

# **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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**Cover Photos:** Bwindi Impenetrable National Park Mountain Gorillas (Left) and Resource User Group meeting in Bwindi (Right). Credits: Uganda Wildlife Authority and Institute for Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC)

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACODE	Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment
BINP	Bwindi Impenetrable National Park
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
QENP	Queen Elizabeth National Park
RS	Revenue Sharing
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority

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## 1. Introduction

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (located in south western Uganda) is the home to about 480 endangered mountain gorillas, which constitutes approximately half of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> The park facilitates gorilla tourism, which has become a key economic asset for Uganda. Gorilla tracking is currently the biggest tourism income earner for Uganda Wildlife Authority and the country generally. The strong demand for Gorilla tracking therefore offers the possibility of sustained wealth generation from wildlife for Uganda.<sup>2</sup>

Before it was gazetted as a National Park, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest provided multiple livelihood and subsistence resources for people living around it.<sup>3</sup> These resources included domestic timber products such as firewood, building poles, forest products (such as medicinal plants, basketry materials) and foods like honey, edible plants and bush meat.<sup>4</sup> In 1991, the forest was gazetted as a national park. The gazetttment changed the forest's conservation status and meant that access to it by communities (including the Batwa - the forest dwelling people) was 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.

As a result of the tense relationship between the community and conservation agency, in 1994 the government designed a collaborative forest management approach that allows the 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 wild animals. The approach involved access to plant resources for medicines, basketry weaving materials, placement of bee hives and subsequently, the revenue sharing scheme. The incentive scheme of revenue sharing with park adjacent communities was considered critical and remains important in wining 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

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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.*



communities living adjacent to 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 the sustainable management of resources in and around the PAs.”<sup>5</sup>

The sharing of revenue from gorilla tourism with local communities around BINP 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, 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 attributed to the low level of funding for community projects under Revenue Sharing (RS). Secondly, the system of funds disbursement 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’ welfare.

This policy brief 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. It also proposes that there should be an improvement of the governance of the RS scheme to ensure that funds from this scheme reach 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.

## **2. Revenue Sharing in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) and the history of the Gorilla Levy**

Gorilla tourism has been a significant tourist attraction for Uganda since 1993 and has the capacity to generate substantial income for the country.<sup>6</sup> The frontline communities around BINP are poor and have traditionally depended on the park for resources such as: firewood, timber, bush meat, cultural interests and medicinal herbs. The Bwindi Management

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

6 Op. cit, footnote 2.

Plan recognizes the importance of community benefits arising out of eco-tourism to enhance the conservation of the endangered mountain gorillas.<sup>7</sup>

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 through 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.<sup>8</sup>

Integrated Conservation and Development (ICD) interventions were built onto the CARE- “Development through Conservation programme” which had started in 1988. The programme had largely focused on tree planting on community lands 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 organization 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.<sup>9</sup>

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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

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.<sup>10</sup> 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 (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 income came from park entry by visitors. The communities around these parks 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 tourism 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 would be received on a daily basis tended to be higher.

In addition, apart from entry of people, savannah parks also charged vehicle entry fees which were an additional contributor to the 20% that was going to the local governments surrounding the savannah PAs. Realizing this limitation and considering that gorilla tourism in Uganda 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 received 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 US\$5 gorilla levy, the cost of the gorilla permit was US\$500 for foreign non-residents and US\$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.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid pp 18-19

**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 (US\$5.00 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 though are that BINP (331km<sup>2</sup>) is much smaller than QENP (1978km<sup>2</sup>), 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 marginalized 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.<sup>11</sup>

The research further noted that the unauthorized resource use was

<sup>11</sup> Twinamasiko et al. (2014). Op. cit foot note 1

driven by 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 fall within remote areas and far away from the road network that benefit other villages. In addition, these villages suffer the loss of food and income from crop raiding by wild animals which worsens their poverty situation and increases unauthorised resource use.

By increasing the community share of the gorilla permit fee, the communities will have more resources to share to improve their welfare. In addition, this enhanced contribution towards poverty alleviation will benefit local communities of Bwindi who will also enjoy the benefits of successful conservation. Ultimately, Uganda Wildlife Authority will gain local support and develop positive attitude for the park which is important for long term conservation of Bwindi National Park.

### **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 US\$500 to US\$600 and from US\$475 to US\$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 Unauthorized Resource Use**

Subsistence needs and security of livelihood for poorer villages living in remote areas close to the national park are drivers of unauthorized resource use.<sup>12</sup> However, poverty is not the only threat to Bwindi's conservation. Literature reveals that the communities carrying out unauthorized resource use were also those who perceived that they benefited least from ICD interventions.<sup>13</sup> The study shows that community members throughout parishes neighbouring the national park shared a belief that their proportion of tourism fees is insufficient to address poverty, and goes to the communities living far from the national park who never suffer from crop raiding by wild animals.<sup>14</sup> These local perceptions of the inequity in revenue sharing fuel feelings of unfairness leading to illegal

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12 Op. cit; footnote 1 p. 75

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

collection of resources from the national park by community members.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.4. Achieving the 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 (ENR SIP) stresses the promotion of long-term conservation of the country's wildlife and biodiversity in a cost effective manner that maximizes the benefit to the people of Uganda. Consequently, a revenue sharing regime that promotes conservation and poverty alleviation is consistent with ENR sector Investment Plan and the National Vision.

Uganda is a signatory to international conventions and in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Article 8 of the CBD, on in - situ conservation, calls for the 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."<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the Uganda 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity Act 1992, Article .8.

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

4 of the revised policy highlights the need to effectively address human-wildlife conflicts with a view to minimizing costs and enhancing positive attitudes towards the 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.

The Revenue Sharing Guidelines focus on providing benefits to frontline communities. The overall goal of the guidelines is to ensure a strong partnership between protected areas management; local communities and local governments, leading to sustainable management of resources in and around protected areas. This will be achieved 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, improving the governance of RS through improved implementation of the RS guidelines and increasing the community share of the gorilla permit levy 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 US\$5.00 to US\$10.00 per Permit Sold**

Increasing the 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 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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Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) 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 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.

Uganda Poverty and Conservation Learning Group (U-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.

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