



**CLIMATE
JUST
COMMUNITIES**
Communities leading on climate justice

Climate Justice in Practice: Learnings from the Climate Just Communities Programme in Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia



INTRODUCTION

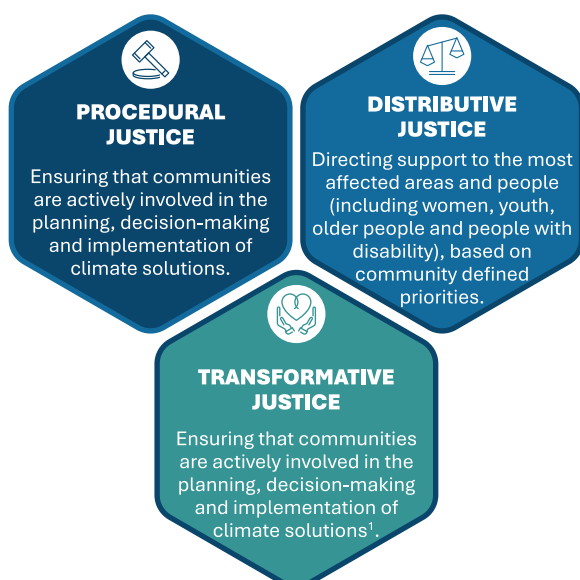
The Climate Just Communities (CJC) programme is a flagship initiative under the Scottish Government's Climate Justice Fund, which promotes a people-centred, human-rights based approach to climate action. Running from 2023 to 2026, this £24 million programme supports communities in Scotland's partner countries: Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia to achieve climate justice.

These countries contribute little to climate change yet bear its greatest impacts. In 2024 alone, Zambia experienced one of the worst droughts in its history, Malawi faced both severe drought and floods, and Rwanda endured devastating floods and landslides. These events highlight the urgent need for fair, community-driven climate solutions.

CJC's Approach to Climate Justice

CJC empowers marginalised communities to lead their own climate responses based on their local needs and priorities. The programme supports community-led planning and action, inclusive participation, especially of women, youth, and people with disabilities, with the goal of achieving systemic change - helping everyone in the communities to thrive despite the changing climate. Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) are a focus throughout the programme.

CJC is built on the three pillars of climate justice:



Sharing and Learning Together

In May and July 2025, CJC hosted a series of virtual learning events to share experiences and lessons learned across Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia. These sessions brought together programme partners to learn from each other as

peers. The sessions concluded with a final event hosted by the Scottish Government, bringing together 50 CJC implementers and 50 external stakeholders, including donors, civil society organisations and UN organisations working on climate justice.

This report captures the key learning from those events. It shows how the climate justice pillars have been applied in practice and offers recommendations for future international climate justice programmes.

Key Recommendations for Policymakers and Donors

- 1. Support genuine community leadership:** Invest in projects, processes and capacity building that enable communities to identify their own climate challenges, set priorities, plan and monitor their own progress and hold partners accountable.
- 2. Leverage systems change by working closely with local structures and organisations:** Provide time and resources to build strong partnerships between communities and government, ensuring these groups are inclusive, well-organised, and informed about climate risks, rights, and opportunities. Additionally, partner with specialist organisations that understand the local context and have trusted relationships with communities, particularly those focusing on areas like disability inclusion, women's empowerment, and environmental protection. Create systems to systematically build the capacity of local organisations, especially self-representative ones like Organisations of People with Disabilities. This approach helps create lasting systems that can respond to climate challenges beyond the life of a single project.
- 3. Make inclusion and advocacy central:** Ensure that all climate programmes actively include marginalised groups – especially women and people with disabilities – as leaders and decision-makers, not just beneficiaries. This means budgeting for awareness and training on gender equality, disability inclusion, ensuring accessibility and providing practical support to remove barriers to participation on an equal basis.
- 4. Commit for the long term and capture learning for feedback into programming:** Achieving climate justice takes time. Use funding models that allow for longer planning and start-up periods, support multi-year programmes, and enable flexibility to adapt to changing needs. Design creative funding approaches that balance accountability with the flexibility for community-led, inclusive climate action. Create mechanisms to learn from both successes and challenges, so future investments build on what works.

1. These definitions are tailored to the CJC context. The Scottish Government Climate Justice Fund Theory of Change is available here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-climate-justice-fund-final-evaluation-report/pages/6/>



“CJC does not discriminate – everyone is included: persons with disabilities, women, youth and the elderly. As persons with disabilities we now feel valued and capable ... we’ve been able to actively participate and contribute to CJC’s interventions ... I’ve learned that even we, the disabled, are capable of leading the able-bodied.”

