



*“If you are not confident, then you are nowhere”*

# Working with Batwa communities in South Western Uganda

*Examples of best practice and lessons learnt*



The Cross-Cultural  
Foundation of Uganda

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Page

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Best Practices .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Resettlement .....	3
a. Inclusive and participative resettlement .....	3
<b>Livelihood and agriculture .....</b>	<b>6</b>
a. Livelihood for conservation, not the other way round .....	6
b. Sustainable soil conservation .....	6
<b>Education and health .....</b>	<b>7</b>
a. A holistic approach to education .....	7
b. Health insurance .....	8
<b>Rights and leadership development.....</b>	<b>9</b>
a. Rights and leadership .....	9
b. Advocacy to build capacity and for self-empowerment.....	10
<b>Collaborative work methods.....</b>	<b>11</b>
a. Collaborative forest management .....	11
b. Working with Government for sustainable development.....	13
<b>3. Lessons learnt and guiding principles.....</b>	<b>14</b>
a. Empowerment: the host community is key and participation should take place at the outset .....	14
b. Integrate within and outside Batwa communities, but safeguard cultural identity?.....	14
c. Build leadership skills .....	14
d. The limits of affirmative action.....	14
e. Project or programme? It all takes time.....	14
f. Networking and collaboration with all service providers .....	15
g. Working with the Government.....	15
h. Knowledge is key.....	15
i. Cultural rights and the Batwa identity.....	15
<b>4. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>16</b>

# 1. Introduction

The Batwa are among the most marginalised indigenous minority groups (IMGs) in Uganda. Originally “forest people” who used to live in what later became the Semuliki, Mgahinga and Bwindi National Parks and the Echuya Forest Reserve, they were forcefully evicted by Government in the early 1990's and have since continued to suffer cultural, social, economic and political injustices that have threatened their existence as a people. In addition to alienation from their ancestral land, these injustices include the loss of dignity, social identity and belonging, and the loss of forest-related knowledge and skills. As a result, most Batwa currently live in extreme poverty. Since their eviction, their plight has however attracted interventions from both government and non-governmental institutions, both to ensure their welfare and to protect their rights. This support has taken the form of humanitarian, social, economic, cultural and spiritual interventions.

The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) has also worked with various IMGs across the country to promote their cultural rights by documenting their oral history, supporting advocacy initiatives, assisting access to land and livelihood interventions, enterprise development and access to education. In the course of working with the Batwa in Bundibugyo, CCFU observed that this relatively small group is isolated, not only from neighbouring communities, but also from other Batwa groups in Uganda. CCFU therefore decided to explore linking these various groups to enhance their advocacy agenda and, as the initial step, to conduct an exploratory visit to Kisoro, Kanungu, Rubanda and Kabale districts. Preliminary observations from this visit revealed a number of successful interventions benefitting the Batwa, undertaken by various organisations.

This prompted CCFU to document these effective interventions to foster cooperation and exchange of information among NGOs and other agencies

working with the Batwa. As one respondent stated, “This is missing and we really need it”. Some of the best practices described below may also be relevant to other development partners working with IMGs in different parts of the country. This report is also meant to highlight the factors that have enabled some Batwa to adapt to their changed living environment; and more generally to provide an opportunity to reflect on the relevance of working with the Batwa and other IMGs in Uganda.

This publication describes the various strategies applied by the organisations we visited, as well as testimonies by Batwa and non-Batwa, illustrating positive changes. To collate these case studies, CCFU conducted individual interviews and focus group discussions with Batwa respondents purposively sampled. The cases focus on resettlement, livelihood and agriculture, education, health, rights and leadership, and on collaborative work methods. Project documentation was also provided by the six organisations whose work is described here and with whom CCFU staff had meetings, involving their project teams and other key respondents.

CCFU would like to thank Batwa community representatives and leaders who agreed to set some of their time aside for this work. We also wish to thank the staff of the Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, the African International Christian Ministry, Nature Uganda, the Batwa Development Programme, the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, and relevant local government authorities for their kind and productive collaboration.



