



Annual Report 2022-2023

About the Charity

This is the Annual Report and Accounts for The Word Forest Organisation, a charity registered in the United Kingdom by the Charity Commission
Charity No: 1172497

Registered Address and Contact Details

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Trustees

Mr Simon West FRSA (Chair of Trustees)
Ms Rikey Austin
Ms Eva Dixon
Mr Philip Gamble
Ms Camille Oster
Mrs Izzy Robertson

Mrs Helen Roberts retired as a Trustee on 9th May 2022.

Ms Camille Oster was appointed as Trustee on 2nd June 2022.

Chief Executive Officer

Mrs Tracey West FRSA

Managing Director

Mr Simon West FRSA

Patrons

Clare Nasir and Zena Edwards

Special Advisors

Bill McGuire and Jo Lawrance

Our Constitutional Structure

Word Forest was incorporated as a CIO on 7th April 2017.

Our constitution follows the model for a Charitable Incorporated Organisation as set out by the Charity Commission for England and Wales and was adopted on 7th April 2017 and revised on 1st February 2021.

Charitable Objects and Public Benefit

To promote sustainable development* for the benefit of the public in countries to be determined by the Trustees by:

- (a) the preservation, conservation and the protection of the environment and the prudent use of resources;
- (b) the relief of poverty and the improvement of the conditions of life in socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

*Sustainable development means “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The Trustees have had regard to the guidance published by the Charity Commission under section 4 of the Charities Act 2011 in planning our activities.

The positive social impact of our work is considered before we direct our tree-planting communities, and outcomes are directly monitored. This enables the Trustees to be confident that the charity has, through its range of activities, achieved significant public benefit for the community in Kenya, and in countries as determined by the Trustees.

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From the Board

Tracey West: CEO and Fundraiser

If you're new to Word Forest, thanks for popping by to dive into this year's Report and Accounts.

If you're familiar with this kind of Report and you're already preparing to yawn, I promise you, ours is unlike anything you'll have seen before.

We're about to give you a deeply informative experience, demonstrating the positive impact Word Forest is having across Kenya and to the planet, without you having to get up from your chair.

Sure, we've got numbers to present to you. Yes, we've got information gathered by our colleagues showing our physical achievements over the past 12 months, i.e. another classroom built here, some more trees planted there, and so on.



I'm confident that by the time you get to the end of this document, you'll feel better informed but I hope you'll also feel mentally and spiritually uplifted, more environmentally engaged, more empowered to make changes at home and inspired to carry those ideas into your workplace.

I also hope you feel less eco-anxious than you felt before, because we've shone a light on how easy it is to make a difference to our world.

I must be honest, once you've digested the facts laid out by our Patron, Met Office Meteorologist Clare Nasir and our Special Scientific Advisor, Professor Bill McGuire, you'll realise how important your engagement is.

Above all, I hope you'll be able to take another look at what your understanding is of the incredible work we've been doing across Kenya for the last 7 years. I want you to know precisely what your donations and partnerships have enabled us to do.

You are the drivers. We are the conduit that moves your energy (be it volunteer hours, financial donations or pro bono offers) from one place to another, for the betterment of our planet and every living breathing thing on it.



The Third Sector has witnessed more adversity in respect of fundraising and continuity of service in recent years, than it has done since the second World War.

Thanks to your support, Word Forest has been able to pull metaphorical rabbits out of hats and cats out of bags.

We're full of gratitude and we're happy to pause a while to celebrate

what we've achieved together - thank you!



As we say in our documentary narrated by Kate Winslet, #TreesAreTheKey to doing so much more than mitigating our climate emergency. In case you haven't seen it yet, [click here and pop it on your watch list!](#)

It might be a few years old but you'll certainly get a great feel for who we work with, what we do and why we do it. Above all, I'm confident you'll get that feel good factor that I get every time I watch it too.

So, it's time to fasten your seat belt and dive into the rest of our report. Believe me, it would have been bulging with additional articles and interviews if I'd had my way, but that would have made it more of a book than a report! We've decided to pop the extra features into our news feed instead.

If you're a fan of positive environmental articles and you're keen to learn more about how you can make more sustainable living choices at home and at work, [click here to subscribe to our news feed](#) and you'll be among the first to know

Word Forest has hit some major milestones recently and we are doing well - as Eva says, "We're getting there pole, pole" (that's Kiswahili for slowly). I would be kidding myself if I said the future was all plain sailing, it isn't. We've set ourselves some high bars to leap over in the year ahead, particularly with our ambition to enter the carbon offset market. Our activities during the first quarter of 2023 show that we are on the right track and we have a terrific guide to get us through the challenges.

Our Corporate Partners, Oaklin Consulting are with us every step of the way. They know the quality of the environmental, educational and humanitarian services we've been providing our donors, partners and beneficiaries with, from day one. We're going to offer permaculture lessons at our PTC (Permaculture Teaching Centre) in Garashi. That knowledge has the power to strengthen the resilience of the tree planting communities, exponentially, because they'll know how to diversify what they're growing and eating too.

I'm going to have to cut myself off here, or I'm going to end up going down another exciting rabbit hole and telling you all about the great updates we've got planned for our news feed.

If you'll excuse me, it's time to hand the baton on to the rest of our phenomenal team.

Simon West: Managing Director and Chair of Trustees

Our sixth year brought forth a new set of challenges, from the war in Ukraine, to massive inflation and soaring fuel prices. Once again, I would not have been surprised if our income had decreased compared to 2021-22. The number of people volunteering for us dropped significantly as they returned to work or sought paying jobs to avoid the ravages of the global economic woes.

Despite the bleak outlook, the truth was quite astounding. Each month exceeded the performance of the same month from the previous year. By the time March 31st arrived, our income had grown by just under 25%, crossing the £100,000 threshold for the first time.

Faced with fewer volunteers and an increased workload, I believed that we needed to work smarter, not harder. Towards the end of the year, I began an in-depth audit of our processes and procedures, alongside the establishment of a budget for 2023-2024. As the year drew to a close, our new business plan was well underway.

Throughout 2022-2023, a substantial amount of time was dedicated to formulating a plan to become a certified issuer of legitimate carbon credits. We carefully considered the positive and negative implications; we are all steadfast in our belief that these credits must not sustain 'business as usual.' Recognising our environmental impact in all our actions, we see them as a means to counterbalance negative actions with positive ones. After careful consideration, we chose Gold Standard as our intended certification body. Their stringent requirements should instil confidence in purchasers of carbon offset units, assuring them that their investments genuinely contribute to CO2 removal from the atmosphere. We aim to complete our registration by the close of 2023.

We also completed our branding review, with a new logo, colours and fonts. It is always an ongoing process to find and replace old logos, but as this financial year comes to a close we think it is complete almost everywhere. We really hope our supporters like our fresh, new look and that the new logo conveys much better the four pillars of our charity.

Our extended monitoring and evaluation visit, spanning December 2022, bolstered our commitment to planting trees, constructing classrooms, and disseminating education as extensively as possible. The tourist industry in the once-thriving Coast Province town of Malindi has scarcely recovered since 2020. Our projects offer valuable employment opportunities and educational experiences in food production, benefiting the local inhabitants. The establishment of the Permaculture Teaching Centre depleted a significant portion of our resources, but it now wields a substantial impact on the local community, providing employment, serving as a hub for the Mothers of the Forest, and offering diverse and valuable education.

Our plans for 2023-2024 encompass finalising Carbon Credits registration and embarking wholeheartedly on our planting initiative for that project. We also aspire to expand our roster of corporate partners. To this end, we have been collaborating with Oaklin, our esteemed and trusted corporate partner since 2021, on a fresh business strategy document. This will guide our efforts towards endeavours that maximise benefits for both the charity and the planet. Our corporate partners contribute in numerous ways, with a substantial portion of our funding stemming from them, alongside considerable "benefit in kind" support, which, while not reflected in our financial accounts, holds a value worth many thousands of pounds.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to all our employees, volunteers, the dedicated individuals in Kenya striving to realise our vision, and all our donors. Without them, everything we undertake would remain an unrealised dream.

Izzy Robertson: Literacy Trustee

This is just a big thank you!

Looking back over the past year, I am, in equal measure, astounded by and grateful for the generosity of all those that support the work of Word Forest in their many different ways – with money, with time, with expertise and with sheer hard graft. In a year which has been challenging on many fronts, every one of you that has followed us, read our blog, told your friends about us, donated to us or given us your time, has been instrumental in helping us develop and expand our work in Kenya. As Eva's report above shows, this is making a real difference, and a lasting one at that. Not only are there more trees in the ground but the community is flourishing too.

It's an honour to be a Trustee for Word Forest – we have a small but dedicated team of employees and volunteers and an extraordinary band of corporate partners, supporters and donors. From the bottom of my heart, thank you all. We simply couldn't do it without you!

