



The Kasiisi project

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



WWW.KASIISIPROJECT.ORG

JOINT MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP



Dear Friends,

Thank you for reading our 2023 annual report. With Founder Elizabeth Ross's retirement as Executive Director, this has been a year of transition for the Kasiisi Project and Kibale Forest Schools Program. We are committed to carrying forward the project's incredible 27-year legacy and feel honored to help lead our organizations into this next exciting chapter. An important effort in 2023 was to begin

evaluating the project's historical impact in order to build on past successes and inform the path forward. We are excited to pull together these data and work with our expert team, boards, and community leadership to create a renewed strategy in 2024 to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of Kibale-area youth and communities and maximize our impact in the years ahead.

In addition to looking forward in 2023, we also continued to do what we do best, which is to holistically support our partner schools with education, health, and conservation education programming. Many of our programs are still getting up to speed after the two-year break from in-person learning caused by the pandemic. However, we made great gains this year across our three strategies and also began to add in new evaluation components, such as the end-of-year student showcase, that helped us to gauge how different schools are faring with the programs. In addition to the core programming we delivered, we are proud of our continued emphasis on research that is helping us in various ways such as understanding how to most effectively deliver our education programming and how to implement conservation solutions to pressing issues facing Kibale such as crop-raiding of community farms by elephants and disease transfer from humans to chimpanzees. We look forward to building on all this work next year then aligning it with our new strategic plan.

We appreciate our hard-working team and their deep love for what we do, which is one of the key ingredients to our success. Another one is our committed supporters who give year after year to make all of this work possible. A big thank you from all of us for your continued support and partnership in 2023.

Sonya Kahlenberg, PhD, Executive Director, The Kasiisi Project
Emily Otali, PhD, Country Director, Kibale Forest Schools Program
Patrick Tusiime, Director, Kibale Forest Schools Program

MESSAGE FROM FOUNDER



2023 has been a transformative year both for the Kasiisi Project and for me. After 26 years I have retired as Executive Director and have happily placed the running of the project in the capable hands of our new ED, Sonya Kahlenberg. With stories of the challenges for programs moving from founder-led organizations ringing in my ears it has been, for me, an unexpectedly smooth transition. As well as coming to us with wonderful credentials and years of experience in the conservation field, Sonya is also an old friend. She did her PhD on chimpanzee behaviour in Kibale National

Park and served as our past Assistant Director and on our U.S. Board. She has extensive familiarity with local culture and our team in Uganda and is, in short, the ideal person to work with our Ugandan leadership as we enter this new era for the project. I am so grateful for her patience and understanding as we negotiate this extremely important change.

My other move has been to succeed Terry Eastman as Chair of the U.S. Board of Directors. Terry has done sterling work for the project for many years and has led us through some very tough times. We are eternally grateful for her wise leadership and for managing to carve time out of a very busy life to bring us to a place where we are ready for the next leap forward.

In 2024, Sonya and I will be digging into 27 years of data and working together to evaluate the long-term impact of our programs which we look forward to sharing with you, our loyal supporters. None of this would have been possible without you. Our gratitude knows no bounds!

Thank you!

Elizabeth Ross, PhD,
Founder and Board Chair (elected 2024)

THE NEED

Nestled in the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains in western Uganda, Kibale National Park is one of the last mid-altitude rainforests remaining in East Africa. Renowned for its remarkable biodiversity and conservation value, Kibale has the highest diversity and density of primates in the region, including Uganda’s largest population of endangered chimpanzees. The fate of this magnificent forest and its wildlife is inextricably linked with the future of its people, a connection that hangs in the balance as the human population around the park continues to grow.

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with nearly half of its citizens being under 15. Thus, young people will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of Uganda’s natural heritage, including Kibale National Park. However, youth residing in rural regions, such as those around Kibale, confront formidable challenges that impede their futures. Foremost among these is the pervasive lack of access to high-quality education.



