



PIPAL
TREE



Seeds of change in Kathmandu

H1 Update Report Jan – Jun 2024

The Pipal Tree financial year follows the calendar year and this review has been prepared for the guidance of our major individual donors, corporate supporters, Trusts and Foundations. I am pleased to report a VERY strong start to the year, both at home and in Nepal with excellent prospects for the remainder of the year and beyond.

Our Purpose

Over the past few months we have been reviewing what exactly we are trying to achieve as a small charity and how we might align ourselves so that we can meet the most pressing needs in a rapidly changing world. Essentially, we have concluded that we need to position ourselves as an organisation that is **responding to crisis**. Or, more accurately, to the three inter-related global crises that are impacting upon Nepal. These are:

- **Climate change** – Nepal is the tenth most affected country in the world
- **Loss of nature** – this biodiversity hotspot is being degraded by a host of factors, most notably from anthropogenic habitat destruction including now by wildfires that are exacerbated by climate change
- **Soaring poverty and inequality** – one fifth of Nepal's population lives below the poverty line, but poverty is multidimensional and to be measured not only in economic terms. It extends to other deprivations experienced by poor people such as poor health, lack of education and social marginalisation. In our main operational area of south Nepal we see on a daily basis how low-caste groups, ethnic minorities and girls are increasingly disadvantaged.

But this is by no means all 'doom and gloom'. For, while we are working to ensure that crisis doesn't turn to disaster, we also see crisis as an opportunity - a wake-up call - that demands an urgent response to these burgeoning challenges.

Our Response

Broadly, our response to the crises is three-pronged:

- **Conservation** – through re-wilding and re-forestation activities
- **Lives** – addressing poverty-associated deprivations such as improving health and access to a full education
- **Livelihoods** – developing new training and employment opportunities, especially involving nature-based solutions

These in turn have translated into three main programmes that combine elements of all three interest areas:

- The Dhanushadham Wildlife Corridor
- Climate resilience in the Kamala River Basin
- The Nepal Urban Nature programme

We continue to implement smaller projects that remain important legacies from the past and that are consistent with the aforementioned interests. I shall now explain what is involved in these three programmes and the smaller projects in a little more detail.

The Dhanushadham Wildlife Corridor

The aim of this project is to connect a large isolated piece of virgin forest on Nepal's southern plains (The Dhanushadham Protected Forest) with the wooded Chure hills to the north by means of a forested wildlife corridor. That corridor will follow the course of the Baluwa River ('Baluwa' means 'sand' in Nepali) which is already a migratory route for large mammals such as wild elephants. However it is very exposed as it crosses open farmland and the risk of potentially fatal human-wildlife conflict is very high. The future corridor will consist of dense forest clusters that act as stepping stones rather than as a continuous strip. Eventually, through encouraging farmers to plant trees between the clusters, this corridor can become more continuous. It should be noted that the future corridor will incorporate a **Gurkha Memorial Forest** with 13 forest clusters planted, one for each Victoria Cross (VC) won by Gurkhas since World War 2.

As well as being important for conservation, the programme will work towards creating and supporting livelihoods. We will educate farmers and women's groups in the ecotourism and economic potential that can arise from re-wilding and sponsor the formation of women's cooperatives that can have access to microloans. We are researching possible forest products (e.g. essential oils and compost) and potential markets domestically and internationally.



Key developments over the past six months have been:

- We have been delighted to secure the volunteer services of Colonel (Retd) Nick Hinton MBE to oversee the programme. Nick is a former Gurkha Commanding Officer who speaks fluent Nepali and who after leaving the Army spent some 20 years in senior management within IBM. He is therefore well placed to liaise with Lily Katuwal and Dev Narayan Mandal, the Founders of our implementing partner organisations. These are the social enterprise Lily's Leaves, which is responsible for the women's cooperatives and microloans elements, and NGO The Mithila Wildlife Trust (MWT) which is responsible for the re-wilding and reforestation aspects.

