



STEP

**SOUTHERN TANZANIA
ELEPHANT PROGRAM**



2025 Annual Report

Letter from the Director

Dear Partners, Supporters, Employees and Friends,

In 2025, STEP and conservation in Tanzania reached a turning point. The Nyerere–Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor is now the first legally recognised wildlife corridor in the country. This is a historic achievement that was made possible by the trust, partnership, and commitment of communities that have chosen to protect their land for a shared future. At the same time, the early implementation of the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy is already showing what can happen when conservation is based on strong cooperation between people, government, and partners.

We saw real progress on the ground this past year. The patrol coverage across the Udzungwa landscape grew a lot thanks to the hiring and training of rangers and Village Game Scouts. Community-led projects kept getting bigger, and Village Savings and Loan Associations helped families become more resilient and better able to deal with the challenges of living near wildlife. Efforts to reach out, educate, and respond to human-elephant conflict have continued to build trust, make things safer, and help people understand how to live peacefully with elephants. Our monitoring is also showing that elephants and other animals are using the corridor more, which is a good sign.

As we move into 2026, our focus will shift from getting things started to keeping them going for a long time. This is just the beginning of the corridor's legal recognition. How well it works for the people who live near it will determine its success. To keep both ecological connectivity and local support, it will be important to strengthen community governance, make sure people have stable jobs, and make sure land use planning is fair and open to everyone.

The dedication of corridor communities who have set aside land, taken part in protection efforts, and signed conservation agreements shows that lasting conservation is based on trust, partnership, and shared benefits. Our job is to keep supporting these communities so that conservation has real benefits, makes them stronger, and opens up new possibilities.

We wouldn't have made any of this progress without the hard work of our team, the guidance of government institutions, and the ongoing support of our partners and donors. As we move forward, we are still dedicated to strengthening these ties and making sure that conservation in southern Tanzania stays focused on people and has an effect.

Not only are we protecting elephants and ecosystems, but we are also investing in a future where people and animals can live together.

With gratitude,

Frank Lihwa
Executive Director





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Overview of Our Work

Southern-central Tanzania remains a globally important region for elephants, home to 35% of East Africa's elephants, and 7% of the continent's population. The key strongholds are the Ruaha

-Rungwa and Udzungwa-Kilombero-Nyerere ecosystems, connected by corridors, forming a meta-population of around 30,000 individuals. In 2009, numbers were more than doubled before

RUAHA-RUNGWA

- Over 45,000 km² the ecosystem contains seven protected areas: Rungwa, Kizigo and Muhesi Game Reserves, Ruaha National Park, MBOMIPA Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Lunda-Nkwambi Game Controlled Area and Waga WMA.
- Population of 15,600 elephants remained stable in the 2021 TAWIRI census. Ongoing demographic monitoring continues to assess the extent of recovery from poaching.
- The elephants of Ruaha National Park make use of the entire Ruaha-Rungwa landscape, moving into Rungwa-Kizigo-Muhesi Game Reserves in the north and into MBOMIPA WMA and village land in the south—this means the entire ecosystem must be protected.

Key Challenges

- Limited resources to effectively patrol a huge area: inadequate road networks and heavy rains limit efforts, especially in the Game Reserves.
- Limited resources for MBOMIPA WMA on the south-eastern border of the park, a critical wildlife area and buffer to Ruaha National Park.
- Threats include poaching for ivory and bushmeat, illegal logging, charcoaling, mining, and encroachment. Elephant poaching caused a >50% population decline between 2009-2015.
- Human settlement along protected boundaries, in conjunction with a lack of land use planning, has led to more frequent human-elephant interactions, due in part to blockage of elephant corridors.

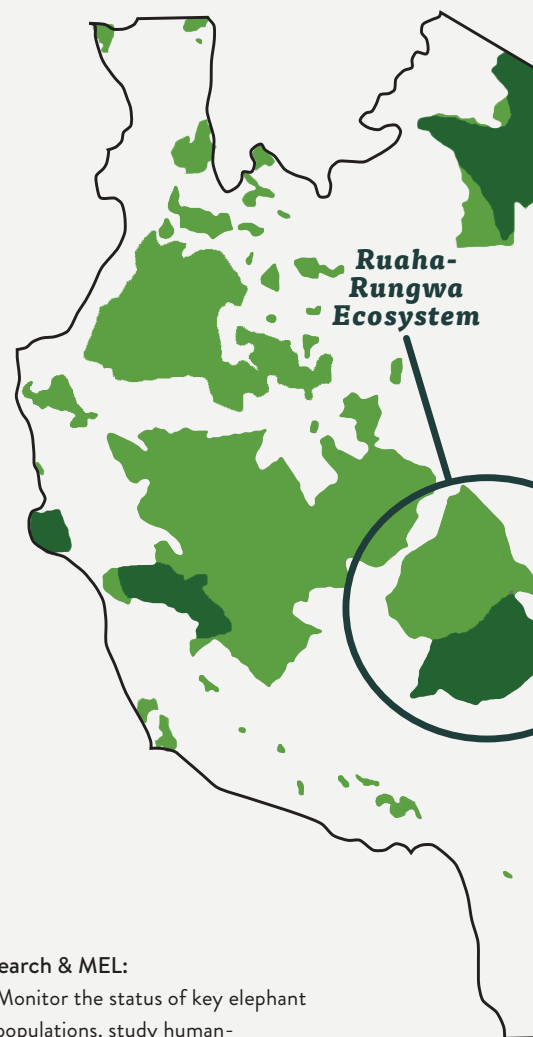
Our Approach:

Protecting Biodiverse Habitats:

- Provide support for the protection of MBOMIPA WMA by supporting Village Game Scout wages, funding patrols, providing training, enhancing governance and conducting aerial patrols.
- Provide support to Rungwa-Kizigo-Muhesi Game Reserves by funding fuel for regular vehicle patrols, providing training in GPS, GIS and camera trapping and conducting aerial patrols in conjunction with ground teams.

Coexistence and Livelihoods:

- Conduct education and awareness-raising activities in villages affected by human-elephant conflict to explain elephant behaviour, provide context for human-elephant interactions and teach communities how to stay safe around elephants, via both large-scale events and one-on-one training by Local Elephant Monitors.
- Operate Village Savings and Loan Associations that provide access to credit during critical periods as well as a way to save money throughout the year. Members receive a share out at the end of a savings cycle from interest paid on loans.
- Understand the drivers of human-elephant conflict and work towards land use planning, facilitating human-elephant coexistence.
- Provide fuel support to ranger teams to assist communities with crop protection.



