

# Racks of Resilience

## EMEDO improves the livelihoods of Tanzanian women in fisheries through enhanced drying racks

By **Lucyphine Kilanga**  
(lucyjuliusk@gmail.com), Gender and Women Empowerment Officer, Environmental Management and Economic Development Organization (EMEDO), Tanzania

In the heart of Magata/Kalutanga Ward, Muleba District, Kagera Region, Tanzania, the women of the Akina Mama na Maendeleo group are rewriting the narrative of small-scale fisheries. Founded in 1998 and officially registered in 2013, this group of twelve women has been at the forefront of the fisheries sector, focusing on the trade and processing of silverfish, commonly known as *dagaa*. These women are more than just fish processors; they are change-makers, committed to improving not only their own livelihoods but also those of other women in their community.

One of the key factors contributing to the success of Akina Mama na Maendeleo has been their collaboration with other women's groups who are members of the Tanzanian Women Fish Workers Association (TAWFA). This partnership has opened doors to new opportunities, and one of the most impactful initiatives has been the construction of modern drying racks, supported by WORLDFISH and the Environmental Management and Economic Development Organization (EMEDO). These racks were designed to enhance both the economic resilience and climate change adaptation of the women involved in fisheries.

Before the introduction of the new drying racks, the women of Akina Mama na Maendeleo faced several challenges with their traditional drying methods. The racks they used were made of wood from local trees, which were often not durable enough to withstand the rainy season. Eaten by ants, they required frequent repairs. Additionally, the traditional racks had a limited capacity, serving only four to five buckets of *dagaa* at a time, resulting in long wait times and forcing women to use a rotational system. This significantly reduced productivity and limited the amount of silverfish that could be processed at any given time. Another challenge was the low-quality nets used to cover the drying fish. These nets were prone to tearing, which added to maintenance costs and sometimes led to contamination of the fish. As a result, women faced significant time and resource constraints, and their products were at risk of losing quality, which affected the market value of their fish.

To address these challenges, a meeting was held with the women's group members, the village chairperson, and executive officers to assess the situation and explore potential solutions. After this discussion, it became clear that what the women needed was a more robust, sustainable, and efficient drying system. The idea of modern drying racks was proposed, with a clear aim: to enhance the women's ability to dry and preserve their fish products more effectively, leading to increased income and improved livelihoods. An environmental assessment was conducted to determine the feasibility of constructing new drying racks, which required ample space and a fenced area to protect the drying fish from animals. The women also devised a sustainability plan, which included the creation of a "*chanja akaunti*" (savings account). The group decided to charge a small fee of 1,000 TZS per bucket of *dagaa* dried on the new racks. Visitors who came to learn about the project also contributed to the savings account, paying a fee of 500 TZS.

With the mobilization of local carpenters and construction workers, the building of the new drying racks began. This was an exciting moment for the women, as they saw their vision of improved fish preservation come to life. The drying racks were designed to accommodate seven to eight buckets of *dagaa*, significantly increasing the drying capacity and allowing more women to access the racks. The addition of fencing further ensured the safety and security of the drying *dagaa*, preventing damage from animals such as dogs. The launch of the drying racks was a momentous occasion attended by community members, local government officials, and journalists from various media houses. This event marked a critical step forward for the women of Akina Mama na Maendeleo, demonstrating their ability to overcome challenges and embrace modern technology to improve their livelihoods.

The new drying racks have had a profound impact on the women fish processors and traders in the sector. The enhanced drying process has not only improved the efficiency and hygiene of fish preservation but also contributed to the

The new drying racks have had a profound impact on the women fish processors and traders in the sector





Modern drying racks made of steel, constructed to improve the processing of dagaa for women and sustain in the climatic shocks, Tanzania. By providing a reliable and sustainable means of drying *dagaa*, the racks have improved the overall resilience of the women's businesses

overall quality of the *dagaa*. With the increased capacity of the drying racks, the women can now process more *dagaa*, leading to higher production levels and ultimately more income. Furthermore, the introduction of these modern drying racks has helped the women adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, such as unpredictable weather patterns and longer rainy seasons. By providing a reliable and sustainable means of drying *dagaa*, the racks have improved the overall resilience of the women's businesses. The increased income from improved production has led to tangible improvements in the women's livelihoods. The fees collected for using the drying racks are saved in the *chanja akaunti*, which will be used for maintenance, repairs, and further development of the group's activities. This sustainable financial model ensures the women benefit not only from

immediate improvements but also from long-term success and growth.

The initiative has contributed to promoting environmental stewardship and economic empowerment within the local fishing industry. Other women's groups in the area are now looking to replicate the success of Akina Mama na Maendeleo, further expanding opportunities for women in the fisheries sector. The construction of modern drying racks has proven to be a transformative solution for the women. Not only has it improved the efficiency, hygiene, and productivity of their fish processing, but it has also contributed to their economic empowerment and business continuity. This initiative is a testament to the power of local innovation and community-driven solutions in enhancing livelihoods and building resilience against climate change. 📌