

POLICY BRIEF

Sustainable Conservation of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and community welfare improvement

Creating a Win–Win Situation by increasing the community share of the Gorilla Permit Levy and strengthening the governance of revenue sharing

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1.0 Introduction

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) located in South western Uganda is the home to about 480 endangered mountain gorillas, which constitute approximately half of the World's population.¹ The park facilitates gorilla tourism, which has become one of the economic assets for Uganda. Gorilla tracking is currently the biggest tourism income earner for Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the country generally. The strong demand for Gorilla tracking offers the possibility of sustained wealth generation from wildlife for Uganda.²

Before it was gazetted as a National Park, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest provided multiple livelihood and subsistence resources for people living around it.³ These include domestic timber products such as firewood, building poles, forest products such as medicinal plants, basketry materials and foods that included honey, edible plants and bush meat.⁴ In 1991, the forest was gazetted as a national park, which changed its conservation status and meant that forest access by the communities including the Batwa (the forest dwelling people) were prohibited. This created conflict between the local community and the conservation agency. This conflict was a result of the loss of subsistence and livelihood resources that local people had collected from the forest since their existence.

In 1994 as a result of the tense relationship between the community and conservation agency, government designed a collaborative forest management approach that allows sharing of conservation benefits with the frontline communities that shoulder the opportunity cost of land not used for agriculture and also suffer crop damage from gorillas and other wild animals. The approach involved access to plant resources for medicines, basketry weaving materials and placement of bee hives and subsequently the Revenue Sharing (RS) scheme. The incentive scheme of revenue sharing with park adjacent communities was considered critical and remains important in winning community support and compliance with conservation requirements. Indeed this is reflected in the overall goal of UWA policy on Revenue Sharing. The goal is, "to ensure that local communities living adjacent Protected Areas (PAs) obtain benefits from the existence of these areas, improve their welfare, and ultimately strengthen partnerships between UWA, local communities, and Local Governments, for sustainable management of resources in and around the PAs."⁵

The sharing of revenue from gorilla tourism with local communities around Bwindi entails the allocation to local communities of USD 5 on every permit sold. This is a positive step towards achieving conservation and community welfare objectives. However, both the current general revenue sharing scheme and the gorilla levy scheme do not offer sufficient benefits that can achieve the twin objectives of sustainable conservation and improved park adjacent community welfare. This is partly because the level of funding for community projects under revenue sharing is too low, and the system of disbursement of funds has been corrupted leading to some of the allocated funds failing to reach intended beneficiaries. The revenue sharing scheme has also not adequately engaged the poorest front line households hence making little impact on these households.

This policy brief therefore, argues that the current conservation outcomes could be enhanced by an incentive system that offers more and better targeted community support to sustain their livelihoods and improving governance of the Revenue Sharing scheme. The brief proposes to Uganda Wildlife Authority to increase the community share of the gorilla permit fee from USD 5 to USD 10 and to improve the governance of the RS scheme to ensure that RS funds reach the front line communities who are the poorest of the local communities around BINP. The two measures are more likely to impact positively on the welfare of the frontline communities and sustainable management of the park.

¹ Twinamasiko et al. (2014). Linking conservation, Equity and Poverty Alleviation: Understanding profiles and motivations of resource users and Local Perceptions of Governance at Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. IIED Research Report London.

² Samson Mukanjari et.al. (2012). Evaluating the Projects of Benefit Sharing schemes in protecting Mountain Gorillas in Central Africa Environment for Development, Discussion Paper Series 12-16. Available at <http://www.rff.org/RFF/documents/EFD-DP-12-16.PDF>

³ Ibid;

⁴ Ibid;

⁵ Uganda Wildlife Authority, 2000. Revenue sharing Policy Programme around protected areas. UWA, Kampala

2. Revenue Sharing in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and the history of the Gorilla Levy

Gorilla tourism has been a significant tourist attraction for Uganda since 1993 and therefore has the capacity to generate substantial income for the country.⁶ The frontline communities around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park are poor and traditionally depended on the park for resources such as: firewood, timber, bush meat, cultural interests and medicinal herbs. The Bwindi Management Plan recognises the importance of community benefits arising out of eco-tourism to enhance the conservation of the endangered mountain gorillas.⁷

