SGG TROPICAL TREE-PLANTING AND CONSERVATION PROJECT [2023-2028]

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a summary of the third SGG Tropical Tree-Planting & Conservation project. The first such project was in the Rotary year 2017-18 when R.I. President Ian Riseley requested that every rotarian plant at least one tree. During that year SGG in partnership with more than 40 donor Rotary clubs organised the planting of 41,475 trees in Tanzania & Kenya. You can read about this project if you browse the www.sustainableglobalgardens.org.uk website. By that time many African small-scale farmers realised that agroforesty tree projects were an excellent strategy for poverty & hunger alleviation, so a second project was established. This was the Tropical Tree-Planting and Conservation [2018-2022] project. This new project was similar to the previous SGG-Rotary project, but here there was both the beginnings of using mature trees for climate change mitigation and the promotion of forest restoration by natural regeneration. You can read the final report for that project at TropicalTreeProjectFinalReport[14.4.2023]. By the end of this second project SGG had recorded 191,118 trees in Kenya, Tanzania & Malawi with more than 700 individual planting schemes recorded. It was evident in 2024 that these tree projects were very popular within the communities where SGG has been present, and that these schemes are both cost-effective and replicable elsewhere in rural Africa South of the Sahara. Thus, we have initiated a third project, the SGG Tropical Tree-Planting & Conservation Project [2023-2028]. Here our objective is to grow more than 250,000 tropical trees over this 6 year period, either by agroforestry planting or by forest restoration using natural regeneration. Furthermore, from 2026 onwards SGG is prepared to facilitate & implement, depending on the availability of funding, an increase of tree cover over a wider range of countries where SGG's approach is appropriate.

PROJECT PURPOSE

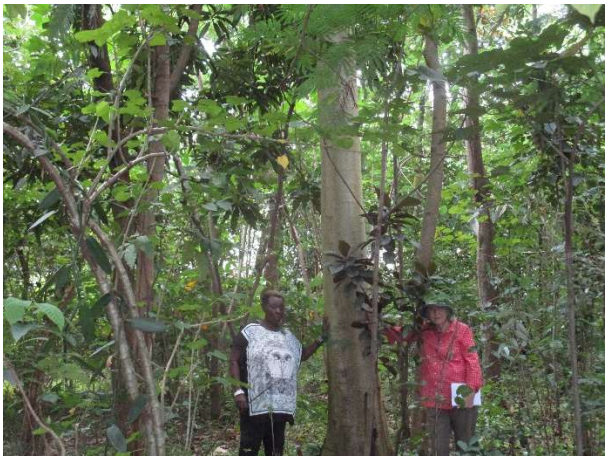
The overall aim of this programme has been to promote an increase in tree cover in Africa South of the Sahara primarily for the benefit of small-scale farmers in those regions, but also as a contribution to improved biodiversity and climate change mitigation which can benefit us all. Most of the trees planted so far have been planted on small-scale farms and have been directly useful to the farmer, such as fruits [e.g. mango, avocado, pawpaw, bananas, citrus fruits] or multipurpose species [e.g. *Grevillea robusta, Azadirachta indica, Markhamia lutea, Moringa oleifera*]. The main purpose of such tree planting has been improvement of the environmental conditions & production on the farm, together with improved socio-economic status for the farming household. The work contributes to UN Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] no 1and 2, the eradication of extreme global poverty and hunger, which are the foundation aims of SGG. The strategy of working directly with small-scale farmers means that SGG contributes to UN SDG no 17, international cooperation & partnerships, at grassroots level. In this third stage project most of the tree schemes will continue to be of this sort.

After 2019 SGG began tree-planting for an additional two purposes. One was for climate change mitigation and adaptation. SGG field monitors have noticed increasing concern about climate change in all our project locations. This is illustrated in the case of Southern Malawi. In addition to the customary long seasonal drought, this region has suffered the impact of 4 tropical cyclones over a 4 year period which includes the start of this third project [i.e. Idai in March 2019, Ana in January 2022, Gombe in March 2022, and Cyclone Freddy in March 2023]. By 27th March the official figures for damage related to Cyclone Freddy included 676 dead with a further 530 missing, while

213,259 children under 5 years old were expected to experience ‘acute malnutrition’ during the rest of 2023. This type of meteorological devastation makes development progress much more difficult, so climate change mitigation has become one of SGG’s action priorities. We also note that our African partners are increasingly aware that they suffer from weather extremes associated with increased atmospheric carbon – a problem which originates from Europe and other developed economies. SGG accepts the ‘polluters should pay’ principle. This implies that, although we view reduction of carbon emissions in developed economies as the priority action to reduce climate change, we also accept support for African small-scale farmers as justified compensation for the environmental damage caused by ‘modern’ lifestyles. Investment in tropical tree-planting not only provides such recompense in rural Africa but also aids climate change mitigation to benefit us all. SGG’s tree-planting for carbon capture contributes to UN SDG no 13, climate action.