Research & MEL:

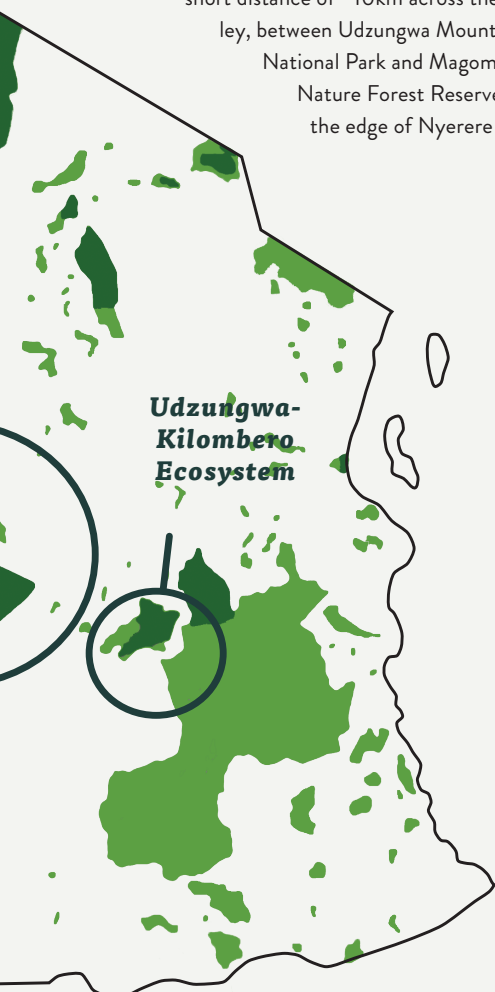
- Monitor the status of key elephant populations, study human-elephant interactions on village land, and evaluate interventions aimed at improving human-elephant coexistence.

devastating declines from poaching for the ivory trade. STEP works to conserve this important population through a landscape level approach. We provide prioritized and targeted support to communities, protected areas and government

to ensure these ecosystems can continue to support these vital elephant populations while also meeting the needs of neighbouring human communities.

UDZUNGWA-KILOMBERO

- The Kilombero Valley, in the Udzungwa-Kilombero ecosystem, is a densely populated, fertile matrix of villages, agriculture and grazing land. Elephants regularly attempt to cross the short distance of ~10km across the valley, between Udzungwa Mountains National Park and Magombera Nature Forest Reserve on the edge of Nyerere



National Park (formerly part of Selous Game Reserve). Less than 50 years ago, there was continuous forest across the valley: today, the forest has been fragmented by rapid land conversion due to agriculture. The route is a critical connection between the western and southern elephant metapopulations of Tanzania and the only link that can be maintained and restored.

This area includes:

- Udzungwa Mountains National Park
- Magombera Nature Forest Reserve
- Nyerere National Park
- Udzungwa Scarp Nature Forest Reserve
- Kilombero Nature Forest Reserve
- Population of 20,000 elephants estimated for Selous-Mikumi in the 2022 TAWIRI census.

Key Challenges:

- The area contains important elephant corridors which link Udzungwa Mountains National Park and Nyerere National Park resulting in frequent elephant presence and movement.
- Intensive agriculture in the valley has created a hard edge between forest and farm land, making farms vulnerable to elephant crop damage.
- Udzungwa's forests are threatened by logging, bushmeat poaching and snaring, and encroachment.

Our Approach

Protecting Biodiverse Habitats:

- Support protection of Udzungwa Mountains National Park, Udzungwa Scarp and

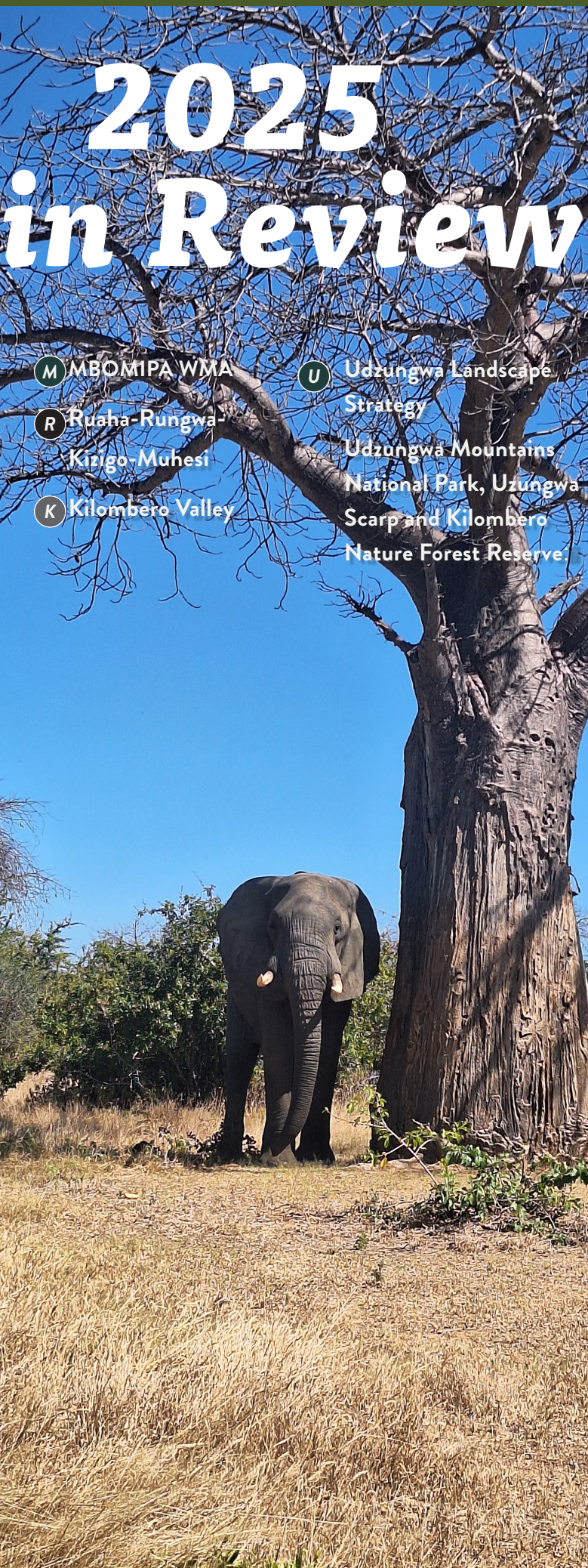
Kilombero Nature Forest Reserves by funding patrols, providing equipment, and facilitating training on GPS and GIS, camera-trapping, human rights, participatory forest management, patrol techniques, reporting, and first aid for rangers and Village Game Scouts. This is being scaled up significantly under the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy

Coexistence and Livelihoods:

- Restore connectivity between Udzungwa and Nyerere through protection and restoration of the Nyerere-Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor.
- Improve farmer livelihoods through beehive fence projects to reduce crop loss to elephants and generate income through honey sales. Provide access to loans through Village Savings and Loan Associations.
- Conduct education and awareness-raising events in villages affected by human-elephant conflict to explain elephant behaviour, provide context for human-elephant interactions and advise communities on how to stay safe around elephants.

Research & MEL:

- STEP's research teams monitor the status of elephant populations, study human-elephant interactions on village land, and evaluate interventions aimed at improving human-elephant coexistence. This work is critical to understanding the status and conservation needs of elephant populations and for planning and evaluating conservation interventions.



