

In case you missed it—Youth lived experiences of climate injustice

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The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) continued its *Towards climate justice in the Caribbean* webinar series with a discussion exploring the lived experiences of climate injustice from the perspective of Caribbean youth. Bringing together young climate advocates from across the region, the session explored how climate change is affecting young people's lives, opportunities and aspirations, while highlighting the leadership and solutions that young people are already bringing to climate action.

The webinar attracted 86 participants representing 20 countries and territories from across the region and internationally. Participants represented youth and climate justice movements; women's rights and LGBTQI+ organisations; Indigenous Peoples, rural, agricultural, coastal and fishing communities; environmental and conservation organisations; government agencies; universities and research institutions; schools; foundations and international development organisations; trade unions; and private-sector entities working in sustainability and renewable energy.

1. Setting the stage: Listening to the lived experiences of Caribbean youth

Welcoming participants, CANARI Technical Officer Niamh Vaughan explained that the webinar concluded the second phase of the series, which has focused on understanding climate injustice through the lived experiences of different communities across the Caribbean. She reflected that the series emerged from CANARI's Partners Forum earlier in the year, where participants identified the need to deepen collective understanding of climate justice, hear directly from communities and strengthen collaboration across the region.

Niamh explained that the session would begin with an artistic reflection through poetry, followed by presentations from three young Caribbean climate justice advocates and additional video reflections from youth across the region before opening the discussion to participants. Rather than discussing climate injustice as an abstract concept, she said the aim was to understand what climate injustice looks and feels like through the experiences of Caribbean youth and to reflect together on what those experiences mean for climate justice in the region.

2. Rodrina Daley: Climate injustice, grief and the future through poetry

The webinar opened with a spoken word performance by Rodrina Daley, Crisis Response and Community Care Coordinator at GirlsCARE Jamaica and a member of the Jamaica Climate Change Youth Council. Introducing her poem, *I Told My Mother I Don't Want Children*, Rodrina explained that it was inspired both by Jamaica's long recovery following Hurricane Beryl and by repeated conversations with her mother.

The poem unfolded as an intimate conversation between daughter and mother. Rodrina described telling her mother that she did not want children, prompting her mother's prayers, grief and attempts to persuade her otherwise. Yet she revealed that her decision did not come from a lack of love for children. Instead, she struggled with how to explain to her mother that economic hardship, conflict and climate change had fundamentally altered how she viewed the future. She questioned how she could bring children into what she described as a world that is burning, where all she felt she could offer them were "the ashes of what once was."

Moving from personal reflection to social commentary, Rodrina recounted her experience of growing up in an inner-city Jamaican community and living through Hurricane Beryl. She challenged political narratives that encourage communities simply to "build back better", contrasting calls for resilience with the realities faced by families living with poverty, insecure land rights, government neglect and repeated climate disasters.

The poem concluded by returning to her conversation with her mother—a frame which highlights climate injustice not simply as an environmental issue but as one that shapes deeply personal decisions about hope, family, identity and the future.

The performance drew an immediate and emotional response from participants. In the chat, words and phrases such as solidarity, deeply touching, so real and authentic, wonderful, and one of the best poems I've ever heard appeared in quick succession. During a brief technical interruption, one participant shared that the poem resonated deeply with her own experience as a young mother. Although she had one child, she explained that she no longer wished to have more—not because she lacked the desire for children, but because climate change, public policy and wider societal conditions had created an environment in which she no longer felt it was fair to bring another child into the world.

Reflecting on the poem, Niamh observed that climate change cannot be understood only through measurements such as rising temperatures, storm intensity or sea-level rise. Instead, she said, the poem reminded participants that climate justice is fundamentally about people—their freedoms, opportunities and ability to pursue the lives they value. She encouraged everyone to carry the emotions the poem had evoked into the discussions that followed.



Photo credit: CANARI

3. Dahvia Hylton: Climate injustice, grief and the erosion of hope

Opening the panel discussion, Dahvia Hylton, Co-coordinator of the Stronger Caribbean Together Network, reflected that Rodrina's poem resonated deeply with her own experiences. She explained that she had decided as a child that she did not want to bring children into the world because of the future she anticipated, noting that what was once considered an unusual view had become increasingly common among young people. She described facilitating an annual Climate Ribbon Ceremony with Jamaican youth, where participants write what they are most afraid of losing to climate change. While many discussions on climate change focus on physical losses such as livelihoods or ecosystems, Dahvia argued that the grief associated with losing hopes, dreams and imagined futures also deserves attention.