Netto Siapaka, People with Disabilities Advocacy Champion, Mabinga Ward, Singazongwe District, Zambia

From the start, CJC focused on building community ownership and ensuring that people could make informed decisions—not just during the project, but long after it ends. Capacity building was a core part of the approach, with a strong emphasis on GEDSI. The process also surfaced valuable local and Indigenous knowledge, building confidence in its use for climate adaptation. For example, communities in Malawi identified the tree species that they know can thrive under changing environmental conditions and which crop combinations spread risk when some varieties fail while others succeed. Holding planning conversations at community level ensures interventions are appropriate and also spreads knowledge on where to access such varieties in future.

This approach means community members have gained skills, knowledge and new institutions that will outlive the programme. They are now better equipped to respond to new challenges, strengthen social cohesion, and advocate for their rights. They are also more capable of addressing both immediate climate threats and the deeper inequalities that make them more vulnerable. Participatory planning and

monitoring tools have given communities practical ways to track progress and hold both programmes and government partners accountable.

Embedding Climate Action in Local Governance Systems

Across all three countries, the CJC programme worked through local community structures to lead climate justice planning, implementation and monitoring. In Malawi, this meant partnering with existing area and village development committees. In Zambia, new community management committees were formed, while the Rwanda project formed steering committees. These groups included representatives from marginalised communities, traditional leaders, and local government, ensuring broad and inclusive participation.

These committees acted as a bridge between the project and other community groups—such as water point committees, disaster risk management committees, natural resource management groups, and informal networks like irrigation clubs and village savings and loans associations (VSLAs). To strengthen these structures, CJC provided training on leadership, inclusion, policy awareness, and good governance. Community champions were also identified and supported to promote climate justice, GEDSI, and advocacy within their communities.

By investing in these structures, CJC helped communities organise themselves for inclusive decision-making and effective implementation of their priorities. It also improved their relationships with government systems and services. For example, in Rwanda, community-identified priorities were successfully integrated into official government Performance Contracts which ensure ongoing government support to community led action. In Zambia, communities have lobbied for and received funding from the national Constituency Development Fund for initiatives beyond the scope of CJC.

Early and consistent engagement with government and local partners was key to this success. CJC was delivered by national and local organisations with deep knowledge of the districts they worked in. These partners helped build the capacity of community structures and strengthened their connections with government and other stakeholders. They supported committees to meet regularly, organise their work, monitor progress, and co-create solutions.

As a result, marginalised voices are now better heard—both within communities and in policy-making spaces. Traditional leaders, local administrators, and district governments are increasingly supporting community priorities. This has led to stronger alignment between policy and practice, improved service delivery, and better access to resources. Government partners are no longer gatekeepers—they’ve become genuine collaborators in community-led climate action.



CASE STUDY 1

Community Management Committees putting communities at the heart of climate justice decision making in Zambia

CJC Zambia has formed Community Management Committees (CMCs) to foster strong community participation and ownership. These ward-level committees, composed of traditional leaders, men, women, youth, and people with disabilities and representatives of key local institutions, have been involved in climate justice planning and the delivery of all interventions. By ensuring all segments of the community are represented, the CMCs have promoted inclusivity and equitable decision-making. They have acted as local champions for climate change issues, selected participants for interventions, and engaged with local governments to coordinate interventions. The CMCs also have oversight of intervention-focused committees (for example, on disaster risk reduction and natural resource management), ensuring that activities align with the community's climate justice plans and that monitoring feedback is provided to the project implementers. The CMCs and local government have agreed that the CMCs will continue to operate after the project ends, maintaining their focus on climate justice, and reporting to the Ward Development Committees, a government mandated body. The CMCs will continue working with community Advocacy Champions to ensure climate justice plans help inform community applications for funding from the government's Constituency Development Fund, among other tangible actions.



Community members raise their hands at a meeting in Mabinga Ward, Sinazongwe District, Zambia to validate the new climate justice plan developed by the Community Management Committee



CASE STUDY 2

Community-Led Bylaws for Climate Resilience in Malawi

In Malawi, communities across seven districts formulated and adopted bylaws to strengthen natural resource management, irrigation, livestock, schools, and waste management. Developed inclusively with Village Natural Resources Management Committees, Village Development Committees, and traditional leaders, the bylaws promote accountability, regulate resource use, and reduce conflicts. Examples include irrigation pump management in Salima, forest protection in Chikwawa and Machinga, and livestock pass-on rules in Neno. These bylaws foster ownership, sustainability, and resilience.



