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# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

# 2024





# MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER AND CEO

## Ojok Okello

**Aero-Kwan Adult Literacy Program:** Now serving 200 women, this initiative has increased literacy rates by 18% in the past two years, empowering rural women in Okere to take charge of their futures.

**Cultural and Creative Development:** The Okere City Studio launched to promote youth talent and preserve Luo culture through music and arts. Our #VisitOkere tourism project continues to attract visitors, showcasing the beauty and resilience of our community.

This year, our efforts were recognized with two prestigious awards. Okere City won the Cultural Tourism Award from Uganda's Ministry of Tourism for our outstanding contribution to promoting cultural heritage and tourism. Additionally, I was honored with the U.S. State Department's Humphrey Fellowship Alumni Award. The cash prize from the award enabled us to increase our solar energy generation capacity to 1KW furthering our commitment to sustainability and innovation.

Our transformative journey continues to inspire. Our work has been featured on CGTN Africa, Panorama newspaper, and other local news channels in Uganda, celebrating our dedication to community transformation. Partnerships with organizations like the Ecovillage of Ithaca have enabled us to have a team of committed volunteers in the US who continue to support efforts to improve our shea butter sales.

To all who share our vision for a prosperous and sustainable Africa, I invite you to join us in this journey. Whether through your time, skills, or resources, your support can make a difference. Let us continue building brighter futures together.



### Warm greetings from Okere City!

As we reflect on 2024, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the incredible strides we have made together. This year, we have continued to live our motto, ensuring that a living wind blows ever stronger through Okere City.

Education has remained at the heart of our work. Our schools have grown remarkably, with over 500 children now enrolled in both our Early Childhood Development Center and Primary School. Despite ongoing challenges like droughts and economic hardships, we have provided scholarships and support, ensuring that no child in Okere is left behind in their pursuit of education. Thanks to our partners, Segal Family Foundation and Tenacre Foundation, we have been able to meet these challenges head-on.

### 2024 has also been a year of new beginnings and bold initiatives:

**Okere Shea Cooperative Expansion:** With 500 women actively engaged, we have increased our sales by 65% because we extended our reach to new markets, including the USA, through e-commerce platforms like Amazon. Our Shea Festival attracted 5,000 participants, celebrating culture and environmental conservation.

# 2024

## At a Glance

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**\$185K**

Invested in local development projects



**10,000**

People served



**80%**

of projects reported increased net profits



**12**

New job opportunities directly offered.



**50**

New jobs were indirectly created



**03**

New businesses launched



**1,000**

Visitors welcomed



# Fighting Hunger And Poverty



**150**

Farmers supported through extension services and access to hybrid quality seed.



**60%**

Improvement in household food security for 100 homes.



**1,000**

Children fed through school feeding programs.



**10%**

Improvement in incomes for 500 households.







## Improving Health Outcomes



**8,000**

people were treated at the Okere Community Health Center.



**02**

dental health camps were organized, benefiting 1,000 people.



Clean water is provided to 6,000 people



# Advancing Education Outcomes



**50**

young women enrolled in technical tailoring programs.



**450**

children attended Okere Community School, a 30% increase from 2023.



**200**

students received scholarship opportunities.



**100**

women participated in adult education program



OKERE CITY



# Expanding Our Reach Online



**100**

New YouTube subscribers



**2K+**

TikTok followers.



**6K**

Unique website visitors showcasing our projects globally.



**\$15K**

Raised through every.org, funding our community initiatives.

amazon.com

**500**

Customers served on Amazon.

# Community Voices

## Josephine

“Okere City has been a tremendous blessing to my household in many meaningful ways. The maize seeds I received on credit have ensured our food security, and my small business of producing and selling simsim paste has flourished thanks to the small loans I access through the Okere City VSLA Bank. Additionally, many of my customers come from within the city, further supporting my business. My grandchild also attends the Okere Community School, which brings us immense pride. Calling the Okere City project a blessing to my family feels like an understatement—it has truly transformed our lives.”



## Aeci (Esther)

“Studying in the Aerokwan Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) class has taught me essential reading and numeracy skills. I can now write my name, sign my documents, and read signposts. Thanks to Okere City, I also had the incredible opportunity to travel to Kampala and perform at the National Theatre. I am truly proud to be part of this transformative journey”.



## Ogwal Felix

“Studying at Okere Community as been a journey of Absolute joy and transformation. I joined the school from a government school and I very weak in many key learning areas. But the teachers gave us their best and I must say that I now feel and know that I am better student. I also participated in playing football which is my favorite hobby”





# Highlights From Our Work In 2024

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# Cultural Tourism Recognition

On September 27, 2024, Okere City achieved a historic milestone when it was recognized as one of Uganda's premier cultural tourism destinations during the World Tourism Day celebrations in Kasese. This prestigious acknowledgment underscores the city's growing reputation as a hub for cultural heritage and tourism excellence.

The theme of this year's World Tourism Day, "Peace and Tourism," holds special significance for Okere City. Once deeply affected by the aftermath of a protracted war, our community has demonstrated remarkable resilience, rising through the preservation of cultural heritage and targeted investments in tourism development.

"This award is a testament to the relentless spirit of our people," said Ojok Okello, CEO of Okere City, as he accepted the accolade. "Through cultural songs, dances, and community-driven initiatives, we continue to showcase the unstoppable power of human determination and solidarity. Okere City is not just a destination—it is a story of transformation and hope."



“THIS AWARD IS A TESTAMENT TO THE RELENTLESS SPIRIT OF OUR PEOPLE.”  
OJOK OKELLO, CEO OF OKERE CITY



# Okere Community School

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Two years after the establishment of our primary school and early childhood development center and welcoming 135 learners, the numbers have more than doubled in 2024 to 350. Our candidate class of 17 learners did their national exams to attain their PLE certificate. 28 learners also graduated from nursery to elementary level. With 80 children enrolled at the ECD center, we are track to achieve our objective of ensuring that 50% of the children in Okere who are between the ages of 3-6 receive early childhood foundational learning opportunities by 2030.

