



## POLICY BRIEF

# Mangroves and Livelihoods in Kenya

*Strengthening policy, legal and institutional frameworks for sustainable mangrove conservation and livelihoods.*

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## Introduction

Strengthened policy, legal and institutional frameworks are critical to enabling national ministries and agencies, county governments, local communities, civil society and other mangrove stakeholders to restore, manage and conserve mangrove forests. These frameworks will reinforce ongoing government and stakeholder efforts to rehabilitate 14,000 hectares of degraded mangroves while improving climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable benefits for coastal communities. They will also advance the government's conservation and livelihoods development agenda.

Mangrove ecosystems are among Kenya's most important coastal natural assets. They support fisheries, provide timber and non-timber forest products, protect shorelines, store carbon and strengthen climate resilience. For coastal households, mangroves are directly or indirectly linked to fishing, aquaculture, tourism, trade and other natural-resource-based livelihoods. Kenya's 2025 National Mangrove Ecosystem Restoration Guidelines recognize livelihoods, fisheries, biodiversity and climate resilience as interconnected restoration outcomes.

However, mangrove ecosystems and the livelihoods that depend on them continue to face pressure from climate change, degradation, competing land uses, resource extraction, and fragmented governance, which led to the loss of around 187 hectares in 2025, according to Global Mangrove Watch. Insecure land and resource rights, limited inclusion, and gaps between national policy and local implementation further weaken incentives for sustainable management.

Addressing these challenges requires stronger policy, legal, and institutional frameworks. This policy brief identifies priority gaps and proposes practical measures to build more equitable, inclusive and gender responsive governance frameworks for sustainable management and conservation mangroves and livelihood outcomes in Kenya's coastal landscapes.

## Status and Policy Context for Mangroves in Kenya

Kenya's mangroves occur along the coastline across Lamu, Tana River, Kilifi, Mombasa and Kwale counties, covering approximately 61,271 hectares, as shown in Figure 1.

Mangrove governance in Kenya is supported by international, regional and national policy and legal frameworks. These include the Rio Conventions, the Ramsar Convention, the African Union Agenda 2063, the Constitution of Kenya, the Forest Conservation and Management Act, 2016, the Environmental Management and Coordination Act, 1999, the Fisheries Management and Development Act, 2016, the Climate Change Act, 2016, the Land Act 2012 and Land Registration Act 2012, the National Mangrove Ecosystem Management Plan (2017–2027), Kenya National REDD+ Strategy / Cancun Safeguards, among others.