The signing of bylaws by chiefs and representatives from the District Council, Malawi.



CASE STUDY 3

CJC Rwanda - Community- Based Childcare Centres supporting communities to work on terracing activities

Within the CJC Rwanda project, the community identified childcare as a barrier to the cash for work terracing activity. To overcome this barrier, the project responded to community feedback and supported the community to establish Community Based Childcare Centres at terracing sites. These centres employed community members to provide childcare while parents, particularly mothers, worked on the terraces. The centres also provided nourishing meals for the children. This enabled programme participants, particularly teen mothers (a target group in the programme) to participate in the cash for work terracing scheme.



Children and carers at childcare centre in Gisagara, Rwanda.

In the CJC programme, procedural climate justice means putting communities in charge of the changes they want to see. It's about empowering people to lead their own climate resilience efforts, based on their priorities and lived experiences.

Distributive Climate Justice

Distributive justice in the CJC programme is realised through climate-resilient interventions that are prioritised by communities themselves. These interventions are designed and implemented with active participation from relevant community structures, ensuring local ownership and leadership. Special attention is given to including marginalised groups in both decision-making and the distribution of benefits. The design process also considers how each intervention can be maintained over time and potentially scaled up. Table 1 outlines the specific interventions supported in each country.



Table 1. CJC Interventions by country

Intervention	Malawi	Rwanda	Zambia
Disaster Risk Management (DRM)	Community DRM plans River banks protected with sandbags Participatory Scenario and Contingency Planning Emergency food relief Digital weather and rainfall monitoring stations	Early warning preparedness and response systems including SMS Training first aiders to respond Working with Rwandan Ministry of Emergency Management Management to have inclusive disaster risk reduction policies and procedures	Disaster risk management committees Early warning, preparedness and response systems Reducing human-wildlife conflict Emergency food relief
Water Access, Sanitation Hygiene (WASH)	Improved water access and quality: boreholes, solar powered reticulation systems Disability friendly latrines in schools	Rainwater harvesting tanks installed Ground water storage facilities constructed	Improved water access and quality: boreholes, wells, weirs Disability friendly pit latrines in schools and homes
Natural Resource Management	Tree planting in farms, gardens, and homes Natural tree regeneration Soil conservation Energy-efficient cook stoves Community by-laws for natural resource protection	Radical and progressive terraces Community owned tree nurseries Fuel efficient cookstoves Marshland rehabilitation	Tree planting Farmer-managed natural regeneration Tree nursery businesses Fuel-efficient stoves Watershed protection Beekeeping
Climate Resilient Agriculture	Sustainable agriculture practices Farm input support Goat and chicken pass-on Solar powered irrigation and greenhouse production	Agroecology training and practices including demonstration plots Compost making Livestock as an alternative livelihood- Pig, goat and chicken distribution Backyard gardening	Farmer field schools in climate-resilient agriculture and livestock Solar powered irrigation Vegetable gardening Re-stocking drought-tolerant seed Small livestock and vaccine distribution
Economic Development	Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) Vocational training for youth Livelihood diversification: honey and mushroom production Strengthened market systems: linking producers with end markets and business support services	Inclusive Village Savings and Loans groups	Business skills coaching for cooperatives and VSLAs Off-taker agreements to link producer groups to markets
Loss and damage	Rehabilitation of community structures. Psycho-social support and awareness raising	Houses rebuilding and made accessible after severe damage from landslides	Housing repairs for vulnerable groups after natural disasters
Resilient Schools	School DRM clubs, capacity and plans	Community based childcare centres	
Watch country videos here:	CJC Malawi video	CJC Rwanda video	CJC Zambia video



The CJC approach is holistic, integrating technical and infrastructure investments with capacity building, advocacy support, and income diversification strategies.

Interventions have delivered a range of benefits, including:

- **Diversified income and financial safety nets:** By linking livestock provision and solar-powered irrigation systems with winter cropping programmes, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), and market access for agricultural products, communities have developed multiple interconnected income streams.
- **Improved disaster preparedness:** Early warning systems—such as SMS-based weather forecasts and those integrating Indigenous knowledge—along with pre-positioned supplies and retrofitted infrastructure, have enhanced response times and reduced damage during climate events.
- **Sustainable infrastructure development:** CJC's support for physical infrastructure (e.g. boreholes, irrigation systems, sanitation facilities) was guided by technical, social, and institutional assessments conducted with communities. This ensured that investments were feasible, cost-effective, environmentally sound, and inclusive of marginalised groups. Communities were also supported to develop maintenance plans, including processes for securing funding and accessing technical or government support when needed.
- **Environmental restoration:** Agroforestry and terracing activities have provided multiple benefits including reduced soil erosion, improved land productivity, and enhanced biodiversity.
- **Water security and year-round farming:** Watershed management, solar-powered water systems, and rainwater harvesting have reduced water scarcity and enabled off-season farming. In remote areas where installing rainwater systems was challenging, programmes adapted by supporting community-led solutions rather than abandoning the interventions.



