The Bwindi Collection 2017-2018

Developing the capacity of community groups to produce high quality handicrafts











Author information

This project report was compiled by Sanaa Gateja (Kwetu Africa Art and Design) and Ian Middleton (for IIED).

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More information

For more information about this report or the project, visit: www.iied.org/local-economic-development-through-gorilla-tourism or contact Dilys Roe, dilys.roe@iied.org.

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International Institute for Environment and Development 80-86 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8NH, UK Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399 Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055 www.iied.org

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Introduction

Tourist numbers in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, southwest Uganda, have increased significantly in recent decades from 1,300 a year in 1993 to around 20,000 today. Many of the tourists who visit the area around Bwindi do so to go mountain gorilla tracking in the park – international tourists pay US\$600 each for a permit to track the gorillas, on top of other tour fees and travel and accommodation costs.

Although Bwindi has potential to generate income for local people through tourism, research by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) indicates that the economic benefits from tourist spending on gorilla tourism are having a limited impact on local people and that local economic development remains extremely constrained. As a result, local people often have an indifferent or negative attitude towards the park, and lack incentives to conserve its biodiversity and bring an end to poaching, snaring and other forms of illegal resources use.

To harness tourism as an engine for local economic development and improve the long-term prospects of the mountain gorilla population, the project 'Local economic development through 'pro-poor' gorilla tourism in Uganda' has been developing initiatives to increase the value of gorilla tourism for both tourists and local people.

When asked what else they would like from their visit to Bwindi, many tourists spoke of their desire to buy high quality, unique crafts but were frustrated to find that the products were either undesirable or that they quality did not meet their standards.

This report summarises the project's training programme developed by the Responsible Tourism Partnership (RTP) in collaboration with and delivered by Sanaa Gateja of Kwetu Africa Art and Design. The training aimed to develop the capacity of community groups around Bwindi to produce high quality handicrafts to meet the expectations of international tourists. Through the series of workshops described, local craftspeople have been able to blend new ideas with old practices to produce high quality products which reflect the environment and cultures of the region – the 'Bwindi Collection'.

A 'training of trainers' approach was used so that key individuals would take the knowledge and skills gained through the programme back to other craftspeople in their communities and pass them on. In this way the reach and sustainability of the training was increased so that craft production for tourists may continue to become a more lucrative and reliable source of income for local people.



Figure 1: The selection team for instructor training – Kisoro, March 2017. The number of trainees gradually grew through the training initiative.

Training workshops

In addition to many onsite field training visits during 2017/8, seven week-long project-sponsored training workshops were held in Uganda's capital city, Kampala, located approximately 350km northeast of Bwindi, in May and June 2017 and in January and February 2018. These were designed to develop the skills of the crafts men and women in the communities around Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park.



Figure 2: Map of the tourist zones and communities around Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park.

Workshop participants represented the different tourist zones and community enterprises from around Bwindi (Figure 2). Those from Buhoma, northwest of Bwindi, were associated with Ride 4 A Woman, an initiative seeking to empower women in Buhoma village through tourism. Participants from Ruhija, northeast of Bwindi, were from the Ruhija Women Community and Cultural Group and also from Change A Life Bwindi, a project aiming to build a secure and sustainable future for both the community and the national park. The remaining participants came from communities spread around the south of the park, Nteko/Sanuriro to the southwest and Rushaga/Rubuguri directly to the south. These participants were members of their own community enterprises such as the Rubuguri-Nteko Handcraft Cooperative Society Limited, Rubuguri Hope Women Weavers and Youth Carvers.

The workshop series taught participants crafts such as basketry, carving and jewellery making. Each workshop sought to train trainers and strongly encouraged the individuals who attended the classes in

Kampala to pass on their knowledge and skills to their communities of craftspeople. A field visit in February 2018 aimed to reinforce skill development and promote further peer to peer learning and collaboration between the craftspeople.

