Park Action Plans: Stories of Change from a community enterprise programme around Murchison Falls National Park, Uganda

Background

In Uganda, people are involved with wildlife crime because of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) or a lack of income earning opportunities. To help address these issues, IIED and partners are piloting an approach that aims to increase community engagement in tackling wildlife crime by implementing park-level action plans.

Our activities include supporting community scouts to protect crops and livestock from wild animals by providing training and equipment in HWC mitigation. In addition, our project partner Village Enterprise is supporting the scouts and other community members to generate non-poaching related income through their community enterprise programme. Village Enterprise has provided training in commercial enterprises followed by on-going mentoring as communities started their enterprises. They also established Business Savings Groups (BSG), with the aim to empower individuals to sustain their new enterprises for the long-term.

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These stories of change are from four individuals living near the park boundary who became members of the community enterprise programme in June 2018. As part of their membership, each joined a BSG where they received a start-up grant of US$100. They all graduated from the programme in March 2019.

Stories of Change

Beatrice Aheebwa

Beatrice lives in Nyinga village which is about one kilometre from Murchison Falls National Park with her nine children and four other dependents. She joined the Tembo Muzuri BSG.

Beatrice and her two business partners invested their start-up grant in growing sunflower. From their one-acre plot, they harvested and sold 620 kilograms of sunflower, earning them US$206 which they split equally.
For the remainder of the programme Beatrice continued to be an active member of her BSG and used her savings, plus shared profits from the sunflower sale, to reinvest in her business for another year. She received ongoing business mentoring support and earned US$108 from a second harvest of sunflower. Beatrice used this income to pay for her son’s school fees as well as buying a solar panel.

In early 2019 Beatrice used some of her savings to plant half an acre of peanuts in order to diversify her income. She harvested and sold three sacks, making US$179. Beatrice now runs two micro retail businesses that, on average, earn her US$81 per month. As a result of her participation in the enterprise programme, she is now also able to keep six goats.

Since Beatrice graduated from the enterprise programme she has remained in touch with her business mentors who provide support and advice.

“With money made in the enterprise programme I was able to buy a solar panel, so my children can now read and study at night” – Beatrice Aheebwa

Emmanuel Odeya

Emmanuel lives in Kisweka village about 200 metres from Murchison Falls National Park. He is the sole provider for his household and was a subsistence farmer before joining the enterprise programme.

Emmanuel joined the Akili ni Mali BSG and used his start-up grant to plant two acres of sunflower with his business partners. They chose sunflower as this crop is rarely targeted by elephants. At first, they harvested 500 kilograms and Emmanuel used his equal share from the sales to purchase two plastic chairs and a solar panel.

Throughout 2018 Emmanuel continued to contribute to his BSG each month and used some of his savings to start a business of buying and selling maize and beans. He grew his trading capital to over US $486 and also bought 3 bulls, which he rents out to farmers for labour. He puts the money earned from these activities towards school fees, educational materials and medical bills.

Emmanuel attributes his success to the business skills training he received and to support from his mentors. He has continued to reach out to his mentors since graduating from the programme.

Wanda Michael

Wanda lives with his seven family members about one kilometre from Murchison Falls National Park. Before joining the enterprise programme, he was a subsistence farmer, mainly growing corn. This often led to human-wildlife conflict as these crops are particularly favoured by elephants.

Wanda joined the Upendo BSG along with two other members from Kihura village and invested their start-up grant in a sunflower farming business. They generated US$190 from the first harvest and this enabled Wanda to buy pigs. Wanda then sold the piglets and, with the income, purchased an ox plough. The plough helps him in the garden and generates an income, as he rents it to other community members.
Wanda continues to be an active member of the BSG and contributes weekly. He now has three sources of income: a piggery enterprise, the ox plough and his sunflower farm. This has increased his household savings by 19% and he is particularly pleased to have reduced crop-raiding incidents now that he grows sunflower instead of maize.

Wanda believes that the enterprise programme has benefitted the community especially by the savings culture of the BSG and by enabling new micro businesses that would not have been possible before.

“I earned 720,000Ugx (US$200) after 12 months of saving in my Business Saving Group, which would not have been possible before the programme” – Wanda Michael

Mary Tabu

Mary has eight children and lives in Kisweka village, 200 metres from Murchison Falls National Park. Before she joined the enterprise programme, Mary was a housewife who depended on subsistence farming.

Mary joined the Akili Ni Mali BSG and they planted sunflower with their start-up grant. This grew into a profitable business unaffected by crop-raiding from elephants in nearby Murchison Falls National Park. They made US$200 from the first harvest and this was shared equally between Mary and the two other members of the BSG.

Mary used this money to set up a business selling smoked fish, and this continues to earn her an income each month. She also used this money to purchase a solar panel so that her home has electricity at night.

Mary now owns a grocery shop, as well as running two micro businesses selling vegetables and smoked fish. This has brought her closer to her aim of setting up a stall at the Bweyale market.

Mary attributes her success to the business skills training and savings support that she received from her mentors.

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