



Natopiwo Partners Annual Report August 2025

Introduction

Dear supporters and friends:

We are excited to share with you this first annual report of our efforts in collaboration with and on behalf of Natopiwo Organization since our founding in 2024. The report provides background on the founding of Natopiwo Partners as a 501(c)(3) as well as specifics on our fundraising efforts and the projects that we support. We hope that you will share our excitement for all that has been accomplished in this inaugural year as well as enthusiasm and resolve to build momentum for the future. Our close partnership with the Maasai communities of northern Tanzania provides opportunities to understand and assist with community needs in education, health, environmental protection, and supporting women and girls. This inaugural year for Natopiwo Partners has been busy and rewarding, but we know that there is much more to do. Thank you for your support and interest. We hope that you share our sense of celebration and excitement for the future as you read this report.

– Natopiwo Partners Board of Directors

Origin and Purpose of Natopiwo Partners

In spring 2024, several individuals with long ties to Maasai communities in and around Monduli Juu in northern Tanzania came together to create an organization that would support those communities through fundraising and collaborative planning efforts. Specifically, the group's intention was to work with longtime friend and colleague Moses "Musa" Kamaika Meng'arana and his registered nongovernmental organization **Natopiwo** ("Lifted Up"). Musa established Natopiwo in 2017 to implement educational, social, and environmental programs in his home community of Eluwai and Monduli Juu more broadly.

Natopiwo Partners was incorporated in May 2024 as an Iowa-based nonprofit organization, and in August of the same year it was designated by the IRS as a tax-exempt public charity under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The purpose of Natopiwo Partners, as

specified in our Articles of Incorporation, is to collaborate with Natopiwo and the people of Tanzania to promote educational, health, social, and environmental wellbeing in Tanzania. We are committed to serving as allies in the broadest sense of the word, providing financial, practical, and moral support for initiatives conceived and carried out by the Natopiwo team and their partners in Tanzania.

The incorporators and original board members of Natopiwo Partners include Cynthia Ann Heckelsmiller, Jon Jensen, Lori Stanley, and Laura Wangsness Willemssen. The board was pleased to welcome our fifth member, Rachel Hodapp, in September 2024, and our sixth member, Jon Lund, in August 2025 (see more about the board members below).

Our first year has been a busy one. We have assisted Natopiwo in identifying project priorities, hosted Musa for two months in the Midwest, organized fundraisers, provided financial support for several projects, and begun to learn the ropes of operating a US nonprofit organization with strong international ties.

The Maasai People of Monduli Juu

The Maasai are an Indigenous group that live in northern Tanzania and southern Kenya in a region that is often referred to as Maasailand. Historically, they are semi-nomadic pastoralists, raising sheep, goats and cattle, though the encroachment of modern society has forced many changes in their communities and lifestyles. Although the Maasai people are one of 130 different ethnic groups in Tanzania, they have maintained their traditional culture and lifestyle more than other Indigenous groups in the country.

Many of the connections to the Maasai communities of this region were made through Luther College study away programs. Luther students have studied in Tanzania for semester- and month-long programs for over 30 years with a regular interim (or January term) program running nearly annually for the past 20 years. Musa Kamaika has been a key organizer for Luther's student groups as well as supporting researchers in the region, including several Natopiwo Partners board members. We work closely with Musa and his organization to support his community as well as projects in surrounding Maasai villages.

Projects Supported

The most impactful community development work involves projects that emanate from the expressed needs and wishes of community members themselves and that directly address one or more community priorities. On the basis of this premise, Natopiwo Organization has, from the beginning, taken a holistic, grassroots approach to all their development work in Monduli Juu. As a result of listening carefully to the people in their community, they have in recent years undertaken projects that focus on one or some combination of four areas of emphasis: **education, health, the needs of women and girls, and environmental conservation and**

restoration. Education is the heart of Natopiwo's work, but our organizations are evolving to support related projects identified by the community as filling vital needs.