The lessons from each workshop and subsequent developments for the Bwindi Collection initiative are detailed in chronological order below.

100% Forest Friendly

All products meeting the technical standards taught during training from the initiative receive a '100% Forest Friendly' label (Figure 3). This is not intended to be a quality standard mark but an indicator that the products have been hand crafted by local people who live close to the edge of Bwindi forest, who have received support from the initiative, and who have used raw materials from outside Bwindi Forest. Ultimately it is hoped that these products will meet the standards required to be awarded a 'Gorilla Friendly' label being developed by the International Gorilla Conservation Programme and Wildlife Enterprise Network.

Figure 3: The 100% Forest Friendly label indicates that the products raw materials have been sourced from outside the park boundaries.



Workshop 1: Basketry

Five women participated in the first workshop which ran from the 8 to 14 May 2017. It focused on developing the skills required to weave the Hinga Raza and Nyamuraza basket patterns.

During the week the entire production process was covered from preparing the dyes to basket weaving and sizing techniques. By the end the participants had produced a set of three baskets which stacked inside one larger basket with a lid and took home materials to work on the Nyamuraza design.



Figure 4: Left: A set of three baskets in the Hinga Raza pattern, designed to reflect the farms on the mountains of southwest Uganda.

Right: The large lidded basket intended to contain the three smaller baskets from the adjacent image. The dimensions for the baskets are shown in the product designs appendix.

Day 1:

The women learnt how to prepare the materials for the baskets. This involved pounding roots for yellow dye, fresh bark for orange dye and green vegetables in boiling water for green and purple dyes. The raffia for weaving was then dyed in these colours.

Two basket design patterns were selected to make in sets of three each, the Hinga Raza and Nyamuraza patterns. That afternoon the women were briefed about the training programme and the challenges that they would face as trainers for members of their community enterprises back home.

Day 2:

The women began constructing three sizes of basket (large, medium and small) using plywood templates to perfect the shape and height of the basket to meet standard measurements.

Davs 3-5:

Using the plywood templates the first set of three baskets was finished with an additional extra basket with a lid to pack them inside.

Day 6:

The ladies began making bases for the second Nyamuraza basket set. These baskets were to be completed at home after the workshop.

Day 7:

The group toured the city to explore the craft markets and found baskets from their own regions and elsewhere. Touring the market provided participants with a lesson in costing as they were able to compare the basket prices in shops with what they had in mind for their products.

Following the workshop the women were all encouraged to share what they had learnt with members of their communities and to continue to perfect their own basket making skills.

Workshop 2: Basketry

Six women joined the second workshop in Kampala between 15 and 24 May 2017. This taught them how to weave the Rushashara pattern, a triangular design which depicts bean stalks stacked on the sides of the mountain gardens ready to be pushed into the ground for planting. Speed weaving is possible for this design facilitating faster production. Two women from the group were tasked with making a laundry basket to contain the smaller baskets that the rest of the group would produce to create a minimum order package.

The workshop began with a briefing about the advantages of group production, sourcing of materials and placed emphasis on product quality and consistency. The women then prepared the dyes: green, yellow and orange. After dyeing the raffia three sizes of basket were selected to make a set which would fit inside the laundry basket: 7x7x7 inches, 6x6x6 inches and 5x5x5 inches.

All the baskets were made using templates. It took four days to complete the set of three baskets and five to produce the laundry basket. Towards the end of the workshop the participants experimented with producing table mats by making circles in raffia and grass as they had for the baskets but thinner. This was to explore possibilities for future products.

Each participant left the workshop with three templates for production. They were also encouraged to continue making sets together with the laundry basket as the container for the other three baskets.



Figure 5: Left and middle: At Kwetu Africa Art and Design studio making Rushashara baskets for the first time (Workshop 2).

Right: Guest carving half a calabash tutored by expert Kenyan gourd carver Benedict Muthini (Workshop 3).

