



48 Governments 1 Nation



KENYA'S BLUE CARBON ECOSYSTEMS 10-YEAR PLAN (2025–2035): STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPERATIVES FOR COASTAL COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

POLICY BRIEF



58%



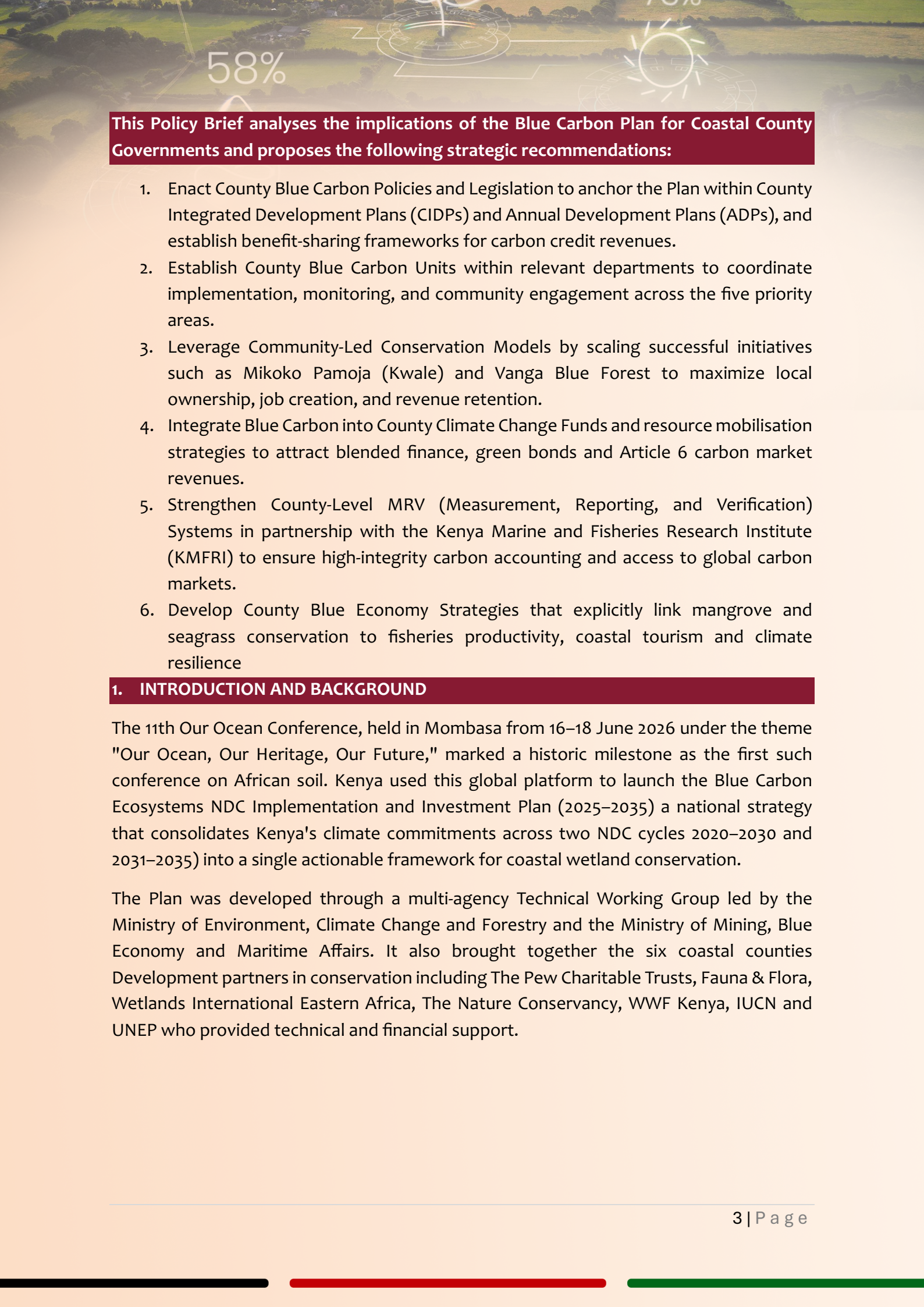
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 17 June 2026, during the 11th Our Ocean Conference (OOC11) held in Mombasa, Kenya launched its first-ever national Blue Carbon Ecosystems Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Implementation and Investment Plan (2025–2035). This landmark 10-year plan positions Kenya as a regional and global leader in ocean-based climate action by recognising mangroves, seagrass meadows and coastal wetlands as strategic economic and development assets.

The Plan sets ambitious targets: conserve all existing mangrove forests; restore at least 75% of degraded mangrove areas; protect a minimum of 22,000 hectares of seagrass meadows; create 40,000–70,000 jobs; and mobilise approximately KES 80.1 billion (USD 620 million) in investment by 2035. It is structured around five Key Result Areas: Conservation and Restoration, Community Stewardship and Livelihoods, Scientific Research and Monitoring, Governance and Policy and Sustainable Finance.

For Coastal County Governments, this Plan represents both a profound opportunity and a constitutional imperative. Under Schedule Four of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, County Governments have a mandate over "county planning and development, including natural resources within their jurisdictions." The six coastal counties Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Tana River, Lamu and Taita Taveta host 100% of Kenya's mangrove forests (approximately 61,000 hectares) and seagrass meadows (approximately 39,000 hectares). Lamu County alone hosts 65% of the Country's mangroves.