M MBOMIPA WMA

R Ruaha-Rungwa-Kizigo-Muhesi

K Kilombero Valley

U Udzungwa Landscape Strategy
Udzungwa Mountains National Park, Uzungwa Scarp and Kilombero Nature Forest Reserve



Protecting Biodiverse Habitats

Aerial Patrols

M R **102** flight hours

Illegal Activity

M U **251** poachers' camps closed

U **1,820** snares removed

U **802** timber cutting sites closed

M R U **87** suspects apprehended

Patrols

M **12,223** km of foot patrols

M R **12,145** km of vehicle patrols

U **6,110** km of foot patrols for forest protection

M R U **1,750** litres of fuel provided

Capacity Building

M U **94** rangers and VGS trained on advanced strategic patrol planning, data management and reporting

U R **5** rangers trained to become licenced conservation drone pilots

U **95** VNRC members trained in forest management, fire prevention and human rights

U **24** new rangers contracted to support patrols

U **3** new patrol vehicles donated

U **6** villages supported with firefighting equipment"



Coexistence & Livelihoods

Reducing Human-Elephant Conflict

10 rangers and VGS trained in safety around elephants & HEC response

121 HEC responses by rangers

5,105 litres of fuel to support HEC response

Building a Foundation for Tolerance and Coexistence Through Outreach and Education

12,037 individuals reached through 1:1 training and household visits

11,999 people reached during 'Tembo and Mitsu Weeks'

20,901 students reached through education program

1 elephant rescued and reunited with its family

80 people hosted through on-site corridor education program

Supporting Livelihoods

3,541 VSLAs loans totalling TZS 1,003,912,250 (\$388,581)

96 operational VSLAs with 3,920 members (57% women)

3,737 chickens vaccinated for Newcastle disease

961 litres of honey harvested

Nyerere-Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor

1 NUWC becomes the 1st Wildlife Corridor to be gazetted in Tanzania

14 km of strategic, solar-powered electric fences built along the corridor

3,013 km of village game scout patrols in the corridor

26 mammal species detected in the corridor



Research and MEL

Monitoring

587 elephant observations for ecological and demographic monitoring, 26% identified against our ID database

20 elephant family groups with detailed histories

228 incidents of elephant crop damage recorded

Corridor Surveys

58 camera traps monitoring the Nyerere-Selous-Udzungwa corridor

>320 walking transects conducted in the Nyerere-Udzungwa corridor

Trials

2.4 km of metal strips fencing

3.5 km of solar lights installed in the strip fencing

4 beehive-fences reinforcement trials, combing beehive fences with metal strips or solar lights

10 improved food stores constructed to keep crops safe from elephants

Capacity Building

3 conference presentations delivered

1 MSc dissertation completed in 2025

18 scientific publications & conference proceedings to date

7 staff trained in MEL

The STEP Story

For elephants, forests and people

VISION: Creating a long and peaceful future for coexistence for the biodiverse ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife of Southern Tanzania, and the communities they inter-depend.

MISSION: To secure a future for elephants in southern Tanzania by supporting elephant protection, enhancing human-elephant coexistence, conducting research and awareness-raising.



Protecting Biodiverse Habitats



Coexistence and Livelihoods



Research & MEL

2014-2015

- STEP founded with 5 members in late 2014
- Aerial support program for Ruaha-Rungwa launched
- Elephant monitoring program in Udzungwa Mountains and Ruaha National Park begins
- Start of ongoing capacity building training program for rangers in GPS and GIS

2016

- Human-elephant coexistence work expanded to Rungwa
- First Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) established in Kilombero
- Expansion of bee-hive fences to two additional villages in Kilombero
- First Local Elephant Monitors engaged

2017

- Launch of the ongoing Udzungwa Scarp Protection Project
- Number of rangers and protection personnel trained in use of GPS units and GIS exceeds 100
- First fuel support for HEC response provided to partners

2018

- Launch of the ongoing MBOMIPA WMA Protection Project
- Efforts to restore the Nyerere-Selous-Udzungwa Corridor begin
- Aerial support program passes 500 hours
- Beehive fence and elephant demography studies published

2019

- Publication of human-elephant coexistence booklet
- First Tembo Cup football tournament
- Number of beehive fences in Kilombero reaches five
- Protection work in MBOMIPA leads to arrest of elephant poaching network

2020

- Human-elephant coexistence work expanded to Doroto village
- Construction of Tanzania's first elephant underpass begins
- Total of 13 Local Elephant Monitors engaged
- STEP's CEO leads development of Tanzania's first national human-wildlife conflict management strategy
- Ongoing recovery of wildlife populations in MBOMIPA WMA

2021

- Expand efforts to strengthen HWC response by rangers through training
- Kilombero Nature Reserve Protection Project begins
- Number of VSLAs established in Rungwa- Doroto reaches 8
- Trials of novel elephant deterrents (smelly repellent, strobe lights) expanded

2022

- STEP Team grows to 50 members
- STEP's new anti-poaching aircraft arrives and begins operations
- Trial of constructing improved food stores begins
- STEP begins conservation agreements for farmers in villages adjacent to the Nyerere-Selous-Udzungwa Corridor

2023

- Lead development of first Landscape Strategy for the Udzungwa Mountains
- Invited to expand aerial support across Ruaha National Park
- Aerial team clocked over 300 hours of anti-poaching patrols in a year
- Started erection of the first electric fence for a wildlife corridor in Tanzania
- 66 VSLA groups now supported, with more than \$87,000 loaned to households during 2023

2024

- Udzungwa Landscape Strategy launched
- 24 additional rangers recruited for joint patrols across Udzungwa
- Government's 90-day community consultation on NSU wildlife corridor completed without objections
- New long-term MoU signed with MBOMIPA WMA, cooperation on protection and HWC support

2025

- 300%+ increase in patrol coverage under the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy
- Coexistence & Livelihood work expanded to 25 new villages under the ULS
- NUWC becomes Tanzania's first legally recognized wildlife corridor
- 103 VSLAs now supported, reaching over 27,000 members
- Inaugural Misitup Cup football tournament hosted, drawing nearly 7,000 spectators
- New publication on elephant deterrent effectiveness in Tropical Conservation Science

Implementing Partners



Ministry of Natural
Resource and Tourism



Tanzania Wildlife
Management Authority



Tanzania Forest
Services Agency



Tanzania National
Parks Authority



Tanzania Wildlife
Research Institute



Community Wildlife
Management Area
Consortium



MBOMIPA Wildlife
Management Area



Kilombero District
Council

NUW Corridor
Management Commit-
tee



Kilolo District Council



Iringa District Council
and Natural Resources
Advisory Board



Manyoni District
Council

Morogoro Regional
Administration

Udzungwa Ecological
Monitoring Centre



Mlimba District
Council



Lion Landscapes



Mazingira Alliance for
Community and Conservation



MJUMITA

Board of Southern Tanzania

Elephant, Tanzania:

Trevor Jones

Josephine Smit

Arafat Mtui

Athumani Mndeme

Richard Phillips

Joseph Olila

Trustees of Southern Tanzania

Elephant Trust, UK

Helen Pearson

Nat Comber

Nick McWilliam

Collaborators



Tanzania Forest
Conservation Group
Shirika la Kuhifadhi
Misitu ya Asili Tanzania
Tanzania Forest
Conservation Group



