



TrustLand

Policy Brief

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Conflict over Protected Areas for Wildlife Conservation in Northern Uganda

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Executive Summary

In the aftermath of two decades of war and forced displacement, land conflicts are rife in northern Uganda. In Purongo Sub-county bordering Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP), they take the form of human-wildlife/human-elephant conflict. MFNP, which is managed by Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), is spatially separated from human settlement as an area to protect wildlife. In the view of the local people, MFNP is owned by UWA, benefits the needs of wild animals, serves the state as source of revenue and enables tourists' relaxation in the wilderness. The people, however, experience the park as a source of hardship. Elephants and other big game frequently cross the park border and destroy their crops, thus endangering their livelihood security. Whole villages

have been displaced as a consequence of elephants' raids, but people do not receive compensation for losses.

Research in Purongo Sub-county bordering MFNP revealed that local people hardly value wildlife protection due to their own negative experiences. Nor have state initiatives for wildlife protection taken people's needs seriously. However, just and sustainable conservation is as much about wildlife as about people who need to be actively involved as important stakeholders. Identified pressing issues to be addressed include compensation, revenue sharing, resource sharing, agricultural practices, the relationship between UWA and the local people, and community engagement.

Introduction

In Uganda and elsewhere in Africa, the protection of areas for nature/wildlife conservation is a vividly and controversially discussed topic. Conservationists argue that protected areas play a crucial role for the survival of endangered species and are vital for the future of our planet. In contrast, human/indigenous people's rights activist lament that local people, who were evicted from their lands in the name of conservation ('conservation refugees'), have lost their homes, livelihoods, culture and customary rights.

In the border area between Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) and human settlements, people and wildlife compete over limited living space and resources. People are affected by big game crossing the borders of protected areas and destroying their crops, but no compensation is paid for such losses. On the other hand, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) emphasizes that encroachment of the protected area and illegal trade with bush meat and poaching are still menacing the elephant population and other endangered species of animals. This situation has led to ongoing conflict, sometimes dealt with in a violent way.

This policy brief highlights selected findings of research on conflict over protected areas for wildlife conservation carried out in Purongo Sub-county, Nwoya District at intervals between 2013 and 2017.

The study aimed at ascertaining approaches to conservation in Uganda; understanding the challenges to conservation and problems caused by conservation from the perspective of conservationists and people living in the vicinity of protected areas respectively; and establishing ways of dealing with conflict over protected areas that will benefit both the people and wildlife.

The methods employed during field research included participant observation, narrative and semi-structured interviews, transect walks and other participatory methods.

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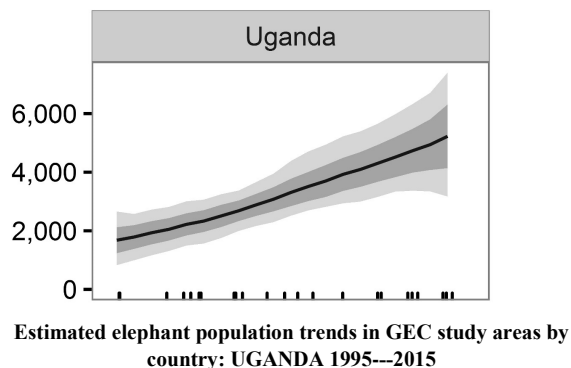
Background

Uganda is among the top ten most biodiversity-rich countries in the world, blessed with stunning wildlife in ten National Parks and numerous Wildlife Reserves. These Parks and Reserves have been gazetted as protected areas of local, national and international importance, because of their biological diversity, landscape or natural heritage (cf. Uganda Wildlife Policy 2014). The creation of protected areas – the dominant strategy of modern conservation in Uganda and worldwide – implies spatially separating people from nature to protect nature and reducing human presence and influence in areas considered important for biodiversity as far as possible.

In Uganda, conservation and development of wildlife resources are regulated by domestic laws such as the Uganda Constitution of 1995, the National Environment Management Act 1995, the Land Act 1998, the Uganda Wildlife Act (establishment of UWA) 1996; and the Uganda Wildlife Policy 2014. In 1991, Uganda joined the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a multilateral treaty to protect endangered wild animals and plants by ensuring that international trade does not threaten their survival.

The Ugandan authorities maintain that Uganda has seen a tremendous recovery of endangered wildlife species, including the elephant population – a trend confirmed by the 2016 Great Elephant Census. This trend is attributed to enhanced conservation efforts and prevailing peace and stability after decades of civil strife, particularly in the northern region. In the 1970s, Amin's soldiers were after ivory and killed thousands of elephants with impunity; and during the two-decade war between the Lord's Resistance Army and the government of Uganda (1986-2006), conservation laws and regulations proved very difficult to enforce. Although population numbers have increased from the fewer than 800 elephants that survived the height of poaching in the 1970s and 1980s to an estimated number of ca. 5000 in 2015, the elephant population is still threatened by widespread poaching. In recent years Uganda has, to some extent, become a hub for illegal trade with ivory and other wildlife products.

GEC–The Great Elephant Census. A Paul G. Allen Project. Country-by-Country Findings, August 31, 2016



(Source: Chase et al. 2016. Continent-wide survey reveals massive decline in African savannah elephants. PeerJ)



Elephants in Murchison Falls National Park
Photo: Lioba Lenhart 4/2016

In contrast to the conservationists from UWA, people living in the vicinity of protected areas emphasize the problems caused by conservation. The neighbours of MFNP and other protected areas for wildlife conservation suffer from crop raids of wild animals and particularly hungry elephants, which cross the park border and sometimes destroy the harvest of a year in a few hours, damage huts and granaries where stocks are kept, and attack, injure and even kill people. There is, however, no law in Uganda that caters for compensation of people's losses. The 2014 Wildlife Policy has some provision for compensation, but a respective law still needs to come into effect.