This Policy Brief analyses the implications of the Blue Carbon Plan for Coastal County Governments and proposes the following strategic recommendations:

1. Enact County Blue Carbon Policies and Legislation to anchor the Plan within County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) and Annual Development Plans (ADPs), and establish benefit-sharing frameworks for carbon credit revenues.
2. Establish County Blue Carbon Units within relevant departments to coordinate implementation, monitoring, and community engagement across the five priority areas.
3. Leverage Community-Led Conservation Models by scaling successful initiatives such as Mikoko Pamoja (Kwale) and Vanga Blue Forest to maximize local ownership, job creation, and revenue retention.
4. Integrate Blue Carbon into County Climate Change Funds and resource mobilisation strategies to attract blended finance, green bonds and Article 6 carbon market revenues.
5. Strengthen County-Level MRV (Measurement, Reporting, and Verification) Systems in partnership with the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) to ensure high-integrity carbon accounting and access to global carbon markets.
6. Develop County Blue Economy Strategies that explicitly link mangrove and seagrass conservation to fisheries productivity, coastal tourism and climate resilience

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The 11th Our Ocean Conference, held in Mombasa from 16–18 June 2026 under the theme "Our Ocean, Our Heritage, Our Future," marked a historic milestone as the first such conference on African soil. Kenya used this global platform to launch the Blue Carbon Ecosystems NDC Implementation and Investment Plan (2025–2035) a national strategy that consolidates Kenya's climate commitments across two NDC cycles (2020–2030 and 2031–2035) into a single actionable framework for coastal wetland conservation.

The Plan was developed through a multi-agency Technical Working Group led by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry and the Ministry of Mining, Blue Economy and Maritime Affairs. It also brought together the six coastal counties Development partners in conservation including The Pew Charitable Trusts, Fauna & Flora, Wetlands International Eastern Africa, The Nature Conservancy, WWF Kenya, IUCN and UNEP who provided technical and financial support.



1.1. Why Blue Carbon Matters for Coastal Counties

Blue carbon ecosystems including mangrove forests, seagrass meadows and tidal marshlands are among the most carbon-dense ecosystems on Earth. Kenya's coastal wetlands currently store more than 75 million metric tons of carbon dioxide providing a natural climate buffer while delivering critical co-benefits including:

- **Fisheries Nurseries:** Mangroves and seagrasses serve as breeding grounds for fish and shellfish, directly supporting the livelihoods of over 300,000–600,000 coastal households.
- **Coastal Protection:** These ecosystems reduce coastal erosion and buffer storm surges. The Plan projects a 10%–20% reduction in storm damage by 2035, avoiding an estimated USD 200–500 million in losses.
- **Biodiversity Hotspots:** The coastal zone supports rich marine biodiversity including endangered species such as sea turtles, dugongs, and migratory shorebirds, forming the backbone of coastal tourism.
- **Economic Assets:** Through carbon credit mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, verified blue carbon projects can generate tradable credits creating new revenue streams for communities and counties.

1.2. The County Government Imperative

Under Kenya's devolved system of governance, County Governments hold constitutional responsibility for natural resource management at the local level. The Blue Carbon Plan explicitly identifies County Governments as key implementers, alongside national agencies such as the Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Fisheries Service, and KMFRI. The Plan's success will largely depend on the capacity, political will and institutional readiness of the six coastal counties to translate national targets into county-level action.

2. KEY PROVISIONS OF THE BLUE CARBON PLAN



58%

The Plan is organised around five Key Result Areas (KRAs), each with specific implications for County Governments:

a) KRA 1: Conservation and Restoration of Blue Carbon Ecosystems Targets:

- Conserve all intact mangrove forests (approximately 36,600 hectares or 60% of total mangrove cover);
- Restore at least 75% of degraded mangrove ecosystems (approximately 18,300 hectares); and
- Protect at least 22,000 hectares of seagrass meadows.

County Implications:

County Governments must identify and gazette county-level mangrove and seagrass protection zones, integrate restoration targets into CIDPs and allocate budgets to community-based restoration programmes. Counties must also enforce existing environmental regulations and by-laws to prevent further degradation from unsustainable harvesting, pollution and unregulated development.

b) KRA 2: Strengthening Community Stewardship and Livelihoods targets:

- Create 15,000–30,000 jobs by 2030 and 40,000–70,000 jobs by 2035;
- Raise household incomes by 15–30% through sustainable blue economy enterprises; and
- Generate USD 30–100 million in community revenues through ecotourism, seaweed farming, mariculture, and carbon credit benefit-sharing.

County Implications:

County Governments are the primary interface with coastal communities. They must establish participatory governance structures for blue carbon management, register and support Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Beach Management Units (BMUs) and ensure equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms for carbon credit revenues. The proven model of Mikoko Pamoja in Kwale County the world's first community-led mangrove carbon credit project demonstrates that counties can facilitate community stewardship while generating verifiable carbon revenues.

c) KRA 3: Scientific Research and Monitoring targets:

- Establish rigorous Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems integrating digital platforms, indigenous knowledge, and high-integrity carbon accounting;
- Complete national seagrass mapping and baseline assessments; and
- Track ecosystem health, carbon stocks, and restoration outcomes.

