**WeForest**

**2024 Project Update**

# Mafinga Hills Community Forest Project

Restoring the Mafinga Hills Forest for Nature, Water and People

## Project management and M&E team

Main implementing partner:
**Wildlife and Environmental Conservation Society of Zambia (WECSZ)**

**Dr. Fainess Lumbwe**
Country Director, Zambia

**Gift Mwandila**
Project Manager, WECSZ

**Gift Mazimba**
MEL Manager

**Maldrine Mbeba**
Finance & Admin Officer - WECSZ

See the full team at:
www.weforest.org/about-us/#our-team

**Mafinga, Zambia**
Miombo Belt

Timeline:
**2021 - 2025**

Targeted ecosystem:
**Miombo woodlands**

**KBA** KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS

**Mafinga Mountains #24247**
**Nyika National Park #7198**

# Project story

The Mafinga Hills Community Forest Project covers a section of the catchment for the source of the Luangwa River, part of the IUCN Green-Certified sensitive ecosystems, the North Luangwa and the South Luangwa National Parks and the Mafinga Mountains Biodiversity Hotspot. The project focuses on the management of two newly-established Community Forests, together known as Mwita Community Forest.

## ⚠️ Key challenges in the landscape

**Deforestation**
From 2001 to 2022, the target area lost 84 hectares of tree cover.

**Land degradation**
Particularly in montane and riverine forest patches.

**Unmanaged fires**
Man-made fires from illegal activities on the plateau are impacting biodiversity and reducing the ability of soils to retain water.

**Future risks**
Although net deforestation in the district is not high yet, it is widespread throughout, and is a particular risk inside the Mafinga Hills National Forest and along the rivers, due to slash-and-burn agriculture.

## ✓ Our integrated approach

**Improve forest governance and stewardship through:**
- Establishing sustainably managed community forests.
- Designing a Multi-Sectoral Management Plan, approved by all stakeholders for the National Forest Reserve.
- Reinforcing the role of the local partner organisation (WECSZ) as an advocate of good forest stewardship in the project area in the long run.

**Conserve and restore the forest through:**
- Protecting and restoring remaining forests in the Mafinga Hills National Forest, using Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) and improving fire management.

**Strengthen forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors through:**
- Enhancing management of forest resources in communal areas adjacent to the Mafinga Hills National Forest.
- Implementation of sustainable livelihood initiatives that promote forest conservation, such as conservation agriculture and beekeeping.

# A long-term vision
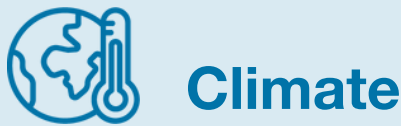
## Climate

The restoration of the Mwita CFA will contribute to both climate mitigation and adaptation: increasing tree cover to sequester carbon while improving water retention and soil stability to help communities adapt to droughts and erratic weather.

## Nature

Restoring the community firest will protect biodiversity and secure critical ecosystem services like water and soil health. Improved land management will enhance habitat resilience, ensuring the forest continues to sustain both people and wildlife.