The Kasiisi Project was founded in 1997 as an extension of the Kibale Chimpanzee Project, aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for children residing along the densely populated western border of Kibale. Initially focused on improving infrastructure of existing schools, the effort quickly transitioned into comprehensive support, ensuring schools could provide the highest quality education for their students. The Kasiisi Project focuses on three strategic pillars – **Education, Health, and Conservation**– to strengthen schools and create a new generation of Ugandan conservationists. Through our Ugandan NGO, the Kibale Forest Schools Program (KFSP), The Kasiisi Project now partners with 16 primary schools, impacting on average 9,200 children each year.



EDUCATION

Ensure access to a quality education so children can reach their full potential

- Infrastructure improvements
- Teacher support
- Libraries and literacy
- Scholarships and student awards



HEALTH

Provide services and education to keep kids in school and promote healthy living, with a special focus on the needs of girls

- Health education
- Menstrual support
- Student vaccinations
- Peer educator, village health worker, and parent training
- One Health research



CONSERVATION

Instill a lifelong appreciation for wildlife and nature and a strong conservation ethic

- Conservation education
- Student and teacher field trips
- Conservation research
- Application of conservation solutions

OUR MISSION

To conserve Kibale National Park through programs that support education, health and care for the environment.

WHERE WE WORK

Kibale National Park, Uganda (795 km²) sits within the Albertine Rift, one of Africa's most biodiverse regions and a hotspot for global conservation. Kibale is designated as a Key Biodiversity Area and an Important Bird Area. Its forest also serves as a significant carbon sink, thus playing a critical role in reducing the impacts of climate change.

 13 PRIMATE SPECIES

 1,450 CHIMPANZEES

 400 ELEPHANTS

 339 BIRD SPECIES

 350 TREE SPECIES



 KASIISI PROJECT SCHOOLS





“Kasiisi Project’s contributions to the transformation of this society are obvious. You have provided hope and quality education to many who would not have been able to afford it. This unwavering support for our schools is invaluable.”

-Moses Musinguzi,
Head Teacher, Kasiisi Primary School

OUR REACH AND IMPACT

OUR REACH AND IMPACT

Going on 27 years, The Kasiisi Project is one of the longest-running educational support projects affiliated with a protected area.

OUR YEARLY REACH

16

Primary Schools

170

Communities

9K

Primary Students
(ages 4-14)

20-30K

Community Members

45

Post-Primary Scholarships

1.7K

Student Club Members

250

Teachers

OUR IMPACT



Top-performing
Schools



Excelling Girls



Student Commitment
to Conservation



Community
Trust



Community
Leadership



Thriving
Forest

HOME-GROWN AND COMMUNITY-LED

One of the strongest indicators of our success is KFSP's talented, all-Ugandan team, the majority of whom were born and raised in the Kibale region. Many team members even benefitted from our programs as students. The team's reinvestment in their community is a source of great pride and helps fuel our work.

We are also proud to have an Executive Committee made up of 10 community leaders who volunteer their time to advise KFSP. This key relationship helps ensure community input into our programming and a strong partnership with schools, parents, and the community at large.



I am living proof of the remarkable influence KFSP has had in my community. I feel incredibly lucky to now be fulfilling my dream of contributing to my community and the protection of Kibale National Park"

— Tusiime Patrick, KFSP Director

KFSP Director Tusiime Patrick grew up in Kanyawara village near the Kibale border and is a former Kasiisi Project scholarship recipient. He is a medical clinician by training and is now working on a Master's degree in One Health from University of Edinburgh in Scotland. In 2023, Patrick was recognized as a National Geographic Explorer for his outstanding work that combines conservation and health. In 2024, Patrick is leading our storytelling and handwashing projects as well as overseeing all health programming and day-to-day operations of KFSP.

“There are so many programs affiliated with this mighty project! I will always be grateful to be part of its success.”

