



**Climate Justice Initiative: Enhancing Effective Civil  
Society Participation towards an Equitable and  
Ambitious Post 2015 Climate Regime**



**Climate Justice Training Report**

**Sena Beach**

**Mfangano Island**

**23rd-25th September 2015**

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## **Abbreviations**

**BMU:** Beach Management Unit

**CJ:** Climate Justice

**EU:** European Union

**IMF:** International Monetary Fund

**MNCs:** Multinational Corporations

**SAPs:** Structural Adjustment Programmes

**WTO:** World Trade Organization

## **Acknowledgement**

We would like to thank various institutions and individuals for enabling the Mfangano Climate Justice Training become a reality.

We appreciate Mfangano Community especially Mfangano Paralegal Network and their allies for hosting the training, for the shared experiences on how Climate Change has impacted on the Fisherfolk and farmers.

Of Special mention are Fahamu-Africa and Ibon International( Africa) for role played in enabling sharing of different perspectives on Fisherfolk and small holder farmers during the training.

## Day 1: Wednesday, 23rd September 2015

### Background

The Mfangano Island Climate Justice Training was the 6th and the last in a series of trainings under the Climate Justice Project whose aim was to enhance knowledge and capacities of frontline communities on key issues and debates on the science, economics and politics of climate change and official negotiation processes and bridge the gap between high level political discussions and decision making on climate change issues as well as articulate people's narratives on Climate Justice (CJ).

### Part 1: Getting to know one another

The participants were asked to share their name and what they do, what they like about their community and through actions, exhibit the kind of change they wanted to see in their community, the other participants were then expected to interpret the exhibited actions.



**Ice – breaking: Using actions to demonstrate what change we want to see in our communities**

The participants included a village elder, business people, paralegals, and members of Beach Management Unit (BMU), farmers and Fisherfolk (males and females).

The shared action to translate to the desired change were as follows:

- ✦ To see a stronger community
- ✦ To see a community working together
- ✦ An inclusive community
- ✦ A community that consistently moves forward
- ✦ A community that is able to learn from the past
- ✦ A community anchored on visionary leadership

Reasons for liking their community were captured as:

- ✦ Freshness of the water and the breeze
- ✦ The fresh air
- ✦ The ready availability of fish

## **Why are Fahamu and Ibon in the Climate Justice Space?**

In giving an overview of Fahamu, Fahamu was described as a word originating from a Swahili term meaning understanding. Fahamu was started by a group of people who wanted to better understand what communities go through and was guided by the principle that if people understand themselves, they are able to address their oppression.

It was further shared that Fahamu believes in a Pan- African conscience in that people in different parts of the world are going through various forms of oppressions which though in different locations are similar.

Fahamu was thus coming to Mfangano Island to be in solidarity with the Fisherfolk and farmer community on issues of Climate Change and how it had impacted on Fisherfolk, create space for collective deliberations on oppressions as experienced by the Fisherfolk and in so doing strategize on forming movements aimed at countering the various oppressions in the long run.

In addition, it was mentioned that Fahamu believes in food sovereignty, and is convinced that every farmer, every Fisherfolk has a right to decide what he or she wants to do. It was further

shared that Fahamu does advocacy at national and continental levels and produces a Weekly online newsletter-Pambazuka on issues on various issues in Africa.

Ibon International was described as a global south based organization from the Philippines but present in Africa focusing on Sustainable development, development finance and Climate justice issues. It was further shared that climate change was a great concern for IBON given that the country is made up of many islands and the negative impacts of climate change is now being experiences more than ever before through earth quakes typhoons and hurricanes, loss of lives etc.

In was also shared that Fahamu and Ibon came together to challenge the oppressive systems related to climate and decided to take action not to mitigate climate issues but to mobilize people to demand change.

Decided to take action not to mitigate climate but to mobilize people to demand change.

## **Day 2: Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

### **Part 2: The History of Mfangano Island**

It was narrated that the Abasuba community came from Busoga in Uganda in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, hey migrated to Kenya and settled on the two Lake Victoria islands of Rusinga and Mfangano. The word Mfangano comes from the Suba word *Okuifangana* meaning people coming together.