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**OKERE COMMUNITY IS SLOWLY BUT SURELY EMERGING AS A MODEL COMMUNITY NOT ONLY IN OTUKE, BUT UGANDA AT LARGE**

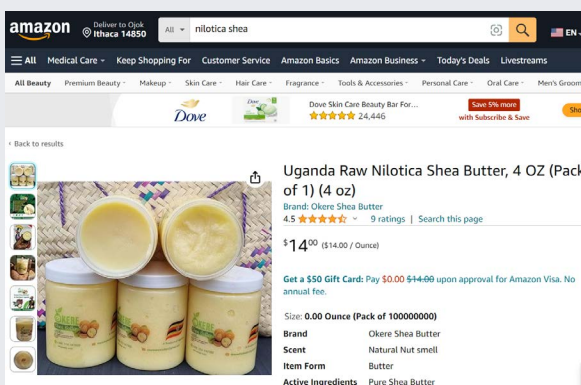
MCDONALD, DISTRICT INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, OTUKE DISTRICT

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# Okere Shea Butter

After introducing Okere Shea Butter to the marketplace in 2020, we have continued to soar to reach even more clientele and create more impact. In total, we sold 5 tons of Shea butter worth \$50,000 registering a net profit of \$15,000 in 2024. This same year, the membership of our shea coop has also grown from just 12 members in 2022 to 120 cooperators, 90% of whom are women. The reasons for our sales success can be attributed to the launch of Okere Shea Butter on Amazon and our continued partnership with Funz Video.



“I work in an industrial sandpaper factory and to keep my hands soft and healthy requires some heavy-duty moisturizer. This stuff is the best. Also, it smells so fresh and lovely! If you're looking for a premium moisturizer made with love, look no further, you've found it! Included in my package was a lovely note from Ojok, a member of the Okere Shea Cooperative Society, I wish you and all the other members wellness, prosperity, and the best of luck on your project! You make a fantastic product!”

“Absolutely Divine!”  
Reviewed in the United States on February 2, 2024



# Nilotica Shea Festival: World Shea Day

On June 15th, 2024, Okere Village came alive with the vibrant spirit of community as 5,000 local residents gathered to honor and celebrate one of nature's most precious gifts – the shea tree. The day was filled with music, dance, and feasting on delicious meals made with shea butter. Beyond the festivities, the event carried a profound message of conservation and sustainability.

As part of the celebrations, participants planted new shea trees and engaged in discussions about the importance of protecting and conserving this invaluable resource. Among the many highlights was a dramatic performance by the women of Aerokwan, our adult education initiative.

In their powerful performance, the shea tree came to life, engaging in a poignant dialogue with men who sought to cut it down. Through this creative expression, the tree pleaded its case as the “tree of life,” emphasizing its transformative benefits to the community, from economic empowerment to environmental preservation.

This moving depiction served as a call to action, reminding everyone of the urgent need to safeguard the shea tree, which sustains livelihoods, protects ecosystems, and symbolizes the resilience and unity of Okere.

Together, we continue to plant, protect, and celebrate the shea tree, ensuring its legacy for generations to come.





# Okere Leadership Lab: Building a Culture of Human Rights in Otuke

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Just days after Uganda's 62nd Independence anniversary, over 50 citizens, local leaders, and human rights advocates gathered in Otuke for a trans-formative dialogue on advancing human rights in rural communities. Hosted by Okere City and supported by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) under the "Human Rights, Our Concern" project, the event explored the challenges and opportunities for protecting human rights in a district still healing from decades of conflict.

Key presentations highlighted the state of human rights in Otuke. Ojok Okello, founder and CEO of Okere City, emphasized the urgent need to address issues such as malnutrition, school dropout rates, and gender-based violence, citing alarming statistics from UNICEF and district authorities. His presentation outlined Okere City's

human-rights-centered development model, which focuses on empowerment, participation, dignity, and equality through initiatives like education, healthcare, and job creation.

Participants actively contributed, sharing perspectives and proposing actionable solutions. Recommendations included engaging cultural and religious leaders, increasing community awareness, and sustaining momentum through follow-up dialogues and radio broadcasts.

The event underscored a collective resolve to tackle human rights challenges through unity, advocacy, and partnerships. It marked a critical step toward building a resilient community where human rights shape every aspect of life in Otuke.







# Transforming Smiles: Dental Health Education and Care

Okere Access to dental care in rural Otuke remains a significant challenge, with residents often traveling up to 80 miles to Lira City for even the most basic oral health services. This lack of access has led to widespread untreated dental conditions, impacting overall health and quality of life.

In 2024, we partnered with Hope Smiles, an international NGO dedicated to improving dental care in underserved communities, to organize two successful dental health camps in Otuke. These camps provided vital oral health services and education, reaching a combined total of 1,000 people in the village.

At our most recent camp, 500 residents benefited from services such as teeth cleanings, fillings, and extractions—critical procedures that are often unavailable locally. In addition, community members received practical advice on maintaining proper oral hygiene, empowering them to take charge of their dental health.

These initiatives reflect our commitment to bridging the healthcare gap in rural areas. Together with Hope Smiles, we are making a tangible impact, ensuring that essential dental care is no longer a distant dream but a reality for the people of Otuke. This is more than dental care—it's about restoring health, confidence, and dignity to our community.





# Okere Luo Music Gospel Explosion: Uplifting Spirits Through Music

On a memorable evening in 2024, the heart of Okere Village came alive with joy, inspiration, and spiritual celebration as we hosted the Okere Luo Music Gospel Explosion. This gospel music concert brought together over 3,000 people from our community to experience a powerful night of worship and entertainment. The event featured performances by some of the biggest names in Lango gospel music, including **Lucky O**, **Sister Nancy**, **Arab-kop**, and **Imat Abolo**. Each artist brought their unique style and message, captivating the audience with songs of hope, faith, and resilience. Their performances not only entertained but also inspired, reminding everyone of the strength found in unity and spiritual connection. The concert was more than just music—it was a platform for community building and shared faith. Attendees described the event as a source of renewal, with many expressing how the uplifting messages in the songs resonated deeply with their personal experiences. Through initiatives like the Okere Luo Music Gospel Explosion, we aim to foster cultural pride and spiritual growth, reinforcing the role of music as a unifying force in our community. This unforgettable evening highlighted the power of faith, music, and togetherness in transforming lives and uplifting spirits.





# Okere City Supermarket

Our supermarket served 15,000 clients generating over \$60,000 in revenues in 2024! The business continues to be the magnet that attracts community members in Okere and being a one-stop-spot for grocery products in the village.

