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## WORLD OCEANS DAY 2020: INNOVATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE OCEANS

### **“Taka ni Mali”: a circular economy approach to address Marine plastic waste on Wasini Island and Shimoni Township**

“Our ocean is chocking and soon will be dead. The tides rise and you see water, but when it lowers, the water leaves behind garbage on the beach and shoreline. Most of it is plastic. But “*Taka ni mali*” (waste is a resource), you know. So, we see that we can turn the plastic to resource by using it to make items to sell and get income for our households”.

The quote above is the recorded voice of Aboud, a resident from Wasini Island in the South Coast of Kenya. His quote captures in simple language, the problem of marine plastic pollution in the waters that surround the island, and in oceans across the globe. Every single day plastic waste enters the oceans through many channels including; land-based sources such as plastic in dumpsites washed into the sea by surface run-off, and from individuals at sea e.g. tourists, fishermen and seafarers who dump plastic waste in the water.

Wasini island lies 75 km south of Mombasa and 3 km off the Indian Ocean, in which are located the villages of Wasini and Mkwiro. There is no electricity and there are no roads. Footpaths criss-cross the island and cargo is transported by wheelbarrow or along the sea. An idyllic coral garden, which also hosts a rich variety of mangrove trees, is located at the Western end of the island. Managed by the Wasini Women group, the garden is a key tourist attraction, which has been enhanced by the construction of a nearby restaurant serving sumptuous Swahili dishes. An additional tourist attraction are the offshore corals, home to a beautiful array of fish whose numbers are increasing as the coral rehabilitation efforts of the Wasini BMU bear fruit.

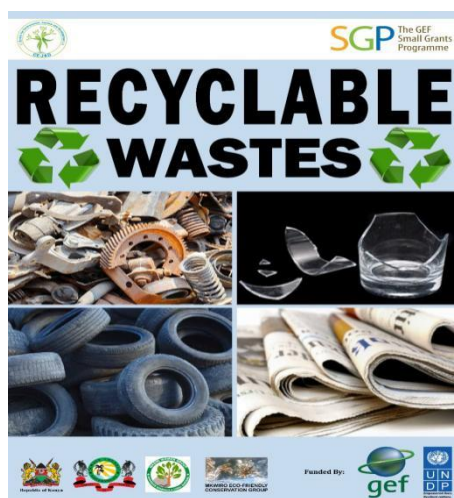
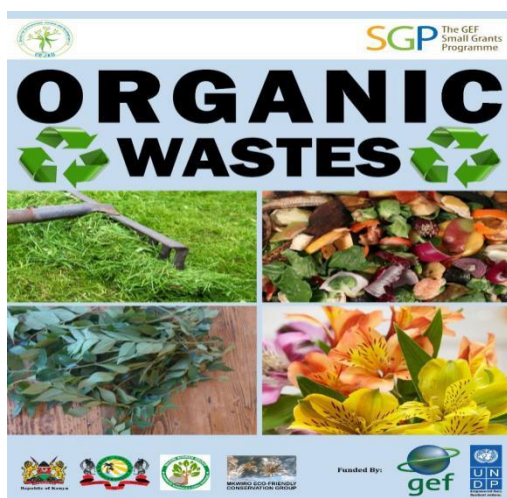
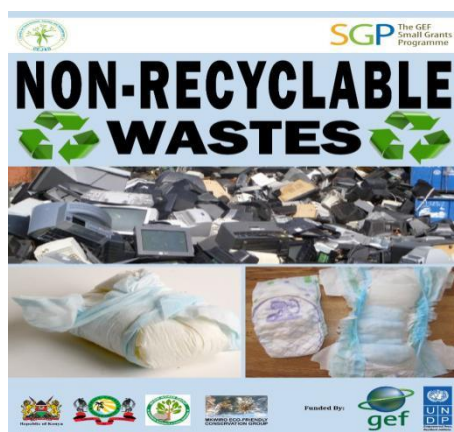
Three km across the Wasini channel lays the township of Shimoni, a slave holding pen (in naturally existing caves) during the East African slave trade in the late 1700s, and later an administration town for the British colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The caves and the ruins of some of the early buildings are tourist attractions today.

Tourism and fishing are the two key income earners for Wasini and Shimoni dwellers. Drove of tourists also pass through on their way to and from the Kisite Mpunguti Marine Park, which is famous for dolphin sightings and snorkelling.

As Shimoni becomes more vibrant due to road construction and improved accessibility, and as more and more people reside in and visit the township and the island, the problem of waste will become increasingly acute, leading to augmented marine pollution.

As Aboud explains, marine plastics suffocate hundreds of marine species, and highly threatened marine organisms such as seabirds, whales and turtles, mistake plastic debris for prey, and accidentally ingest it. Most die of starvation as their stomachs are filled with plastic debris. They also suffer from lacerations, infections, reduced ability to swim, and internal injuries. Plastics choke fish breeding grounds that in turn lower fish regeneration rates, with a ripple negative effect on livelihoods of fishing communities. Lost or constrained livelihoods increases poverty and hunger amongst the communities. Furthermore, plastic waste damages the aesthetic value of tourist destinations. The loss of tourism-related incomes and the high costs of clean-up divert the benefits of the ocean further away from development of coastal communities.

The Centre for Environment, Justice and Development (CEJAD), with funding from the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme of UNDP, works with the county government of Kwale and the local communities of Wasini and Shimoni, to adopt principles and practices of a circular economy, in an effort to curb the impacts of marine pollution. CEJAD is leading a “*taka ni mali*” campaign, that combines advocacy, community education, source separation and value addition through the 4R principles (reduce, reuse, repurpose and recycle) to minimize local sources of marine plastic pollution within the Shimoni-Vanga Seascape.



*Images of printed stickers used to label waste segregation bins*

Signage boards have been erected in Wasini and Mkwiro villages to remind community members that it is their responsibility to ensure the cleanliness of their villages. Separation bins (colour coded) have been acquired and clearly labelled by CEJAD, and will be installed at strategic points to aid in the sorting of waste by community members of Mkwiro and Wasini villages. Demonstration centers, made from recycled material, will be constructed in Mkwiro and Wasini. It is at these centers that the plastic waste will be further sorted for reuse, recycling and re-purposing, and quality products for domestic use and tourist artefacts will be sold. Community members will benefit from trainings on product development, marketing and financial and business management to ensure products of quality and business sustainability.



*Photo of a signage board at the entry of Mkwiro village reminding visitors and residents to keep the village clean*

The “taka ni mali” campaign is gaining momentum. The clean-up days have seen an increased participation of community members, provision of support and goodwill from members of the county assembly (MCAs), and the Kwale County government officials from the Department of Tourism and Environment.





Photo of CEJAD, Wasini Women Group and Wasini BMU conducting a clean-up in Wasini village

“Our project is embedded on, “the belief that constant empowerment of communities with knowledge, information and skills on circular economy in addressing plastic pollution will ensure continuity and transfer of best practises to future generations .” said, Ms. Dorothy Otieno, the organizations project officer.

The ban on single-use plastics in protected areas across the country, announced by the President of Kenya to be enforced from 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020, is hailed as a bold and positive move towards the country’s efforts in forcefully curbing the plastic menace. This is a boost for the Shimoni-Vanga seascape, in whose waters lay the Kisite-mpunguti National Reserve and Marine Park, a world-renown and bio-diverse-rich marine ecosystem, and complements the efforts of the county and local communities towards a plastic-free environment.

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