The Mfangano people fled Busoga because they were running away from persecution after one of them killed the Buganda King named Kabaka Jumuaia meeting was organized to revenge the death through torching homes at night .The Sub fled using boats to a place called Yimbo and Kiteny in Kenya.

With time, the Suba kept moving towards Islands for fear of being attacked by other community's .The community was predominantly Fisherfolk.



**Participants being taken through the historiography of the Suba people by Mzee Kasera-Member of the Abasuba Council of Elders**

**Mfangano Island before 1940s**

In comparing Mfangano through the decades, it was shared that before the 1940s, there used to be a lot of fish with some fishermen using spears and not nets, with the fish sometimes being trapped using woven grass.

Men were the ones fishing, the role of women was to cook. There were no clothes and people wore cloaks made of goatskin. Community members used to walk armed with spears and other weapons. This was also the advent of slave trade. People would be tricked that they would be given food only to be captured as slaves. There was a lot of violence in the community, even within families, as there was a general feeling of insecurity.

Economically trade was through barter, fish could be exchanged for cereals such as maize, groundnuts, cassava and bananas. During this time, new plants were introduced to the Island e.g. *lantana camara* commonly known as *nyabende* used mostly for fencing homesteads.

Ecologically, Lake Victoria was not as expansive, the community shared that the lake has submerged a lot of land in the course of its expansion. The land had a lot of forest cover and a lot of food grew on the lakeshores.

Colonialists introduced fishing twines and fishing rods. According to the narration, the declining fish stocks were attributed to introduction of fishing nets. It was further mentioned that the



introduction of Nile Perch on Lake Victoria by the British resulted into reduced fish varieties as well as the extinctions of other small fish such as *Ningu, Fulu, and Soga*, which were consumed by the Nile Perch.

Many inhabitants of Mfangano Island were taken away to fight during the world wars, it was further shared that fishing was an exclusive male affair and fishing amongst women was not allowed and considered a bad omen.

It was shared that in 1952, many Abasuba community members were arrested for taking part in struggle for independence, in addition a prison made of iron sheets was established at Mageta Island to house freedom fighters from other parts of the count

### Historiography of Mfangano Island



It was discussed that in the olden days children never used to go to school because there was a lot of money being gained from fishing and the community kept large numbers of cattle.

On food and nutrition, it was mentioned that food was readily available and that fish was cooked without cooking oil, the fish was also very tasty as the level of pollution was extremely low.

## **Mfangano Island after Independence**

It was shared that the population with time increased as more people came to settle on the Island. It was further mentioned that as the population increased so did the pressure on fish resulting into gradual depletion of fish stocks as well as environmental degradation arising from charcoal burning.

## **Distinguishing the Mfangano in the 1960s and the current**

It was shared that as a result of depleting fish stocks, many community members took up farming although at a small scale. New businesses emerged in the area including selling of firewood and charcoal, which is transported, to neighbouring Islands e.g. Rusinga. It was shared that livestock are being reared but at a very minimal rate.

Small-scale mining e.g. sand from the shore and sell within Mfangano and to other islands e.g. Remba and Ringiri Island. It was mentioned that fishermen have organized into Beach Management Units (BMUs) who are categorized into owners of boats, traders, fishermen and other interested stakeholders responsible for fishing and fish related activities.

Economically, many youth in the area survive on *boda<sup>1</sup> boda* business. There are also tourism enterprises including beach hotels and beach clubs and a number of the community members derive their incomes from this. Transport ventures using boats is also an economic activity mainly by youths as well as quarrying of stones used in building.

Socially, the reduced levels of fish has resulted into increased number of women engaged in sex work who come from other Islands especially during seasons when there are high catch. The culture of *jaboya* is also present in the Lake, in addition it was shared that women nowadays engage in fishing as opposed to the situation in the past where it was considered taboo. It was shared that for the last one year, they have visited various communities. Sharing of past visits made to frontline communities including indigenous forest dwelling communities,

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<sup>1</sup> Boda boda means motorcycle

<sup>2</sup> Pouw is a strangler(*ficus*) tree in the Abasuba language

Focuses on control of own food systems. Emphasized on food security. Give a person a fish you feed him for one day, teach a person how to fish you teach him for a lifetime, what if someone is stealing all the fish, or if the lake is polluted h. is production small scale or large-scale production.



