

# The impact of eco tourism tourism essay

[Sport & Tourism](#), [Ecotourism](#)



This essay begins with an introduction of the main aim of eco-tourism in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) and its history. It is followed by an explanation and evaluation of tourism revenue sharing; community-based conservation; outsiders (staff and investors); the loss of land and gorilla warfare. A conclusion draws on some of the main points discussed in the essay.

**INTRODUCTION** A new model of conservation **with a human face** (Bell, 1987) became apparent in the 1980s, connecting the demands of local people with biodiversity conservation (Laudati, 2010). The new method offered tempting **win-win** outcomes from conservation projects around protected areas (Sandbrook and Adams, 2012), of which nature tourism is used as the most widely applied tool (Laudati, 2010). Ecotourism suggests, at least in practice, to deliver an enormous amount of benefit at the community level (Laudati, 2010), by harnessing the ability to provide economic alternatives to environmentally destructive practices, off-setting the cost of living with wildlife, and creating improved attitudes towards conservation (Brandon, 1996), at least in theory, ecotourism promises to deliver considerable benefit at the community level (Laudati, 2010).

**HISTORY** Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) is a 321 km<sup>2</sup> forested area and is linked to the wider biogeographic unit of the Albertine rift forests (Adams, 2004: 7). It represents one of the oldest, most complex, biologically rich systems on earth. In addition to its biodiversity value, Bwindi also has a significant regularity function on local climate and acts as an important water catchment area (Blomley, 2003). Reflecting its biological importance, BINP has been awarded a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site, and is considered a global

conservation priority (Plumptre et al., 2007). Previously designated as a forest reserve, with relatively liberal and rarely enforced regulations regarding access rights, it was declared a National Park in 1991 (Blomley, 2003). Partly due to external pressures, particularly from United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Ditrio, 2003); its high levels of biodiversity (Blomley, 2003) and following considerable degradation to the forest (Butynski, 1984; Howard, 1991). The promotion of Bwindi to a National Park resulted in the introduction of stringent policing and the complete depeopling of the park (Jones, 2006). Restrictions on access in the early years of BNIP were characterised by conflict between local people and park authorities, culminating in arson attacks on the forest itself (Hamilton et al., 2000). As a result, Uganda National Parks decided to adopt an Integrated Conservation and Development (ICD) approach which links human needs, and seeks to build local support for conservation by improving livelihoods of local communities through sharing benefits from revenue (Baker, 2004; UWA, 2001). Central to this approach was the development of mountain gorilla tracking tourism; which is intended to bring benefits to local people around the park, contributing to their livelihoods and creating incentives for conservation (Gossling, 1999; UWA, 2001). Currently, Uganda's second largest earner of foreign exchange, ecotourism efforts in the country primarily rely upon the economic promise of Bwindi and its globally recognised mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) which currently account for more than 70 per cent of the Uganda Wildlife Authority's (UWA) total revenue (Anon, 2007). Mountain gorilla tourism is amongst the world's best known wildlife experiences (Macfie and Williamson, 2010). It is seen as

one of the success stories of conservation, a glimmer of hope in an otherwise grim tale of threat, loss and destruction (Adams, 2004: 6). Rapid population growth in the southwest of Uganda has placed acute demands on the regions natural resource base, with an average population density of 246 people/km<sup>2</sup>, exceeding 350 people/km<sup>2</sup> in some areas, (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning) (MFEP, 1992). The dominant land-use activity surrounding the park is small holder agriculture. Some 90 per cent of the approximately 170 000 inhabitants (Hamilton et al., 2000) earn a living on the regions rich volcanic soils (Hatfield, 2004), and many depend on resources from the protected areas to supplement their livelihoods. With more than 50 per cent lacking sufficient land to meet their basic needs, the majority of the human population in the region has been classified as living in extreme poverty (Laudati, 2010). Cultivation extends to and covers most hilltops; wetlands are being drained and very little of the original forest cover remains (Blomley, 2003). Despite these trends, the rate and extent of environmental degradation have been contested, and recent work suggests that in the last 50 years, there have actually been increases in fallow, woodlots and a relocation of grazing land from sensitive areas (Lindblade et al., 1998). The recent addition of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and its surroundings as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots has launched Bwindi's significant wealth of natural resources onto the global stage. Its promotion as an area of global interest has acquired significant international attention, as evident in the many environmental and development NGOs currently active in the area, as well as the creation and expansion of a highly profitable ecotourism program. For local residents, however, such notoriety