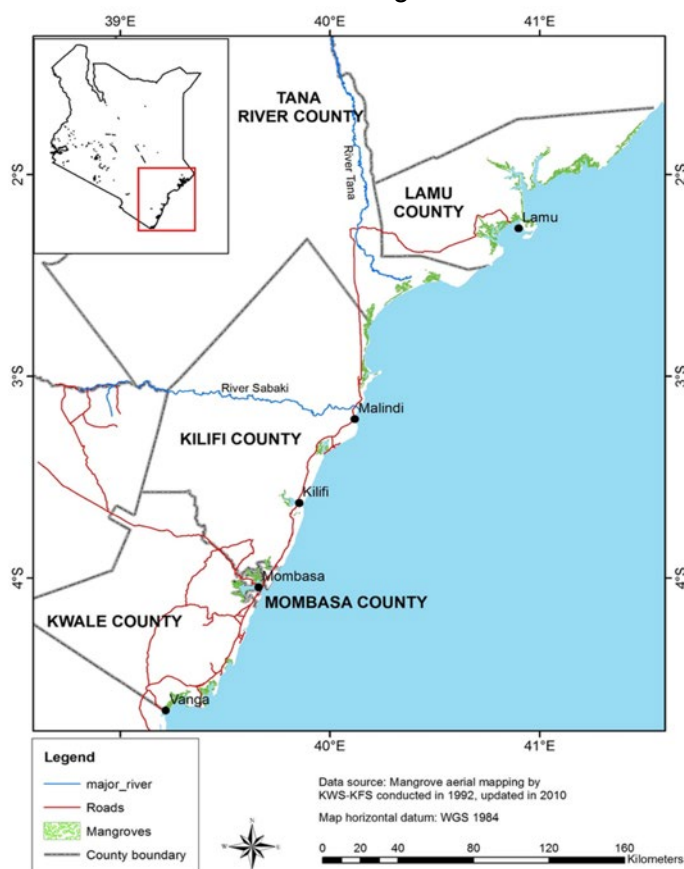


*Figure 1. Distribution of mangroves across Kenya's coastal counties.*

Despite this enabling framework, implementation gaps continue to limit effective mangrove conservation, governance and livelihood outcomes. Key policy and institutional gaps, together with proposed measures, are summarized below.

| Issue                                                                                                                   | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Inadequate provisions and guidance to enable communities access and sustainable use of mangrove forest resources</i> | Develop user rights guidelines to support Community Forest Associations (CFAs); develop user right rules and regulations securing sustainable and regulated community access to mangrove resources.                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>Fragmented legal mandates and weak coordination in mangrove governance</i>                                           | Review and harmonize relevant laws to clarify institutional mandates and strengthen coordination across national and county levels.<br><br>Establish joint approval mechanisms involving Kenya Forest Service (KFS), National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), fisheries authorities and county governments for mangrove management plans. |
| <i>Unclear and undocumented mangrove forest boundaries</i>                                                              | Conduct participatory surveys and mapping to clarify, mark, and document mangrove forest boundaries.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Insecure land and resource tenure, contributing to unsustainable dependence on mangroves</i>                         | Strengthen local land tenure and land-use planning to support diversified livelihoods and reduce unsustainable pressure on mangroves.                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Weak community participation in mangrove governance</i>                                                              | Provide sustainable financing for community structures, including Community Forest Associations and Beach Management Units, through relevant legal and institutional frameworks.<br><br>Institutionalize regular capacity strengthening for community institutions involved in mangrove governance and management.                                 |
| <i>Insufficient gender equality and social inclusion in mangrove governance and conservation</i>                        | Mainstream Gender Equality and Social Inclusion across mangrove governance, management, and conservation, and monitor compliance with constitutional inclusion requirements in decision-making structures.                                                                                                                                         |
| <i>Limited alternative livelihood opportunities, increasing pressure on mangrove resources</i>                          | Expand and support viable alternative livelihood options for coastal communities to reduce unsustainable dependence on mangrove resources.<br><br>Support Community Forest Associations to develop site-specific user rules that enable sustainable access and use of mangrove resources.                                                          |
| <i>Weak benefit-sharing arrangements for mangrove</i>                                                                   | Recognize customary governance structures and promote transparent, equitable benefit-sharing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>conservation, tourism and carbon initiatives</i>                                                                              | arrangements for conservation, tourism and carbon-related initiatives.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>Limited awareness of carbon credit regulatory frameworks and benefit-sharing mechanisms among local mangrove stakeholders</i> | Anchor carbon initiatives in secure tenure, meaningful participation, and transparent benefit-sharing.<br><br>Provide targeted training and awareness raising for local stakeholders on carbon credit frameworks, safeguards and benefit-sharing mechanisms. |

## Conclusion

Strengthening policy, legal, and institutional frameworks for inclusive mangrove governance requires coordinated action by government, communities, civil society, development partners, and the private sector. Government leadership will be central to advancing policy and legal reforms, while partners and community institutions will be essential for effective implementation at the local level.

A strengthened governance framework will support healthier mangrove ecosystems, more resilient coastal livelihoods, enhanced climate mitigation and adaptation, and more inclusive benefit sharing for sustainable development in Kenya's coastal landscapes.

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Landesa is an international non-governmental organization that fights rural poverty and provides opportunity and security for women and men through the power of land rights. Landesa opened an office in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2023.

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