**Energizers during the training**

### **Part 3: The Science of Climate Change**

Asked what changes they have experienced with relations to climatic issues, the participants shared the following:

- Massive cutting down of trees, the participants shared that the area in the 1960s was referred to as Mfangano Green Island but today it was

The fishing is done in Mfangano but its processing is done in Thika, this is a challenge as the fishermen sell their fish at lower prices-Samuel, Fisherman, Mfangano Island

rocky due to erosion.



### **Fisherfolk community in Mfangano Island**

- ❖ Dwindling stocks of fish attributed to overfishing
- ❖ Overpopulation leading to more fishermen on the lake hence more pressure on the fish stocks
- ❖ Some fishermen in order to get more catch are using herbicides e.g. Diazinone to poison the fish while at the same time blocking oxygen from sections of the lake. These fishermen then put nets and as the fish escape from the herbicide powder trapped into the nets.
- ❖ Many fishermen prefer to sell their fish in the market as opposed to household consumption and case of malnutrition

On markets, the Nile Perch is being exported to Western countries but it does not benefit the local fisherman-Bernard, community member Mfangano Island

film they get

are rampant despite proximity of the Fisherfolk to Lake Victoria. A kilogram Nile perch goes for Kshs 200, which is high for many families.

There lacks cooperatives in the fishing industry, when challenges occur, they overburden the fishermen-Owuor, community member, Mfangano Island

➤ No bonuses have every been given to fishermen, but there have been instances of other sectors getting bonuses such as tea producers.

➤ After a period of time e.g. 3 months, the lake is cordoned off and the government stops people from fishing during this period and fishermen get arrested.

### **What is Climate Change?**

Climate change was described as changes that occur in weather patterns of a given place over a long period of time. Examples of these changes were given as changes in rainfall patterns, increase in the number of climate related disasters e.g. storms and earthquakes.

There is malnutrition in this Island because children are not eating the fish, families prefer to sell the fish rather than consume it- Samwel Magadi, fisherman,

It was further shared that climate change is caused by burning of fossil fuels which increase the amount of heat on the earth's surface, this energy is then spread mainly through ocean currents and winds.

Global warming and the climate changes seen today are being caused by the increase of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gas emissions by humans. Human activities like the burning of fossil fuels, industrial production, etc. increase greenhouse gas levels. This traps more heat in our atmosphere, which drives global warming and climate change.

## **Part 4: Root causes of climate change**

Using an analogy of a strangler tree, known as *pouw* in the Abasuba language, the participants went through the root causes of climate change in their community and the effects.



### ***Tracing the climatic changes in Mfangano Island***

The root causes of climate change were explained as follows:

Colonialism resulting into exploitation and introduction of new varieties of fish, which further resulted into depletion of fish stocks. Poverty which makes people cut down trees because they have to earn an income for their families, industrialization where many industries in Kisumu as well as beach resorts channel their wastes into the lake, bad governance which allows for illegal fishing and which gives permits to large trawling companies responsible for overfishing and at the same time destruction of other animals and plants living in the lake, technology resulting into further pollution through production of fertilizers which are washed into the lake .

The results of climate change were shared as food scarcity, death of fish, reduced farm produce, desertification, diseases e.g. cholera, discrimination, pollution and increased rates of poverty.

## The Root Causes of Climate Change in Mfangano



### Part 5: Linking the Global to the Local

During the session, linkages were identified between industrialized nations in the west with the adverse effects of climate change in Africa and in Mfangano specifically.

It was deliberated that as a result of capitalism and its inherent corporate capture of food, companies in the west were exploiting raw materials such as fish and farm produce and selling them at higher prices to maximize profits at the expense of farmers and Fisherfolk.



### **Deliberations on corporate capture of our food system**

In addition, it was mentioned that various solutions have been touted to the current climate crisis such as bio fuels, planting of trees and being cautioned against farming along river banks, however, it was noted that communities should not be blamed for climate change as the contribution of Africa as a continent to the current climate crisis was very minimal (at 4%) whereas USA and other EU countries contributed over 85% of global pollutants.

The introduction of mechanized fishing using trawlers was also cited as a reason for climate change in that heavy machines produce a lot of noise and spill oil into the waters resulting into pollution for both fish and human beings.