## People

Strengthened governance and forest-friendly livelihoods will ensure communities see the forest as an asset: one that provides resources while being sustainably managed. By integrating agroforestry, beekeeping, and other forest-friendly livelihoods, the project reduces deforestation-driven income reliance while securing long-term economic stability.
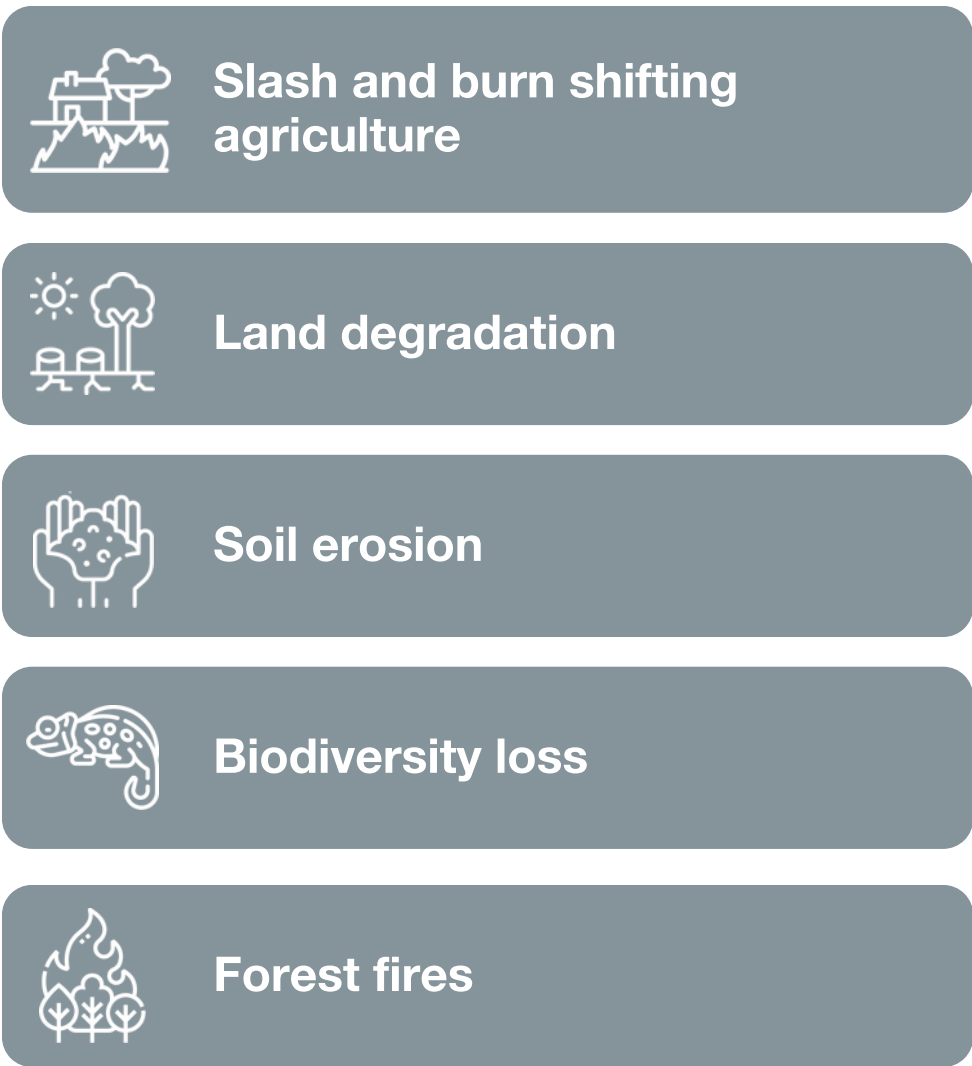
# Outcomes

By integrating these interventions, the project will:

- Strengthen **stewardship and governance** in forest and natural resource management

- Increase **tree cover** within the National Forest Reserve

- Increasing **household income** within the communities surrounding Mwita Community Forest Area (CFA)

- Enhancing **community participation** in forest stewardship and governance.

- The **long-term** impact of our work will benefit people, nature and climate.
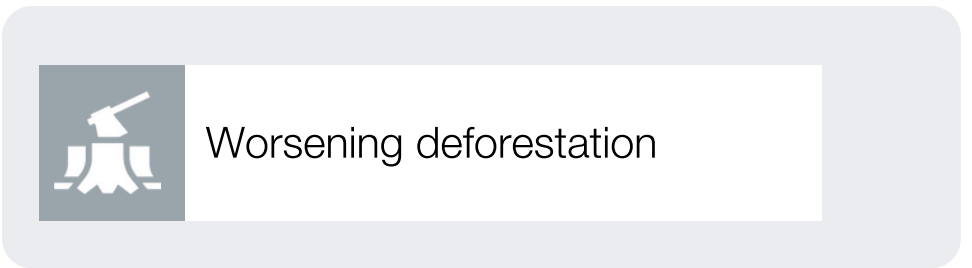
# Theory of Change

