



# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2023

**"Collaborative Action for Nature and People"**



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# 1. About ARCOS

The Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS) was founded in 1995 as a regional conservation organisation with the sole focus on the Albertine Rift biodiversity conservation. ARCOS has grown and upscaled its geographic areas of intervention from the Albertine Rift region to Africa Great Lakes and Africa Mountains.

To achieve its mission, ARCOS builds on its Theory of Change:

- We facilitate networking with local, national, and international players to enhance sustainable development through information and experience sharing,
- We empower our network through policy dialogue, capacity building and policy engagement when implementing our work. We work with all kinds of organizations– Non Government Organization(NGOs)/Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), academic institutions, governments and increasingly business.
- Our activities on the ground take an integrated landscape approach focusing mainly in protecting biodiversity and enhancing ecosystem services, building Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs) and building shared vision among stakeholders to address threats.

**Legal status:** ARCOS is registered in Uganda and Rwanda as International NGO and in the UK as a Charity and Company Limited by Guarantee. ARCOS has offices in Kampala and Kigali (Head Office) and Cambridge. In addition, ARCOS has a Board of Directors and Trustees comprised of appointed Board members. These board members include representatives from the Albertine Rift countries, Africa, and other international experts. Within the Board of Directors, a Management Committee is responsible for overseeing and reviewing ARCOS progress. The Management Committee is comprised of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and the Chief Executive Officer, whose responsibility is to ensure the day-to-day management of the organization.





# Our Vision

**Our Ecosystems are  
Healthy and Provide  
Sustainable Benefits for  
Nature and People.**

# Our Mission

**To Build a  
Sustainable Future for  
Nature and People  
through the  
Promotion of  
Collaborative Actions.**



## 2. Message from the Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

The year 2023 marked the 28th Anniversary of the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS). Similar to previous years, ARCOS continued to drive local actions to tackle global challenges.

In the beginning of 2023, ARCOS together with partners namely: the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance (CBA) and Reforest'Action with financial support from the AstraZeneca, launched the 30-year project with the goal of restoring degraded landscapes and promoting climate resilience in the western province.

In the middle of the year, ARCOS was honored with the prestigious Award for Long-standing Landscape Restoration Efforts in Africa by One Tree Planted. As part of increasing the philosophy of acting locally and engaging broadly, ARCOS launched the African NGOs Alliance for Environmental Sustainability (ANAES), a collaborative endeavor between ARCOS, CBA, AUDA-NEPAD/AFR100, Bezos Earth Fund and other partners to bring together 32 committed conservation and development NGOs from 16 African countries to work together to restore biodiversity and put nature back to our economy and community livelihoods. Later on, in a notable development, His Majesty the King Charles III, who also established the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance in 2020, was introduced to ANAES, the newly launched initiative.

When the year was going down, ARCOS was awarded by the Earth Bezos Fund with a grant to empower local actors engaged in restoration efforts in Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic Republic Congo in the Kivuu-Rusizi Catchment. ARCOS increased its resources through 14 projects including (four new project earned in 2023). With 162 staff (86% of them in the field), through 14 projects ARCOS engaged over 54,000 farmer households and restoring 40,000 hectares in activity related to landscape restoration and other sustainable initiatives.

We deeply appreciate the support from our donors, partners, ARCOS members, and the tireless efforts of our staff. Your contributions have been essential to our achievements this year. We look forward to your ongoing collaboration and welcome new partnerships as we continue our journey to build environmental resilience, care for our planet and people.



A stylized black ink signature of Mr John YONAZI SALEHE.

Mr John YONAZI SALEHE  
Board Chair



A stylized blue ink signature of Dr Sam Kanyamibwa.

Dr Sam Kanyamibwa  
Founder & CEO





# ARCOS NETWORK







### 3. Acting Locally to Address Global Issues Through ARCOS Strategic Programme Areas

*The year 2023 marked the third year of the implementation of the ARCOS 2021-2030 strategic plan based on 6 strategic areas. The strategic plan has Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration, Building Social Capital and Sustainable Community Livelihoods, Promoting Education for Sustainable Development, Promoting Eco-Agriculture and Sustainable Food System, Building Resilience to Climate Change and Supporting Governments and Private Sector to Enhance Green Development Agenda as pillars.*



In the year 2023, ARCOS accomplished remarkable milestones in various areas to further its conservation efforts. From expanding full-time staff to extensive reforestation initiatives and the mobilization of biodiversity data, ARCOS displayed a deep commitment to preserving the rich biodiversity of the Albertine Rift, Africa Great Lakes and Mountains Region.