Workshop 3: Carving

Between 22 and 28 May 2017 four men from Nteko, Rubujuri, Remedius and Rushaga attended a workshop on carving calabash. The individuals were selected from a bigger group based on their existing skills from carving gorillas from wood.

Calabash is a gourd which once dried has a very thick woody skin ideal for carving. It is used rather than wood as wood is related to the forest and its use would not be in line with the laws governing the Ugandan national parks.

Over the seven day period the men learnt how to sketch designs onto the surface of the calabash in preparation for carving. They expanded their skills into making calabash elements for jewellery and adding weaving to transform the calabash into a pot. All participants were given seeds at the end of the workshop to plant calabash in their own garden.

Day 1:

Under the tutorage of Benedict Muthini from Ukambani, Kenya, a master in traditional calabash carving, the four participants were introduced to the ways of carving calabash and skills required. This involved sketching with pencil to prepare the gourd for carving and the use of different tools for different effects.

Day 2:

Each man was given a calabash to cut out forms and carve with participants producing different animals and birds with as fine a design as they could.

Days 3-5:

The participants carved utility objects such as bowls and medallions.

Day 6:

This was spent refining products and finishing gourds with a weave of Rushashara.

Workshop 4: Jewellery

Four women and one man joined this workshop from the 29 May to 4 June 2017. All five already knew how to make paper beads and weave baskets but were interested in forming a special group for making jewellery.

The workshop focussed on experimenting with materials as opposed to creating specific products. Participants devised production techniques that suited the whole group and found that combining calabash carving with woven basket elements proved to be an effective way of collaborating with other crafts men and women.

Day 1:

The workshop began with a brief looking at the environment as a source of materials as bamboo, reeds and traditional beer straw material all grow abundantly in the area. It also covered the jewellery making process and advised combining carved decorative components in their beads to produce necklaces, earrings and bangle sets.

The first activity was to measure and cut paper for rolling beads. The rolled beads were then treated and used in jewellery making.

Day 2:

Weaving Hinga Raza bangles with gorilla faces.

Day 3:

Weaving the calabash tops with Rushashara as an experiment for improving the bowls.

Day 4-6:

Producing jewellery, necklaces and earings.

Day 7:

The workshop concluded with a visit to Owino market.

Workshop 6 built on this workshop with a more direct focus on creating products, such as necklaces, earrings and bangles, from different materials and using different skills.

Workshop 5: Bamboo cabinets

The aim of this workshop was to train Geoffrey Semvumbi, a specialist in bamboo basketry, mats and structures, to make a bamboo shelving unit that could display the Bwindi Collection in tourist lodges. The ten day workshop covered collecting bamboo materials and designing a folding cabinet structure. Bamboo is a unique material and can be difficult to work with so certain elements of the cabinet design and construction needed to be refined to allow for this.

Day 1:

The workshop began with bamboo cutting and collection from a garden. This was followed by a discussion of the end product that the production team wanted to achieve and how best to design it. The bamboo was then measured and cut to size.

Days 2 & 3:

Shelves for the cabinet were weaved from strips of bamboo.

Day 4:

It was decided that the cabinet should be foldable so that it could be transported and packed easily. A mechanism was devised such that the shelves were able to fold back from the front bar and fall against the back stand.

Continuing until the end of the workshop, Geoffrey produced his first cabinet. However, the trial bamboo cabinet lacked much of what the team wanted. It was based on the right concepts but had not been able to perfect them. Since the workshop a well known bamboo artisan has been identified from the Virunga area of Kisoro, southwest of Bwindi, to join Geoffrey in making the final cabinets.

Workshop 6: Carving and bead making

This six-day workshop ran from 14 to 20 January 2018 in Kampala and Lubowa, a suburb of Kampala. It followed on from Workshop 4 where participants had explored combining calabash carving with paper heads



Figure 6: The first bamboo cabinet design with a folding shelf mechanism. The design will be perfected in subsequent workshops.