Phil Gamble: Horticultural Trustee

Monitoring and Evaluation Visit to Kenya: 2022

I'm a retired horticulturist and permaculture tutor. I've been involved in horticulture, permaculture and nature photography since 1976. I spent many years lecturing on some of these topics at Kingston Maurward. I've always had a passion and deep appreciation for understanding the natural world and the way it works.

I have been the Horticultural Trustee of Word Forest since 2017 and I was deeply involved with it during the preceding year, leading up to when the charity was formalised. My experience, though extensive and broad, has largely been circled around UK flora and fauna. Over the years, it has been a joy to extend my education to include Kenyan trees, plants and wildlife, too.

Opportunity Knocked, I'm Glad I Answered

When the golden opportunity arose for me to offer permaculture training and organic gardening tips to the Mothers of the Forest and others in Kenya, I felt it couldn't be missed. I self-funded my trip, and whilst it was a very demanding month physically, mentally and spiritually, it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Our growing network of women's empowerment groups - fondly known as Mothers of the Forest - are astonishingly impressive to see first hand. The first branch was set up in Garashi and is led by Eva Jefwa and Esther Kadzo. Despite the language barrier, as my Kiswahili was slightly more limited than Simon and Tracey's, it was clear that they were super keen to add new growing and permaculture design skills to their existing remit.

From the Mothers in Coast Province in the far east of Kenya, to those on Rusinga Island in the far west on Lake Victoria, the collective keenness to learn was overwhelming. These amazing women have been successfully rearing saplings and growing trees and sharing their knowledge in great abundance. Despite the challenges of the ever increasing climate emergency and Africa's ongoing drought, they've also been growing a wide range of food crops too, in what are ostensibly jolly hostile climatic conditions. They work tirelessly to feed their families, even if it is only one meal a day.

It was an honour to create bespoke courses for them that built on their existing knowledge and experience. By consulting with Eva and our extensive network of contacts in Kenya, I devised a programme that I thought would be the most effective.

Where We Plant and Why

Although Word Forest plants a few trees here in the UK, I know they'd say they really are just a token amount, designed to start conversations about the global value of trees. Tracey and Simon's energies remain focused on planting them in the tropics where they grow up to 10 times faster than they do here in Dorset in the UK.

As trees contribute so strongly to alleviating the climate crisis we're all experiencing, our tree planting efforts in the tropics must clearly remain our primary remit. However, in order for those trees to be well planted and cared for in their early days, the people who are tending them have to be well nourished, fit and able to carry out those duties. Therefore, knowledge of small scale food production is critical to the mix, if the Word Forest trees are to grow to maturity.

Generously enabled by your kind donations I ran courses which - with remarkable translation skills from our Kenyan team - were seemingly a great success. I found the Mothers were incredibly keen to learn, they were very attentive and they enjoyed bringing their experiences and good humour to the table; I openly confess, I learned so much from the Mothers too!

It's remarkable that we have so many common threads that flow through the way we grow in our respective countries, yet, how astonishingly varied the different species are. I recognised many of them, although there were several I didn't. Most notably, I was amazed just how quickly everything grows in Kenya!

Any Questions?

At the end of our tutoring sessions, I posed the question, was there anything else the Mothers wanted to know? They gave a collective response: "When are you coming back to Kenya to teach us more about permaculture?" To address that, we have been working on creating a set of videos that the students can learn from, without me setting foot on an aeroplane.

The courses I ran in December were designed to be interactive and a lot of fun - it is the best way to learn after all - and they showed me how hard the Mothers want to develop and hone their skills at food growing and tree planting too. They want everything they grow to be successful.

Once I had a better understanding of what they needed individually (each topic I ran a course on had its own quirks) I worked with the students to design companion planting schemes using plants that were relatively easy to grow. Permaculture design ethics and principles will enable them to manage their shambas to the best of their abilities and to much better effect.

The course I ran at L'magiro in eastern Kenya was wonderful. This teaching centre is run by Sylvia Pirelli. She established a verdant permaculture food forest in the 1970's. It was a delight to teach there because there were many well established plants and trees and Sylvia uses countless nature-friendly techniques, which were all easy to see and learn from.

New Tools New Skills

The Mothers all showed determination to practise their newly learned propagation skills with the knives and other tools I'd brought over from the UK. We do know it's better to spend money in Kenya to keep it flowing through the local economy, however, I already knew these specialist items were difficult to source there, hence a heavy payload in my well-packed suitcase. With their new tools, they soon became experts in mapping, plot design, using overlays and colour coding, planting methods, composting

and mulching too. With such a vast subject area to cover, one might have thought it would be overwhelming, on the contrary - they couldn't learn fast enough!

I remain impressed to this day with the tenacious spirit of the Mothers. Their attitude to learning was all embracing and they took time to help each other find different ways to convey their thoughts and agree on the best translations to pose questions. They clearly have a strong framework of support for each other, yet none of them have an easy life, by any stretch of the imagination.

I recall Benina, a wonderful woman of very diminutive stature and the most enormous smile. She had suffered with hearing difficulties all her life and she needed additional translation from my English into Kiswahili and then into her native language, Luo. She was overjoyed to have mastered how to take cuttings and propagate, even with our tri-language difference. Those successes have gone on to make enormous positive waves on the ground in Kenya, as Benina and the other Mothers share the skills they learned with their respective communities.

Permaculture Has the Answers

Permaculture is such an enormous topic and the subjects I covered in those few days of intensive learning with them ran the risk of being a drop in the ocean. In reality, it represented the fantastic creation of real "ground truth" as I like to call it. Perhaps for the first time in my career, I was honest to goodness changing lives and fighting for the planet. It was a privilege. Overall, I believe it was a great success and I am incredibly proud to be part of their learning journey through Word Forest.

As an English gardener who hadn't previously travelled outside of Europe, I'd say a particularly memorable element of the teaching experience in Kenya, was coping with the heat and goodness me, how different it was from one side of the country to the other. During December in Dorset, I'm grateful for any degrees above zero, so 32 degrees in the shade was very challenging indeed. That said, the hospitality our UK team was given was nothing short of amazing and incredibly gracious. The Mothers will always be stars in my eyes and my word, they do such phenomenal growing in a place that's not far off of being a volatile sauna.

One final thing, I have never taught so many lessons with young children and babies present in the room. The children were all so well behaved and quiet. In fact, I'd say they were fascinated with what was being done. I remember pausing for a moment and wondering whether these youngsters would remember back to the day the very hot mzungu (non pejorative term for a white English speaking person) taught their mum about plants and trees? I hope so. I hope they carry their thirst for knowledge about permaculture and growing long into adulthood and that they pass on their skills to as many people as I have, as years go by.

The Best Investment

In the UK, it's often said that permaculture is 'hobbyist'. In Kenya, knowledge of this kind is the stuff that can save lives - it is the difference between life and death.

I hope you are able to continue to pop the odd pound or two into Word Forest's bucket because I can tell you, every penny is being so wonderfully well spent. Our work is locking down untold tonnes of CO2, reducing stresses and human/wildlife conflict, improving relationships and reducing domestic violence and more, all by putting more food on the table and creating luscious canopy cover.

It simply doesn't get any better than that.

Phil Gamble

Financial Summary

Income

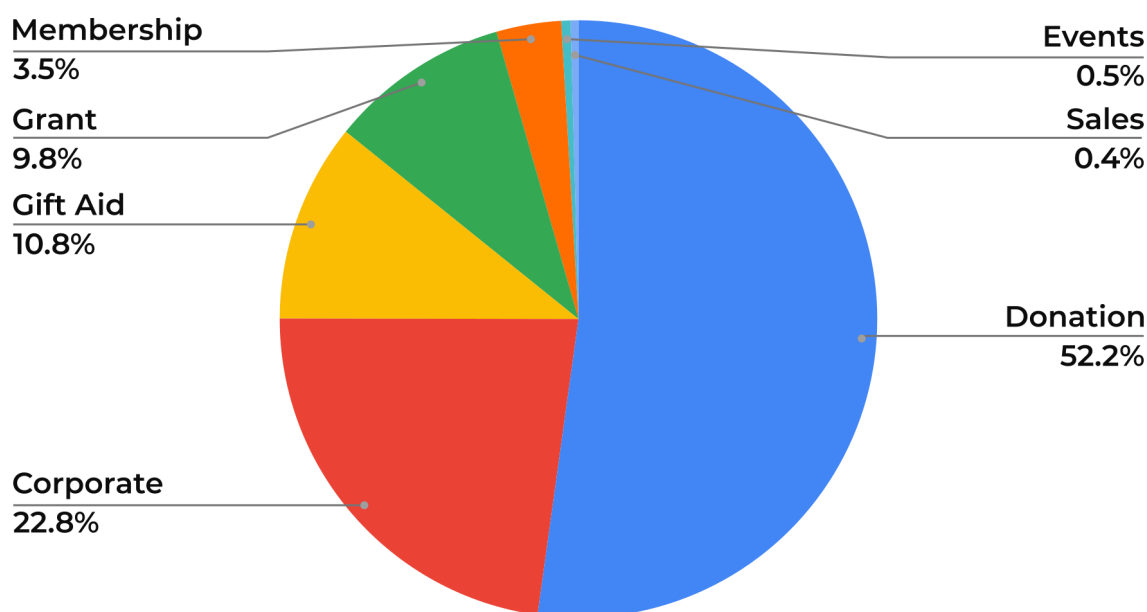
In 2022-2023 (year 6) our income was **£101,738.00**, an increase of 25% over our 2021-2022 income of £81,381.85.

