

THE MURCHISON FALLS COORDINATION FORUM 2021



FORUM NOTES

Background

The Coordination Forum was jointly organised as one of the activities under the Implementing Park Action Plans for Community Engagement to tackle Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) project, implemented by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), in partnership with Village Enterprise (VE), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The project was funded by the UK Government through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund.

It was jointly coordinated by VE and WCS on behalf of the project consortium. It took place on 20th September 2021, at Green Pearl Motel located in Kichwabugingo, Bweyale Town Council, and Kiryandongo District, and brought together 50 community wildlife scouts and village enterprise groups in Kichwabugingo and Kyankende Parishes in Kiryandongo Sub-county, Kiryandongo District.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the meeting was conducted both virtually and physically. The offline audience of 50 participants was comprised of government representatives, scouts, VE staff and entrepreneurs. The virtual audience consisted of representatives from the implementing partners including WCS, VE, IIED and Fauna & Flora International (FFI).

Opening session: John Ilima, Country Director (Village Enterprise)

The forum began at 10:30 am with a word of prayer from one of the community wildlife scouts. The Master of Ceremony (MC), Mr. John Ilima, welcomed the participants to the forum. He recognised the presence of representatives from the Local Government, UWA, WCS and VE. He went on to inform the participants that WCS, in partnership with IIED, UWA and VE implemented a project funded by the UK Government aimed at community engagements in preventing wildlife crime around Murchison Falls Conservation Area (MFCA). He said that combating wildlife crime was a collective responsibility and that wildlife scouts have been playing a key role in the project.



John briefly provided the project background and further explained the objectives of the workshop, which included sharing lessons from the scout and enterprise programme, sharing findings from the research on human-wildlife conflict (HWC), and facilitating discussions on the potential to roll-out the project's approach.

Session 2: Isaac Kirya, Wildlife Conservation, Society

Mr. Kirya from WCS consortium pointed out the various voluntary roles played by scouts in combating HWC which included convincing poachers to abandon poaching activities (for example in Kyankende, Kiryandongo District), collecting data and providing intelligence to WCS about illegal wildlife activities around park areas. He mentioned that scouts require initial basic training and means of support for their livelihoods. He also said that scouts need regular engagement, supervision, monitoring and encouragement to become members of the local community-based organisations (CBOs) that are registered at the sub-county. He strongly advised people to desist from committing wildlife crimes. Concerning the issue of compensation, Mr. Kirya stated that even though compensation is mentioned in the Uganda Wildlife Act 2019, the compensation structures are not yet in place to handle it.



Session 3: Pheona Akullo, Enterprise and Savings Lead, Village Enterprise, Uganda

Pheona provided in-depth information on how VE ran the IWT project using its poverty graduation model programme, which was implemented over a period of one year through activities including: targeting, training, disbursement of seed capital, starting of enterprises in business groups (BGs), formation of business saving groups (BSGs) and ongoing business mentoring. She stated that in total, the IWT project worked with 360 project participants including scouts and community members of which 59% were male and 41% were female. Pheona also stated that over the life of the project, 120 BGs were established with 94% of the businesses being agriculture and 6% being service and retail businesses. She further informed the forum that household savings increased from US\$ 19.72 to US\$ 33.26 over this period.

Pheona also presented the lessons learnt from the enterprises in terms of what worked well and what did not work well over the project life. These lessons are presented below.

There were some reactions to Pheona's presentation, notable of which was from the Resident District Commissioner for Kiryandongo District, Mr. Debele Peter.



Mr. Debele started by appreciating the efforts put in by WE and partners to mitigate IWT activities and noted that there has been a significant reduction in IWT, except for a few isolated cases in which three poachers got killed inside the reserve. He stated that the greatest challenge of late was the intrusion of elephants into the human settlement and the destruction they left behind.

