations 2024 now require that a minimum of 40% of proceeds from land-based carbon projects and 25% from non-land-based go to local communities respectively.

path forward. Across coastal counties, community-led projects are restoring mangroves, cultivating seaweed, and practicing regenerative land management. These initiatives protect ecosystems, sequester carbon, and diversify incomes especially for women. They also reflect a broader turn toward co-created climate action that centers community agency.

There is also a shift in policy that can create meaningful transitions if properly enforced. An example is Kenya's Climate Change (Amendment) Act 2023 that created a National Carbon Registry and set new rules for environmental and social safeguards. The Carbon Markets Regulations 2024 now require that a minimum of 40% of proceeds from land-based carbon projects and 25% from non-land-based go to local communities respectively.

Draft regulations expected in 2025, including those governing non-market approaches, could broaden the space for community participation and collaborative adaptation. Meanwhile, Kenya's National Gender and Climate Change Action Plan (2024–2027) is pushing for more inclusive approaches that empower women at the frontlines of climate action.

What is clear is that Kenya cannot afford a top-down transition. If carbon markets are to succeed, they must be accessible, ethical, and community-anchored. That means equipping local actors with the skills, tools, and institutional backing to be able to take a seat at the table.

Kenya's leadership in climate finance will be measured not just by carbon credits generated, but by whether its most vulnerable citizens are empowered to benefit centering community-led action for sustainability.



I planted my trees with love and care, In my heart, for my beautiful women here. Orange trees, early kinds, bright and new, Valencia, Pixie, Washington Navel too.

With patience and honesty, we help them grow. Watching them flourish, in a vibrant show.

With pride, we'll share the fruits we raise. Our children will squeeze juice, in happy days.

Elders will rest beneath the cool, green shade. Enjoying the peace, a haven made.

Cows and goats, full and free, will roam around. Life thriving, safe on this blessed ground.

This is our important call, you see. From the plants and women, helping nature be.

Come join us, help restore and conserve, It's our purpose, a gift we must preserve.

Seeing Change First-Hand:

Plan CEO visit to COSME project sites

Plan International's CEO, Reena Ghelani, recently travelled to Kenya's coast to see first-hand how communities are restoring their land and strengthening families through the COSME project. COSME has so far reached over 38,656 people, including 79% women and 67% youth and children, helping protect coastal ecosystems, build resilient livelihoods, and advance gender equality where it matters most.

Her first stop was a lively primary school where children's songs echoed under a big mango tree. The CEO crouched to greet pupils whose education is supported through Plan's sponsorship, and smiled as the school's 4K Club proudly showed off the seedlings they're growing to protect their land for the future. Turning to a circle of girls, she told them simply, *"Your dreams matter — stand tall for your land and your future."*

Next, she joined Tumbe Seaweed Group on the beach, laughing with the women as they taught her how to tie seaweed lines and set up a small seaweed farm. She tasted seaweed half cakes, which she called *"a delicious local delicacy"*, and listened as farmers shared how saving groups and gender sessions are helping them earn more and work together at home.

The day ended among the mangroves with Yungi Mwenjeni Group. There, Fatuma proudly shared how gender training transformed her marriage, even calling her husband over to nod with a shy smile that drew cheers and laughter. The CEO sipped fresh coconut, smiling at the songs and ululations all around her. *"Your stories show what real partnership looks like,"* she said. *"Thank you for letting us walk this journey with you."*

Plan International
CEO with students
from Migodini
Primary School
during her visit to
COSME sites.

“My
husband and
I should join
these sessions
too!

— Reena Ghelani,
Plan International
CEO

Plan International
CEO with Roger
Yates, Regional
Director, MEESA
tasting donuts made
from seaweed by
Tumbe seaweed
farmers, Kwale.



Members of Tumbe seaweed farmers, Kwale with
Plan International staff.

COSME Holds 2nd TAG Meeting to Strengthen Coastal Communities

The COSME Project's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) plays a vital role in keeping community priorities at the heart of coastal restoration work. Recently, TAG members — a mix of local leaders, technical experts, and government representatives — came together to reflect on the project's progress and shape practical next steps. The group celebrated milestones like expanding mangrove restoration, growing vibrant seaweed farms, and strengthening community saving groups that help families build resilience. During a visit to the Mtimbwani Seaweed Group in Shimoni, farmers proudly demonstrated how seaweed and home gardens are boosting household incomes and local biodiversity.

“ I never imagined seaweed could bring us together like this — we’re earning, learning, and helping our families grow stronger every day.”

— Mwanahawa,
Member Mtimbwani Seaweed Group

Field insights sparked honest discussions on what's working and where to improve, with members offering clear recommendations to guide Year 3.

“ The commitment shown gives me great confidence that Year 3 will deliver even more for our coastal communities.”

— Mr. Mburu, Kenya Forest Service Coast
Regional Forest Conservator and TAG
Chairperson

By staying rooted in local voices and technical know-how, the COSME Project continues to grow stronger — restoring ecosystems, building livelihoods, and bringing communities together, one step at a time.

➔ TAG members with COSME team assessing fruit tree during a field trip in Shimoni, Kwale.



⬆ TAG members with COSME team during the 2nd TAG meeting.



The Plan Effect: From Sponsorship to Restoration

In Kenya's coastal counties of Kwale and Kilifi, forests and mangroves that once seemed lost are beginning to thrive again. It's not just about trees taking root, it's about people rediscovering their power to protect what sustains them. Through concerted efforts by COSME project, communities are engaging in gender responsive restoration with biodiversity co-benefits.

