KMFRI

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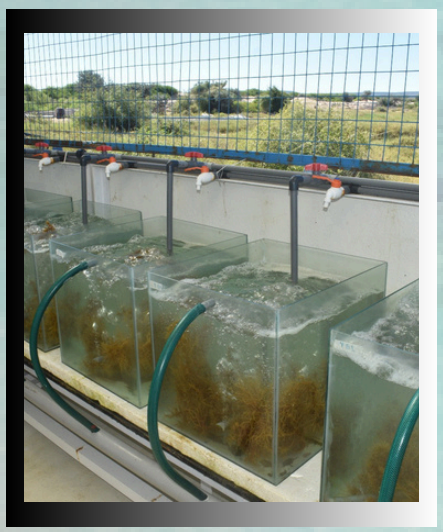
Feature Story:

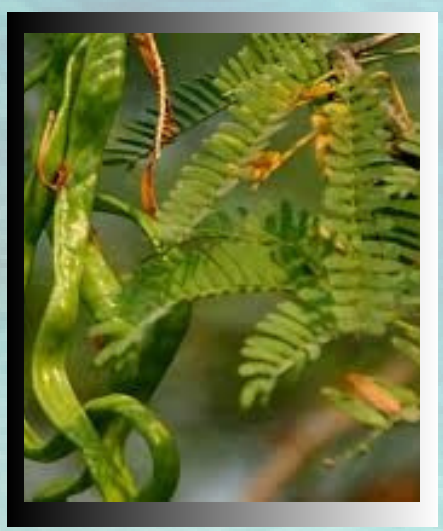
Sailing on standards: How ISO frameworks anchor KMFRI's scientific excellence

Highlights

ARBEC III set to convene global experts in Nairobi to advance Africa's Blue Economy Agenda



KMFRI seeks advances in seaweed farming and artisanal mariculture



KMFRI research transforms invasive Mathenge into a sustainable alternative for fish feed

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By: Faith Mboka | *Edits: Jane Kiguta* | Layout: Faith Mboka

ARBEC III set to convene global experts in Nairobi to advance Africa's Blue Economy Agenda

KMFRI Director General, Dr. Paul Orina

The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute is set to host the **Third African Regional Blue Economy Conference (ARBEC III)** from 23–27 November 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya, bringing together scientists, policymakers, development partners, innovators, and practitioners from across Africa and beyond to shape the future of sustainable blue economies. Held under the theme "**Science, Innovation and Partnerships for Resilient Blue Economies**," the conference is expected to attract more than 1,000 participants and feature over 300 scientific presentations focusing on critical issues affecting Africa's inland and marine ecosystems.

"ARBEC III is more than a conference; it is a call to action for science, innovation, and partnerships that will secure the future of our aquatic resources and blue economies. We look forward to welcoming researchers and stakeholders to Nairobi to share knowledge, inspire innovation, and co-create solutions for a resilient and sustainable future," says Dr. Paul Orina, Director General, KMFRI.

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"ARBEC III comes at a critical moment when science, innovation, and partnerships are needed more than ever to address the challenges facing our aquatic ecosystems and to unlock the full potential of the blue economy," added Dr. Orina.

Building on the momentum of previous editions held in Kisumu in 2022 and 2024, **ARBEC III** aims to strengthen regional collaboration and generate evidence-based solutions for sustainable aquatic resource management, climate resilience, and inclusive economic growth. According to the organizers, the conference has evolved into one of East Africa's premier scientific and policy platforms dedicated to advancing research, innovation, and partnerships within the blue economy sector.

While inviting stakeholders to participate in the regional conference **Dr. Orina** emphasized that the discussions at ARBEC III will play a critical role in shaping evidence-based solutions for the sustainable management of aquatic resources and the millions of livelihoods that depend on them.

"ARBEC III presents a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge, showcase innovations, and forge partnerships that will drive resilient and sustainable blue economies," said KMFRI CEO.

In preparation for the conference, Dr. Orina has been engaging potential sponsors, financial institutions, and development partners to mobilize support for the event. He noted that strategic partnerships are essential for unlocking investments, advancing ocean and aquatic science, fostering innovation, and promoting sustainable livelihoods across the region.