What has Worked

Strengthening community capacity and ownership for sustainability: CJC's interventions are grounded in principles of procedural justice. They are planned and implemented in an integrated way, based on locally identified priorities and through agreed community structures and partnerships. Each intervention blends the community's technical, cultural, and social knowledge—of what works, what does not and potential risks—with external technical expertise from government and other actors, including the private sector. To ensure sustainability and inclusive benefits, CJC invests in building the capacity of both communities and local institutions. This includes technical training, the development of protocols and agreements for infrastructure management and maintenance, benefit-sharing arrangements, and support for advocacy, leadership, and institutional strengthening. These efforts help ensure that physical infrastructure is effectively used, maintained, and connected to government services and community advocacy efforts—delivering inclusive and lasting benefits.

Government partnership at all levels: Government partnership at all levels has been critical to the success of CJC interventions. Collaboration with local government sector experts and services, alongside strong support from national governments, has helped facilitate cooperation from local authorities. CJC has worked to embed technical interventions within existing government services, plans, and structures—both locally and nationally—avoiding the creation of parallel systems. Close coordination among all actors has been a key feature of this approach. However, a challenge for long-term sustainability remains: securing continued government support after project funding ends. Local governments often face resource constraints and competing priorities, which may limit their ability to maintain and scale interventions without external assistance.

Linking intervention challenges with advocacy: CJC communities face a range of challenges that are often worsened by climate impacts—for example, damaged transport infrastructure due to floods or landslides, limited rural roads and communication systems, and long distances that make it difficult to access markets, government services, or participate in group activities. To address these barriers, CJC supports communities in advocating for improved government services and infrastructure from mainstream sources. This advocacy is essential not only for enhancing the effectiveness of CJC-supported interventions but also for ensuring their long-term sustainability.





CASE STUDY 4

Increasing the income of Smallholder Farmers in Malawi

CJC Malawi has promoted winter cropping in climate vulnerable communities. Households were supported with inputs (including maize seeds) and training on the cropping process to enhance their food security and climate resilience. As a result, households have been able to increase their annual income and benefit from an additional season of farming. Rosario Misomali (below) is a member of a farming cooperative who were supported with winter cropping to plant maize in Zomba. He earned an additional £70 during a season when he typically would not earn from his farm. This has meant he is now able to expand his farming activities for the upcoming season and increase his productivity, without further support from the project.



Rosario Misomali is a member of a farming cooperative supported by CJC in Zomba, Malawi



CASE STUDY 5

Sustainable water supply in Zambia

Community water management committees and trained pump minders have been established to ensure the sustainable use, maintenance, and repair of every borehole or well drilled or repaired by CJC. Local water department staff are involved in training these committees and pump minders to align with government WASH approaches. This training helps promote equitable water distribution and protects the water points from misuse. The committees will also implement a minimal user fee to cover minor repair costs, ensuring the sustainability of the water points well beyond the project's lifespan.



Community members take part in rehabilitating a dysfunctional hand pump in Luangwa District, Zambia to restore access to safe water.



CASE STUDY 6

Housing repair for vulnerable families in Rwanda

CJC Rwanda has supported marginalised households with housing repair following floods and landslides in 2023 which affected more than 50,000 people. Solomon and Colette's home of 17 years was one of many which collapsed after heavy rain. Colette recalled, "I was breastfeeding my daughter. I had to rush out of the house to save my children." The family lost everything, including their daughter Esther's wheelchair.

The project supported Solomon and Colette to rebuild their lives in 2024, following detailed assessments which involved local government and community members. A new house was built in a safer location, made of concrete and with a tin roof. The house is adapted for Esther's needs and includes a water tank and furniture. Solomon said, "I am confident that my new house is strong. My daughter has a life now too. She is happy." Colette added, "The water tank has saved me so much time. I cherish not having to carry water on my head thanks to the CJC programme."

The activities have formed part of official government Performance Contracts which ensure ongoing government support to community led action.