For many, putting food on the table and the idea of restoring forests seemed so disconnected. But these communities knew Plan International, not just as an organization, but as a partner. For more than 30 years, Plan's child sponsorship has helped children grow up healthy, educated, and safe. That trust laid the foundation for bigger conversations about what communities want for themselves and their ecosystems not just for today, but for the future.

“When Plan started sponsoring our children, we saw how much can change when people feel supported. Now with the COSME project, it feels like that work is growing even deeper into our community. We are restoring our forests and ecosystems together. This is what real change looks like for us.”

— Nassoro, Lungalunga, Kwale.



Community members engaging in gender responsive restoration with biodiversity co-benefits.

“For many, putting food on the table and the idea of restoring forests seemed so disconnected. But these communities knew Plan International, not just as an organization, but as a partner.”

Around her village, small nurseries are tucked behind family homes and community halls. Families grow thousands of seedlings ranging from indigenous trees to exotic ones through community seedbeds which they then sell to the project, which then supports them to plant back on degraded land within the community. Many are using what they have learned to grow diverse home gardens too, full of fruit trees and vegetables, using regenerative practices that keep soil healthy while contributing to the local biodiversity.

Along the coast of Kwale, sustainable seaweed farming is giving families, especially women, another way to earn steady income. Groups are also forming gender-responsive savings groups (GRSGs), helping women and men borrow money at fair rates to start small businesses, pay school fees, or handle emergencies without falling into debt. With this support, women are gaining confidence and influence not just in their homes, but in the wider community.

Women who once stayed quiet in the back of meetings now head Community Forest Associations (CFAs) and Beach Management Units (BMUs). They pass down traditional knowledge, guide decisions, and show that when women have a voice, everyone benefits. Families are seeing that true gender responsiveness is about coexisting with respect and ensuring everyone has a say.

Young people are stepping up too. Through the Roots & Shoots approach

introduced by the Jane Goodall Institute, youth groups use art, photography, and storytelling to show their friends that conservation isn't just for elders rather it's their future to protect too. In schools, 4K Clubs help children understand how climate change affects their home and how to care for the trees and coastlines that protect them.

Where once people saw tree planting as someone else's responsibility, they now see it as their own.

“When everyone is involved, we protect what we plant, like we protect our families—with pride and guarded jealousy!”

— Nassoro, Lungalunga, Kwale.

Today, women are leading restoration efforts with men as their allies; from the seaweed farms that bring steady income to the mangrove forests that shield the coast. Young people are equally growing up with the knowledge that what they plant and protect today will sustain them tomorrow.

What began with one sponsored child is now a growing movement, rooted in trust, spreading through villages and owned by the people who care and live in the ecosystem.

In partnership with these communities, we will keep pushing for climate justice and gender equality — until we are all equal.

Dance for Climate Change: Roots & Shoots Methodology

In Kenya's coastal communities, young people rarely get involved in climate action. For many, it feels far removed from their daily struggles. With few opportunities and little support, some drift into substance abuse or crime, seeing no clear path forward. But that story is beginning to change.

Through the Plan International COSME Project, young people along the coast are showing that real change doesn't always start big, sometimes it begins with small, creative steps and conversations. The Roots & Shoots Methodology from the Jane Goodall Institute, which encourages care for people, animals and the environment, is helping them make climate action feel real and personal. They are using art, sports, storytelling and photo voice to share their stories and bring others on board. Bit by bit, they are proving that when youth lead the way, climate resilience can grow into something fun, local, lasting and sustainable.

So far, 11 youth leaders from Kilifi and Kwale counties have been trained by Jane Goodall Institute Tanzania on the Roots & Shoots model. These trained youth are now cascading their knowledge through 10 active Youth-Led Organizations (YLOs) across Kilifi and Kwale. Each group has appointed local youth matrons and patrons as trainers of trainers, ensuring that the approach spreads sustainably through trainings being cascaded down to other youth organizations in other regions of Kenya. So far, 21 youth groups have already been mapped and onboarded to benefit from the Roots & Shoots method with each acting as a small hub for practical, youth-led environmental action.

One such participant is Mariam, a youth matron from Samba Sports Agenda, who says Roots & Shoots gives young people clear, adaptable ways to connect climate and environmental work with their daily lives.

“It's practical, it's local, and it links care for people, animals, and nature. It helps youth take real action, but also see how protecting the environment supports their own wellbeing and future opportunities.”

— Mariam

At Samba Sports Youth Agenda, the approach is woven into everyday activities from garbage clean-ups and plastic recycling to creating products like key holders and flower vases that help fund other youth initiatives.

Violet, a young leader with Timiza Youth Group, says they are now using different youth friendly ways to engage youth in environmental restoration including music and dance, sports, and photo voice, giving youth the chance to tell their own stories through photos and spark conversations that influence change in their communities in a manner that resonates with them.

“Roots & Shoots works for us because it brings in song, dance, and art. It makes protecting the environment something we love doing, together.”

— Violet, Timiza Youth Initiative

“We are showing what we see, dirty beaches, clean-ups, recycling, and effects of all this on biodiversity within the coastal ecosystem so people understand why this work matters. Roots & Shoots works for us because it brings in song, dance, and art. It makes protecting the environment something we love doing, together.”



Violet (center) a member of a YLOs with Jane Goodall Institute during a Roots & Shoots methodology training in Mombasa, Kenya.