How we started

ARBEC I laid the foundation by convening researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to establish priority research agendas for blue economy governance. **ARBEC II** expanded the conference's regional reach, attracting participants from over 30 countries and generating important policy dialogue to support decision-making within regional economic communities. This year's conference will place greater emphasis on high-impact economic sectors supported by cross-cutting themes essential to sustainable development.

KMFRI Team during the 2nd African Regional Blue Economy Conference held in June 2024

What to expect

The conference programme is organized around seven thematic tracks that reflect emerging priorities in aquatic science and blue economy development. These include sustainable fisheries and aquatic food systems, climate-smart aquaculture, blue tourism and nature-based enterprises, governance and blue finance, digital innovation and technology, climate resilience and ecosystem health, as well as community engagement, equity, and capacity building.

Researchers and innovators attending the conference will have an opportunity to showcase advancements in areas such as artificial intelligence applications, remote sensing, IoT-based monitoring systems, ecosystem restoration, aquaculture technologies, fisheries management, and community-led conservation approaches.

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Nairobi was selected as the host city due to its strategic role as a regional hub for international development and environmental governance. The city hosts the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, alongside several international organizations supporting environmental management and sustainable development initiatives across Africa. The conference is also expected to strengthen collaboration among governments, academia, development agencies, local communities, and private sector actors working within the blue economy space

The organizers have invited researchers, students, policymakers, development partners, and private sector stakeholders to submit abstracts and participate in discussions that will help shape resilient and inclusive blue economies for the continent. Abstract submission opened on 15 February 2026 and closes on 31 May 2026, while successful applicants will receive notification of acceptance by 15 July 2026.

In addition to scientific sessions**, ARBEC III** will provide networking opportunities, exhibitions, partnership engagements, and policy dialogues designed to foster innovation and strengthen regional cooperation. The conference further presents sponsorship and partnership opportunities for institutions and organizations interested in supporting sustainable blue economy initiatives and expanding their visibility among regional and international stakeholders.

As Africa increasingly looks toward its oceans, lakes, rivers, and coastal resources as drivers of economic transformation, **ARBEC III** is expected to play a significant role in advancing research-driven solutions and collaborative action for the sustainable use of aquatic resources.

For more information about the conference, abstract submission, registration, and partnership opportunities, interested participants can visit the KMFRI website or contact the organizing secretariat through **arbec2026@kmfri.go.ke**

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By: Hellen Moyoni, Edward Waiyaki, Faith Kimanga, Nicholas Karani, Stephen Makupe and Faith Mboka | *Edits: Jane Kiguta* | Layout: Faith Mboka

KMFRI study reveals impact of brokers in fish value chain

The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) study has revealed multiple fish market pathways, often dominated by intermediaries. The research carried out by KMFRI socio-economics team indicates that the presence of middlemen in the fish value chain, reduces profit margins for primary producers. The findings also showed that over the past five years, respondents have experienced increased competition, fluctuating fish supply, and declining profitability, suggesting growing strain within domestic fish markets.

The study, carried out in key landing sites across Kilifi County and Kwale County, sought to assess domestic market access for artisanal fisherfolk along Kenya's coast. In the survey, 100 participants across five coastal sites were sampled. A mixed-methods approach combining surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews was used to collect data. The research provides timely insights into the opportunities and persistent barriers affecting small-scale fisheries one of the backbone sectors supporting coastal livelihoods and food security.

Small-scale fisheries contribute significantly to employment, nutrition, and income generation. However, despite their importance, artisanal fisherfolk including fishers, processors, and traders continue to face structural challenges in accessing profitable domestic markets. Strengthening market systems is therefore essential for achieving sustainable livelihoods and supporting national blue economy goals.

Ice is a common fish preservative used by artisanal fisherfolk in coastal Kenya.

Respondents decried limited access to cold storage and transport facilities as some of the most pressing challenges experienced in the venture. They also cited exploitative pricing and delayed payments by middlemen, inadequate access to credit and financial resources, and weak institutional support, particularly from Beach Management Units (BMUs) as major constraints. They said poor fish handling, lack of refrigeration, and inefficient logistics continue to contribute to significant post-harvest losses, directly affecting incomes and food security among coastal communities.

