

Stories of Change — ZanzAdapt 2025-2026

From Youth Members to Youth Leaders


Before the establishment of a Community Forests Management Agreement (CoFMA) in Unguja Ukuu, mangrove conservation efforts were led by a local community group, Mikoko ni Urithi Wetu largely made up of older community members. For years, youth participation remained low, and there were no young leaders to represent the next generation. Despite ongoing conservation work, the lack of youth involvement meant missed opportunities for innovation, sustainability, and long-term continuity.


The introduction of the ZanzAdapt Project marked a turning point. With a strong emphasis on youth and women's participation, the community began to rethink its leadership structure. When the CoFMA was officially formed in 2025, both elders and youth came together to design a more inclusive system—one that ensured shared leadership across generations.

A key decision emerged: Every leadership position would have a youth representative.

Inspired by this shift youth members Shaaban Omar Shaaban and Zakia Mansab stepped forward to run for leadership positions. Their confidence and commitment paid off—they were elected as Chairperson and Deputy Secretary.



 *"I was confident I would win because of the effort and hard work I put into our conservation work," said Zakia.*


 For Shaaban, leadership came with a clear purpose. *"My goal in leadership is to transform the organisation and the people who have entrusted me to lead."*

Since their appointment, CoFMA and mangrove conservation efforts have undergone a noticeable transformation. Youth participation has significantly increased, bringing renewed energy and ideas into conservation efforts. The committee is also learning to embrace modern approaches, including the use of technology and social media to support awareness and coordination.




Activities that had previously faded—such as beekeeping—have been revived, creating new opportunities for income generation within the community.

Looking ahead, the youth-led leadership is also developing plans for sustainable mangrove tourism, aimed at creating jobs while protecting natural resources. Leading in a traditional setting has not been without challenges. As young leaders, Shaaban and Zakia have had to navigate hesitation from some community members, particularly around accepting new ideas or being led by youth. Cooperation has been key.

 *“Without cooperation, we wouldn’t be able to achieve anything. I can’t do anything without Zakia and vice versa. There’s immense collaboration with other leaders and members to achieve our shared goals,” said Shabaan.*



 *Zakia adds, “You shouldn’t give up. You have to remember why you’re doing something and keep going and eventually, they’ll accept you.”*

With the CoFMA structure now finalised, the team is ready to move from planning to implementation. A strategic plan is already in place, focusing on strengthening conservation efforts while expanding income-generating opportunities for the community.

Their vision goes beyond environmental protection—they aim to empower fellow young people not only to engage in conservation but also to build sustainable livelihoods.

The opportunity to lead has strengthened their confidence and sparked aspirations for broader leadership roles in the future.

But for now, their focus remains clear: transforming their community, together.



Building Resilience from Within



When the rains come to Zanzibar, farmers across Unguja and Pemba prepare their fields for planting. Agriculture here, like much of Tanzania, is heavily rain-fed—a fact that makes farmers highly vulnerable to the irregular rainfall patterns caused by climate change.

But this season, something remarkable happened. With support from the ZanzAdapt Project, thousands of improved tree seedlings—grown in women-led community nurseries—were transplanted into farms across the islands. For the first time, many communities did not have to rely on external sources for seedlings. They supplied themselves.

Women are at the heart of these changes. Two nurseries in Unguja, owned and run by women's groups, produced and distributed over 25,000 seedlings this season. In the process, nurseries have become more than places for growing trees, they are hubs of knowledge, leadership, and resilience.

Mrs. Mwanaali, who manages one of the nurseries learned how to raise improved seedling varieties, apply modern nursery techniques, market her products, and manage finances, all backed up with nursery equipment, water infrastructure, seeds, and supplies.

“For me, the biggest asset is not just the tools,” she explains. “It is the skills I now have to grow, manage, and lead. These skills will stay with me and my community.”

Her words reflect ZanzAdapt's broader vision—empowering women to lead environmental solutions in their communities. By equipping women with the necessary tools and training, the project is ensuring that the capacity to adapt to climate change rests within communities themselves.

The trees, now firmly rooted in farmers' fields, represent far more than agricultural inputs. They symbolize food security, diversified incomes, and ecological restoration.




Through agroforestry, farmers gain higher yields, improved soil fertility, and natural protection against erosion and pests. What began as small nurseries has grown into a system of resilience that will continue to benefit communities season after season.

Mrs. Mwanaali and her friends have proven that resilience is best built from within. Strengthening local capacity and supporting women to lead, ZanzAdapt is enabling farmers to secure a better future in the face of climate change.

Stronger Together

Eight months ago, Bi. Hakika Busara had never farmed a day in her life. Her livelihood depended entirely on the ocean—long, exhausting days spent fishing just to put food on the table and earn a small income. The work was physically demanding and often unreliable. Despite her efforts, she struggled to meet her family's needs. At the same time, she watched other women in her village of Unguja Ukuu join the ZanzAdapt project and begin transforming their lives through agroforestry. They were growing food, earning income, and building more secure futures.


 *"I felt envious when I saw other women benefiting," she recalls. "I also wanted to farm, to have something of my own."*

But Bi. Hakika faced a major barrier; she did not own land. Without access to land, she could not participate in the project, leaving her feeling excluded and discouraged.

Carrying this frustration, she confided in her close friend, Bi. Rehema. Recently widowed, Bi. Rehema had inherited her husband's farm and was transitioning into agroforestry.




But farming was relatively new to her, and she had been finding it difficult to manage the farm on her own. Moved by her friend's situation, Bi. Rehema made a life-changing decision. She offered Bi. Hakika half of her land to farm, for as long as she needed.

 *"I wanted to help her because she is a dear friend," says Bi. Rehema. "So she can support herself and her children, have food to eat, something to sell, and a way to meet her basic needs."*

What began as an act of generosity quickly grew into a strong partnership.

Rather than working separately, the two women support each other—sharing labour, knowledge, and responsibility across their farms. With encouragement from ZanzAdapt project officers, their collaboration expanded even further.

Together, they reached out to other women in the project and formed a small informal group to share technical knowledge, reduce labour burdens, and strengthen their productivity.

 *"The project taught us the importance and power of ujima, collective work and responsibility," says Bi. Rehema. "We take turns helping each other on our farms, and I am very grateful for that."*





This arrangement has benefited Bi. Rehema as well. As a widow, she had been struggling to manage her farm. Through this partnership and group support, she now has the help she needs to sustain her farm and better provide for her family. For Bi. Hakika, the transformation has been profound. She has gradually stepped away from the physically demanding work at sea and now relies on agroforestry to feed her family and earn an income.

What once felt out of reach is now her reality

Looking ahead, both women have ambitious goals. Bi. Hakika is saving her earnings with the hope of purchasing her own land in the future. Meanwhile, Bi. Rehema continues to strengthen her farm with the support of her peers. They are both exploring ways to diversify their income through value-addition and hope to start a small businesses like juice making with the group.

Their story is a powerful example of how a strong sense of community and collective action make women stronger together. What began as a simple conversation between friends has grown into a network of women uplifting one another—proving that when women support women, lasting change is possible.