A second new purpose for SGG is the reversal of biodiversity loss, which has occurred in several project locations. These locations often have spare land available for wildlife habitat restoration without significant damage to local farming. On such land forest restoration offers a solution which provides not only improved habitat but also a ‘carbon sink’, a more reliable water supply, and new employment opportunities outside traditional agricultural work. Some of SGG’s new planting schemes are found in such locations. Furthermore SGG partners experienced in such forest regeneration work have often concluded that natural regeneration, or ‘rewilding’, can be a more effective process than simple tree-planting. Thus, this action of forest regeneration is included in SGG’s tree project portfolio and contributes to UN SDG no 15, improved biodiversity.





Here are two aspects of SGG tree projects which are becoming of greater importance in the 2023-8 tropical tree project. Many farmers around Busia, West Kenya began planting around 2015. Those trees *[see above left]* are highly suitable for carbon capture. The farmer, like many others, is seeking donors who will pay him to keep such trees at a cost of 20p/year/tree. Other farmers *[see above right]* contribute not only to a carbon sink but also preservation of biodiversity.

Both of these new aspects of SGG tree projects were started but only slightly developed in the 2018-2022 project, but in this successor 2023-2028 project it is hoped to give much more attention to schemes which promote these two aspects of tree cover. Nevertheless, it should be appreciated that the prime concern for SGG is not simply to facilitate increased tree cover, important though that is. The core concern for SGG is the eradication of extreme poverty & hunger, so our focus in this project is agroforestry & forest restoration which has a clear, tangible benefit for the poor. It is our intention to extend our work over an increasingly large area with many specific locations where rural poverty is endemic, but not to engage in large-scale tree plantations for the benefit of few.





A common SGG strategy is to encourage the development of local tree nurseries so that farmers nearby have a ready supply of cheap seedlings. Here *[see above left]* the nursery manager for Magube Choir group had 1,046 agroforestry seedlings, about half being *Senna spectabilis*, and 74 fruits to be distributed to its 25 members. A crucial SGG strategy is to pay farmers for care they have given to surviving young trees. Here *[see above right]* Benedicto, who is one of the community leaders at Nankhunda Transformation, is giving out remuneration to small-scale farmers who have planted trees on their plots. These tree payments have proved a small but valuable additional income for many of these farmers. SGG has records of farmers whose income comes from sales of fruit. Here *[see below left]* this Kilimanjaro farmer has planted 130 Hass avocado to meet to increasing demand for this fruit. This extended family *[see below right]*, which includes 6 separate households living in the same spacious compound near Nankhunda village in southern Malawi, has more than 300 fruits planted within the family lands.





STRATEGY

During the previous two Rotary-SGG tree projects a strategy to promote tree cover in various African locations was developed. See TropicalTreeProjectFinalReport[14.4.2023] for details. This strategy has proved itself to have high social impact, to be cost effective, and to be replicable. Thus, the methodology for this third tree project remains largely the same. However, there are two significant changes. One is that the project's replicability implies that there is no need to confine action to the three main locations of the previous projects. Thus, if sufficient funds are available SGG will consider cooperation with institutions in other neighbouring countries [e.g. Zambia, Uganda etc] if they have the capacity to implement tree projects for the purposes given above.

The second change in strategy is of greater importance. SGG's experience of tree-planting over the last 15 years is that there is an almost unlimited [we should think in terms of millions!] of small-scale African farmers wanting to plant trees for their own benefit on their own plots. This is true even when the immediate financial rewards are as small as 20p for each surviving seedling. By early 2026 we have considerable evidence to support this viewpoint. Since January 2024, when young trees planted in 2023 were counted, SGG has recorded a total of 103,449 trees. This includes 83,826 in Malawi, 17,520 in Tanzania, but only 2,103 in Kenya. No systematic counting has been done at the locations of the 18 tree-planting groups in Kenya during this third project. Yet Kenya has been the most enterprising of these 3 countries in terms of tree-planting & conservation. Thus, SGG anticipates a total tree count of 100,000 trees recorded there by early 2029. The country where SGG tree-planting has not expanded recently is Tanzania, but new contacts have been found in 2025. We expect to have 50,000 new growing trees in Tanzania by the end of this project as a result of planting schemes, forest restoration, and "Kisiki Hai", Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration. Tree work in Malawi is well on track to reach a target of at least 150,000 by the end of 2028. Although the initial target in this project set in April 2023 was 250,000 trees, SGG has good reason to anticipate a final total of more than 300,000 trees.