— Mutasi Francis, Kasiisi Primary School parent and member of the KFSP Executive Committee





Scholarships

Even when students in our rural area do well in primary school, their education is at risk because many families cannot afford the steep costs of a good secondary education. Thus, for around 75% of kids, their educational journeys end after primary school, limiting their future options. Girls out of school are also at risk for early marriage. Our scholarship program offers high-achieving students 100% paid tuition to the best boarding secondary schools in the area and supports students as they pursue advanced education, whether technical training, university, or professional schools. To date, 160 students have benefitted from this program, and for most, it has been life changing. In 2023, we were able to offer scholarships to 37 students (65% girls). This year's graduates received certifications and degrees in engineering, pharmacy, and medicine.

EDUCATION

2023 Key Outcomes

37

High-achieving students attended secondary school, university, technical or professional colleges of their choice tuition free.

5

Students received cash awards to assist with their education, including girls excelling in math and science and the top-performing scholarship student.



The Kasiisi Project scholarship was an amazing blessing to my family. It restored hope and fulfilled my dreams beyond my imagination.

-Dr. Hope Proscovia, Scholarship recipient and 2023 graduate from medical school at Kampala International University

Former Scholar Recognized by Ugandan President



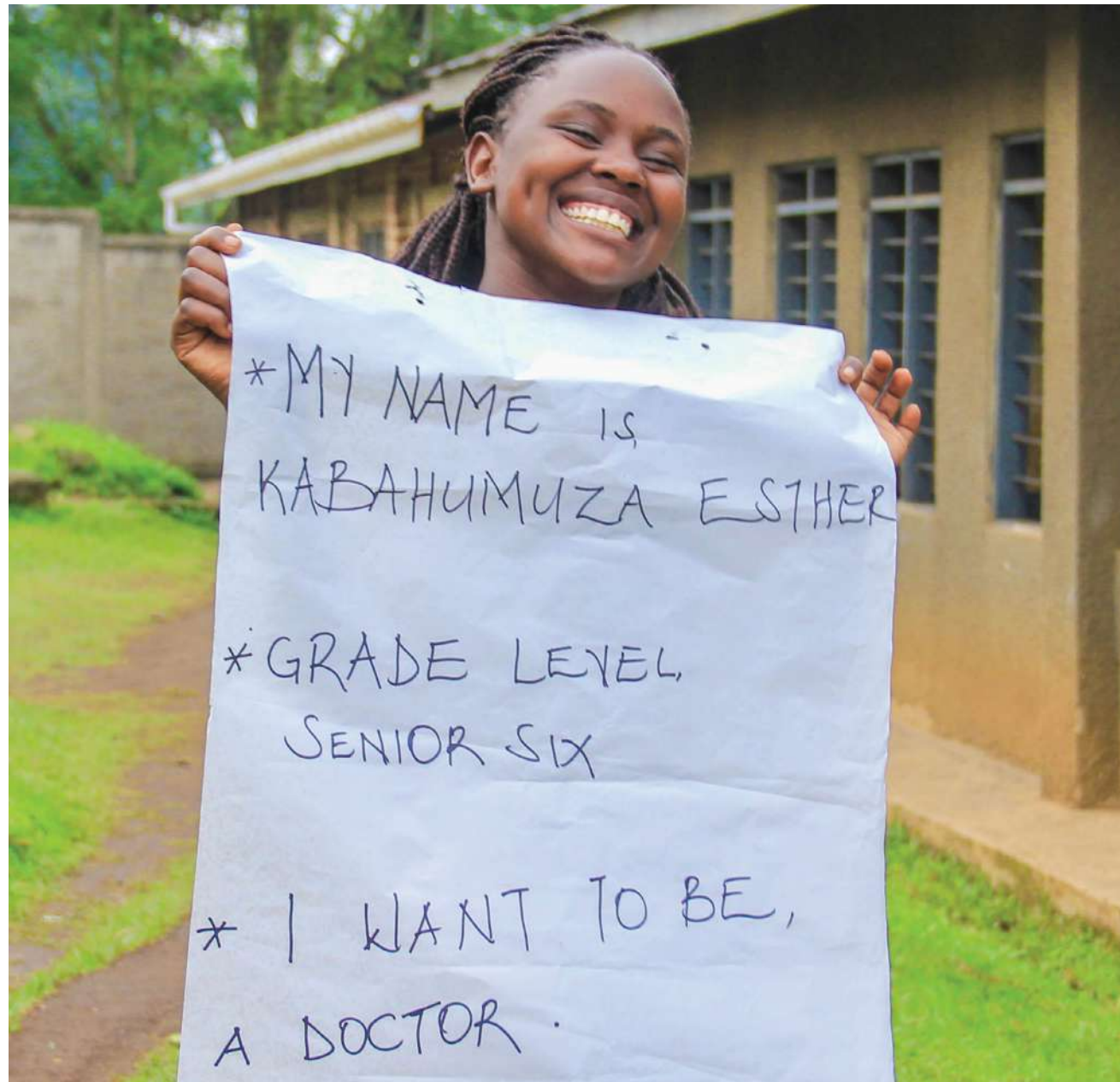
Imelda Imetur grew up with a single mom who struggled to make ends meet. Imelda excelled at school and earned a Kasiisi Project scholarship, which allowed her to get a good secondary education. She went on to gain a certificate in tourism and a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy. Imelda is now an Assistant Team Leader for the Uganda Wildlife Authority with expertise in K9 handling to detect illegally smuggled wildlife products like ivory. In 2023, Imelda was recognized along with 9 other conservationists by the President of Uganda for her outstanding conservation work and was awarded the prestigious Diamond Jubilee Medal of Honor.