Kichaka Expeditions
Environmental Program



PAMS Foundation



Protecting Biodiverse Habitats



Aerial Program in MBOMIPA WMA at Lunda Airstrip

MAIN GOALS & FUNCTIONS

Enhance protection efforts of rangers and Village Game Scouts by supporting foot and vehicle patrols

Conduct aerial patrols coordinated with ranger teams to detect and prevent illegal activity

Build the capacity of rangers and Village Game Scouts through training

Provide equipment to increase the effectiveness of law enforcement

Map and analyse patrol outcomes to increase patrol effectiveness



Where We Work

MBOMIPA WMA

- 777 km²
- Comprises land from 21 villages in Iringa Rural District
- The WMA forms a critical buffer zone to the south-east of Ruaha National Park, and is used by one of the largest concentrations of elephants in the ecosystem

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-LED PROTECTION OF MBOMIPA WMA

STEP continued to support community-led protection of the MBOMIPA Wildlife Management Area through Village Game Scout (VGS) patrols. In 2025, 30 VGS received comprehensive refresher training on their roles and responsibilities, human rights, and the code of conduct, strengthening their ability to conduct lawful enforcement, protect themselves, and engage appropriately with communities.

During the year, scouts covered 12,223 km on foot and 5,725 km by vehicle, recording all patrols using handheld GPS units and the EarthRanger mobile application. Patrols resulted in the apprehension of 38 suspects, dismantling of 57 poaching camps, and removal of 34 wire snares. Only one elephant was poached in MBOMIPA WMA in 2025, compared to zero in 2023 and 2024, and a marked improvement from nine elephant poaching incidents in 2022.



Village Game Scouts on patrol in MBOMIPA WMA

STRENGTHENING VGS CAPACITY: POISON RESPONSE AND INTERNATIONAL RANGER FEDERATION TRAINING

In 2025, STEP partnered with The Peregrine Fund to support Tanzania's Vulture Conservation and Management Plan by delivering a two-day poison response training to 23 VGS (17% women) in MBOMIPA WMA. Participants learned about vulture species, drivers of poisoning including bushmeat hunting and retaliatory killings and safe response protocols. Practical sessions covered area search procedures, incident reporting, handling sick vultures, sampling of carcasses, and safe disposal to prevent secondary poisoning. Training also addressed waterhole poisoning, commonly used for birds such as guineafowl, and responder safety. All participants received certificates and response kits and are now actively monitoring, reporting, and responding to poison-related wildlife incidents across the WMA.



Vulture/Poison Response Training in MBOMIPA WMA

We also partnered with PAMS Foundation to deliver a month-long International Ranger Federation-standard training in Songea for 10 Village Game Scouts (50% women) from the WMA. The curriculum covered patrol operations, human rights, first aid, wildlife law enforcement, court procedures, teamwork, and community engagement, integrating human-wildlife conflict management. This cohort is the third trained since 2020, bringing the total number of VGS trained under the program to 26, further strengthening local conservation capacity in the Ruaha-Rungwa landscape.

RUAHA - RUNGWA ECOSYSTEM

- 50,000 km²
- Supports critically important elephant range
- Varied landscapes: hilly with patches of riverine forest, open grassland plains, rocky outcrops and extensive miombo woodland

RUNGWA-KIZIGO-MUHESI GAME RESERVES

- 15,000 km²
- Supports critically-important elephant range
- Varied landscapes: hilly with patches of riverine forest, open grassland plains, rocky outcrops and extensive miombo woodland

ENHANCING THE CAPACITY OF MBOMIPA WMA TO MANAGE HUMAN WILDLIFE CONFLICT

Crop damage caused by elephants continues to be a major challenge for communities living adjacent to MBOMIPA WMA. In 2023, STEP supported the establishment of a human-wildlife conflict (HWC) response unit comprising 12 trained Village Game Scouts, followed by the development of a structured HWC management strategy in 2024. In 2025, STEP supported the HWC unit's operations by providing a dedicated response vehicle, driver, fuel, and technical expertise. The unit responded to 44 HWC incidents across seven villages, preventing elephants from entering crop fields in 61% of cases and safely driving them out in the remaining 39%.

Notably, although 22% of elephant mortalities in and around MBOMIPA WMA since 2018 are linked to conflict, no conflict-related elephant deaths occurred in 2025, demonstrating the effectiveness of sustained and well-resourced mitigation measures.



MBOMIPA HWC unit during noisyball training at Mboliboli post

AERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE RUAHA - RUNGWA ECOSYSTEM

In Ruaha-Rungwa's vast wilderness areas, aerial support allows for strategic deployment of ranger teams and provides valuable information on conservation threats to improve patrol planning. In 2025, STEP provided 101.7 hours of aerial support to MBOMIPA WMA and Ruaha National Park. All flights were coordinated with rangers and Village Game Scouts, who were ready to respond to threats observed from the air. Follow-up by these teams led to the apprehension of 11 individuals and the dismantling of six poaching camps. Observations from aerial patrols also help us understand trends in threats to the ecosystem. In 2025, encounter rates of timber-cutting sites, poaching camps, and elephant carcasses continued to decline compared to 2022–2024, demonstrating that sustained protection efforts are having a positive impact across the Ruaha-Rungwa landscape.

SUPPORTING HWC RESPONSE AND PATROLS BY OF RUNGWA-KIZIGO-MUHESI GAME RESERVES

To support the work of rangers in Rungwa, Kizigo and Muhesi Game Reserves, STEP provided >6,200 litres of fuel for response to human-wildlife conflict incidents and law enforcement patrols in 2025. This support enabled rangers to respond to 78 HWC incidents, while patrols resulted in the arrest of 6 suspects and the confiscation of 9 firearms, over 100 rounds of ammunition, and illegally obtained bushmeat.



UZUNGWA SCARP NATURE FOREST RESERVE

- 327.63 km²
- The second largest mountain block of the Udzungwa Mountains, part of the Eastern Arc Mountains
- Home to many globally threatened species, especially primates, small to medium-sized antelopes, reptiles and amphibians. In the 1970s, elephants were known to be locally present

KILOMBERO NATURE FOREST RESERVE

- 1345 km²
- Pristine rainforest
- Provides habitat for threatened species such as kipunji monkeys, Abbott's duiker and elephants

Challenges/Risk

- Habitat destruction (logging, charcoaling, forest fires) and encroachment from farming and illegal hunting

FOREST PROTECTION PROJECTS

See Page 22 for updates on how STEP is scaling up protection of highly biodiverse forests under the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy:



2026 PRIORITIES

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate Village Game Scouts to conduct monthly strategic patrols across MBOMIPA WMA • Continue capacity building for VGS and rangers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue aerial support • Support WMA Response Unit to respond to human-wildlife conflict incidents around MBOMIPA WMA |
|--|---|



Coexistence and Livelihoods



Tembo Cup final 2025 at Nkonko village adjacent to Kizigo GR

MAIN GOALS & FUNCTIONS

- Reduce negative human-elephant interactions through protecting crops and food stores
- Support farmers to diversify into sustainable, nature-positive livelihoods
- Build a foundation for tolerance and coexistence through education and outreach to explain elephant behaviour, provide context for human-elephant interactions and provide advice on how to stay safe around elephants
- Work with Village Governments to understand the drivers of human-elephant conflict and work towards land use that facilitates human-elephant coexistence
- Reduce negative human-elephant interactions through establishment of corridors to facilitate safe elephant movement



ENHANCING RESILIENCE TO ELEPHANTS IMPACTS THROUGH VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATIONS

For families living alongside wildlife in remote, agriculture-dependent areas, access to reliable financial services is limited, leaving households vulnerable to elephant-related crop losses and other environmental shocks. STEP addresses this challenge through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), community-run groups where members make weekly contributions to save money and access small loans. These groups help households invest in their futures, diversify incomes, and strengthen resilience.



