

The Word Forest Organisation

Everybody Benefits – New Enterprise Award

Describe the work of the charity organisation being nominated

Launched in April 2017 by environmentalists, Tracey and Simon West, Word Forest has planted well over 70,000 trees, helped build 14 classrooms and facilitated education in various schools in rural Kenya. The classrooms they build, frequently replace unsafe mud huts and flimsy wooden structures. Positive impacts have been felt by over 4,680 members of the community in a variety of ways, including regular employment for 46 people, adult education for women who never had an opportunity to attend school, and more besides. Word Forest also founded a 40 strong women's empowerment group called Mothers of the Forest. In challenging environmental conditions, the Mothers look after saplings in the nursery, eventually plant them out and nurture them to maturity. They're widely regarded as inspirational within their community. Before the group started, many suffered from social isolation and depression. They've created a supportive sisterhood and are going from strength to strength. They meet twice a month at a community centre Word Forest helped build. They share best practice for looking after the forests and enjoy a nutritious meal with fresh fruit and safe, clean water; a rarity in their world. They're also paid to plant saplings on their shambas (homesteads). Everyone at Word Forest believes the best way to ensure the health, well-being and protection of these fast-growing forests to mitigate climate chaos, is by applying an holistic approach, and investing in the communities who are tending the trees, in a variety of ways. Word Forest are based in Lyme Regis and are just unrolling their Tree-Mend-Us Project, planting over 3,700 trees around Lyme, one for every resident. CEO Tracey is the only full time member of staff on £10 per hour (their constitution states salaries won't exceed twice the living wage) and they have a handful of amazing trustees and volunteers.

Give examples of the projects or work the organisation has done

The Mothers of the Forest have also benefited from education. In February 2018, they were given a sewing machine and a local seamstress taught them how to make washable sanitary pads, the likes of which they'd never seen before. There are no disposable options or flushing toilets in the bush and many girls and women used to deal with a period by staying home for a week. Now, they have liberty, freedom and dignity. It has lifted their spirits to no end. Additionally, in February 2019, after identifying the fact that most of the Mothers were illiterate and couldn't count because they never had an opportunity to go to school, Word Forest employed local tutor, Michael Jefwa, to come early to their twice monthly meetings to deliver one hour of Kiswahili and English, and one hour of mathematics. A few months later, they took their first ever exams and passed with flying colours. The net result is they're able to really lift themselves out of poverty, as they can sell excess abundance from the forest at market, because they know how to count a money exchange. Right now, they're receiving training on permaculture.

What has been the impact of the organisation's projects or work?

Word Forest has planted well over 70,000 trees, most of which they have the precise GPS coordinates for. Once trees are planted, well embedded and nicely established, Project Manager, Alex Katana collects the GPS on his Garmin. This gives donors high security in the knowledge that their trees are in good health and if any die, for any reason, they are replanted. In five to seven years, those trees will have absorbed over 17,500 tonnes of CO2 and other pollutants from the

atmosphere, subsequently cleaning the air we breathe all over the world. Because of their position on the planet, just three degrees south of the equator, these are some of the fastest growing forests on the planet. They grow up to ten times faster than anywhere else and are mitigating climate change at a pace. The forests provide safe habitats for creatures who are returning for the first time in decades: dik-dik (the smallest of the antelope family), critically endangered Clarke's weaver birds, guinea fowl and more; recently, there was a herd of seven elephants, not seen here for over 40 years. Commodities from the forest are alleviating poverty and hunger, reducing the number of people making illegal charcoal, or turning to child prostitution to survive (this is an all too common backstop) but it is reducing. The trees also act as wind and weather breaks, assisting attempts to grow small cash crops via agroforestry. Recent lessons in permaculture design are helping the community understand how to attain food and water security via irrigation, composting and vermiculture. Thousands of students have conducive places to learn in cool classrooms. John Kadenge, Headmaster of Kundeni Primary, reported exam results have increased by 14 percentage points across the board since they had three classrooms built. Teachers have fewer sore throats, as they don't have to shout to teach in open spaces. This multifaceted education is having a profoundly positive effect on the whole community. It's reinforcing the necessity for them to take care of the forests by instilling a palpable sense of excitement, ownership and responsibility. Despite the fact that many schools have zero resources, completely undeterred, many have set up wildlife clubs to observe and learn from the forests. Word Forest's mission is to attract new funding streams that replicate their work throughout Kenya. It's hoped their forthcoming documentary #TreesAreTheKey narrated by Kate Winslet, will do just that: see TreesAreTheKey.com.

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