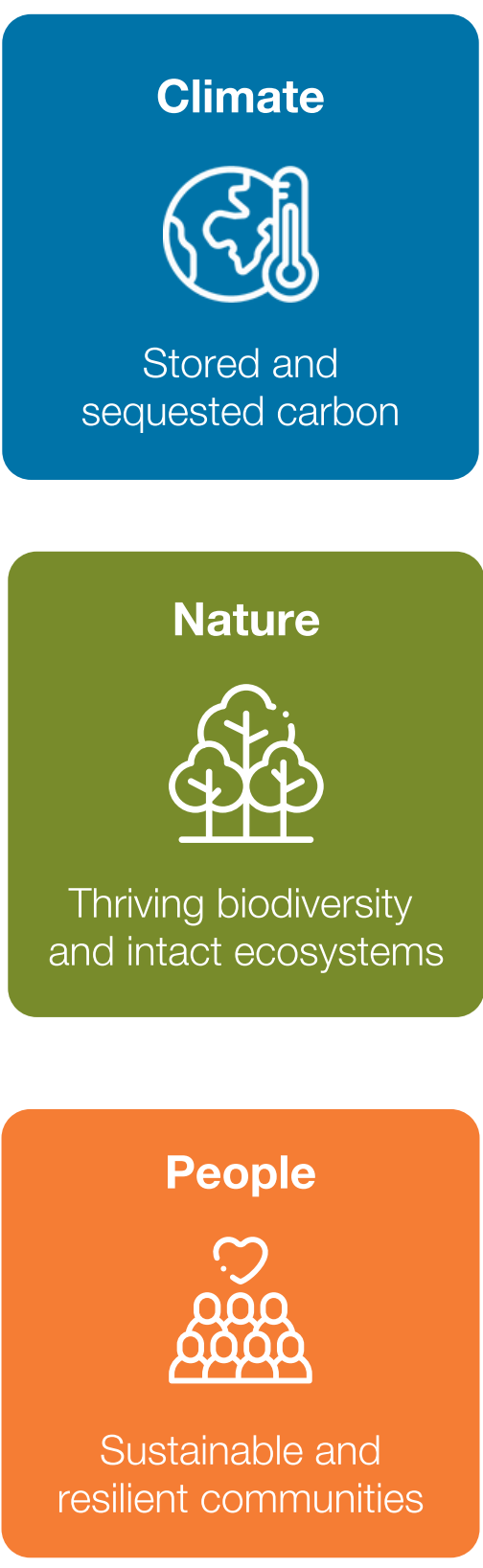**Existing problems in the landscape**

- Slash and burn shifting agriculture
- Land degradation
- Soil erosion
- Biodiversity loss
- Forest fires

**Risks**

Worsening deforestation

**WeForest Interventions**

**Project outcomes**

**Improved forest governance and stewardship**

- Improving local forest management structures & regulations
- Improving forest law enforcement and compliance
- Community awareness-raising

Enhanced community participation in forest stewardship and governance

**Restoring and conserving at-risk forests**

- Assisted Natural Regeneration
- Fire management

Enhanced management of forest resources in communal areas adjacent to the Mafinga Hills National Forest

**Introducing forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviours**

- Beekeeping
- Agroforestry
- Conservation agriculture

Increased household income within the communities surrounding Mwita CFA through the implementation of sustainable livelihood initiatives that promote forest conservation.

**Long term impact**

**Climate**
Stored and sequested carbon

**Nature**
Thriving biodiversity and intact ecosystems

**People**
Sustainable and resilient communities

# 2024 Major Achievements

In 2024, the Mafinga Community Forest Project was showcased at the Mafinga District Agriculture Show and was awarded first prize in the "Most Impactful Community Project" category. This award recognizes initiatives that demonstrate tangible benefits to local communities through sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation, and inclusive development. The project's integrated approach to forest restoration, climate-smart agriculture, and community empowerment stood out among district-level entries, reflecting its growing visibility and stakeholder support.