**15,000**

Clients



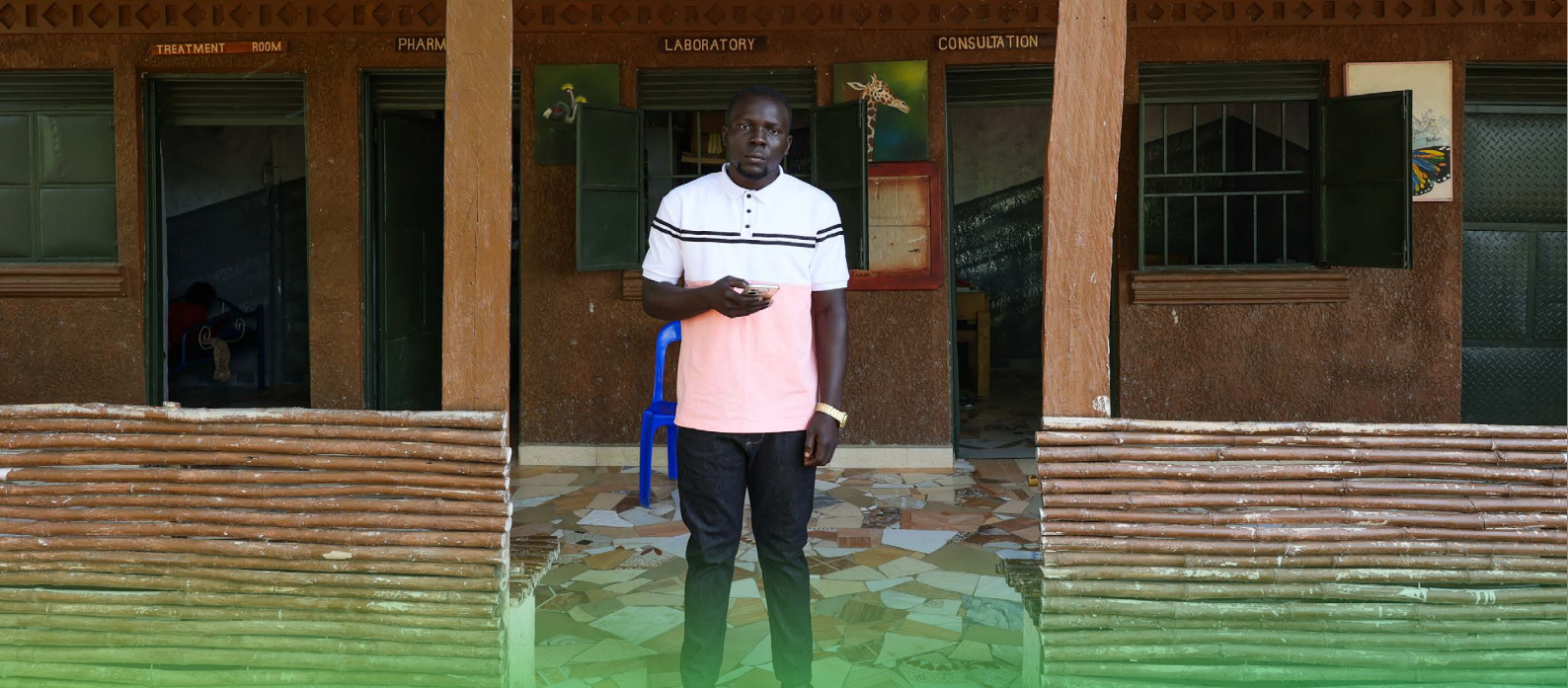
**60,000**

Revenue





# KERE CITY Medical Centre



## Okere Community Health Centre

In 2024, Okere Health Centre successfully provided health care services to 8,000 community members.

Key health services provided include; testing and treatment of infectious diseases like malaria, typhoid, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs).





# Empowering Women through Functional Adult Literacy and Village Lending

Functional adult literacy (FAL) is one of the cornerstone initiatives of Okere City, designed to empower rural women with knowledge and practical skills for their personal and economic growth. The Aerokwan Functional Adult Literacy Class, a vibrant group of 120 women, models how education can transform lives in rural Okere.

The Aerokwan program combines literacy training with village savings and lending activities, enabling members to improve their financial literacy and access critical financial services. This dual approach enhances their ability to manage household finances and fosters economic resilience within the community.

A 2024 survey revealed the program's profound impact:

74% of Aerokwan members invested in additional livestock, such as cows or goats—a vital indicator of economic progress in Okere, where livestock

ownership signifies improved household stability. On average, each member has continued to save at least \$300 annually, demonstrating their ability to build financial security for their families.

Through functional adult literacy and financial empowerment, the Aerokwan program is paving the way for sustainable economic development in Okere, showcasing how education and savings can transform rural livelihoods. This initiative continues to empower women as key agents of change in their community.





# Enhancing Food and Income Security through Improved Seed Distribution

In 2024, Okere City launched a transformative initiative to address food and income security challenges faced by smallholder farmers in our community. Recognizing the critical role women play in agriculture, we distributed 500 kilograms of Tembo-73, an improved high-yielding and drought-resistant seed variety, to 100 female farmers.

The 500 kgs of seeds we distributed yielded 5 Metric tons of maize which is contributing to improve household food security.

The seeds were provided through a flexible credit scheme, ensuring accessibility while empowering women to invest in their farms without undue financial strain. Tembo-73 is specifically designed to thrive in semi-arid conditions like those in Otuke District, making it an ideal solution to the persistent challenges of low rainfall and climate unpredictability.

By adopting this improved seed variety, farmers are expected to increase their yields significantly, enabling them to

produce surplus crops that enhance both household food security and income generation. This initiative also aligns with our broader mission to promote sustainable agricultural practices that boost resilience against climate change.

The distribution program has already begun to make a tangible impact:

- Farmers report increased optimism about the upcoming planting season, with many projecting higher yields compared to previous years.
- Improved seed access is fostering a culture of collective effort and innovation, as farmers share knowledge and best practices within the community. This initiative reflects our commitment to building a future where every household in Okere has reliable access to nutritious food and the means to earn a sustainable livelihood. By empowering female farmers with the tools they need to succeed, we are laying the foundation for a resilient, self-reliant, and thriving rural community.