Voices from the Coast

Fishers and processors highlighted that resource insufficiency especially financial and infrastructural

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constraints lie at the root of most market challenges. Many expressed the need for better organization, fair pricing mechanisms, and improved institutional accountability.

Motorcycles are used by traders to ensure they are able to access domestic markets.

Key informants, including BMU leaders, also noted the importance of strengthening collaboration among fisheries stakeholders to improve market access and service delivery.

Pathways to Improvement

The study recommended several strategic interventions that could improve domestic market access for artisanal fisherfolk which include strengthening fisher cooperatives to enhance bargaining power, improve access to high-value markets, and reduce dependency on intermediaries. Investment in cold storage, transport systems, and modern processing facilities is also critical in reducing post-harvest losses and improving product quality.

Key Informants, such as the Vanga BMU Chairlady, are knowledgeable on market access issues.

The findings further emphasize the need for tailored credit facilities for small-scale actors to support investment in better equipment and business expansion. At the same time, reforms aimed at improving transparency and accountability within BMUs are essential in ensuring fisherfolk interests are better represented. The study also recommends promoting collaborative market approaches to help small-scale actors compete more effectively and access larger, more lucrative markets.

Looking Ahead

As Kenya advances its blue economy agenda, improving domestic market access for artisanal fisheries is no longer optional; it is essential. The study provides a foundation for evidence-based policy,

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targeted investments, and inclusive interventions that can transform the sector.

Key Informants are knowledgeable on market access and service delivery issues.

Further research is recommended to explore demand dynamics and opportunities in both domestic and export markets, ensuring that artisanal fisherfolk are not left behind in the evolving fisheries economy.

By: KMFRI Risk Management and Quality Assurance Department | *Edits: Ruth Ommala* | Layout: Faith Mboka

Sailing on standards: How ISO frameworks anchor KMFRI's scientific excellence

In today's fast-evolving and interconnected world, institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate excellence not only in service delivery but also in quality assurance, accountability, and environmental responsibility. For research institutions, where accuracy and credibility form the foundation of scientific advancement, maintaining internationally recognized standards has become more important than ever. At the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), these standards are more than operational requirements they are strategic pillars that continue to strengthen the Institute's contribution to Kenya's Blue Economy.

As the country's lead institution in marine and freshwater research, KMFRI plays a critical role in generating scientific data and information that informs sustainable management of aquatic resources. The Institute's work spans fisheries, aquaculture, oceanography, hydrography, environmental and ecological studies, as well as bio-prospecting. In addition, KMFRI collaborates with global research organizations and institutions of higher learning to promote innovation, scientific advancement, and capacity development.

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Managing such broad and technically demanding research areas requires systems that guarantee precision, consistency, and continuous improvement. This is where International Organization for Standardization (ISO) frameworks have become instrumental in shaping KMFRI's operational excellence.

Through the adoption of internationally recognized ISO management systems, KMFRI has strengthened its institutional processes while fostering a culture of quality across all levels of operation. Standardized procedures have improved workflow coordination, clarified roles and responsibilities, minimized operational errors, and enhanced efficiency in service delivery. These systems also ensure that scientific outputs generated by the Institute remain reliable, reproducible, and globally credible.

Beyond efficiency, ISO frameworks have significantly enhanced KMFRI's risk management practices. By proactively identifying and addressing operational and technical risks, the Institute is better positioned to safeguard resources, protect the integrity of scientific research, and maintain uninterrupted service delivery. In a field where data accuracy and laboratory precision are paramount, such systems are essential in sustaining stakeholder confidence and institutional credibility.

The Institute's unwavering commitment to quality is reflected in its long-standing compliance journey. KMFRI has maintained ISO 9001:2015 certification through the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) continuously since 2012. Most recently, the Institute successfully attained recertification of its Quality Management System (QMS) in February 2026, reaffirming its dedication to maintaining high standards in both administrative and scientific operations.

KMFRI Director General, Dr Paul Orina receiving the ISO 9001:2015 certification award from the Managing Director, Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), Madam Esther Ngari, during the 5th Regional Quality Conference at Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort & Spa.

