

RISING FROM THE DEPTHS – BAHARI YETU, URITHI WETU (OUR OCEAN, OUR HERITAGE)

The coast around Bagamoyo, Tanzania, is alive with a sight rarely seen elsewhere in the world today: locally-built wooden watercraft, powered by sail, and engaged in economic activity.

The sight of these traditional boats is often used as a representation of Tanzania's coastal beauty and monetized to attract tourists. However, for the Bagamoyo communities who build and use these craft, economic development, urban expansion, the planned Bagamoyo Special Economic Zone (or Mega Port) and tourism development—are pressuring 'traditional' ways of life and threatening the practices that build these iconic craft.

Dr Lucy Blue, in collaboration with maritime and heritage academics from the Universities of Exeter and Dar es Salaam, have been working with maritime communities in Bagamoyo to explore, through co-created, collaborative engagement, the value of maritime heritage as perceived by the communities of the region, and to document endangered material culture, craft and fishing practice.

"This community faces displacement and loss of access to traditional fish landings, markets and construction areas, while coping with overfishing and disruption to traditional timber supplies unless visibility is brought to these important heritage assets," said Lucy. "Besides ongoing documentation of the living maritime heritage, the project has already successfully conducted a series of co-created workshops, engaging local communities of boat-builders and fishers, as well as regional and national policymakers.

"We commissioned master boat-carver, Mr Alalae Mohamed, to build a double-outrigger ngalawa logboat, the region's most common fishing vessel, which we recorded from start to finish and created a Swahili-language documentary film, with English subtitles, entitled 'Ngalawa Making Film'.

Lucy went on to reveal other outputs of the project included: "The creation of a three-day community exhibition which showcased the lives and work of the maritime community, including boatbuilders, mangrove-whelk collectors and fishermen, who were all on hand to explain their craft.

"However, our most impactful achievement to date is the establishment of a formal organisation to represent the interests of maritime practitioners in Bagamoyo, an officially registered non-governmental organisation named CHAMABOMA-Bagamoyo – the Association of Boatbuilders and Vocational Training-Bagamoyo."

CHAMABOMA-Bagamoyo brings together boatbuilders to advance their collective objectives and provides training opportunities for the next generation. And it provides members with the opportunity to diversify their economic activities, bringing much-needed income whilst at the same time preserving and promoting traditional practices .

The ultimate goal of the project is to formulate a coastal heritage strategy briefing for municipal planning, tourism and heritage agencies in Tanzania, to secure sustainable continuity of valuable maritime heritage practice and knowledge.