Natopiwo Partners has served as a sounding board for Natopiwo and the local communities, assisting with project prioritization and planning, as well as fundraising for projects of highest priority. What follows are very brief summaries of undertakings for which we have provided practical and financial support over the past year. Most of these projects, especially the educational initiatives, are ongoing, and we will continue to partner with Natopiwo to ensure their success. Detailed descriptions of the projects, including photos, are available in the Natopiwo Organization Annual Report

Natopiwo Preschool

Natopiwo's first community development initiative was to establish a preschool for Maasai children in the rural community of Eluwai. The preschool is in its eighth year of operation, filling a vital need for the young children of the community. In 2024, generous donor support made it possible for Natopiwo to move instruction from a temporary space inside a local church to a new, permanent classroom along with a stand-alone kitchen, water collection tank, and washroom. In just the past year, enrollment at the preschool has nearly doubled, now serving 98 children. To date, 273 children have completed the preschool course. Thanks to their head start at Natopiwo Preschool, all of these children have either completed their primary education or are still enrolled. The presence of a local preschool led by trusted teachers and administrators has meant that many more girls are prepared and encouraged to seek primary school education than in the past.

Secondary School Sponsorships

Natopiwo tracks the progress of children who have finished preschool and gone on to primary school. By earning high test scores on national examinations, some children are accepted to secondary school, an opportunity not guaranteed in Tanzania. Natopiwo provides scholarships for secondary school students who have tested well on the national examinations, but who would not be able to continue their education without financial support. Scholarships cover the cost of school supplies, school fees, small required donations for food, health insurance cards, and pocket money for transport and other basic necessities. Currently six students are receiving secondary school scholarship support.

Post-Secondary Sponsorship

In addition to providing a handful of secondary school sponsorships, Natopiwo has been able to support one student's post-secondary studies. That student graduated from college in July 2025 with a diploma in community development.

Women's Literacy Classes

Natopiwo began to offer free adult literacy classes in 2024 in response to a request by mothers who wanted to be able to better support their young children in completing their homework. In addition to enabling mothers to engage more effectively in their children's learning, developing literacy also increases women's confidence and opens up opportunities for personal and

economic growth. Despite the difficulty of making time in their busy days for classroom instruction, 15 women are participating in this program and making steady progress in their learning. Natopiwo hires the teachers and provides enrollees with textbooks, exercise books, writing instruments, and other learning materials.

Women's Sewing Classes

Sewing classes for adult women were also begun in 2024. Until recently Natopiwo owned just two sewing machines, which meant women had only short turns practicing their new skills during any given class period. In June 2025, Natopiwo Partners provided funding for two additional sewing machines, effectively doubling the women's time at the machines. In addition to hiring the teachers and providing the sewing machines for these training sessions, Natopiwo purchases the fabric, thread, scissors, measuring tapes, and other materials that the women need to learn sewing skills.

One of the participants in this program progressed so quickly in her learning that she has already purchased a sewing machine and started her own business. On Saturdays she takes the machine to the local market where people come to her with their requests for repairs and custom-made garments. She is now a role model for other women who seek to generate an income in order to pay school fees for their children and purchase essential goods at market.

Women's Reproductive Health Workshops

In one of the newest initiatives, Natopiwo is starting to provide workshops to support women's health through education and supplies that support reproductive health. Adult women in the community informed Natopiwo that they wanted this type of training. Two local Maasai women were hired to run the workshop. Given the success of the first workshop and requests from more women in the community, the trainers will do this again in the fall. As with all Natopiwo's projects, we will listen to the community and work to meet the needs and priorities that have been identified.

Erosion Mitigation and Landscape Restoration (Roots of Resilience)

Maasai communities work to be conscientious caretakers of the land that sustains their herding and farming way of life, but years of severe drought in the region have resulted in extensive erosion and the development of yawning gullies that deeply dissect the landscape. Wearing away of the land's surface has negatively impacted grazing and agricultural practices in Monduli Juu and disrupted both vehicular travel and foot traffic in the area by creating impassable ravines.

Natopiwo began work with the community in 2024 to mitigate this erosion and work to restore local ecosystems. Partnering with another Maasai NGO, Livelihoods and Environmental Agenda (LEA), Natopiwo has supported a project to map the local communities in order to both identify borders and determine proper land management for the different parts of the community. In addition, we supported supplies for the community to engage in direct erosion mitigation. Sandbags and other structural supports were added to fill some of the gullies and make the area safer for children and others to travel within the community.