Drawing on her experience as both a climate advocate and a teacher, Dahvia described how climate change is affecting young people's outlook on life. Among youth climate advocates, she has observed a growing loss of hope after years of confronting worsening climate impacts. Among students who are not directly engaged in climate advocacy, she sees a different but equally concerning pattern— young people disengaging, losing motivation and struggling to imagine positive futures for themselves. Rather than striving towards self-actualisation, many appear to cope by withdrawing, scrolling endlessly on social media or attempting to ignore the realities around them.

She also reflected on the consequences of repeated climate-related disruptions to education. Disasters interrupt schooling in ways that extend well beyond missed lessons. Young children, she explained, are not simply losing content but also fundamental developmental skills, including the ability to listen, reason, concentrate and write. As these cumulative disruptions continue, she warned that education outcomes are deteriorating. She questioned assumptions that today's youth will inevitably become the generation that solves the climate crisis if societies continue to underinvest in education while allowing the structural drivers of climate change—including colonial legacies and economic systems that prioritise foreign investment over investment in people—to persist.

Responding to Dahvia's presentation, Niamh reflected that the experiences she described illustrated how climate change undermines children's rights to education, learning and play, reinforcing that climate injustice reaches far beyond environmental impacts alone.

4. Ferdison Valmond: Indigenous identity, history and meaningful participation

Speaking next, Ferdison Valmond, an Indigenous youth activist from Dominica and Indigenous Youth Climate Policy Fellow, reflected first on Rodrina's poem. He described it as a powerful expression of resilience, responsibility and empowerment, observing that climate change is not only an environmental issue but a profoundly human story that connects past, present and future.

Ferdison then shared how Hurricane Maria transformed his own understanding of climate injustice. He recalled the experience of trying to hold a door shut against hurricane-force winds, losing his family's roof, becoming homeless for five years and seeing entire food systems destroyed. These experiences, he explained, demonstrated how a community's social fabric can be altered within a matter of hours. Looking beyond the immediate disaster, he argued that colonisation had laid the foundations for today's climate crisis through the overexploitation of soils, oceans and natural resources. Young people, he said, continue to bear the consequences of decisions they did not make.

Drawing on his Indigenous identity, Ferdison highlighted the contributions of Indigenous peoples to protecting biodiversity and addressing climate change. Although Indigenous peoples comprise a small proportion of the global population, he noted that they continue to protect the vast majority of the world's biodiversity, often while facing exclusion from decision-making. He argued that Indigenous knowledge systems should be recognised as part of the solution to the climate crisis rather than treated as peripheral to climate policy.

Concluding, Ferdison challenged the common description of young people as "future leaders." Young people, he argued, are already leading projects, developing solutions and shaping communities today. Governments and regional organisations should therefore create more opportunities for young people to participate directly in decision-making, recognising them not as future contributors but as present-day leaders helping to shape the Caribbean's climate future.

5. Princess Avianne Charles: Climate justice through the lens of work, family and dignity

Speaking from her experiences in Trinidad and Tobago, Princess Avianne Charles, Programme Coordinator at GirlsCARE Jamaica and climate justice advocate, reflected on how Rodrina's poem prompted her to think not only about the future that young people hope to create for the next generation, but also about the futures that have already been taken away from people because of climate injustice. While the poem centred on motherhood, Princess observed that many other aspirations and life choices are similarly constrained when people are forced to make decisions based on increasing climate risks and uncertainty.

Princess shared that her own understanding of climate injustice began in childhood through watching her mother work. Her mother earned a living selling plants outdoors, beginning work before sunrise, transporting heavy trays of plants across city streets and often bringing her children with her because childcare was unavailable. Extreme heat meant work had to stop at midday, while rain prevented work altogether. These interruptions directly affected her mother's ability to earn an income and support her family, demonstrating how climate impacts intersect with labour, livelihoods and care responsibilities. For Princess, these early experiences revealed that climate change was not simply an environmental issue but something that shaped everyday survival.

