

Green Gold of Zanzibar: The Seaweed Women of Paje

By Salamuu Hemed

On 15th to 16th Sept, 2025, a students from SUZA, together with volunteers from TROCEN, KOICA, joined forces to visit Paje beach, a popular spot known for tourism and seaweed farming. There, they learned a lot about seaweed cultivation, including planting, harvesting, its benefits, and even the challenges faced by seaweed farmers, especially women, who have been at the forefront of managing this crop.

They also explored how various activities taking place in the area, particularly tourism and small-scale businesses, are interconnected with seaweed farming. Additionally, they discussed the issue of seaweed pricing, which has been a major concern for many farmers, especially those at Furahia Center.



A students of SUZA gathered together on discussing different issues about seaweed farming

As the sun rises over the turquoise waters of Zanzibar's southeastern coast, the village of Paje awakens to a rhythm shaped not by machines, but by the tides. Here, a 100's of women wade into the shallows, their feet sinking into soft sand as they tend to rows of seaweed strung between wooden stakes. This is seaweed farming, an ancient practice reborn as a modern lifeline.



seaweed farmers grow seaweed into the ocean

About Seaweed Farming

Seaweed farming in Paje involves cultivating red algae species like *Eucheuma* and *Kappaphycus*, prized for their use in cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and food products. Farmers tie seaweed seedlings to ropes anchored in the shallow lagoon, allowing them to grow for 6–8 weeks before harvesting. It's a low tech, eco-friendly method that requires no chemicals, no fresh water, and no soil, just the ocean's embrace.



Seaweed harvested

Here's a details from Bi Bahati, who lives at Paje, has been farming seaweed for over a decade. "The ocean is our garden," she says, her hands rough from years of tying ropes and collecting harvests. Each morning, she walks nearly to the beach, carrying bundles of seedlings and tools. With her earnings, she paid school fees for her children, and even started a small soap-making business using seaweed extracts.



in the picture, machine used for making seaweed into seaweed flour

Her story is echoed by hundreds of women in Paje, where seaweed farming has become a symbol of empowerment. In a region where economic opportunities for women are limited, this humble crop has transformed lives.

Beyond the Beach: Innovation and Enterprise

Seaweed farming isn't just about harvesting, it's about creating. In recent years, local initiatives like the Seaweed Center (now Mwani Zanzibar) have helped farmers turn raw seaweed into high value products: organic soaps, body scrubs, and even snacks. These products are sold to tourists and exported abroad, multiplying the income potential.



Seaweed into different products

Women like Bi Bahati are no longer just farmers, they are entrepreneurs, scientists, and storytellers. Workshops teach them how to process seaweed, brand their products, and market them to a global audience.



Furahia Center for the Seaweed Processor

Challenges Beneath the Surface

Despite its promise, seaweed farming faces challenges. Rising ocean temperatures and changing currents have made shallow farming less viable. Some farmers are forced to move to deeper waters, which requires skills and better equipment resources that many women lack. Additionally, market prices fluctuate, and middlemen often take a large cut of profits.

But there is hope. NGOs and government programs are stepping in with training, gear, and fair trade initiatives. The community is adapting, innovating, and pushing forward.

Why It Matters

Seaweed farming in Paje is more than an economic activity, it's a story of resilience. It's about women reclaiming their place in the economy, about sustainable practices that heal rather than harm, and about the power of community to transform hardship into opportunity.

As the tide rolls in and the sun climbs higher, the women of Paje continue their work quietly, steadily, beautifully. In their hands, seaweed becomes not just a crop, but a future.