Solomon standing in front of a surviving wall of his old mud house (2023) and his family in front of their newly built house with a metal roof, adapted to the needs of his child with a disability (2024)

In the CJC Programme, distributive justice means taking systems-based approaches to address the interconnected nature of climate vulnerability. Success depends on linking local knowledge with technical expertise, on government and private sector partnerships and on promoting community ownership. CJC has shown that resilience building is a long-term, complex endeavour requiring sustained commitment across multiple sectors and stakeholders.





Transformative Climate Justice

Transformative climate justice in the CJC programme begins with recognising that marginalised groups living in hazard-prone areas face multiple, intersecting barriers to preparing for, coping with, and recovering from climate shocks. These structural inequalities not only drive vulnerability but also intensify the impacts of climate change, creating compounding cycles of disadvantage—particularly for women, youth, older people, and people with disabilities. From the outset, CJC has used GEDSI as a central strategy for climate justice, not only to ensure inclusive participation and benefit-sharing, but also to challenge and shift harmful social norms that exclude or silence marginalised voices. Through community-led processes, CJC has supported traditionally marginalised women and men to build confidence, assert their rights, and engage in advocacy—empowering them to hold duty bearers accountable and demand more responsive, equitable, and inclusive governance. This approach recognises that true resilience requires not just technical solutions, but social transformation.

What has Worked

Identifying marginalised groups. CJC’s approach to inclusion began through identifying and clearly defining the most marginalised groups of people within the CJC communities. These groups were included as participants in initial climate risk assessments and climate justice planning processes to highlight the specific risks and barriers they face, and benefit from their knowledge and skills. Climate justice plans explicitly include interventions that respond to the specific priorities of these groups. This set the tone for all subsequent CJC approaches and interventions.

Mainstreaming inclusion. CJC works to ensure that inclusion is not a one-off activity but a mainstreamed approach—embedded in community norms and systems. The goal is to create an enabling environment where everyone, especially traditionally excluded people, can participate meaningfully. Activities include co-creating solutions with empowered women and people with disabilities, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making structures. Participation quotas—such as Malawi’s target of 60% women in leadership roles—help set clear expectations from the outset. In Zambia, ambitious GEDSI guidelines were developed and applied across all activities, setting minimum participation targets for marginalised groups in both interventions and governance structures. Awareness-raising efforts have been wide-ranging. Traditional leaders (such as village chiefs), district government officials, service providers, and media outlets have received training. In Rwanda, innovative approaches like parasports have been used to promote inclusion and ensure that intervention designs are accessible and inclusive for all.

“I didn’t think I could do much to help my community and was just trying to find ways to get by. But the CJC trainings helped me realize that my disability doesn’t limit my ability to contribute. People look at me differently now—I am not just the young man with a disability; I am someone who is part of something bigger, something that is helping my community and those like me thrive.”

**Hendricks Kafawima,
Community Management
Committee representative
for people with disabilities,
Liwandamo Village, Sioma
District, Zambia**



Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) is a transformative behaviour change approach that helps participants identify gender-related barriers and develop joint action plans to address them at individual, household and community levels. It uses visual methods that are accessible across literacy levels and is facilitated by trained community members. GALS promotes inclusive, collaborative visioning rather than confrontational approaches. By integrating gender awareness at the community level and engaging traditional leaders—where inequality is often rooted in cultural norms—it helps shift perceptions and address power imbalances. This approach supports sustainable change by fostering dialogue, reflection, and shared ownership of solutions. Community members have shared powerful testimonials about the change that GALS is making in communities, namely building a more respectful and supportive environment within married households, where the contributions of husbands and wives are both valued.

Targeted interventions for marginalised groups. CJC takes a twin-track approach to inclusion: mainstreaming awareness and action across all activities, while also implementing targeted interventions to ensure the most marginalised groups can participate and benefit meaningfully. These targeted efforts aim to empower individuals to contribute to decision-making and become agents of change. For example, participants receive additional training in leadership, communication, and assertiveness skills to support their engagement. In Zambia, this included partnering with health institutions to organise cataract surgery camps for older people. Improved vision enabled them to participate more actively in CJC interventions and community processes.

Inclusion as Standard Practice: CJC embedded inclusion from the project inception, including conducting comprehensive needs assessments to understand the barriers faced by different groups, and ensuring these were addressed and budgeted for through the project design. For example, new infrastructure (such as retrofitting houses) incorporates accessibility into the design, and trainings are held in accessible venues at a time suitable for participants with unpaid care work burdens. The project also addresses individual barriers to participation through provision of reasonable accommodations. For example, through budgeting for sign language interpretation and assistants in trainings and meetings, provision of childcare, and providing assistive devices to ensure people with disabilities can meaningfully participate in climate justice activities.