I am forever grateful to Kasiisi Project for being a family I could count on. I found my purpose through their education program that was birthed by a love for conservation."

- Imetur Imelda

Student Awards

Since 2016, in collaboration with the African Opportunity Foundation (AOF), we have awarded annual cash prizes to the two Kabarole District girls with the highest marks in math and sciences on the Grades 10 and 12 public exams. In 2023, we also extended the award to top-performing girls on the Primary Leaving Exam. The aim is to encourage more girls to pursue STEM fields, as women continue to be significantly underrepresented in STEM, particularly in Africa. This Goodhart Prize is named for the late Brad Goodhart, a Board Member of AOF who was passionate about STEM education and helped orphaned girls in East Africa. In addition to the Goodhart Prize, we also awarded a cash prize to the top-performing student in our scholarship program.





Health Clubs and Girls Support

Our after-school Health Clubs work to keep kids healthy and in school by providing needed skills and targeted education to encourage healthy behaviors, with a special focus on girls issues. Our signature health program trains club members to make reusable menstrual pads (RUMPs), a skill that is critical since many adolescent girls lack access to reliable hygiene products during their periods, making it difficult to stay in school. Both boys and girls receive this training alongside our puberty and reproductive health education. Because all children benefit from health education but space in our clubs is limited, we also train peer educators (2 boys and 2 girls per school), teachers, club leaders, and village health volunteers to be resources about health information for students.

HEALTH

2023 Key Outcomes

800

students equipped with new skills to make reusable menstrual pads

3

year study completed and link discovered between pediatric respiratory outbreaks in schools and in wild ape populations in Uganda, aiding future conservation efforts

1.2K

adolescent girls protected against HPV and tetanus

240

peer educators, teachers, club leaders, and village health workers trained to support student health needs

700

people from rural villages received medical services through our mobile clinic



Why Focus on Girls?



Up to 80% of girls in rural Uganda do not finish their primary education. As a result, Uganda has a high teen pregnancy rate (25%); girls and women are disproportionately infected by HIV; and Uganda has one of the highest maternal death rates in the world. Educated girls tend to be healthier, marry at a later age, have fewer children, healthier families, earn more and reinvest in their communities. Education reduces vulnerabilities and allows girls the opportunity to reach their full potential.

