HEADING:
Reportage

SUBHEADING:
A wall of trees puts food on the table

INTRODUCTION:
On the island of Pemba in Tanzania, for years the tides have repeatedly destroyed the harvests, and the farmers have been forced to move farther and farther inland to secure the fields against seawater. However, now a living screen of trees has tamed the destructive force of the sea.

Troels Kølln

BODY COPY:
A fishing boat is anchored in the middle of a desert.
Two men crouch on the sand and smear the hull with a dark mixture of entrails and rotten fish to protect the wood against marine animals. But where is the sea? In the 30-degree heat of the noonday sun, only the smell makes you think of the harbour where you logically imagine the boat should be berthed.

However, the image of a boat stranded on a plain of sand is just an illusion. It only *looks* like a desert. Small dark puddles staining the flat landscape show that the sand was recently covered by water. In five hours, the sand will once again be covered by four metres of seawater. The boat is actually resting on the seabed.

Tides are a familiar phenomenon. Yet in recent years, the forces of nature have haunted the local farmers on the island of Pemba in Tanzania where the tides battered the coastline with such force that the water has flooded the paddy fields farther inland. Sea salt kills the green rice shoots. Once, the coast was covered by natural forest that screened the fields, but the trees were cut down and used for firewood and timber.

I had no idea it was possible
'The water came over the hills. It hit my paddy fields and destroyed the harvest. My family and I had to move. Once, to begin with, but then the water hit there too. So we moved again. And again.'
50-year-old Maulid Simai Haji stands looking out to sea as he speaks. For him and his family of 11 who depend on him, the beach is not for picnics, but the symbol of a natural force that is the key to their survival. If the tide wipes out the harvest, there is no rice to eat.
Now the saltwater no longer washes inland. With CARE's help, the community has planted a mangrove forest – evergreen trees and plants that live in saltwater – along the coastline. And that was all it took.
'I didn't think the problem could be solved, but this works. The trees stop the water and the crops are beginning to grow again,' says Maulid Simai Haji, who has now moved back to the fields he left.

Solutions within their grasp
Every week, Maulid Simai Haji and 14 other villagers work alternate shifts in the mangrove forest, maintaining it and planting new trees. He could have used this precious time farming his own crops but the mangrove is worth it. As well as protecting against the tides and flooding, the forest attracts fish and small animals that the fishermen use as bait. The roots of the mangrove trees anchor the soil and sand, so the tides do not slowly carry the island off to sea.

CARE has completed the project on Pemba. The mangrove stands its ground, green and strong, exactly where it was planted. However, other coastal areas on the island are unprotected, Maulid Simai has noticed – but now he knows how to solve the problem: 'We are building a temporary wall of sandbags. When that has been built, we'll start planting more mangrove trees.'

FACT BOX:

What is happening to the climate in Tanzania?

Eighty percent of the population of 41 million people make a living directly from farming. The East African country is therefore very vulnerable to climate changes, which can have a decisive impact on crops.

By 2050, the average temperature may have risen by 1.3 degrees. That may not sound much, but it would mean more frequent and harder rainfall, floods, forest fires and tropical storms.

Climate change will also affect mangrove forests and coral reefs along Tanzania's coastlines. That will endanger species of animals such as turtles, sea cows and migratory birds that are facing extinction.

Caption: The mangroves along the coast of Pemba do not only benefit rice farmers. The fishermen are also pleased with the forest, which makes the seabed more fertile and attracts fish.