The workshop aimed to combine the skills of the carvers and bead makers to produce a variety of jewellery items. Working together enables the creation of many small items in a much shorter time for a wider and bigger market interest.

Given the mixed skill set at the workshop four different materials were used: calabash, bamboo, paper beads and clay. All were readily available and can be made into beads by hand in the absence of electricity or solar power. To increase productivity an electric drill and polishing machine were used at the workshop.

Day 1:

Reviewed the products produced in Workshop 4 by both carvers and jewellers and introduced the idea of working together to produce components. The components are finished products in their own right and can be packed and sold on their own.

All participants had the chance to learn the methods and use of tools to produce the components. They were guided in the process of making each item from start to end with particular focus on material characteristics and behaviour.

Day 2:

Clay was introduced for making round beads, flat beads as spaces, flat pendants and tubular beads. Each participant rolled clay and produced four types of clay bead. After drying the beads were put in the inner chamber of a charcoal stove for firing. Usually this could be done whilst food is cooking on top of a stove.

Day 3:

Bamboo was introduced for making round beads, flat round beads, flat square beads and tube beads. All trainees were given a task working together in an assembly line. To make the work easier a machine was used for drilling holes and polishing though most of the work was finished by hand. Some of the beads were dyed to show how organic dyes can work to colour bamboo.

Day 4:

Explored decorating beads and, although not encouraged, it included training on painting beads using natural materials. Calabash pieces were decorated and the finished beads were checked for quality.

Day 5:

Covered the design and assembly of four types of jewellery.

- 1. Necklaces made of different combinations of beads and each student had to try and make a selected design
- 2. Earrings made using thread, silver rings and hooks
- 3. Pendants combined flat clay discs with other beads such as calabash and wooden gorillas
- 4. Bangles joined by elastic and the best designs were selected

Day 6:

The last day of the workshop finished the products and evaluated the work to be done. It concluded with a tour of Kampala jewellery shops and suppliers.

Three of the carvers proposed to return to Kampala at their own cost to do a more intensive training course.



Figure 7: Teaching the carving and bead making workshop, practicing assembly line style production and the different sizes and shaped of bead used in the jewellery.

Workshop 7: Basketry speed and accuracy

Six representatives from Nteko, Rubuguri, Buhoma and Ruhija came to Kampala for a special workshop with four days making Raza baskets and two days experimenting with table mats. The workshop was aimed at gauging speed and accuracy.

Raza baskets are the finest baskets from Bwindi. Weavers from the south of Bwindi are more experienced than the weavers from Buhoma and Ruhija who in comparison lack speed and accuracy. Bringing them together for this session gave the less skilled individuals a chance to learn from more experienced weavers.

The women came to Kampala with barks, leaves and roots to make dyes. Raffia for dying was found at the studio in Kampala. Weavers were briefed on how to make a small 12 x 10 cm Raza basket under specific criteria:

- Size of basket (thickness of the weave and the amount of grass in the woven ring)
- · Accuracy of patterns
- Shape
- Consistency

After four days the group had produced six well finished baskets which looked the same. At a rate of one small basket every two days we can assume that a set of three open Raza baskets can be made comfortably in 10 days per maker.

Tablemats were introduced as an experimental project with the brief that the weave had to reflect the environmental features of the region, inspired by the patterns in the baskets. The Rushashara and Raza basket styles were used to produce small glass mats before tackling larger table mats.

In just two days the weavers produced promising trials of mats close to a marketable product. More consideration needs to be given to the weave tension in the hands of the makers, the approach to making a mat and the size of grasses used.





Figure 8: Left: Experimenting with weaving a table mat based on basket designs.

Right: New baskets on display at Ride 4 A Woman in Buhoma.

Field visit to handicrafts community groups in Bwindi

This two day field trip, from the 20 to 22 February 2018, allowed a group from the previous workshops to visit Ruhija, Buhoma, Rushaga/Rubuguri and Nteko/Sanuriro to meet, learn from and observe other local craftspeople.