This achievement highlights KMFRI's commitment to continuous improvement and institutional excellence. By embedding quality management principles into everyday operations from administrative processes to laboratory research and field activities the Institute continues to strengthen systems that support innovation, accountability, and impactful scientific research.

In line with its strategic growth agenda, KMFRI has also expanded the scope of its QMS to include the Sagana Aquaculture Centre and the Kisumu Freshwater Systems Centre. This milestone demonstrates the Institute's ongoing efforts to harmonize quality standards across its regional stations while improving efficiency and service delivery nationwide.

At the same time, KMFRI is making significant strides toward achieving ISO/IEC 17025:2017 accreditation for its testing and calibration laboratories at the Mombasa Centre. This internationally recognized accreditation focuses on laboratory competence and technical accuracy, reinforcing confidence in the Institute's analytical and testing capabilities. Notably, the laboratories have already been formally designated

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by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) under the same ISO/IEC 17025 management framework a strong indication of the Institute's growing technical excellence and professional credibility.

As Kenya continues to embrace the opportunities presented by the Blue Economy, institutions such as KMFRI remain central to providing the scientific knowledge necessary for sustainable development and evidence-based decision-making. By investing in internationally recognized quality management systems, KMFRI is not only enhancing institutional performance but also positioning itself as a globally competitive Centre of scientific excellence.

Through its continued commitment to quality, innovation, and continuous improvement, KMFRI is steadily building a future where credible science, strong systems, and sustainable development move forward together firmly anchored on international standards.

By: Anthony Kamau & Brian Isoe | *Edits: Jane Kiguta* | Layout: Faith Mboka

KMFRI seeks advances in seaweed farming and artisanal mariculture

The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute participated in the second edition of the International Training Program in Artisanal Mariculture Sciences and Village Farming held in Toliara, southwest of Madagascar.

Anthony Kamau, a Research Associate at KMFRI, represented the Institute during the training conducted from 2nd March to 28th April 2026. The programme was jointly facilitated by the University of Toliara through its Institute of Fisheries and Marine Sciences, the University of Mons, and the University of Liège.

Anthony Kamau (far left) with fellow trainees during a routine practical activity on seaweed farm monitoring in Sarodrano village, Toliara, Madagascar.

Theoretical sessions were delivered through classroom lectures at the University of Toliara's Institute of Fisheries and Marine Sciences, complemented by instructor-produced videos integrated into a flipped classroom system hosted on the University of Mons online learning platform. Practical field-based training in seaweed farming was conducted at pilot seaweed hatcheries and nurseries operated by Ocean Farmers Company, as well as in the coastal village of Sarodrano.

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Program trainees during a discussion session with Mr. Frédéric Pascal, CEO & Co-founder of Ocean Farmers Company, at the University of Toliara's Institute of Fisheries and Marine Sciences (IHSM) in Toliara, Madagascar.

The training programme covered a wide range of modules, including biology of aquaculture organisms, general principles in mariculture, diseases affecting marine organisms, sociology of village farming, gender in artisanal mariculture, management and entrepreneurship in artisanal mariculture, legislation relating to village farming, and algoculture (seaweed farming).

Participants also engaged directly with industry practitioners, including the CEO and Co-founder of Ocean Farmers Company, Frederic Pascal. Upon successful completion of the programme, trainees received a triple certification jointly issued by the University of Toliara, the University of Mons, and the University of Liège.

Drawing from his previous experience working with seaweed farming communities in Kwale County and participating in technical teams that designed and delivered classroom and in-water field-based training on restorative seaweed aquaculture, Anthony described the programme as an important opportunity to deepen his knowledge in seaweed farming. He noted that the experience strengthened his appreciation of how seaweed farming supports livelihoods, improves community well-being, and offers hope to communities heavily dependent on declining capture fisheries.

One of the key highlights of the training was witnessing the growing participation of women in seaweed farming, the adaptive management approaches applied in seaweed farming techniques, and gaining first-hand exposure to a pilot seaweed hatchery as well as the advanced level of seaweed research and development in Madagascar.

Sarodrano women seaweed farmers paddle out by kayak to their seaweed farms, carrying seeded ropes for farm setup.

"The training also gave me valuable insight into how the contractual farming model operates in practice. Beyond the internationally recognized contractual farming approach, Madagascar's seaweed sector thrives through strong collaboration among researchers, academia, the private sector, local communities, and government institutions," said Anthony.