This photo shows community members gathered around a manual honey press, extracting honey from the combs. The individuals, mostly women, are seen working together, showcasing the community's involvement in sustainable beekeeping practices. The simple yet vibrant setting highlights the blend of traditional and sustainable livelihoods.

# 2024 activity update



**Improved forest governance and stewardship**

- **8 Honorary Forest Officers** (HFOs) conducted 60 man-days of patrols in Mwita CFA, with two forest offences recorded.

**Restoring and conserving at-risk forests**

- **91 hectares** of forest were brought into the conservation zone.
- **12,500 tree seedlings** were planted for livelihood improvement.

**Introducing forest-friendly livelihoods**

- Over **700 school children** and community members attended the commemoration of World Environment Day spearheaded by WECSZ, and attended by senior district government officers and traditional leadership including 24 Headmen.
- **260kg of honey** was harvested from 40 beehives and sold locally, generating US$603.95, the first harvest from the beekeeping scheme.
- The **50 farmers** that received 250 Gliricidia trees each in 2022 have successfully maintained them on their farmland for maize intercropping.
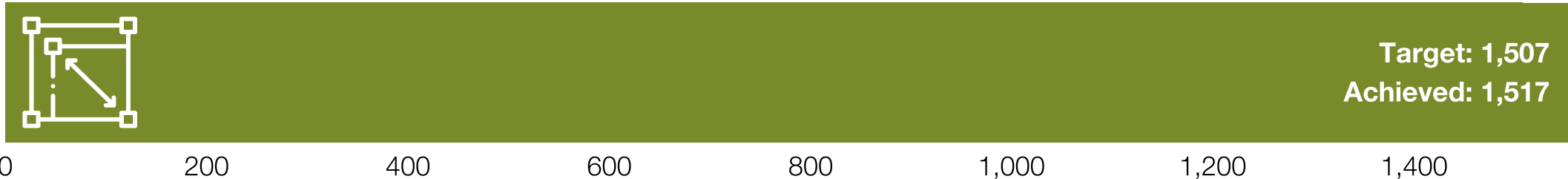
# Progress tracker

**2021** **2025**

**Anticipated CO2 sequestered in the future from project activities**

Target: 252,724
Achieved: 253,010

0    50,000    100,000    150,000    200,000    250,000

**Hectares planted, conserved and restored**

Target: 1,507
Achieved: 1,517

0    200    400    600    800    1,000    1,200    1,400

**Number of trees conserved and restored**

Target: 1,627,560
Achieved: 1,628,068

0    500,000    1,000,000    1,500,000

**Number of households positively impacted**

Target: 300
Achieved: 300

0    50    100    150    200    250    300

**Trees planted to date**

Total: 25,525

**Woody species in project to date**

18    1

Total: 19
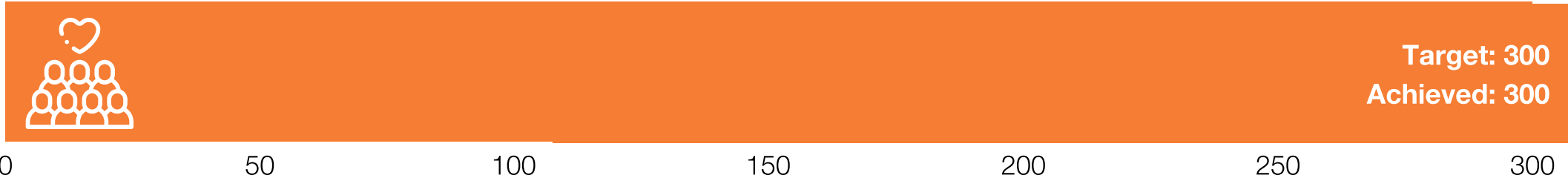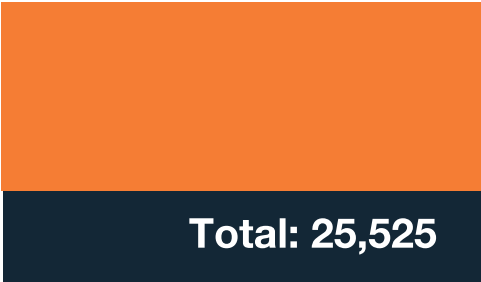
**Mammal species sighted**