Ruhija

The group left for Bwindi from Kabale stopping first at Ruhija to meet Tina, from Change A Life Bwindi, and some of her weavers who specialise in Rushashara baskets.

Tina expressed great satisfaction in sales of large open baskets in three different sizes: large, medium and small. However, currently the products are mixed up with other baskets from different parts of the country. Although they stand out and look superior to the other products, Change A Life Bwindi would sell more baskets if they were given their own special display cabinet for the Bwindi Collection

Buhoma

Evelyn from Ride 4 A Woman received the group for a meeting and practical session on how to make table mats and coasters. The group looked at the different sized Rushashara baskets that the weavers had been making and noted that they did not make the large laundry basket as they had found that customers could only carry smaller items so did not purchase the larger baskets.

While the weavers were well organised they lacked a supervisor who could provide the details necessary to avoid compromising quality. The weavers also had a competitive attitude to be the fastest

makers which although it generated a high output rate it contributed to deviations from the set designs and quality standards.

As in Ruhija there is a need for a separate display cabinet for the Bwindi Collection so that they are separate from other stock.

It was agreed that the amount of grass used to weave baskets and mats should be the same to ensure uniformity across the products. Using drinking straws as a template, and packing them with grass, it was found that around 25 different grass types make a smart, firm and lightweight mat or basket. This formula will be used by the local crafts people from now on.

Rushaga/Rubuguri

The Rushaga and Rubuguri groups do not have a communal place to meet and work together except in one community member's house. While the Rushaga group has a plot of land available they are yet to build a structure.

The group usually meet at Ruth's house as she is one of the best weavers in the community and chairperson of the Rubuguri weavers group. She is willing to have a shed built on her land as a community weaver's workshop if there is no alternative.

There is great excitement amongst the group about a recently discovered source of clay for making beads. A sample was collected from the gold prospector's pit in the swamp, where there is an abundant source of clay, and taken back to Kampala for testing and firing as there is not a kiln in the local area.

A discussion among the group revealed that getting access to materials is the basic problem which affects the quality of the baskets. To get around this a material procurement plan has been initiated whereby one individual from the community will collect money from the others and purchase quality raffia from the Kisoro market. Travel and food expenses needed for the trip will be paid for from the collected money.

It was agreed that the crafts people would meet every Thursday at Ruth's to get their share of the materials and discuss any other production issues as a group. Materials would also be dyed as a group on a given Friday. Every group member agreed to this and said they would tell others in the Nteko/Sanuriro group to do likewise.



Figure 9: Left: Weavers and jewellers at the Nteko community building. The building is in very bad condition and in need of renovation.

Right: Finding clay on the banks of a gold mining pit in Rubuguri.

Nteko/Sanuriro

The communities have a large group of men and women present whose skill set spans basket making, jewellery and carving. The baskets from some of the producers are of particularly high quality and are some of the best Rushashara laundry baskets.

However, there is a lack of leadership amongst the craft producers which causes inconsistencies in production and the flow of information. Morale among producers was low and many operate on their own with little interaction with other producers.

A community member who moved to the area from Kampala a while ago built a kiosk in Nteko. Eight years on the building is in a sorry state as it has not been maintained. The floor is dangerous and community members are afraid of using the building which has also been damaged by vandalism. With some attention and cooperation to repair the building this location could be ideal for helping to formalise production activities, sharing materials, and setting up a community handicrafts shop.

Conclusion

The Bwindi Collection aims to build sustainable and self-reliant communities who can maximise their economic benefit from tourism to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. Until this training programme took place, skills in handicraft production were concentrated among a few individuals and the communities lacked large well organised networks of producers. All groups of craftspeople around Bwindi stand to gain from working together and developing formal associations.