Income by Category

Category	Amount (GBP)	Percent	2021-2022 (GBP)	Change
Donation	£53,096.45	52.19%	£45,035.57	+18%
Corporate	£23,235.00	22.84%	£17,950.88	+29%
Gift Aid	£10,949.99	10.76%	£7,484.82	+46%
Grant	£9,948.60	9.78%	£5,200.00	+91%
Membership	£3,564.00	3.50%	£4,341.35	-18%
Events Income	£516.30	0.51%	£0.00	+100%
Sales	£427.66	0.42%	£1,369.23	-69%
Total	£101,738.00	100.00%	£81,381.85	+25%

Our ring fenced income was **£19,625.00**, (37% for salaries, 53% for our M&E visit) and our non-ring fenced income was **£81,063.97**.

Income



Outgoings

Our total outgoings were **£98,353.13**. **£65,442.48** of this went directly to Kenya. This represents 66.5% of our total income, but **80.73%** of our non-ring fenced income.

For 2023 we have increased our rate of pay for people we employ in Kenya to 220 Kenyan Shillings per hour, or **459,360 KES** per year full time equivalent, which is the same as a senior high school teacher or middle manager.

From January 2023 we increased our UK salary rate to £10.90 per hour in line with The Living Wage Foundation recommendation (see livingwage.org.uk)

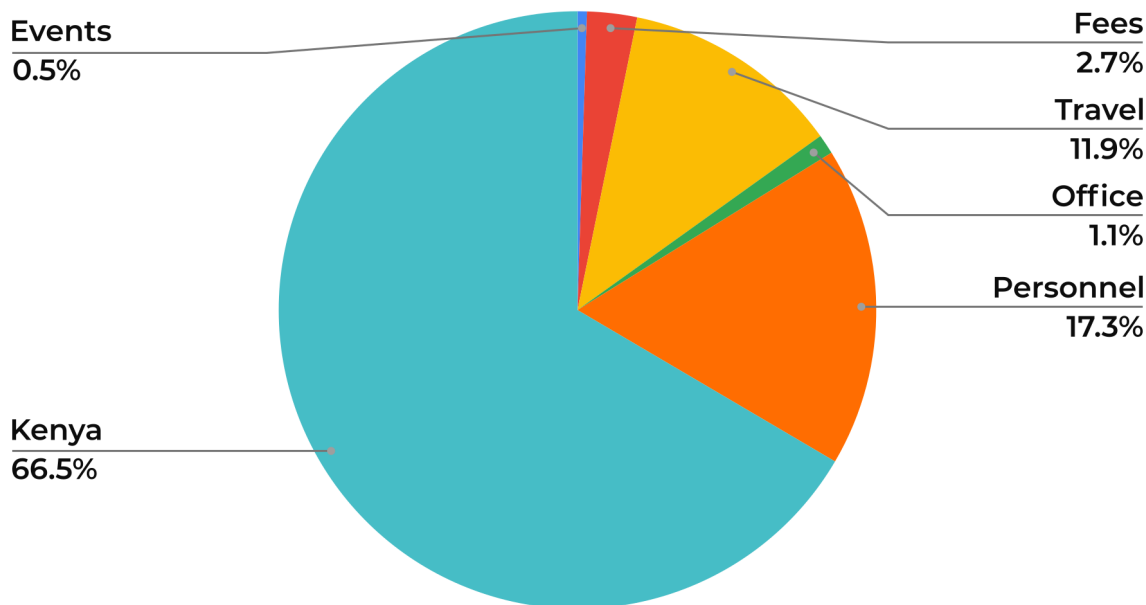
We raised £10,500 for our M&E visit (December 3rd 2022 - January 3rd 2023)

We ended the year with a balance of **£9,682.89** and an average monthly income of **£8,478.17**, compared to £6,781.82 the previous year - an increase of 25%.

Outgoings by Category

Category	Amount	Percent	2021-2022	Change
Events	£496.90	0.5%	£775.00	-36%
Fees	£2,657.70	2.7%	£3,513.23	-24%
Travel	£11,702.55	11.9%	£6,609.21	+77%
Office	£1,049.03	1.1%	£11,308.50	-91%
Personnel	£17,004.47	17.3%	£24,821.81	-31%
Kenya	£65,442.48	66.5%	£49,950.52	+31%
Total	£98,353.13	100.0%	£69,665.15	+41%

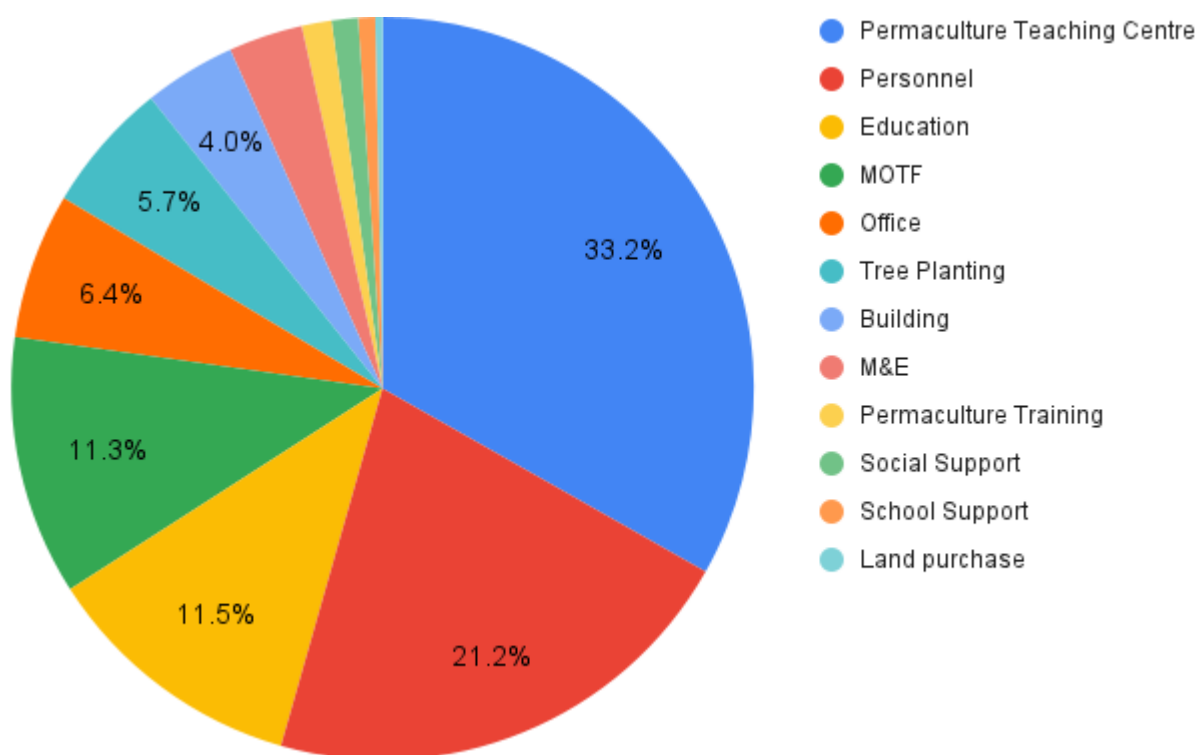
Outgoings



Kenya projects by Category

For 2022-2023 we have analysed the money sent to projects by category to better understand what we are funding. Almost all of the funding categories have tree planting associated with them, so where we have paid for a building to be built, there will have been trees planted at a rate of at least one tree for every £2.50 sent over.

Category	Amount (KES)	Percent	GBP (Approx)
PTC	2,599,122	33.2%	£21,729.62
Personnel	1,660,161	21.2%	£13,879.56
Education	900,328	11.5%	£7,527.08
MOTF	884,600	11.3%	£7,395.58
Office	497,080	6.4%	£4,155.77
Tree Planting	446,800	5.7%	£3,735.41
Building	312,671	4.0%	£2,614.05
M&E	252,684	3.2%	£2,112.53
Permaculture Training	101,750	1.3%	£850.67
Social Support	90,050	1.2%	£752.85
School Support	57,455	0.7%	£480.35
Land purchase	25,000	0.3%	£209.01
Total	7,827,701	100.0%	£65,442.48



Trustees' Statement

For our 6th year, our Trustees continue to support and advise the charity and oversee its operations. Every major decision was taken in full consultation with the Trustees and they take a very active role in determining the best course of action for the charity.