YLOs representatives from Kilifi and Kwale with Jane Goodall Institute and COSME staff during a simulation exercise at Mazingia Beach, Kilifi.



Jerricans of Hope:

Solvatten reduces the burden for women!

In the heart of Mwangea village, Kilifi County, she is simply known as Madam Sholo, a name that echoes her decades of service as an early childhood teacher and respected community figure. For over 30 years, Madam Sholo nurtured young minds in local classrooms, and today, that same spirit lives on in her new role as a village elder. It's a position she holds with pride, earned through her unwavering commitment to solving community issues, especially those affecting girls and young women.

Life, however, shifted dramatically in 2004 when her husband suffered a stroke. Once a teacher himself, he now requires full-time care, support that Madam Sholo provides tirelessly. She retired early to be by his side.

Access to clean water in Ganze has always been difficult. The area is dry, and families rely on purchased water. Sholo buys water from a local vendor who operates a tapped water system supported by a development partner. Though sold at a subsidized rate, it still requires careful budgeting. In the past, she also had to spend additional money on charcoal or gas to boil water for drinking and bathing, especially for her husband, who is highly vulnerable to illness.

Through the COSME project, Sholo received a Solvatten kit, and it has changed her routine in ways she never imagined. She now uses the sun to heat water for household use, including bathing her husband and preparing safe drinking water for both of them. The kit has helped eliminate the need to boil water over charcoal or gas, saving her time, money, and energy.

“Solvatten has given me something I had lost, more time with my husband,” she says. “Now we both drink clean water, I have more time to take care of my husband, and we avoid unnecessary hospital visits. It has made our days lighter and our home more peaceful.”

— Madam Sholo

Having lived in Ganze for over 30 years, Madam Sholo has experienced the worsening effects of drought and climate change. The weather used to follow patterns they could rely on. Today, the rains are unpredictable, and the land is drier than ever. She links these changes to environmental degradation,



Madam Sholo using her Solvatten kit to heat her bath water.

especially the widespread cutting of trees for charcoal, one of the few income-generating options in the area.

She sees Solvatten not just as a household solution, but as a tool for climate resilience. By reducing her need for charcoal, she knows she is contributing in a small but powerful way to protecting the environment.

“Solvatten is not just safer for my family,” she says, “it’s safer for our environment. Every time I use it, I know I’m not adding to the damage.”

— Madam Sholo

For Madam Sholo, the Solvatten kit is not just another way to heat water rather, it is a symbol of progress. It has eased the burden of caregiving, saved resources, and aligned with her deep concern for climate resilience. From teacher to elder, caregiver to changemaker, her story is a testament to how small innovations can transform life, making what seemed a big task rather easy to solve.

Community members from Mkwajuni Young Mothers Group excited after receiving the Solvatten kit.





Roots of Change:

Women Leading Restoration in the Kaya

Members of Tumaini Ondoni SHG tending to their community seedbed in Kaya Chonyi, Kilifi.



In Chonyi village, Kilifi County, the cultural forest known as Kaya has long held deep spiritual and cultural meaning for the Chonyi people. For generations, deeply rooted beliefs kept women away especially during their monthly periods, when they were seen as “unclean” and forbidden from entering the holy place.

Today, these old norms are shifting. Women are no longer just bystanders; they are stepping forward to protect and lead the Kaya Forests. For 24-year-old Kadzo, this change is opening doors her mother and grandmother could never have imagined.

“I grew up knowing the Kaya was sacred, but out of reach for us as girls. Now I help protect it. I even help lead the restoration effort.”

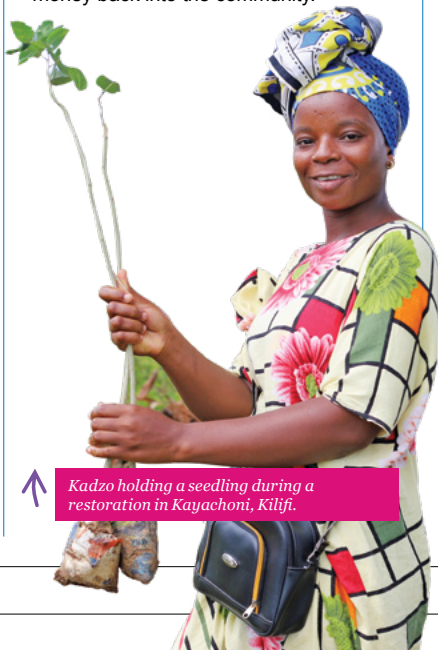
— Kadzo

Through the COSME Project, and with support from the Kenya Forest Service, the community came together to form the first-ever Community Forest Association in Kaya; the Kaya Chonyi Community Forest Association (KACHOCOFA). Together, they co-designed a participatory forest management framework with 8 forest user groups, ensuring local people have a stake and a say in how the Kaya is cared for. Today, 48% of all leadership positions in Kaya Chonyi are held by

women; a clear sign that tradition and gender inclusion can grow side by side.

Kadzo, despite her young age, was elected treasurer to the CFA, a role once unthinkable for a woman, let alone a youth.

Through community-led forest restoration, local families raise trees in 6 community seedbeds that COSME helped establish. So far, over 26,000 trees have been bought from these seedbeds and used for reforestation, generating an estimated Ksh 1.56 million in income for households. Early monitoring shows a promising 72% survival rate, helping restore degraded areas while putting money back into the community.



Kadzo holding a seedling during a restoration in Kayachoni, Kilifi.