## 2. Best Practices

### Resettlement

#### ***a. Inclusive and participative resettlement***

It is generally accepted that the greatest challenge faced by the Batwa is limited or lack of land on which to settle and farm. Resettling the Batwa has therefore been a common intervention by a number of organisations concerned with their plight. These have met with mixed success, but the experience of the Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT) appears to have been particularly effective. BMCT was established in 1994 to foster the conservation of the biodiversity of the Mgahinga and Bwindi National Parks. The Trust therefore works with the surrounding communities, including Batwa communities, to integrate conservation and development outcomes. It procured 406 acres of land and settled 303 Batwa households in Rubanda, Kisoro and Kanungu districts.

The BMCT's strategy is based on the belief that providing displaced Batwa with assets is an important way to foster their sense of self, since it is by owning productive assets such as land, a house and livestock, that the Batwa become valued in the eyes of the local communities. BMCT encourages the Batwa to identify their own desired piece of land in a neighbourhood of their choice to ensure that they appreciate the proposed land to be acquired. This must also be where they will co-exist peacefully with the sellers. The Batwa lead on the price negotiation process without the involvement of the Trust, thus often securing a lower price than the seller might agree on for an NGO. To qualify for such land, and as agreed by both Batwa and the BMCT, one must be an existing squatter, have a family with children, be socially accepted within the community and be able and willing to participate in building a house on the allocated land. Community acceptance is measured for instance by acceptance to participate in the monthly "stretcher group meetings" (*engozi*), in community savings and loans associations (although this can be challenging because the Batwa may not have the necessary income to contribute to

the groups' rotational savings scheme) and by the land owners' willingness to sell to the Mutwa concerned.

Recognising the need to support the Batwa that have been resettled with other basic amenities, the land to be purchased is preferred not to be in some distant location, but within a reasonable distance from health facilities, a church ("to foster moral values") and a school where the beneficiary family will be encouraged and supported to educate their children. These conditions are meant to foster inter-ethnic linkages, mutual recognition and incentives to embrace development. To promote acceptance, BMCT encourages the local community to embrace the Batwa in their midst and to sell land to them.

BMCT, together with other civil society organisations, also conducts awareness raising sessions and training events to build the confidence and capacity of the Batwa to engage with non-Batwa. They encourage them to attend the same church, to mix during community meetings and to participate in other community events, such as burials and weddings. This lays a foundation for BMCT's participatory approach.

The purchase of land is participatory and inclusive: when a Mutwa has identified and negotiated its price, he/she informs the BMCT who then visit the location to ensure value for money before payment. Unlike other organisations, the BMCT processes the land agreements in the names of the Mutwa for whom land has been purchased. This provides the latter with a sense of ownership and security to utilise the land productively without re-selling it. BMCT signs the purchase agreement as a witness with the local council leaders. The leaders' involvement provides support in the event of a dispute between the purchaser's family and the seller.

The beneficiary Mutwa also participates in the construction of his/her home by either providing labour or a financial contribution for the purchase of raw materials. BMCT supports the construction of a kitchen and provides a water tank to maintain hygiene and to encourage agricultural activities.

This approach has yielded results, including promoting a sense of ownership of the land, economic empowerment and a sense of belonging to the community. After 25 years, the Trust has so far resettled 303 families.