- Our immediate fundraising needs have been met by our very successful participation in The Big Give Green Match Fund in April that raised £81,396, placing us twelfth out of 247 charities in terms of funds raised in the campaign. This has been boosted by a major two-year grant from the Swiss Foundation La Lomellina.
- Operationally, the hot spell and prolonged drought seems to have ended. This, together with the funds raised, has allowed us to purchase three more landsites for Gurkha Memorial Forests that are now being planted out.
- Since 2020 we have been supporting **Bhatighadi community school** which is located where the corridor meets the Chure hills. This community school serves 248 low-caste children from ethnic minorities, many of their parents being members of the local Community Forest Users Group (CFUG) that has implemented our reforestation projects locally.

When we started supporting the school in 2020, it was quite dilapidated (built in 1961) and under-resourced. Most of the students, who attend classes 1-8, are girls because parents often choose to send their sons to better-resourced private schools. Our broad goal has been to raise the standards of educational provision at the school to be on a par with the best private school. The Chairman of the CFUG is also Chairman of the school and he has played a central role in encouraging children's attendance in return for our support.

We responded to the need in 2022 by building a new fully-equipped computer room at the school (funded by UK charity Guy's Trust). And starting last year, following a major gift from a supporter, we began refurbishing dilapidated school buildings and built a new two-storey classroom block. This building work was finished in April 2024. The capital works at the school are now complete, but we continue to support the school through our funding of an additional female teacher, Mrs Jina Tamang Sherpa. Jina's salary is covered through the Big Give Christmas Challenge.

This year, children from two nearby villages registered as pupils for the first time with a total of 43 new registrations. Historically, 15-25 new children have joined the school at the start of each academic year. Regular attendance has now increased from a baseline of 70-75% in 2020 to 90%.

Overall, this programme is on course and well-funded, the funding to be topped up by some of the proceeds of this year's forthcoming Big Give Christmas Challenge.