County Implications:

58%

Counties must partner with KMFRI, universities, and research institutions to establish county-level monitoring protocols. They should invest in geospatial capacity and data management systems to feed into national MRV frameworks. The KMFRI-led Large-Scale Seagrass Mapping and Management Initiative (LaSMMI) offers a ready partnership platform for counties.

d) KRA 4: Governance and Policy targets:

- Clarify mandates across national and county institutions;
- Harmonise benefit-sharing frameworks for carbon revenues; and
- Develop a national seagrass restoration framework.

County Implications:

This KRA directly addresses the devolution dimension. County Governments must enact specific county legislation on blue carbon management, clarify roles between county environment, fisheries, forestry and planning departments, and align county by-laws with national frameworks such as the Climate Change Act, 2023 and the National Blue Economy Strategy.

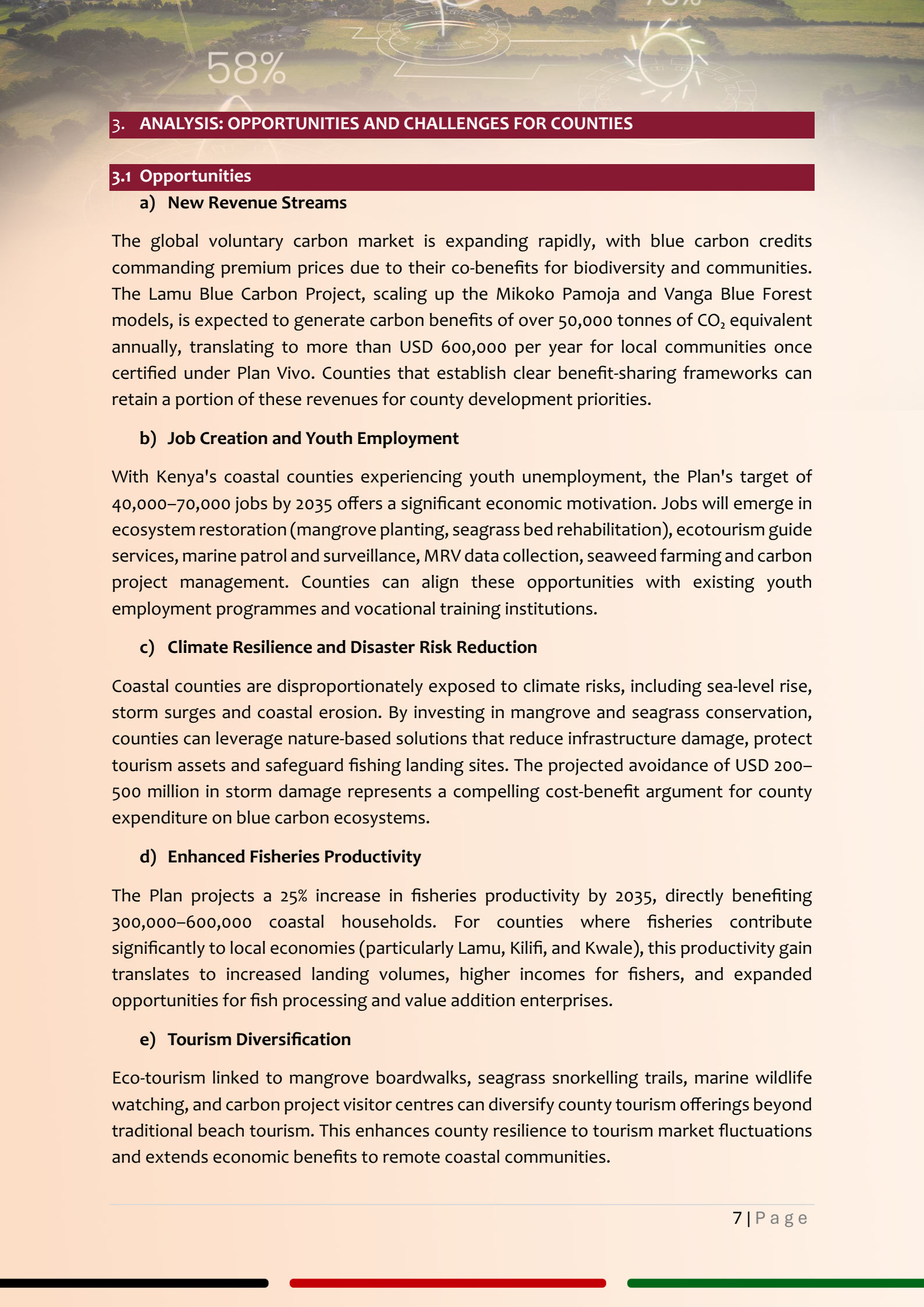
KRA 5: Sustainable Finance targets:

- Mobilise KES 80.1 billion (USD 620 million) over 10 years.
- Access blended public and private financing, green bonds, GCF and GEF funding, bilateral donor support, and Article 6 carbon markets.
- Achieve commercial returns of 8–25% internal rate of return (IRR) on blue carbon investments.

County Implications:

County Governments must position themselves as credible investment partners by developing bankable county blue carbon projects, establishing County Climate Change Funds (where not already existing) and engaging with carbon market developers. The Plan's four-tiered financing architecture provides multiple entry points for counties to attract resources beyond national exchequer allocations.





