



Mgahinga-Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust (MBIFCT)



TRANSLINKS | April 2009

Partners

- The World Bank – Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- Uganda Tourism Board, Uganda Investment Authority, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Mgahinga Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust (MCIFCT)
- Uganda Manufacturers Association, PSFU
- IUCN, AWF, WWF, CARE, SNV

Financing

The MBIFCT became effective on July 12, 1995. During its first seven years of operation, co-financing secured from USAID (\$890,700) and the Government of the Netherlands (\$2.7 million) enabled the initial investment in the Trust Fund to grow. Project funding is now self sustaining, allowing the The World Bank to remove itself from the project on December 31, 2000.

Project Description

Uganda’s Bwindi Impenetrable (BINP) and Mgahinga Gorilla (MGNP) National Parks protect some of the most biologically diverse tropical forests in East Africa. Both parks conserve rare montane and alpine forests. Up to fifty mountain gorillas use Mgahinga for part of the year. It is also home to numerous other rare mammals and eleven regionally endemic bird species.

Bwindi contains at least 120 species of mammals, including ten primates and close to half the world’s population of mountain gorillas.

Bwindi’s forests are rich in plant, butterfly, vertebrate, invertebrate, reptile, amphibian, and bird species. The two parks are important water catchments and provide forest products for local communities. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park protects 6% of Uganda’s

water catchment area and was declared a World Heritage site in 1994.

Logging has affected much of Mgahinga; only 10 percent of Bwindi remains undisturbed. Human settlements near these parks are large and growing. Agricultural land is intensively used and is becoming scarce.



Mgahinga-Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

The Mgahinga Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust (MBIFCT) was set up in 1994 under the Uganda Trust Act to provide long term funding for the conservation of

the biodiversity and ecosystem of the MGNP and BINP in Southwestern Uganda. The World Bank/GEF contributed the original fund capital worth \$4.3 million. MBIFCT manages the resources in the national parks on behalf of the endowment partners and the citizens of Uganda.

Project Status

The World Bank closed the project on December 31 2000, but the Government of Netherlands continued funding until 2003. The most current phase began in 2003 after the Netherlands grant ended. Since then, the MBIFCT has been drawing on Trust Fund income to finance its activities.

The scope of the project has been narrowly focused on developing the capacity of communities surrounding the parks. Unless the value of the Trust Fund increases, the Trust will have to indefinitely maintain the narrower focus for its program, or convert to a sinking fund so that it may draw down larger annual sums to finance its three original priorities at higher levels.

The third Protected Area project has not been able to effectively continue with its threat-reduction mechanisms after GEF support ended. At project conclusion, funding goals for biodiversity and ecosystem conservation had been achieved. However, some concerns remain about whether or not the interest collected from the Trust will sustain the ambitious scope of the project. Furthermore, inadequate project monitoring and evaluation make it impossible to accurately assess achievements at the community level or with regard to biodiversity.

The **Uganda Wildlife Act (1996)** introduced the concept of tradable wildlife use rights to hunt, farm, ranch and trade in use. This allows for the establishment of commercial wildlife areas within which local communities are empowered to benefit economically from wildlife management and user rights to land owners over wildlife outside protected areas.

The **National Forestry Business Plan (2003)** promotes the use of incentives to encourage private sector involvement in tree planting activities. It stresses community and private sector involvement in forestry management.

The decentralization system provided for by the **Local Government Act of 1997** has vested the power of managing the environmental and natural resources at Local Government Level.

Project Accomplishments

Although the main objective of the MBIFCT project is biodiversity conservation, community empowerment has emerged as secondary benefit promoted by the project. Community participation was achieved through effective community mobilization and inclusion in the decision making process through formation of Local Community Steering Committees (LCSC). Women's participation was consistently ensured as was the representation of the former forest indigenous people, the Batwa.



The LSCCs act as a liaison between community and the Trust. They also pre-select community projects and approve small grants. Decisions on large project grants are recommended to the Trust Management Board.

The terms of the Trust Fund provide adequate protection for the villagers, which is reflected in the distribution of funds: ecotourism and community development activities (60%), park management activities (20%) and ecological and socioeconomic

research to improve park management (20%).

Looking Forward

This project was set up to support biodiversity conservation in the two national parks through incremental support for park management, research activities, and funding grants that help local community groups develop income-generating alternatives to traditional activities based on harvesting forest resources.

The project represents an experiment in (a) using a trust fund as a mechanism to provide reliable, long-term funding for conservation activities and (b) including community representatives as full partners in project decision-making to gain community support and ownership. As a first step in funding conservation activities, the project set up the Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust Fund.

The MBIFCT provides many best practices for similar endeavors of combining payments for ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation. The fact that the project area falls within two renowned national parks that are tourism hotspots has created a steady stream of income through ecotourism for the communities living there.

It is ambiguous as to whether the Government of Uganda will have the financial means to sustain the project financially if the donors were to stop their funding. Institutionally, there is sufficient legislation (see left side column) to provide an enabling framework for continuing and expanding conservation work and payments for ecosystem services in Uganda.