Voices of fishermen are never heard because they are always assumed to be illiterate-Nicholas Olambo, Organic Health Response, Mfangano

The role of government was also mentioned as giving permits to large companies to carry out fishing resulting into competition over fish stocks between small-scale fishermen and large-scale fishing. Furthermore,



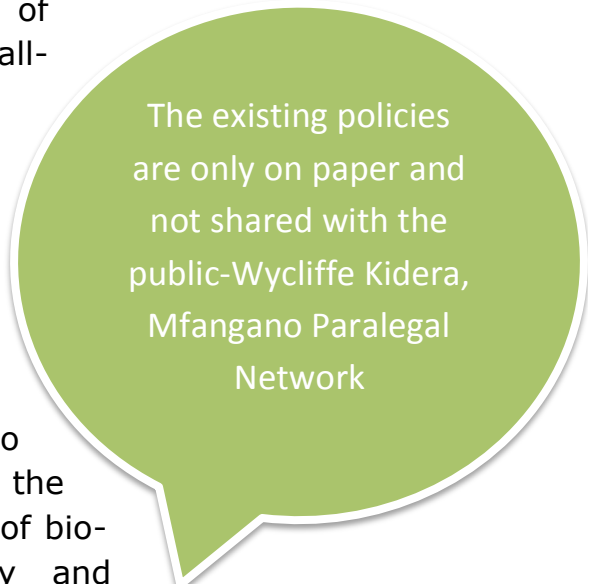
community members shared that there is a lot of neglect of the area because many government officials prefer not to work in the area.

On policies, the community voiced concerns that they have no knowledge on policies as regards to fishing because the government has not done enough to popularize them.

The participants shared that there is a lot of vulnerability amongst fisher folk and small-scale producers in the area because industrial waste management is not properly done and a lot of waste from industries in Kisumu are directed to Lake Victoria.

Another phenomenon shared was land grabs where huge tracts of land are taken away by Multinational Corporations (MNCs) to produce bio-fuels for cars in Europe and the USA. It was emphasized that the production of bio-fuels was resulting into food insecurity and interfering with food sovereignty as communities were forced to grow crops they do not consume for a market that does not benefit them.

Neo liberalism was shared as a concept where market forces prevail and states are not supposed to intervene. In linking neo-liberalism with the fish in Mfangano, it was deliberated that the community although living close to the lake could not afford to buy fish as this fish was sold at prices determined by supply and demand and when the supply was low, the prices tended to increase. Characteristics of neo-liberalism were shared as exploitation, profit maximization and excess financial power to the extent that Multinationals were documented to have sued government, as was the case of British American Tobacco (BAT) suing Kenyan government due to control on amount of cigarettes that BAT can sell.



The existing policies are only on paper and not shared with the public-Wycliffe Kidera, Mfangano Paralegal Network

On institutional influence on climate change, powerful organizations linked to the climate crisis were identified as World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) who either through financing were responsible for the increase in number of industries hence global pollution crisis, forcing countries to comply to regulations such as through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) as preconditions for aid. An example of Nigeria was given on oil pollution that even after 50 years, shell does not want to pay, i.e. to clean the environment, which they were responsible for destroying.



## **Part 6: Towards a System Change: What Do we do to address the Current Climate Crisis?**

In deliberating on what to be done to address the climate crisis, core issues affecting fishermen and farmers in Mfangano were revisited in order to strategize clearly on a way forward informed by the lived realities.

The participants shared that the Beach Management Unit (BMU) has been given a responsibility in handling issues of fishermen including rooting out illegal fishermen. Conditions for being a member of the Beach Management Unit (BMU) given, as one must be a fisherman, own a boat and pay membership fee. It was shared that Mfangano Island has an international element in that it has people originating from Somalia, Uganda and Tanzania among other countries who come in search of fish, it was further pointed out that the area has been a hideout for criminals who undertake fishing as a camouflage to escape arrests.

Rampancy of diseases was also noted as a major challenge to the Mfangano community, with HIV being the leading cause of death among fishermen, including other health complications such as malnutrition and diarrhea due to water pollution.

The participants shared that one need not have a certificate to become a fisherman, hence it was wrong to blame the fishermen for overfishing and pollution as many of them did not understand the needs of fish, what breeding areas of fish are and how human activities result into death of fish such as siltation and water acidification.

