

Local economic development through gorilla tourism

Developing and testing new 'pro-poor' tourism products and services around Bwindi forest in Uganda



In brief

This 3-year project funded by the Darwin Initiative will work with local people and established tour operators to develop and test new ‘pro-poor’ tourism products and services around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda. The new initiatives — such as guided tours, food experiences, cultural performances and improved handicrafts — will aim to add value to the typical 2-night gorilla tracking package and increase local revenue from tourism, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation, improving local peoples’ attitudes to conservation and reducing threats to gorillas.

Why now?

Tourism in Uganda is critical for generating revenue for conservation of Mountain Gorillas and other species and habitats. At Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, tourist numbers have increased from 1300 per annum in 1993 to around 20,000 today. International tourists pay US\$600 per head to track gorillas. Local people living around the forest receive US\$10 per gorilla permit sold plus 20 per cent of the US\$40 park entry fees in recognition of the importance of their support for conservation.

However, our research has shown that local people have a negative attitude towards the park and towards conservation. This is driven by the fact that they suffer significant costs such as crop raiding by wild animals, but the revenue from the park is not targeted at those who

suffer most, and there are few conservation or tourism based jobs open to local people. Benefits from tourism are also limited as a result of poor quality handicrafts and presentation of community-based enterprises (which deter tourists), and low levels of skills development to improve job prospects or enterprise opportunities.

The result is that relationships between local people and the park authorities are poor, and poaching, snaring and other forms of illegal resource use continue. This represents a significant threat to the park and to the long term conservation of the gorillas, and a missed opportunity for harnessing tourism as an engine for local economic development.



Project partners

IIED

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an international policy research institute working for a more sustainable world. IIED works globally through a wide range of partners, which enable IIED to link local development priorities to national and international policy making. www.iied.org

RTP

The Responsible Tourism Partnership (RTP) works to support the development of more responsible forms of tourism, using a partnership approach to develop mutually beneficial relationships between tourists and tourism businesses in originating markets, and communities, governments and tourism businesses in destinations. RTP www.responsibletourismpartnership.org also maintains the website www.propoortourism.info

ITFC

The Institute for Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC) is a Ugandan research institution located in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, with over 20 years of experience in research and monitoring for tropical forest conservation and with increasing expertise in socio-economic studies. The institute is affiliated to Mbarara University of Science and Technology. www.itfc.must.ac.ug

IGCP

The International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) is a regional coalition programme of Fauna & Flora International and WWF with a mission to conserve the critically-endangered Mountain Gorillas and their habitat through partnering with key stakeholders while significantly contributing to sustainable livelihood development. Since 2012 IGCP has

partnered with the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network to initiate a 'Gorilla Friendly' ecolabel and certification scheme for the major actors in mountain gorilla tourism. www.igcp.org

Tourism specialists

Explore Worldwide is a UK-based tour operator which specialises in small group adventure holidays including to Bwindi forest.

Great Lakes Safaris is a tour operator that owns a small network of lodges in Uganda and is the preferred ground handler for Explore.

Kwetu Africa Art and Development Centre in Kampala was founded by Sanaa Gateja. He trains mainly rural communities in skills, using art to fight poverty.

Wild Places has four lodges in Uganda, including one of the highest regarded lodges in the country near the project's target communities. It also owns and operates the Uganda Safari Company.

Responsible Travel is an online travel agent that promotes holidays and initiatives that meet their criteria for responsible tourism and partners with NGOs and academic institutes to lobby for increased social and environmental responsibility within the travel industries.

Roles

IIED will coordinate the project and work with RTP to design the fieldwork, which will be undertaken by ITFC. RTP will lead the design of tourism services coordinating with tour operators. IGCP will lead the integration of certificates for those receiving training, as part of testing and further development of the 'Gorilla Friendly' ecolabel. Responsible Travel will lead international marketing.

Our plans

Local economic development through 'pro-poor' gorilla tourism in Uganda (Apr 2016 to Mar 2019)

1: Scope demand

Consult with tour operators and survey tourists to clarify demand for local tourism products and services including their type, price, quantity and quality.

2: Assess supply

Survey households in the tourist zones to identify current benefits from tourism, current attitudes to conservation, and capacity to engage.

3: Match supply and demand

Share results with tour operators, agree the most viable products/services, and identify quality criteria and sources of product/service development training.

4: Build capacity to meet demand

Work with existing guides, performers and handicraft makers to deliver training. We will also adapt the emerging 'Gorilla Friendly' enterprise standards and test them on project products and services.

5: Test, refine and rollout

Tour operator partners will include the new products/services in the Bwindi packages that they offer to tourists and collect feedback, starting in one tourist zone and rolling out to others. We will share lessons learnt with other tour operators in Uganda and internationally.



Outputs and outcomes

The project will bring improved and new livelihood benefits from tourism to poor households around Bwindi forest. Local women and men, especially those who are currently marginalised from tourism benefits, will acquire the necessary skills to offer quality tourism services and products to international tourists and to manage basic enterprises. They will also benefit from working relations with tour operators, which will set the foundation for sustaining the initiative in the long term.

In the medium and long term, the project will improve local attitudes to conservation and

hence reduce threats to the forest. Project beneficiaries will extend beyond the households as successful approaches are replicated by others and become integrated into standard tourism packages. The way tour operators and national tourism and wildlife authorities view local communities will change, as they are seen as a source of new, quality, tourism experiences that improve the packages they market to their clients. Local people will become active partners in conservation and key to the long term survival of the Mountain Gorilla.



Get involved

If you would like to find out more about the project or if you are a tour operator and interested in becoming involved, in the first instance please contact the Project Leader Dilys Roe: dilys.roe@iied.org

Website

Project outputs will be made available online as the project progresses.

www.iied.org/pro-poor-tourism-uganda

Get in touch

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Project Materials

Biodiversity; Poverty

Keywords:

Responsible tourism; conservation; livelihoods; capacity building; gorillas; Uganda

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Page 2: Community members Bwindi edge (D Roe 2015)

Page 4: UWA ranger, Bwindi edge (L King 2015)

Page 5: Mountain Gorilla (M Mahboobeh 2013)