VSLA meeting at Simbanguru village adjacent to Muhesi G.R.

In 2025, STEP supported the formation of six new VSLAs in the Ruaha–Rungwa and Kilombero landscapes, benefiting 143 members (62% women), while also building the capacity of 29 existing VSLAs. Together, these groups disbursed 2,356 loans valued at TZS 582,243,500 (\$232,897), supporting small businesses, agricultural investments, and household needs such as school fees and home improvements.

Under the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy (read more on page 22), STEP formed a further 28 VSLAs, bringing the total number of VSLAs supported to 103 VSLAs, reaching over 2,700 members and stronger support for their continued conservation.

In 2025, we undertook a formal evaluation to assess the impact of VSLA membership on food security, household resilience, livelihoods, and conservation attitudes. Results showed that VSLA members experienced stronger food security, higher dietary diversity, and greater ability to meet basic needs than non-members. While financial shocks affected both groups, VSLA members were less likely to sell valuable assets like crops or livestock to cope.

Membership was also linked to more positive conservation attitudes, with VSLA members showing higher tolerance for elephants, greater awareness of protected area benefits,

STRENGTHENING LIVELIHOODS THROUGH POULTRY HEALTH

STEP further seeks to strengthen household resilience by improving poultry health. Chickens are an important source of income, nutrition, and emergency cash for rural families, especially where elephant-related crop losses occur. Disease outbreaks, such as Newcastle disease, can reduce flock productivity and threaten these benefits. In 2025, STEP engaged experts to train 219 farmers (74% women) from eight villages in poultry health management, disease identification, proper chicken care, and the importance of routine vaccination.

Following the training, 153 farmers vaccinated 2,680 chickens, improving poultry health at the household level. By reducing disease-related losses, we hope to enhance household resilience to economic shocks and support more stable coexistence in communities affected by human–elephant conflict.



Newcastle vaccination at Muhanga village adjacent to Muhesi G.R.



FOSTERING TOLERANCE FOR ELEPHANTS THROUGH THE TEMBO CUP

STEP's work also involves outreach and engagement with communities to share practical information on elephant behaviour, safety, and effective mitigation measures while also highlighting the ecological importance of elephants and the benefits of protected areas.



Sack race during Tembo Cup week at Muhesi GR

Engagement takes place through household visits, small group discussions, school sessions, film screenings, and large community events. A powerful platform for outreach is the annual Tembo Cup held in partnership with Kizigo and Muhesi Game Reserves, where conservation messages are shared alongside matches, creating opportunities for learning and dialogue.

In 2025, we reached 23,613 community members through Tembo Cup matches, 12,486 students through school visits, 3,711 people through film screenings, and 10,403 people through household visits. Our monitoring data indicate that this engagement strengthens community support for conservation. Individuals who participate in STEP's outreach activities are more likely to recognize the benefits of protected areas and express support for elephant conservation efforts

STRENGTHENING RANGER CAPACITY FOR HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT RESPONSE

Strengthening ranger capacity to respond to human-elephant conflict incidents is essential for reducing both human and elephant fatalities, while also improving relationships between protected areas and surround-

ing communities. In 2025, STEP partnered with Kichaka Expeditions Environmental Program to train eight rangers and two VGS from Muhesi and Kizigo Game Reserve in elephant behaviour, situational awareness, and human-elephant conflict response. To enhance elephant rescue capacity, STEP also provided specialised rescue toolkits and organized training for 12 rangers and six Local Elephant Monitors in partnership with KiliCREW. The training covered rescue operations, first response to injuries, and safe handling. Following training, ranger teams successfully carried out one elephant rescue in 2025.

PROTECTING HARVESTS FROM ELEPHANT DAMAGE

In 2025, STEP continued supporting practical measures to safeguard harvests from elephant damage. In some areas, elephants target homes or food stores to access stored crops. To reduce this risk, STEP supported the construction of 10 improved food stores, with households contributing 20% of the cost. Since 2023, a total of 30 improved food stores have been built, enhancing food security and giving families greater confidence that their harvests are protected



Elephant rescue training for rangers at Muhesi G.R.



ONWARDS TO 2026

- Expand Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to increase farmers' access to safe and reliable credit, strengthen livelihoods, diversify household income sources, and build resilience to human–elephant conflict.
- Introduce sustainable agriculture training to promote environmentally friendly practices and improve farmers' health and wellbeing.
- Continue supporting key livelihood activities, including Newcastle disease vaccination for poultry, beekeeping, and mushroom farming.
- Scale up Misitu Cup to enhance forest conservation awareness, while continuing to support Tembo Cup football and netball tournaments.
- Strengthen human–wildlife conflict mitigation efforts in villages adjacent to protected areas.



Groupwork during conservation education



NYERERE - UDZUNGWA WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

In 2025, STEP achieved a major milestone in our long-term vision of restoring the Nyerere–Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor (formerly known as the Kilombero Elephant Corridor). Through Government Notice (GN) No. 226 of 4 April 2025, the Government of Tanzania officially designated the Nyerere–Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor (NUWC). This was a historic event as the NUWC became the first corridor in Tanzania to be legally recognized under the Wildlife Corridor Regulations of 2018. The Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism and Director of Wildlife emphasised the importance of the NUWC as an example to multiple other corridor restoration projects around the country.

At the heart of this achievement are the communities of Sole, Mang'ula A, and Kanyenja villages, which have collectively agreed to set aside approximately 7% of their village land for the corridor. STEP's goal in restoring the corridor is to facilitate the peaceful movement of elephants across the Kilombero Valley, enhancing food security and coexistence with surrounding communities.

This corridor also helps to maintain connectivity between Tanzania's southern and western elephant populations which together form one of Africa's most important remaining strongholds for elephants. We are delighted that our monitoring data are demonstrating greater use of the corridor by elephants in 2025 compared with previous years..

However, threats to the corridor persist, particularly from proposed nearby commercial developments such as petrol stations. In 2025, STEP facilitated a preliminary survey to address unsustainable land-use practices around the corridor. The assessment was led by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT) in collaboration with the National Land Use Planning Commission (NLUPC). The team held meetings with key stakeholders including the Regional Commissioner, Regional Administrative Secretary, Assistant Land Commissioner, Regional Environmental Zonal Manager, as well as district and village governments. The purpose

of the survey was to ensure the corridor remains safe and attractive for elephants and other wildlife, while managing human–wildlife conflicts in adjacent areas. Consultations and actions based on the results of the survey are still ongoing as we enter 2026.