# RISE-UP Women's Tailoring Centre

Our tailoring center have continued to provide 80 young girls and women with vital skills in tailoring and knitting. This brings the total to 200 youth skilled in tailoring and garments cutting.







# SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS





## Learning How Biochar Produced from Shea Waste Could Promote Sustainable Agriculture in Okere

In a move to promote sustainable agriculture and waste utilization, Okere City, a member of the Circular Bionutrient Economy Network (CBEN), recently joined an Artisanal Study Tour conducted in Baringo and Uasin Gishu counties in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. Alongside soil scientists from Ethiopia and biochar experts, Okere City explored biochar production methods and gained practical insights into transforming agricultural waste into valuable resources. This journey holds the promise of unlocking Okere's agricultural potential by converting waste from shea butter production into biochar—a step that could dramatically improve crop yields, soil health, and the economic stability of northern Uganda's rural communities.

### Why Biochar is Especially Relevant for Okere City

Okere City is situated in a semi-arid region with low soil moisture retention, a characteristic that poses ongoing challenges for local agriculture. Biochar's porous structure helps soils retain moisture and nutrients longer, making it an ideal amendment for Okere's dry soil conditions. Additionally, this organic material has been shown to improve water availability, a crucial factor for regions like Otuke district where unpredictable rainfall can affect crop production.



According to the FAO, current agricultural productivity in the area is a mere 25%, a rate that hinders food security and economic growth. By integrating biochar into the local soil, Okere City aims to boost this productivity rate significantly. When used as a soil amendment, biochar has been shown to increase crop yield, improve nutrient availability, and bolster plant resilience—all key factors that can help Okere City achieve its goal of supporting local farmers and improving household food security.

### Benefits of Biochar for Okere City's Agriculture

For Okere City, biochar production represents a trans-formative opportunity to turn shea butter processing waste into a powerful resource. Here's how biochar can benefit Okere City and the broader agricultural landscape:

- **Enhanced Water Retention:** Biochar's high porosity helps the soil retain water, making it especially useful for the semi-arid lands of Okere where water scarcity is an ongoing challenge.
- **Improved Soil Structure:** Biochar enhances soil aeration and supports healthy root growth, giving crops in arid regions a better chance to thrive.
- **Increased Soil Fertility and Nutrient Retention:** Biochar slows nutrient leaching, allowing plants more access to the nutrients they need over time, which can be transformative for soil health.



- **Carbon Sequestration:** Biochar acts as a carbon sink, storing carbon for centuries and contributing to climate change mitigation efforts.
- **Pest and Disease Resistance:** Biochar can help suppress certain soil-borne diseases, reduce pest pressure, and increase crop resilience, an added benefit for agricultural areas with limited access to resources.



### Insights from the Artisanal Study Tour

The tour began in Baringo County with an insightful presentation from PlantVillage on the C-Sink Manager role and the Global Artisanal Accreditation Process. This presentation offered Okere City a roadmap for setting up its biochar production and managing carbon credits, a valuable addition that could make Okere City eligible for carbon credit markets in the future. Training on biochar production methods and monitoring provided essential skills that will be applied directly to Okere City's community-led farming initiatives.

At Uasin Gishu County, we observed how waste

from maize, livestock, and agroforestry could be repurposed into biochar using the Kon-Tiki Tower Rig, a method that could be adapted for shea waste back home. We also learned how to integrate biochar into bio-fertilizers, creating a cost-effective and sustainable solution for local farmers. This will be easier to apply in Okere considering that many people also livestock farmers.

### Market and Digital Insights from the Study Trip

The study tour emphasized effective marketing strategies for biochar-based fertilizers, which will be critical in ensuring access and affordability for smallholder farmers in northern Uganda. In fact, this could present a unique business opportunity for us to start producing a shea-based biochar fertilizer which can be sold to widen the scope of Okere City's revenue streams, while at the same time improving agricultural productivity in the region. Additionally, we also learnt more about biochar monitoring and tracking via the PlantVillage Biochar App which equipped us with digital tools and insights to monitor carbon credits and refine biochar production practices.

### The Future of Biochar in Okere City

Armed with knowledge and expertise from the CBEN network and international biochar experts, Okere City is set to apply biochar production within its shea butter value chain. This will enable the transformation of shea nut shells and shea butter cake into biochar, which will then be distributed to local farmers to boost crop yields, improve soil health, and increase water retention. This initiative aligns with our mission of promoting food security and create economic resilience in Okere and beyond.





## Do Not Uproot The Pumpkin”: Okot P’Bitek Legacy Seminar At Cornell University

On March 28, 2024, in collaboration with the Institute for African Development (IAD) at Cornell University, we organized a literary seminar commemorating the enduring influence of Okot p’Bitek, a significant figure in 20th-century African literature and philosophy. Themed “Do Not Uproot the Pumpkin: Reflecting on Okot p’Bitek, African Literature, and Culture”, the seminar drew 35 attendees at the Africana Center and an additional 40 participants who joined virtually via Zoom.

The seminar was curated by our founder and CEO, Ojok Okello who also moderated the event.

During his opening remarks at the seminar, Ed Mabaya, a professor of global development and director of the Fulbright Humphrey Fellowship program at Cornell University, pondered the significance of ancestral ties and their role in influencing our perspectives and self-perception. Born in a rural Zimbabwean village himself, Mabaya shared personal insights into the disruptions caused by pursuing Western education, which led to his detachment from his ancestral village and experiences of studying, working, and marrying across the Atlantic. He reflected on the resultant complexities and praised p’Bitek’s literature for guiding us through such challenges.

Prof. Juliane Okot Bitek, who teaches creative writing at Queens University in Canada gave

the keynote address entitled, “Returning to the Pumpkin: Poetry and Song as Decolonizing Practice”. Juliane’s keynote address used the Luo proverb of “not uprooting the pumpkin”, as well placing emphasis on truth-telling to provoke the audience to think about placemaking and art practice, especially for the African people living in the diaspora. To reflect on this issue, she encouraged us to borrow a lift from the Anishinaabe (an Indigenous people in North America) concept that you cannot get lost if you constantly ask yourself: Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? And who am I? While always uprooted from her own land of Acholi (born in Nairobi, raised in Kisumu and Kampala, studied and now living in Canada), Juliane tries not to get lost by leaning on this indigenous American philosophy.