58%

3. ANALYSIS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR COUNTIES

3.1 Opportunities

a) New Revenue Streams

The global voluntary carbon market is expanding rapidly, with blue carbon credits commanding premium prices due to their co-benefits for biodiversity and communities. The Lamu Blue Carbon Project, scaling up the Mikoko Pamoja and Vanga Blue Forest models, is expected to generate carbon benefits of over 50,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent annually, translating to more than USD 600,000 per year for local communities once certified under Plan Vivo. Counties that establish clear benefit-sharing frameworks can retain a portion of these revenues for county development priorities.

b) Job Creation and Youth Employment

With Kenya's coastal counties experiencing youth unemployment, the Plan's target of 40,000–70,000 jobs by 2035 offers a significant economic motivation. Jobs will emerge in ecosystem restoration (mangrove planting, seagrass bed rehabilitation), ecotourism guide services, marine patrol and surveillance, MRV data collection, seaweed farming and carbon project management. Counties can align these opportunities with existing youth employment programmes and vocational training institutions.

c) Climate Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction

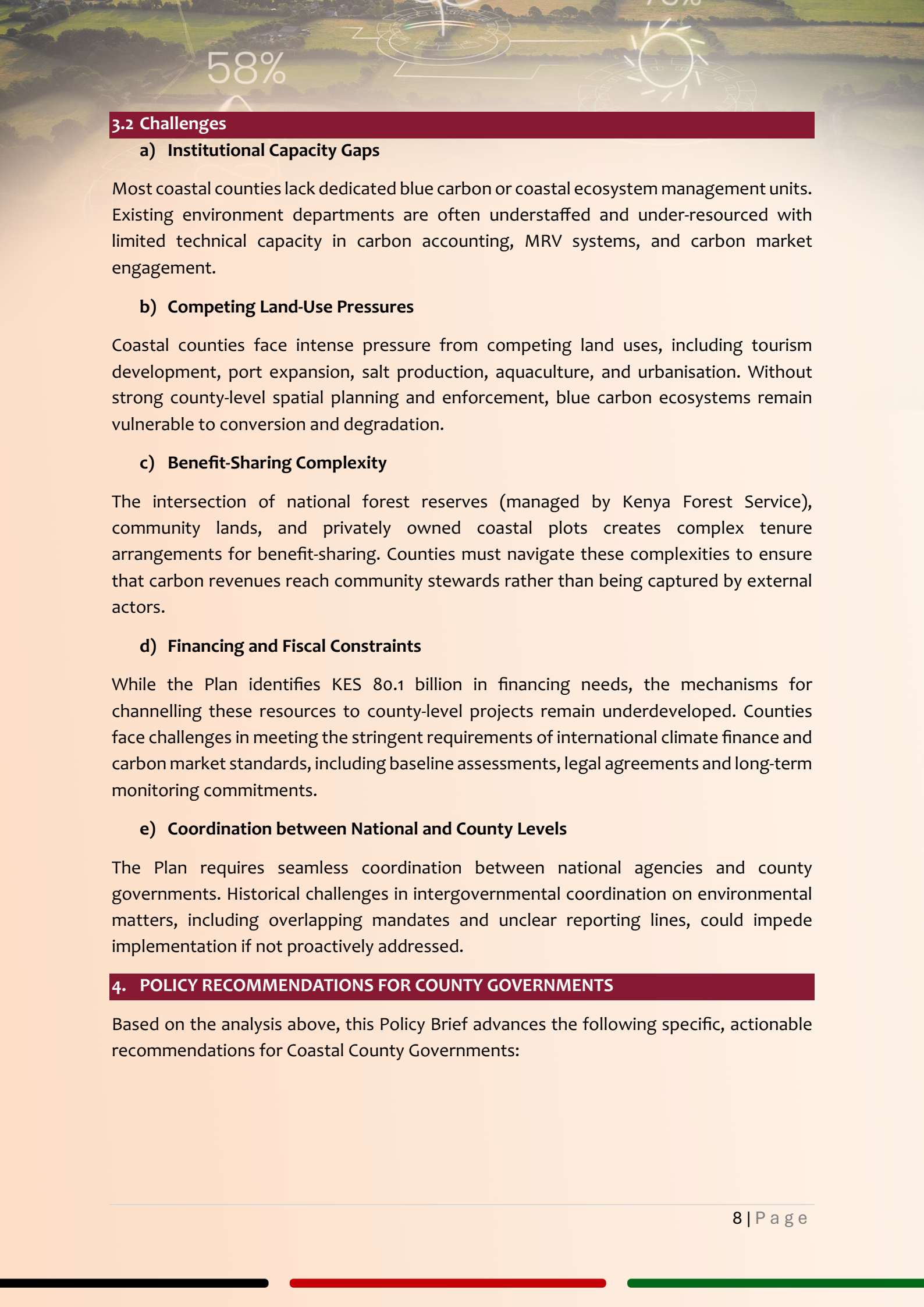
Coastal counties are disproportionately exposed to climate risks, including sea-level rise, storm surges and coastal erosion. By investing in mangrove and seagrass conservation, counties can leverage nature-based solutions that reduce infrastructure damage, protect tourism assets and safeguard fishing landing sites. The projected avoidance of USD 200–500 million in storm damage represents a compelling cost-benefit argument for county expenditure on blue carbon ecosystems.

d) Enhanced Fisheries Productivity

The Plan projects a 25% increase in fisheries productivity by 2035, directly benefiting 300,000–600,000 coastal households. For counties where fisheries contribute significantly to local economies (particularly Lamu, Kilifi, and Kwale), this productivity gain translates to increased landing volumes, higher incomes for fishers, and expanded opportunities for fish processing and value addition enterprises.

e) Tourism Diversification

Eco-tourism linked to mangrove boardwalks, seagrass snorkelling trails, marine wildlife watching, and carbon project visitor centres can diversify county tourism offerings beyond traditional beach tourism. This enhances county resilience to tourism market fluctuations and extends economic benefits to remote coastal communities.



