

Title of Project: Peace-building and Natural Resource Management in Gorilla Parks, Kisoro District
Country of Project Implementation: Uganda (South-western)
Student: Joy Bongyereire, Future Generations Graduate School

a. Project goal: To foster harmony, harmonious coexistence and interdependence between communities adjacent to Mountain Gorilla Parks and conservation agencies, especially the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

How the Project Worked: The baseline survey unearthed the scam that has been going on since the creation of Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (MGNP) and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) in 1992 by the Government of Uganda. The project brought a ray of hope to the park adjacent communities that one day, the enormous natural resource management conflicts will be solved and development brought to their localities. Community members appreciated the capacity building packages within the project and learned life skills as well from the trainings and exposures. Community members fully embraced the project by freely and actively participating in project activities.

Some constraints were faced. (i) Project deadlines were difficult to meet because of challenges balancing graduate studies (including travel), community work, and family responsibilities in addition to the Davis Peace Project. (ii) The prices of goods and services hiked during the months of October and November, 2009, resulting in over-spending the initial budget. (iii) Activities such as mobilization and sensitization had not been included in the budget and yet were vital in involving local leaders and communities. (iv) Training of Trainer workshops could not be held within the communities. Participants from MGNP and BINP gathered at Mubano Hotel, Kisoro, for a joint Training of Trainer workshop. This facilitated the adult learning atmosphere, and problems like participants dodging sessions to attend to family and other personal issues were eliminated. (v) Another challenge experienced was the complex nature of the conflict. Unlike countries like Nepal where revenue sharing is 50% between the government and the protected area adjacent communities, it is a different story in Uganda. The 20% annual gate collection that goes to the communities in Uganda is very minimal and does not motivate community members to participate in conservation of the endemic species, the Mountain Gorillas and environmental conservation activities.

Good side: The student has worked and lived in Kisoro District since January 2003. She's very fluent in the local languages, Kifumbira, Kinya-Rwanda, and Rukiga. The team involved in project implementation with the student knew the local languages, which made interaction with the beneficiary communities very easy, and culminated into community building characterized by trust and confidence.

Beneficiaries: A total of 164 people benefited from the project – baseline survey, focus group discussions and Training of Trainer workshops. These include indigenous Pygmies (Batwa) of the Sanuriro Settlement adjacent to BINP, and non-Batwa people from the MGNP and BINP adjacent villages. In reality, very many people benefited from the project especially the listeners of the local FM radio station, Voice of Muhabura where one program was aired.

The long term impact and project sustainability: Park adjacent communities were imparted with conflict transformation skills through the Training of Trainers workshops. These workshops were highly interactive and enjoyable, characterized by roleplays and organized sessions covering community building, conflict analysis and transformation skills, including the Traditional African Best Practices for Reconciliation, intervention, peace-building strategies, leadership skills, and plans for the future. A total of 84 people participated in the baseline survey questionnaire administration exercise, while 44 people participated in two focus group discussions. Due to the complex nature of the conflict, key informants included former CARE-DTC employees, local government leaders, and tour guides.

During the baseline survey, 95% of the respondents mentioned that they had never participated in exposure visits. These were either organized by the community members themselves, sub-county local government authorities, or by a development agency such as the International Gorilla Conservation Program to the neighboring Republic of Rwanda and Kanungu Districts. When asked about how they benefited from the exposure, participants revealed that the exposure was centered mainly on how the major problem of crop raids by gorillas and other animals especially elephants, buffalos, bush pigs,

monkeys, baboons, and more can be prevented. In Rwanda the problem was overcome by constructing a long perimeter stone-wall fence in the buffer zone, whereas in Kanungu District, the problem was overcome by planting Mauritius thorn or Mysore Thorn (*Omukwatangwe*) in the buffer zone of BINP to prevent animals from coming into the park and destroying crops. It is hoped that in preventing crop raids, the Mauritius thorn will contribute to creating harmonious coexistence between the park adjacent communities, the innocent wild animals, and conservation agencies.

This type of harmonious coexistence also depends on the government's commitment to change the policy to create a win-win situation. Short of that, people will continue to kill the animals in the parks, which kills tourism, and is a violation of animal rights. In the MGNP for instance, gorilla tourism is dying out due to snares. The gorillas escaped to Rwanda two years ago and have never come back since then, according to information from community members and organizations such as the Mghahinga Community Development Organization.

Definition of Peace: Peace can be defined as a situation where there is harmonious coexistence between people and God, people and nature. John Paul Lederach¹ defines just peace as "an orientation toward conflict transformation characterized by approaches that reduce violence and destructive cycles of social interaction and at the same time increase justice in any human relationship."

How the project will contribute to peace: A cadre of community change agents, the local peace trainers, is now in place, resulting from the Training of Trainer workshops. They are ready with community action plans for implementation and growing more seeds of human energy. I will continue to follow up, lobby and advocate for the gorilla levy to be increased from 5\$ to at least 100\$ so that the community feels they are benefiting from the lucrative gorilla tourism of US \$ 550 per permit per foreign tourist. The park adjacent communities will continue to be advised to invest in alternative income-generating options..

How the project has impacted me: The project has changed the way I think about the world. The Davis Project has impacted a multitude of people and given them hope. While conducting the baseline survey, the field assistants and I interacted with development partners from the Buhoma Gorilla Sanctuary in Kanungu District. They were informed that in Buhoma, most people have abandoned other trades such as agriculture and immersed themselves in tourism as porters, tour guides, handicraft makers, hotel workers, prostitutes, and the like. This has negatively impacted the area. The cost of living has more than doubled since very few people are engaged in agriculture and the demand for food stuffs is very high. It was also shocking to learn that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS has radically increased with tourism.

There are many lessons to learn from the happenings in Kanungu District so that they are applied in Kisoro District for the good of us all and the park adjacent communities. First, the project has widely opened my eyes and made me realize that as a community development practitioner, there is a lot of work that needs to be done with Kisoro communities. On September 26, 2009, two more gorilla groups were habituated and officially opened, namely Shongyi and Rushaaga in Rubuguri Parish. There is need for early interventions such as sensitizing the communities to take good care of their lives, balance agriculture, other trades and tourism so that the negative irreversible problems that have befallen their brothers and sisters in Buhoma-Kanungu District are minimized.

Personal Statement: The Batwa were the worst losers when the gorilla parks were created. They need to be resettled by the government of Uganda that had evicted them from their ancestral lands. This will enable them to live settled lifestyles where they can practice agriculture, instead of living as perpetual beggars, thieves, and highly exploited by non-Batwa to whom they provide manual labor in exchange for food! This in itself is a conflict and violation of Indigenous Batwa's rights to decent settled lifestyle. All the stakeholders in this project and I are very grateful to the Davis Projects for Peace for the funds that enabled us to have this very important project implemented. I remain committed to the rural communities of Kisoro District, South-western Uganda, to implement community-based natural resource management projects which focus on peace-building and sustainable community development..

¹ Lederach John Paul. 2005. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford University Press, inc. pp 182



During the ToT workshop, participants were exposed one evening to Dr. Musekura's zero grazing unit in Kisoro Town Council, Gasiza village to teach them how they can integrate crop and animal husbandry for livelihoods improvement and as a way of minimizing conflicts related to little/lack of benefit sharing between them and the corrupt Third world government. This can contribute to environmental conservation in a sustainable way.



ToT training workshop in progress at Mubano Hotel, Kisoro Town



(Right) Maniriho Penina, a Mutwa lady from Sanuriro Batwa community with one of the Voice of Muhabura (VOM) program modulators at the VOM studios in Kamonyi village, Kisoro Town Council after the radio talk show