has come at a price, as their activities and their daily practices become subject to international scrutiny (Laudati, 2010: 730). Despite the concentrated efforts of Uganda's ecotourism programs in the region, the actual impact of these programs and the institutions that shape them on the everyday lives of people living adjacent to the park is complicated and often contradictory (Laudati, 2010: 728). Research by Sandbrook and Adam (2012) within the park shows a limited ability for ecotourism to benefit local people monetarily and casts serious doubt on the overall effectiveness of ecotourism to deliver benefits of conservation to local people.

### TOURISM REVENUE SHARING

Tourism revenue sharing (TRS) in Uganda can be traced back to the 1950s, when the British colonialists used it as a tool to draw co-operation from native Ugandans settled in areas adjacent to the country's game reserves. At that time, the monetary benefits were delivered to the local districts, while rural households received a direct share of the meat from crop raiding animals that were shot by the Games Department (Naughton-Treves, 1999). Although revenue sharing was maintained in independent Uganda, the national administration that followed the attainment of political independence in 1962 was not pro-conservation. In 1975, during the President Amin era, a double production campaign was introduced encouraging people to increase their use of forest resources in a bid to increase agricultural production and double the gross domestic product (Kigenyi, 2006). Tourism (along with agriculture and forestry) is on top of the list of Uganda's key economic growth sectors (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development) (MFPED 2010). According to the World Tourism and Travel Council, tourism contributed 9.2 per cent or USD 1.2

billion to the gross domestic product in 2008 (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2012). Over the last two decades, tourism has increasingly been fronted both fundamentally and as an instrument for maintaining protected areas (PAs) (Balmford et al. 2009). A long-standing discourse on conservation management envisages that conservation can pay its way through tourism (Eltringham, 1994), and that the sharing of revenues with local people will demonstrate the economic advantages of PAs and secure local people's loyalty (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2012: 15). However, evidence shows that the effectiveness of such policies is diverse (Parry and Campbell, 1992; Mehta and Keller, 1998; Kellert et al., 2000). Around the mountain gorilla tourism hub of Buhoma in BINP, the value of tourism reaching local people is more than four times the value of all other revenue sources combined (Sandbrook 2008; Blomley et al., 2010). Direct employment as a guide or tracker is a much-valued benefit in areas where formal employment opportunities are scarce (Macfie and Williamson, 2010). Indirect benefits may also be stimulated, such as locally-owned enterprises, or revenue-sharing schemes that fund infrastructure such as schools and hospitals (Sandbrook, 2006). Where significant benefits are generated, serious consideration must be given to their distribution, to avoid disbursing benefits in a manner unconnected with conservation objectives, thus limiting their effectiveness in contributing to financial compensation or poverty reduction. A clear example is access to employment opportunities, usually dictated by education level, gender, age and domination by local elites (Sandbrook, 2006). These challenges are intensified by the sheer scale of poverty and high human population densities around some great ape tourism sites

(Macfie and Williamson, 2010: 18). Blomley et al., (2010), report that while the Bwindi tourism programme appears to have been effective at delivering both individual and collective benefits, and making the link between these benefits and the presence of gorillas, it has failed to reach the poorest members of the community. Furthermore, benefits may not be viewed as adequate compensation if they are provided in a form which is inappropriate or that individuals fail to value (Macfie and Williamson, 2010: 18). In addition, the costs to residents living near protected areas vary considerably both within and between communities (Shyamsudar and Kramer, 1997). Farmers at one site may suffer catastrophic crop losses to wildlife, while their neighbours lose nothing (Ngure, 1995). The highly uneven distribution of wildlife assets and wildlife costs make it difficult to identify appropriate beneficiaries for TRS projects (Archabald and Naughton-Treves, 2001: 136). From a definitive point of view, institutions are viewed as the conventions, norms, and formally sanctioned rules of a society. They regularise life, support values, and produce and protect interests (Vatn, 2005). While people can create institutions, institutions also form us, and shape the way we interact with other people and with our environment. The institution of revenue sharing in Bwindi seeks, through the provision of economic importance of protecting biodiversity. This in turn may influence attitudes, values and norms, and create support for conservation. However, success of any intended institution depends on the framework of its application (Vatn, 2009; Muradian et al., 2010), and on other existing institutional arrangements that may be in place (Young, 2002; Young et al., 2008; Corbera et al., 2009). Where there is often a multitude of actors with varied