# 28

## Years of Transformation



162

ARCOS full-time employed staff by the end of 2023.



40,000

Hectares under restoration in the region.



54,000

Households engaged by ARCOS in sustainable landscape restoration and biodiversity conservation.



350,000\$

Money invested in green community businesses through ARCOS Community Fund (Umusave). 600+ green enterprises were supported since 2017 thanks to Umusave Fund.



48,869

Through the Eco-Schools Programme, ARCOS successfully mobilized a total of 48,869 students and their wider school communities, empowering them to actively participate in environmentally sustainable initiatives within their local landscape.



3,400,000

Biodiversity data mobilized and hosted on ARCOS Biodiversity Information System (ARBIMS) to guide informed decision making.



+8,500,000

8.5 Millions trees planted between 2021-2023. By 2030, 100 Millions trees will be planted and grown.





# NURTURING NATURE

Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation  
& Ecosystem Restoration



# 3.1. Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Restoration



## Indicators

Number of trees planted and grown, hectares restored and abundance of species in the restored areas as a result of rehabilitation activity, .

On the ground, our actions yielded impactful results. We significantly increased tree planting, growing a total of 3.5 million trees this year, with nearly half being native species. Restored areas expanded from 30,000 hectares to 40,000 hectares. Notably, the rehabilitation efforts contributed to the return of 20 indigenous species and other beneficial ecosystem services.

This year saw significant progress in strengthening our network for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration. We forged partnerships in order to foster collaboration and expanding our reach.

We empowered staff and community members by developing a comprehensive Biodiversity & Ecosystem Restoration Strategy. Additionally, 60 staff and 20,000 community representatives participated in training sessions, enhancing their capacity to contribute to these efforts.



8,500,000

3.5 Million Trees planted and grown making 8.5 Millions trees planted between 2021-2023. . This increased variety of species (including fruits, agroforestry, woodlot and fodder crops; friends of farmers). Increased availability of vital resources such as food, fuelwood, and medicine for local communities.



40,000

Number of hectares under restoration increased from 30,000 to 40,000 hectares. This increased soil fertility. Households testify that since they started practicing conservation practices their yield doubled.



54,000

Empowering community members through training sessions has enhanced local expertise, strengthened community engagement, and improved capacity for sustainable environmental practices. Engaged community households increased from 40,000 to 54,000.



20

The rehabilitation efforts were significantly enhanced by the contribution of 20 indigenous species .



# IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS

Building Social Capital and  
Sustainable Community Livelihoods





**US\$ 350,000**

Injected in Village-Based Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) enabled communities to finance micro-project and save about \$270K per year on their return on investment.



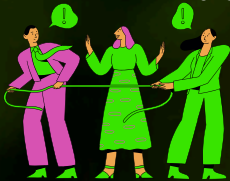
**281**

Project proposals from community were awarded grants or loans, further promoting entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods at the community level which reduced poverty and increased food security at household level.



**17,000**

10,000 Green jobs through various initiatives such as tree nursery development and value chains development surging to total of 17,000 jobs created between 2021-2023.



**900**

Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) surged from 440 to 900, accumulating a total of 97.2 million RWF, empowering communities economically with 60% participation of women in leadership.

## 3.2. Building Social Capital and Sustainable Community Livelihoods

### Indicators

Increased household income, Improved food security, Reduced poverty rates, Increased access to financial services, Improved gender equality.



ARCOS significantly enhanced social capital and sustainable community livelihoods in 2023. The network of Farmer Network Associations (FNAs) grew by 460, reaching 1150 and fostering knowledge sharing. Three Endokwa Newsletters empowered communities with critical information.

Capacity building was prioritized with 83 new ARCOS staff trained extensively as trainers. Additionally, 24 cooperatives and 14 women's groups received Train-the-Trainer sessions, boosting their ability to support sustainable development initiatives.

Extensive household engagement efforts led to the adoption of sustainable practices, promoting environmental conservation and resilience. Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) surged from 440 to 900, accumulating a total of 97.2 million RWF, empowering communities economically.

Land was allocated for developing 35 hectares for value chains of agro-commodities, and a selling point was constructed in Rulindo to improve market access for local produce. Additionally, ARCOS funded 281 community and school project proposals through grants and loans, fostering entrepreneurship, green jobs, and inclusive growth.