Natopiwo Preschool

Photo credit: Daniel Tumaini

Outreach and Fundraising

Natopiwo Partners was founded to support the work in Tanzania that is described above, and our main role is financial support, communications, and outreach. We want to help, and we know that supporting what the local communities identify as their needs and the work they are doing to meet these needs is the most important role that we can play. Natopiwo Partners first year has been a time of learning and development for this entirely volunteer organization. We have focused on developing our outreach and fundraising capacity as we spread the word about the needs of the Maasai communities of northern Tanzania and the good work that Musa and Natopiwo are doing to meet these needs. We have much more to learn and the possibilities for growth are great but we are gratified at what has been accomplished in this first year. What follows is a very brief summary of key accomplishments in 2024-25 in the areas of outreach and fundraising.

Donors

Over 60 individuals made donations to Natopiwo Partners in our first year with financial support totalling more than \$60,000 USD. We've transferred nearly all of those dollars to Tanzania to directly support the work of Natopiwo.

Outreach

We have a contact list of over 100 individuals and are developing a communications and fundraising plan to elevate our efforts to reach more individuals who want to partner with Musa and the Maasai people of Monduli Juu. We created a website (www.natopiwopartners.org) and

have launched Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts to spread the word via social media.

Musa’s visit to the US

One highlight of our first year was hosting Natopiwo founder, Musa Kamaika, for a two-month visit to the US in Fall 2024. Musa gave a formal presentation at Luther College and spoke at fundraising events in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Virginia. He also visited individually with dozens of people, sharing stories of his homeland and the good work that is happening through Natopiwo. He is now preparing for a trip to the UK in August and September to speak at a conference at Oxford University and do outreach there.

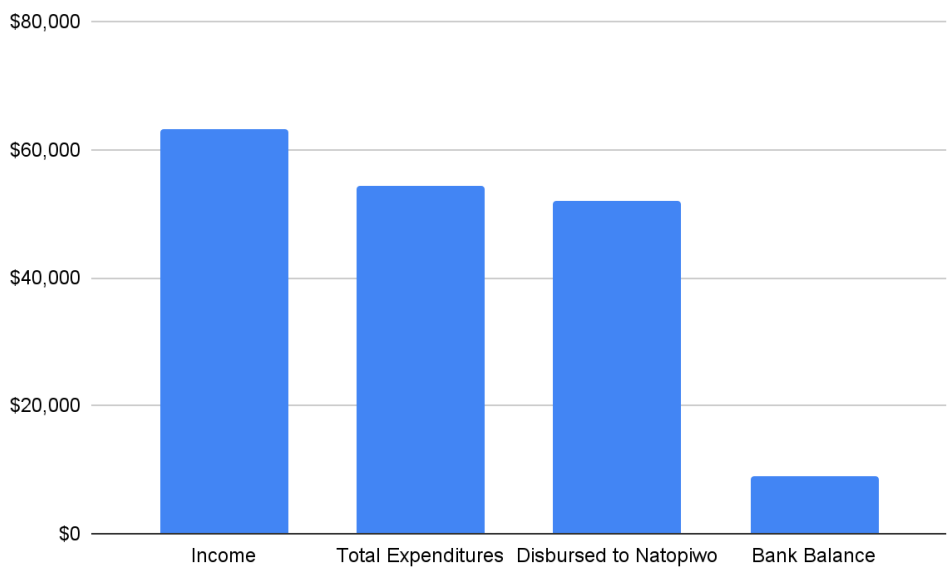
Professional Video

In addition to the communications described above, Natopiwo was able to produce numerous videos, including a professional video by a Tanzanian professional videographer and designer. This video is accessible through a link on the Natopiwo Partners website.

