



CSC STORIES

Supporting Community Conservation in Kahuzi Biega National Park

Two extinct volcanoes dominate the landscape outside of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The dense lowland and montane rainforests that surround and cover Kahuzi and Biega, the two mountains, are host to staggering levels of biodiversity: lowland gorillas, bush elephants, chimpanzees, buffalo and bongos roam these forests, and nearly 350 bird species have been identified in the area. It is also home to the world's most important remaining population of eastern lowland gorillas.

This rich wildlife is a function of the region's varied topography and the range of habitats that span its low- and high-altitude sectors. It is one of the reasons that the two mountains and the land that connects them were declared a national park in 1970; within ten years, Kahuzi Biega National Park (KBNP) had been further designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

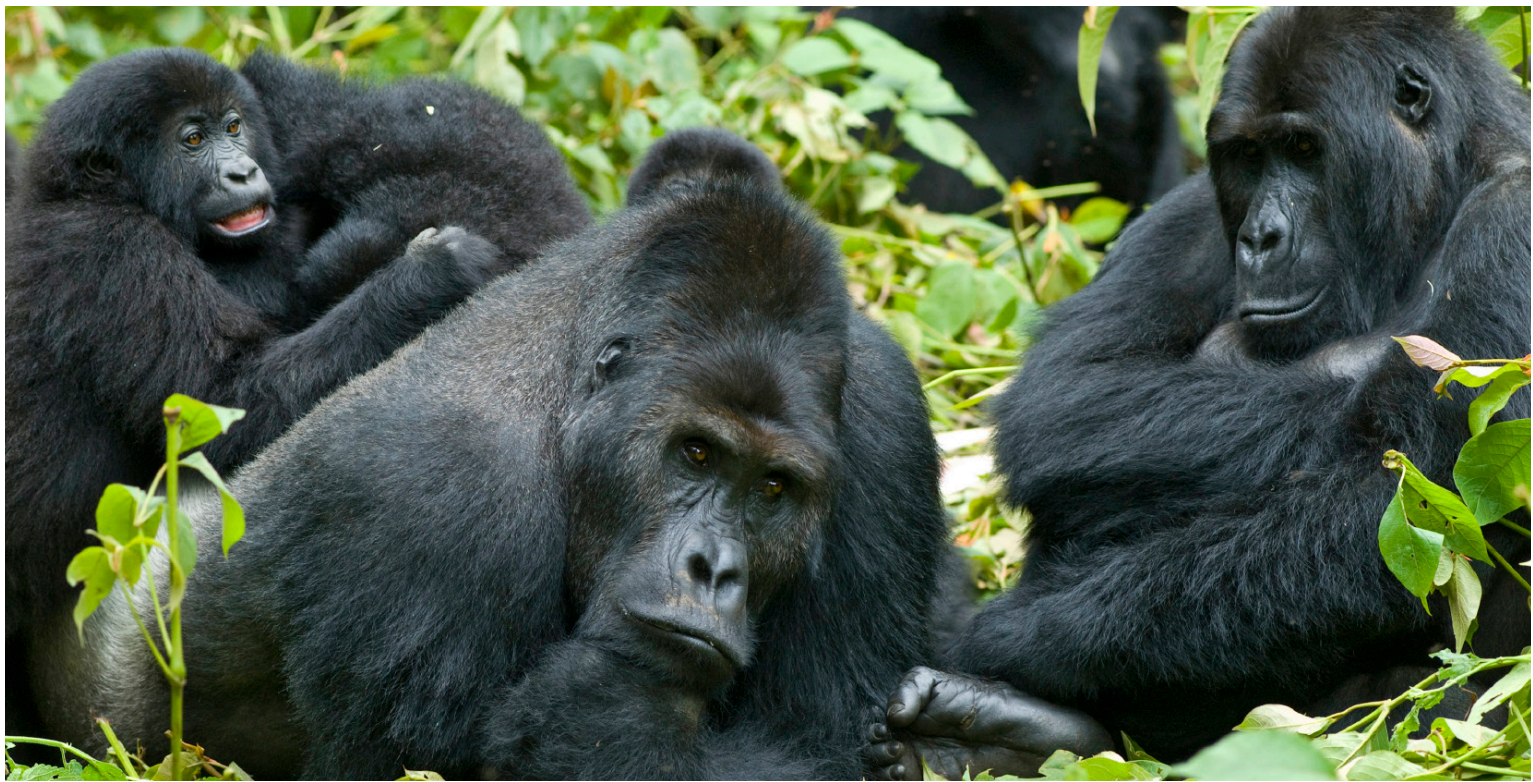
Unfortunately, by the late 2000s, chronic instability, severe encroachment and continuing pressure on park resources meant that in 1997 the park was placed on the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger. To help address some of these threats to the ecosystem, conservationists applied the conflict-sensitive conservation (CSC) approach.

Conflicts between the national conservation authority, Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) and the local communities in and around the park had become commonplace, typically centred on access to and extraction of

KBNP's valuable natural resources (including forests, land and minerals). In 2000 ICCN and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) launched a project to improve relations between the park and its surrounding communities. The goal was to work with these communities to support both local development initiatives and the conservation of the park's natural resources, and led to the formation of elected Community Conservation Committees (CCCs) in 13 villages around KBNP. These committees were designed to act as a bridge between the community and ICCN: committee members, representing their constituent stakeholder groups, were apprised of ICCN activities and involved in relevant ICCN decision making, and were able to transmit community concerns and grievances to the conservation authority.

One of the CCCs was established in Bugobe, a village bordering the park's high-altitude sector about 15 km west of Bukavu. From its initial creation, the CCC at Bugobe—like many of the CCCs—faced a number of challenges, including the perception among community members that the committee was simply an informer of the national park authority, and that it worked to reinforce what was seen as ICCN's unfair control of the park's natural resources. These tensions undermined and significantly weakened the CCC.

In 2006 the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) launched a project aimed at supporting the Bugobe CCC, with support from USAID and the MacArthur Foundation. The project objectives were: to support



the activities of the Bugobe CCC, to increase the effectiveness of the CCC, to reduce tensions between ICCN and the community, and to ensure that the committee was seen as a neutral mediator of conflicts between ICCN and the community, as well as a facilitator of development projects in the village.

Partnering with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), WCS applied the CSC approach to identify a number of conflicts in the region, which included bamboo cutting in the park, the expansion of farming settlements into the park, human settlement in the park and issues surrounding park demarcation. Working with stakeholders, WCS decided to prioritize addressing the threat posed by bamboo cutting in the park. It was hoped that by offering neutral, outside support, WCS could increase the effectiveness of the CCC while reducing tensions between ICCN and the community. Specific conservation activities included: raising awareness among community members on the laws governing the park and natural resource extraction; improving relations between

the park and the community; and lobbying military and political leaders for support.

The project had a positive impact on reducing illegal woodcutting in KBNP. WCS support for the Bugobe CCC succeeded in opening a dialogue between the various stakeholder groups in the region, and in raising awareness among community members of the importance of respecting the park's natural resources and its laws. This temporarily led to a decrease in the amount of illegal logging in the park near Bugobe and greatly improved relations between ICCN and the community members.

Despite these advances, poverty remains a central driver of illegal woodcutting in Bugobe. Woodcutters stressed that without some other means of supporting their families, they would likely return to extracting park resources, regardless of the penalties and risks. In response, the project team—in consultation with stakeholder groups—designed and put in place a financial and agricultural microcredit program for community members as a concrete way of supporting local livelihoods.

To learn more about conflict-sensitive conservation and associated training opportunities, please contact:

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