

# WE Africa

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





# OUR PURPOSE

is to put women at the heart  
of transforming Africa's  
environmental movement.

# OUR VISION

is that WE Africa sparks a  
movement of women leaders in  
Africa and beyond, who are role  
modelling a more effective and  
impactful way to do  
conservation. By delivering  
transformational and deeply  
African leadership experiences,  
amplified by a strong pay it  
forward approach and supported  
by a connected community, WE  
Africa is making tangible  
contributions to the sustainability  
and wellbeing of leaders and  
ecosystems. WE Africa is a  
beacon of hope for the future,  
locally and globally.



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## LETTER FROM OUR COFOUNDERS



It's been over a year since the formal launch of WE Africa's first cohort – our 2021 Founding Fellows – and wow, what a year it has been!

Firstly, we want to extend another massive congratulations to our 2021 Fellows. The journey was intense at times, as we committed to co-creating and dreaming together. We are now sitting in a space where we have an incredible opportunity to open doors for others, shift power, and pay it forward to our new 2022 cohort and beyond through collective action. Through a year of online meetings, it was deeply moving to finally meet each other at the first WE Africa in person retreat in February and to brainstorm how to amplify the WE Africa movement and welcome the 2022 fellows to WE Africa in person. Thank you so much to Natural Selections and Meno-a-Kwena Camp in Botswana for hosting this retreat.

Throughout this past year, as we have dealt with crises close to our own homes and further afield, it was often hard to see what the future might look like for people, wildlife and wilderness. But WE Africa gives us tremendous hope. Our collective power bounded by inclusion and compassion is an unstoppable force.

As our colleague Jackie Asiimwe shared with us last year: “Women are innately generous. It's in our DNA. When we action it – 'ubuntu' – there is a strong healing capacity. It is not top-down. It is circular and inclusive.” Circles of generosity are all around us in Africa.

We know from data collected over the past year that our Fellows feel more confident, better able to deal with conflict, and less alone than they did one year ago before their one-year experience on WE lead. They emerged connected, inspired and ready to pay it forward and create the movement through WE move projects. We thank the WE Africa support team who have made this change possible across all five pillars of personal leadership, wellbeing, relationships, visibility, and radical imagination. It is so exciting to see this movement grow. With our new 2022 cohort, WE Africa now includes 40 women environmental leaders across 17 countries in Africa. By 2025 we will have 100 women, strategically placed to open doors for others- 100 sparks to flame this movement and many more connected to WE Africa. This will change the environmental movement to reflect the African reality of leadership: collectivism, feminism, community, generosity, indigenous knowledge, and action.

Together we are rooted in our trust for one another, with the skills, passion, experience and ingenuity to make it happen.

We hope the details shared on the following pages will give you a sense of WE Africa's accomplishments over the past year. In closing, we'd like to share a message on behalf of all of our WE Africa support team, Fellows, and Leadership Council:

**Believe in us, all of us. Invest in us, our ideas, and our visions, and let's make this happen together.**

This is just the beginning.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Colleen Begg and Dr. Leela Hazzah  
WE Africa Cofounders

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF WE AFRICA

WE Africa was born out of our joint frustration that we were doing too little to address the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. We recognized that we were facing not only an environmental crisis but a leadership crisis. Few women were at decision making tables in the environmental space in Africa and we urgently needed diverse teams making decisions – diverse in all aspects of identity including gender- as this leads to more innovation and more impact. Too many environmentalists said they felt alone, overwhelmed, and frustrated. In 2017 we began sharing perspectives and stories with other African women environmental leaders about the need to urgently scale our impact. We needed to address this profound imbalance in African conservation leadership while at the same time creating a community of practice that reduced competition and valued

connection and collaboration. Through a series of conversations and the creation of a Leadership Council of eight African women conservation leaders, the WE lead experience was created and refined and WE Africa was born. In February 2020 WE Africa was formally inaugurated by The Honorable Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of Kenya, at the 2020 Pathways Conference in Kenya. WE Africa's founding cohort launched the first 12-month experience in January 2021 with these fellows graduating in December 2021. As of January 2022, we have officially welcomed our second cohort for their year-long program with applications opening for cohort 3 in July 2022. WE Africa continues to evolve as it is co-created by all who are part of it. This is a non-hierarchical movement driven by our purpose and governed by our values of co-creation, disruption, inclusion, equity, and joy.