Intersectional approaches in CJC enable recognition and targeting of interventions related to the intersections of gender, age, disability and other diversity factors, resulting in distinct and often compounding challenges. For example, single women, divorcees, widows, men, women and children with disabilities face a unique set of climate and other vulnerabilities that differs across contexts and climate hazards. Our community-led approach and the use of behaviour change tools like Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) mean that the programme starts from where individuals' own analysis of their challenges and their vision for future change. Starting with a shared understanding of a climate just community that works for everyone is an ideal approach for identifying and tackling intersectional drivers of exclusion. The resulting support therefore addresses multiple axes of marginalisation – such as poverty and disability.

“The involvement of women ... has been seen as transformative. Women, who traditionally handle domestic work, have now gained opportunities to engage in more income-generating activities, improving not just their living conditions but also contributing to the community’s welfare.”

**Project participant,
Ngororero District, Rwanda**





Power Redistribution: CJC interventions have helped elevate women and people with disabilities as key decision-makers and agents of change. By valuing their unique knowledge, lived experiences, and skills, these individuals are now working alongside other community members in shaping local development. Traditional leaders have also been actively engaged to raise awareness and gain their support, contributing to a cultural shift where women and people with disabilities are increasingly seen as equal and active participants in community life. A crucial part of this transformation involves challenging and changing deeply rooted cultural norms and government attitudes. Community GEDSI Champions have helped promote these changes in social norms.

Policy Influence: CJC has empowered communities to hold local service providers accountable and lead their own advocacy efforts. A key part of this work involves training and supporting community-based Advocacy Champions, with a strong focus on youth. These Champions have created sustained pressure for systemic change, influencing policy at both district and national levels. They are equipped with knowledge about their rights and opportunities, and trained in documenting their experiences, gathering evidence, engaging with decision-makers, and advocating for policy reform. As a result, community representatives now contribute testimony that shapes legislative processes and influences funding decisions for mainstream services. CJC also applies a twin-track approach to policy influence. CJC partners with organizations such as the National Union of Disability Organisations Rwanda and Zambia Disability Rights Watch to promote disability inclusion in climate justice efforts, including advocacy to improve access to assistive devices through community-based health insurance schemes. Enhancing official recognition for people with disabilities has been an important outcome of CJC in Zambia, where people with disabilities are often left out from receiving essential services due to a lack of official recognition as a person with a disability. The CJC Zambia project, led by Disability Rights Watch, has therefore worked with the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services to give over 1,3000 identification cards to people with disabilities. Collaborating with local and national organizations focused on gender, disability, and advocacy has been essential to these efforts. These partnerships help ensure a deeper understanding of local needs, better outreach to marginalized communities, and more effective engagement with the policy environment.

CASE STUDY 7

Making disaster risk management and healthcare more inclusive for people with disabilities in Rwanda

CJC Rwanda disability inclusion partner, the National Union of Disability Organisations in Rwanda (NUDOR) has achieved significant advocacy wins for people with disabilities. In 2025, NUDOR organized a workshop with the Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) to analyze the inclusiveness of Rwanda's Disaster Risk Management policies for people with disabilities. Participants identified barriers such as inaccessible evacuation routes, lack of accessible communication formats, low awareness of specific risks, and insufficient social protection. The analysis and policy recommendations were disseminated to relevant ministries. Districts committed to incorporating these recommendations into their disaster risk reduction plans.

NUDOR also successfully advocated for the inclusion of assistive devices in Rwanda's Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI). NUDOR met with the Parliamentary Commission to address the lack of coverage for assistive devices. Their sustained efforts led to the Government of Rwanda's announcement that CBHI would expand its coverage to include 14 additional health services, including orthotics, prosthetics, and other assistive devices, by July 2025. This development means a 50% cost contribution from the government will improve access to these essential devices, granting people with disabilities greater independence.



Cover page from the Kigali Times newspaper, illustrating a meeting between government and community representatives to strengthen disaster support for people with disabilities.



