

RESILIENT AFRICA

.....
2026: Volume II

Inspiring Young
Hearts & Minds
The Potential of
Conservation Education



BUILDING A FUTURE WHERE
PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE THRIVE



From Classrooms to Conservation Champions

Investments in African conservation education have been core to our identity since our founding in 1961 as the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation. In the early years we helped establish two of the most influential conservation colleges on the continent, the College of African Wildlife Management in Mweka, Tanzania and Garoua Wildlife College in Cameroon, both of which have graduated thousands of protected area managers, rangers, and other professionals. We’ve invested heavily in conservation science through grants to working scientists and the Charlotte Fellows, a research-based fellowship program designed to support post-graduate training. And we’ve developed other fellowship programs to provide management training, experience in policy and advocacy, and support geospatial-based careers. These programs all have one thing in common—they target Africans working in, or wanting to work in, conservation.

A child’s imagination is a powerful thing. Their young passions shape their future choices, and they hunger for opportunity. So the challenge before us became: How do we spark a lifelong passion for conservation in rural children? How do we inspire children to pull conservation into their lives beyond a moment in a classroom? How do we scale beyond a handful of schools? Thus was born a new program, Young Conservation Heroes, piloted in Kenya’s Tsavo landscape in 2024 with the support of Bob and Emmy King. This initiative builds on our experience with Classroom Africa but shifts the focus from infrastructure for individual schools to scaling conservation education through partnerships and driving landscape-level impact. It creates pathways for promising young learners to pursue secondary education. And most importantly, it puts them at the center of conservation action.

The long-term fate of Africa's wildlife and wild lands will not be decided by institutions or international agreements alone. It will be decided by the choices made by young people growing up alongside wildlife right now. Which is why exposing them to conservation in ways that connect to their sense of identity, early and close to home, may be the most important work AWF does.

Sincerely,

Laura Kohler
AWF Board Chair

In 2013, we started something new—building primary schools near high priority conservation areas as an incentive for local communities to make conservation commitments. The program is called Classroom Africa. Community members help promote human-wildlife coexistence, participate in sustainable agriculture practices, or partner with wildlife authorities to discourage poaching. Students gain exposure to conservation through after-school activities and benefit from safe, modern learning facilities. Altogether, AWF has built six schools, all of which operate today under the management of local authorities.

Those students taught us something.

40% Sub-Saharan Africans are under age 15

6 schools / **~16,000** students reached through Classroom Africa (2013-2021)

137 schools / **52,683** students reached through Young Conservation Heroes (2024-Present)

Resilient Africa is a newsletter from the African Wildlife Foundation exploring how Africa is defining and meeting conservation challenges on the continent.

HEADQUARTERS
AWF Conservation Centre
Ngong Road, Karen
P.O. Box 310, 00502
Nairobi, Kenya

awf.org/linkedin
awf.org/facebook
awf.org/instagram
awf.org/youtube

africanwildlife@awf.org
www.awf.org



Expanding the Reach of Conservation Education

Across Africa, many people, especially youth between the ages of 16 and 35 are moving from rural communities to cities in search of opportunity, weakening their ties to nature. For those that remain, the challenges of living with destructive or sometimes deadly animals can make coexistence seem like a burden. For both, conservation is someone else's concern.

Recognizing that our core values and interests are determined in childhood, AWF's conservation education initiative seeks to instill conservation as a value in primary school children living in wildlife-rich landscapes. For them, nature is simply home—familiar, sometimes threatening, rarely seen as something that needs them or that could define their future. But it does, and it can.

AWF has been investing in conservation education for 10 years, first through Classroom Africa, and most recently through Young Conservation Heroes, which seeks to go beyond individual school communities to reach children across a landscape, equipping them to become conservation champions in their own right.

Launched in 2024, Young Conservation Heroes is implemented by AWF and the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) across 137 primary schools in Kenya's Tsavo landscape, reaching learners ages 7 to 17.