As she entered the field of occupational safety and health, Princess began recognising similar patterns across different workplaces. She encountered workers—particularly women—who, despite unsafe conditions that threatened their health and livelihoods, had little choice but to continue working because their families depended on that income. Although the circumstances differed from those she had witnessed growing up, she observed that the underlying pattern remained the same: climate change was creating increasingly unsafe conditions for people whose economic circumstances left them with few alternatives.

Her involvement with organisations including GirlsCARE Jamaica and Climate Tracker further broadened her understanding of how climate change affects different communities. Princess reflected that climate impacts are experienced differently depending on people's identities and circumstances, but many young people share a common desire to build a future that is safer, more equitable and more representative than the one they currently face. She argued that today's young people want future generations to inherit opportunities that many of them have struggled to access, including greater representation and more inclusive decision-making.

Princess concluded by emphasising that young people are already generating ideas and solutions to the climate crisis. Rather than assuming adults hold all the answers, she encouraged organisations and decision-makers to create more opportunities for young people to share their perspectives and have those perspectives taken seriously.

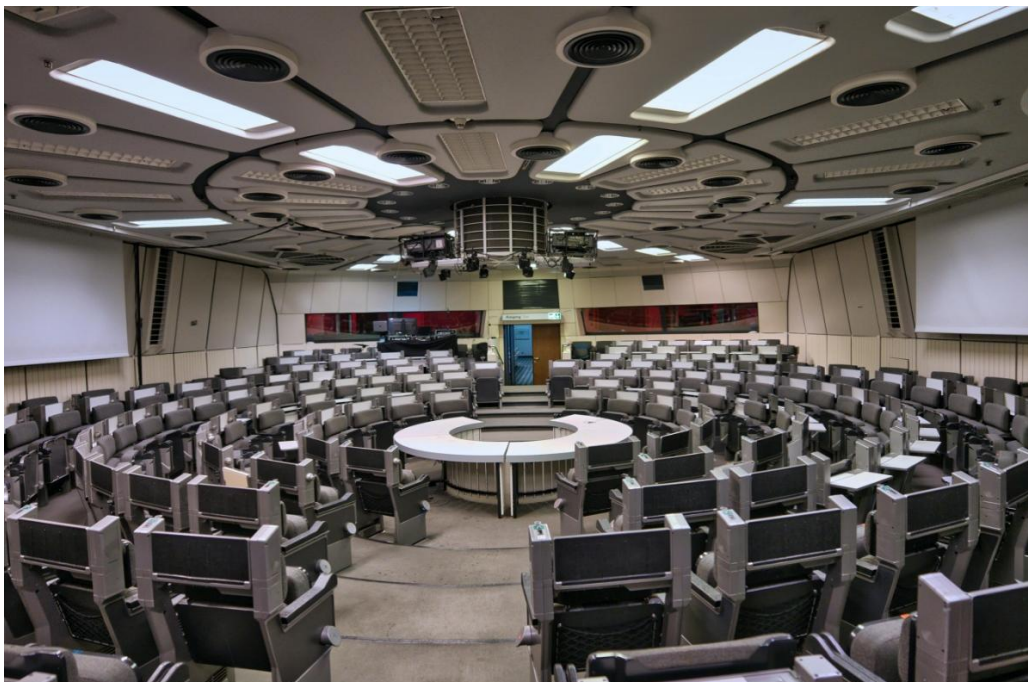
6. From consultation to partnership: What meaningful youth participation really looks like

Introducing the second round of discussion, Niamh invited the panellists to reflect on what meaningful youth participation should look like and how institutions can move beyond tokenistic consultation and towards genuine partnership with young people.

Responding first, Ferdison Valmond described meaningful youth engagement as a question he had grappled with for many years. He argued that meaningful participation extends far beyond inviting young people into a room to satisfy expectations of representation. Instead, young people should be integrated into every stage of planning and implementation so that their ideas influence outcomes rather than merely being acknowledged after decisions have already been made.

Ferdison also reflected on structural barriers that continue to limit youth participation, particularly for young people from small island developing states and Indigenous communities. He observed that age and hierarchy often result in young people's knowledge being dismissed in favour of older voices. Highlighting examples such as the Caribbean Development Bank's Future Leaders Network, he pointed to institutions that actively involve young people in reviewing policies, planning activities and contributing to organisational decision-making as practical models for others to follow.