The corollary of this is that SGG must reach a new level of funding if it is to realise our ambitions. Although SGG can still "plant a tree for 20p", as it has done for the last 19 years, inflation and fruits which are increasingly in demand are constantly pushing up prices. As the more expensive fruits [mango, avocado, jackfruit, bananas] now usually cost more than £1 and these fruits constitute approximately 10% of all planting, the average cost of seedlings in the local African markets we use is now about 25p/seedling. This means SGG is needing to raise a budget of £25,000 annually for the next 3 years, if we are to honour our commitment to reward African farmers for the work they do.

We see three funding avenues open to SGG i.e.

- sources within Rotary International. In the two previous tree projects rotarians have made significant donations, especially perhaps as 'support for the environment' is now one of Rotary's Areas of Focus. SGG is now looking for Rotary partners, either clubs, Districts or Rotary Foundation, willing to engage in the task of increased tropical tree cover. Please contact sgginfo16@gmail.com directly if you have such plans.
- in recent years our several projects have been maintained primarily by grants from Trusts and Foundations. Much of this funding is necessarily allocated to SGG's other projects [e.g. support for orphans, table-banking, improved soil management, kitchen gardens & permaculture], but most of these other schemes encourage increased tree cover – so Trust funding is probably our main hope of achieving our targets.
- when SGG first promoted agroforestry planting SGG's role involved fund-raising, organisation of the implementation, monitoring & remuneration of work done by farmer participants, and reports to sponsors. Over the last 15 years that role has gradually been reduced, as local partners take more initiative, to fundraising, monitoring & report-writing. This change has greatly benefitted SGG because we can now administer more tree projects than previously. We envisage progressing further to a stage where SGG match funds with partner NGOs who have the same core objectives as SGG and who have the capacity to implement tree projects autonomously. In 2025 we started using this strategy to increase SGG participation in Tanzanian tree projects. However, it is worthwhile to emphasise again that SGG wishes at present to prioritise NGO partnerships where poverty & hunger eradication are core components of any tree project.

The funding raised specifically for tree projects in recent years has been well below the £25,000 annual budget mentioned above. Nevertheless, we believe that now is an appropriate time to scale up our operations and increase our fund-raising activities.

ESTIMATED BUDGET

The new target is to grow, either by planting or by natural regeneration, 300,000 trees over the six year period, 2023-2028. At the time of writing, June 2026, this target appears to be entirely reasonable, although only about 130,000 have so far been recorded and the farmers remunerated. The basis of this is that systematic tree counting has not yet started in Kenya, which has proved to be the main country for SGG tree projects. For the remaining three years of the project an annual target of approximately 60,000 trees is required. Until now SGG has been remunerating small-scale farmers and tree workers at an average rate of 25p/tree [approximately $0.33/tree or 0.29 euros/tree]. If such prices are maintained a likely total budget for an additional 180,000 trees would be £45,000 [US$ 61,000 or 52,000 euro] spread over 3 years.

In addition to the matter of payment for trees growing after agroforestry planting or forest restoration, there is the issue of carbon capture trees. Such trees receive an initial remuneration of 20p when the farmer agrees to preserve the mature tree for at least 5 years, but also a further 80p at the end of the 5 year period. SGG estimates that there will be 15,000 such trees recorded by the end of 2028. Thus there is a supplementary payment of £12,000 for such trees, most of which will be paid in 2028-2029.

The 2019-2022 Tropical Tree-Planting & Conservation Project had 551 separate schemes recorded in Kenya and a further 72 in Tanzania. The current membership of Nankhunda Transformation group near Zomba Malawi is 500. This indicates that SGG will be providing administration & fund-raising support for more than 1,000 participating small-scale farmers. The local coordination and monitoring for such a large number of participants requires several coordinators, and an estimated budget of £7,500 to be spent over the 3 year period is required. SGG would like to point out here that all SGG services [i.e. fund-raising, consultations, liaison with local coordinators, monitoring, reports to sponsors] are provided freely and any such administrative costs are absorbed by SGG volunteer members.