objectives, mandates and skills, and where forms and sources of power and legitimacy interact, these factors increase the likelihood of a conflict between stakeholders and the institution of sharing tourism revenues (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2011: 17). This is supported by Adams and Infield (2003) after a number of studies have explored the potential for revenue generation through consumptive and non-consumptive uses of wild species, and have assigned to maximise either community benefits or community compliance with conservation goals (or both). Whatever the size of revenue streams from wildlife, there are questions of distribution between different interests. Most obviously, these include the desire to use such revenues to compensate and support the livelihood and development needs of local communities, and the desire to use them to meet the costs of conservation science, planning, administration and management at the national scale. Where revenue streams are insufficient to meet all the costs of conservation, these distribution choices can be problematic (Adams and Infield, 2003: 179). Sherman and Dixon (1991) point out that while nature tourism has the potential to contribute to both national and local economies, there are important questions of the distribution of benefits and costs. The generation of income through tourism creates its own force of competition as different parties attempt to dominate the resulting revenue streams that are locally generated (Adams and Infield, 2003: 182). Bwindi is an interesting case, because it has a vibrant gorilla tourism programme, and also a tourism revenue sharing scheme that has been operating since it was first piloted in 1994, (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2012: 17). The park generates more revenues than most other protected areas in Africa. The tourism revenue sharing



scheme is meant to share this revenue with the local people. This approach resonates with the national tourism revenue sharing policy and its goal of ensuring that local communities living adjacent to PAs obtain benefits from the existence of these areas, improve their welfare, and ultimately strengthen partnerships between the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), local communities and local governments for sustainable management of resources in and around PAs (UWA, 2000b: 6). This is a well-intended proposition, but its realisation requires scrutiny (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2012: 17). As Blomley (2003) states, local people continue to see the reduced monetary benefits as evidence of empty promises, a sense that is further disconcerting when funds are delayed, misappropriated, or fail to materialize at all. Research carried out by Archabald and Naughton-Treves (2001) showed that respondents characterised improved attitudes by friendlier relations between local people and park employees, decreased illegal activity, and greater involvement by community members in park meetings and projects. Sharing even modest sums of tourism revenue can reduce conflict between park management institutions and local communities and increase local participation in park management. Respondents representing local communities as well as government agencies emphasised the significant role of revenue-sharing in improving attitudes towards the park and its management institutions. However, UWA staff and local beneficiaries at Bwindi suggested that attitudes at the household level ultimately depend on a resident's distance from the Park boundary and thus his or her exposure to crop-raiding by wildlife (Archabald and Naughton-Treves, 2001). In addition, several conservationists doubt that

revenue-sharing can significantly improve conservation outcomes given the heterogeneous qualities of local communities and the uneven distribution of wildlife assets and costs (Wells and Brandon, 1992; Gibson and Marks, 1995; Brandon, 1997; Ferraro and Kramer, 1997; Hackel, 1999).

COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION Managing protected areas with community participation is one of the key strategies of the UWA management style as laid out in the Uganda Wildlife Policy (Namara, 2006: 40). The mission statement of UWA as laid out in Wildlife Policy is: To conserve and sustainably manage the wildlife and Protected Areas of Uganda in partnership with neighbouring communities and other stakeholders for the benefit of the people of Uganda and the global community. Thus, the Community Conservation approach to protected area management has become a logical one to achieve conservation goals, such as education and awareness programmes; conflict resolution to reduce the impact of wildlife on communities and vice versa; and consultation to get people's ideas on the best way to manage wildlife, and to create a sense among communities that they are important stakeholders. A major aspect of community conservation has been the extension of benefits to local communities as an incentive for them to assume responsibilities that support national and international conservation interests, broadly known as collaborative management (Namara, 2006: 41). The community conservation approach is expected to reduce the animosity between local communities and protected area authorities, and to increase local communities' stake in protected resources, thus increasing their support for conservation. This approach to protected area management endeavours to link communities to