3.2 Challenges

a) Institutional Capacity Gaps

Most coastal counties lack dedicated blue carbon or coastal ecosystem management units. Existing environment departments are often understaffed and under-resourced with limited technical capacity in carbon accounting, MRV systems, and carbon market engagement.

b) Competing Land-Use Pressures

Coastal counties face intense pressure from competing land uses, including tourism development, port expansion, salt production, aquaculture, and urbanisation. Without strong county-level spatial planning and enforcement, blue carbon ecosystems remain vulnerable to conversion and degradation.

c) Benefit-Sharing Complexity

The intersection of national forest reserves (managed by Kenya Forest Service), community lands, and privately owned coastal plots creates complex tenure arrangements for benefit-sharing. Counties must navigate these complexities to ensure that carbon revenues reach community stewards rather than being captured by external actors.

d) Financing and Fiscal Constraints

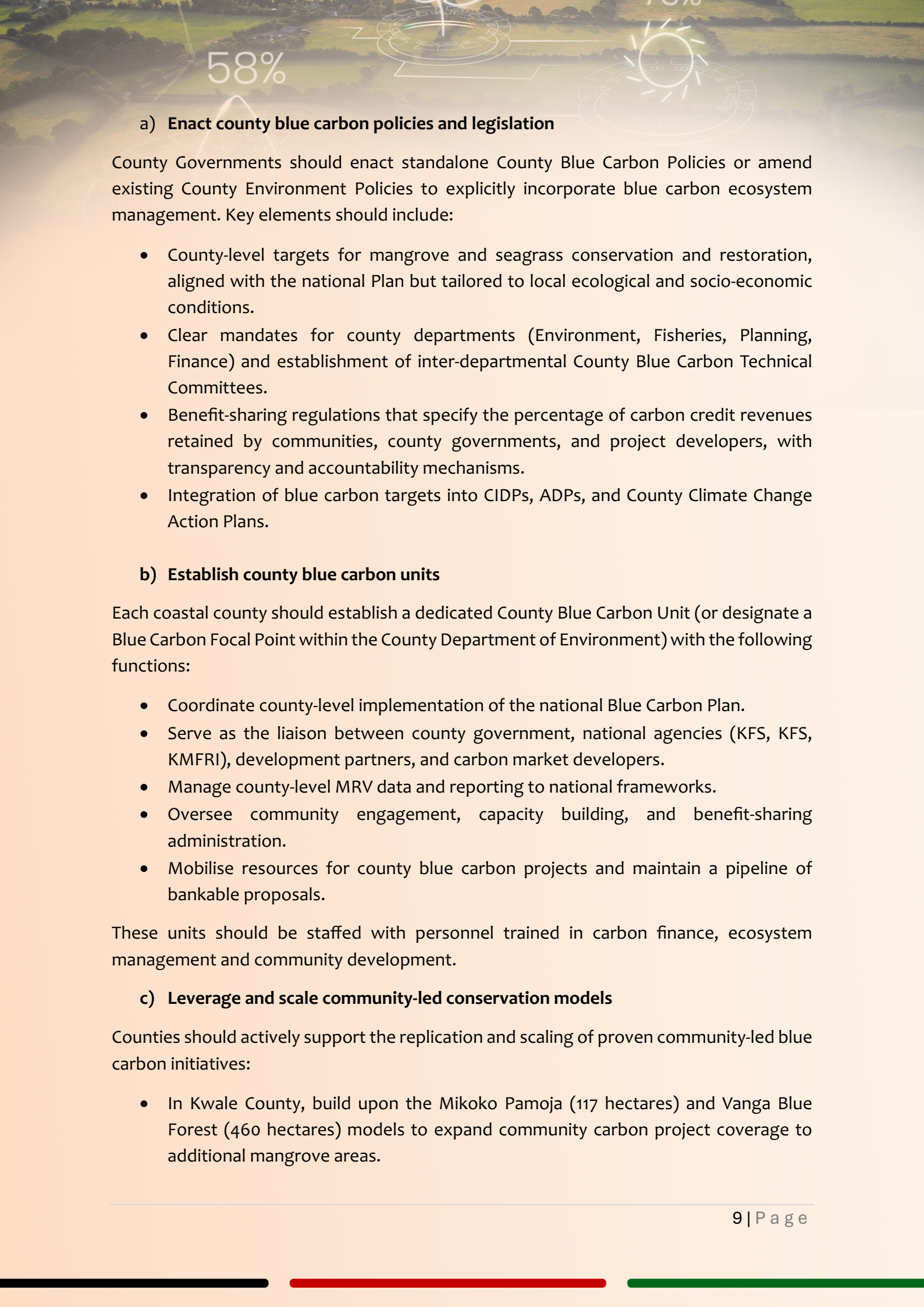
While the Plan identifies KES 80.1 billion in financing needs, the mechanisms for channelling these resources to county-level projects remain underdeveloped. Counties face challenges in meeting the stringent requirements of international climate finance and carbon market standards, including baseline assessments, legal agreements and long-term monitoring commitments.