# TO IMPLEMENT OUR VISION WE HAVE THREE CO-STRATEGIES TO IMPACT

The one-year transformational **WE lead** experience is comprised of a range of leadership building opportunities for 20 top level women leaders from Africa each year. These include tailored trainings, facilitated dialogues, one-on-one coaching and mentoring, community building, peer support, focused retreats, and increased visibility. To date 40 WE Africa fellows from 17 different African countries have been part of WE lead.



**WE talk** binds us to women leaders of diverse sectors, ages, countries, and across triumphs and challenges through authentic storytelling and shared experience. To-date we have hosted 15 women leaders from nine countries around the world to share their stories to motivate and inspire our Fellows as part of WE talk.



Since our last report in July of 2021, our fellows and support team have been building out **WE move** to effectively scale our impact and pay it forward through collective action. We have strategically chosen key projects that tackle current challenges and barriers to grow the WE Africa movement.



## THIS IS WE AFRICA A COMMUNITY CREATED FOR IMPACT WITH ONE PURPOSE.

# TRACKING TRANS- FORMATION

WE Africa's "Understanding & Adapting" team is dedicated to monitoring and evaluating WE Africa's progress toward our mission and vision and providing real time input from coaches, the delivery team and fellows to ensure we co-create. WE lead is designed around regular facilitated dialogues and these are key to co-creating the WE lead journey. Over the past year this U&A process included conducting hour long 1:1 introductory and exit interviews with each WE Fellow supplemented by written feedback from the coaches.

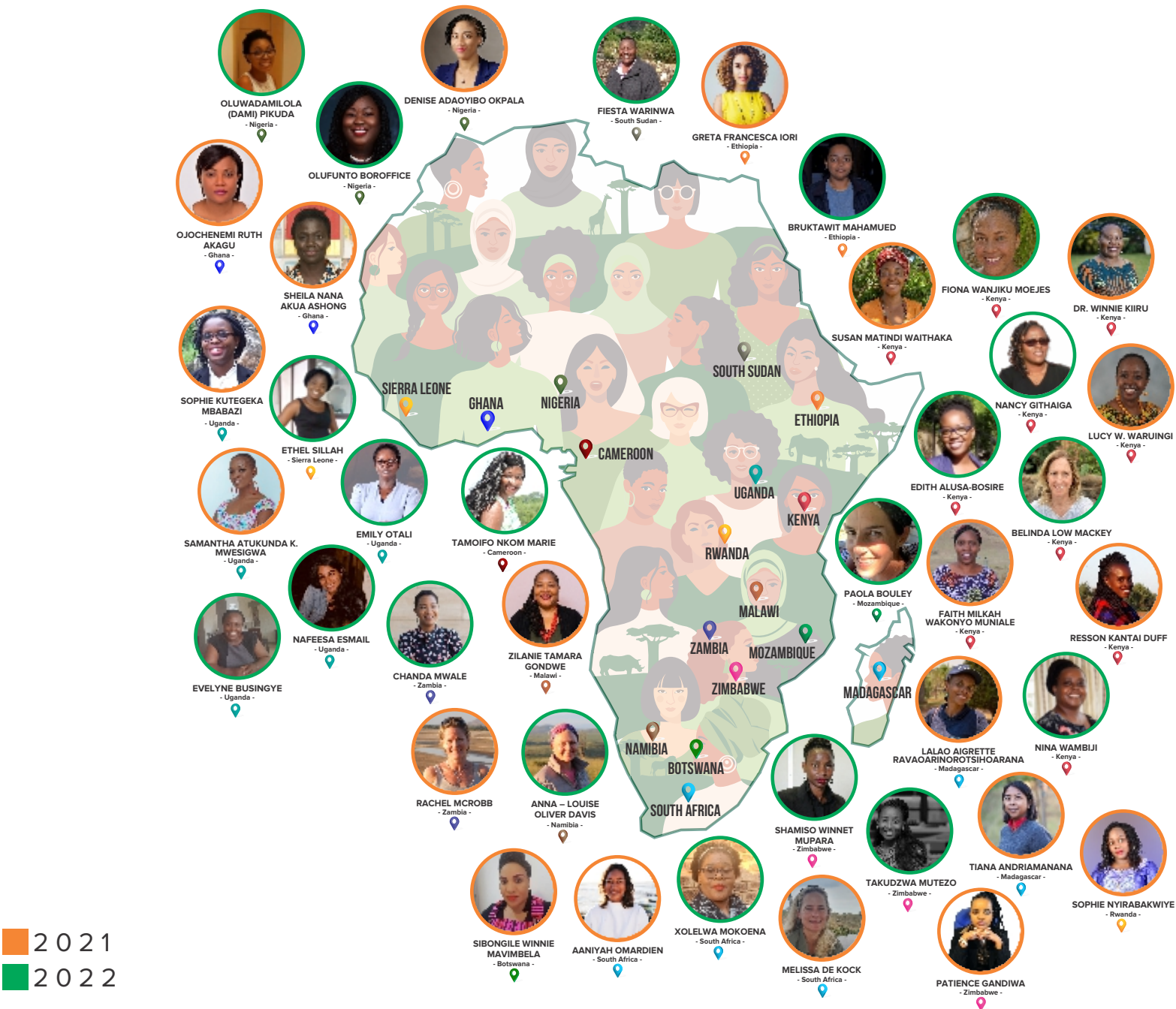
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**This past year has been illuminating for me in that what I thought was mythical, actually can exist: a real sisterhood. Where women support and care for each other, and don't compete but elevate one another. I am so grateful for WE Africa and CANNOT WAIT to meet all of my sisters at the [upcoming] retreat!**