In 2023, we enrolled 620 Health Club members across 16 schools and trained 64 peer educators, 32 teachers, 64 Boy Scout and Girl Guide representatives, and 80 Village Health Team volunteers. Our RUMPs trainings directly reached more than 800 people in 2023 and these skills were further demonstrated to more than 6,000 others. Clubs also taught lessons on many topics including nutrition, permagardening, and handwashing. Our health team also coordinated with health workers to ensure students had access to available government vaccines, which often do not reach rural areas. This resulted in 1,239 girls getting vaccinated against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and tetanus.

What Girls Say about RUMPs

In 2023, we surveyed 437 girls who were trained to make RUMPs in our Health Clubs and here is what they said:

95%

would recommend RUMPs to other girls

78%

agreed RUMPs were affordable and easy to make

70%

taught others how to make RUMPs after learning the skill in their Health Clubs, and they taught their sisters (47%), friends (29%), mothers (19%), and aunts (5%)

99%

felt there was a need for more RUMPs training in their school

Mobile Clinic

In collaboration with local clinics and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority, our health team run a mobile health clinic that offers affordable medical services to remote villages around Kibale that lack health care access. Although outside our school health strategy, we prioritize this community service because we have trained medical personnel on staff, there is a great need, and it ties in with our conservation strategy. At every mobile clinic, our conservation educators deliver programming to waiting patients and their families, which greatly increases our reach. Topics important to forest-edge communities are discussed, such as conflict with elephants. Our district has the second highest HIV infection rate in Uganda, so testing and counseling is an especially critical service offered by the mobile clinic.

In 2023, our mobile clinic reached 5 villages and treated nearly 688 people, the majority (64%) of whom were women. In addition to HIV/STD services, the mobile clinic also offered general medical check-ups, gynaecological and obstetric care, and basic family planning services.



Research

In 2023, we completed data and sample collection for our three-year Healthy Children, Healthy Apes research project, which was funded by the Arcus Foundation and involved Kibale Chimpanzee Project, Kibale Ecohealth Project, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and three other collaborating great ape research sites in Uganda. Results showed that respiratory outbreaks in schools are linked to potentially fatal respiratory outbreaks in the Kibale wild chimpanzee population. Additionally, at all ape sites, respiratory diseases known to cause outbreaks in apes were found circulating in people living near the ape habitats. Human respiratory diseases are a leading cause of death in great apes and little is known about how viruses are transmitted from humans, so this work is important. Three scientific publications about these important findings are in progress and a recent high-profile article appeared in *Nature*.



Kids show what they know

Health and wildlife clubs hosted end-of-year showcases for parents, teachers, and community members to demonstrate what they learned throughout the year and to encourage implementation of these initiatives in homes and communities. Across our schools, more than 2,000 parents and 7,000 pupils attended the showcases. These demonstrations are also used to evaluate schools and clubs to name top-performers of 2023 for our programs.





Wildlife Clubs

Our after-school Wildlife Clubs teach about Kibale wildlife and provide hands-on activities to encourage learning and conservation leadership in members. In 2023, we enrolled 640 members and, complementing our research initiatives, our curriculum focused on pollinators and elephants. Students also established tree nurseries at their schools to grow a species that is an important source of food for chimpanzees and traditional medicine for people. Club members led celebrations in their schools to commemorate World Chimpanzee Day (Jul. 14) and World Elephant Day (Aug. 21).

Our multi-year research project funded by the International Elephant Foundation continued in 2023 on student "influencers". Students from 6 schools anonymously selected peers who are considered to have the most social influence and, in 2024, these students will participate in an immersive elephant educational experience, including a field trip to see wild elephants. This initiative is part of our research project investigating the most effective way to deliver conservation education messaging.

Storytelling

In 2023, we launched an exciting multi-year storytelling project funded by National Geographic. Students from Kanyawara Primary School were trained on interviewing methods and have begun interviewing elders in their village, which is close to the park boundary, about how Kibale has changed over the last 60+ years. This project was inspired by National Public Radio's StoryCorps methodology and tests student interviews as a conservation education tool and a way to connect kids with their elders.