Results

Local people's perspectives

- People from the parishes of Purongo S/C bordering MFNP are extremely bitter. After their return from the IDP camps, they were full of hope for a better life; they had fertile land to return to and expected good harvests. However, only a few years later, elephants displaced them again. They feel that they have been left alone with their plight, left out from development, and that they do not matter.

- People complain that UWA's approaches to deal with so-called problem animals, such as digging trenches, planting chili etc. do not help much; that rangers do not respond in time to problem animals attacks; and that there is no compensation for losses.
- Because of crop raids, people lose interest in farming, but have no alternatives either; they are facing food shortage and lack of money needed for satisfying other basic needs.



Deserted huts in Lawaca Village
Photo: Lioba Lenhart 6/2017



Destruction caused by elephants
Photo: Lioba Lenhart 12/2014

UWA's perspective

- Encroachment of the protected area, poaching and illegal trade with bush meat is still a problem.
- UWA has addressed the problem of stray elephants and other big game with various methods (e.g. scare shooting, digging trenches, blowing whistles, keeping bees, planting chili, or burning bricks made out of chili and cow dung) and has trained community volunteers, so-called UWA scouts, to assist the rangers in observing elephant movements and chasing away stray elephants.
- UWA has build community benefits into conservation efforts through 20 per cent revenue sharing from park entrance fees with parishes neighbouring MFNP, which has been used e.g. for funding classroom construction.
- UWA has endeavoured to make the selling of wildlife in the wilderness profitable to locals through a community tourism project. An Acholi Culture and Tourism Centre was built from park entrance revenue sharing, intended to house a museum and restaurant and offer guided tours, thus providing a chance for livelihood alternatives to agriculture and at the same time being conducive to the protection of wildlife. However, the centre has not opened three years after the physical structure had been completed in late 2014, but has become an arena of competing interests and display of power among sub-county and district officials and potential investors.

"The park is like a disease in the life of people, specifically for those bordering the park. Animals are encroaching people's gardens. They can only farm something small, [they] need to shift to another place to dig." (Participant of a group discussion in Purongo Trading Centre on 18/12/2014).

"UWA staff, central and local government, and our political representatives from Local Council to Parliament have always turned a deaf ear to our problems and appeals. They are eating well, are able to pay for the schools of their children and are looking at us as fools...I should be staying in my home. I feel displaced for so long...I fear I will die without having a stable home and my children will not inherit my land or be able to marry wives, but become slaves in people's farms and houses instead..." (Interview with farmer from Lawaca village, 22/12/2016)

People from Purongo Sub-county affected by human-wildlife conflict were asked several questions on owning, using, belonging and rights of wildlife. According to the most frequent responses, *"wildlife is owned by UWA, useful because of its meat to eat and sell, belongs to land like grasses and has no rights, because they are animals"*.

Conclusion

The research results demonstrate that there is need for more justice in conservation affairs, putting in mind the interests of people, however without compromising animals' interests. The two must be balanced, with the ultimate aim of achieving a win-win solution integrating the interests of all. If people become involved in conservation, they will play an important role in protecting the environment for future generations.

Implications and Recommendations

The research findings point to six major areas for policy changes:

- Compensation
- Revenue sharing
- Resource sharing
- Agricultural practices
- Relationship between UWA and the local people
- Community engagement

Recommendations for steps to be taken include the following:

- Compensation

Government should consider legal provisions for people's losses (injuries or loss of life of people, loss of crops and livestock) caused by human-wildlife conflict.
- Revenue sharing

The government's revenue sharing policy from park entrance fees is a meaningful step for making people benefit from the park. People have been involved in decision-making on how to use the money. However, it must be ensured that the money, which is sent to local governments, reaches the communities it is meant for. Moreover, 20 per cent is not a big amount and should be scaled up.
- Resource sharing

Local people should be allowed to use water sources or collect firewood and medical herbs from the park in a sustainable manner. Controlled hunting of game – a traditional subsistence activity – should be permitted in buffer zones to protected areas.
- Agricultural practices

People should grow marketable crops, which are of no interest to wildlife (chili, garlic, ginger, okra, sun flowers), and buy millet and other crops for their daily needs from the profits. NAADS could be lobbied to provide seeds and capacity building in cultivating such crops.
- Relationship between UWA and the local people

There should be regular dialogue meetings. UWA should sensitize the people on the value of conservation and laws on protected areas. UWA should rethink its recruitment strategy and provide chances for employment in conservation and conservation-related business/tourism (park guards, rangers, workers, service providers in lodges).
- Community engagement

Local people can play a substantive role in conservation, because of their vast knowledge related to their natural environment. This knowledge should be documented and used by integrating it in modern approaches to conservation.

Community development projects are part of an effective conservation strategy. UWA should continue supporting such projects, so that people benefit from conservation, e.g. in form of community-based eco-tourism projects.

A vision for the future could be supporting the creation of community wildlife conservancies on communal land, where communities manage and benefit from wildlife, possibly in cooperation with private companies, as already in place in Namibia, Botswana or Kenya.