Moreover, Juliane’s presentation also examined the role of wer (song), a Luo poetic tradition, as tools for truth-telling, decolonization, and political engagement. She highlighted how her paternal grandmother, Cerina Lacwa, passed on her songs and love for poetry to her son, Okot p’Bitek. Juliane observed that in Acholi culture, poetry and art are considered collective assets, passed down from one generation to the next for the shared benefit of society. In fact, many of the songs featured in p’Bitek’s book, “Horn of My Love,” were authored by his mother. Juliane also

AN INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT LITERARY EVENT

### "DO NOT UPROOT THE PUMPKIN"

Reflections on  
Okot p’Bitek, African Culture & Literature

A Day of Lectures, Poetry,  
Theatre and Networking

28TH, MARCH 2024  
EST / NEWYORK 9:00AM-1:00PM  
EAT 4:00PM-8:00PM

Cornell University,  
Africana Center

Funded by the US Department of  
Education UISFL Program

zoom  
<https://bit.ly/49yds5U>

CONVENER  
**OJOK OKELLO**  
Fulbright Humphrey  
Fellow

Speakers

KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
**JULIANE OKOT BITEK**  
Prof. Creative Writing &  
Professor at Queens  
University

**BER ANENA**  
Poet, Creative Writer &  
Student (University of  
Nebraska-Lincoln)

**SAMUEL IMBO**  
Professor of Honors  
University of Minnesota

Cornell University  
Humphrey  
Fellowship  
A Fulbright Exchange Program  
at Cornell University  
KERE CITY



noted that the fact that her grandmother’s songs are still sung is evidence not just of her skill but also of how songs are imbued with meaning and how they continue to resonate with people across time and space.

After Juliane’s address, Ber Anena, Ber Anena, a Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa laureate and a creative writing scholar shared her insights on rereading Okot p’Bitek in contemporary Africa. In her talk, she asked the question: How does Okot p’Bitek’s writing mirror Africa’s political and social landscape today? Focusing on p’Bitek’s Song of a Prisoner, Anena explored the literal and metaphorical prisons inside which Africa, particularly, Uganda, finds itself decades after attaining “independence” from Western colonial masters. First published in 1971, Song of a Prisoner navigates post-independence Uganda marked by flowery promises from African politicians, silencing of opposition, and meager delivery of critical social services to the citizens.

Detailing the metaphorical prisons constructed and managed by successive Ugandan leaders (from Obote and Amin to Museveni), Anena remarked that while it might seem like airing Uganda’s dirty laundry in public, the reality is that the country’s “linen has been hanging in the square for quite a while.” Indeed, “no country is immune from the mess of its politics”. She then recited a verse from Song of Prisoner to exemplify the political turmoil in Africa during p’Bitek’s era, which sadly still remains true to date.



Do you plead guilty or not guilty?  
I plead smallness,  
I am a mare pygmy  
Before your uniformed power  
Which towers like Mount Elgon  
And covers the land with its dark shadow.  
My eardrums are torn  
I cannot hear you, a red wall  
Stands between you and me, i cannot see  
you,  
But i feel the cold blade of your axe on my  
neck!  
I plead fear, i plead helplessness, i am an  
insect trapped between the toes of a bull  
elephant,  
I am an earthworm i grovel in the mud  
I am the wet dung of a chicken on the floor

“Yes, these words may make you squirm in your seat. They should, because writers have continued to produce work that holds a mirror to the face of our society, despite the hostile environment within which they work. Even if it makes the powerful uncomfortable, today’s writers, like p’Bitek and his generation, know that to stop would be a betrayal of the literary canon”, Anena said.

Prof. Sam Imbo, A professor of African philosophy at Hamline University also gave a talk that focused on philosophical discourses underpinning the work of Okot p’Bitek. Okot p’Bitek’s works are a rich source of philosophical discourses on African literature and culture, offering great insights into the complexities of identity, tradition, and colonial legacy. Almost all his writings present and dig deep into the heart of African cultural consciousness, presenting broad themes that resonate with many philosophical inquiries. In p’Bitek’s books, his key protagonists like Ocol, Lawino, the Prisoner, and the Prostitute navigate the tension between the modern and the indigenous, the educated elite and the rural masses, the leaders and the led, the colonized and the colonizer. This exploration serves as a lens through which to examine broader philosophical questions of power, agency, and cultural hegemony.

One of the areas Prof. Imbo reflected on was on



the significance of African oral traditions and how Okot p'Bitek has emerged as one of its fiercest proponents. While reason, facts, logic, and science are held as the foundations of a philosophic life, western societies requiring certain individuals to invest time to philosophize, study, think and write, p'Bitek reject this. He argues that the act of living a life on a daily basis is of and in itself a philosophic practice, and further warns against separating life from philosophy as philosophy is not merely one aspect of life but rather encompasses all aspects of our human life and experience. "So, the role of the philosopher is to make explicit connections between cultural practices, and the social order to serve, as only such a philosophy has durability", Prof. Imbo noted.



During the Q&A session, the speakers provided more depth to the questions raised. In response to a question about how her father inspired her to become a writer, Juliane noted that p'Bitek encouraged all his children to read, think and take a stand especially if one is convicted and believes that that position will bring about collective progress. "Our house was always filled with books, and this inspired all of us to become fervent readers". Juliane reflected.

For Anena and Prof. Imbo, the loathing of and underinvestment in the humanities, literature and arts by most governments in Africa lie in the fact that the arts are instrumental in raising critical consciousness which the politicians see as threats to their privileges and power. Reflecting on Prof. Odera-Oruka's argument that excessive reliance on writing could impair certain cognitive abilities like memorization, both speakers stressed



the importance of writing. However, Anena emphasized the need to promote writing in indigenous African languages, citing Okot p'Bitek's initial writing of Song of Lawino in Acholi. This is because much can be lost in translation when foreign languages are used for documentation due to differences in context and nuances. For Prof. Imbo, while writing is good, it cannot capture the emotion of the moment, and so the immediacy of spoken word in portraying realities cannot be taken for granted.