The new classroom block



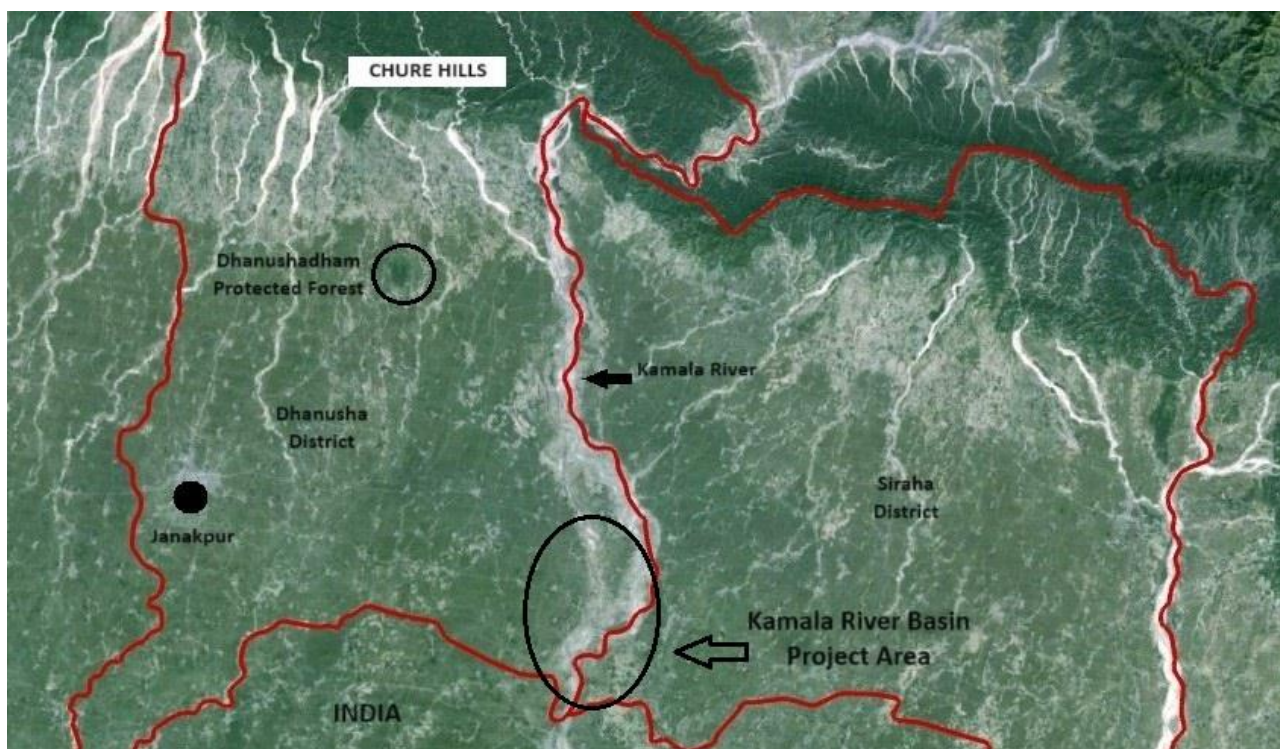
Jina Tamang Sherpa



The computer room at Bhatighadi School

Climate Resilience in the Kamala River Basin

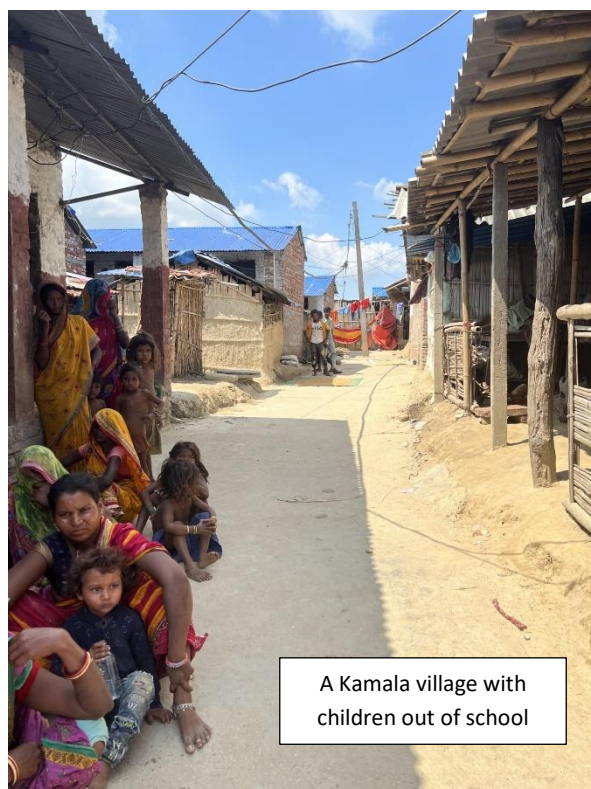
This new programme will launch this month, building upon some of our earlier work in the Kamala River area. This major river forms the boundary between Dhanusha and Siraha Districts, to the east of the Dhanushadham Wildlife Corridor area. See below.



The Kamala River floods on a regular basis and did so disastrously in 2004 when the river burst its banks and claimed over 800 lives. The survivors were relocated to government land further inland and have lived there under miserable circumstances ever since.

Their plight first came to our attention in 2020 when we delivered food relief to some 29,000 people across the whole Province during a COVID lockdown. Media reports had stated how villagers were on the brink of starvation and we intervened immediately with life-saving food supplies. But it was clear at that time that children were not attending schools and families were therefore existing fully in a poverty trap.

Soon afterwards, we responded by building two Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in the area that can offer non-formal education and act as entry point into mainstream education. This helps overcome the lack of self-confidence that bedevil people from the lowest castes. Once children have learned some of the basics of the 3 Rs they can join school and thereafter be supported by the CLCs with their homework. This kind of support cannot be offered by their illiterate parents. The tutors are college students from the same low-caste background who receive modest salaries that allow them to complete their own studies and proceed into higher education or good employment. So, this is win-win for tutors and children, with the tutors acting as role models to the children and proof that there can be a future in education.



This year, there has been an important development in that using funds raised in a Big Give 'Women and Girls' appeal last October we have been able to set up a local high-interest fund that can cover some CLC female tutor salaries. This fund was supplemented by our Big Give Christmas Challenge that allowed us to issue bursaries to girls

and, importantly, also to boys. We do not discriminate against boys; instead, we aim to ensure that boys and girls have exactly the same opportunities. It should be noted that the bursary recipients can act as CLC tutors. Earlier this month saw the outcome of the grade 10 examinations in Nepal and, based upon that and an assessment of family circumstances, we have been able to select eight boys and eight girls who will receive bursaries to allow them to join Class 11. We hope that this opportunity can be expanded significantly in future years. And this month we have had a philanthropist offer to sponsor girls into degree nursing courses, so that we can now offer a potential full career pathway available for a girl starting in Class 1 right through to rewarding employment.