He opines that even as Kenya's seaweed sector continues to grow, it still faces multiple challenges,

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including climate change. “There is a growing need to diversify cultivated seaweed species by exploring other commercially valuable native seaweed communities in Kenya’s coastal waters. In addition, Kenya can strategically position its seaweed sector to align with emerging global trends in seaweed processing and build on the already established value-added products while exploring alternative markets beyond the carrageenan.”

The program brought together participants from Kenya, Madagascar, Somalia, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and was financed by Académie de Recherche et d’enseignement supérieur – Cooperation au dévelopement (ARES-CCD).

A nursery section of a pilot seaweed hatchery at Ocean Farmers Company in Toliara, Madagascar.

Seaweed farming great promise

Seaweed farming is an important economic activity that supports coastal livelihoods, marine ecosystems, and has the potential to contribute significantly to the blue economy. In Madagascar, a consortium, made up of universities (Universities of Toliara, Mons, and Liège) and private partners (Indian Ocean Trepang, and Ocean Farmers), has been supporting the development of artisanal mariculture and village farming for more than 20 years.

The program’s objective is to increase and strengthen the capacity of ocean professionals to support the development of artisanal mariculture across developing countries for the benefit of village communities while promoting conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.

In Kenya, KMFRI, in partnership with other government agencies, including non-governmental organizations and seaweed farming communities, has been spearheading the enhancement of restorative seaweed aquaculture for economic development and environmental benefits in Shimoni, Kwale County and is currently expanding towards the north coast in Lamu County.

These interventions have seen the adoption of best practices in seaweed farming across nine villages-Changai, Kijiweni, Kibuyuni, Magogoni, Amka Utsamba, Mtibwa (Nuru, Daima), Chiromo, and Mtimbwani-reaching over 300 seaweed farmers in Kwale County. This has progressively been achieved through capacity building initiatives targeting seaweed farmers, the majority of whom are women and youth, through in-classroom sessions, in-water field-based training practices, and continuous monitoring support to encourage adoption of best farming practices.

Seaweed farming in Madagascar is relatively well developed compared to Kenya, with progressive investments in research and development**.** The sector operates commercially under a contractual farming model centered on *Kappaphycus alvarezii*, with production primarily targeting export markets with limited value addition within the country, unlike Kenya, which processes its seaweed into value-added products, including soap, shampoo, and snacks.

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By: R. Ondiba, E. Kembenya & K. Obiero | *Edits: Faith Mboka* | Layout: Faith Mboka

KMFRI research transforms invasive Mathenge into a sustainable alternative for fish feed

The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute has unveiled promising research findings that could transform the way an invasive plant species is perceived and utilized in Kenya. The study has demonstrated that *Prosopis juliflora*, commonly known as Mathenge, can serve as a valuable alternative source of protein in aquafeeds, offering a sustainable solution to the rising cost of fish feed while contributing to the management of the invasive weed.

Mathenge is a shrub belonging to the Fabaceae family and is native to parts of the Americas, including Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Introduced to many parts of Africa and Asia for land rehabilitation and fuelwood production, the plant has since become one of the most invasive species in arid and semi-arid regions. In Kenya, particularly in counties such as Baringo and Turkana, Mathenge has spread extensively, reducing grazing land, suppressing indigenous vegetation, obstructing waterways, and causing injuries to livestock and people through its sharp thorns.

The invasive weed has also been linked to reduced agricultural productivity and livestock health challenges. Consequently, many affected communities have advocated for its eradication. However, a team of KMFRI researchers led by Senior Research Scientist Robert Ondiba sought to investigate whether the plant could instead be transformed into a resource that benefits local communities and supports aquaculture development.

Finding Value in an Invasive Species

Prosopis Juliflora (Mathenge) tree.

The research focused on the seeds of Mathenge, which were evaluated as a potential replacement for fishmeal in aquafeeds. Fishmeal is one of the most important ingredients in fish feed due to its high protein content, but its rising cost has significantly increased production expenses for fish farmers.

To assess the suitability of Mathenge seeds as a feed ingredient, ripe and dry pods were collected from the southwestern shores of Lake Baringo in Meisori and Salabani areas. The pods underwent a series of pre-processing procedures designed to ensure safe utilization and prevent further spread of the invasive species.