The #pBitekSeminar provided a unique opportunity to reflect on many intersections of literature, culture, and identity. From Ed Mabaya's poignant reflections on ancestral ties to Juliane Okot Bitek's impassioned keynote on decolonizing practices, Prof. Sam Imbo's emphasis on oral traditions, and Ber Anena's thoughtful analysis of contemporary Africa through the lens of p'Bitek's works, each speaker illuminated the enduring relevance of his writings. As we navigate the complexities of our world, p'Bitek's continuous wisdom never wanes in urging us to embrace our roots, amplify diverse voices, and challenge entrenched power structures through the transformative power of literature and art.

The seminar was part of our "Echoes of Lawino" project, which use a vehicle to spark and join the chorus of voices daring to reimagine a more decolonized African people through plays/theatre, songs, dances, films, literature and other forms of visual art. Echoes of Lawino is inspired by and adapted from "Song of Lawino" and "Song of Ocol", classic collections of African poems written by Okot p'Bitek, one of Africa's greatest writers of the 20th century. The different activities of project shall be executed through partnerships and collaborations with various curators, artists, and producers.

**THIS EVENT WAS FUNDED BY THE UISFL GRANT FROM THE US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.**

## Championing Land Restoration on a Global Stage



In June 2024, Timothy Masembe, our esteemed board advisor, delivered a keynote address during the United Nations Federal Credit Union's (UNFCU) World Environment Day commemoration in New York. The event, held under the theme "Land Restoration: Our Land, Our Future!", spotlighted global efforts to restore degraded lands and promote sustainable development.

True to the conference's theme, Mr. Masembe passionately shared how Okere City is leading a grassroots movement to restore the land and strengthen community resilience. He highlighted our innovative approaches, including agroforestry, sustainable farming practices, and shea tree conservation, as transformative models for rural development.

Mr. Masembe's keynote underscored Okere City's commitment to creating a harmonious relationship between people and nature, inspiring a global audience to recognize the potential of community-led solutions. His address was a powerful reminder that local actions can contribute meaningfully to global challenges, from environmental restoration to sustainable livelihoods.

We are deeply grateful to Tim for his unwavering dedication to amplifying Okere City's vision and sharing our story of transformation on international platforms. Together, we continue to demonstrate that restoring the land is not just an environmental imperative but a pathway to a brighter, more sustainable future for all.



# OUR SPECIAL 2024 GUESTS

## Five Lessons from Ngonzi, Mr. Solution



Ngonzi Wetaba, also known as Mr. Solution, is a business coach and leadership thought leader who recently spent a weekend with us. During his visit, he taught our children five key assets essential for achieving success. First, he emphasized the importance of the mind, encouraging the children to work hard to sharpen it by reading and seeking knowledge. Second, he highlighted the power of imagination, advising, “It is only by imagining a better future in our mind that we can recreate it in real life.” Third, Mr. Solution stressed the value of our hands, teaching that they can help us work effectively by using various skills and tools. Fourth, he underscored the importance of unity, describing it as the most effective way to bring ideas to life and accomplish tasks. Using shea nuts as a practical example, Mr. Solution advised the children of Okere to value and conserve shea trees, emphasizing that they are a vital asset capable of catalyzing transformative change in the village.

“

**It is only by imagining  
a better future in our  
mind that we can  
recreate it in real life.**

Ngonzi Wetaba (Mr Solution)  
Business Coach



We are delighted that our shea butter cooperative society was mapped by the team from the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development to benefit from GROW, a flagship women economic development program implemented by the government of Uganda with support from the World Bank group. We will provide all relevant details pertaining to our engagement on this project.



## Forested: Exciting Partnerships for Shea Conservation and Carbon Opportunities

This year, we were delighted to welcome Abby, Addis, and Matt to Okere as part of our growing collaboration to conserve shea trees and harness their benefits for sustainable development along Uganda's shea belt. Over the past year, we have been working together to explore innovative ways to protect this vital resource while leveraging its potential to drive both environmental and economic progress.



Through our partnership with Forested, we are making remarkable progress in several key areas:

- Enhancing export readiness: We are receiving technical support to refine our production processes and meet international standards, ensuring our shea butter thrives in competitive global markets.
- Connecting with large-scale buyers: Forested is linking us to high-volume purchasers, opening pathways for our shea butter to reach international shelves.
- Accessing carbon credit opportunities: Our conservation efforts are being aligned with carbon offset programs, creating a dual impact where companies purchasing our shea butter can also support reforestation and sustainability initiatives through carbon credits.

## George Abudul, Residential District Commissioner, Otuke District

In the first week of Oct 2024, the newly posted RDC of Otuke reported for duty and heartily made stop over at Okere City. He encouraged our children to work hard and be determined to succeed against all odds. We wish Mr. Abudul George, all the best as we work together to develop our district.







## Guy Loftus

Guy Loftus, a UK documentary film maker visited and stayed in Okere for a week to film an upcoming documentary about our work.

*Thank you, Guy*

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## Okello Andrew Herbert

Okello Andrew Herbert, a Ugandan Photographer and storyteller visited us in Okere for over 10 days to capture and tell some human stories from Okere.

*Thank you, ladit Okello*

# PARTNERSHIP NEWS

In 2024, our work was made possible through a special collaboration with amazing partners, such as;



Since 2022, when we joined the portfolio of Segal Family Foundation partners in Uganda, they have continued to invest to improve educational and economic outcomes at our community school.



This year, KAS supported a human rights workshop in Okere which attracted 50 local leaders. The support from KAS continues to support us to implement Okere Leadership Lab project which is our bold attempt to improve local governance and leadership development in Otuke District.



The PBE/Stocking Family Foundation has significantly supported Okere City's business and investment portfolio, enabling us to scale and diversify our economic activities.

## FORESTED

Forested has played a crucial role in expanding the international market for our shea butter, helping us connect with global buyers and increase demand for our products.



In 2024, we collaborated with the Ecovillage of Ithaca (EVI) to strengthen Okere Shea Butter's e-commerce operations. EVI has been instrumental in managing orders and facilitating the shipment of our shea butter to customers in the United States.



The UNFCU Foundation provided a grant of \$1,000 to bolster our environmental conservation efforts, supporting initiatives to preserve and restore natural ecosystems.



Obangangeo Hardware is a reliable partner that supplies construction materials for our infrastructure projects, often extending credit to ensure our development goals are met.