CASE STUDY 8

Holding local duty bearers accountable in Zambia

CJC Zambia has empowered community members, including youth, women, and people with disabilities with the skills to hold local duty bearers accountable, delivering critical advocacy wins. Through training in advocacy tools and ongoing mentorship from specialist advocacy partners, CJC Advocacy Champions have made significant improvements in their rural, underserved communities. These include the construction of new elementary school buildings, advocating for a mining company to drill a borehole for improved access to clean water and installation of communication towers. In Luangwa District, cooperatives have gained access to funding from the Constituency Development Fund, enabling them to start new businesses. The Chikolewe, Kapilinego, Muchinga and Kafuwela Youth Clubs and the Victory Women's Club have started goat rearing businesses while the Nhasta Women's Club obtained a hammermill to produce flour for sale. The communities of State Ranch Ward, Shang'ombo District, one of the most geographically remote areas of Zambia, used their new advocacy skills to secure a Food Reserve Agency maize sale point in the ward. This achievement has improved access to a vital food staple at subsidized prices during periods of food insecurity. As one of the Advocacy Champions reflected, *"This achievement has not only made food more accessible but has also strengthened our confidence as a community."*



Advocacy Champions in Mulangu Ward, Shang'ombo District, Zambia, meet with traditional leaders and the government Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) Coordinator.



CASE STUDY 9

Resilient Schools in Malawi

The CJC project in Malawi, with its partner Link Educational International, has enhanced school resilience through the Resilient School Package, providing schools with tools and training to prepare for disasters and maintain learning continuity. Key components included school preparedness kits, emergency planning, and community engagement. Additionally, murals were created in schools to promote safety, hygiene, and disaster awareness, serving as visual guides for students and staff. These interventions strengthened school capacity, increased awareness among learners, and fostered a culture of preparedness in districts across Malawi.



A school mural on disaster risk management at Chapanya Primary School in Chikwawa District, Malawi



Transformative climate justice in the CJC Programme means ensuring inclusion of all marginalised groups, building broad-based support for inclusion and influencing decision makers to shift policy and become champions of cultural shifts. By recognizing the knowledge, skills, and agency of every community member is a vital contribution in the face of escalating climate risks, CJC has helped connect principles of equality to lived experiences of climate vulnerability.





CLIMATE JUSTICE IN PRACTICE:

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Donors

1. Support Genuine Community Leadership

Move beyond participatory consultation by funding programmes that start with community-defined problems and solutions. Invest in the design and delivery of processes and training that enable communities to assess their needs, set priorities, plan actions, monitor progress and hold implementing partners accountable. This approach requires a commitment to letting communities determine specific interventions only after they've had access to resources for informed decision-making—such as assessments, planning, and capacity building. To ensure quality and inclusivity, robust systems for accountability must be in place. Additionally, allocate resources for community advocacy training and institutional capacity building. These are essential foundations for long-term resilience and meaningful community leadership.

2. Leverage Systems Change by Working Closely with Local Structures and Organisations

Work intentionally with local organisations—both governmental and non-governmental—that have established relationships with communities and a deep understanding of the local context. Also engage specialist organisations focused on disability rights, women's rights, and environmental issues, including self-representative groups such as Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. These partners bring valuable contextual knowledge and trusted connections with marginalized groups. Because GEDSI is shaped by cultural norms and personal beliefs—including those of CJC practitioners—fostering inclusive empowerment requires intentional effort, sustained support, and time. It involves raising awareness, providing 'software' support such as training and relationship-building, and creating space for reflection and growth. Recognise that climate justice work demands practitioners to examine their own biases, adopt a holistic, community-led approach, and develop new skills. Invest in staff training and organisational culture change to support this shift and ensure inclusive, effective programming.

3. Make Inclusion and Advocacy Central

Achieving meaningful participation and inclusion requires a long-term, multi-dimensional approach. This lays the foundation for more inclusive and sustainable development at the community level. Set a clear, long-

term direction for power redistribution and systemic change, embedding inclusion and accessibility from the very beginning of program design. Ensure adequate budgeting for essential 'software' activities such as rights and climate risk awareness, training, capacity building, relationship-building, leadership development, systems change support, and advocacy. Plan proactively to remove barriers to participation for marginalized groups, including people with disabilities. This may involve raising awareness about disability, providing assistive devices, and ensuring accessibility across all activities—such as training sessions, distribution points, livelihood programs, and venues. Budget for and provide reasonable accommodations to meet individual needs, such as sign language interpreters and accessible transport. Programmes should be co-designed to deliver tangible short-term benefits while laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable systems change.