We continued to support community-led protection of the corridor by facilitating 17 Village Game Scouts from the corridor villages to conduct patrols and community outreach. All scouts received several training including smart data collection, and safety around dangerous wildlife. In 2025, we also provided the scouts with refresher training in code of conduct and human rights.

Maintenance of the electric fence along the corridor boundary (14 km completed to date) was continued to ensure functionality. Challenges to extending the fencing, particularly relating to increased flooding in the eastern section of the corridor due to climate change, are currently the topic of a comprehensive internal review. Through our partnership with Reforest Africa, 80,000 trees have now been planted within the corridor to support habitat restoration. Fires spreading from farmland in the dry season are another increasing challenge, which we are increasing efforts to address in collaboration with the corridor communities.



Village Game Scouts on patrol in the Nyerere Udzungwa Wildlife corridor



2026 PRIORITIES

- Continue VGS patrols of the corridor
- Renew Conservation Agreements with corridor villages
- Enhance community capacity to manage and prevent fire in the corridor
- Find funding to complete the strategic fencing of the corridor
- Resume our on-site education program to show how the corridor works to farmers, community groups and students
- Support corridor villages on sustainable land use planning to protect the corridor and reduce human-wildlife conflict
- Work with Tanzania Railways Corporation to reduce elephant collisions



Elephant in the Nyerere-Udzungwa wildlife corridor



Research, Monitoring and Learning



Research team conducting elephant monitoring in Ruaha National Park

MAIN GOALS & FUNCTIONS

Monitor the conservation status of key elephant populations in the Ruaha-Rungwa and Udzungwa-Kilombero ecosystems

Understand human-elephant interactions on village lands by studying elephant behaviour and community perceptions; trial interventions to improve coexistence

Map elephant movements and assess the status of elephant corridors

Build capacity for research in Tanzania



INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATION SCIENTISTS

Grace Mchome joined STEP in 2022 as a Master's student through our program to build research and monitoring capacity, receiving mentorship in data collection, analysis, and scientific writing under the supervision of our Research Associate, Dr. Josephine Smit. Her research took her to the Kilombero Valley, where she studied how elephants respond to deterrents such as beehive fences, metal strip fences, and solar light fencing using camera trap images and videos. She also interviewed farmers to understand their views on experiences with these mitigation measures, gaining valuable insights along the way. In Grace's own words: "Interacting with communities built my communication skills and broadened my understanding of conservation - that it's not only about managing wildlife but also fostering the wellbeing of communities adjacent to protected areas."



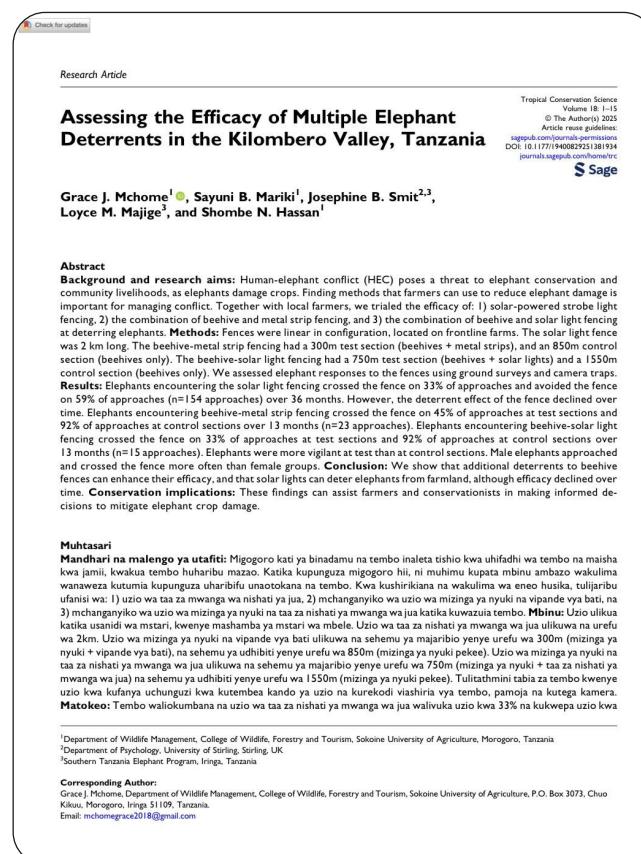
STEP's Grace Mchome presenting at the 15th TAWIRI conference in Arusha

Grace went on to present her Master's research findings at national and international conferences and published her research on elephant deterrent effectiveness in the Kilombero Valley in the journal *Tropical Conservation Science*. In 2025, after completing her Master's degree, she joined STEP as a Research and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Officer. Today, she serves as MEL Coordinator under the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy, leading data management, evaluation, and learning processes that strengthen STEP's impact.

NEW PUBLICATION ON ELEPHANT DETERRENT EFFECTIVENESS

In October 2025, STEP published a research article titled "Assessing the Efficacy of Multiple Elephant Deterrents in the Kilombero Valley, Tanzania" in *Tropical Conservation Science*. The study evaluated three types of fences designed to reduce elephant crop damage: (i) solar light fencing, (ii) beehives combined with metal strip fencing, and (iii) beehives combined with solar light fencing.

All three designs were moderately effective at deterring elephants from farms, and adding secondary deterrents to beehive fences further improved their efficacy. However, the deterrent effect of solar light fences decreased over time, and no method provided complete protection against elephant incursions into farms. This research provides important guidance for farmers and conservation practitioners seeking practical, evidence-based ways to reduce human–elephant conflict.



STEP Study, published in *Tropical Conservation Science*



LONG-TERM RESEARCH INFORMING ELEPHANT CONSERVATION

STEP's long-term elephant research and monitoring program in the Ruaha–Rungwa landscape examines the impacts of the 2010–2015 poaching crisis and tracks the population's recovery. Since 2015, the team has recorded more than 3,700 elephant sightings, matching individuals to a growing identification database that now includes over 200 family groups and 400 adult bulls.



STEP elephant monitoring team conducting dung transects in Ruaha NP

In 2025 alone, 587 elephant sightings were documented across 111 monitoring days, with 26% successfully matched to known individuals in our ID database. The team also compiled detailed life histories for 20 family groups to assess birth rates and calf survival. This dataset is being analysed by Research Assistant Christinga Monja as part of her MSc at the University of Glasgow, which she began in September 2025. The resulting publication will provide important new insights into the demographic status and recovery of the Ruaha elephant population.

MONITORING WILDLIFE USE OF THE NYERERE-UDZUNGWA WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

Since November 2023, STEP has been monitoring wildlife use of the Nyerere–Udzungwa Wildlife Corridor, focusing on elephants and other species, in collaboration with Lion Landscapes and the Udzungwa Ecological Monitoring Centre. Camera traps in the corridor have recorded 26 mammal species to date, including elephants, serval, side-striped jackal, honey badger, buffalo, red duiker, suni, bushbuck, and large-spotted genet.