Last week, we launched our Big Give summer appeal to raise funds for this programme that would allow us to:

- Construct two more new CLC's
- Fund six new CLC tutors
- Refurbish three community schools
- Plant two rapid-growth forests to act as strategically sited natural flood barriers
- Distribute 2,500 school rucksacks to incentivise attendance, these made by young deaf women at Lily's Leaves.

This matching appeal target was set very high at £112,100 to accommodate up to a possible £45,000 in grant funding that could have doubled in value. Unfortunately, this element will not be forthcoming as the two applicant Foundations have stated that they are grossly oversubscribed (a common refrain). So, we will have to proceed with the funds that we have available (probably in the region of £70,000 after the appeal has run its course) and make up the shortfall through future appeals. We will certainly be able to start the construction of one of the two new CLCs in the Kamala River basin area immediately after the appeal ends.

There has been one other piece of great news regarding this programme and that is our appointment of a new volunteer to supervise this programme. Mr Julian Bates has just retired as a partner at [Workman LLP](#) and, like Nick Hinton, will be able to dedicate one day per week to this programme. The appointment of Nick and Julian has allowed us to not only draw upon their expertise and experience, but also to expand our programmes cost-effectively.

The Nepal Urban Nature Programme

The restoration of urban nature is growing in popularity around the world as communities and organisations push back against urbanisation that has been to the detriment of nature and the health of city-dwellers. For example, The Natural History Museum is launching its [Urban Nature Project](#) on the 18th July and [this link](#) identifies eight other world cities that are rewilding their open spaces. The benefits are manifold and largely self-evident, but include reduction of pollution, restoration of biodiversity, improvement in mental health and an urban cooling effect.

The approach is highly relevant to Kathmandu which has for many years struggled with air pollution as the city has expanded rapidly. Emissions generated by traffic and industry (including brick kilns) linger in the bowl that is Kathmandu valley. But recently the situation has deteriorated even further because of climate change. A lack of seasonal rainfall has meant that pollutants have remained in the air for longer than normal. Now, Kathmandu has the worst air quality index and the highest rate of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) of any world city. And, unsurprisingly, it is the poorest people who are the most exposed and feeling the greatest impact.

A useful response is **The Miyawaki Method** of reforestation that encourages trees to grow ten times faster, creating forests twenty times more biodiverse and thirty times denser than conventional ones. Designed primarily for urban areas, it requires only small plots, such as the size of a tennis court, to be available. It involves:

- Fencing to exclude people and animals
- Excavating soil for compost layering
- Replacing topsoil and densely planting native saplings (six per square metre)
- Mulching and watering for the first three years

We have been pioneering the use of the Method in Nepal since December 2021, initially with MWT in south Nepal (see later under 'Dhanusha Bird Park'). Lily's Leaves became enthusiastically involved in urban rewilding in July 2023 by planting Kathmandu's first Miyawaki forest. This involved cleaning of an area of public land that had been used as a general dumping area. Then, in conjunction with the municipal authorities, the land area was planted out, as described above. Ten months later the results speak for themselves (see right). This was followed by a second phase plantation last month, at a site also alongside the Bishnumati River.

Lily Katuwal, the Founder of Lily's Leaves has in the process become a passionate environmentalist, earning the respect of the municipal authorities such that she is now being given priority in developing other sites over other agencies who might apply to develop public land for different purposes.

For the third and fourth sites, the Municipality has offered Lily's Leaves two areas of waste ground further along the Bishnumati River. The Phase 3 site covers 1,500m² and Phase 4 1,000m². As can be seen from the image on the right, the first site will require considerable preparation in removing derelict buildings before the earth-moving can commence. The budget for Phase 3 is £33,000 and for Phase 4 £23,000, including Pipal Tree and Lily's Leaves support costs @ 10%. The budget items include land clearance, earthmoving, purchase of saplings (fruit and nut species that are not available free from the Department of Forestry - DFO), compost, irrigation, fencing and maintenance. DFO will provide 1,500 saplings free, the remaining 2,800 saplings will have to be purchased from private nurseries.

The public benefit from this project is massive. Approximately 200,000 people live within five kilometres of these sites. We anticipate engagement with approximately 200 school children who will be involved in the plantation work and subsequent field studies. Seven young deaf women who are currently in training and employment at Lily's Leaves will be directly involved in the project.