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards.

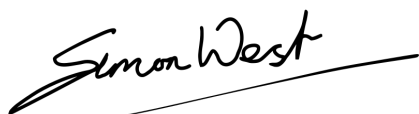
The law applicable to charities in England and Wales requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- observe the methods and principles of the Charities SORP
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 1993, the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 and the provisions of the constitution.

They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the charity and financial information included on the charity's website.

This Report and Accounts was approved by the trustees on 15th April 2023 and signed on their behalf by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Simon West', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Simon West FRSA
Managing Director and Chair of Trustees

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Word Forest

I report to the Trustees on my examination of the accounts of Word Forest, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), for the year ended 30th March 2023.

Responsibilities and Basis of Report

As the charity Trustees of the CIO you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the CIO's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent Examiner's Statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Trust as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have come across no matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

The accounts were independently examined and approved on 9th May 2023.



Hannah Foster
392 Wood Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S6 6AQ

From our Team

Clare Nasir: Patron

Heed the Climate Science

I believe we are in the early years of what will inevitably be noted by historians as *'the most crucial decade for ensuring human survival on planet Earth'*.

The one where internationally gathered data and great science was woven into a globally adhered-to policy that had the power to move the planet's trajectory away from erasing life on earth for humans and wildlife. It might take a while for it to gain governmental consensus but on the back of what meteorologists are seeing and predicting today, I remain optimistic it *will* happen.

A Phoenix will Rise

Death tolls from active forest fires raging across the globe are increasing and species decline of everything from miniscule insects to gargantuan whales, is at an all time high. This is a bone-chilling fact, not conjecture or speculation.

Our outlook is horrifically bleak, there's no doubt about it and yet the voices of incredibly knowledgeable climate scientists are only just beginning to rise above those filled with rhetoric and inexcusable excuses for not guiding our planet towards Net Zero.

Word Forest's Solution

While Rome quite literally burns, my gratitude is offered up to Word Forest for the ambitious, multi-faceted mission they've undertaken to combat our climate emergency by reforesting Kenya.

Trees there have the ability to grow incredibly fast, up to 10 times quicker than elsewhere and in a country that has around 10% canopy cover, that leaves a huge amount of space to green up, drawdown and lock in CO2.

I accepted the responsibility to be Word Forest's Patron in December 2020 because I believed they had the right blueprint for *all* life on Earth. By combining tree planting, environmental education and critically, a raft of women's empowerment initiatives, they have the ability to get the job done, regardless of who walks the political corridors.

The Power of Partnerships

With the right finance streams unlocked - which I'm confident will happen, as they enter the carbon offset market with assistance from Oaklin and other Corporate Partners - Word Forest will at last be able to scale up their operation. Everything is aligning for them to become the multi-million pound NGO they deserve to be.

Word Forest will be able to engage more Mothers of the Forest across Kenya. They in turn will be able to mitigate hunger, malnutrition and starvation because they'll understand the solutions that lie in organic growing, permaculture and syntropic agroforestry. They'll be able to put a dent in poverty too because they'll be armed with solutions for income generation and they'll be able to work with whatever Mother Nature throws at them. The Mothers will ensure their communities are more self-sufficient and Kenya will become a trailblazing country that inspires other African nations to follow their lead.

Green Fingers

We folks in the northern latitudes will do well to pay attention to the actions of the Mothers. Regardless of whatever jobs we *think* we do, we will benefit from learning how to grow a few comestibles for our dining tables. Let's also do more to understand *how* food arrives on our plates. Learn what eating seasonally really means and comprehend the consequences of excessive road miles. Let's supplement our dinner plates with fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs and more from our gardens, allotments and window boxes.

Let's be Mothers and Fathers of all the world's forests by implementing Word Forest's pioneering initiatives in our home countries. As Kate Winslet said, #TreesAreTheKey to mitigating climate chaos and so much more.

Add Pests to the Mix

I often think about the biblical 'plague' of locusts that annihilated thousands of hectares of farmland across the Horn of Africa in 2019. It was one of two waves, the first destroying 70,000ha of farmland in Somalia and Ethiopia, and 240,000ha of pastureland in Kenya. A second wave hit Uganda and South Sudan. It was the worst outbreak in decades.

Naturally, Word Forest responded immediately to the news of the swarms by declaring that all future food growing plots were to be covered in insect and shading nets. This has given them extra costs which they've taken on the chin. However, it is far better to anticipate the next inevitable swarm and to protect the food in situ, than to have to rely on emergency aid, which can take a very long time to deliver.

There are ways of stopping such extreme outbreaks and it starts by identifying breeding grounds. This is where satellite data is so important.

Ground Zero

Endeavours can be made to prevent extreme outbreaks from starting in the first place. Satellite data is a vital tool for identifying locust breeding grounds, as are early warning systems that use algorithms, mapping and ground information. Remote sensing from space provides weather, climate and environmental observations, such as vegetation indices and humidity values. It's the bigger picture that's needed, along with past and present imagery.

The EUMETSAT provides 16 megabits of data per second via its EUMETCast system to African meteorological services, climate researchers and other institutions. The satellite in geostationary orbit has had a continuous view of the continent for 40 years.

Meteorological Matters

Erratic rainfall patterns across Africa also continue to bring a whole host of other life threatening risks and impacts to agriculture, food and water security. It's not only severe storms, droughts and floods, but their frequency and intensity are also on the increase and that can potentially cause major population shifts. Accurate weather forecasts and warnings of severe weather are *essential* to enable African countries to deal with and adapt to, the impacts of the changing climate.

Shiny New Satellite

Meteorological satellites have a key role to play too. In December 2022, a new payload of instruments was launched into space, including the first ever satellite instrument

continuously detecting lightning over Europe and Africa. This promises a breakthrough for the detection and prediction of severe storms and this wasn't the *only* satellite launched that year: it's worthy of note that near space is actually getting very crowded.

Our Fragile Space

Recently, I had the privilege of interviewing astronomer and photographer Max Alexander at the Blue Dot Festival in Jodrell Bank, Cheshire. Max's latest exhibition, *Our Fragile Space*, is part of a proactive initiative led by the UK and European Parliament to manage and regulate the exponential increase in human launched space debris.

The festival wanted a discussion on how we can learn from the mistakes, ignorance, policy weaknesses and general laissez-faire attitude when dealing with the global climate crisis here on Earth. So what's the problem? Of the current 33,000 tracked objects in near space only 7,700 are functioning satellites. In addition to the current 100,000 satellite licences granted, there are another million pending approval.

Critical Kit

As a meteorologist, my day begins by studying the latest set of satellite pictures. The swirls of clouds, in every hue from white to grey to black, reveal a plethora of information for the day's forecasting analysis. This, and so much more, is ingested into computer models to deliver short term output and longer term climate trends. My colleagues and I take this information for granted; it's an integral tool that we live and breathe by.

The images in Max's exhibition map the positives and negatives of using near space. I could write an essay on the uses, from monitoring retreating ice sheets, to understanding the level of heat absorbed by oceans and seas, the extent of wildfires, hints of reforestation, decline of lakes, the list is endless and essential. Instead I will close with some positive words from Max and then Word Forest.

Lessons for a Better Future

When it comes to near space, we still have time. Many lessons *have* been learned from our environmental successes and failures. However, it will take a mindful, concerted effort from all parties around the world to bring order and regulation to the future shared use of space.

Meanwhile, back at grassroots here on Earth, I'd like to hand the final words in my address to Tracey West, Word Forest's CEO.

"If we get on the right side of Mother Nature and treat our host planet with a little more respect, instead of squeezing it for every drop of natural resource (water and oil), it has great potential to heal itself. If we reach back and unlock pots of indigenous knowledge and combine that with modern day science and education, we'll have a workable solution for reducing unnecessary death and destruction. Unfortunately, it relies on a bit of degrowth and an urgent reframing of the measurement of GDP: surely GDH (health/ happiness) is a far better metric?"

"If the simple logic behind #TreesAreTheKey sat at the heart of local, regional, national and international decision making and governance, we could depart the Anthropocene and enter the restorative period - the Regeneracene, if you will - that humankind is going to end up in, at some point in the future. I'd rather that be sooner than later. How about you?"

Bill McGuire: Special Scientific Advisor to Word Forest

Professor Emeritus of Geophysical & Climate Hazards at UCL. His latest book, Hothouse Earth: an Inhabitant's Guide, is published by Icon Books.