# PARTNERSHIP NEWS



The Tenacre Foundation generously supported the operations of our community school until September 2024, ensuring continued access to education for local children.



Friends of Okere, through various crowdfunding platforms, have raised funds to support critical community projects, including health, education, and women's empowerment initiatives.



**Institute for African Development**

In partnership with the Institute for African Development at Cornell University, we convened the Okot p'Bitek Literary Seminar: Do Not Uproot the Pumpkin, celebrating African literary heritage and fostering cultural dialogue.



Recognition through the IIE Impact Award allowed us to win \$10,000 to expand our solar systems to continue powering our operations.



ILF supported us in building two units of energy cooking stoves in our school kitchen.



In 2024, Okere City strengthened its commitment to improving community health through a strategic partnership with Hope Smiles, a global leader in dental care. Together, we organized dental outreach programs that provided essential oral health education and services to over 1,000 residents, including children and vulnerable groups in otuke District.

# SNIPPETS OF OUR WORK ON NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL MEDIA



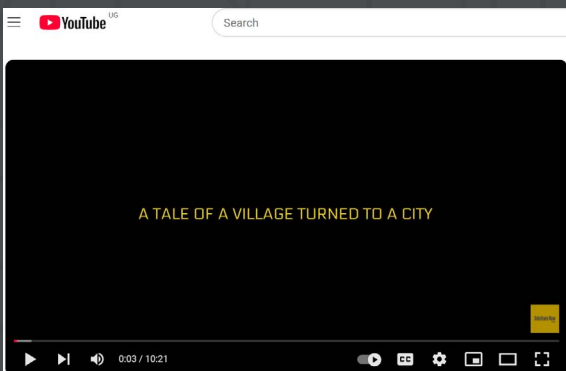
**Panorama:**

**OKERE CITY - AFRICA'S FIRST COUNTRY CITY**



**CGTN AFRICA:**

**OKERE CITY IGNITES DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN UGANDA**

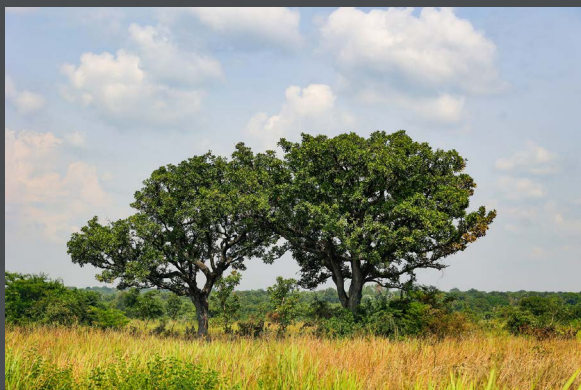


**SOLUTION NOW AFRICA:**

**THE TALE OF A VILLAGE TURNED TO CITY**



# SNIPPETS OF OUR WORK ON NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL MEDIA



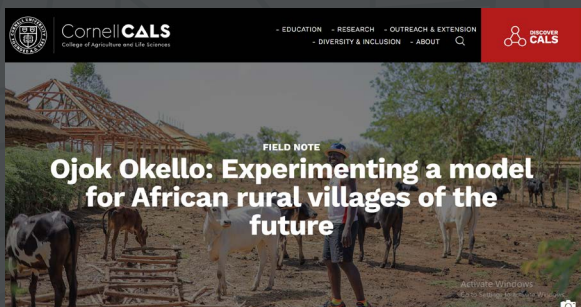
## LAST DROP AFRICA:

**BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE RURAL CITY USING SHEA TREES**



## TND NEWS

**OKERE CITY RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE 'BEST CULTURAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN UGANDA'**



## CORNELL UNIVERSITY:

**EXPERIMENTING A MODEL FOR AFRICAN RURAL VILLAGES OF THE FUTURE**

# WELCOME OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER

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Mary Otuko is the UK Programmes Manager at FORWARD leading in the planning and delivery of multiple projects under our Communities and Youth & Schools Programmes. She is part of FORWARD's Senior Management Team directly managing staff as well as our work relationship with partner organizations, other service agencies, and FGM-affected communities nationally. Mary has an MSc in Population and Development from the London School of Economics. Mary is also a Committee member and Projects Lead for the Lango Association UK (LAUK).

## Mary Otuko

UK Programmes Manager  
at FORWARD





# TEN KEY LESSONS WE LEARNED IN 2024

Here are some key lessons for Okere City from 2024, based on our growth, challenges, and achievements:

## 1. Capacity Building is Essential for Sustainability

- Empowering local residents, especially women and youth, through programs like the Aero-Kwan Functional Adult Literacy Project and Yaa-Malu Tailoring Center has demonstrated that sustainable development begins with capacity building at the grassroots level.

## 2. Partnerships Amplify Impact

- Collaborations with organizations like the Segal Family Foundation, Tenacre Foundation, and Cornell University have shown that strategic partnerships bring in critical resources and expertise to address local challenges.

## 3. Education is a Pillar of Resilience

- Despite financial challenges faced by many families, subsidized and accessible education remains central to creating opportunities and breaking cycles of poverty. Expanding educational programs and facilities is critical for the long-term well-being of the community.

## 4. Integrated Development Models Work

- Combining interventions in education, healthcare, vocational training, tourism, and environmental sustainability creates a holistic approach to rural transformation.

## 5. Climate Action Must Be Central to Rural Development

- Initiatives like the shea tree planting campaign underscore the dual importance of environmental conservation and economic development.

## 6. Economic Empowerment of Women Drives Community Growth

- The success of the Okere Shea Cooperative Society demonstrates that when women are economically empowered, they reinvest in their families and communities, driving broader societal benefits.

## 7. Rural Tourism is a Viable Economic Lever

- The success of #VisitOkere and events like the Okere Shea Festival reveals the untapped potential of rural and cultural tourism in showcasing tradition and heritage while driving economic growth.





## 8. Technology and Innovation are Game-Changers

- Leveraging Wi-Fi for e-commerce through the shea cooperative and digital training for youth has highlighted the transformative power of technology in bridging rural-urban divides. Continued investment in tech literacy and digital infrastructure is key for future growth.

## 9. Storytelling Mobilizes Support

- Sharing Okere City's journey through platforms like CNN, Panorama, and local media has raised awareness and drawn global attention to its transformative model.

