

Interview with Mercy Wasai Mghanga, fish trader and Chairperson, Bamburi Beach Management Unit (BMU) and Vice-Chairperson, Mombasa County BMU network

By **Hadley B. Becha** (becha.canco@gmail.com), Executive Director, Community Action for Nature Conservation—CANCO

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I have been a fish trader in Mombasa, Kenya, for 20 years now. I was inspired to join this profession by a friend, who used to supply fish to tourist and beach hotels. My husband, who is a businessman, gave me the start-up capital to start my work and also helped with transportation of the products to the market.

What are the challenges that you and other women traders face?

Women have financial needs. And so, we must have the right to work in any sector of our choice. Kenyan resources are for all Kenyans. But men think they are superior to women. They occupy all the leadership positions, and downplay the rights of women to leadership in the sector. We met with a group of Tanzanian women processors who were on an exchange visit to Kenya. It was their experience too that fishermen consider women as the weaker sex, and this view is compounded by cultures and customs based on gender discrimination. However there are also good signs: women are beginning to fight for their rights. Women definitely need to stand up for their rights and fight discrimination by men in the BMUs and county network positions.

Tell us about the Women Fishers' Conference you attended recently.

I was very proud to be part of the conference. The conference gave women an opportunity to share and discuss issues affecting all women fishers in Africa. We realized that the problems of women are similar but we also realized that women traders can no longer be considered *mama karanga* or informal traders, rather we are entrepreneurs.

What future steps would women need to take?

Women must struggle, fight and advocate for women's rights and leadership in the fisheries sector. We need support and we must look for adequate assistance to equip women fishers with appropriate fishing equipment and vessels, and continue to engage with all stakeholders and well-wishers, including banks, through the Mombasa county BMU network. 📄