the protected areas, to share with them not only the benefits, but also the responsibilities of wildlife management, which the central government has come to realise it cannot fulfil alone given the ever-dwindling human, material and financial resources available (Namara, 2006: 41). The logic of the original integrated conservation-development projects (ICDPs), and community conservation in general, was to create a stake for the local community in conserving a particular resource (Brown, 2002). In the case of community-based conservation, there has often been a mismatch between what conservationists have thought of as community benefits, (e. g., the sharing of financial benefits from ecotourism) and what multiple stakeholders in communities may have considered benefits (Songorwa, 1999; Brown, 2002). Berkes (2004) suggests that the conception of local incentives purely in terms of community economic benefits is too narrow, too simplistic, and potentially counterproductive. There are two reasons for this; first, just as the community is complex and ambiguous, the distribution of benefits from any conservation or management project is also complex and ambiguous (Berkes, 2004). Kellert et al., (2000) used a number of social and environmental indicators to study cases of community resource management and found that these projects rarely resulted in the more equitable distribution of power and economic benefits. It is a well-known phenomenon that local elites tend to capture the benefits from development interventions, so a conservation-development projects that starts with the aim to provide community benefits often ends up resulting in a less equitable distribution of power and assets (Berkes, 2004). Second, rural communities in the developing world rarely equate benefits with simple monetary

rewards. Various kinds of social and political benefits are also likely to be important. Key considerations include equity; fairness in the distribution of benefits and empowerment (Berkes, 2004), defined by Chambers (1983) as the process through which people, and especially poorer people, are enabled to take more control over their own lives, and secure a better livelihood, with ownership of productive assets as one key element. As many rural livelihoods are based on mixed strategies of wage employment and resource use, what people value is going to vary from case to case. Access to resources is almost always important; therefore any conservation measure that closes access to an area or a resource is likely to be opposed, at least by some members of the community (Berkes, 2004: 627).

**OUTSIDERS** STAFF AND INVESTORS Gorilla tourism is also important to the private sector and as previously mentioned the tourist industry is a powerful player in the Ugandan economy (Adams and Infield, 2003). The economic benefits of nature tourism spread far beyond visitor fees, to include investment by the private sector in tourist enterprises such as hotels and elite safari operations at local, national and international levels, as well as investments by the state in the infrastructure necessary to support them (Sherman and Dixon, 1991). The scale and intensity of gorilla tourism is subject to pressure from the actors in the tourist industry. Thus businesses have attempted to control access to gorilla tourism by seeking preferential concessions with UWA. For example, a large safari tour operator demanded and was awarded exclusive access to 50% of the gorilla tracking permits in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in return for their commitment to construct a tourist facility at the park (Adams and Infield, 2003: 185).

These state and private sector interests pose a potential threat to gorilla populations for example, demanding that more groups are habituated, or that access rules are relaxed to allow larger groups of tourists or more frequent visits (Butynski and Kalina, 1998). They also tend to shift the focus of decision-making about the tourism levels and revenues away from the local level (community and park management) to national level (Adams and Infield, 2003: 185). The underlying reason local people face difficulty in capturing such ventures, Duffy (2002: 125) argues, is that ecotourism development is inextricably linked to the very processes that ensure these communities have remained relatively impoverished. With minimal qualifications regulating those individuals who actually gain access to project benefits and no restrictions on wider regional and international interests in the preservation of Bwindi as a natural area (Laudati, 2010). Not only does this frustrate local monetary gains in ecotourism ventures, as the majority of ecotourism dollars are siphoned out of the region (Butynski and Kalina, 1998: Sandbrook, 2008), but ultimately it frustrates the ability of local peoples to participate in their own development (Laudati, 2010: 735).

**LOSS OF LAND**

**GORILLA WARFARE** Damage to crops and property by wildlife is one of the most widespread and significant problems faced by frontline communities living next to forest and wildlife protected areas in Africa. Due to the problems of remoteness and isolation, households living immediately adjacent to national parks often have the most limited options and opportunities to diversify and sustain their livelihoods (Namara, 2006: 52). The hardship for local residents is obvious, as it prevents locals from accessing their land and makes land directly adjacent to the park particularly