He concluded by urging governments and regional institutions to recognise young people as leaders of the present rather than simply leaders of the future.



Building on Ferdison's remarks, Princess Charles argued that genuine inclusion begins with intention. If organisations truly intend to include young people, she said, they must involve them throughout the entire policy process—from consultations and preparation through to implementation and evaluation—rather than inviting them only at the final stage or for public visibility. Young people's lived experiences, she emphasised, should inform how policies are developed from the outset.

Princess stressed that young people bring forms of knowledge that others may not possess because they experience climate change differently. For this reason, policymakers must continually ask how proposed decisions will affect young people, particularly those experiencing multiple forms of vulnerability. She also challenged hierarchical cultures that discourage young people from speaking openly or imply that their perspectives are less valuable because of their age. Institutions, she argued, must be prepared to listen, acknowledge when younger generations offer new insights and adapt their approaches accordingly. Only by embedding young people's experiences throughout policymaking can climate solutions become genuinely inclusive and representative.

Reflecting on both contributions, Niamh observed that the discussion highlighted an important distinction between being invited into decision-making spaces and being genuinely heard. She noted that meaningful participation requires both recognition and procedural justice, ensuring that young people's contributions influence decision-making rather than merely satisfying expectations of representation.

Niamh then invited Dahvia Hylton to reflect on how different generations could work together more effectively, emphasising that the conversation should not be understood in terms of blame but of shared responsibility. Dahvia responded by acknowledging the important work of environmental defenders who had laid the foundations for today's movements long before younger advocates entered the space. She explained that after years of climate advocacy she had begun experiencing burnout but found encouragement in recent efforts to strengthen intergenerational collaboration. She described participating in an Environmental Defenders Summit in Jamaica, where activists from different generations reflected together on lessons learned, how movements evolve over time and how leadership can be passed from one generation to the next while recognising that advocacy is a continuous process rather than one with a fixed endpoint.

Dahvia argued, however, that intergenerational solidarity alone would not solve the persistent problem of youth representation. Reflecting on repeated experiences of speaking in meetings where decision-makers praised young people's contributions without acting on them, she proposed that youth require their own constituency rather than relying on others to represent their interests. She described the frustration of repeatedly entering policy spaces and feeling heard in the moment, only to find that the same conversations had to be repeated with little tangible progress.

She concluded by stressing that meaningful youth participation must also recognise the economic realities facing young people. Youth advocates, she said, should not be expected to volunteer indefinitely simply because they are young. Many are already struggling to build stable lives while contributing significant time and expertise to climate action. She therefore called for greater financial and psychosocial support, arguing that compensating young people fairly for their work is essential if meaningful participation is to become sustainable rather than relying on unpaid labour and personal sacrifice.

Closing the first half of the discussion, Niamh reflected on several themes that had emerged across the panel. Meaningful youth participation, she observed, requires engaging young people early in decision-making processes, recognising them as partners in development rather than simply beneficiaries, and valuing both their expertise and their lived experiences. She also highlighted the importance of compensating young people for the time, knowledge and leadership they contribute, noting that genuine partnership depends on moving beyond consultation towards shared responsibility and co-design. These reflections provided a bridge into the second half of the webinar, which explored youth leadership and action in greater depth.

7. Looking ahead: What gives young people hope?

After exploring the realities of climate injustice and the barriers facing young people, Niamh invited the panellists to reflect on a more hopeful question. Acknowledging that the discussion had centred on difficult experiences, she asked each speaker to share what gives them hope for the future and what action they believe is needed to build a more just Caribbean.

Princess Avianne Charles began by describing two sources of hope. First, she pointed to the many organisations and initiatives across the Caribbean that are already supporting young people to become leaders within their own communities. Citing GirlsCARE Jamaica as one example, she explained that meaningful youth engagement requires more than recognising young people's lived experiences—it also means equipping them with the mentorship, training, skills and confidence needed to develop solutions that respond to their own realities. She encouraged participants to seek out and strengthen these spaces, learn from approaches that are already working and adapt them to meet the needs of different communities.

Her second source of hope, she said, was much simpler but equally important: listening. Throughout her own work, Princess had learned that genuine understanding begins by creating space for people to speak openly about their identities, experiences and realities. Only by listening carefully could she begin to understand how to support others. She expressed the hope that beyond the webinar, organisations and decision-makers would continue to create spaces where people feel heard and where listening becomes the first step towards developing meaningful solutions.