“These places remain sacred. But letting women restore the forest does not change our culture, it complements it. Women are born nurturers. When they care for the Kaya, they keep our heritage alive and strong.”

— Kaya leader

“One day, I want more girls to see that leadership is for us too. We are the ones who will keep the Kaya standing for those who come after us.”

— Kadzo

KSh 1.56m
generated in income for households.

“Being trusted with this shows our community believes in young women. We’re proving we can lead and still honour what our elders taught us.”

— Kadzo

From Charcoal to Fruit Orchard:

“

We have seen what happens when we lose our trees. I want to be part of reclaiming not just the land, but the future for girls like me — *Rehema*

”

Ksh. 138,000
Amount saved by the Dzikunze Binti Group.



4,300
The number of fruit tree seedlings planted by the youth-led organizations.

Rehema, 21, lives in Kilifi County, Kenya, where life is shaped by climate extremes. Long droughts dry up rivers and crops; sudden rains then carve deep gullies, turning dry riverbeds into deadly floods. She still remembers watching a schoolgirl get swept away.

“She was just walking home; water came fast and no one could help. It could be any of us.”

— *Rehema*

With her parents away doing casual work and no steady income, Rehema lives with her grandmother and supports her seven siblings. She had to drop out after secondary school, as the family's small earnings barely covered food. Additionally, elephants driven by drought from nearby forests destroy their remaining crops and also cause temporary insecurity to the community.

In her village, charcoal burning is a major source of income including for Rehema's family. But through Plan

International's COSME Project, she began to understand how cutting trees fuels the crisis by degrading the land, worsening floods, and drying streams.

The project supported her and other members of Dzikunze Binti Group, a support group for young women and teen mothers to form a gender-responsive savings group (GRSGs). Their group now brings together 23 active young women, who have already saved Ksh. 138,000 and issued 12 loans, showing how young people are stepping up to build safer, greener futures in their communities.

With her first loan, Rehema opened a small boutique. With proceeds from the shop, she hopes to pay her school fees and also support her family to stop charcoal burning. She is also growing a fruit orchard at her home with the support of the project.

Through support from youth-led organizations and technical guidance from key partners such as Kenya Forest Service, the COSME project has helped households plant 4,300 fruit tree

seedlings, with a current survival rate of 81%. These trees will help families boost their income through livelihood diversification while restoring biodiversity, one of the project's key climate resilience goals.

Through Gender Justice Journey sessions that train community members on gender equity and inclusion, she found her voice.

“Now even older people listen to me, including men. I was chosen secretary of a new community group — something I never imagined.”

— *Rehema*

Rehema dreams of going back to school and helping other girls in her village stay in school, and learn how to protect their environment.

SEA OF OPPORTUNITY

Youth Growing a Future through Seaweed Farming

Mukwiro Island, located off the coast of Kwale County, is a small, close-knit community surrounded by the Indian Ocean. The island is only accessible by boat, and for the families who live there, the sea is not just a natural boundary; it is there way of life.

Fishing and small-scale marine activities have long been the main sources of income, with daily life shaped by the tides and weather. Boats transport people, goods, and hopes between the island and the mainland. In this setting, opportunities are few and often fragile, especially for young people.

However, 25-year-old Athman is quietly rewriting what's possible for young girls in her community. Where others face the pressures of early marriage, joblessness, or addiction, Athman is choosing seaweed and shaping her future with her own hands.

Her journey began with someone close to her heart, her aunty, a dedicated seaweed farmer and one of the participants in the COSME project. "She introduced me to seaweed farming," Athman says. "I saw her working tirelessly in the water, and I saw how seaweed gave her a way to support herself. She brought me in, taught me what she knew, and now we work side by side."

“GRSGs trainings opened my eyes, they made me believe I can lead too, just like the women I see stepping up in my community; something I never imagined.”

— Athman

Under the support of the COSME project, Athman received formal training in sustainable seaweed farming where she learnt how to grow and manage *Eucheuma denticulatum* seaweed, and how to turn it into products like soap and skincare items, adding value and increasing income. The project also provided her with tools such as pegs, ropes, seed and safety gears to support her seaweed farming initiative. In addition, she also joined a Gender Responsive Savings Group (GRSGs) where she was trained in financial literacy, crucial skills for a young woman building her own path. "Now I can save, track my earnings, and plan my future, it feels good not to depend on anyone," she says.

She also completed the Gender Justice Journey training, where she learned how to live in harmony with others, challenge gender roles, and speak up for herself and other women. "These trainings opened my eyes, they made me believe I can lead too, just like the women I see stepping up in my community," she says.

One of those women is her aunty, who was recently elected as part of the Mukwiro Beach Management Unit (BMU) leadership, where 8 out of 15 positions are now held by women. Liking her to the current and first female Kwale County Governor Fatuma Achani, she sees them as symbols of what is possible.

Seaweed has also become more than just a livelihood for Athman, acting as her catapult to a better future she dreams for herself. She now earns approximately Ksh.10,000 a month that she is saving to start a seaweed-based business, selling value added products like soap, shampoos and also has a vision of together with her aunty opening a restaurant at the shore that cooks seaweed delicacies to sell to the many tourists that visit the island. She also mentors other young girls, encouraging them to choose seaweed farming as a source of income over dependence on their parents or spouses. With unwavering dedication, she looks forward to increasing her yields, better sales and increased savings; a dream that will push her closer to starting her own business and subsequent financial freedom, not just for her but her younger siblings as well.