CONSERVATION

2023 Key Outcomes

4

films produced in conservation storytelling initiative, connecting students with elders to understand how Kibale National Park has changed over time

591

beehives monitored and research advanced to test efficacy of hives as a solution for human-elephant conflict



“Being 5 meters away from the park boundary, my land is heavily affected by elephants. We were previously provided with hives by the park but had little knowledge in beekeeping and our bees were always weak. Kasiisi Project helped us monitor hive health and keep the queen strong. We now experience less elephant incursions compared to before.”

—Turyamushanga Jack, Chairperson Nyabinyugu Beekeepers for Elephant Protection Group



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS : CONSERVATION

Research on Bees and Elephants

Elephants are a key part of the Kibale success story as their numbers have steadily increased over the past few decades. However, more elephants mean more elephant incursions into local farms outside of the park, which can cause devastating damage to crops and create tension between farmers and the park. Dug trenches between forest and community land are generally effective at deterring elephants, but in some wet areas of Kibale, trenches are not possible. Thanks to a grant from the Disney Conservation Fund, we have been working to understand whether bees might be a solution to this problem. In other parts of Africa, elephants are known to avoid bees and hives “fences” can serve as an effective way to protect crops. What is unclear is whether this strategy will work in Kibale’s forested environment.

In 2023, in collaboration with 10 apiaries, we conducted beekeeper trainings and collected weekly data from 591 hives, which we used to develop an index of hive health. We also set up rainfall monitoring, as our working hypothesis is that hive health is impacted by the heavy amounts of rain in our region. This will inform beekeeper-led interventions, such as hive food supplementation. We also set up a system of elephant incursion monitoring using a network of community informants and launched a curriculum to educate children and adults about elephants and their importance to the park, the crucial role of bees as pollinators and their impact on the local economy, and the potential usefulness of beehives as elephant deterrents. The study will be completed in 2024, but early results suggest that if hives are healthy, they can be effectively deter elephants and protect crops.

Bee Study Stats

34

beekeepers trained on beekeeping best practices and data collection protocols

62

devices installed in hives to collect hourly data on internal hive temperature, humidity, and weight (yielded 447,128 data points)

756

hive checks completed by beekeepers

401

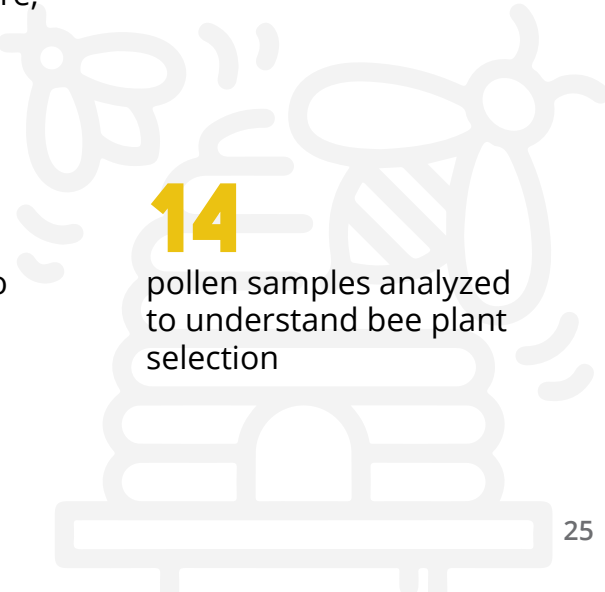
observations collected on iNaturalist of plant species visited by bees to understand available foraging options