A group of students in blue uniforms are sitting outdoors under large trees, listening to a speaker. The speaker is a young man in a blue shirt, standing and gesturing with his hands. The students are sitting on wooden benches, some looking at the speaker and others looking towards the camera. The background shows a school building and more trees.

## EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Promoting Education for Sustainable  
Development



### 3.3. Promoting Education for Sustainable Development



#### Indicators

Increased knowledge of sustainable development concepts, Improved understanding of environmental issues and Improved teaching competencies .

In 2023, ARCOS made significant strides in promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within Rwandan communities. Strategic networking and targeted empowerment initiatives aimed to equip educators, students, and community leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary for a more sustainable future.

ARCOS actively participated in the global ESD conversation by attending three high-level meetings. These included the Foundation for Environmental Education General Assembly, an update session with the Rwanda Education Board, and a UNESCO validation workshop on the Education for Sustainable Development 2030 Framework. These engagements ensured ARCOS remained at the forefront of ESD best practices and policies.

Empowerment was a key focus, with ARCOS staff receiving dedicated training on the Eco-Schools Approach and Climate Change adaptation strategies. This knowledge was then disseminated through a workshop, reaching a total of 50,671 individuals. Notably, this included 1,602 teachers, 48,869 students, 40 school leaders, 40 village leaders, 40 Environmental Officers, and 120 District Education Officials. By equipping these key figures with the tools and strategies for sustainable development, ARCOS is laying the groundwork for a more environmentally conscious future across Rwandan communities.



48,869

Through participation in 25 Eco-Schools, 48,869 students have gained an improved understanding of environmental issues, fostering a more environmentally conscious generation.



40

Number of schools that are part of the Education for sustainable development through the Eco-Schools Programme. 16 New schools have improved knowledge and understanding of eco-thinking, eco-citizenship.



31,001

Parents have been empowered with the Eco-Schools approach, gaining valuable knowledge in climate change adaptation strategies, environmental awareness, and eco-thinking, contributing to more sustainable practices within their communities.



1,602

The quality of education enhanced as 1,602 teachers were equipped to integrate ESD into the competence-based curriculum. This empowers students with the knowledge and skills needed to address environmental challenges.

A close-up photograph of several green, bumpy passion fruits hanging from a vine with large green leaves. The background is softly blurred, showing more foliage and some yellow light filtering through.

# ECO-AGRICULTURE

Promoting Eco-Agriculture  
and Sustainable Food System



### 3.4. Promoting Eco-Agriculture and Sustainable Food System

#### Indicators

Enhanced community resilience to climate change, Improved nutritional status of households, increased knowledge & adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

The Eco-Agriculture and Sustainable Food System initiative achieved significant progress in 2023. Through strategic networking efforts, including the Endokwa Newsletter and Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) workshops, communities were empowered with essential knowledge on sustainable practices. These initiatives ensured that valuable information reached a broad audience, fostering informed community participation in sustainability efforts. Capacity building was a key focus, with over 133 individuals and groups trained as trainers in Sustainable Agriculture and Land Management (SALM) practices. This training equipped community members with the skills to implement and mentor others in sustainable practices, ensuring long-term positive impacts on local agriculture and environmental stewardship.

On-the-ground actions delivered tangible outcomes. Fifty model sites were established as local learning centers, providing practical demonstrations of sustainable practices. Additionally, 50 community-managed tree nurseries were set up, ensuring a steady supply of seedlings for reforestation and agroforestry projects. Adoption rates of sustainable practices among farmers were impressive, with 69% adopting kitchen gardens, 56% using grass strips, and 38% practicing conservation agriculture. These practices improved soil health, crop yields, and ecosystem resilience. To support livelihoods, 552 livestock and tool packages were distributed, along with high-quality seeds, seedlings, manure, and lime. This distribution bolstered food security and agricultural productivity, enhancing the economic stability of farming households and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Overall, the Eco-Agriculture and Sustainable Food System initiative's multi-pronged approach effectively empowered communities with the knowledge, resources, and practical skills necessary for a more sustainable and food-secure future. The program's comprehensive strategy ensured that the benefits of sustainable agriculture were widely distributed, fostering resilient and self-sufficient communities.



40,000

Hectares of agro-systems under restoration, leading to enhanced community resilience to climate change. Households have experienced improved nutritional status, and there has been a significant increase in knowledge and adoption of sustainable agricultural practices within the community.