“I see change happening in real time, women are rising, and I'm part of that.”

— Athman



Athman tending to her seaweed farm in Mukwiro Island, Kwale.

Building Unity and Livelihoods

through Gender Responsive Seaweed Farming

The Story of Mwalimu Bakari's blended Family.

In Tumbe village, Kwale County, the sea has always been a lifeline. For many years, Mwalimu Bakari, a respected elder, depended almost entirely on deep-sea fishing to provide for his household. But with fish stocks declining and the ocean becoming less reliable, sustaining his family grew harder.

Through the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems (COSME) Project, supported by Global Affairs Canada, new opportunities emerged. The project promotes sustainable livelihoods such as seaweed farming while also training communities on gender-responsive restoration through the Gender Justice Journey (GJJ).

Bakari and his family including his two wives and his 36-year-old daughter, a mother of six joined the Tumbe Seaweed Farmers group. Today, they manage two productive seaweed farms. On one farm, Bakari works with his second wife while on the other, the first wife teams up with her daughter. Yet when the workload is heavy such as during harvesting and ferrying the wet seaweed home, the whole family supports one another.

For Bakari, this venture has been transformative.

“Seaweed is a great venture. It has helped many in the community to earn a living and live a decent life. It has also helped diversify income since I now do both fishing in the deep sea and seaweed farming near the shore.”

— Mwalimu Bakari

But the COSME Project has delivered more than livelihoods. Through GJJ training, Bakari's family has also learned to work together in new ways.

His second wife, who runs a food kiosk, explains:

“GJJ has really helped the family. I never thought my husband would support me with housework, but now he does. Since I rise early for my food kiosk business, he helps prepare the younger children for school. This is new especially because sometimes he spends the night fishing. I also use seaweed powder in my cooking especially porridge which has become a delicacy in the village. With this he supports me by helping me grind the seaweed to powder.” Mwatime, Bakari's Second wife



“ We now open up about our income. Proceeds from seaweed were partially saved in the GRSGs. During the last share-out we received Ksh. 18,000, which we plan to use to buy cement and complete our house. Thanks to Plan International and the COSME Project, this has become possible.”

— Mwatime, Bakari's Second wife

“ Our husband is very supportive of us, especially in seaweed farming. We work well together.”

— Mwanasiti, Bakari's First wife

The daughter notes how GJJ transformed family dynamics:

Through COSME, the Bakari family has gained more than a stable livelihood. They have built trust, strengthened bonds, and become role models for others in Tumbe.

And their journey is far from over. With a renewed sense of unity, the family is determined to continue working together and with the wider Tumbe Seaweed Farmers group to ensure that their progress contributes not just to their household, but to the sustainable development and resilience of their entire community for generations to come.

Athman tending to her seaweed farm in Mukwiro Island, Kwale.

“ Initially, my two mums never used to get along. After the Gender Justice Journey training, we now work together well—and I have a better relationship with my younger step-siblings.”

— Halima, Bakari's Daughter



Hope, Allyship and Shared Dreams: One Couple's Path Towards Gender Justice

For many people living in the hot semi-arid areas like the coast of Kenya, sunshine is seen as a source of problems. With each scorching ray, drought spreads like a wild fire impacting availability of clean water for household use. Mwangea in Ganze, Kilifi County, Kenya is one of such areas that has largely been impacted by drought as a result of climate change.

In Pongwe Kidimu, a coastal village in Kwale County, life has always been tied to the ocean with fishing being the backbone of most families' livelihoods. Yet, in a place where men traditionally go out to fish and women shoulder the burden of fetching water, firewood, and caring for large families, change is not easy; but it's happening.

Ndana, 43, and his wife Kwekwe, 35, are parents to eight children with the youngest just four months old. They are both members of Jipe Moyo (Be Hopeful) Self Help Group; one of the groups working with the Conservation and Sustainable Management of COSME. Through the COSME project, they have been trained in mangrove restoration and have actively participated in restoration drives in Majoreni, contributing to the 35,000 mangroves planted so far in the area.



*Ndana and Kwekwe
grazing their herd
of cattle.*

35,000
mangroves
planted so far
in the area by
Jipe Moyo (Be
Hopeful) Self
Help Group.

Together, they have also undergone Gender Justice Journey training and it has transformed how they live, relate, and work. Initially, Ndana could not support Kwekwe, but now he does so with enthusiasm.

“Before, men used to laugh at me for looking for water and firewood. But now they see how happy my family is, and slowly many are joining in.”

— Ndana, 43

So far, over 68% of men in the community have been trained through Gender Justice Journey sessions as allies, learning to share unpaid household work like child-minding; something Ndana does himself now. Sometimes, he stays home with the children when Kwekwe needs to attend trainings or help with mangrove restoration - a big shift from how things were before.

With his wife, they have created better boundaries and communicate more openly, all thanks to the Gender Justice trainings and the Gender Responsive Savings groups (GRSGs) which have helped them participate in community savings, immensely improving their economic status. For every training offered by the project, participants are reimbursed Ksh 500 as lunch, to cater for the time that would have otherwise been spent sourcing for a livelihood. For her and Ndana, they saved this money for a certain period totaling to Ksh.7,000 for Kwekwe and Ksh. 6,500 for Ndana, a total of Ksh. 13,500. With this amount, they bought a fairly grown calf, which they added to their herd of cattle.