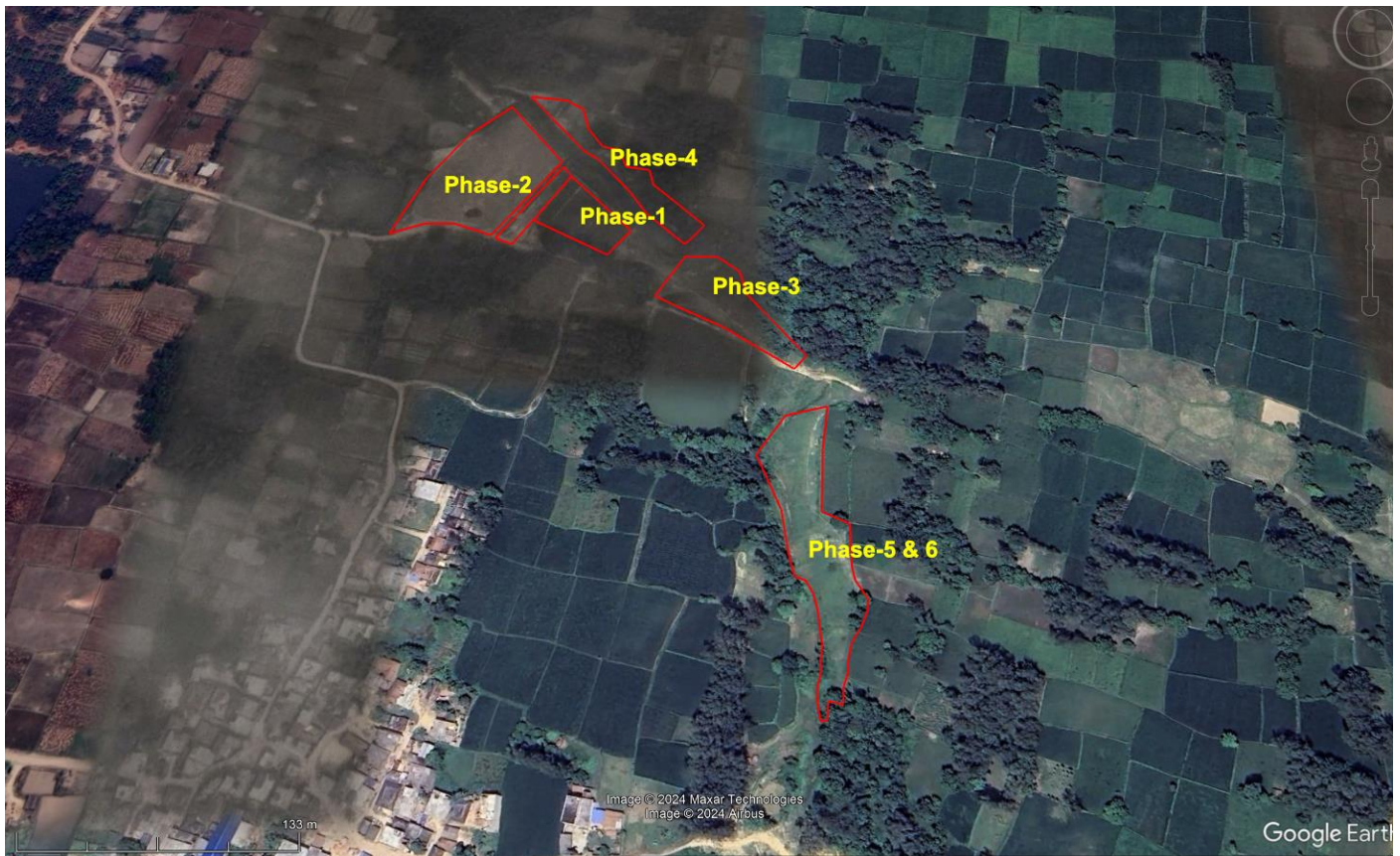
As previously stated, part of our response to the crises in Nepal is the creation of nature-based livelihoods. An example of this is our intention to set up a **Lily's Leaves nursery**, run on a not-for-profit basis and managed by young deaf women. Sales can be made privately to individuals and institutions while in future saplings can be donated to Lily's Leaves' projects rather than these having to be purchased. This plan is the subject of a current grant application for £40,000 to cover setup and initial operating costs, the outcome expected next month.