The news isn't good. Since the Industrial Revolution, a couple of centuries back, human activities have added 2.4 trillion tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, pushing up concentrations of the gas by 50 percent. The global average temperature rise, as a result, is now at 1.27°C (averaged over the last five years). In order to stay this side of the dangerous climate change guardrail - equated with a temperature rise of 1.5°C - global emissions need to be halved by 2030. The chances of this happening are now vanishingly small, so we must accept the fact that we can no longer dodge deadly, all-pervasive, climate breakdown that will insinuate itself into every aspect of our lives and livelihoods.

But this doesn't mean it is too late to act. On the contrary, action becomes even more critical. Every tonne of carbon we stop being emitted, and every 0.1°C rise in global temperature we prevent, can help stop dangerous becoming cataclysmic, and increase the chances of leaving a liveable planet to our children and their children.

One positive thing we can do is plant trees - lots of them. A 2019 study reckoned that foresting an area the size of the United States could potentially pull 205 billion tonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere - equivalent to two-thirds of the carbon that humans have pumped out through their activities. The true number could be smaller, but still big enough to significantly draw down atmospheric carbon levels.

Where trees are planted makes a big difference, and for maximum effect the tropics are best. Here, they can reach their maximum size and optimal carbon-absorbing potential more rapidly, leading to carbon sequestration rates that can be as much as 10 times greater than for trees planted at higher latitudes. At the same time, reforestation programmes can also improve the lives and livelihoods of those living in majority world countries through building agroforestry infrastructure.

And this is exactly what marvellous Word Forest is doing in Kenya, where it has just planted its one millionth tree. As our world continues to heat up, however, it is inevitable that extreme weather, arising from a failing climate, is going to make things harder for both the trees and the people who plant and care for them. While Kenya is unlikely to face the lethal humid heat waves capable of killing in six hours, which will plague other parts of the world, increasingly extreme temperatures will still make working outside a real ordeal. On top of this drought and flood are both set to become more common, bringing additional threats to both newly forested areas and communities.

Most worryingly, food supply and security is looking as if it could become a colossal problem. One projection envisages our world needing 50 percent more food by 2050, by which time crop yields could be down by as much as 30 percent. If this worst case is realised, it would mean - on average - a halving of the amount of available food per person - a recipe for widespread civil unrest and societal collapse. African nations, in particular - where food security has long been an issue - will be hit especially hard, and famine is likely to become common-place. An inability to grow and find food is likely, more than any other factor, to drive migration, which is predicted to occur on a scale never seen before, with hundreds of millions - possibly billions - on the move. This, in turn, will promote conflict as those nations on the receiving end will fight to hold onto what they have, and fortify their borders.

But if anything can help alleviate the situation - at least to some extent - it is trees. Research has shown that reforestation increases both evapotranspiration (the total movement of water into the atmosphere from plants, soils and water bodies) and

rainfall. Not only can this limit the intensity of dry conditions or drought, thereby giving crops a better chance of survival, but it also reduces the chances of extremely dry months. And as they pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere at the same time, it is a win-win situation.

Dangerous climate breakdown is now inevitable, and with a new El Niño set to bring hotter weather globally, it is possible - perhaps even likely - that the global average temperature rise (since pre-industrial times) will touch 1.5°C next year for the first time. We all need to face the fact that adaptation to living on a hotter planet, as individuals, communities and societies, is now vital, and one of the best ways of doing this - whether in Kenya or the UK - is to plant more trees. As Word Forest never tires of pointing out - trees are the key.

Eva Jefwa: Head of Kenya Operations and Juliet Anyanzwa, Assistant

2022 was a year to be grateful for. After the pandemic and post-pandemic struggles, it was nice to have a much calmer year than the previous one.

I can confidently say that we started our financial year on the right foot. In April last year, we purchased 4 acres of land. Something that we here in Kenya had been looking forward to for a long time. Having a space of our own was very important because with rented space, one can only do so much. We now have an office, a toilet, and a gatehouse for our security guard. We have grown from 2 to 5 permanent employees, which is amazing because jobs are hard to come by. Erick is the Plantsman, and Juliet is my assistant.

We named our space the PTC, which stands for Permaculture Training Centre. Permaculture is a form of agriculture that draws inspiration from nature to develop synergistic farming systems based on crop diversity, resilience, natural productivity, and sustainability. We named it PTC because we want to share the knowledge with the community, and we would like the PTC to be a place where people can come to see how to establish sustainable ecosystems.

Kenya as a whole experienced and is continuing to experience land degradation due to poor land practices and deforestation. Irregular and unpredictable rainfall, increasing temperatures, and rising fuel costs have taken a devastating toll on livelihoods, increasing people's vulnerability and seriously impacting their ability to recover, which in turn affects their ability to cope with future shocks and stresses. However, the Mothers of the Forest forged on. Thanks to Word Forest, the mothers continued to learn skills that are aiding them in their journey to resilience. Beadwork, crocheting, moringa & neem powder processing, growing of herbs, upcycling, and soap making are some of the skills that have kept the mothers afloat.

We also established a six-thousand mini-tree nursery that consists of fruit, medicinal, indigenous, and exotic trees. Diversity is key to balancing the ecosystem.

The twice-monthly meetings for the Mothers continue to be an exercise they look forward to. The meetings are the only space they have where they do not need to be anything other than who they are. Nourishment, as is tradition, is always provided.

The mothers meet to learn and share best practices of tree growing, forest conservation, and how to care for the environment, and, best of all, how to share this knowledge with our neighbours, friends, and relatives. We learned the hard way that talking about it wouldn't get us to where we wanted as fast as we wanted. So we reassembled and came up with a new tactic. We decided we would make being a mother of the forest a lifestyle. We started at home, making sure the people we lived with understood the meaning of taking care of our environment. Simple things like no littering in the homestead, and if you cannot repurpose it, put it in a sack, and when the

sack is full, I will collect it and take it to Malindi to a recycling farm. The mothers can put something in the sack today, and after a few days, they find something useful to do with it.

Another very important thing is water. A lot of water is wasted daily in the homesteads. For example, in the morning while washing one's face, that can be done in a basin or directly on a sapling. This felt like a struggle in the beginning, but once the people we lived with were in sync, it was worth it.

Zosi, whose husband is a wine tapper, told his wife one day, "The coconut tree that I planted last year is now about 3 ft tall, and I don't struggle with fetching water for the tree. Thanks to you, Zosi, I just rinse my tapping containers at the bottom of the tree, and that's it. Two birds with one stone."

We also had a brick-making workshop, and now the mothers are making a minimum of 40 bricks a day, depending on the turnout. These bricks are going to be used in the building of different structures at the PTC. Word has spread about the mothers making bricks, and this is attracting lots of people, mostly those who would like to join the Mothers of the Forest group.

When the UK team came for the annual Monitoring and Evaluation, the mothers were given a gift: a solar kit that contained a small panel, three bulbs, and an in-built radio on the battery, which also had a torch on one side and a floodlight on the other. Their partners were also given watches. On top of that, the mothers got an even better gift: we call them Hedhi (menstrual) cups. These are life-changers for all of us. There was a time when the mothers made reusable sanitary towels, and that was good, but this is simply AMAZING. There is no maintenance cost whatsoever. All one needs is just a handful of water to clean it after draining.

It broke our hearts when we learned that the UK team would not make it to the PTC, but it was better to be safe than sorry. So, since the team couldn't come to Garashi, the mothers went to Malindi to meet them. We had a wonderful two-day training about propagating through cuttings and plant management by Phil Gamble, our horticulture Trustee, at a place known as LMagiro in Malindi.

Mitigating climate chaos while creating resilience is our goal, and now that we have a space of our own and a proper office, we look forward to being able to plant lots of trees, especially fruit trees, so that we can create food security as we combat climate chaos.

Getting together and working towards a common goal is amazing. But what is truly and utterly awesome is what is being achieved on the way. There are things that cannot be quantified yet they play the biggest role. The mothers are not what they were some years back. They are stronger mentally, emotionally, and socially too. All this is thanks to the mothers getting together to find solutions to matters affecting them as an individual and as a whole. Most of the married mothers speak about how their marriages have changed for the better. They can better communicate with their husbands. Before, it used to be a yes or no answer, but now they can reason with them through respect and love.

Unlike many organisations that go to a place and just give relief food and leave, Word Forest is actually creating resilience by establishing sustainable systems that will be in place for generations to come. I speak for the mothers, my community, and myself when I say no word in the Oxford dictionary can truly describe how grateful we all are for having come this far. It would never have been possible if it were not for this remarkable organisation.

Personally, I am extremely blessed and proud to be part of the team that is making a difference.