Together, the couple is also working on a project that has been Ndana's dream for a long time. As an aspiring fisherman, he wants to own a fishing boat. From the proceeds they saved, they have already started this journey, with Ndana buying nyavu (nets), and together they are religiously saving in the GRSGs, one of 96 active gender-responsive savings groups in the area to help them get a better loan to buy the boat. With this, they hope to supplement their livelihood and keep their children in school, with one almost graduating to high school.

Ndana is optimistic about a better future. “Gender Justice Journey has helped us a lot. As an ally, I'm happy to have joined the trainings. Now I see how much stronger our family is when we work together.”



“Now I see how much stronger our family is when we work together.”

— Ndana



BREAKING BARRIERS:

Faraja's Journey From Dependence to Climate-Smart Entrepreneurship

At 27, Faraja Batista from Mwembeni Village in Muheza District, Tanzania, is rewriting her story, and also inspiring other women to believe in themselves. A mother of two, she once depended almost entirely on her husband for household needs. "I depended on my husband for almost everything. Sometimes I felt ashamed because I could not provide even the basics for myself and my children," she recalls.

Like many women in her community, Faraja faced limited opportunities to earn an income. Cultural norms and financial exclusion made it difficult for women to access credit or start businesses. On top of this, she doubted her own ability to manage a venture, a reality that kept her trapped in dependence.

Her turning point came in 2024 when she joined a Community Conservation Bank (COCOA) under the COSME Project. Through the group, she received training on savings, entrepreneurship, and alternative livelihoods. For the first time, she gained access to small loans. With her first loan, she started a

“ I never imagined myself producing charcoal, let alone in a way that helps the environment. When people bought my charcoal and encouraged me, I felt proud and motivated”

— Faraja

hot pepper trading business, gradually expanding and increasing her household income.

But the COSME Project also exposed her to another opportunity, that involved alternative charcoal production. Unlike traditional charcoal that drives deforestation, this method transforms wood waste into sustainable fuel. At first, Faraja could hardly imagine herself producing charcoal.

Today, Faraja successfully manages both her hot pepper enterprise and her eco-friendly charcoal production. Her businesses now allow her to meet her children's educational needs and contribute significantly to her family's welfare. Beyond income, her confidence has grown. She now participates actively in community activities and is seen as a role model for other women.

Through alternative charcoal production, Faraja is not only lifting her family out of financial struggle but also promoting sustainable energy, reducing pressure on local forests, and showing that women can lead in climate-smart innovation.

Looking ahead, Faraja hopes to scale up her alternative charcoal venture while expanding her trading business. Despite the fact that she still experiences challenges such as limited equipment and market instability, her story illustrates the powerful link between women's empowerment and environmental conservation. With access to credit, skills, and community support, women like Faraja are proving that economic independence and ecological protection can go hand in hand.

“ My dream is to grow more, to secure my children's future, and to help other women see that they too can succeed if they are given an opportunity.”

— Faraja



The photo shows Faraja preparing wood shavings/residues for carbonization to produce alternative charcoal.

The photo shows Faraja operating the machine used for carbonizing wood shavings.

The photo shows Faraja producing alternative charcoal by hand.

The photo shows Faraja after completing the carbonization of wood shavings (sawdust).

From Shy School Girl to Meeting the President at 16!



“I used to be shy speaking to the public, but my role as chairperson intentionally exposed me to learning to speak in public through interactions with R&S members in and outside the school,” she explains.”

— Ester

1. Ester George Barua with Her Excellence President of the United Republic of Tanzania Honorable Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan
2. Ester George Barua presenting appreciation speech to the president of United Republic of Tanzania on development progress made towards public schools in Muheza district
3. Ester George Barua with her fellow Roots & Shoots attending seedlings at their school tree nursery sites

At just 16 years old, Ester George Barua from Magila Secondary School in Muheza District, Tanzania, has already stood before the President of the United Republic of Tanzania and left an impression that made headlines. What began as a shy schoolgirl uncertain about public speaking has transformed into a confident youth leader, thanks to the Roots & Shoots (R&S) program supported by the COSME project.

Before the project, many students in Ester's school lacked confidence and self-expression skills. Teachers often noticed that during assemblies and learning sessions, students were reluctant to answer questions without persistent prodding. The heavy emphasis on academics left little space for platforms like clubs, where students could practice leadership, build confidence, and engage in meaningful discussions. For girls, this gap was even more visible.

The COSME project responded by facilitating the creation of Roots & Shoots clubs, where students gather weekly to learn, exchange ideas, and take part in practical environmental activities. Beyond school, the project connected club leaders across schools

“I feel blessed to be among the chosen presenters and get the opportunity to get that close to our President.”

— Ester

through training sessions and regional forums, offering young leaders a stage to sharpen their voices and develop confidence.

Ester, was elected chairperson of her school's R&S club, a challenge she embraced with optimism and grace.

Leading meetings, guiding peers, and representing her school pushed her to overcome her shyness.

Her transformation reached a national stage on February 27, 2025, when she addressed the President during a high-profile event. Moved by her confidence and eloquence, the President invited Ester to sit in her chair of honor, a powerful gesture that resonated across the country. Pictures of Ester were widely shared on social media, cementing her as a symbol of youth empowerment.

The impact has gone far beyond personal growth. Ester's leadership has inspired her peers to embrace self-expression, strengthening the Roots & Shoots clubs as platforms for environmental advocacy. With confident young leaders, the clubs are better positioned to advance conservation and climate action at community and national levels.

