

Providing an incentive for Conservation and cultural strengthening among the pygmies (Batwa) in Uganda

By

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Background information

For many years, the Batwa (pygmies) community lived in the forests and swamps and traditionally believed that God created them to live in forests. Their permanent socio-economic livelihood for centuries was the forest. However in subsequent years, they were evicted from the forests by the government when Bwindi game reserve was turned into a national game park. The eviction made these people vulnerable since they could hardly afford the basic necessities of life. As a result, the few people that were resettled turned back to their former habitat (the forest), and resorted to extensive encroachment. Areas with massive encroachment included pocket forests of *Rushaaga*, *Nyabwishenye*, *Kafuga* and swamps of *Kashaasha* and *IRyaruvumba*, in search for local building materials, fire wood, collecting medicinal herbs, setting up beehives for honey and hunting some animals for wild meat. Encroachment disrupted habitats for chimpanzees in Nyabwishenye farm and birdlife; like African owl, grey crowned crane in Kashaasha swamp.

Purpose of the project

- To use ancestral cultural conservation practices such as norms, taboos, story telling, cultural performances, and music to create behavioral change of the people and communities that traditionally depended on ecological resources for their survival.
- Establishing sustainable practices to conserve existing forests, wetland habitats, in partnership with communities' adjacent Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park in Uganda.
- Networking with local partners like, Nkuringo Cultural Centre to publicize the activities of the groups to generate sustainable earning and contribute to the Habitat Conservation Fund for the Batwa Children's Welfare.

Methods and approaches used

- Reviving of Batwa music, dances, arts, values, symbols and technology.
- Setting up of cultural sites in and around the protected area (PA).
- Using cultural practices such as Batwa dances and music which are very unique in public sensitization (music and dances are linked to natural resources conservation) to fundraise.
- Financial motivation in which (the community members share a certain percentage of funds collected from these activities) cultural tourism.
- Formation of cultural performance groups
- Massive cultural sensitization

Outcomes/out put

The communities that live adjacent to the protected areas of Bwindi national park; have been organized into cultural groups. These communities in the Parishes of *Rubuguri*, *Nteko*, and *Remera* are structured into *clans*. These are social groupings commonly known as *Ngozi groups*¹

- The *Ngozi* cultural groups sensitize communities around *Ruhenzamyenda* river gorge with bee keeping skills.
- Fishpond development and management skills.
- Cultural groups are the major means of accessing indigenous tree seedlings to the members in their social groups like *Omurara*, *omushebeya*, *Omushengishe* and *Ekyanya*² as alternative sources of firewood and roofing material.
- The Batwa in the parishes of: *Nteko*, *Rutaka*, *Rubuguri* and *Remera* are being given indigenous tree seedlings, for replanting of pocket forests.
- The Batwa have been sensitized to protect their ancestral home and source “the forest” by planting more trees.
- Currently, they have developed a positive attitude towards forests and believe that any encroachment on the forest is an attack of their origin and may displease their ancestors.
- Increased participation in cultural tourism.
- Most importantly, the Batwa elders recognize and appreciate the future value of educating their children.
- The establishment of cultural tourism structures, bases of; nature walks, bird watching zones, fishponds, and bee hive corners has generated revenue to the Batwa.
- Members feel they own the projects, take care of them, and conserve them since they earn a living from them.
- Preservation of medicinal plants by the Batwa traditional healers.
- Batwa communities are currently participating in agriculture.

Strengths on this project

- Integration of culture in conservation is paramount
- Working with communities adjacent protected areas is a requisite for successful conservation
- Culture conservation programs have generated incomes and created sustainability.

Limitations

- Lack of support and incentives to accomplish our plans in the original proposal
- Limited collaboration with government institutions
- Slow adoption of the Batwa communities
- Low esteem of the Batwa Community
- Increased stigmatization of the Batwa by other people

¹ Traditional stretchers used to carry patients to hospital.

² Names of local trees.