- Melissa de Kock -

## THESE ARE THE KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Increased self-awareness:**  
90% of fellows reported having a better sense of self-awareness at the end of WE Africa than at the beginning.
- **Increased confidence in leadership skills:**  
78% of fellows said they were now more confident in their leadership skills than at the start of the fellowship.
- **More women are successfully obtaining leadership opportunities:**  
Success rates increased from 40% to 64% of fellows successfully seeking and obtaining opportunities.
- **Confidence to deal with difficult situations:**  
By the end of WE, 77% of the fellows shared that they were more comfortable dealing with conflict than when WE began where 72% of WE fellows reported being somewhat comfortable with conflict resolution.
- **Developed emotional intelligence:**  
By the end of WE, 72% of fellows said they now use emotional intelligence more in their day-to-day activities, with 94% saying their understanding of emotional intelligence had changed.
- **Women feel they have more colleagues they can trust and rely on:**  
At the start of WE, 65% of the fellows felt alone; by the end, that number dropped to 10%.
- **Women are actively relying on more colleagues more often:**  
By the end of the program, 57% of fellows were asking for help from others compared with 26% at the start.





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**Opening doors for others takes courage and compassion, but also the timing has to be right. Others have to be ready for it. We are all here because others have opened doors for us, and there is a responsibility and an honor that comes with that.**

- Hon Mary Robinson -

# A CELEBRATION

For our 2021 graduation, we could not think of two better speakers – women leaders who have so generously held space for other leaders like us – to share their stories and inspire our cohort. If you were unable to attend this event, we invite you to please make time to [watch](#) the recording of this special ceremony with the esteemed Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro, and Former President of Ireland Hon Mary Robinson. This event, including all of the amazing participants who presented their visions of themselves, was a highlight of our year.



## THIS IS WHAT WE CAME UP WITH:

- 1. Inclusion**  
If we are a pan African movement, we need to find women in leadership positions for the environment across Africa particularly North, West and Central Africa and the Sahel and remove barriers of participation.
- 2. Keeping the movement alive**  
Connecting the cohorts through WE talks, retreats, masterclasses, exchange trips and additional coaching as needed.
- 3. Visibility**  
Improve the visibility of WE Africa through telling our stories, improving the website, and creating a more assertive presence that aligns with our values.
- 4. WE too**  
Creating safe spaces to access support, coaching and justice against sexual harassment in the environmental sector since this is one of the main barriers to women staying in the sector.
- 5. WE Xchange**  
Our version of the “stock” exchange; an innovation hub and the catalyst/vehicle that will make change happen through an exchange of funds and skills and experience within the WE Africa community in an equitable, African way based on a spirit of generosity and trust.



A Circle expands forever  
It covers all who wish to hold hands  
And its size depends on each other  
It is a vision of solidarity  
It turns outwards to interact with the outside  
And inward for self critique  
A circle expands forever  
It is a vision of accountability  
It grows as the other is moved to grow  
A circle must have a centre  
But a single dot does not make a Circle  
One tree does not make a forest  
A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality and care

- Mercy Amba Oduyoye - “The Story of a Circle”

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## WE move

For 12 months deep bonds had been created online between the WE 2021 fellows guided by expert facilitation by the Open Circles team and two online “pop-up retreats” but the missing piece was being together. Through the generosity of Natural Selections, offering their Meno-A-Kwena lodge in Botswana and a lessening of Covid-19 restrictions we were finally able to meet each other. This was a celebration of “come as you are”. In three days of intensive activity, the WE Africa 2021 Fellows, now alumnae created the first five WE move projects designed to pay it forward and spark the movement. Each project needs to bring the fellows joy, be aligned with our purpose and have clear deliverables in the next 12 months.