When Bwindi was gazetted into a national park in 1991, there was increased hostility towards the protected area due to the enforcement of stringent rules that restricted access by these communities to utilise the forestry resources. This resulted into increased destruction of forest biodiversity due to deliberate forest fires. In order to create harmony between the community and the park, various Integrated Conservation and Development (ICDs) interventions were introduced by international and national conservation and development organizations working with UWA at Bwindi. These interventions involved problem animal control, revenue sharing, collaborative resource management (multiple use programmes) and tourism. ICDs were meant to resolve the resistance from the communities surrounding the protected area since this threatened the management of the national park.⁸

Integrated Conservation and Development interventions built on the CARE-Development through Conservation programme which had started in 1988. The programme had largely focused on tree planting on community land in order to provide local people with non-park sources of timber and fuel wood hence reducing their need to collect timber and wood from the park. Government also responded by developing a revenue sharing policy for PAs which was first piloted at Bwindi in 1994. Under this arrangement, the then Uganda National Parks (UNP) which was a parastatal organisation managing Uganda's national parks was required to give 12 per cent of their total gate revenue collections from tourists to the local communities. In 1995, the UNP formally adopted revenue sharing as a wildlife management policy, and in 1996, it was recognised under legislation - the Uganda Wildlife Statute (now the Wildlife Act, Cap 200 of the Laws of Uganda, 2000). The Act also merged Uganda National Parks and the Game Department into the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) in 1996.⁹

Under the Act, the revenue sharing percentage was revised from 12 per cent of the total park revenues to 20 per cent of park entry fees.¹⁰ The modification was meant to increase local share of the revenues from protected areas. However, this meant a decline in revenue shares for protected areas like Bwindi where the number of tourists allowed to track gorillas which is the main tourist attraction was limited. The communities surrounding other national parks like Queen Elizabeth and Murchison Falls benefited from this percentage increase since most park income came from park entry by visitors and therefore had more funds to develop and expand their livelihood projects. Besides, the increase of percentage share of the park entry fees meant that no revenue from gorilla tracking permits would be shared; yet Bwindi's major tourist attraction and source of revenue is mountain gorilla trekking.

Considering that gorilla permits were limited, habituated gorilla groups were few, and numbers of visitors per day were strictly controlled - the funds collected from the gate as entry fees for Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks were found to be less than for other parks and less than what would have been the case if a share of trekking permits had been included.

This was in comparison with the revenue collected from savannah parks where the number of visitors that are received daily tends to be higher. In addition, apart from entry of people, savannah parks also charge vehicle entry which is an additional contributor to the 20% that goes to the local governments surrounding the savannah PAs. Realizing this limitation and considering that gorilla tourism in Uganda

⁶ Op. cit, footnote 2.

⁷ Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Uganda Wildlife Authority. Bwindi Impenetrable National park General Management Plan 2013-2023 (draft) July 2013 p. iii.

⁸ Blomley, T. et.al. (2010) Development and gorillas? Assessing fifteen years of integrated conservation and development in south-western Uganda, Natural Resource Issues No. 23. IIED, London.

⁹ Tumusiime, D. and Vedeld, P. (2012). False Promise or False Premise? Using Tourism Revenue Sharing to Promote Conservation and Poverty Reduction in Uganda. Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Conservation and Society 10(1): 15-28, p. 19

¹⁰ Ibid pp 18-19

brings in the highest tourism revenue, communities around Bwindi and Mgahinga National Parks proposed that a levy be deducted from the gorilla permit as additional funds to the 20% entry fee to boost the share they got from the prestigious gorilla tourism. This formed the basis for the approval by the UWA Board in 2005 of a US \$5 RS levy on every gorilla permit accruing to the local governments sharing boundaries with Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks.

At the time of approving the USD \$5 gorilla levy, the cost of the gorilla permit was USD \$500 for foreign non-residents and \$475 for foreign residents. Implementation of the gorilla levy started in 2007 with the first disbursement to Local Governments of Kanungu, Kabale and Kisoro in September 2009. Despite the introduction of the gorilla levy, the amount of revenue shared with communities was and has remained much lower compared to what Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) shared with the communities.