Picking up on Princess's reflections, Ferdison Valmond said that his greatest hope lay in collaboration and collective action. Young people across the Caribbean, he argued, already possess the passion and commitment needed to address climate injustice, but their greatest strength comes from working together. Drawing on the saying that "one hand can't clap by itself," he reflected on the importance of building partnerships that empower young people to learn from one another, mentor younger generations and create opportunities for others to step into leadership roles.

He also encouraged young people to find confidence in raising their own voices and continuing to build collective action across the region.

When it was Dahvia Hylton's turn, she admitted that only a few days earlier she would have struggled to answer the question at all. Attending a recent conference had prompted her to rethink her outlook after conversations with older environmental advocates. She recalled telling them that she no longer felt hopeful, only to hear their reflections that previous generations had also experienced periods when change seemed impossible. Rather than giving up, they had continued organising because working for a better future had become part of who they were.

Dahvia concluded that her hope ultimately comes from people themselves. Even if one challenge is solved, communities will continue working together to address the next because striving for a better future is part of who we are. Looking around the webinar participants, she concluded simply: "We are the hope."

Niamh thanked the panellists for sharing their experiences and reflected that climate justice is about creating the conditions for people to thrive while ensuring young people's voices help shape a more just future.



Photo credit: JC Dubi on pexel

8. Broadening the conversation: Additional youth voices from across the Caribbean

Before opening the discussion to participants, Niamh introduced two pre-recorded video reflections to broaden the geographic and thematic perspectives represented during the webinar. She explained that these contributions would add further youth voices before participants entered the wider discussion.

The first reflection came from Johannah-Rae Reyes Project and Community Outreach Officer at CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice. Johannah described how the organisation's work centres on advancing the rights of LGBTQI+ people through advocacy, legal reform and capacity building. She explained that climate justice cannot be separated from questions of gender identity, sexuality and discrimination because the social inequalities experienced by LGBTQI+ people often become even more pronounced during climate-related disasters. While governments frequently describe communities as the first line of response during emergencies, Johannah noted that this assumption does not always hold true for people who experience rejection or discrimination from their own families or communities.

Johannah explained that many young LGBTQI+ people seeking support had already experienced family violence, discrimination and exclusion before climate-related crises occurred. As climate

impacts intensify, these existing inequalities increase their vulnerability, reinforcing the need for climate justice to explicitly recognise gender equality and LGBTQI+ experiences.

She also highlighted the importance of protecting natural spaces, describing them as places of healing, belonging and connection for many LGBTQI+ people. Protecting these environments, she argued, is therefore both an environmental and social justice issue.

The second video featured Kadia Gilkes, Co-lead of the Youth Climate Justice Working Group and an environmental science student at the University of Guyana. Reflecting on growing up in Guyana, she described how living in the "land of many waters" had shaped her appreciation of the environment as the foundation of people's health, livelihoods, culture and shared future. These experiences led her to understand climate change as fundamentally an issue of justice because it determines whether people can pursue the lives they hope for and whether communities have equal opportunities to thrive.

Kadia described increasingly severe flooding across Guyana, where damaged homes, impassable roads, disrupted education and lost livelihoods have become recurring realities. These experiences reinforced her view that those contributing least to climate change often bear its greatest burdens.

Turning to youth participation, Kadia challenged the common assertion that young people are simply the leaders of tomorrow. Climate change is already shaping their education, careers and life decisions today, she said, yet young people are too often consulted without being involved in decision-making. If younger generations are expected to live with the consequences of today's decisions, they should also play a genuine role in making them. She stressed that young people bring innovation, lived experience and practical ideas that should inform climate policy rather than being acknowledged only symbolically.

Despite these challenges, Kadia said she finds hope in young people across Guyana, the Caribbean and beyond who are leading community initiatives, conducting research and advocating for stronger policies. Leadership, she argued, is defined not by age but by action, and people-centred climate solutions offer a pathway to a more just future.

Drawing the video reflections to a close, Niamh observed that Kadia's remarks provided a natural bridge into the audience discussion. She then opened the floor for participants' questions, reflections and comments, while also inviting Rodrina Daley to rejoin the conversation so that participants could respond to her opening poem and continue the dialogue it had begun.