17

■ For forest conservation and restoration    ■ For forest-friendly livelihoods

## ⚠️ 2024 Challenges

The beekeeping scheme in Mwita CFA, within the Mafinga Hills landscape, highlighted both promising developments and key challenges in 2024. The initiative, involving 50 households, recorded a 6% increase in annual honey revenues, demonstrating its potential to enhance local livelihoods while promoting forest conservation. However, production remained significantly below target due to logistical and environmental constraints.

Only 260 kg of honey was harvested from 40 active beehives, averaging 6.5 kg per hive, well short of the annual target of 3,850 kg. Heavy rainfall and difficult site accessibility limited hive monitoring and harvesting. Although 520 out of 550 distributed beehives remain in good condition, the low occupation rate of 20% underscores persistent challenges in establishing and sustaining bee colonies.

These results underline the importance of timely hive management, improved site access, and adaptive practices in response to weather variability. Moving forward, the project aims to strengthen infrastructure, enhance technical support, and improve market linkages to increase productivity and reinforce the Mwita Community Forest Management Group's role in the broader Mafinga Hills restoration efforts.

## ›› Looking ahead to 2025

With the first phase of the project drawing to a close in 2025, there is now a window for extensive collaboration in the landscape and potential for scaling up. Most of the key stakeholders in the landscape, including the District Administration, have shown confidence in the project to achieve its goals. This will be further explored in 2025.

The government is implementing a GEF-funded project through WWF Zambia covering the whole landscape of Mafinga and preliminary engagements with WWF Zambia have taken place to discuss the possibility of incorporating the Mafinga Project into the wider GEF Project at the end of 2025.

# Supporters & Partners

## 2024 project partners

**WECSZ** led the implementation of the project, while WeForest provides technical and financial support.

**Department of Agriculture** supported the project on honey processing and visibility, provided equipment and training.

**Forestry Department** supported the project through organising commemorations for notable World Days, provided oversight and training for the Honorary Forest Officers.

### With thanks to our supporters in 2024, including:

**Brambles**

**wex**™

## Contact us

Visti **www.weforest.org** or for more information or email: **contact@weforest.org**

Mafinga Hills Community Forest Project

# How we measure and forecast our impact

## Baseline

For the sake of simplicity, the progress bars in this report show a baseline of zero. This represents the concept that the area covered by WeForest forest and landscape restoration (FLR) activities was zero; thus the associated trees conserved and restored, carbon stored and households impacted through WeForest intervention was also zero.

In reality, when a WeForest project begins, our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team undertakes a detailed survey on forest structure and regeneration through establishing Permanent Monitoring Plots, and conducts an extensive questionnaire on livelihoods, to establish meaningful baseline values. You can read more about our full MEL activities here.

## Hectares planted, conserved and restored

### Progress up to 2024
Verifiable cumulative total since the project began of all mapped intervention sites, also known as polygons, of:
**1)** Conservation forest areas, such as forest reserves
**2)** Restoration forest areas, such as Assisted Natural Regeneration and planting areas
**3)** Agroforestry areas on community/farm land

### End of Project Target
Target number based on the potential area of land able to be conserved, restored and planted in the project area under the known and expected conditions at project start. However, it is subject to change based on unforeseen opportunities or challenges that may arise.