e) Coordination between National and County Levels

The Plan requires seamless coordination between national agencies and county governments. Historical challenges in intergovernmental coordination on environmental matters, including overlapping mandates and unclear reporting lines, could impede implementation if not proactively addressed.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

Based on the analysis above, this Policy Brief advances the following specific, actionable recommendations for Coastal County Governments:



a) Enact county blue carbon policies and legislation

County Governments should enact standalone County Blue Carbon Policies or amend existing County Environment Policies to explicitly incorporate blue carbon ecosystem management. Key elements should include:

- County-level targets for mangrove and seagrass conservation and restoration, aligned with the national Plan but tailored to local ecological and socio-economic conditions.
- Clear mandates for county departments (Environment, Fisheries, Planning, Finance) and establishment of inter-departmental County Blue Carbon Technical Committees.
- Benefit-sharing regulations that specify the percentage of carbon credit revenues retained by communities, county governments, and project developers, with transparency and accountability mechanisms.
- Integration of blue carbon targets into CIDPs, ADPs, and County Climate Change Action Plans.

b) Establish county blue carbon units

Each coastal county should establish a dedicated County Blue Carbon Unit (or designate a Blue Carbon Focal Point within the County Department of Environment) with the following functions:

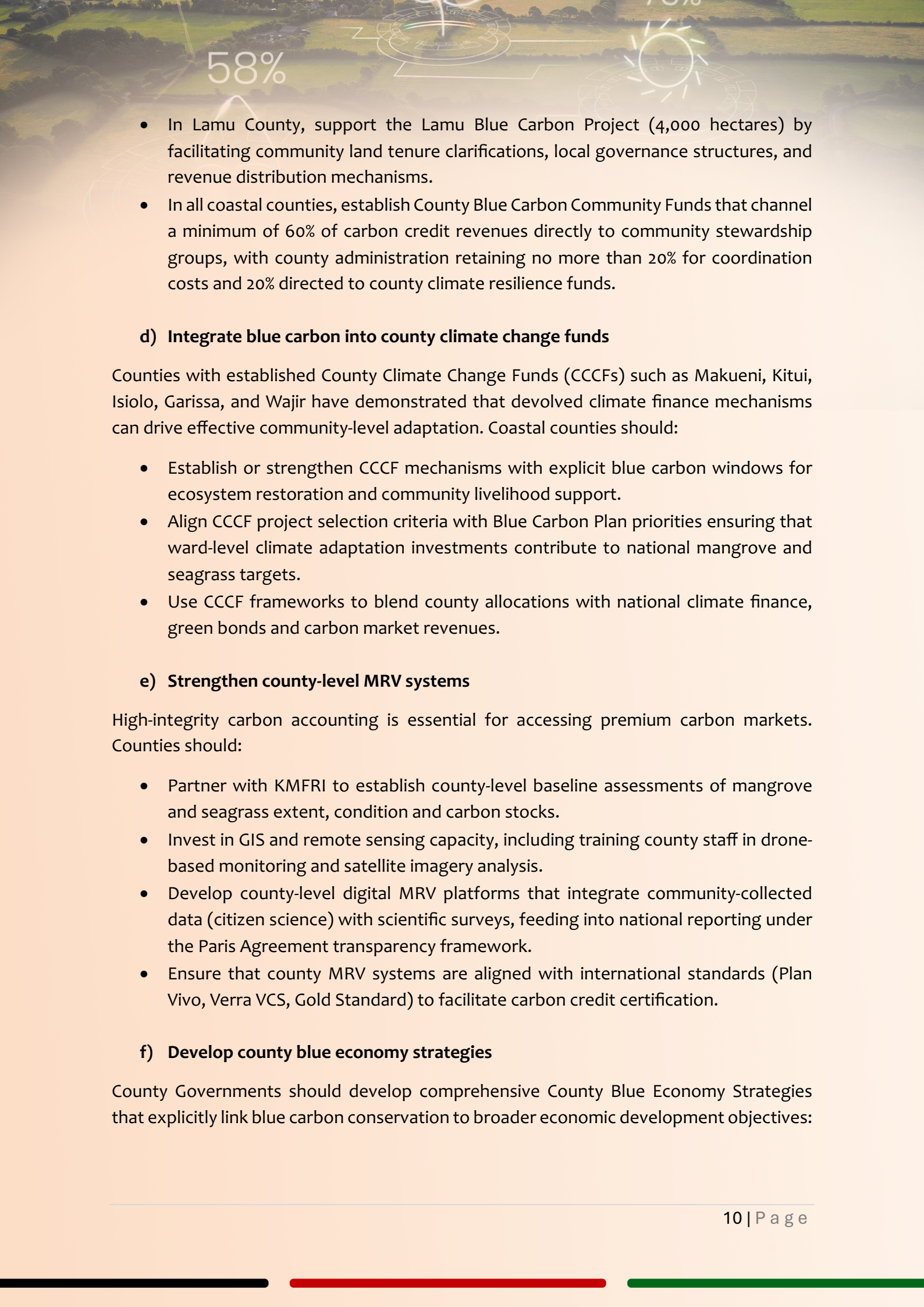
- Coordinate county-level implementation of the national Blue Carbon Plan.
- Serve as the liaison between county government, national agencies (KFS, KFS, KMFRI), development partners, and carbon market developers.
- Manage county-level MRV data and reporting to national frameworks.
- Oversee community engagement, capacity building, and benefit-sharing administration.
- Mobilise resources for county blue carbon projects and maintain a pipeline of bankable proposals.