Joy Masseno: Mothers of the Forest Rusinga Island

Our Wonderful Team

My name is Joy Masseno and along with priceless assistance from Eunice Majuma, I am the facilitator of the Mothers of the Forest branch of Word Forest in the far west of Kenya on Rusinga Island. Our group was formed in March 2022. I was proud to have the task of recruiting a number of women from humble backgrounds to become the first members.

I did this with help from my good friend Solomon Owiti, who is well known on the island for his work teaching permaculture. Through the support of Tracey and Simon and the entire Word Forest Organisation, we selected 10 women and a cook also. This was done through door-to-door visits and below are the criteria I used for selection:

- They had to be very small scale farmers who had some growing knowledge
- We wanted them to be team players who were happy to form a group
- They needed to be considered vulnerable members of our community who had no major source of income
- They needed to be willing to plant 50 trees or more each year in the name of Word Forest

We all meet at least twice a month for our usual discussions and we do many things. Centrally, we concentrate on learning and sharing knowledge about saplings and tree growing. We also come together to learn how to start up small farming programmes using the permaculture way, in order to help reduce global warming but also to be more self-sufficient.

The good work we Mothers do ensures that no woman is just seated but at least can do something to make her living and feed her family. Our activities are also exciting to do. We empower each other and thankfully also other vulnerable people in our community, especially the very elderly but also children and young girls particularly.

Our Members

Here is a little background information about four of our members, so you can feel more closely connected to their everyday lives. These are not their true names, so as to protect their identity:

- Amelia is 70 years old and has been widowed for 20 years. She had five children who are sadly all dead too. She is a survivor of death trauma but it haunts her very badly. She does have three grandchildren and they all survive with the money they make from small-scale farming on her shamba (homestead). Her house is a mud hut unfortunately in very bad shape. If she could raise the capital, Amelia would like to learn how to grow more food.
- Carol is 40 years old and was widowed at a tender young age. It is now 16 years since her husband's demise and she is left with four children. She has a heavy burden with education and school fees and her mud thatched house is in very bad shape. She is a very hard-working woman and wants to learn more about permaculture and would love to learn some tailoring in the future.
- Mercy is 24 and a very hardworking woman in a polygamous marriage. The second wife left her with four children, adding to her three children. She now parents seven children, three boys and four girls. She has many problems paying school fees, plus one of the boys suffers from sickle-cell anaemia.

- Patricia is 36 years old and married with four children. She dropped out of school in class 8 (aged 13) due to lack of school fees and because she had an early marriage. She had a small kiosk shop that collapsed because her husband is an alcoholic. Her house is not in good shape, health-wise she's also not feeling very well and she really needs the support from our group so her children can go to school. Her hobbies are dancing and singing and she loves working with the children.
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Achievements Within Our Group

Here are a few of the goals we've managed to score during our first year:

We have:

1. All created kitchen gardens at our homes with vegetables we've never grown before and some we know
2. Planted more than 50 different trees on our shambas
3. Planted more than 300 trees at our Permaculture Teaching Centre (PTC),*
4. Been running our own table banking system*
5. Been running a successful Siri Ya Jikoni system*
6. Received ongoing good education on tree grafting, sapling care, tree growing, permaculture principles and ethics from Solomon
7. Had great training about syntropic agroforestry from Solomon's son, Daniel
8. Received comprehensive training on plant propagation, all aspects of permaculture and tree planting and care, from our UK teacher, Phil Gamble*
9. Planted many different fruits and vegetables at our homes and the PTC
10. Become much stronger as individuals and we help each other in times of need and personal crises. This has helped our mental health a lot.

* More Info

The PTC: This is currently a 2 acre site which we've fenced in to protect the food from marauding animals. It has been very kindly donated to Word Forest by our dear tree planting friend, Solomon Owiti and his wife, Florence. It is their homestead and family land. This is where the Mothers come together for their twice monthly meetings. When it is raining or scorching hot, the Mothers are graciously able to learn and eat in the Owiti's small living room, which protects them from the elements. In due course, we want to build a proper stone constructed Edible Classroom at our PTC, as has been done in Garashi.

Table Banking: As per their sister group in Garashi, the Mothers are paid to plant trees when they come to their meetings. Of their own free will, the Mothers have chosen to put some of that money into a kitty, from which they can take small loans and pay a small amount of interest back. At the end of the year, the money from the pot is shared out amongst the Mothers. It helps them out during times of hardship and everybody wins.

Siri Ya Jikoni: This quite literally means 'Secret Kitchen'. Just think along the lines of the UK office-based Secret Santa gifts at Christmas. Each Mother brings a low value but essential food or everyday item like soap. The bundle of useful items is given to one of the Mothers of the Forest and the recipient changes at each meeting. The Mothers also share the abundance of the crops they are growing. This means many of them are now

able to put food on their table every day. Some are even able to have three meals a day, not just one!

Phil Gamble: Word Forest's Horticultural Trustee has been a member of the Board since its foundation in 2017. Phil is an expert in his field. He was also a lecturer at Kingston Maurward. He accompanied Tracey and Simon on their Monitoring and Evaluation visit in December 2022. Phil shared critical knowledge on organic growing, composting, propagation and more, across the length and breadth of Kenya during their month-long stay.

What We're Growing

Thanks to Word Forest support, the Rusinga Island Mothers are now planting food crops that were new to them and others they knew well. In no particular order these include herbs, trees, fruits, nuts and vegetables, such as:

Ochuoga, pedo, ochol, moringa, aloe vera, arubaini and tee grass, thorn melon, pawpaw, passion fruits, lemon, water pear, avocado, mango, orange, guava, açai palm, acacia, eucalyptus, pine, bamboo, oak, jacaranda, mast tree, tamarind, banana, croton megalocarpus, lucena, glacidia, fountain tree, ferna, tibician, waterpear, maize, kunde/cowpeas (black eyed peas), sukuma wiki (kale), cassava, beans (black, cannellini, mung, red, soya, pinto), susa (pumpkin), apoth (jute), saga (spider plant), kandhira (brassica), osuga (black nightshade), spinach, tomatoes, onions (round and leaves), sweet potatoes, arrowroot, sugar cane and napier grass croton

A Humble Start

When we started coming together as a group, it was from a humble beginning and with much hope. We did not know each other, most of us were meeting for the very first time. We did not have any real knowledge on farming other than what our families had handed to us, nor did we have any business skills.

Most of us were just housewives or single/widowed women. We survived on one meal a day and we had the mentality that it was men who go to work and bring home the food for our families.

We've come to learn that we women are perfectly able to do this, thanks to Word Forest projects and belief in our group. It has been a big eye-opener to us all and many positive actions have happened as we've embraced our movement towards more women's empowerment.

We are so thrilled, encouraged, motivated and our self-esteem has been boosted. Thanks to our collective learning, we are now able to enjoy the fruits of our labours and from time to time we do have a very healthy abundance of food.

Meeting Colleagues and Christmas Blessings

Since we met with Tracey, Simon, Eva (from our HQ in Garashi) and Phil in December 2022, we have been uplifted even more. The Mothers come to the meetings on time or even early, because their husbands have been made happy by the watches that they were gifted by Word Forest for Christmas. Our men are now always encouraging us to get to our meetings. This involvement of men in Word Forest projects has also managed to bring us more peace in our marriages. There is much less conflict and that is a blessing indeed.

At Christmas 2022, the Mothers were indeed grateful to receive gifts of the portable solar lamps. Each one has 4 separate light bulbs on long wires which we can put in different places in our homes. It also has a big portable torch which we can take outside when we hear animal noises in the night and it scares them away.

This lamp has improved our lives in a big way since the light acts as a security system for us, not only in our houses, but it also prevents wild animals from invading our plants. Some of the worst ones are the hippos, mongooses, rabbits and monkeys. Some of our houses were also being invaded with bats but right now because of light, the bats are not coming anymore and they cannot destroy our precious items. Bats urine is very poisonous and it has destroyed many properties around here.

These wonderful lamps also give us lighting so our children are able to do their homework and studies comfortably once the sun has gone down at 6pm. We Mothers also enjoy the fact that we no longer have to buy kerosene to fill our lamps for the night. This has brought us big cost savings and made our homes safer. We were also very grateful to receive the lip salve cream for our dry lips and that is a blessing in these dry, hot conditions.

The formation of this group has done more for us all than you could ever imagine. We have become strong as women and more productive members of our community who are blessed to be better nourished with good food and broad education.

Through the permaculture teachings and knowledge from our tutors, our kitchen gardens have become much larger. We started small, as that is one of the key permaculture principles. We now understand how to grow a wider variety of fruit trees, vegetables and medicinal plants. This knowledge has also been of great help because our local environment is greener where we live and I'm glad to say we will soon be making a harvest once again.

The Challenges We Still Face

Life is much better in many ways, however we still face a lot of other difficulties. We must walk before we can run but we know that as time goes on and our projects expand, we will be able to overcome our problems.

