



# **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION FOR WILDLIFE AND COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE (ECOWICE)**



**ANNUAL REPORT**

**DECEMBER 2024**

## Chief Executive Officer's Statement



This year, ECOWICE has grown stronger, more resilient, and more deeply connected to the communities and landscapes we serve. At the heart of our mission lies a simple but powerful belief: people and wildlife are meant to thrive together.

From restoring ecosystems to empowering farmers with sustainable livelihoods, every step we took was guided by balance between conservation and culture, tradition and innovation, and today's needs and tomorrow's possibilities.

We celebrated the harvest of honey and passion fruit that not only nourished families but also protected farms from elephants. We watched children's curiosity flourish as they built backyard weather stations, linking classroom learning to the rhythms of farming and nature. And we stood side by side with community members as they shared their hopes, challenges, and solutions reminding us that true conservation begins with people.

Yes, challenges remain. Climate change, crop-raiding, and limited infrastructure continue to test our resolve. Yet with every challenge comes an opportunity to learn, to innovate, and to strengthen the bridge between people and wildlife.

As we look ahead, ECOWICE is committed to deepening partnerships, championing creative education, and expanding livelihoods that honor both the land and the people who depend on it. With your support, resilience can be transformed into hope and hope into lasting coexistence.

Felician Chemihanda  
Chief Executive Officer

## Harvest Achievements

This year, farmers celebrated the rewarding fruits of their labor through passion fruit cultivation, sesame farming, and beekeeping. Together, they harvested 180 kilograms of passion fruit, 7,500 kilograms of sesame, and an impressive 3,580 kilograms of honey.

Much of the passion fruit was enjoyed locally, nourishing families and strengthening cultural traditions tied to farming and food. The surplus, along with honey produced through the innovative beehive fence system, was sold to the ECOWICE social enterprise and other buyers, creating vital links between conservation, livelihoods, and markets. Sesame, a crop increasingly valued by farmers for its resilience against elephant destruction, also provided both food security and a reliable source of income.

This story goes beyond numbers; it illustrates how conservation and culture walk hand in hand. Passion fruit and sesame proved not only to be climate- and wildlife-resilient crops but also powerful tools for reducing human–elephant conflict, while honey became a sweet reward symbolizing harmony between people and nature.

By purchasing these products through the ECOWICE social enterprise, community members and supporters play an active role in sustaining these initiatives. Their contributions empower farmers to continue adopting practices that protect ecosystems while improving their livelihoods.

Each harvest tells a larger story of resilience, creativity, and shared responsibility, where local action is building a future that is both environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive.



 **180 kg of passion fruit harvested**

 **Honey**  
**3,580 kg harvested**

 **7,500 kg of sesame harvested**





## Habitat Restoration and Community Empowerment

This year, ECOWICE advanced its ongoing work to restore the Kimboza and Ruvo Forest Reserves through support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). These forests are home to the rare Williams' Blue-tailed Gecko (*Lygodactylus williamsi*) and form an ecological bridge to Nyerere National Park, making their protection vital not only for local species but for the wider survival of Tanzania's wildlife.

The progress made this year reflects both ecological care and community involvement. More than 20,000 native seedlings were raised in an expanded nursery, each one a symbol of renewal and a step toward restoring habitats that have been lost. At the same time, an 8-meter-wide, 50-kilometer-long firebreak was rehabilitated and extended, with sisal planted along some sections to create a living barrier against wildfires. These efforts strengthen the forest's natural resilience while protecting surrounding communities from the dangers of uncontrolled fires.

To address the spread of invasive species, ECOWICE established ten control plots targeting *Cedrela odorata*, a fast-growing tree that threatens native biodiversity. By clearing space for indigenous plants to flourish, these plots mark the beginning of a long-term recovery process for the forest ecosystem.

🌱 20,000 native seedlings raised

🐝 100 beehives installed

🔥 50 km firebreak established

👥 280 community members supported

Alongside ecological restoration, the project also invested in community livelihoods. A network of 100 modern top-bar hives was installed across ten apiaries, with training provided to local farmers in hive management and honey production. Beyond the promise of producing thousands of liters of honey annually, the initiative links income generation directly to forest conservation, showing families that a healthy forest is also an economic asset.

Altogether, more than 280 community members have been engaged through nursery work, fire management, and beekeeping. Their involvement ensures that conservation is not imposed from outside but built from within, rooted in local knowledge and shared responsibility.

This year's achievements are just the first chapter of a larger story. As seedlings take root, bees begin their work, and firebreaks secure the landscape, ECOWICE is demonstrating how people and wildlife can thrive together. Each action, however small, contributes to a vision of resilience and harmony, where protecting forests means protecting the future of both nature and the communities who call it home.