It was emphasized that communities are not subjects but are co-creators of information and that the co-analysis enables a better understanding of how to organize. It was mentioned that Fahamu and Ibon-International did not visit Mfangano as experts or “angels” but in solidarity with the community to work together to counter the various experienced oppressions.



**Strategizing on demanding System Change using the strangler (*pouw*<sup>2</sup>) tree analogy**

It was pointed out that as comrades in the struggle, Fahamu and Ibon International would be looking in depth at the oppressions and their outcomes. It was exemplified that a new form of colonialism in the name of neo-colonialism was taking place with many foreigners in developed nations eating

fillet but they had no idea the story behind the fillet or what oppressions farmers and Fisherfolk were going through in Mfangano Island.

It was observed that contradictions existed and there was a dire need to arise and challenge the current governance system in

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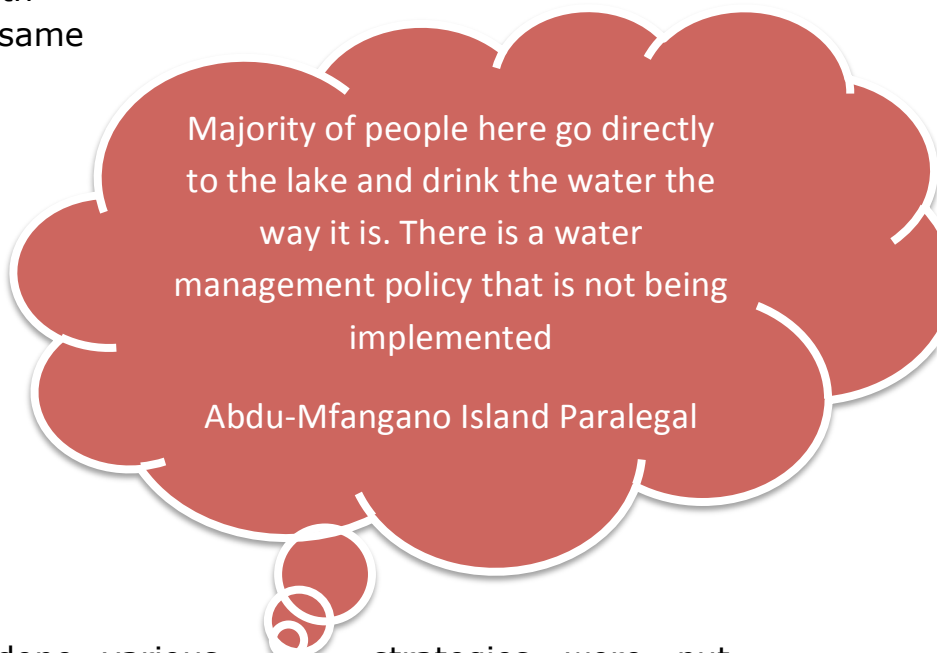
<sup>2</sup> Pouw is a strangler(*ficus*) tree in the Abasuba language

fishing and agriculture that avoids the realities of the fisher folk and peasant farmers.

It was pointed out that there that it was essential to raise form a movement of people conscious about their history and their struggle, where communities learn together to enable understanding and challenging the bigger international oppressive system on Fisherfolk and small holder farmers.

It was pointed out that an oppressive system makes us poor and its essential to ask interrogate the intersection of climate change- Fisherfolk and small scale farmers such as big companies take away Nile perch from Mfangano, which is transported by huge planes causing pollution, the fish is sold at high prices but the fisherman's children are suffering from malnutrition.

The participant's attention was drawn to the necessity of challenging the various actors responsible for the climate crisis, such as Ministry of Environment, Water and Natural Resources and Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries including the county government officials who allow sewerage from industries to be disposed in the lake, with communities using the same water for domestic purposes including drinking. This highlighted the policy gaps existing amongst government officials and was described as form of structural oppression.



On what needs to be done, various strategies were put forth including continuous collective learning amongst the community members to sharpen their knowledge on issues of climate change and other related social justice issues, building alliances with other existing group not in the space, awareness

creation and information sharing using community avenue such as *barazas*<sup>3</sup>.