Other project activities

We continue to support five other project activities that have been running since 2020/2021. In no particular order these are:

a. **The Dhanusha Bird Park:** Our first Miyawaki project launched in December 2021 in Dhanusha District when we began transforming an exhausted and over-grazed piece of community land into becoming a haven for endangered birds and other wildlife. Once again, the project has been implemented by phases as funds come available. Usually, it costs £20k - £25k to plant a new area of forest. This year, we were very pleased to be able to begin Phases 5 and 6 of reforestation. See the Google Earth view below:



The trees have grown prolifically and the Park has attracted not only wildlife but also visitors from 66 of Nepal's 77 Districts, curious to see this new and impactful reforestation method. Our next activity at the site will be the construction of a small lodge that will accommodate weekend visitors and bird-lovers, bringing carefully managed ecotourism to the area.

b. **Lily's Leaves:** Pipal Tree provided setup funding for social enterprise Lily's Leaves in October 2020 and has funded it ever since through monthly transfers. Lily's Leaves provides training and employment at its Kathmandu centre for vulnerable young women, including deaf women, who work alongside their able-bodied peers. Training includes making silver jewellery and tailoring at basic and advanced levels. In training, the women produce school rucksacks and reusable sanitary pads ('dignity pads') that are distributed free to girls who attend community schools in Madhesh Province. This incentivises attendances and reduces school dropout rates. The latter tend to peak when girls reach puberty, especially given the absence of proper toilet facilities at many schools. Lily distributes the pads personally so that she can speak to classes of girls AND boys about the taboo subject in Nepal of menstrual health and hygiene.

Through our Big Give Christmas Challenge fundraising, this year we have been able to:

- Distribute a total of 2,700 dignity pads and to girls in classes 6-12 at schools in Madhesh Province. These have been very well received with girls describing them as being very comfortable, reusable, and durable. Moreover, they are pleased to have some independence in that they no longer have to ask their fathers for money to buy pads.
- Construct a CLC in Sarlahi District that is currently providing tuition support to 44 children in classes 1-6 and to 30 children who are preparing for the challenging Secondary Education Examination (SEE) which equates to GCSEs in the UK.
- Rusticate Lily's Leaves tailoring training to Madhesh Province, delivering training to 30 girls in their own language (the girls' first language is Maithili rather than Nepali). This is cheaper than training girls in Kathmandu and the trainees are able to be day students rather than having to use hostel accommodation in Kathmandu. The trainers are Lily's Leaves' graduates from previous Kathmandu training courses.
- Fund 12 young women into setting themselves up in small tailoring businesses in their home areas in south Nepal. These start-up grants have covered initial equipment and material purchase and six months' rental.



c. **Dhanushadham CLC building extension:** In 2021 The McGough Foundation funded the building of a new CLC at Dhanushadham. This project became a victim of its own success with its daily 250 attendance requiring tuition to be conducted in shifts. This year, following grant support from The Cauda Trust, The SMB Charitable Trust and the TUUT Charitable Trust we have been able to fund the construction of a second building to cater for the additional demand. Construction work has had to be delayed a little because of extremes of heat followed by torrential rain and flooding, but this project should be completed within the coming 2-3 months. The Gilchrist Trust has continued to support us with meeting the CLC operating costs.

d. **The Janakpur refuge for rape survivors:** Since 2021 we have been co-funding with registered charity Our Sansar on a 50:50 basis a 30-bed refuge for rape survivors in Janakpur. This is operated by Our Sansar's local NGO partner, also called Our Sansar. The facility provides a place of security and caters for all basic needs while offering counselling and other rehabilitation services. The aim is to reintegrate the survivors with their community and help them move on in life, while our team provides legal support towards bringing their assailants to justice. Our support involves a monthly expenditure of approximately £1,200 and the project is currently reasonably well funded, but we will need to top up the fund from the Big Give Christmas Challenge.

Financial statement

Our financial position is very healthy in spite of the fundraising situation being more competitive than ever and notwithstanding the current cost of living crisis.