The required budget for the remaining 3 years of this project can be summarised as follows:

- either agroforestry planting or natural regeneration £45,000

*[as most payments are made **after** at least several months of tree growth and **farmers decide what to grow** SGG cannot be precise about tree species nor the balance between planted & natural growth]*

- supplementary payments for 20,000 carbon capture trees £12,000
- local coordination in Kenya, Tanzania, & Malawi £7,500
- SGG administration & monitoring costs paid separately -----
- Total budget for 2026-2029 £64,500.

SGG must emphasise that these are only estimates based on past field experience and reasonable optimism: we cannot predict precisely what African small-scale farmers are going to decide in the next two years.

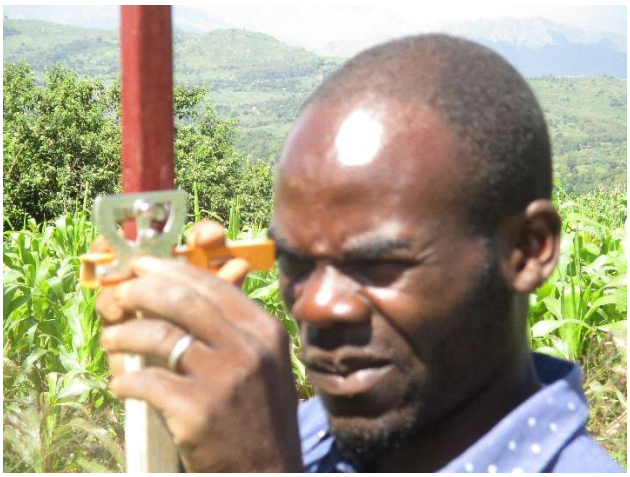
RECENT PROGRESS

The first summary of this successor Tropical Tree-Planting & Conservation Plan [2023-2028] was written in 2023 after completion of fieldwork and the final report for the previous project. For potential sponsors who wish to appreciate the full development of this programme over more than a decade of action, we would recommend reading of TropicalTreeProjectFinalReport[14.4.2023, and even the 2017-18 Tropical Tree Planting Report available at www.sustainableglobalgardens.org.uk.

The situation has changed so much since 2023 that we now feel it necessary to produce a modified version of the original Tropical Tree-Planting & Conservation Plan [2023-2028]. This allows SGG to report some early progress in this latter project.

So far most progress in this current project has been in Malawi. The first 22,509 trees recorded here in January 2023 [so growing in 2022] were part of the previous project, but since April 2023 a further 46,026 of agroforestry trees have been counted. In addition 37,800 trees have been recorded in the various "conservation areas" around Zomba Forest Lodge. With 83,826 trees recorded already, local groups being encouraged to each have their own tree nurseries, and new community groups wanting to join Nankhunda Transformation, SGG believes our partners near Zomba are well on their way to achieve a target of 200,000 trees healthily growing and forming a significant carbon sink.





The main focus for SGG around Nankhunda village is to increase agroforestry planting on large treeless maize fields. Here *[see above left]* at the group tree nursery belonging to Chigwandembo group 30 seedling are being distributed to each of the 20 members. Such trees should be planted along the contour especially on steep slopes. Here *[see above right]* Humphrey is being trained to use an Abney level to aid tree-planting along contours. The conservation areas established by ZombaTREEZ now have significant numbers of mature indigenous trees suitable for carbon capture. Here *[see below left]* SGG fieldworker Carole demonstrates how to select trees for carbon trading. See SGG website for details. This new patch of forest which is maintained by Magube Choir group was largely treeless in 2018 before Magube Choir's forest restoration project was started. A new development around Nankhunda has been the development 'copses' on patches of steep or rocky ground unsuitable of cultivation. In March 2025 a group cleared grass & weeds from this previously waste ground to establish a new conservation area and plant 500 seedlings *[see below right]*. In January 2026 1,750 young trees above shoulder height were counted here – the beginning of a new patch of forest.





Since 2020 tree projects in Tanzania have been quite limited. SGG began to rectify this situation in 2025 when we requested a young Tanzanian friend to count trees on behalf of SGG, thereby saving the cost of an expensive air flight. Currently SGG records show only 17,520 counted since April 2023, but we anticipate this figure rising rapidly in 2026 with new tree-planting contacts found outside North-East Tanzania. In 2026 we are looking to promote "Kisiki Hai" and are looking for potential partners engaged in this type of tree project. For details of this new strategy, browse https://thesustainableinnovation.com/kisiki-hai.





