

Addressing the real issues: a local village perspective

- By Jean Paul Ntungane



Trainees group photo in Uganda ©IGCP

Both [Volcanoes National Park](#) and [Bwindi Impenetrable National Park](#) are part of the Virunga Landscape, the transboundary region that spreads over the borders of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This region shelters the world's remaining population of wild mountain gorillas and is also home to chimpanzees, golden monkeys and forest elephants as well as an array of birds, reptiles and amphibians. With the average human population growth being around 3%, this region has extremely high population pressures, with some areas in Rwanda having up to 1,000 people per square kilometer. The majority of the population is living in poverty, with more than 50% of people lacking sufficient land to meet their basic needs. Yet, despite all these challenges, the Virunga mountain forests make a major contribution to local livelihoods, particularly through water catchment and revenue generated from mountain gorilla tourism and associated enterprise.

In a region of high population pressures and poverty like this one, a plan to enhance the livelihoods of local communities that depend on the forest is crucial; involving them in the process is key to success. That is the approach that the [International Gorilla Conservation Programme \(IGCP\)](#) adopted in their work with communities around the two parks.

With support from the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund \(CEPF\)](#) through its investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot, IGCP worked to build the capacity of two Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and four Lower Local Governments around the mountain gorilla parks in Rwanda and Uganda, to provide them with the technical skills required to develop participatory project proposals, engage in fundraising and participate effectively in local development and natural resource management. Forty-two people (32 men and 10 women) from Rwanda and 69 people (48 men and 21 women) from Uganda have benefited from this capacity building. People targeted include technical staff of the CBOs, local government agents and village leaders.

Community ownership of the local plans and projects ...

The main problem here is not that CBOs and local governments are unable to access funds. Rather, the issue is that most of the time the projects developed by CBOs are based on the opinions of a few leaders; they may not reflect the real needs of the target beneficiaries. Moreover, most of the local leaders' plans are not participatory and funds are not well managed. To address the problem, beneficiaries of these two CBOs; [Sabyinyo Community Livelihood Association \(SACOLA\)](#) in Rwanda, and Nkuringo Community Conservation Development Foundation (NCCDF) in Uganda, are encouraged to participate and become actively involved in new planning processes and projects targeting their development and conservation of the Virunga mountains. To accomplish this, a "village profiling" method is used, in which local community members identify their needs for themselves and are able to suggest possible appropriate solutions to the real problems they see on the ground.



The view of volcanoes from Mgahinga Gorilla National Park: Left: Muhabura and right: Gahinga ©IGCP

The trainees gained a better understanding of participatory planning at the village level which will enable them to address the real issues from the village perspective in the future. They were able to develop project proposals based on the local problems identified as part of the village profiles. Anna Behm Masozera, the IGCP Director who also managed the project, has

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reported that a total of 12 project proposals for improved agriculture and livestock, water and sanitation were developed: two are already under discussions for financing by SACOLA; two will be financed by NCCDF in Uganda. Other project proposals are expected to receive funding from various sources including the existing tourism revenue sharing schemes in the area.

She added that the bottom-up approach starting with village profiles completed by community members themselves was very well received by all participants.

Besides the project proposals, Community Based Planning and Monitoring profiling and a development planning tool was developed in the two countries, reviewed and harmonised with current development planning practices within Lower Local Governments (parish /cell level) and two CBOs (SACOLA and NCCDF). The tool was adapted for the Rwanda side and translated into Kinyarwanda, the local language, to help in facilitating the data collection. In Rwanda, all the information was summarised and entered into the cells planning registers to be incorporated or considered during the planning process at sector levels. In Uganda, the guidelines tool was also translated into Kifumbira.

While working to strengthen the skills of CBOs and Lower Local Government leaders in sustainable financing, IGCP project has contributed to one of the key objectives of the CEPF Investment Strategy for the [Eastern Afromontane hotspot](#): “Strategic Direction 3: To initiate and support sustainable financing and related actions for the conservation of priority Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and corridors.”

“We have grown and advanced the ability of our programme to meet our strategic objectives through this project, and we are grateful for the support and guidance provided throughout,” said Anna Behm Masozera.

Related stories about capacity building through CEPF investment in the Eastern Afromontane region are available [here](#). You can also read a detailed story on these activities from IGCP [here](#).