47

elephant incursions into farms recorded since Mar 2023

14

pollen samples analyzed to understand bee plant selection





FINANCIALS

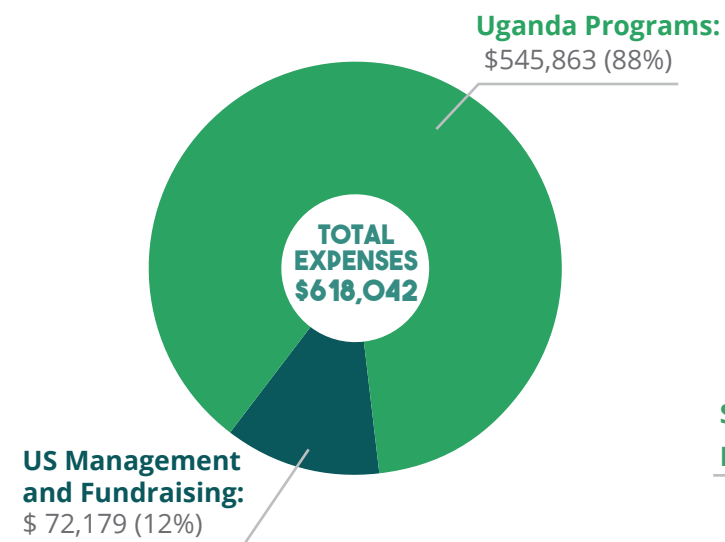
FINANCIALS*

* Exclusive of income and expenditure related to donor travel program

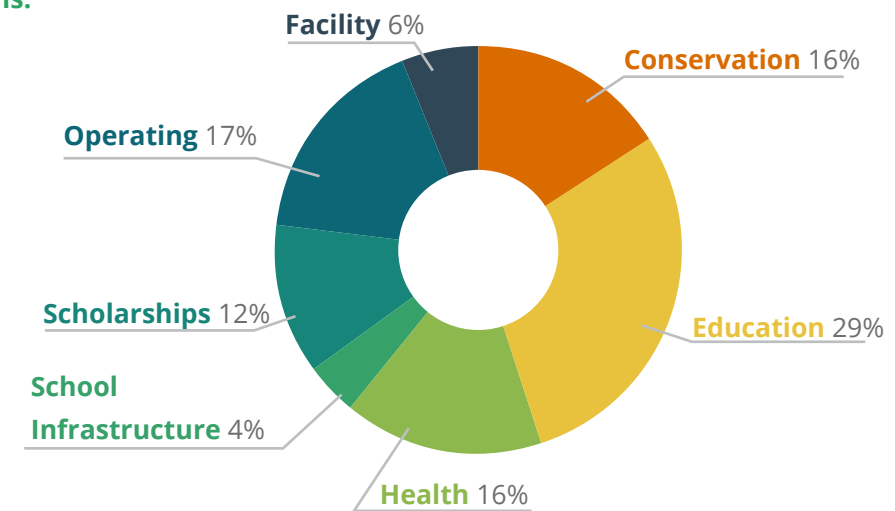
Source of Funds



Use of Funds



Uganda Expenditures



Assets and Liabilities

	Beg. FY23	End FY23
Assets	\$318,690	\$346,610
Liabilities	0	\$1,058
Net Assets	\$318,690	\$345,552



VOLUNTEERS

Kasiisi Project has always benefitted from volunteer support, and 2023 was no exception. For 6 weeks, we hosted our second cohort of Laidlaw Foundation Scholars in Uganda. Nine students from 8 undergraduate institutions in Europe, Asia, and the US, assisted our team by editing and designing curriculum, delivering conservation content to Wildlife Clubs, preparing data for analysis, organizing mobile clinics, and training staff on technology. Volunteers also collected local folklore stories through interviews that will be used in future curriculum projects. Thanks to these students for the wonderful support and cultural exchange. Also, special thanks to our long-term volunteer, Marianne Staniunas, for continuing to oversee our bee program.

“Kasiisi Project’s holistic approach to education, health, and conservation has made a visible and positive difference to the community around Kibale National Park, which is why we have supported them for over 17 years.”