120 farmers supported



75% farmers adopted  
drying and packaging  
techniques



38% increase in income

## From Farm to Market: A Farmer's Story

When Mariamu, a small-scale farmer near Mikumi National Park, began cultivating mushrooms, she quickly realized that growing them was only half the challenge. Although her harvests were good, she struggled to find a profitable and reliable market. Without established buyers, much of her hard work brought only modest returns.

This year, things began to change. **Through** ECOWICE's support, 120 farmers, including Mariamu were linked to potential buyers, especially hotels and lodges within Mikumi National Park that are increasingly interested in sourcing fresh, locally produced mushrooms. For Mariamu, this meant she could finally deliver her mushrooms directly to hotels and receive a fairer price.

Farmers were also supported to attend a regional fair in Morogoro Municipal, where they showcased their mushrooms to a wider audience. The fair not only connected them to new buyers but also gave them the confidence to see their produce valued as a specialty food with strong market potential.

Beyond market access, farmers received training in value addition, such as drying and packaging mushrooms to increase shelf life and appeal. Mariamu proudly notes, *"Now my mushrooms are dried and packaged properly. Buyers see them as premium products, not just a roadside item."*

To ensure that these new opportunities translate into long-term benefits, ECOWICE also trained farmers in financial management and encouraged them to join Community Conservation Banks (COCOBA). Through these groups, farmers are saving together, lending to one another, and reinvesting in projects that strengthen their livelihoods while reducing pressure on nearby forests.

Mariamu's journey shows how access to markets, new skills, and financial empowerment can transform livelihoods. By helping farmers find value in mushrooms, ECOWICE is proving that sustainable farming and conservation can grow hand in hand.



## Stakeholder Engagement

This year, ECOWICE facilitated 5 stakeholder workshops, 10 meetings, and 4 joint field visits to actively engage partners, gather input, and secure contributions essential for project success. These gatherings brought together **270 key stakeholders**, including farmers and conservation organizations, to build a shared understanding of ongoing projects and to openly discuss pressing challenges, such as crop-raiding by wildlife.

During these engagements, participants explored the importance of protecting endangered species, including the Kipunji monkey and elephants, while collaboratively identifying sustainable solutions such as alternative crops and community-based beekeeping initiatives. The discussions also emphasized the integration of environmental issues into village meeting agendas and the pursuit of financial resources to sustain wildlife protection and conservation efforts.

By fostering dialogue, cooperation, and shared problem-solving, these workshops empowered communities to balance conservation priorities with livelihoods, creating practical strategies that benefit both people and wildlife. Through these efforts, ECOWICE strengthened local ownership of conservation initiatives and reinforced the connection between healthy ecosystems and sustainable community development.



270 stakeholders  
engaged

6 workshops  
conducted

4 meetings

4 field visits



## Inspiring Learning Through Hands-On Environmental Education

This year, ECOWICE placed a strong focus on bringing environmental education to life by blending inquiry-based learning with improved learning spaces. The goal was simple but powerful: to help young learners see how conservation is not an abstract idea, but something connected to their daily lives and community values.

Across four local schools, a total of 153 students participated in hands-on projects such as building backyard weather stations, where they tracked rainfall, temperature, and wind. These simple tools encouraged them to ask questions, make observations, and discover patterns in nature, linking science directly to farming seasons and everyday village life. Post-activity reflections showed that 80% of participating students felt more confident in asking scientific questions and connecting lessons to real-world conservation issues.

To make this possible, ECOWICE also invested in the future of learning by upgrading one learning lab with new tables and shelves, ensuring that 5 sets of equipment and materials could be safely stored and easily accessed. Six teachers were trained to integrate inquiry-based methods into their lessons, ensuring that this approach will continue to shape learning well beyond the initial activities.

These educational efforts connected conservation to the cultural heartbeat of the community. By equipping children with curiosity, skills, and a sense of responsibility, ECOWICE is nurturing the next generation of conservation leaders, young people ready to protect their environment while sustaining their culture and livelihoods.

153   Students  
Engaged

32  Penpal  
Connections

80%  Knowledge  
Gained

6  Teachers  
Trained

 15 sets of  
learning Equipment



Alternative  
Crops Work

Elephants  
Active Night

Tourism Impacts  
Wildlife

Ultrasonic  
Tools Help

Farming  
Increases Conflict



## Strengthening Coexistence Through Research and Innovation

This year, ECOWICE deepened its commitment to fostering harmony between people and wildlife by continuing to monitor human-wildlife conflicts. Our work focused on tracking changes in animal behavior, listening to community perceptions, and testing innovative approaches that reduce conflict. These efforts reflect our belief that conservation and culture must move hand in hand, just as the Mikumi palm sustains both livelihoods and traditions.