In Tanzania SGG has often invested in tree-planting on bare school grounds. This *[see above left]* is Mother Kelvin's School in Same where environmental education is part of the curriculum for young Tanzanians. A special part of our Tanzania actions has been to try and preserve large trees *[see above right]* found on the slopes of Kilimanjaro. Trees such as this are often used for shade in banana and coffee plantations, but they are also valuable as carbon sinks and habitats needed to maintain local biodiversity.

As SGG approaches the latter part of this project it is clear that tree-counting & remuneration to tree growers in Kenya is a priority task. We plan to do much of this work in January 2027 when we hope to record the best part of 100,000 trees located among more than 500 small-scale farms.

In this third stage of the tropical tree-planting programme, Kenya has the least trees recorded so far, but it has perhaps the greatest potential. SGG has more than 500 contacts who have a history of agroforestry planting. The Kenya government has encouraged for several years farmers to use at least 10% of their farm for trees. Of particular value for SGG plans is SCOPE Kenya, an NGO which specialises in the conversion of barren, unproductive school grounds into spaces producing a food surplus for pupils and their parents. See https://www.scopekenya.net



At St Denis Libolina School for the Physically Challenged in Bungoma County, Kenya SCOPE led training in permaculture methods funded by SGG in 2023-24. Much of that training concerned new methods of horticulture, but there were also 225 trees planted. These included mango, pawpaw, avocado as well as bananas. Here *[see left]* a narrow, previously wasted space between a classroom and the perimeter fence is now planted with bananas, vegetables and a double row of *Grevillea robusta*. Similar work is now being done elsewhere.

SGG also has several contacts in various institutions [e.g. Friends Monthly Meeting in Kitale, Mundika Sisters of Grace & Compassion, the International Society for Pesticidal Plants] who have a strong history of tree-planting. If these various contacts maintain interest in agroforestry & forest restoration for the next few years, we could expect a final Kenya tree count of close to 100,000 if funding for such progress is available.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Are there any conclusions which can be drawn from SGG's field experience between April 2023 and June 2026 i.e.. during the implementation of the third stage of this Tropical Tree-Planting and Conservation programme now in its 10th year? I would like to reiterate the following salient points:

1. there is an enormous potential in Africa South of the Sahara for tree projects, both by agroforestry and natural regeneration. Even in areas where the rural population density is quite high, there is abundant poorly used land available. From SGG's field experience in Tanzania, Kenya and Malawi there is more than a sufficiency of farmers looking for additional income and willing to plant/care for trees -provided they receive some benefit/financial reward for their 'environmental services'. An illustration of the willingness of African small-scale farmers to plant is that SGG rarely plants trees or organises the planting nowadays. Instead those farmers take the initiative, plant what species they want at the most convenient time for themselves, take care of their young trees, and then wait until SGG monitors progress and pays them for their work. As confirmation of this African-led approach, SGG has recently received tree counts which increase SGG's tree portfolio by about 45,000. The July 2026 total tree count mentioned earlier was 103,449. The current total in early November is an estimated 148,780 trees
2. there are significant local obstacles to an increase in tree cover. However, our experience is that land ownership issues and government policies are more important than the presumed indifference of small-scale farmers;
3. another major difficulty is the slowness of potential donors & investors from the Developed World to appreciate the full value of African tree projects i.e. not just as an environmental improvement but also as a core strategy for poverty and hunger eradication;
4. African tree projects can make a major contribution to climate change mitigation, both through forest restoration and agroforestry systems on small-scale farms. At the time of writing Europe is experiencing historic, record-breaking high temperatures: we are witnessing what the late 21st century climate is likely to be. So far much effort has been put into technological solutions to solve this problem, but such solutions are being developed far too slowly to combat a rapidly changing climate. At the same time there is an appeal for people to change their greenhouse gas-using lifestyle, but there is widespread resistance to this. Thus, it is time to appreciate the global value of an extensive increase in tropical tree cover.

SGG fieldworkers believe that we have appropriate strategies for a rapid and extensive increase in African tree cover. We believe our methods to be widely replicable outside the countries where SGG is active. However, we are a micro-development group with limited resources. We therefore call upon other larger entities & institutions to support SGG's actions or to engage in similar activity elsewhere, everywhere that it is needed.

Paul Keeley
c/o Sustainable Global Gardens 5th November 2026