On our shambas, the most common issue is a lack of proper fencing around our kitchen gardens. We do try to improvise by making dead hedges with broken branches from thorny trees which we stack together, but it doesn't always work and it is messy.

Also, despite the fact that we are very close to Lake Victoria here on Rusinga Island, we are mainly up in the hills and we suffer from not being close to a water source. We ideally need small water tanks/butts. These will make our lives much easier during the hot months, and during the rainy season we'll be able to capture free, fresh water from the skies above.

We would all benefit from having a few more simple farming hand tools, like jembes, slashers, pangas, a wheelbarrow would be wonderful too. This would help us improve the picture around our kitchen gardens and at our PTC.

We have been planning ahead and once funds do become available, we would like to start a few new projects. They all have a sustainability focus and they would help us raise income for our group too. These include:

1. A sapling nursery
2. Soap and mat making courses, like the ones the Mothers had in Garashi
3. Tailoring/handicrafts training, so we can mend clothes and make items to sell

Conclusion and a Final Request

We want to appreciate all of our donors for the timely receipts of our salaries, our money for food for our meetings, payment for the cook and the monthly stipend for the Mothers to plant more trees.

We kindly request if possible to recruit more Mothers, since we have many more very vulnerable women in our community who would benefit from being part of our team. Our program would be of great help to them and us, since we would be able to plant more trees to help our planet.

God bless you all richly with good health and happiness,

Joy Masseno, Eunice Majuma and the Mothers of the Forest on Rusinga Island

Solomon Owiti: Rusinga Island Permaculture Lead

A Moment of Reflection and Thanks

Let me begin by taking a moment on behalf of my whole community to express our feelings of gratitude for the amazing year we've had through 2022/3. Simon West, Tracey West and the Word Forest Organisation fraternity, let me once more say thank you. You made me truly confirm the existence of the phrase: "If you want to go fast, go alone and if you want to go far, go together"

In spite of all of our challenges with the weather, rising temperatures and big cost of living increases since COVID, we have had a good year full of sustainable development projects in the community that target climate change, as well as improving our food and water security.

The New Normal

Over the past decade and more, Rusinga Island has been seriously hit by the terrible effects of global heating. We could go for 5-6 months without a single drop of rain. Our grandparents used to have 2 planting seasons per year but now, things have happened such that we are even straining to have one. This has led to a great deal of food insecurity, worry and stress on our Island.

However, in association with the Lake Victoria Peace and Sustainability Center and with financial support from Word Forest, we've planted and are taking care of around 100,000 trees. Their ongoing care is being done because we have mobilised our youngsters, women and men. We are taking an all round approach to getting everyone involved because we know we will all benefit from it in the long run.

#TreesAreTheKey

Everybody here knows this planting and this work is making a difference to climate change here and around the world. Many people have improved the standards of living in the community through tree planting. Many people have diverted their minds away from fishing Lake Victoria (which is very, very overfished) and they are focused on small-scale organic farming with permaculture methods. Fishing was the main and only real economic activity around here. Now, we know we need to conserve our existing mature forests and plant more trees too, if we are all to survive and thrive into the future. Word Forest has encouraged us to spread that message far and wide.

We have reached out to the men and women, girls and boys in our communities through Word Forest projects with tree planting and environmental education. We've shared ideas, had meetings with open minds and free flowing thoughts. We have made a big impact caring for our Mother earth as well as the people and wildlife upon it. We

feel like together, we are coming to the rescue of our planet and through many different initiatives, we are making good progress with all members of society.

The Mothers of the Forest

I know you will have read about the Mothers from my colleague Joy, but I wanted to share my thoughts on the group too. The Mothers come from all the different corners of Rusinga Island. They have formed a powerful alliance with each other and they are learning so much about all matters relating to climate change and food production. Each and every one of them is now equipped with permaculture and syntropic agroforestry knowledge and they utilise that in order to raise their own organic food and fresh produce for themselves and their neighbours.

During their 2 main workshops each month - held on the first and last Wednesday of every month - they come together to share a meal, discuss matters pertaining to just being women and of empowerment. It has been the pleasure of my wife Florence and I to offer our home so they can do these efforts in comfort. I know at some point in the future, we will build an Edible Classroom where they can work. For now, this is all good.

These meetings have made the women play a much bigger role in the wider community. They are all taking care of more trees than they were before. Together, we've planted 500 additional trees around our Permaculture Training Centre. Their kitchen gardens by their homesteads are flourishing too because they are implementing the permaculture principles and ethics. I am so proud to be part of their learning.

Word Forest Came to the Island

We were very much happy to receive the Word Forest Team in December 2022, led by Simon West, Tracey West and Phil Gamble, their permaculture expert from the UK. They also brought along Eva from Garashi, Coast Province and Paul and Laura Clark, Word Forest Corporate Partners, Phat Pasty, from the UK. We all had many very wonderful moments planting trees together, offering permaculture advice during the workshops Phil led and the gifts we were given made a very big impact on us and our families.

I am a lover of football, as are many youths and men from the Island. One of the most memorable events from their visit was the arrival of the kindly donated football kit from Bristol Rovers, which was given to our local football team. We have renamed ourselves the Rusinga Rovers in their honour!

We have a new initiative and we're using football as a way to engage with the younger generation and also for us to be more inclusive in the community. Word Forest already does great work with women, but they know we mustn't forget the men and youths too! The arrival of the football kit and the naming of the Rusinga Rovers was very powerful. We have a mens and a women's football team and when Word Forest were with us, we brought everyone together to do some tree planting in thanks.

Bristol Rovers kit and footballs were donated by the Bristol Rovers Community Trust and we remain incredibly grateful to them. To add to this already great concept, Simon West came up with the idea of a Trees for Trainers project and I am so pleased to say the players in the mens, youths and women's team now have trainers to wear when they play. This has made a huge difference to their health and their minds too. We all feel stronger and more united as we look the same, we are a proper team!

We know we need to start our own sapling nursery so we can keep up with all the planting we want to do in the future. We know this is going to take infrastructure, some buildings and more fencing. As soon as we are able to receive funds, we will get to it, we

will make the Island proud with our saplings and more planting. Our humble request is that we start creating a tree nursery so we can get back on our journey towards regenerating Mother Earth for us now, and for future generations too.

Developing the Permaculture Teaching Centre

With gracious assistance from Word Forest, we have managed to fence in 1 hectare of my farm that I have willingly donated to the project from my family's land. This space will be of so much benefit to the Mothers of the Forest and to other groups that come there to learn.

As Rusinga Island has moved to being a one season planting community, animals are usually being left to graze freely where they roam but there is a lack of food for them too. By putting a fence around the Mother's vegetable planting area, we're doing all we can to fully protect the food we human beings need to survive.

I am so happy we have created this little Permaculture Teaching Centre. We can demonstrate how to carry out the practices of Bill Mollinson, the creator of permaculture. This is what we all need across the whole of Kenya. I remain confident Word Forest will be able to raise more funds and do this undertaking.

Nobody in this world is doing things perfectly. We are all human. We all need to share ideas, information, minds, thoughts and energy for the betterment of our communities today and tomorrow. We know that by putting our energy into teaching permaculture, we are planning to make good use of the little knowledge we have gained so far. We hope to be able to train more and more people in the ways of this simple land management system. I know our demonstration farm will really help in the long term.

One of the first things we did there was to build a safe and proper pit latrine toilet and to get a large water tank installed so we can store and gather fresh water. Once we have a teaching building with a good roof, we will be able to take advantage of the runoff water. We have created all the right conditions for a training centre to be most effective. These important things are in place and we have lots of food growing too in the safe arms of the trees we've planted. All we need now is our first Edible Classroom and I know that will come as soon as it possibly can, we are ready!

Looking to the Future

With our shared mission to spread more sustainable development projects across the Island, targeting the improvement of food and water security, we will see the need to fully advocate more permaculture and syntropic agroforestry lessons.

In the year ahead, our Word Forest team is going to concentrate on getting more of our members trained and furnished with Permaculture Design Certificates (PDCs). In time, I believe it will be possible to offer more training to everyday people here on the Island and to make learning simpler and affordable. Our teaching centre is so well placed for this to happen and we are excited about the future for the first time in many years.

Everyone here looks forward to 2023/4 being a great year of action with Word Forest and the communities on Rusinga Island.

Asante sana for all of your belief in what we are doing and for your support into the future.

Solomon Owiti

Sue Jueno: Special Projects & Fundraising

Tulinde Bongo Project

For the last year Word Forest has been working closely with the Murang'a Youth Bunge County Forum CBO (MYBCF) to find ways to help their Tulinde Bongo Project which is taking place in the Kmakia, Gatere and Wanjerere ranges of the Aberdares Forest, approximately 3 hours north of Nairobi.