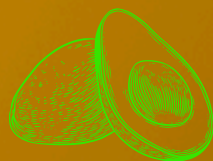
552

Enhanced community resilience to climate change has been achieved through the distribution of 552 livestock to farmers. Manure from the livestock enriches soil fertility, boosting crop yields and providing a stable income for farming communities, thereby supporting sustainable agricultural practices.



212,000

Training 212,000 individuals from 750 community groups in Sustainable Agricultural Land Management (SALM) has transformed landscapes and notably empowered women and youth, with 55% of beneficiaries from these groups, leading to increased sustainability and community empowerment.



164

The construction of a mini selling point in Rulindo, Tumba Site, has facilitated market access for local fruit and vegetable producers, benefiting 164 merchants by providing a key sales platform.



# RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Building Resilience to Climate  
Change





3,500,000

Trees have been planted with an expected sequestration of approximately 2.3 Million tons of carbon dioxide in 30 years.



236,160

The allocation of USD 236,160 to support climate resilience and green development activities provided substantial funding, ensuring that communities had the essential resources to implement effective and sustainable green projects.



ARCOS supplied quality seeds and seedlings, manure, and lime to farmers, enhancing food production. This approach helped farmers adapt to climate change by promoting resilient agricultural practices, ultimately fostering better market linkages and economic opportunities.



105,000,000

105,000,000 Tons of soil potentially protected against erosion thanks to 3,500,000 trees planted in 2023.

## 3.5. Building Resilience to Climate Change



In 2023, the Eco-Agriculture and Sustainable Food System initiative achieved remarkable progress in promoting sustainable agricultural practices and enhancing climate resilience.

The initiative was further strengthened by community savings schemes, Nature-Based Community Funds (NBCFs), and various community projects, all aimed at empowering local populations to drive the green development agenda. A total of 851 community green projects received funding, reflecting the widespread commitment to environmental sustainability and the empowerment of grassroots initiatives.

Financial investment played a crucial role in the success of these projects, with 308,504,300 RWF allocated to support climate resilience and green development activities. This substantial funding ensured that communities had the necessary resources to implement effective and sustainable green projects.

Additionally, a significant milestone was reached in tree planting efforts. A total of 3,500,000 trees were planted, expected to sequester approximately 2.3 tons of carbon dioxide, demonstrating a strong commitment to mitigating climate change through natural solutions.

The 2023 accomplishments of the Eco-Agriculture and Sustainable Food System initiative highlight the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to environmental sustainability. By integrating financial support, community empowerment, and practical on-the-ground actions, the initiative has set a robust foundation for ongoing green development and enhanced climate resilience in the communities it serves.



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# GREEN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Supporting Governments and Private Sector  
to Enhance Green Development Agenda



## 3.6. Supporting Governments and Private Sector to Enhance Green Development Agenda



### Indicators

Adoption rate of green agriculture practices, productivity increase, cooperatives income increase and green job created.



ARCOS made significant progress in promoting environmentally friendly practices. They grew a large number of coffee seedlings (175,000) that are expected to bring substantial income to the community (\$223,024). Additionally, ARCOS created thousands of green jobs (4,117) by planting trees and running nurseries. This not only benefited the environment but also boosted cooperative income by 13% through both employment opportunities and seedling sales.

Beyond ARCOS' own work, a broader alliance (ANAES) was formed to promote environmental sustainability across Africa. This alliance, consisting of 32 NGOs, signifies a unified effort toward conservation across the continent. By funding over 850 community green projects, ARCOS demonstrated its commitment to environmental responsibility and its role in supporting the government's green development goals.



6,500

Through Public-Private Partnership (PPT), farmers have adopted circular agriculture practices through tea production, leading to more sustainable farming methods that enhance resource efficiency and reduce environmental impact.



1750,000

175,000 shaded coffee seedlings were grown and expected to generate income of \$223,024 to the community



4,117

Green jobs in tree nurseries and planting campaigns led to a 10% increase in annual cooperative income through employment and seedling sales.



851

Funding 851 community green projects not only enhanced environmental sustainability but also created 2,553 jobs, boosting local economic development.

## 4. ARCOS Finance and Operations in 2023

In 2023, ARCOS generated \$3,036,096, marking a substantial 107% increase from the previous year's \$1,466,879. This growth in revenue reflects ARCOS' expanding impact and enhanced ability to support its initiatives. The increased funds enabled the expansion of conservation projects, implementation of climate adaptation strategies, empowerment of communities, advancement of sustainable farming practices, support for educational programs, enhancement of policy advocacy, and ensured smooth operational functioning.