Looking ahead, Ester hopes to continue using her voice to influence change, not only in her school but across Tanzania. Her story demonstrates how empowering girls in leadership does more than build confidence; it creates champions for climate action and role models for the next generation.

At just 16, I presented before the President and she invited me to sit in her chair of honor.”

— Ester



Read the full story here:
<https://youtu.be/qsJ0SosiW0?si=fbXgSR8Fe1tTy5k8>



Johnson Stuart recording forest patrol data into the Survey 123 application using a smartphone provided by the COSME project



An eye contact photo of Johnson Stuart, a Forest Monitor with a skin disability



A group photo showing Johnson Stuart and his fellow Forest Monitors from other project villages

COSME PROJECT:

Champions Social Inclusion Through Forest Restoration

In the quiet village of Mgambo in Muheza District, Tanzania, lives Johnson Samuel Stuart, a 36-year-old man whose story is changing how his community views conservation and inclusion. Living with a skin disability (albinism), Johnson had long experienced exclusion in many aspects of life, especially in environmental conservation. In a community where people with disabilities are often sidelined, his resilience is rewriting the narrative.

Before the COSME project began, people with disabilities in Mgambo rarely found opportunities to take part in environmental programs, despite being among the most affected by climate change. Even when chances arose, stigma and social barriers kept them away. As Johnson recalls, village leaders initially dismissed his application to serve as a Forest Monitor, assuming his disability made him unfit for the role.

But Johnson's determination and the project's commitment to inclusion changed everything. Through advocacy and a fair recruitment process, he secured the chance to attend a three-month

“I have proven beyond a reasonable doubt that taking part in conservation activities is not restricted by a disability. I hope my dedication will encourage other disadvantaged people to get involved in conservation.”

— Johnson

paramilitary-style training in forest management and patrol techniques. While some participants without disabilities dropped out due to the demanding nature of the training, Johnson endured and excelled.

“I never imagined that I would travel to Mwanza and receive paramilitary training; it has given me the life skills I need to endure any difficult situation outside of conservation in my personal life.”

— Johnson

Since completing the training, Johnson has returned to Mgambo with renewed purpose. He has played a central role in identifying a 5-hectare Village Forest Reserve, situated six kilometers from the village, and in leading the transplanting of 1,680 seedlings into the area. Every week, he joins patrols, keeping detailed records using a smartphone application introduced by the COSME project. His leadership has inspired his fellow community members to participate actively in conservation efforts.

“I am happy with the degree of involvement my community members have demonstrated in the restoration process by helping to transplant tree seeds in the village forest reserve.”

— Johnson

Johnson's journey is more than personal triumph; it is a symbol of inclusive climate action. By breaking through social barriers, he has shown that disability does not limit one's capacity to restore ecosystems. His story has opened the door for

greater participation of marginalized groups in conservation, aligning with the spirit of Tanzania's Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) Guideline, which prioritizes women, youth, and disadvantaged groups in restoration.

Looking ahead, Johnson remains committed to advocating for inclusion in environmental programs. His story is a powerful reminder that when marginalized voices are brought to the center of climate action, communities not only restore forests but also restore dignity, belonging, and hope.

I have proven beyond doubt that taking part in conservation is not restricted by a disability.”

— Johnson Stuart



PIK Country Director George Otim (standing) addressing community members during a field visit in Takaungu, Kilifi.



COSME stakeholders during validation of the EDNa Report in Mombasa.



PIK coastal Programme Area Manager, Eston Niyaga (center) giving a speech during World Seaweed Day celebration in Msambweni, Kwale.



COSME Project Senior Managers, Beryl Oduor for Kenya (right) and Dr. Namkunda for Tanzania during this year's annual review meeting in Mombasa Kenya.



H.E Governor Achani (2nd left) visiting the PIK exhibition stand during World Seaweed Day celebration in Msambweni, Kwale.



Kimani Mungai, Senior International Assistance Officer at GAC during a field visit to COSME sites.



Alex (center) from KEMFRI with Cascadia Seaweed Corporation, Jane and Bosun during a technical visit to Mkwiro Seaweed Farms.



Plan staff and community members from Yungi Mwenjeni in Kwale County during a mangrove restoration exercise.



Plan International CEO, Reena Ghelani, Regional Director MEESA Roger Yates, Kenya Country Office Director George Otim together with Plan International Coastal hub staff during a field visit to Kwale project sites.



Project coordination-NRM and community members from Chonyi during a tree planting activity in Kaya Chonyi.



Seaweed farmers from Mukwiro seaweed group tending to a seaweed farm together in an act of sisterhood.

YouTube

https://youtu.be/Jn7Wg1sfgl?si=vvvYJma_1Z0cS3Nwf



World Environment Day: Kilifi women break barriers to save forests



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57-G0RDeIVc>



Kilimo Cha Baharini: Wanaume sasa wamegeukia fursa mpya ya ukuzaji wa mwani



YouTube

<https://www.thecoast.co.ke/2025/06/09/seaweed-my-father-my-mother-say-kwale-women/09/11/news-feature/thecoast/9551/02/>



Seaweed my Father my Mother, Kwale Women Say



in the news.

