

Our Blue Economy Dream: A Resource Centre to Spur Economic Growth and Incentivize Communities to Conserve Mangroves

We still have a vivid memory of the day our team got its first taste of our resource centre, even though its construction work is still ongoing.

It was on a bright, sunny day on the 10th of October 2025, the National *Mazingira* Day. We were having an event to commemorate the occasion. The theme for 2025 was 'Citizen-Centric Tree Growing and Environmental Stewardship' and as is Big Ship's culture, we marked the day by raising awareness on environmental conservation and planting of mangroves.

Preparations for that day had already identified a suitable planting site at Ganahola, a location right next to the construction site of the Resource Centre. Given the proximity to the centre, we decided that the site would be the venue for our main event – on a partially built structure – before proceeding with the planting activities on the beachfront. We engaged students from nearby educational institutions for the event, as well as women and youths to sensitize the community on matters environmental stewardship for a greener environment.

Big Ship's flagship environmental conservation initiative is centered around the restoration and conservation of Mombasa's Tudor Creek. The creek's mangrove ecosystem suffered an estimated 80% degradation over the last 30 years, attributed to unsustainable use of its resources and pollution. In 10 years since the organization's registration in 2012, Big Ship's mangrove cover restoration activities along the Tudor Creek had restored over 90 hectares of degraded mangroves. This, in addition to promoting the development of some mangrove ecosystem-based local value chains for the forest adjacent communities.

Meanwhile, we had met our objectives for that day in October 2025. Over 100 participants received sensitization on the importance of conserving mangrove forests. Plus, we planted 500 mangrove seedlings.

But this is a story about the venue where that event was held – the resource centre under construction. You see, our mangrove conservation work led us on the path of sustainability and economic empowerment as these things are interconnected. This journey over the years brought us to the concept of an investment opportunity in the creek's blue economy potential, eventually giving birth to the idea of a resource centre.

Development work of the resource centre began in March 2025, and seven months later, we were having the opportunity to sample the structure's ambiance, holding a community meeting in a spacious and safe venue by the seaside under the cool shade of a *makuti*-thatched roof. It is still work in progress, yet using the structure for the first time had felt good and reassuring. It gave us a taste of the future, a dream that our

team has been working hard to turn into reality. It is our conviction that when the resource centre is complete and at its optimal use, it will encourage the mangrove forest adjacent communities to own up conservation efforts whilst reaping the fruits of their labour.

Eco-tourism

When fully operationalized, the centre is projected to produce an eco-tourism hub in Mikindani, Jomvu constituency where it is located, with ripple effects far beyond. The centre's main features will include conferencing and eco-lodging facilities, a restaurant, a multi-purpose hall and a community library. The project's design also incorporates access facilities including a jetty, boardwalks, and a complementary road infrastructure.

The centre is positioned to explore Tudor Creek's hidden attractions and under-utilized eco-tourism appeal. Community members have always flocked to the creek to enjoy the sea view, swim or search for seafood. The centre will provide a variety of value-added services for tourists in accessing and experiencing the attractions of the creek. The boardwalks for instance, will facilitate uninterrupted access along the mangrove forests for those seeking leisure such as birdwatching, sunrise and sunsets et cetera. The jetty service, complete with boats, will facilitate water sports activities such as creek cruising, kayaking, but also help people from the adjacent communities to cross the channel in their daily activities.

Conferencing services target corporates, public sector and non-governmental organizations in Mombasa that have always sought these services for their regular boardroom and community meetings. The eco-lodge will provide attractive, affordable accommodation packages for local and international tourists alike who are seeking exciting alternatives from the high-profile hotels and cottages.

Meanwhile the community library will provide educational and awareness services to adjacent community members to increase awareness on environmental management and sustainable utilization of natural resources. Supporting facilities such as a restaurant, toll station and ablution services are also designed to generate revenue streams. Overall, the services offered by the resource centre will generate income and increase volumes, facilitate quality enhancement, and build a client base. It is projected that at its peak operations, the resource centre could generate a cash flow of up to eight million shillings per year.

These activities will spur economic growth of the area through employment creation and supporting small businesses both directly and indirectly, eventually improving household incomes for the forest adjacent communities. The effects of these economic activities will address poverty and help reduce over-reliance and unsustainable use of the

mangrove resources by the adjacent communities. This will in turn enable the decline of mangrove degradation, allowing its restoration and mitigating climate change.

Even though competition in the tourism business in Mombasa and the coastal region remains strong, we are optimistic this is all achievable. Our eco-tourism model's competitive edge lies in its unique features around accessibility to local communities, projected pocket friendly services and the eco-lodging facility that many other similar services around do not have. Meanwhile, the designed expansion strategy of the resource centre also includes plans to incorporate a cold room installation. This is aimed at providing refrigeration services for local fishermen to preserve their seafood harvests – a capacity they currently lack – and maximize their profits.

This is the Big Ship's dream of a holistic approach to the blue economy exploitation of Tudor Creek's marine resources. Only, it's not just a dream. For now, at least, we already have a suitable venue for our community meetings.