### **Charting the Way Forward- Envisioning the change we want to see**

In charting the desired future, the following questions and concerns emerged:

#### **i) We have challenges so what next?**

The approach is to identify within our communities who else to bring on board to enable formation of a movement of not only farmers and Fisherfolk but a collective of people joined together by social justice struggles and who are a force able to demand change.

#### **ii) How best can the community work with Fahamu and Ibon-International in pushing the climate change agenda to the next level?**

Fahamu and Ibon International are willing to support the community through learning, exchange of ideas and sharing. This is deemed a beginning a partnership aimed at challenging the root causes of oppressive systems that impact not only of farmers and Fisherfolk in Mfangano but the same people in various parts of Kenya and the global south at large.

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<sup>3</sup> Baraza means a public meeting

Day 3: Friday, 25th September 2015

## Part 7: Site Visits: Mawanga Rock Arts and Abasuba Peace Museum

Two site visits were conducted to understand the Abasuba community better. At the Abasuba Peace Museum, artifacts showing the migratory routes of the Abasuba, tools they used in the past both domestic and for protection and how the community was organized.



Artifacts of the Abasuba community

### Abasuba migratory routes

A second visit entailed Mawanga Rock Arts site and Zenze Island of which is a sacred site revered by the Abasuba for the role ,of



protection, prayers and thanks giving to the ancestors.

It was shared that the caves were used as hiding grounds during raids as well as a place for asking ancestors for rain. It was further noted that rainmaking was predominantly a male affair and women were not allowed to undertake any roles in the sacred site. Age was highly respected and its only males of above 70 years who were allowed to visit the shrine.

Gender divisions were observed in the set up of the shrines with separate chambers for men and women, children were put together with their mothers.



**Mawanga Rock Arts/caves visit**

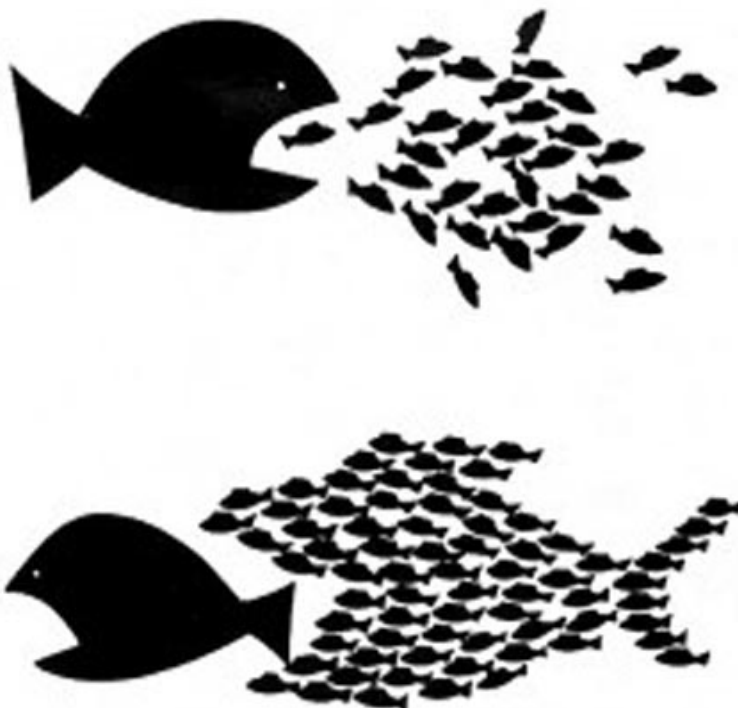


**Mawanga Rocks / Caves with designated engendered divisions**

### **Analogy of the Fish**

Using an analogy of fish, the power of the people was reinforced in two scenarios where a big fish swallows smaller fish and a reverse of the situation where small fish organize and chase away the big fish. It was observed that if communities come together they can be

able to challenge oppressors and demand change, but on the other hand if they work along, their voices can not be heard and it becomes easy to push aside issues affecting them as trivial matters.





## **Part 8: Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the climate justice training achieved its objective in that it created an opportunity for dialogues on climate change with frontline communities (Fisherfolk and farmers), (include objective of the climate justice project.

On moving the climate justice agenda forward, the local area chief assured the participants that he would reach carry sensitize community members on what he had learnt in barazas. The community members reported that they had gained a lot of information and new learning during the training and now understood climate change better than before.