We are proud to have shared some of these findings in peer-reviewed journals, ensuring that local voices and experiences contribute to global conservation knowledge. Our main insights from this year include:

- **Wildlife Movements & Tourism:** Hunting tourism inside the park was found to influence wildlife movements, shaping when and how animals interact with surrounding communities.
- **Farming Near Protected Areas:** Cultivating crops along the park's edge continues to increase the risk of human-wildlife conflicts, underscoring the need for land-use planning that balances farming and conservation.
- **Innovative Tools:** Integrating ultrasonic devices with other conflict management strategies shows strong potential in reducing human-elephant conflicts.
- **Nighttime Behavior:** Elephants are increasingly active at night, a behavior linked to crop raiding, which calls for more adaptive protection measures.
- **Alternative Livelihoods:** Sesame, beekeeping, and passion fruit farming show promise as both sources of income and protective strategies against elephant conflict. With greater support, these alternatives can strengthen farmer livelihoods while easing pressure on the land.

Through these efforts, ECOWICE is helping communities and wildlife find common ground, where conservation goals align with everyday life and cultural values. Each insight opens the door to practical solutions: healthier harvests, safer villages, and thriving wildlife. By nurturing curiosity, encouraging innovation, and sharing benefits, we invite everyone—farmers, researchers, and supporters to take part in building a future where people and elephants coexist in balance.



## Celebrating Culture Through Music and Partnership

This year, ECOWICE partnered with **Trust Drum Circle**, a U.S.-based non-profit organization, to support a local drums and dance group. Through this collaboration, the group received new drums and related instruments, strengthening their ability to preserve and share cultural traditions. In addition, 4 of their songs were professionally recorded and will soon be published on music platforms, giving them greater visibility and an opportunity to reach wider audiences.

By supporting music and dance, ECOWICE is not only helping safeguard cultural heritage but also reinforcing the message that conservation and culture are deeply connected—just as protecting the land ensures that traditions, rhythms, and stories can continue to thrive for generations.



- 28 Artists Supported

🎵 10 Instruments  
Provided

- 4 Songs Recorded



## Challenges

Like many grassroots organizations, ECOWICE has made important progress but continues to face structural challenges that limit the scale and sustainability of its impact.

### Limited Funding

Most of the funding secured to date has been short-term, often lasting only one year. While this support is valuable, it affects the sustainability of programs and makes it difficult to plan for long-term impact. At the same time, the need for solutions to human-wildlife conflict is growing, with many communities still facing serious challenges.

### Limited Infrastructure

Infrastructure remains a barrier to effective program delivery. Roads and bridges in many project areas are unable to withstand heavy rains, causing delays in activity schedules and making some villages temporarily inaccessible. This hampers timely monitoring, data collection, and community engagement.

### Limited Transport Facilities

Currently, ECOWICE relies mainly on motorbikes for fieldwork. While practical for short distances, motorbikes are difficult to use during heavy rains or for covering long distances between scattered communities. This limits the team's ability to respond quickly to conflict incidents and provide regular on-site support.

### Limited Personnel

With a small team, ECOWICE faces capacity constraints. There is an urgent need for full-time technical staff in project management, research, and administration to strengthen efficiency, ensure high-quality implementation, and improve communication with partners and communities.

## Way Forward

To overcome these challenges and build greater impact, ECOWICE is committed to the following actions:

**1. Diversify and Extend Funding:**

- Strengthen proposals to target multi-year grants and strategic partnerships.
- Expand fundraising to include social enterprises (honey, passion fruit, eco-cultural tourism) that can generate sustainable income.
- Build individual donor engagement through digital platforms and storytelling campaigns.

**2. Invest in Infrastructure Support:**

- Partner with local government and NGOs to improve critical access roads and bridges in priority villages.
- Explore low-cost, community-driven solutions such as raised walkways or temporary wooden bridges to maintain access during rainy seasons.

**3. Upgrade Transport Capacity:**

- Seek funding for a 4x4 vehicle to enable reliable transport in all-weather conditions.
- Maintain motorbikes for short-distance travel, complemented by shared transport solutions with partner organizations when possible.

**4. Strengthen Human Capacity:**

- Recruit full-time technical staff in project management, research, and administration.
- Build volunteer and internship programs with local universities to expand technical support.
- Provide professional development opportunities for existing staff to enhance efficiency and leadership.

## OUR PARTNERS