This amazing project covers a range of activities, with one goal, to help protect and save the Mountain Bongo, a forest antelope and a subspecies of the Bongo Antelope.

The Mountain Bongo is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, with only several 100 left worldwide, most being found in the Aberdares region in Kenya. Mary Wambui, MYBCF's Ambassador, states: "As we speak, we have less than a hundred Mountain Bongos in Kenya. The heartbreaking part of this sad story is that fifty of the last of these antelope species have been domesticated in a conservancy at Mt Kenya region for their protection. Knowledge is key to sustainability and that is why the project will target young people with the goal of creating awareness and empowering them to make change"

MYBCF was formed in 2011 with the aim of turning around fortunes for youth. It has grown from strength to strength in exposing young people to leadership development opportunities through community service projects.

Part of the planned Tulinde project includes reforesting specific areas within the Aberdares. The habitat replacement will enable the Mountain Bongo conservation, as well as play a vital part in carbon sequestration.

We were delighted to facilitate a first phase planting of 4224 saplings in April 2022 to initiate the project in the Wanjerere Forest area of the Aberdares Range. To make sure the correct species of trees were used, members of MYBCF team met with a Kenyan Forestry Service Forester and a graduate of wildlife management who worked at the Mount Kenya Conservancy where the 50 sheltered Mountain Bongo antelopes reside. On their advice, 1400 Podocarpus, 1000 Olea Africanus, 912 Prunus Africana and 912 Syzgiumguinese saplings were planted by 44 youths employed by MYBCF over two and a half days.

It is with thanks to The Souter Charitable Trust that we were able to secure an annual subscription to the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) for 3,500 students in the Aberdares Range. As part of the subscription the students and teachers, based at 12 selected MYBCF schools, received three different issues of Komba magazine for the year, free lectures and video / slideshows, access to the WCK mobile conservation education lectures and film showings, plus their WCK roadshows. All with the aim to help and encourage the conservation of wildlife.

We would also like to thank Animal Friends Pet Insurance who enabled us to fund the purchase of camera traps that will help monitor the last few remaining Mountain Bongo and collect data. These are to be set up in the coming months.

One last thank you needs to go to Alex Lancaster, our volunteer bid writer, who secured the above mentioned grants for the WCK memberships and the camera traps. Thank you so much for your support and dedication.

Lindsey Selleck: E-learning Content Creator

The Educational Learning Platform (ELP) is slowly but surely growing with 5 courses live, 2 ready to be published shortly and numerous ideas flowing for more.

Two of the current courses focus on education; The Importance of Trees and An Introduction to Climate Change. The former of the two has a large focus on the work

done by the Word Forest in Kenya, highlighting the importance of the organisation. The latter has been developed in a way which provides the general population with easy to digest information on a complex topic. More educational focussed courses are being developed as I believe it is important to inform people about what is happening to our planet and highlight why the work done by the Word Forest is crucial.

The other three courses are more lifestyle oriented; Conscious Consumerism, Eco-resilience and Spiral Wind; A creative writing course. The existing lifestyle courses are targeted more towards a Western World audience at the moment due to the content. However, there is hope to make more courses which are specifically aimed at the people in Kenya over the coming months.

The plans for new courses include an in depth course or perhaps even a set of courses looking at permaculture within the U.K. and Kenya. These courses will include videos which were filmed during the last visit to Kenya, in addition to ones filmed here in the U.K. The aim is for the part focussing on Kenya to be able to be used for teaching out there.

Additionally, we are looking to create courses which can be used as an extra tool by the Mothers of The Forest to teach basic English literacy and numeracy skills to those who are keen to learn.

It would be great to have the ELP used by teachers or organisations to help teach people of all ages and backgrounds why we need to care for our planet and how to be better environmentalists. I hope that the platform continues to grow over the next year and that we are able to market the courses to a wider audience, in order to increase the number of people who take our courses and learn from us.

Jed Robertson: Digital Media Specialist

Social media is a complex and often difficult world to manage, especially as a charity or non-profit organisation. To us, it serves several functions that must all be balanced by the team that creates our content and schedules it to go out on each of our platforms. We currently use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, each of which must be managed in a slightly different way. From the short, punchy 280 characters of Twitter to the visual focus of Instagram the minutiae are many but we try to cater for all, however they absorb their media.

Firstly, it acts as a way to keep our wonderful supporters informed on the work we do through articles, updates and links to our various resources such as training courses and videos. It's our main point of contact with the world beyond our walls and so it is imperative that it remains as active as we are, a true reflection of the sheer amount of work we do. In addition, we can keep the severity of climate chaos on the front lines in the forefront of people's minds through our reporting.

Secondly, it acts as a form of portfolio. To corporate donors, individuals looking for a charity to support or potential volunteers, social media shows the best version of us to those who want to give. Not only that, it also provides all the links and information necessary for a quick and easy donation process.

Thirdly, it allows us to celebrate specific supporters, without whom we wouldn't be able to do the things we do. We have many corporate partners and are happy to provide a bit of promotion in return for their help.

We currently operate our social media channels without a marketing budget, which is getting increasingly harder as the platforms push paid promotion more and more. This is mostly due to our commitment to direct as much of our income as possible to direct action on the ground in Kenya (more than 80% this year). However, we are currently conducting research into how paid promotion has helped other charities. If trends

show that paid promotion creates a net positive in earnings then it will be something we pursue, albeit trepidatiously.

In conclusion, social media is a fantastic tool to reach a wider audience, but it is not without its challenges. As the algorithms and rules constantly mutate, we will try to move with them and bring you the best news feed we can.

Dominic Hurndall: Founding Partner, Oaklin

The people of Oaklin are passionate about what they do, but they also care deeply that the firm they work for is playing its part in supporting local communities and protecting and restoring the environment. They care about empowering women and about offering education to those who have not had the same opportunities we enjoy. We have long felt that we should play a leading role as a business in helping society tackle these challenges. At first we were unsure about how we might take forward something constructive, fearing wasted investment and false flag opportunists, which is why we were so pleased to discover Word Forest.

With Tracey and her team, we have found a partner who tackles the big challenges we face as a global community, in one connected and co-ordinated response. Their approach brings reforestation, sustainable business, education and empowerment of women together in one 'virtuous circle'. For us, the Word Forest approach is as refreshing as it is effective and is exactly what the SDGs are intended to encourage businesses towards.

We have been delighted to raise money for Word Forest and we are now proud to be helping them pursue Gold Standard accreditation for their projects, which we believe is the fastest way to help scale up the operation. We have made huge progress as a joint team over the last financial year and we are poised to make significant headway as the accreditation application is submitted in the weeks ahead. We are also helping Word Forest structure their offering to fit other corporate partners who would find as much value from working with them as we have. Businesses large and small must be at the vanguard of improving our world and striving to achieve a sustainable future. With Word Forest we are confident that we are making a fantastic contribution to achieving these critical goals.

And Finally...

We're thrilled to name our Volunteers of the Year for 2023/23. They are:

Harry Lloyd, Corporate Partner Liaison and responsible for helping Word Forest rise to the challenges of being a better, more financially successful charity.

Karoline Hohorst, Corporate Partner Liaison and responsible for getting Word Forest through the highly challenging application process to become a Gold Standard Carbon Offset organisation.

Lindsey Selleck, the facilitator and expander of our Educational Learning Platform. Her work is doing a great job for the whole planet by encouraging people to be better all round environmentalists.

All three have gone above and beyond the call of duty. They've put in countless volunteer hours to help and with many early starts too. We're incredibly grateful for their belief in our work and our team.

We wouldn't be here without the unwavering financial support of our awesome Corporate Partners. We've added a few new ones to our list over the past year and we've got some amazing stalwarts like Phat Pasty and Oaklin Consulting, who remain solidly dedicated to reforesting Kenya with us.

Dearest All Corporate Partners, large and small. Please take a moment to accept our asante sana and to recognise how important you are to us all. Thank you for everything you're doing to enable Word Forest to crack on. Without you, we'd be doing the same job, just a great deal more slowly.

Childrensalon Green Gazelles Herb UK Oaklin Phat Pasty Swift Crafted and more

There's a long way to go before women and men have equal opportunities across Kenya (and the UK, come to that) and we're not limiting our projects to supporting women alone. We pride ourselves on our inclusivity, our intergenerational, disability-positive, multi-gender opportunities for all.

I'm leaving Eva Jefwa to have the final say. Eva oversees everything we're doing across Kenya. She has met everyone in our wider team personally and we couldn't be happier with their dedication.

I asked Eva for 7 words to sum up what we are - she gave me 8 and I'm not ditching one to get what I asked for - I'm thrilled with the extra word! They are:

Care Knowledge Sustainability Transparent Hope Empower Light Ethical

We look forward to interacting with you all in the years to come.

Sincerely yours, in service to our planet, people and wildlife,



Tracey West