Income for the year (up to 30th June) of £182,575 is up from last year (2023: £72,518) and tracking well against what was an optimistic budget for the year. We had an excellent Big Give 'Green Match Fund' campaign in April which brought in a total of £96,399, including Gift Aid. Our expenditure has been high at £213,144 (2023: £147,398) but this is in part due to some payments in advance around the needs of projects (e.g. transferring funds early to ensure tree planting can proceed in optimum climatic conditions). It is worth remembering that a high expenditure reflects a high impact and our recognition that funds are donated to be spent on projects and beneficiaries rather than held on account. On that subject, the cash balance is £175,960 this including £54,425 in unrestricted reserves (2023: £63,109), which is broadly in line with the Trustees' reserves policy, and £20,791 as an emergency relief fund that we are developing to allow an immediate response to the inevitable future natural disasters in Nepal.

Fundraising and Communications

These fundraising points are noteworthy:

- Our participation in **The Big Give** lies at the heart of our annual fundraising strategy, thereby maximising the value of donor gifts, allowing these to become investments that attract matching donations and co-funders. The Big Give appeals, based on different aspects of our projects, serve as fundraising milestones throughout the year. [Our summer Big Give appeal](#) (which focuses mainly on education) is underway at the time of writing, with £56,180 raised towards a fundraising target of £112,100. It seems highly unlikely that we will reach this target for the aforementioned reasons.

The next Big Give appeal will be in October, [for Women and Girls](#), with an appeal target of £20,000, subject to the Big Give awarding £10,000 in Champion funding (a matching pledge). The final appeal of the year will be [The Christmas Challenge](#), the funds raised covering a broad range of our projects and that always gives a strong financial boost to the start of the following year's activities. Last year, the Christmas appeal target was £100,000 based upon £50,000 in pledges, half of which represented Big Give Champion funding. This year there is the tantalising prospect of Pipal Tree being awarded £50,000 in Champion funding as a Big Give favoured charity (I act as a mentor for other charities participating in The Big Give and Pipal Tree is a member of the Big Give users' group). This possibility could therefore increase our fundraising target to £200,000. We have suspended our search for in-house pledgers pending a decision from The Big Give, but [our pledges](#) currently stand at £23,850.

- In our nine and a half years of existence, we have never received **a gift from a Will**. However, we continue to invite such gifts as a supporter's final expression of interest in a particular cause. To move the process forward, last month we joined the 'Remember a Charity' network that encourages legacy giving, particularly during legacy appeal week in September. Remember a Charity offers member charities guidance, publicity materials and templates and exposure through [its website](#) and campaigns.
- Pipal Tree is now listed as one of five 'Tier 1' partner charities on the [Raffle House website](#) through which the public is offered the chance to win a dream home (or sometimes an expensive car) through a monthly raffle. 10% of income from ticket purchases supplements our unrestricted funds.
- Also this year we have begun investigating additional sources of **European income**, particularly from Germany and Holland. Consultancy support by Vienna-based 'Triple Minds' has given us useful leads that we will follow up, including by Trustee Angela Sherman who is based in Denmark and speaks fluent German.

- We continue to support and take part in **challenges**. I ran the Rome Marathon with our Treasurer (and ultramarathon runner) John Clark in March. Between us we raised a total of £5,647 (not including Gift Aid). I have registered to run the Barcelona Marathon in March 2025 (five days after my 65th birthday) and John may join me in that and/or in the London Marathon 2025 if Pipal Tree is awarded a guaranteed place.

In respect of communications there are three points of note:

- We are currently rebuilding [our website](#) to reflect our current and revised priorities. This should be live by the middle of August.
- In April I delivered a TEDx talk to Bristol University of West of England (UWE) entitled “Ripples of Change in Nepal”. This is available on [YouTube](#) where it currently has 116k views.
- In the week beginning the 20th August we will host my colleague Dev Narayan Mandal’s first visit to the UK. He will have a very full itinerary as I introduce him to rewilding and ecotourism projects in this country, but we would like him to engage with as many supporters as possible. If you are interested in meeting this passionate conservationist, please let me know.

Conclusion

This has been far and away the strongest H1 in our nine-year history. We are confident that this success will be reflected in our performance for the whole year as we lead the way in turning crisis into opportunity in Nepal. With your help, we can continue to make a difference - disproportionate to our size - in these most challenging of times.

Thank you.



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 28th July 2024