9. Participants reflect on youth leadership and intergenerational solidarity

The first contribution came from CANARI Executive Director Nicole Leotaud, who reflected on the discussion from what she described as "the other side of youth." As the mother of a young person, she said Rodrina's poem had powerfully captured the hopes and fears shaping young people's futures.

Addressing Dahvia Hylton, Nicole observed that previous generations of environmental advocates had also experienced fatigue after years of campaigning for change. What struck her most, however, was that today's young leaders possessed what she described as an "audacity" that earlier generations often lacked—the confidence to speak openly, challenge established systems and act

without apology. She suggested that this willingness to demand change gave her hope that younger generations would achieve progress where previous generations had struggled.

Turning to Princess Avianne Charles, Nicole reflected that throughout her presentation she had heard a consistent call to organise communities, demand space within decision-making processes and insist that young people's voices be recognised. She described Princess as a champion for collective action whose leadership centred on empowering others and ensuring communities claimed the agency they deserved.

Nicole also praised Ferdison Valmond for highlighting Indigenous knowledge and intersectionality, arguing that climate discussions too often privilege academic expertise over community knowledge. His reflections, she said, reinforced the need to confront the continuing influence of colonialism and extractive economic systems.

Building on these reflections, Nicole posed a question to the panel about engaging more young people in climate justice. Recognising that many young people understandably prioritise securing employment and financial stability, she asked how organisations could begin conversations that encourage wider youth participation while acknowledging these competing pressures. Since today's young people will inherit the consequences of climate change, she argued, it was important to consider how they could be meaningfully drawn into discussions about the future they will inherit.

Dahvia responded that she was beginning to see positive changes, with growing international attention creating new opportunities for Caribbean youth organisations despite continuing funding challenges.

Drawing on her own experience, Dahvia explained that she had volunteered within the climate movement for seven years before receiving paid opportunities to continue her work. She observed that many young people today simply cannot afford to follow the same path, particularly given rising living costs and economic pressures. Encouragingly, however, she believed more funders were beginning to recognise that meaningful youth engagement requires paying the people doing the work, rather than funding only project activities. If organisations expect sustained youth leadership, she argued, they must invest in young people themselves rather than relying indefinitely on unpaid volunteerism.

Participants also reflected on how climate justice intersects with livelihoods, education, gender equality, mental health and community wellbeing. Throughout the discussion, speakers returned to the importance of compensating young people fairly, moving beyond tokenistic consultation and creating genuine opportunities for youth to shape climate policy as equal partners.

10. Key reflections

In closing, Niamh reflected that the discussion had illustrated how climate injustice is experienced differently across the Caribbean while revealing common themes around recognition, participation and fairness. Together, the speakers showed that climate change affects far more than the environment, shaping education, livelihoods, wellbeing, family decisions and opportunities for the future.

She also highlighted the leadership already being demonstrated by Caribbean youth, emphasising that climate justice must be built with young people as partners whose knowledge and lived experiences help shape climate action across the region.

11. Closing reflections and looking ahead

Before closing the webinar, participants shared final reflections in the chat. They highlighted the importance of greater accountability and transparency, collective solidarity, expanding opportunities for inclusive climate action that recognises different lived experiences and vulnerabilities, strengthening diaspora engagement in climate justice and reparative justice, and ensuring that care and wellbeing remain central to climate action. Others expressed encouragement that so many young people were already actively engaged in shaping the region's future.

Niamh invited participants to continue these conversations beyond the webinar through the Caribbean Climate Justice Alliance, describing it as a growing coalition of civil society organisations, academics, creatives and practitioners working together to advance climate justice across the region. She encouraged participants to join the Alliance and become involved in its thematic working groups, including the Youth Working Group, and to continue building partnerships and collective action beyond the webinar series.

In closing, Niamh thanked the panellists and video contributors for sharing their experiences, acknowledged CANARI's partners—the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Clara Lionel Foundation (CLF) and the Panta Rhea Foundation—and announced that the next phase of the *Towards climate justice in the Caribbean* series would focus on agency, capabilities and practical pathways towards climate justice.

The webinar concluded with thanks to all participants for contributing to an open and thoughtful discussion and an invitation to continue engaging with CANARI's climate justice initiatives in the months ahead.



Photo credit: Nicole Leotaud, CANARI