4. Commit for the Long Term and Capture Learning for feedback into programming

Building genuine, inclusive resilience means working closely with marginalized communities over time. Given the complexity of climate change and the time needed to shift mindsets and build sustainable systems, long-term commitment is essential. Short-term donor expectations for quick, visible results can hinder the deep, transformative change that climate justice requires. To support community-led approaches, funding mechanisms should include longer inception phases, multi-year commitments, and adaptive management. Creative funding models are needed—ones that allow for flexibility and responsiveness while maintaining accountability and meeting deliverables. The Locally Led Adaptation principles, endorsed by over 150 organisations including many donor organisations offer a valuable framework for this approach.

It is also vital to establish systems that capture and apply learning from both successes and failures. Future investments should build on this knowledge, avoiding repeated challenges. Prioritize collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, especially around the core pillars of climate justice: inclusion, resilience, and empowerment.



GLOSSARY

Adaptation: Changes in human and/or natural systems in response to actual or expected climate impacts to reduce negative impacts or take advantage of any new opportunities that come with them.

Advocacy: empowering communities to hold local duty bearers accountable and supporting organising at local to national levels to influence government policy and plans.

Climate justice: a people-centred, human rights-based approach that aims to share the benefits of equitable global development. Climate justice approaches recognise that people in the Global South are least responsible for the global climate emergency but are most severely affected by it. It also acknowledges that existing inequalities must be addressed first in order to effectively address the climate crisis, including wealth disparities and marginalisation based upon gender, age, disability and/or indigenous status.

Climate vulnerability: the degree to which a system, community or individual is likely to be harmed by climate change, based on how exposed and sensitive they are to its impacts and how well they can cope or adapt.

Duty bearers: individuals, institutions, or entities that have the legal, moral, or political responsibility to uphold, protect, and fulfil the rights of others—especially those of rights holders (e.g., citizens, communities, or marginalised groups).

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI): an approach that ensures development initiatives are inclusive, equitable and responsive to the needs of all people, especially those who are marginalised due to gender, disability or social status. It prioritises removing systemic barriers and promoting meaningful participation so that no one is left behind.

Intersectionality: a social theory that different aspects of a person's identity—such as gender, race, disability, class, and sexuality—interact and overlap to shape their experiences of discrimination, privilege, and access to opportunities. It highlights that social inequalities are not experienced in isolation but are interconnected and often compound one another.

Intervention: a planned set of actions or strategies designed to address specific development challenges in target communities or systems.

Marginalised people or groups: those who are disproportionately affected by climate change due to existing social, economic, or geographic disadvantages. This includes individuals and communities who face barriers to participation in decision-making, have limited access to resources, and are more vulnerable to environmental shocks—such as those living in remote areas, experiencing poverty, or facing discrimination based on gender, age, disability, or indigenous status.

People with disabilities: Disability arises from the interaction between an impairment or health condition and the attitudinal and environmental barriers in society which hinder a person from participating in society on a full and equal basis as others.

Reasonable accommodation: a modification or adjustment based on individual need, to ensure a person, particularly a person with a disability, can participate in an activity on an equal basis as others.

Resilience: the capacity of people to maintain their livelihoods and natural resources through continually anticipating, absorbing and adapting to current and future climate risks, shocks, stresses and opportunities.

Twin track approach: mainstreaming disability considerations into development activities to ensure people with disabilities have access on an equal basis with others in the community while also providing specific and targeted support to empower people with disabilities.



AUTHORS:

Fiona Percy, Mackenzie Klema, Patricia Mukumbuta, Baba Niber Tierto (NIRAS), Ciara Commins, Blessings Kachale (SCIAF), Anne Brady, Hermonda Kalludra, Kenneth Matekenya (DAI), Emma Symonds (CBM UK), Agnes Munyoro (The Scottish Government).

September 2025

This programme was made possible with funding support from The Scottish Government.

In Malawi, CJC is implemented by DAI Global, in partnership with Water Witness International & Water Witness Malawi, Link Education International & Link Community Development Malawi, Evangelical Lutheran Development Service, World Relief Malawi, Catholic Development Commission, Organisation for Sustainable and Social Economic Development Initiative, Circle for Integrated Community Development, Civil Society Network for Climate Change, Oxfam GB & Oxfam In Malawi, and Churches Action in Relief and Development.

In Rwanda, CJC is implemented by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), in partnership with Trocaire, Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network (RCCDN), DUHAMIC-ADRI, Duterimbere, CBM UK and the National Union of Disability Organizations in Rwanda (NUDOR).

In Zambia, CJC is implemented by NIRAS Group (UK) Ltd, in partnership with the Council of Churches in Zambia, Green Living Movement in Zambia, Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, Centre for Environment Justice, Disability Rights Watch and CBM UK.