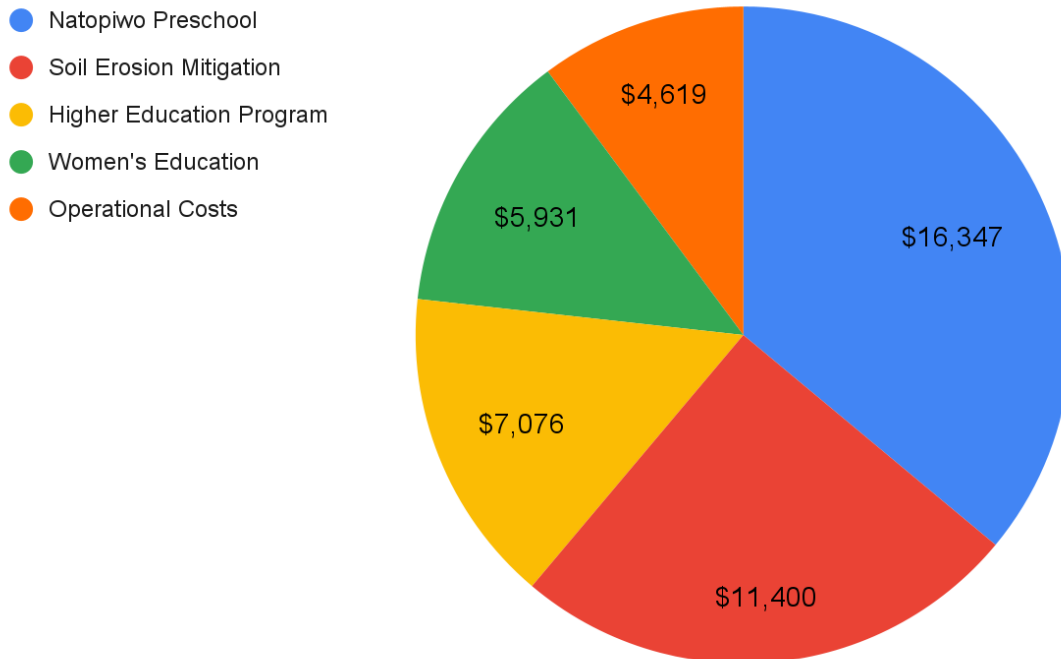
Finances (May 2024-August 2025)

Since the founding of Natopiwo Partners in early 2024 we have raised more than \$63,000 in support of Natopiwo initiatives. We have disbursed 82% of the funds (\$51,865) to Natopiwo, approximately 4% (\$2,521) has been used to cover our organizational start-up and administrative costs, and 14% (\$8,943) is in reserve for future disbursement to Natopiwo.

Income	\$63,328.78
Expenditures	\$54,385.93
Funds Sent to Natopiwo	\$51,865
Bank Balance	\$8,942.85



Expenditures by Program Area



Gratitude for Your Support!

We are deeply grateful for the many people who have supported this work. Forming Natopiwo Partners was a leap of faith for the board members motivated by awareness of the needs in Tanzania and the resilience and commitment of Musa and the Natopiwo team to meet those needs. Thanks to all who have supported this work. We could not have done this without you, and we look forward to continued partnership in the year to come.

Natopiwo Partners Board of Directors

Lori Stanley, President (Decorah, IA)

Lori is a founding member and current president of Natopiwo Partners. She is a professor emerita of anthropology at Luther College, where she taught cultural and linguistic anthropology for four decades. While leading Luther study abroad programs in northern Tanzania from 2002 until 2023, she worked closely with Musa Kamaika Meng'arana and other Natopiwo Organization team members. A number of years ago, at the request of a Maasai colleague, she and her students collaborated with Musa and others on research about Maasai medicinal plants, producing a text for use in the Indigenous Knowledge course taught at a rural secondary school serving mostly Maasai students. Lori lives in Decorah, Iowa, with her husband David, where she

enjoys hiking, cycling, gardening, bird watching, cooking, writing, and playing with her Goldendoodles, Angel and Patience.