Reports indicate that following the initial training workshops local community weaving groups have gone from strength to strength and basket sales have increased. For example, in Buhoma, Evelyn from Ride 4 A Woman remembers that the first day they laid the baskets out to sell the tourists couldn't stop staring at them. Meanwhile in Ruhija, Tina from Change A Life Bwindi recently received an order for over 50 baskets from a new lodge called Agandi Uganda Eco-Lodges. According to Tina:

"The ladies are very excited and they have already started weaving...They will be paid more than double for these baskets"

"The ladies are very excited and they have already started weaving. I have given them part of the payment already so they will not be out of pocket for the materials. They will be paid more than double for these baskets compared to the other lower quality, old design ones."

The weavers in Ruhija and elsewhere have also begun to introduce their own designs such as a Mountains pattern which complements the other designs.

Evidence also suggests that the training of trainers approach is successful in transmitting skills and knowledge across the communities. For example, by mid-2018 community trainers in Ruhija had trained another 55 women since attending the workshops. The Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT) have continued training carvers and have secured an additional grant for enterprise training from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

While the early stages of the project have been successful, as the field trip indicated, there is still work to be done to strengthen craft production in the communities. Most urgently the community groups require working facilities, registration and formalisation. Group members all need to be trained to the same skill level and once the training program finishes it is important to create a market for the products. The conditions for production also need to be improved. For example, ensuring producers plant their own materials will provide them with ownership and confidence in the production process. Furthermore many community groups require a workshop with enough space to store materials, make dyes, dry products and carry out their work. This sheltered outdoor space would also benefit the wider community serving as a meeting place and event venue.

Product designs

Hinga Raza Baskets



Basket Dimensions

Dadket Dimensions			
Basket	Height/cm	Base/cm	
Lidded basket	25	14	
Large	16	14	
Medium	14	12	
Small	12	10	

Nyamuraza Baskets



Basket Dimensions

Dasket Difficultions			
Basket	Height/cm	Base/cm	
Lidded basket	24	14	
Large	16	14	
Medium	14	10	
Small	12	10	

Rushashara Baskets









Basket Dimensions

Basket	Height/cm	Base/cm	
Laundry lidded	24	40	
Large	18	18	
Medium	14	14	
Small	12	12	

Table Mats and Coasters





Table mat and coaster development made at the end of the training (left) and perfected in later workshops (right). The left shows the Raza style mats and the left the Rushashara design.

Carved Calabashes







Calabashes carved and woven at the top with Ishinge and raffia

Bracelets







Above: bracelets made from clay and bamboo.

Clay was recently found in Rubuguri in a gold prospector's pit. The local women were very happy to discover it and collected a lot to make beads which were fired in Kampala.

Bamboo can grow into a thick pipe providing sections for making beads. Other bamboo beads can be made by flattening sections using hot water and a press. Some of the bamboo beads have been dyed.

Left: a bracelet of fired clay beads.

Combining the crafts



Left: a carved calabash gourd finished with a weave.

Right: a necklace made from combined skills and materials – clay beads, bark cloth beads and carved calabash.





Left: an elaborate necklace made from carved calabash, banana fibre beads and bamboo sections. The groups would like to develop this into a set with earrings and a bangle.

Right: paper beads with carved bamboo.



The project 'Local economic development through 'pro-poor' gorilla tourism in Uganda' has been developing initiatives to increase the value of gorilla tourism for both tourists and local people. This report summarises the project's training programme provided by Sanaa Gateja of Kwetu Africa Art and Design. The training aimed to develop the capacity of community groups around Bwindi to produce high quality handicrafts to meet the expectations of international tourists. Through the series of workshops described, local craftspeople have been able to blend new ideas with old practices to produce high quality products which reflect the environment and cultures of the region - the result is the 'Bwindi Collection'.



Biodiversity; Poverty

Keywords: Tourism; Livelihoods; Bwindi Impenetrable National Park; Conservation; Uganda



International Institute for Environment and Development 80-86 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8NH, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399 Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055