Table 1. A comparison of revenue sharing funds (Uganda Shillings) for QENP and BINP over the years

| Years | 1996 - 2003 | 2004 - 2009 | 2010 - 2014 | Total |
|---|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Revenue share/Gorilla Levy for BINP | 167,755,000 | 496,004,000 | 661,774,809 | 1,439,752,509 |
| Revenue shared with Communities around QENP | 105,084,210 | 1,183,432,542 | 1,240,775,212 | 2,529,291,964 |

Adopted from the background report (unpublished) justifying the community share of the Gorilla permit levy before its adoption in 2005

Though BINP contributes more tourism revenue to Uganda than QENP, Table 1 shows that QENP generates more revenue that is shared with the communities than BINP. The figure for BINP between 1996–2003 is slightly higher than that of QENP because, revenue sharing in BINP started in 1996 before the concept was modified and adopted for all protected areas with QENP having the first revenue sharing release in 2002/2003. It is also clear from Table 1 that even with the introduction of gorilla levy (USD \$5 per gorilla permit sold) in BINP as an additional component of revenue sharing for the gorilla permits, and its implementation since 2007, the revenue shared with communities around BINP is just about a half of that shared by QENP. Other considerations are that BINP (331km²) is much smaller than QENP (1978km²), and the two National Parks have different population densities on their boundaries (and so have different numbers of people that are to benefit from revenue sharing).

3. Justification for increment of community share of the gorilla permit levy

3.1. Sustainable park management and poverty alleviation

There is a close link between protected areas and poverty incidences in Uganda. Communities that live around protected areas are usually poor and marginalised although the marginalization and poverty may not entirely be attributed to the existence of protected areas. The findings of a study on poverty-conservation linkages with emphasis on ICD in Bwindi observed that the local people living closest to the national park boundary were significantly poorer and less educated than those living further away.¹¹

The research further noted that the drivers of unauthorised resource use included subsistence needs, livelihood security and lack of alternative resources. For example bush meat hunting was associated with poverty of the local communities who were unable to buy meat. The research findings also indicate that poorer villages live in remote areas and far away from the road network that benefit other villages, and suffer the loss of food and income from crop raiding by wild animals which worsens their poverty situation.

By increasing the community share of the gorilla permit fee, the Uganda Wildlife Authority will make a significant step towards gaining local support for the national park that is crucial for long term conservation of Bwindi. In addition, this enhanced contribution towards poverty alleviation will benefit local communities of Bwindi who will also accrue the benefits of successful conservation benefits.

¹¹ Twinamasiko et al. (2014). Op. cit foot note 1

3.2. Change in circumstances

The communities around Bwindi and Mgahinga have continued to complain about the limited share of the gorilla levy. The argument is that, the gorilla permit fee has since increased from \$500 to \$600 and from \$475 to \$500 for foreign non-residents and foreign residents respectively. Given this change in circumstances, it is just and fair that the shared levy should also be revised.

3.3. Enhancement of incentives as a mitigation measure for unauthorised resource use

Subsistence needs and livelihood security of poorer villages living in remote areas close to the national park are drivers of unauthorised resource use.¹² However poverty is not the only threat to Bwindi's conservation. The literature reveals that the villagers or communities engaging with unauthorised resource use were also those who perceived that they benefited least from ICD interventions. The study shows that villagers throughout parishes neighbouring national park shared a belief that their proportion of tourism fees is insufficient to address poverty, and goes to the villagers living far from the national park who never suffer from crop raiding by wild animals. These local perceptions of the inequity of revenue sharing fuel feelings of unfairness that lead to villagers to illegally collect resources from the national park.¹³

3.4. Achieving national vision and international commitments

Poverty reduction and transformation of rural economies is central to the national development plan and national vision. Uganda's Environment and Natural Resources Sector Investment Plan (SIP) stresses the promotion of long-term conservation of the country's wildlife and biodiversity in a cost effective manner that maximises the benefit to the people of Uganda. Consequently, a revenue sharing regime that promotes conservation and poverty alleviation is consistent with the National Development Plan and National Vision.

