

Sea PoWer: Improved seaweed farming technology for women's empowerment, livelihoods and environmental protection

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In the Western Indian Ocean, particularly Zanzibar, seaweed farming is a small-scale activity carried out mainly by women. They are, however, confronted with many challenges: inadequate technology, climatic variations, low yields, economic inefficiencies and social and cultural constraints. Tubular nets have recently been piloted and are showing promise over the traditional 'off-bottom' peg and rope technology to improve productivity and local ecosystem conditions. The promotion of the use of tubular nets, however, requires a gender-sensitive approach that gives women producers full control over all farming tasks and contribute to their empowerment and better work conditions, before it can be promoted for wider adoption across the region. Tubular nets are more suited to deeper water, and thus, require either swimming or boat manning skills that most women do not have. Moreover, little is known about the economic profitability of the technology, its potential cultural acceptance and adoption, as well as its impact on livelihoods and women's empowerment. These economic and cultural factors are pivotal for the sustained adoption of the technology. The encouraging results of initial pilots with tubular nets must be capitalised upon with improvements in the technology to ensure that not only is the innovation sensitive to cultural constraints and facilitates women's work, but that it also acts as a vector for their emancipation. The goal of our project, Sea PoWer, a winner of the Blue Economy Challenge award (<http://theblueeconomychallenge.com>), is to achieve an adapted seaweed technology that is ready for scaling out and wide adoption among women producers in the Western Indian Ocean. We will share how our gender-sensitive approach to innovation is improving the use of tubular nets and facilitating women's work, and validating their effectiveness and value for enhanced seaweed productivity, quality, livelihoods, coastal ecosystem services and women's empowerment.