These units should be staffed with personnel trained in carbon finance, ecosystem management and community development.

c) Leverage and scale community-led conservation models

Counties should actively support the replication and scaling of proven community-led blue carbon initiatives:

- In Kwale County, build upon the Mikoko Pamoja (117 hectares) and Vanga Blue Forest (460 hectares) models to expand community carbon project coverage to additional mangrove areas.

- 
- In Lamu County, support the Lamu Blue Carbon Project (4,000 hectares) by facilitating community land tenure clarifications, local governance structures, and revenue distribution mechanisms.
 - In all coastal counties, establish County Blue Carbon Community Funds that channel a minimum of 60% of carbon credit revenues directly to community stewardship groups, with county administration retaining no more than 20% for coordination costs and 20% directed to county climate resilience funds.

d) Integrate blue carbon into county climate change funds

Counties with established County Climate Change Funds (CCCFs) such as Makueni, Kitui, Isiolo, Garissa, and Wajir have demonstrated that devolved climate finance mechanisms can drive effective community-level adaptation. Coastal counties should:

- Establish or strengthen CCCF mechanisms with explicit blue carbon windows for ecosystem restoration and community livelihood support.
- Align CCCF project selection criteria with Blue Carbon Plan priorities ensuring that ward-level climate adaptation investments contribute to national mangrove and seagrass targets.
- Use CCCF frameworks to blend county allocations with national climate finance, green bonds and carbon market revenues.

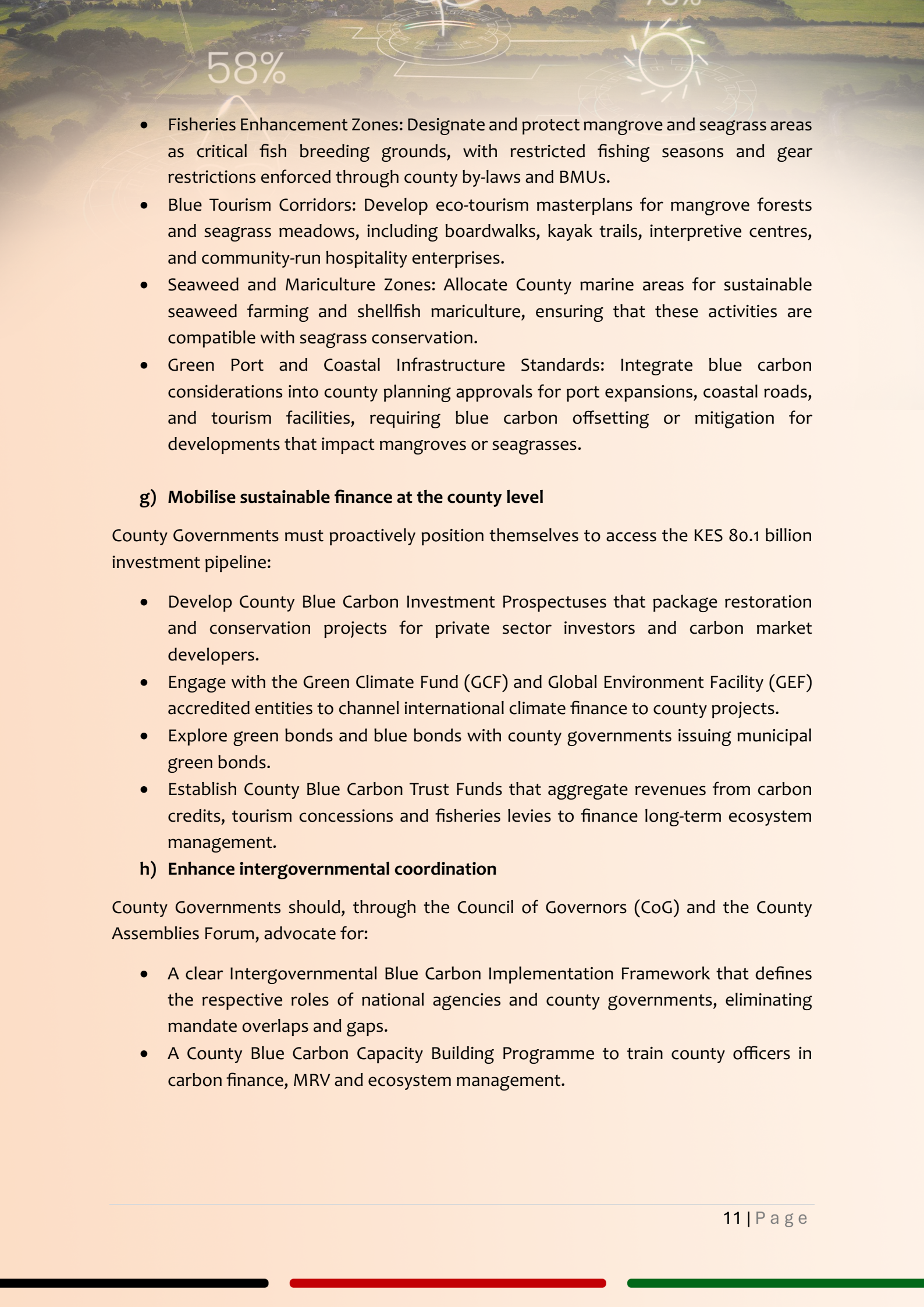
e) Strengthen county-level MRV systems

High-integrity carbon accounting is essential for accessing premium carbon markets. Counties should:

- Partner with KMFRI to establish county-level baseline assessments of mangrove and seagrass extent, condition and carbon stocks.
- Invest in GIS and remote sensing capacity, including training county staff in drone-based monitoring and satellite imagery analysis.
- Develop county-level digital MRV platforms that integrate community-collected data (citizen science) with scientific surveys, feeding into national reporting under the Paris Agreement transparency framework.
- Ensure that county MRV systems are aligned with international standards (Plan Vivo, Verra VCS, Gold Standard) to facilitate carbon credit certification.

f) Develop county blue economy strategies

County Governments should develop comprehensive County Blue Economy Strategies that explicitly link blue carbon conservation to broader economic development objectives:

- 
- Fisheries Enhancement Zones: Designate and protect mangrove and seagrass areas as critical fish breeding grounds, with restricted fishing seasons and gear restrictions enforced through county by-laws and BMUs.
 - Blue Tourism Corridors: Develop eco-tourism masterplans for mangrove forests and seagrass meadows, including boardwalks, kayak trails, interpretive centres, and community-run hospitality enterprises.
 - Seaweed and Mariculture Zones: Allocate County marine areas for sustainable seaweed farming and shellfish mariculture, ensuring that these activities are compatible with seagrass conservation.
 - Green Port and Coastal Infrastructure Standards: Integrate blue carbon considerations into county planning approvals for port expansions, coastal roads, and tourism facilities, requiring blue carbon offsetting or mitigation for developments that impact mangroves or seagrasses.

g) Mobilise sustainable finance at the county level

County Governments must proactively position themselves to access the KES 80.1 billion investment pipeline:

- Develop County Blue Carbon Investment Prospectuses that package restoration and conservation projects for private sector investors and carbon market developers.
- Engage with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) accredited entities to channel international climate finance to county projects.
- Explore green bonds and blue bonds with county governments issuing municipal green bonds.
- Establish County Blue Carbon Trust Funds that aggregate revenues from carbon credits, tourism concessions and fisheries levies to finance long-term ecosystem management.

h) Enhance intergovernmental coordination

County Governments should, through the Council of Governors (CoG) and the County Assemblies Forum, advocate for:

- A clear Intergovernmental Blue Carbon Implementation Framework that defines the respective roles of national agencies and county governments, eliminating mandate overlaps and gaps.
- A County Blue Carbon Capacity Building Programme to train county officers in carbon finance, MRV and ecosystem management.

5. CONCLUSION

Kenya's Blue Carbon Ecosystems 10-Year Plan (2025–2035) is a transformative policy framework that recognises coastal wetlands as central to the nation's climate action, economic development and community resilience. For the six Coastal County Governments, the Plan is not merely a national directive it is a constitutional opportunity to exercise their devolved mandate over natural resources, generate new revenue streams, create tens of thousands of jobs for coastal youth and protect their communities from the escalating impacts of climate change.

The success of this Plan will be determined at the county level where mangroves are planted, seagrass beds are protected, communities are engaged and carbon credits are verified. County Governments must move swiftly to enact enabling legislation, establish dedicated institutional structures, integrate blue carbon into county development plans and mobilise the financing required to turn national ambition into local reality.

REFERENCES

1. Carbon Ecosystems Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Implementation and Investment Plan (2025–2035).
2. Pew Charitable Trusts. (2026, June 17). Kenya Launches National Plan to Protect Blue Carbon Ecosystems. <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2026/06/17/>
3. Wetlands International Eastern Africa. (2026, June 24). Kenya Charts a New Course for Blue Carbon Ecosystems. <https://eastafrica.wetlands.org/kenya-charts-a-new-course-for-blue-carbon-ecosystems/>
4. Global Mangrove Alliance. (2026, June 22). Kenya Launches Landmark Blue Carbon Ecosystems Plan at OOC11. <https://www.mangrovealliance.org/news/kenya-launches-blue-carbon-ecosystems-plan-at-ooc11>
5. UNEP. (2024, July 25). Scaling up mangrove conservation in Kenya. <https://www.unep.org/technical-highlight/scaling-mangrove-conservation-kenya>
6. World Resources Institute. (2026, June 18). Global Leaders Announce \$6.4 Billion for Ocean Action at First African Our Ocean Conference. <https://www.wri.org/news/release-global-leaders-announce-64-billion-ocean-action-first-african-our-ocean-conference>
7. UNESCO IOC. (2026, June 17). IOC at the 11th Our Ocean Conference 2026. <https://www.ioc.unesco.org/en/articles/ioc-11th-our-ocean-conference-2026>
8. Constitution of Kenya, Schedule Four- Distribution of Functions between National and County Governments.
9. Climate Change Act, No. 11 of 2023. Government of Kenya.
10. Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI). Large-Scale Seagrass Mapping and Management Initiative (LaSMMI).