## Anticipated tons of CO2 to be sequestered through project activities

### Progress up to 2024
Extrapolated tons of CO2 calculated from the measured areas of different types of land use (for example forest or agroforestry) under "Hectares of forest planted, conserved and restored" to date, and the average amount of projected long-term CO2 per hectare provided from literature review for each land use type in their locations. Although totalled, please note the methodology for calculating these CO2 projections are specific to land-use type, and span a period corresponding to the expected time taken for the trees to reach maturity, which varies between locations.

### End of Project Target
As above, but using the target (and not current) number of hectares planted, restored and conserved and their respective area totals as a parameter for calculations. As this parameter is subject to change, the associated CO2 target may also change over time.

# Number of trees conserved and restored*

**Progress up to 2024**
Extrapolated number of trees calculated from the measured areas of different land use types (for example conservation areas, restoration areas or agroforestry) under "Hectares planted, conserved and restored" to date, and the average tree densities observed for each land-use type when mature, known through our MEL activities or scientific literature.

**End of Project Target**
As above, but using the target (and not current) number of "Hectares of forest planted, restored and conserved" and their respective area totals as a parameter for calculations. As this parameter is subject to change, the associated trees conserved and restored target may also change over time.

*Estimations based on average numbers per hectare

# Trees planted to date (2024)

**Total**
Actual counted number of planted seedlings and saplings of woody (tree and shrub) species in the project to date.

**Trees planted for forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors**
Only woody species directly planted for livelihood improvement. This also includes woody fruit, fodder & timber trees, and woody cash crops, exclusively planted on community or farm land.

**Trees planted for forest conservation and restoration**
Only woody species that were directly planted for ecological reasons, aiding restoration of the natural forest ecosystem.

# Woody species in project to date (2024)

**Total**
Actual observed number of woody (tree and shrub) species:
- Regenerating in the conservation/restoration zones (i.e. in the Permanent Monitoring Plots) and
- Planted, either for restoration or livelihood improvement
- Growing as mature trees in the conservation/restoration zones (i.e. in the permanent monitoring plots).
- Please note, these numbers are not exhaustive and the true species richness is likely to be higher.

**Tree species for forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors**
Only woody species directly planted for livelihood improvement. This also includes woody fruit, fodder and timber trees, and woody cash crops, exclusively planted on community or farm land.

**Tree species for forest conservation and restoration**
The woody species observed in the project area that are not used for livelihood improvement purposes. Where species are used for both livelihood improvement and restoration (which is sometimes the case, as we use native species as much as possible), they have been counted under 'forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors'.

# Terminology

**Conservation**
Where native forest canopy cover is still intact, we focus on protecting the forest from any threats and disturbances, such as overgrazing, unsustainable wood extraction and fire.

**Restoration**
Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR): Where there is reduced forest cover but high potential for natural regeneration, we aim to accelerate natural recovery, typically through preventing soil degradation, reducing competition with weeds, and protecting young trees.

**Tree planting**
Where there is reduced forest cover and little regeneration potential, we actively plant native trees at a density that corresponds with the regeneration potential.

**Agroforestry and tree crops**
Where agricultural landscapes exist, WeForest promotes the planting of trees for livelihood improvement. These trees can be used either for direct consumption or sale (fruits, timber, fuelwood) or to support other crops or livestock (agroforestry). Native tree species are prioritized but, where necessary, non-native species may be used.

# Mammal and bird species sighted to date

Numbers are included where we have a good level of biological monitoring, for example using camera traps or audio devices - please note that numbers are unlikely to capture the full species richness of the project area and that the absence of reporting does not imply the absence of species.

# Other notes

WeForest works in close cooperation with local partner organisations, institutions, community-based organizations and local people. Therefore, our impact can never be fully separated from the work of our partners. WeForest acknowledges that the presented impact numbers cannot be solely attributed to our work, but is also supported through the hard work contributed by all our local partners.