Uganda is a signatory to international conventions on biodiversity namely the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Article 8 of the CBD, on in situ conservation, calls for establishment of systems of protected areas and various measures to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity. It calls upon countries to promote efforts to support "environmentally sound and sustainable development in areas adjacent to protected areas, with a view to furthering protection of these areas."¹⁴ Consequently, the Ugandan government has a moral obligation and international commitment to ensure that Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is sustainably managed and it does not worsen the poverty of local communities.

In addition, the 5th IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban noted in its recommendations that protected areas should contribute to poverty reduction at the local level, and at the very minimum should not contribute or exacerbate poverty.¹⁵ Indeed as rightly observed at the congress, as long as the parks remain surrounded by hungry and angry communities, their existence and that of their biodiversity will remain threatened.

3.5. Supporting the implementation of the National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Development of Wildlife Resources and revenue sharing guidelines

In 2012, the government of Uganda approved a new policy on Conservation and Sustainable Development of Wildlife Resources and revised the revenue sharing guidelines. The overall Policy goal is to conserve Wildlife resources of Uganda in a manner that contributes to the sustainable development of the nation and wellbeing of its people. Strategic Objective 4 of the revised Policy highlights the need to effectively address human wildlife conflicts with a view of minimising costs and enhancing positive attitudes towards conservation of wildlife resources. Objective 9 of the Policy seeks to promote wildlife protected areas as a focus of local community involvement, pride, ownership and commitment. The policy also stresses the importance of sharing wildlife revenue and other benefits with the communities impacted by wildlife.

¹² Op. cit; footnote 1 p. 75

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Convention on Biological Diversity Act 1992, Article .8.

¹⁵ Recommendation 5.29 of the 5th IUCN world Parks congress Durban (South Africa), 8—17 September 2003.

The Revenue Sharing Guidelines focus on providing benefits to frontline communities. The overall goal of the guidelines is to ensure strong partnership between protected areas management; local communities and local governments leading to sustainable management of resources in and around protected areas by enabling people living adjacent to those areas to obtain financial benefits derived from the existence of these areas that contribute to the improvement in their welfare and help gain their support for protected area conservation.

Therefore, by improving the governance of RS through improved implementation of the RS guidelines and increasing the community share of the gorilla permit levy; this will facilitate the achievement of the twin objectives of improving community welfare and sustainable conservation of the park.

4. Recommendations

4.1. Increase the community share of the mountain gorilla permit fee from USD5 to UDS10 per permit sold.

Increasing community share of the Gorilla Levy will help the Uganda Wildlife Authority and government to gain several benefits at the community, national and international levels. At the community level, there will be more income to invest in community welfare projects and at the national and international level the country will achieve the harmonious co-existence of the community and the park. Indeed, failure to improve the livelihoods of the communities around protected areas undermines the community support and threatens the existence of the wildlife.

4.2. Improve governance of revenue sharing fund

A mere increase of the revenue shared by communities is not enough to improve the welfare of the poor park adjacent communities. There is need to improve community targeting to ensure that the poor households constitute key beneficiaries. There is also need to strengthen the village level engagements with the project concept and selection. Imposing project ideas on the communities however viable they may appear will not be productive.

Another important aspect that can improve the outcomes of the revenue sharing schemes is developing and implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Relevant stakeholders and beneficiary communities should be involved in the development of the monitoring and evaluation framework. The sub-county local governments should take the primary role of monitoring and evaluating the performance of the selected projects.

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(U-PCLG) (<http://povertyandconservation.info/en/pages/uganda-pclg>) was established in 2011 to bring together Ugandan conservation and development practitioners to share their experiences and to work together to better inform policy and practice. The learning group pursues its mission through a range of research, communication and policy advocacy activities. U-PCLG is part of the wider Poverty and Conservation Learning Group (PCLG), an international network of organisations coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and development (IIED), which promotes learning on the linkages between biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) (<http://www.acode-u.org>) is a charitable public policy and advocacy think tank registered in Uganda. Its Mission is to make public policies work for people. Through research, ACODE helps governments and international development agencies to expand the range of policy choices necessary to confront challenging and sometimes controversial public policy problems. Through policy outreach and advocacy, ACODE contributes to the formulation of public policies that support sustainable development, thereby expanding livelihood and income opportunities for poor people. Through civic awareness, ACODE empowers communities to demand for justice, promote public participation and citizens' demand for accountability in decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods.



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