11 Young Conservation Champions scholarships awarded to high school students

5,000+ entries received for annual Shujaa Zone Competitions (2025 & 2026)

The program has four main components:

- 1 Curriculum support, learning materials, such as posters and activity books, and in-school activations** that strengthen wildlife clubs and embed conservation education in daily school life.
- 2 The Annual Shujaa Zone Competition** (shujaa means “hero” in Kiswahili), co-branded with the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, which invites students across seven counties to express their conservation ideas through photography, art, poetry, essays, drama, and music.
- 3 Solar-powered Information and Community Technology (ICT) labs** to expand digital access in rural areas and improve conservation education through tailored online learning materials that provide access to digital literacy and online learning materials.
- 4 The AWF Young Conservation Champions Scholarship**, which provides full academic support and mentorship to exceptional students from communities bordering Tsavo's protected areas, along with seed funding to launch their own conservation projects.

PHOTO: CLASSROOM AFRICA STUDENTS AT MANYARA RANCH, TANZANIA.



KENYA: BEN AKATCH, MOBILE CONSERVATION EDUCATION OFFICER AT THE WILDLIFE CLUBS OF KENYA, GUIDES STUDENTS AT ST. PAUL'S MTITO ANDEI COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL THROUGH DIGITAL CONSERVATION-THEMED CONTENT DURING A SCHOOL VISIT.

Simangele Msweli, Associate Director, Conservation Education and Youth Leadership, oversees AWF's Youth Leadership programs. We spoke with her about Young Conservation Heroes, its connection to Classroom Africa, and why investing in a 10-year-old today may be the most strategic conservation decision AWF makes.

Simangele, AWF has been involved in conservation education for a long time. For people who don't know that history, what is Classroom Africa?

Classroom Africa was grounded in a simple but important truth: Education is one of the key drivers of sustainable development—not just broadly in society, but in conservation specifically. The more you have an empowered youth population, the more they can explore real opportunities and career paths. They are therefore less likely to be drawn into activities like illegal wildlife trade or be entirely reliant on a single livelihood in a fragile landscape.

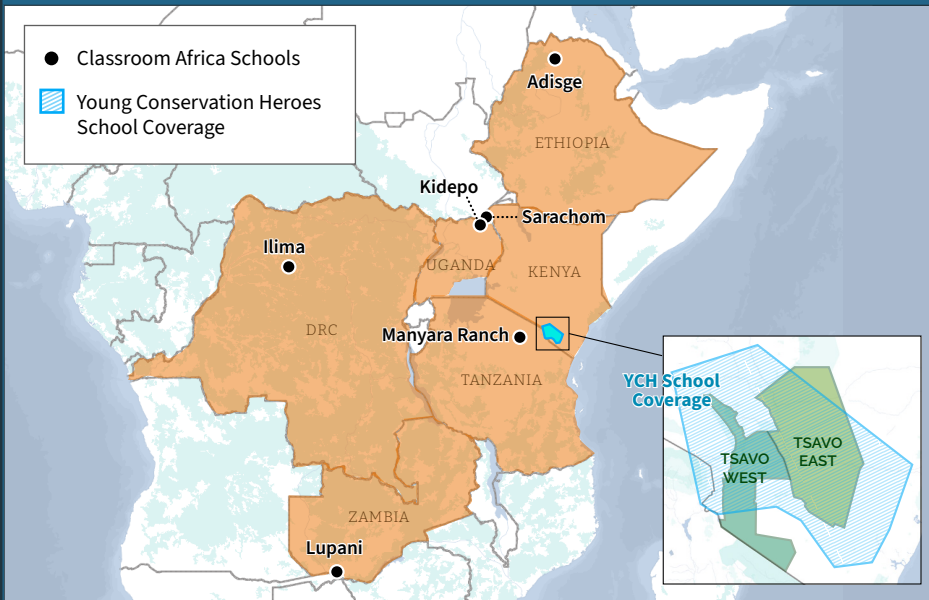
The focus of Classroom Africa was on building schools in communities situated in landscapes of conservation importance—to boost literacy levels, yes, but also to address real, on-the-ground needs. If you think about

Manyara Ranch in Tanzania, for example, the ranch is in a wildlife corridor. The original school there was in a place that put children in the path of elephants. AWF moved and modernized the school to improve safety for the children. The strategic placement of Classroom Africa schools was never arbitrary. It was always grounded in conservation logic. The schools also included conservation agreements with communities, ensuring a degree of “buy-in” for conservation from families and other community members.

What did AWF learn from that model that shaped what came next?

We learned a great deal from Classroom Africa. One is that we are not a chain of private schools. We built these schools, but they were always handed over to relevant government agencies—that was intentional. They were always meant to be locally owned.

