

Mercy is a 45-year-old fish trader in Mombasa in Kenya. She does not come from a fishing family. However, in 1996, after dropping out of school because of poverty, Mercy migrated at the age of 25 to Mombasa city and started out as a fish vendor, selling to different beach hotels in Mombasa.

Taking to fish vending was not easy for Mercy. She had very little knowledge, and had to learn the trade from male traders in the various fish landing sites. Being a Muslim woman, given the biases that Muslim women working outside the home in Kenya have

fishlanding site. There are about 74 Registered BMUs along the Kenyan coastline today. The main objectives are to ensure sustainable fishing through co-management arrangements, compliance and enforcement.

Mercy's articulation skills and sense of determination made her the representative of artisanal fishers and traders in various fisheries forums. She is a Management Committee member of the Tuna Fisheries Alliance of Kenya (TuFAK) and has been representing the Mombasa County BMU in the annual Tuna Fisheries dialogue meetings since 2013.

She is presently the elected chairperson of the Bamburi BMU. This BMU has 92 registered members, 20 of whom are women. She is also the elected vice-chairperson of the Mombasa County BMU network.

In 2013, Mercy founded Pwani Fish Marketing Association to enhance fish product development, quality assurance, value addition and marketing. Through her efforts, the members of the association and those of Bamburi's BMUs received training on fish quality assurance and cold storage facilities. They also received training on leadership, fisheries governance, policy advocacy, and a rights based approach to fisheries management.

Mercy's leadership skills and ability to engage decisionmakers in the government and private sector have yielded positive results. The County Government of Mombasa and the Kenya Commercial Bank provided fishers a grant of 60 million Kenya Shillings (USD 59,154.2) to secure modernized fishing vessels and equipment. Further, they sponsored 112 BMU members from Mombasa County to train on various technical skills and knowledge areas at Bandari College, Mombasa. Mercy is one of them and is being trained as a boat management and maintenance technician. ■

PROFILE

Mercy Wasai Mghanga: Profile of a Kenyan Woman Fishworker Leader **Chairperson of the Bamburi Beach Management Unit, Mercy works extensively on fish product development and marketing**

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to face, it was not easy to take up a trade that involved interacting a lot with 'other' men and working long hours outdoors. Her lack of skill in selecting good stock made her incur losses when she started off.

However, Mercy persisted, establishing her base at the Bamburi fish landing station in Mombasa County. Soon, Mercy became a strong advocate for the rights of artisanal fishers, both men and women, as well as for the rights of women in fish trade.

In Kenya, fish trade is controlled by Beach Management Units (BMUs). These are legal entities of fishers, fish traders, boat operators, fish processors and other beach stakeholders dependent on the fisheries sector.

The enactment of the Fisheries (Beach Management Units) Regulations of 2007 led to the establishment of BMUs in each