

AFRAQ26 | NOWLA SESSION CONCEPT NOTE

2nd Session on Women Leaders in Aquaculture Research & Development

Conference: Aquaculture Africa 2026 (AFRAQ26)
Date: Friday, 4 December 2026
Time: 14:00-15:30
Organiser: World Aquaculture Society (WAS)
Session Format: Interactive Leadership Panel and Moderated Dialogue

Session Title

Women Leading Regenerative Value Chains: From Research to Markets in African Aquaculture

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Background

Aquaculture in Africa is at a pivotal stage of development, with increasing recognition of its role in food and nutrition security, employment creation, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. Achieving sustainable growth requires innovation across the entire aquaculture value chain, from research and technology development to production, post-harvest management, market access, and consumer engagement. Women play critical roles throughout these systems, yet they remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions despite their substantial contributions.

The World Aquaculture Society (WAS) has prioritized the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and leadership development within the global aquaculture sector. Building on the momentum generated through previous discussions on women in aquaculture and complementary initiatives such as the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET), this special session will showcase women leaders who are driving innovation, strengthening resilience, and creating inclusive value chains across Africa.

Positioned toward the conclusion of AFRAQ26, the session is designed as a reflective and forward-looking dialogue. Rather than presenting new scientific findings, participants will focus on leadership experiences, practical solutions, and collaborative actions that can accelerate the translation of research and innovation into sustainable economic and social impact.

Session Theme

Women Leading Regenerative Value Chains: From Research to Markets in African Aquaculture

The theme emphasizes the role of women in creating regenerative and inclusive aquaculture systems that enhance productivity, reduce waste, strengthen market participation, and contribute to environmental and social sustainability.

Purpose

To bring together women leaders from research, academia, policy, production, post-harvest management, and market systems to share experiences and identify practical pathways for transforming aquaculture innovations into resilient, inclusive, and sustainable value chains across Africa.

Objectives

The session aims to:

1. Highlight leadership models that successfully connect research, production, post-harvest management, and market access.
2. Showcase the contributions of women leaders advancing innovation and sustainability throughout African aquaculture value chains.
3. Identify practical approaches to reducing post-harvest losses, improving product quality, addressing gender specific barriers to women led enterprise growth and strengthening market participation.
4. Explore mechanisms for translating research outcomes into economic opportunities and scalable industry solutions and the opportunities for participatory action research
5. Strengthen collaboration among researchers, producers, policymakers, development partners, and market actors.
6. Explore how strengthening post-harvest enterprises including the work of AWFISHNET, can create reliable demand for aquaculture produce and value-chain development, enabling participants to extend earlier discussions into actionable recommendations. explore how strengthening post-harvest enterprises can create reliable demand for aquaculture producers,
7. Generate concise recommendations that can inform national, regional, and continental programmes promoting women's leadership in aquaculture.

Session Format and Delivery

The session will be delivered as a **90-minute interactive panel discussion and moderated stakeholder dialogue**, allowing participants to exchange experiences and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Programme Structure

Time	Activity	Description
14:00-14:10	Opening and Framing	Session Chair introduces the theme, objectives, and linkages to the earlier AWFISHNET session on post-harvest losses and value-chain development.(celebrating International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026))
14:10-14:50	Leadership Panel	Four invited speakers share practical insights and leadership experiences from research, production, policy, and market systems.
14:50-15:15	Moderated Dialogue	Interactive discussion with participants focusing on scaling successful leadership models, strengthening value chains, reducing post-harvest losses, and connecting research to market opportunities.
15:15-15:30	Synthesis and Closing	Co-Chair summarizes key outcomes and presents 3-4 actionable recommendations for future collaboration and policy engagement.

Panel Composition

The panel will be comprised of women leaders representing diverse areas of expertise across the aquaculture sector:

1. **Research and Academic Leadership**
    - Aquaculture scientist or university leader involved in innovation, genetics, health, nutrition, or production systems.
2. **Production and Farm Management**
    - Female commercial producer, hatchery operator, or producer association representative.
3. **Policy and Institutional Leadership**
    - Representative from a governmental, regional, or international organization supporting aquaculture development.
4. **Post-Harvest and Market Systems**
    - Practitioner, entrepreneur, or development specialist with expertise in processing, quality assurance, market access, or trade.

Proposed Session Leadership

Session Chair

Dr M.S. Thaela-Chimuka

Co-Chair

Prof Maryam El Bakali

Guest of Honour

Dr Areola Faluke

Key Discussion Questions

The moderated dialogue may explore the following questions:

- What leadership approaches have been most effective in advancing aquaculture innovation and value-chain development?
- How can research institutions better translate scientific findings into commercial and community-level impact?
- What opportunities exist for women to strengthen their participation in production, processing, and marketing systems?
- Which interventions offer the greatest potential to reduce post-harvest losses in African aquaculture?
- How can regional networks and partnerships support the next generation of women leaders?
- What actions should governments, industry, and development partners prioritize to promote inclusive growth within the sector?

Expected Outcomes

The session is expected to:

- Showcase successful women leaders and role models from across Africa.
- Promote knowledge exchange and networking among participants.
- Strengthen linkages between research, production, post-harvest management, and market systems.
- Increase awareness of practical solutions for reducing post-harvest losses and improving value-chain efficiency.
- Generate a concise set of recommendations for policymakers, researchers, industry stakeholders, and development organizations.
- Foster stronger collaboration between WAS, AWFISHNET, research institutions, and industry partners.
- Contribute to the advancement of women's leadership in African aquaculture.

Alignment with AWFISHNET

The session is intentionally aligned with the earlier **AWFISHNET Tanzania Chapter Session on Post-Harvest Losses and Women's Economic Empowerment**. By incorporating expertise from post-harvest and market-system practitioners, the discussion will build upon lessons and recommendations emerging from the AWFISHNET session. This approach ensures continuity, reinforces key messages, and promotes the development of integrated solutions that address challenges across the aquaculture value chain rather than in isolation.

Delivery Notes

- Speakers will be pre-briefed and invited to focus on practical experiences and lessons learned rather than formal scientific presentations.
- Contributions will be limited to key messages supported by a simple presentation template consisting of a title slide and three main points.
- Recommendations generated during the session will be consolidated into a brief post-session summary for circulation to participants and stakeholders.
- Audience participation will be encouraged throughout the moderated dialogue to maximize engagement and capture diverse perspectives.

Conclusion

- The **2nd Session on Women Leaders in Aquaculture Research & Development** will provide a unique platform to celebrate women's leadership while advancing practical discussions on building regenerative and inclusive aquaculture value chains in Africa. By bringing together leaders from research, production, policy, post-harvest management, and market systems, the session will identify actionable pathways for transforming innovation into impact and strengthening the role of women in shaping the future of African aquaculture.