Laura Wangsness Willemssen, Vice President (St. Paul, MN)

Laura is a founding member of Natopiwo Organization, and serves on the Board. She conducts anthropological research at the intersection of education, gender, and climate change, including within communities where Natopiwo works for her 2023-2024 Fulbright Global Scholar Award to Tanzania. Her work in Tanzanian classrooms spans thirty years and includes teaching English in Monduli, leading longitudinal research for the University of Minnesota, and consulting on educational initiatives for entities such as USAID and Lutheran World Federation. An Associate Professor in the Department of Doctoral Studies at Concordia University, Saint Paul, Dr. Wangsness Willemssen mentors doctoral students, teaches research methods and ethics, and leads research on educational equity. Laura bridges academic scholarship with public discourse through pieces in outlets ranging from *Comparative Education Review* to *Education Week* to Minnesota Public Radio. She holds a Ph.D. in Comparative and International Development Education from the University of Minnesota and balances her academic responsibilities with community service, including with Natopiwo Partners and several other board positions with NGOs supporting educational advancement in Tanzania. She and her family live in Minnesota.

Cynthiann Heckelsmiller, Secretary (Fairfax, VA)

Cynthiann is a founding member and current secretary of Natopiwo Partners. She has worked with Musa and the Maasai community of Monduli Juu since 2015. Her research focuses on how people develop and adapt cultural knowledge systems in changing environmental conditions. Her work in Tanzania focuses on transitions from pastoralism to agricultural subsistence, ethnobiological knowledge, and how communities balance cultural identity with ecological risk management. She also uses cross-cultural data to test evolutionary theories about why people seek out and/or become experts in ethnoscientific domains. As a Research Associate with the HRAF Advanced Research Centers at Yale University, Cynthiann investigated how societies respond to different types of environmental shocks so that we can better understand the cultural dimensions of ecological resilience. She lives in northern Virginia with her family.

Rachel Hodapp, Vice Secretary (Duluth, MN)

Rachel is a co-founder of Natopiwo Organization and a board member and assistant secretary for Natopiwo Partners. She is a medical anthropologist, social scientist, licensed advanced practice social worker, and higher education instructor whose work centers on reproductive well-being, feminist ethnography, and decolonial praxis in East Africa and the United States. Rachel is committed to community-based participatory action research and to a redistributive politics that supports people who have been marginalized by structures of power. Rachel has been working with Musa Kamaika Meng'arana on various ethnomedical research and development projects since 2011. Her doctoral work focused on menstrual care among Maasai of Tanzania. Currently, Rachel is a research scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the School of Medicine and Public Health in their Collaborative for Reproductive Equity. She works on public health-based, reproductive justice projects. Rachel lives in Duluth, Minnesota,

and in her free time loves camping, cycling, running, and spending time in the woods and near the Great Lake with her partner Joe and their pup, Sage.

Jon Jensen, Treasurer (Decorah, IA)

Jon is a founding board member and the current treasurer of Natopiwo Partners. He is Professor of Philosophy and Environmental Studies and Director of the Center for Sustainable Communities at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He has taken students to Tanzania on several occasions over the last 10 years, including leading a semester program in 2016 through the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. He has worked with Musa on study abroad programs in Tanzania since 2015 and has sponsored Musa's visits to the US. Jon lives with his wife, Rachel, on a small farm along the Upper Iowa River in the Driftless Area and enjoys canoeing, biking, and tending his gardens and orchard.

Jon Lund, Member (Decorah, IA)

Jon is the most recent addition to the Natopiwo Partners Board of Directors, having joined the board in August 2025. He is an administrator emeritus at Luther College after serving the institution for 30 years in a variety of administrative roles. For nearly 20 years, Jon led Luther's international admissions efforts, helping thousands of students from around the world both enroll at and obtain the scholarship support necessary to obtain a Luther degree. He also managed all of Luther's international and domestic off-campus programs, helping thousands of Luther students and faculty encounter a much larger world through international study. Over the years, Jon has traveled extensively to 106 different countries; he has visited Tanzania (and Musa) four times. Jon lives in Decorah and enjoys volunteering at a number of local and global nonprofits, and continues to travel extensively.

Be a Partner!

To support Natopiwo's transformative work in Maasailand, visit natopiwopartners.org to make your tax deductible donation via PayPal, credit card, or debit card. Checks may be made payable to "Natopiwo Partners" and sent to: Jon Jensen, Treasurer, 2682 Lannon Hill Road, Decorah, IA 52101. You will receive a receipt for your tax-deductible donation.

Contact and Social Media

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