# A GROWING SISTERHOOD

We are thrilled to have welcomed our second cohort of 20 African women leaders to WE Africa in January 2022. Once again, the selection process for this cohort was highly competitive, proving the immense need for this experience. Hailing from 12 countries across Africa, the 2022 cohort members will be guided through WE lead by a dedicated team of mentors, coaches, trainers, and their fellow WE Africa sisters who have helped to lay the groundwork over the past year for their journey ahead. We look forward to sharing updates with you on our 2022 cohort in our mid-year report.

Please visit our [website](#) to see all the amazing women from across Africa and around the globe who have joined the WE Africa community as Fellows and support team members in the past year.



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**WE is cultivating cycle-breakers. Together we have the power to stand in the face of the systems that want to hold us back and say: this ends with me. This ends with WE. The WE sisterhood has shown us that none of us will ever have to climb a mountain alone again.**

- Greta Francesca Iori -



# VISIBILITY WITH VALUE:

READ OUR STORIES



[Aaniyah Omaidien](#)



[Denise Adaoyibo Okpala](#)



[Faith Milkah Wakonyo Muniale](#)



[Greta Francesca Iori](#)



[Lucy W. Waruingi](#)



[Melissa de Kock](#)



[Rachel McRobb](#)



[Resson Kantai Duff](#)



[Ruth Akagu](#)



[Samantha Atukunda K. Mwesiwa](#)



[Sheila Nana Akua Ashong](#)



[Sibongile Winnie Mavimbela](#)



[Susan Matindi Waithaka](#)



[Tiana Andriamanana](#)



[Dr. Winnie Kiiru](#)



[Zilanie Tamara Gondwe](#)

# OUR FINANCES

WE Africa is financially governed by our fiscal sponsors TRT Conservation Foundation (NPC:2017/024322/08) in South Africa & Wildlife Guardians (501 c3) in the USA. A joint financial statement is provided for all WE Africa accounts.

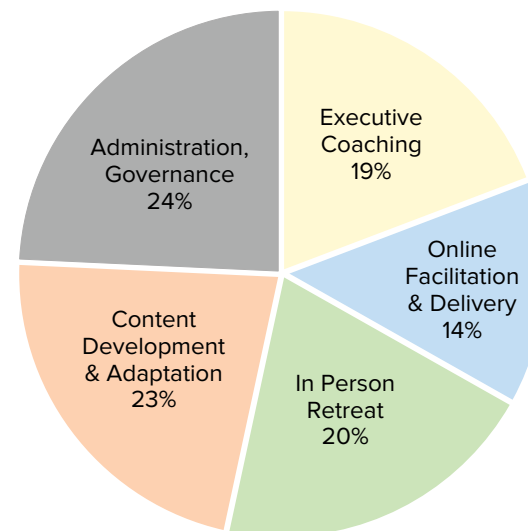
WE lead has a sponsored value of \$10 000 per fellow (\$200 000 a year). Each fellow is required to pay their own travel to the in-person retreats (limited scholarships are available to assist where needed) and to pay a fee of \$500 to secure their place and pay it forward. WE lead is now fully funded to 2025. Our WE lead expenditure in 2021 was \$197,729.

Our net assets on the 31st of December 2021 were \$199,347. Our financial statement can be downloaded [here](#). We are now moving into extensive fundraising to support the WE move projects, governance and development which will create the movement and pay it forward seeded by the WE lead program. We have a fund-raising goal of \$5 million USD over the next 4 years.

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**Part of my plea, as a person who has come from philanthropy for many years, is trust the women of Africa, invest big in them, think big of them as they think big and they want to do good work. The deeper your investment in people the more you will see impact.**

- Musimbi Kanyoro, 2021 -



# WE LEAD

YEAR LONG LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE





# OUR PARTNERS

WE Africa is inspired and supported by a large community. We would not be where we are today without the people and organizations who not only believed, but truly showed up to create a world that understands that nothing in nature exists in isolation. Thank you to our donors, friends and supporters for cultivating the power of women and cultures of leadership that go the distance for the environment.

With particular thanks to the Blue Foundation, Dry Creek Foundation, Liz Clayborne and Art Ortenburg Fund and Acacia Fund for their substantial support of WE lead.

Our first in person retreat would not have been possible without the generous in kind support from Meno-A-Kwena lodge in Botswana and Natural Selection.