Classroom Africa & YCH School Locations



But we also learned to ask a harder question: How do we move from infrastructure to deepening student engagement? How do learners, beyond just having access to education generally, also receive a higher level of conservation education? That is how the two connect. We started with building schools and then recognized that the schools must be complemented with what I call core conservation education supports.

And in almost every landscape we worked in, we found there was already a local organization actively championing or trying to champion conservation education. So the question became: How do we work with those existing institutions to scale our reach, strengthen their capacity, and build toward something that is sustainable long after we've moved on?

That brings us to the Young Conservation Heroes program. How does it differ in approach?

Young Conservation Heroes is focused on individual learners, but it scales through local structures. In Kenya, AWF helped establish the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya in the late 1960s, which today is a government-supported program reaching 20,000 schools. That is the kind of reach that makes

scale possible. So we work with the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya as our primary partner—but we've been intentional not just about partnering on activities, but on building the institution's own sustainability.

In the past two years, the initiative supported the Clubs' development of an informal curriculum and teacher's guide on conservation education and in June 2026, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development officially approved it. It now has the government's stamp of approval and is recommended for all schools in Kenya. That's huge. It means the work continues whether we are in the room or not and reaches far beyond the landscape where we work.

We also work closely with the Teacher Service Commission and Kenya Wildlife Service—because teachers are the ones driving education full-time, and the wildlife service has sub-offices across the counties we work in. Through those partnerships, we are reaching more schools without having to be physically present. That multiplier is everything.

In the last two years in Tsavo alone, we reached around 40,000 learners. If we had focused only on school infrastructure, we might reach 300 to 500 children in a single

school. The difference comes from putting tools—activity books, learning materials, ICT labs powered by solar and connected via satellite—directly into the hands of schools, teachers, and local actors. We also run competitions that invite every school in the landscape to participate. For the last competition alone, there were more than 2,000 entries: essays, poems, drawings, sculptures—learners articulating in their own voices how human-wildlife conflict, deforestation, and charcoal burning affect their communities and proposing solutions.

Do you have a moment that stays with you?

There's a girl, Peace Wauda. I keep thinking about her. The first time her school heard about Young Conservation Heroes was through the competition announcement, before our team had even visited it. Her group entered anyway and won. They built an elephant out of recycled soda bottle caps collected from the community. It was beautiful, and it carried so many messages at once: recycling, pollution, the significance of elephants in their landscape.

This year, when I visited the scholarship cohort, she was there. The competition sparked something in her, and she applied for the scholarship to learn more about conservation leadership and start her own project. She's already engaging other young people in her community.

I pick her, honestly, partly because she reminds me of myself. I grew up in northeastern South Africa, near a protected area called iSimangaliso Wetland Park—and like most kids who grow up near wildlife, I didn't think of it as special. Hippos came into my community. My relationship with them was fear, not wonder. It wasn't until I joined an environmental club at around 13 or 14 years old that someone planted a seed: *this is significant, this needs you*. And then an opportunity came to be involved in a bigger way, and I chose to dedicate my whole career to conservation.

That's what I see in her. It started with a

(Continue story on back page)

A YOUNG ARTIST INSPIRES OTHERS



KENYA: BAKARI ALI MANGALE (SECOND FROM LEFT) AND CLASSMATES AT CHANZOU PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWALE STAND IN FRONT OF A MURAL BAKARI PAINTED.

For 16-year-old Bakari Ali Mangale, art is more than just a pastime—it's a lifeline that connects him to nature and conservation. With vivid memories of his family's maize field destroyed after repeated raids, he could have turned away from conservation. Instead, he leaned in, joining his school's wildlife club in February 2025, to be part of the solution. Now,

alongside his peers, he participates in tree planting, poultry farming, and school gardening—projects that not only promote sustainability but also feed his community.

Bakari's involvement with the Young Conservation Heroes Project provides

him with access to sketchbooks, paints, and conservation learning materials. He uses these to amplify his message of environmental stewardship. Teachers like Mwakupha Chitsala, his wildlife club patron, commend his dedication: "Students like Bakari remind us why empowering youth matters. They are the ones who will spearhead conservation in the future."

For Bakari, the journey is just beginning. He dreams of becoming a teacher, using both his voice and his art to ensure those who come after him understand the value of protecting Kenya's wildlife.