vulnerable to crop raiding, in some cases resulting in the complete abandonment of frequently raided areas, resulting in disastrous economic losses for small farmers (Laudati, 2010). Ecotourism, rather than presenting a real opportunity for farmers living adjacent to the national park, stands as a physical reminder of the increasing inequalities farmers face, particularly when the tourism from which local people are supposed to be benefitting is the very reason farmers are facing increased hardship, whether in the form of marauding animals or increased restrictions placed on their daily movements and activities (Laudati, 2010: 732). Consequently, this involves the deployment of children as crop guards during daytime and older family members at night, while crops mature and ripen. Some households therefore have to deny children educational opportunities to provide the needed labour of crop guarding, further reducing opportunities for breaking out of poverty (Namara, 2006: 52). Yet individuals living adjacent to the park receive no additional monetary benefits for the involuntary sacrifice of their land and resources for the protection of a global good. On the contrary, farmers often face suspicion and, in some cases, outright brutality by park staff just for being on land close to the park (Laudati, 2010: 733). Once seemingly innocent daily activities, then, become potential criminal acts against nature, subject to increased park surveillance, and acts of violence maintained by a paramilitary-trained park staff are justified as serving the global good. The infiltration of state control into rural and previously remote areas is aided by ecotourism policies, which, in the case of Bwindi, require that farmers remain spatially segregated from park resources so tourists can experience a perceived wild and primitive nature untouched by people

(Laudati, 2010: 733). UWA and its supporting donors have instead opted to purchase the community land on which gorillas frequently forage, in the hope that this would reduce the associated health risks and reduce the conflict. Peasant landowners were given this one option. They, in turn, agreed to sell off their land, if only because retaining it would make it useless to them, since they cannot realise agricultural or any other form of production from it. The process of land valuation and purchase itself was characterised by unequal power relations, with the legally aware UWA and conservation NGO officials taking the lead in determining terms of purchase, with no real community participation (Namara, 2006: 53). Perhaps this one of the best opportunities the UWA has foregone to create a real partnership with the community around Uganda's most biologically diverse national park, which would have not only contributed to resolving conflict, but also to building a strong relationship with the community (Namara, 2006: 54). The act of buying land from the affected communities actually signifies the reluctance of UWA to involve local people in wildlife management in mutually beneficial ways. The whole process has built suspicion within the local community. People are concerned that it could have negative social implications. Other local people have expressed fears that the park is expanding and squeezing people out, and may eventually create a class of landless people, which might become a problem for remaining local communities (Namara, 2006: 54). CONCLUSION It has been suggested by Archabald and Naughton-Treves (2001) that long term institutional support for tourism revenue sharing is critical and depends on well defined, realistic national policies, and committed implementing agencies. The work of

designating beneficiaries, designing education programmes, and choosing criteria for project selection is all dependent on strong institutional support, adequate funds for the TRS programme, transparency and sustainability. Namara (2006: 60) suggests that there is a need for park management authorities to be open to change, to create partnerships with communities that benefit both conservation and enhance community livelihood. This, for example should involve genuine consultation of communities on important and joint decision making. Experience of TRS in western Uganda reveals the potential positive influence of TRS on local attitudes towards parks and park management agencies. Community level benefits may also promote collective action against both local and regional threats to protected areas (Archabald and Naughton-Treves, 2001: ). Furthermore, whilst TRS has improved local attitudes, providing community wide benefits such as schools and clinics is inadequate to compensate farmers losing crops (Archabald and Naughton-Treves, 2001: ), especially when as previously mentioned, children are denied educational opportunities to protect crops (Namara, 2006: 52). For many, ecotourism promises to reconcile the seemingly contrary projects of local development and biodiversity conservation. Yet, for rural peoples who have been used to test this promise ecotourism presents a problems and challenges. Far from improving the overall welfare of rural peoples, ecotourism often translates into greater state control and increasing pressure from outside forces on people's day-to-day lives (Laudati, 2010). The problem is not with tourism revenue sharing as an idea and as a concept, but with the difficulties of putting it into real-world practice (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2012: 26). For the residents of Bwindi ecotourism



has come at a high cost. Decisions that ultimately affect food security, land tenure, adaptation strategies, and the general welfare of the surrounding areas have suddenly become affairs of international organisations. Bwindi's presence on the ecotourism agenda severely restricts people's use of their own landscape (and even their own property) as their lives become objects of greater government and international surveillance. The very processes that promise to raise rural farmers from a shaky and exposed existence actually serve to reinforce the unchanging and endemic poverty of local people by reshaping their day-to-day activities, their cultural identity and their future path to development (Laudati, 2010). WORD COUNT 4, 200