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Boiling of Prosopis Juliflora (Mathenge) pods.

The pods were boiled for over an hour to soften them, remove the protective gum surrounding the seeds, and destroy their ability to germinate. This process was critical in preventing accidental introduction of viable seeds into new environments. After boiling, the seed-bearing portions were separated, dried, and transported to KMFRI's Sangoro Research Station for further processing.

At the station, the dried seed-bearing endocarps were subjected to additional drying before the seeds were extracted and milled into a fine powder known as Prosopis Seed Meal (PSM).

Developing Mathenge-Based Aquafeeds

The Prosopis Seed Meal was incorporated into experimental fish diets formulated for African catfish (*Clarias gariepinus*). Four diets were developed, with fishmeal replaced by PSM at varying levels of 0 percent, 15 percent, 30 percent, and 50 percent.

Drying of boiled Prosopis Juliflora (Mathenge) endocarps.

Other ingredients used in the feed formulations included soybean meal, sunflower seed cake, wheat pollard, maize bran, vitamin and mineral premixes, and mycotoxin binders. All diets were formulated to provide approximately 30 percent crude protein, ensuring that nutritional requirements for fish growth were met.

Testing Fish Performance

The feeding trial was conducted at KMFRI Sangoro Station using catfish fingerlings stocked in twelve hapas installed within a pond. Each hapa measured two metres by two metres and contained 50 fish. The experimental diets were administered twice daily, and fish growth, feed intake, survival, and water quality parameters were monitored throughout the study period.

The results were encouraging. Fish fed diets containing Mathenge seed meal performed comparably to those fed conventional fishmeal-based diets. In fact, fish receiving the diet containing 50

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percent PSM recorded the highest weight gain, feed intake, and survival rates. Meanwhile, fish fed the diet containing 15 percent PSM achieved the highest specific growth rate.

Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in growth among fish fed the different diets, indicating that replacing fishmeal with Mathenge seed meal did not negatively affect fish performance.

Water quality conditions during the study remained within acceptable ranges for catfish culture, confirming that the observed results were attributable to the diets rather than environmental factors.

Implications for Sustainable Aquaculture

The findings demonstrate that Mathenge seed meal can successfully replace up to 50 percent of fishmeal in catfish diets without compromising growth or survival. This presents a significant opportunity for fish farmers seeking affordable feed alternatives amid rising production costs.

Beyond reducing feed expenses, the utilization of Mathenge seeds could contribute to environmental management by creating economic value from an invasive species that has long been regarded as a burden. Harvesting and processing the pods may also help reduce the spread and impact of the weed in affected regions.

Looking Ahead

The study highlights the potential of innovative research to transform environmental challenges into practical solutions. By converting Mathenge from a troublesome invasive plant into a valuable feed resource, KMFRI is contributing to the development of sustainable aquaculture while supporting efforts to manage invasive species.

Based on the study findings, the researchers recommend the replacement of fishmeal with Prosopis Seed Meal at levels of up to 50 percent in catfish diets under semi-intensive production systems. The breakthrough offers new possibilities for lowering feed costs, enhancing fish production, and promoting the sustainable use of locally available resources in Kenya's growing aquaculture sector.

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Mtafiti Pictorials

By: Faith Mboka

Prof. Tsiresy Gaetan (University of Toamasina) takes trainees through a record of dry seaweed harvest at a community seaweed storage facility in Sarodrano, Toliara, Madagascar.

Prosopis Juliflora (Mathenge) seeds.

Program trainees with their facilitator, Prof. Tsiresy Gaetan (University of Toamasina), during a practical session on seaweed farm monitoring techniques.

Experimental set-up for Performance trial experiment at KMFRI Sangoro ponds.

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Program trainees are guided through a seaweed research experiment during a visit to Ocean Farmers Company's grow-out section of their pilot hatchery.

Ongoing session during National Maritime Spatial Plan for Kenya at KMFRI Headquarters.

Participants taking a group photo during National Maritime Spatial Plan for Kenya.

A group Discussion During the National Maritime Spatial Plan for Kenya workshop at KMFRI.

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