"My drawings help me explain why we need to protect and conserve wildlife," he says. "Other students have told me my art gives them joy, and that makes me want to keep going."

A SCHOOL BRINGS HOPE



ETHIOPIA: STUDENTS AT ADISGE SCHOOL NEAR ETHIOPIA'S SIMIEN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK.

In Ethiopia's Simien Mountains, AWF's Classroom Africa Adisge School is transforming the lives of children, families, and the wider community. For many families here, children often left school early to work and support their households. Today, they are staying in school, participating in conservation clubs, playing football on the school grounds, learning computer skills, and imagining futures that were previously unimaginable. In return, community members recognize a responsibility to help conserve Simien Mountains National Park.

The school currently has 513 students supported with meals, uniforms, and stationery. Funding through AWF, particularly the Straus Family Foundation, has also covered construction of classrooms, kitchens, teacher housing, a library, IT facilities, and reliable solar power.

Before AWF's investments, the school suffered from poor infrastructure, low enrollment, and challenges in attracting teachers. Today, the school has recorded zero dropouts for the past three years, with every student progressing to the next grade. Success in enrollment and student retention at Adisge inspired the Ethiopian Government to introduce school meals programs in other areas to encourage children to stay in school—a powerful example of how a locally rooted intervention can influence broader public policy. Next year, as part of AWF's focus on long-term sustainability and local ownership, support for the school will transition to a local NGO AWF is helping to establish.

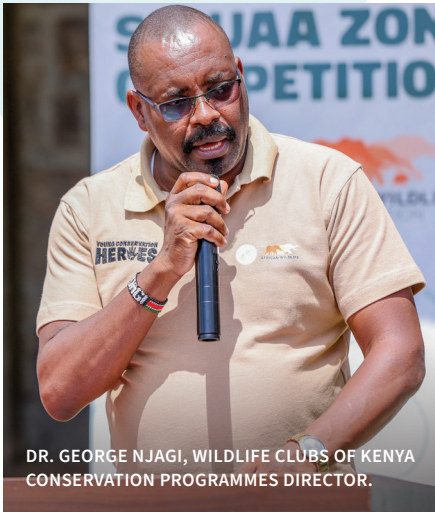
In the Simien Mountains the Adisge School has become a symbol of possibility. It is viewed as a trusted institution that gives every child an equal chance to succeed. One PTA member said, "There are only two fair institutions in our area that treat everyone equally: the Orthodox Church and the Adisge School."

“

I feel privileged to have the chance to go to school.

YESHAREG ASFAW
14-year-old student
at Adisge School

SCALING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP: WILDLIFE CLUBS OF KENYA



DR. GEORGE NJAGI, WILDLIFE CLUBS OF KENYA CONSERVATION PROGRAMMES DIRECTOR.

In 2025, the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya reached around one million students across 20,000 schools. That made WCK the ideal partner for AWF to join forces with to scale conservation education.

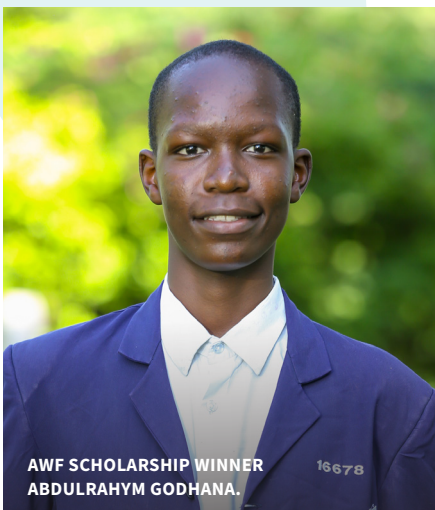
Dr. George Njagi, Conservation Program Director at the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, thinks programs like AWF's Young Conservation Heroes are critical for engaging children and families living near protected areas like Tsavo National Park. For him, the program is a tangible way of changing attitudes and showing real benefits from wildlife. Through curriculum and hands-on activities, the clubs demonstrate how people can live harmoniously with wildlife, intentionally shifting the narrative from human-wildlife conflict to coexistence.