We are also identifying individual elephants from camera trap images to create a database of elephants using the corridor, which will allow us to estimate the number of elephants moving through this key linkage. In addition, monthly foot transects are conducted to record elephant signs, such as dung. Encounter rates of elephant dung were higher in 2025 compared to 2023–2024, suggesting increased corridor use by elephants and highlighting the importance of this landscape for connectivity and conservation.



STEP field assistant servicing camera traps in the NUWC



2026 PRIORITIES

- Continue monitoring of key elephant populations and human-elephant interactions
- Collaborate with Tanzanian Master's student from Mweka to analyze camera trap images from the NUWC
- Collaborate with two Master's students from the University of Glasgow to analyze elephant demography in Ruaha NP and elephant deterrent trials in the Kilombero Valley
- Improve STEP's MEL functions and dashboards

PUBLICATIONS

Mchome, G. J., Mariki, S. B., Smit, J. B., Majige, L. M., & Hassan, S. N. (2025). Assessing the efficacy of multiple elephant deterrents in the Kilombero Valley, Tanzania. *Tropical Conservation Science*, 18, 1–15.



Udzungwa Landscape Strategy



Photo by Claudia Barelli

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

SO1

Enhance the capacity and efficacy of protected areas

SO2

Improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of communities in ways that reinforce their stewardship of forests

SO3

Strengthen relations between communities and protected areas, as well as collaborations among other stakeholders in the landscape; and ensure strong governance of the ULS

SO4

Develop a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Process to systematically improve the strategy

South-central Tanzania's Udzungwa mountains are renowned for their pristine rainforests and exceptional biodiversity, including many endemic and threatened species. STEP is proud to be part of a coalition of partners implementing the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy, a collaborative effort to protect this unique ecosystem, supported by Hempel Foundation and the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation. The strategy focuses on three core protected areas—Udzungwa Scarp Nature Forest Reserve, Kilombero Nature Forest Reserve, and Udzungwa Mountains National Park— and 71 adjacent villages.

Strategic Objective 1 of the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy is to enhance the capacity and efficacy of the three core protected areas within the Udzungwa landscape, building on our long-standing forest protection projects in the area.



ULS VGS attending participatory forest management training

In 2025, we significantly strengthened ranger capacity and patrol operations.

In partnership with TFS and TANAPA, 24 new qualified rangers (25% women) were recruited, provided with refresher training, equipped, and deployed from the Pasiansi Wildlife Training Institute. Training covered patrol conduct, wildlife identification, data collection, human rights, social safeguards, mental health, and field readiness, with all rangers signing human rights agreements to ensure readiness, professional conduct and accountability. The recruitment increased the patrol workforce in the landscape by 55%. STEP also provided technical support in patrol planning, database management, and reporting. 70 patrols were conducted in 2025, all including rangers and

Village Game Scouts, totaling 7,840 person-patrol days and covering 6,110 km—a more than 300% increase in patrol coverage compared to 2024. Patrols removed 1,786 snares, closed 188 poaching camps, detected 802 illegal logging incidents, and apprehended 32 suspects. Additionally, 30 VGS (30% women) from 15 villages were trained and equipped in patrol techniques, participatory forest management, human-wildlife conflict management, first aid, mental health, and leadership. These VGS now join TANAPA and TFS rangers on patrols, enhancing both community engagement and landscape protection.

Strategic Objective 2 of the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy aims to improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of communities in ways that reinforce their stewardship of forests. One of our initiatives involves scaling access to safe and reliable credit for livelihood diversification through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). VSLAs enable members to invest in sustainable income-generating activities, helping to diversify livelihoods, improve wellbeing, and reduce dependence on forest resources. In 2025, we established 28 new VSLAs with 857 members (58% women) in 26 villages and delivered financial literacy training to 725 VSLA members (59% women). VSLAs disbursed 1,455 loans worth TZS 452,036,150 to support local ventures, including agriculture, small businesses, animal husbandry, and education.

A further initiative involved scaling up conservation agreements which link tangible benefits to communities to local stewardship of wildlife and critical habitats.

In 2025, we signed agreements with two villages, with support going towards construction of a village dispensary, primary school classroom repairs, and wastewater pit construction. In return, both villages committed to key conservation actions, including protecting the Nyerere-Udzungwa wildlife corridor,



safeguarding elephants, and promoting broader environmental stewardship.

Our approach also involves conducting community outreach to raise awareness on forest conservation. In July 2025, we hosted the inaugural Misitu Cup football tournament, bringing together teams from 11 villages and



The team from Ipalamwa celebrating their win of the first ever Misitu Cup in Kilolo district

The tournament provided a platform to share conservation messages and engage communities in dialogue. We also organized night-time film screenings attended by 1,302 community members and conducted school visits reaching 3,508 students. Our monitoring showed that participants with prior environmental education were more likely to strongly agree that they benefit from Udzungwa's protected areas compared to those who had not received prior education. This highlights the value of sustained conservation education in strengthening community support for protected areas.

Strategic Objective 3 of the ULS seeks to strengthen collaborations among stakeholders across the Udzungwa Landscape. A key milestone in 2025 was the third Udzungwa Landscape Workshop, co-organized by STEP, Reforest Africa and MACCO. The workshop brought together over 100 representatives from government, NGOs, communities, donors, and the private sector. It culminated in the formal endorsement of the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy and the Greater Udzungwa Restoration Strategy focusing on community-centered conservation,

habitat connectivity, sustainable financing, protected area strengthening, climate-smart agriculture, research and monitoring, and transparent knowledge sharing. Community involvement in natural resource management was also strengthened. STEP trained 95 Village Natural Resource Committee members and village leaders (36% women) from six villages in forest management, fire prevention, and human rights, and provided important firefighting equipment.

Strategic Objective 4 focuses on tracking the progress and impact of the Udzungwa Landscape Strategy. In 2025, STEP co-hosted a four-day pilot workshop at the Udzungwa Ecological Monitoring Centre to test the new IUCN WCPA Conservation Effectiveness Framework, a tool for monitoring progress toward global 30x30 conservation targets. Facilitated by Foundations of Success and attended by TANAPA, TFS, MACCO, and STEP teams, the workshop assessed the three core protected areas in the Udzungwa Landscape. Participants highlighted the framework's value for adaptive management and effectiveness reporting, while STEP strengthened its capacity in conservation planning, threat assessment, and theory of change development. The workshop also laid the foundation for aligning future protected area management plans with global standards.

For much more detail on results from the ULS in 2025, please read our sister report, the [ULS Impact Report 2025](#).