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg5juUwzKPY>

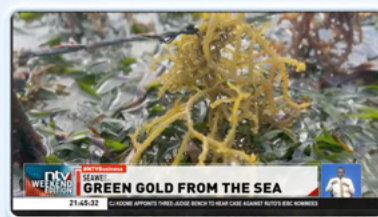


Uimarisha ukulima wa mwani Kwale



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M7a62FHaXk&t=9s>



In Tumbe Kwale, men dive into seaweed farming, proving that the future floats offshore



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFhIJ-GcKA>



Mangrove Mamas of Takaungu: Women lead Kilifi's climate fight to restore mangroves



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBovgcQEgEg>



Fahamu kuhusu kilimo cha mwani | Kilimo Almasi



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFhIJ-GcKA>



Mangrove Mamas of Takaungu: Women lead Kilifi's climate fight to restore mangroves



Kwale women ride the tides of fortune through sea weed farms

Driven by determination and a deep belief in the power of the ocean, they have tapped into the silent wealth beneath the waves

By Shabane Omar

Published: June 10, 2025 | PEOPLE DAILY

Along the sparkling shores of Takaungu, the women of Takaungu are busy with their seaweed farms, a source of income and pride. The women are known for their hard work and dedication to their craft.

Seaweed farming is a traditional practice that has been passed down from generation to generation. The women of Takaungu are proud to continue this tradition and to share their knowledge with others.

The women of Takaungu are not only skilled in seaweed farming, but they are also entrepreneurs. They have started their own businesses and are selling their seaweed products to local and international markets.

The women of Takaungu are a source of inspiration for many. They have shown that with hard work and determination, it is possible to create a successful business out of a traditional practice.

The women of Takaungu are a testament to the power of the ocean. They have shown that the ocean is not just a source of food, but it is also a source of wealth and opportunity.

The women of Takaungu are a source of pride for their community. They have shown that women can be successful in any field, and they have inspired many other women to follow in their footsteps.

The women of Takaungu are a source of hope for the future. They have shown that with hard work and determination, it is possible to create a better life for oneself and for one's community.

The women of Takaungu are a source of strength. They have shown that women can be strong and resilient, and they can overcome any challenge that comes their way.

The women of Takaungu are a source of joy. They have shown that life can be full of joy and happiness, even in the face of adversity.

The women of Takaungu are a source of love. They have shown that love is the most powerful force in the world, and it can overcome all obstacles.

The women of Takaungu are a source of life. They have shown that life is precious, and it should be lived to the fullest.

The women of Takaungu are a source of hope. They have shown that hope is the key to a better future, and it is something that everyone should have.

The women of Takaungu are a source of faith. They have shown that faith is the foundation of all things, and it is something that everyone should have.

The women of Takaungu are a source of peace. They have shown that peace is the most important thing in life, and it is something that everyone should have.

The women of Takaungu are a source of happiness. They have shown that happiness is the most important thing in life, and it is something that everyone should have.

Read the full story here:
<https://tinyurl.com/9sa5yb8y>



Players push for seaweed to be categorised as cash crop

Move would open up doors to structured markets, access to loans, insurance and extension services for seaweed farmers

By Shabane Omar

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COSME PROGRESS

AS AT AUGUST 2025



Improved climate-resilient, equitable economies within communities relying on coastal and marine ecosystems, especially women, in Kenya's Coast Region



NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Enhanced **adoption of** gender-responsive and socially-inclusive **Nature-based Solutions (Nbs) for climate change adaptation** with **biodiversity and ecosystem integrity co-benefits**.



SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL ASSETS OF WOMEN

Increased **agency of women** in their diversity to exercise their right **to participate in gender-responsive Nbs** with biodiversity co-benefits **to increase adaptive capacity and build household and community resilience**.



GOVERNANCE FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Improved gender-responsive and child/youth-friendly **governance for climate adaptation, resilience and biodiversity**.

205,000 mangrove and 46,380 indigenous trees Planted with 63.5 ha rehabilitated

Over KES 19 million directly channelled to conservation groups through the purchase of tree seedlings & Labour

90% of seaweed groups participating in production

Over 95.0 tons of seaweed produced

Over 40.1 tons of seaweed sold earning the Groups KES 2.9M

Over 2,800 women trained on Nature base Solutions

Over 23,000 Fruit trees seedlings distributed to community with a 84% Survival rate recorded

2,337 women trained on Gender Justice Journey methodology

78% successfully completing Gender Justice Journey 3 training modules.

137 savings groups; 3,241 trained in financial literacy

Over KES. 10.2 million in savings has been recorded across 137 Gender Responsive Savings Groups (GRSGs) from 2024

78% of Women participating and Saving from a baseline of 28%

Over 2500 Women Supported with Solvatten kits to reduce women's domestic workload

Over 4,000 students engaged via 4 K-Clubs

75 water tanks, 3,120 Solvatten kits distributed to 65 schools

Women Rights Organisations (WROs) /Youth Led Organisations (YLOs) engaged in national climate policy dialogues

Project Management Information Systems (MIS) set up completed and functional



	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS
Percentage of targeted schools with access to sustainable clean water solutions	23.4%	60%	57.8%
Percentage of women actively saving in a Savings Group	28.8%	70%	78.6%
Percentage and Number of targeted women with adequate resources to undertake regenerative and sustainable seaweed production, value addition and commercialization (disaggregated by type of activity)	0%	75%	28%
Number of Seaweed Groups undertaking regenerative and sustainable seaweed production, value addition and commercialization (disaggregated by type of activity)	0	20	13 (65%)
Area (hectares) under rehabilitation using gender responsive nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation with biodiversity benefits, disaggregated by terrestrial, aquatic and coastal ecosystem	0	123.8 ha	63 (51%)



Until we are all equal

About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion, and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters, and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national, and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

Plan International

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OUR PARTNERS