Many Kenyans working in conservation began their journey by joining a wildlife

club during their school years. But even if they do not pursue conservation as a profession, Dr. Njagi believes the Young Conservation Heroes program can positively change peoples' attitudes and mindsets. Students grow with the understanding that conservation of wildlife and nature is essential, and those values will carry with them regardless of the careers they choose.

He estimates that the AWF Young Conservation Champions Scholarship has the potential to double the number of schools registering with the WCK, from 20,000 to 40,000. "The scholarship makes our work easier because more schools will want to join in order to benefit from such programs," he says. "It strengthens schools and communities to become part of Wildlife Clubs of Kenya."

A YOUNG SCHOLAR LOOKS TO THE SKY TO CARE FOR THE EARTH



AWF SCHOLARSHIP WINNER
ABDULRAHYM GODHANA.

For Abdulrahym Godhana, conservation is not just about protecting wildlife—it is about creating opportunities for communities to thrive. Growing up in Kenya's Tana River County, he has witnessed firsthand the environmental challenges that threaten both people and nature, including deforestation, charcoal burning, and the loss of wildlife habitat.

When Abdulrahym learned he had been selected as an AWF Young Conservation Champions Scholar, he described the moment as a dream come true. The scholarship represents more than educational support; it is a chance to develop the skills and confidence needed to make a difference in his community.

While conservation is close to his heart, Abdulrahym also dreams of becoming an aeronautical engineer. Fascinated by aviation, he hopes one day to use aircraft and aerial technology to support environmental monitoring, helping

track changes in forests, vegetation, and wildlife habitats from above.

"Taking care of the environment matters because we cannot expect it to take care of itself," he says. "We must actively protect and conserve it."

Since joining the scholarship initiative in April 2025, he has translated mentorship and training into practical conservation action in his home region. His efforts have included documenting mangabey and red colobus monkeys in Lala Fito Forest while capturing the effects of human activities such as deforestation for charcoal production.

He has also led a youth outreach activity through a friendly football match that reached 52 young people and launched a Facebook platform to amplify conservation awareness through videos and personal stories on environmental issues affecting the county.



KENYA: PEACE WAUDA (SECOND FROM THE RIGHT) AND FELLOW STUDENTS FROM MBULIA COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL SHOWCASE THEIR AWARD-WINNING ELEPHANT ARTWORK, CREATED FROM RECYCLED PLASTIC BOTTLE CAPS COLLECTED FROM THE COMMUNITY. THE PIECE EARNED FIRST PLACE IN THE SHUJAA ZONE COMPETITION.

poster about a competition. Now she's asking, "What other opportunities are there for me?" I look forward to what kind of professional she becomes.

What's next for the program?

We are working on how to replicate what we've learned in Kenya in other landscapes, starting with Kidepo in Uganda, but being very honest with ourselves about the differences. In Kidepo, for example, the majority of children of school-going age are not in school. Wildlife clubs alone are not going to be our primary approach there. But just because there are fewer wildlife clubs doesn't mean there are no forms of social

organizing—youth networks, sports groups, community structures. We're already beginning to design for that.

We've also started piloting Information and Community Technology labs in a few Tsavo schools—solar-powered, connected via satellite—so that learners in remote conservation landscapes can access the wealth of materials that exist online. In Uganda, satellite internet is not yet approved, so those structural challenges require different solutions.

My dream for the program is a longer-term one, though. When you invest in an 8-year-old, the impact is not always immediate. Of

course they may learn things in the short term and change certain behaviors. But in five years, when the children who are in primary school now are in high school—I want to meet them and ask: How are you living with these values? How are you giving back? They may go into IT, into law, or into medicine. That's fine. The question is: Do they carry with them an understanding that nature is important, that their environment is not separate from their lives but is their lives?

That's what we're building toward. And it takes patience. But it is exactly the right investment to make.

2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Read our 2026 Annual Report to learn how the African Wildlife Foundation is building a future where people and wildlife thrive:

[ANNUALREPORT.AWF.ORG](https://annualreport.awf.org)



LEADING for Wildlife **LIVING** with Wildlife **CARING** for Wildlife

We believe in a vision of Africa where sustainable development includes thriving wildlife and wild lands as a cultural and economic asset for Africa's future generations. **Your generous gift today can help us build a resilient future for Africa where people and wildlife both thrive.**

Support by visiting:
[AWF.ORG/RESILIENT](https://awf.org/resilient)