The revenue growth underscores ARCOS' commitment to fostering biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods, eco-agriculture, education for sustainable development, and green development. This success positions ARCOS to continue driving positive change and contributing to a more sustainable future, reinforcing its role as a leading organization in environmental stewardship and sustainable development.



Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation  
and Ecosystem Restoration



Building Resilience to Climate  
Change



Building Social Capital and  
Sustainable Community Livelihoods



Promoting Eco-Agriculture and  
Sustainable Food Systems



Promoting Education for Sustainable  
Development



Supporting Governments and Private  
Sector to Enhance Green  
Development Agenda



Development, Administration and  
Operation Costs



## 5. Gratitude to Our Partners

Our work is possible thanks to the financial support of our Funding Partners and the collaboration of our Strategic Partners. In 2022, we have worked closely with a range of local, regional and international organizations/institutions to deliver our projects with the greatest potential impact. Our gratitude goes also to our strategic partners that accompany ARCOS with guidance towards a smooth implementation of our initiatives.

### Funding Partners

- AFR100\_One tree Planted
- Alinea
- AstraZenaca/Reforest Action
- Bezos Earth Fund
- Danish Civil Society in Development (CISU)
- Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection/IKI
- Fondation Audemars-Watkins (FAW)
- GEO Mountain-Mountain Research Initiative
- GIZ
- JRS Biodiversity Foundation
- Leuphana University
- Livelihood Funds
- Netherland Embassy - RVO
- New Field Foundation
- One tree planted
- Rwanda Green Fund (former FONERWA)
- Sainbury's
- Sweden Government
- The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
- UN Environment Programme
- UN High Commission for Refugees
- Van Tienhoven Foundation(VTF)
- Zoi Environment Network

### Strategic Partners

- ASSOPTHE
- Danish Outdoor Council
- dipcoop intl
- Global Nature Fund
- East African Community, Secretariat
- European Forest Institute
- Foundation for Environmental Education
- GRID-ARENDAL
- L'Autorité du Bassin du Lac Kivu et de la Rivière Rusizi
- Ministry of Environment Rwanda
- Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda
- Nature Tanzania
- NAEB
- Rwanda Forest Authority
- Rwanda Water Resources Board
- SORWATHE
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature
- University of Rwanda
- World Resource Institute





## 6. Facing the Future

ARCOS is growing both in human resources and funds, and its projections are grounded in a vision of sustained growth and impact.

For 2024, below are key targets that ARCOS plans to achieve:

- Over USD 12 million is the annual budget planned for 2024, mainly from ongoing projects such as MuLaKiLa Project and others. Moreover, ARCOS intend to develop and submit proposals totaling over USD 20,000,000, that will enable ARCOS to undertake transformative initiatives in the future.
- We will thrive to maintain ARCOS' position as a champion in landscape restoration across Africa through the delivery of impactful projects and fostering strategic partnerships. ARCOS targets to plant around 6 million trees on 20,000 Ha with focus on agroforestry trees, fruit trees, with the promotion of climate resilient indigenous species.
- ARCOS will continue to lead the change at local/national/regional levels in environmental conservation and community empowerment.
- To strengthen the established African NGOs Alliance for Environmental Sustainability (ANAES), ARCOS plans to build the capacity and resilience of Africa NGOs engaged in this platform and work together in bringing nature-based solutions
- ARCOS will also build on its leading role in Africa Mountains to increase efforts in Africa Mountain ecosystems conservation and mountain communities' development, through advocacy activities such as the Africa Mountain Community-to-Community Exchange and the Africa Regional Mountain Forum.
- ARCOS will continue to enhance the Education for Sustainable Development in Africa



## Contact Us

### UK Office

C/o BirdLife International  
The David Attenborough Building  
Pembroke Str, Cambridge CB30PE, UK  
[info@arcosnetwork.org](mailto:info@arcosnetwork.org)

### Kigali Head Office

KN 14 Avenue, No. 47  
Kimihurura  
P.O Box: 1735 Kigali, Rwanda  
[info@arcosnetwork.org](mailto:info@arcosnetwork.org)

### Uganda Office

78 Semawata Rd, Ntinda  
P.O. Box 9146, Kampala  
Kampala, Uganda  
[info@arcosnetwork.org](mailto:info@arcosnetwork.org)