IUCN WCPA conservation effectiveness framework for ULS partners at Udzungwa Ecological Monitoring Center



Delegates to the Udzungwa workshop 2025, including DC of Kilolo, DAS of Kilombero, RNROs of Iringa and Morogoro colleagues from MNRT and David Emmett of Hempel Foundation

2026 PRIORITIES

- Ensure effective governance of the ULS through structured coordination mechanisms
- Facilitate rangers and Village Game Scouts to conduct strategic patrols across Udzungwa's core protected areas
- Continue capacity building for rangers, Village Game Scouts and Village Natural Resource Committees
- Form 10 additional VSLAs, reaching minimum 250 community members, and implement new VSLA loan policy
- Scale up community participation and benefits from conservation via participatory conservation agreements
- Finalize the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework for the ULS and launch a publicly-accessible dashboard

Staff Welfare and Finance



MAIN GOALS & FUNCTIONS

Promote employee well-being and professional development

Ensure compliance with Tanzanian labour laws and promote fair practices

Manage financial risks, prepare financial statements, and oversee financial compliance

Provide timely financial reports to donors and stakeholders



STAFF WELFARE

In 2025, STEP employed 52 staff members, slightly down from 56 in 2024 due to funding changes following the suspension and termination of several US government grants. While the reduction was modest, it was a difficult decision, as STEP values its team and had hoped to retain all staff. Despite these challenges, the organization remains committed to supporting its current team, strengthening cohesion, and advancing its mission with a shared sense



STEP team during STEP rebranding session

STEP continued its special internship program to promote women in conservation, offering opportunities to four graduates, with one female intern successfully transitioning to a full-time role. We also maintained compliance with Tanzanian labour laws, donor requirements, and occupational health and safety standards. Key internal policies, including the Human Resources and Operations Manuals, were reviewed, and safeguarding, grievance redress, and data protection policies were strengthened and implemented.

Significant investments were made in staff capacity building through internal and external training on communications, monitoring and evaluation, grant writing, and the application of social science methods in conservation.

Staff also participated in conferences and professional forums, including the TAWIRI Scientific Conference and the IUCN World Conservation Congress. STEP strengthened its institutional engagement by joining IUCN while maintaining its membership with the Association of Tanzania Employers.

Looking ahead, STEP will continue to prioritize staff wellbeing and retention, structured training and mentoring, implementation of safeguarding systems and gender equity initiatives, while fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE FINANCE AND GRANTS MANAGEMENT

In 2025, STEP's Finance and Grants team continued to provide critical support for operations, overseeing payments, account preparation, and donor reporting while ensuring compliance with national laws and internal controls. To maintain transparency and accuracy, we conducted quarterly internal audits alongside our annual external audit. This year, a consultant supported capacity building for finance and grants staff, helping the team enhance donor reporting, adopt best practices in financial management, update the financial manual, and implement improved grant management processes.

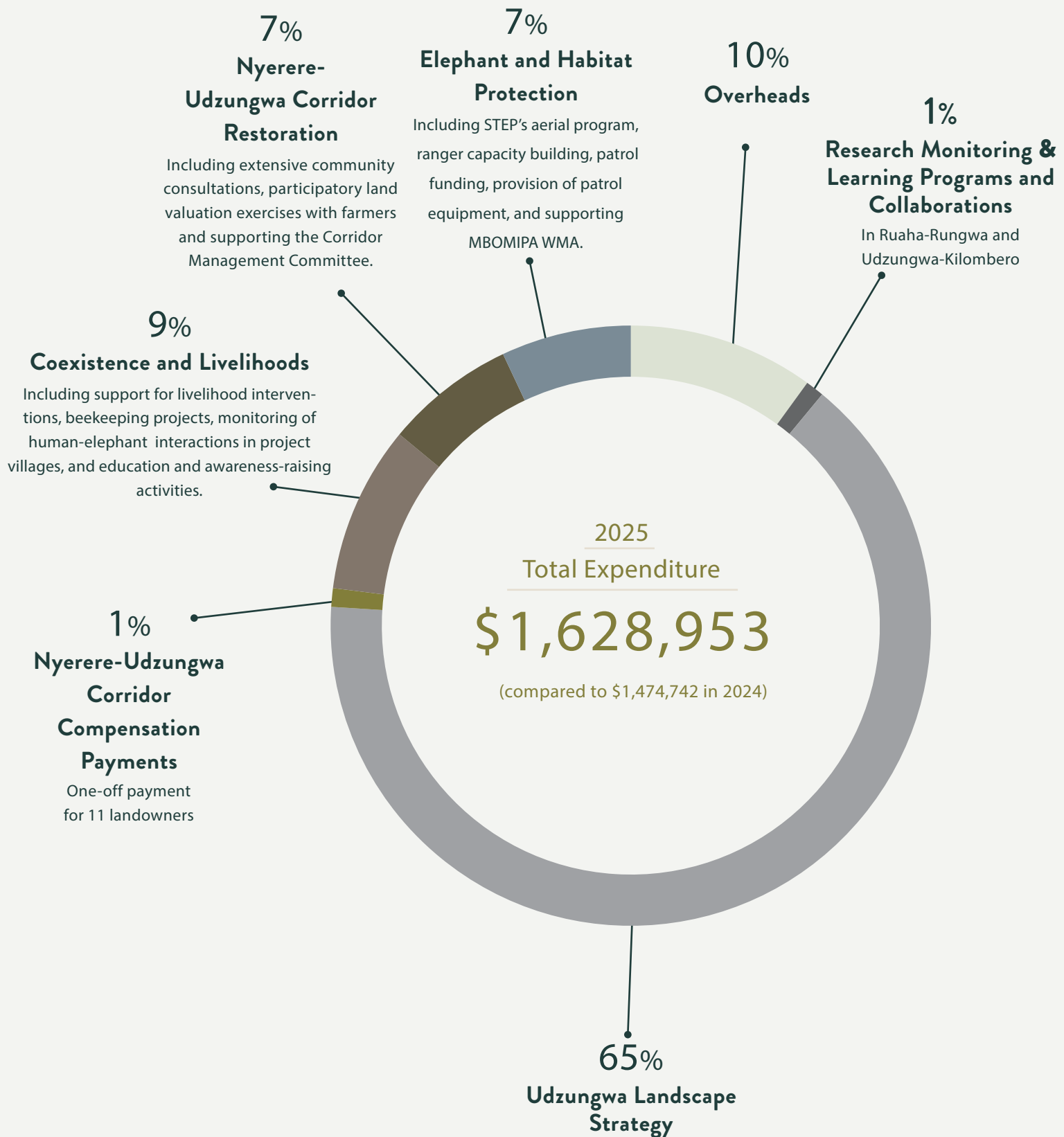


STEP team during in-house training

2026 PRIORITIES

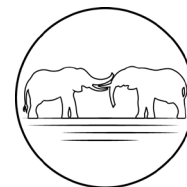
- Rollout of Safeguarding and Grievance Redress Mechanism Policy.
- Adopt and operationalize revised Human Resources and Operations Manuals.

- Rollout of Data Protection Policy.
- Ensure staff wellbeing and development, safeguarding, gender equity, and fostering an inclusive culture.



Supporters

We are deeply grateful for the generous support of the following organisations and individuals who supported our work in 2025.



**Elephant
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Saving Wildlife Together





Photo by Claudia Barelli

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Technical, Field and In-Kind Support

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