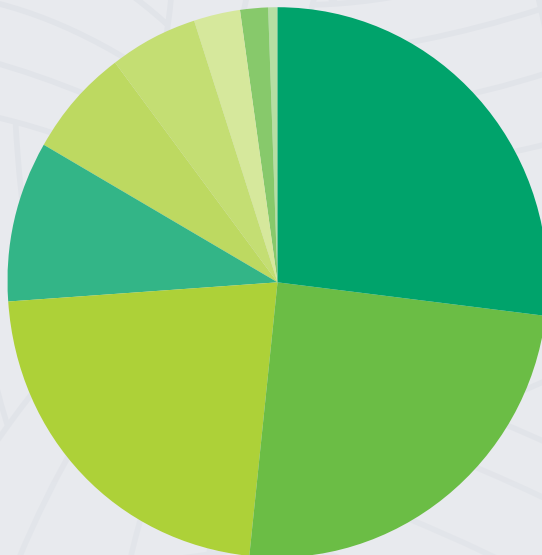
## 10. Long-Term Vision Matters

- Staying focused on the broader vision—transforming Okere into a sustainable rural city—has provided clarity and purpose.

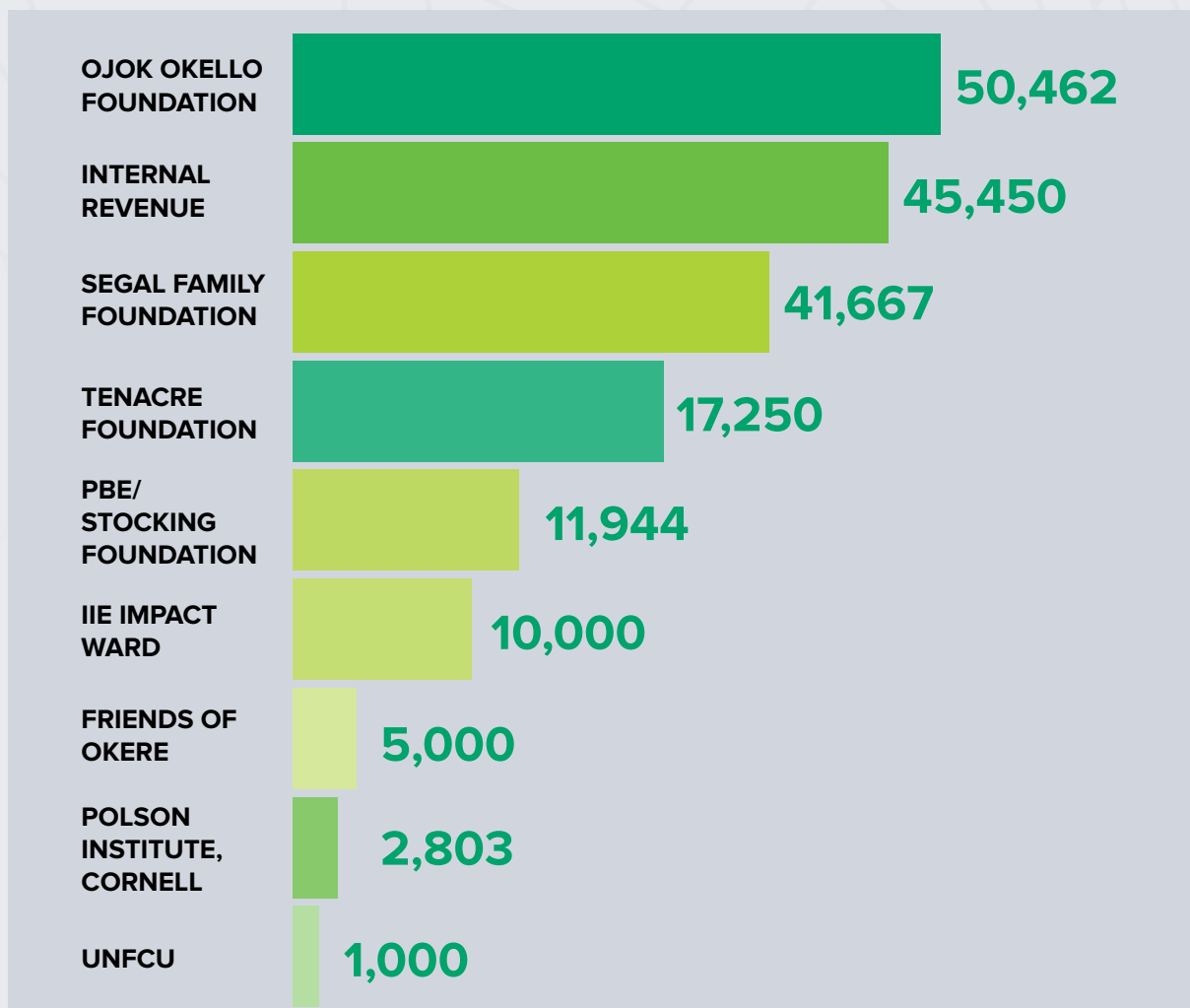




# GRANTS & REVENUES IN USD



TOTAL REVENUE  
**185,576**



## WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT 2025. HERE'S WHY AND HOW:

# 1

We shall further strengthen Okere Village Bank and position it as a financing arm of the Okere City project.

# 2

We shall triple the enrolment at our community school from 350 in 2024 to 500 children by the end of 2025.

# 3

We shall extend medical outreach services to 2,000 people in Otuke District.

# 4

We intend to increase the sale of Shea butter from 10 tons in 2024 to 50 tons in 2025.

# 5

We shall establish a shea museum and resource, in addition to starting up Okere Shea Residency Programme.

# 6

We shall train 500 local councilors in Otuke County, up from 100 trained in 2024 through our political leadership lab project.

# 7

We shall prioritize investment in key infrastructure, such as school blocks, toilets, libraries, and classroom.

# 8

We shall strengthen our adult and vocational educational possibilities through investments in study tours and exchange visits.





# Thank you!

Photos used in this report are attributed to:

1. Okello Andrew Herbert
2. Nze Eve
3. Sofi Ludin
4. Jjumba Martin



[www.okerecity.org](http://www.okerecity.org)

Okere City 2024 Annual Impact Report