- a) He encouraged the community to partake in the activity of digging trenches that stop elephants from intruding into the human settlement area and also advised the community members to set up beehives in the park to repel the elephants.
- b) He called upon international organisations and partners to join hands with government in combating IWT activities.
- c) He encouraged the communities around park areas to plant trees in order to avoid encroachment into the game parks to collect firewood.
- d) He appealed to VE to enrol the various sub-counties near the park area into their programme and encouraged the programme participants to embrace the various programmes of VE and others to improve their livelihoods.

Mr. Debele applauded VE and all partner organisations for their continued efforts that are aimed at combating and reducing IWT activities and HWC around the park areas of Kiryandongo district and beyond.

Session 4: Henry Travers

Henry Travers in his presentation said that the project was implemented to reduce the rate at which people go to the park to hunt and fetch firewood, and to conserve wildlife. He shared the results of a survey, which stated that the majority of participants were very happy with the project. Similarly, the attitude of the general population towards wildlife became more positive over time and there was an increase in responses to HWC. There was also an increase in people participating in the enterprises that were started around park areas to reduce HWC. However, he noted that for people to take up the project, and for projects to come, there was need for participants to gain tangible benefits.

Offline discussions

A representative from the project participants gave the following responses to answer the question of what could be done by the entrepreneurs to sustain the project beyond its life cycle: He said that there was need to put in a lot of effort to sensitise the community about the project and its benefits to their communities, including about BSGs. There is also a need to sensitise scouts about their roles through training and to provide scouts with necessary materials needed to combat HWC.

In research on HWC, elephants came up as the leading destroyers of crops. The people who had higher wellbeing thought they were the most affected compared to their counterparts who had low wellbeing.

The majority of the community members around park areas disagreed that UWA responds to wild animal intrusions on human settlement communities within an hour. But most community members agreed that they are benefiting from the various programmes because they reside near park areas.

Lessons & Experiences

This session of the forum was facilitated by Ms. Pheona Akullo (VE) and Mr. Isaac Kirya (WCS). Leaders of the different scout groups and enterprise groups were called to the front to present their views on the different project components with regards to what worked well and did not work well throughout the project. These lessons are summarised in the table below.



a) What worked well

Project Component	Learning
VE and WCS	Joint messaging from VE other partners amplified the conservation efforts hence reduced HWC/IWT.
	Providing financial literacy trainings among participants is key to building a savings culture.
	Livelihood opportunities designed to benefit both the community and scouts improved community cohesion.
	Creating conservation friendly enterprises such as chili planting reduced HWC.
	WCS scouts training taught members skills in controlling wild animals that stray from the park with different interventions such as vuvuzelas. This has helped to improve community relations with UWA.
	Training in data collection using open data kit (ODK) collect helped improve scout's interaction with technology.
	Wildlife scouts were taught the behaviours of wild animals with knowledge transferred to the community members. This has helped improve the tactics of communities in chasing away the animals without causing them harm thus decreasing conflicts and accidents.
	Training with VE has helped to integrate wildlife scouts with other community members through enterprises which has helped to improve their relations.
	Training also exposed members to different places that they had never been such as other districts which widened their understanding of conservation.
VE and WCS trainings taught members how to work cohesively in groups	
Enterprises & Savings Groups	Enterprises have improved member livelihoods. Members have acquired solar lights and are buying more household items
	Loans from VSLAs are used for growing businesses and paying school fees for children

Project Component	Learning
	VSLAs have brought community members together and improved relations.
	Profits made by members were used to open retail shops, buy domestic livestock which improved on their diet
	Reduction in poachers and improved relations with communities

b) What did not work well

Project Component	Learning
Enterprises & Savings Groups	Weather changes affected enterprises given 94% were crop businesses.
	We did not meet the target to have 50% female project participants. Women participants were not taking leadership positions.
	Price fluctuations affected the chili businesses.

Final remarks and closure

The final remarks were provided by the LCV of Kiryandongo district, applauded VE and other partners for their empowering programme and acknowledged that there was a big challenge of poaching previously but of late, the activities have reduced because of the programme the communities around park areas have been engaged in.

The forum was then adjourned with a luncheon at 2:30pm after receiving closing remarks from John Ilima who thanked all the members for making time to participate in the various interactions in the seminar.

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