— Debbie and Bob Slotpole, Long-term supporters

VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTERS

SUPPORTERS

The Kasiisi Project’s work is made possible thanks to the support from generous individuals and organizations. Supporting foundations and organizations in 2023 include:



Our work would not be possible without the support of our collaborators in Uganda and around the world:

- Boston College
- Budongo Conservation Field Station
- Bulindi Chimpanzee and Community Project
- Busiriba Beekeepers and Conservation Association
- Church of Uganda, Ruwenzori Diocese
- Conservation through Public Health
- Conservation to Coexist
- Global Giving
- Harvard University
- Kabarole, Kyenjojo, and Bunyangabu District Governments
- Kibale Chimpanzee Project
- Kibale Ecohealth Project
- Laidlaw Foundation
- Makerere University Biological Field Station
- Ndali Lodge
- Tooro Botanical Gardens
- Uganda Wildlife Authority
- UNITE
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Wildlife Clubs of Uganda



STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

Kasiisi Project is a 501(c)(3) non-profit in the U.S. (EIN 54-2195079) and operates as a non-governmental organization in Uganda called the Kibale Forest Schools Program (KFSP). The U.S. organization is the fundraising arm for KFSP.

Kasiisi Project Staff

Sonya Kahlenberg, PhD, Executive Director

KFSP Staff

Emily Otali, PhD, Country Director

Tusiime Patrick, Field Director and Health Program Coordinator

Amanyire James, Accountant

Ategeka Kenneth, Conservation Education Assistant

Ayebale Joshua, Conservation Education Assistant

Kajura Derrick, Conservation Education Coordinator and Community Liaison

Musana Isaac, Health Program Assistant

Nyabutono Gorret, Conservation Education Assistant and Guesthouse Supervisor

Tuhaise Shamilah, Project Nurse and Girls Health Program Coordinator

Turyatunga Vallenge, Farm Team

Tusiime Vincent, Farm Team

Kabarokole Faith, House Staff

Kahunde Jane, House Staff

Mugusa Patrick, Security Team

Nyakahuma Emmanuel, Security Team

Kadona Pasikali, Security Team

Byaruhanga Patrick, Security Team

Musinguzi Christopher, Grounds Staff

Kasiisi Project Board of Directors

Terry Eastman, Chair

Beth Armstrong, Secretary

John Slyconish, Treasurer

Tammie Bettinger, PhD

Zarin Machanda, PhD

Elizabeth Ross, PhD

Sean Rush

Richard Wrangham, PhD

KFSP Board of Directors

Clare Murumba

Emily Otali, PhD

Elizabeth Ross, PhD

Richard Wrangham, PhD

KFSP Executive Committee

Kato Innocent Mwesige, Chair

Mugabe Wilfred, Secretary

Mutonyi Rose, Deputy Secretary

Omeja Patrick, PhD, Treasurer; Chair of Finance and Admin. Sub-Committee

Bigabwa Julius, Chair of Farm and Tourism Sub-Committee

Kemigabo Catherine, Chair of Health and Education Sub-Committee

Magezi Godfrey

Mutasi Francis

Rukidi Sam

Tooro Richard



LOOKING AHEAD

LOOKING AHEAD

Here's a preview of some of our exciting plans for 2024

NEW PROGRAMMING ON CONSERVATION CAREERS TO INSPIRE WILDLIFE CLUBS MEMBERS AND CONNECT THEM TO CONSERVATION ROLE MODELS IN UGANDA

HANDWASHING CAMPAIGN IN SCHOOLS TO COMBAT RESPIRATORY OUTBREAKS LINKED TO CHIMPANZEE MORTALITY

STUDENT FIELD TRIP TO QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK TO SEE WILD ELEPHANTS AS PART OF OUR RESEARCH ON INFLUENCERS

FINALIZATION OF OUR CONSERVATION STORYTELLING PROJECT

A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2025-2028



SUPPORT US

Please follow and support our work in 2024.

DONATE



THANK YOU!

Thanks to Mackenzie Wheatley and Ronan Donavan for the use of their photographs.

The
Kasiisi
project

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