*Building their own homes: Batwa constructing their shelter*

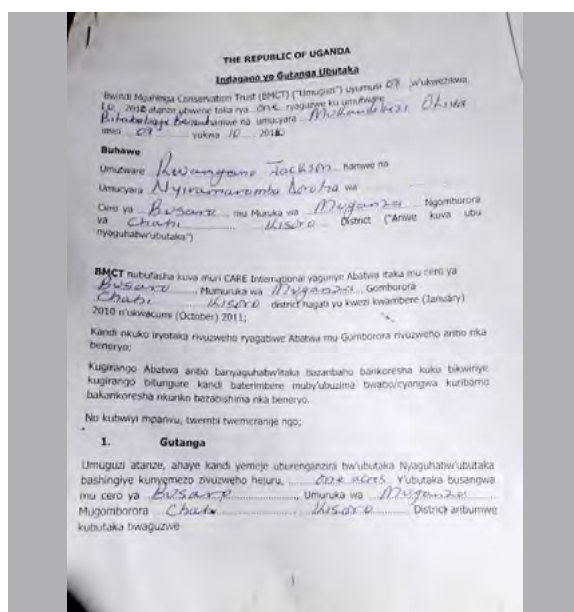
### Buying our very own land

"The Trust works differently from other organisations. I feel treasured and respected as a Mutwa to be allowed to look for a place I wish to live in. Since our eviction from the forest, we were suffering. We had no place to call home; my children were dying of cold. We used to beg or work in people's gardens for food. The land I found is near the Bakiga I had worked for and with whom I had built a good relationship. It was easy to have them sell me their land because we had started trusting each other. I negotiated the price and only went to the Trust to inform them that I had found a piece of land I wished to live on and call home. We sign the agreements and they are given in our names. Many Batwa who have been supported by other organisations feel the land they live on is not theirs and that it can be taken away at any time. Those Batwa are like caretakers of land for the purchasing organisations. I can now use the land in a better way because I know it is mine forever and this has made my life better. I, my husband and children took part in the construction of our houses. The Trust helped us to put up the house while we prepared and put the mud and wattle. I am happy with my home, my land, my Bakiga friends and neighbours. I cannot sell this land because it would be like washing away my efforts". - Maromba Dorotia, Busaro, Kisoro district.

The approach is however not without challenges: some Batwa do not cultivate their land and rent it out, sell donated seeds to purchase alcohol, or use some timber from houses for cooking purposes. Remedial action has been taken, such as brick construction. The approach has also created divisions among the Batwa as some feel more privileged than others (some have not benefitted) especially in view of the continuing shortage and sub-division of land among Batwa children. "There is now a social class of the haves and have not. This never used to be the case among the Batwa" - said one of the respondents.



*Dorotia (right) at home and her land purchase agreement*





## **b. Community integrative approach**

The African International Christian Ministry (AICM) has been interacting with Batwa communities for 26 years, especially in Kabale, Kanungu, Kisoro and Rubanda Districts. It is said to be the first organisation to have concerned itself with the plight of the Batwa in Uganda, and it opened its first resettlement scheme for them in 1998. After instances when houses built for them would be dismantled by their occupants for firewood, or where seeds would be eaten or sold, it became evident to AICM that working without cost-sharing and with the Batwa in isolation of their “host” communities could be counterproductive.



*The “Nyakabungo Batwa-Bakiga Turanzyehare VSLA Group” at work – see box*

The organisation now therefore works in what it calls “Batwa resident areas” and has made it a core strategy since 2014 to target Batwa and neighbouring groups simultaneously. The Batwa are also required to contribute to the construction of their houses by providing labour (after training by AICM) or some money towards the purchase of materials. To integrate the Batwa successfully in the communities, AICM also developed projects that jointly involve the Batwa and non-Batwa, such as village savings schemes, goat/sheep grazing rota and inter-ethnic voting on who gets the offspring in rotational goat/sheep rearing. Training on how to effectively use the savings is given to the whole group. Decisions as to who benefits from group savings or on house construction are made by those concerned, rather than imposed by an external agent, although there are guiding parameters jointly developed by AICM, the Batwa and non-Batwa communities. An interesting example of the integrative approach is the use of “pairing” a Mutwa and a non-Mutwa, especially within the village savings and loans associations (see box).

### **AICM’s “pairing” approach**

*“AICM introduced us to the Bakiga community where we were resettled through church gatherings and community meetings. Before that, the Batwa would never freely mix with the Bakiga. Neighbouring communities used to refer to us as monkeys. We used to fear non-Batwa and preferred to live at the edge of the forest. AICM encouraged us to learn about one another and to visit our homes. The non-Batwa learned about our ways and got to appreciate us. That is how I have been able to identify and pair up with some non-Batwa friends who have supported me in various ways. We joined hands and started up a savings group called “Nyakabungo Batwa-Bakiga Turanzyehare VSLA Group”. With the training received, I have been able to save and borrow money, for example I recently borrowed 600,000/= which I used to purchase land. I no longer wait for charity from NGOs. The difference between AICM’s approach and other organisations is that AICM emphasises relationship building and group work for increased profits. We pair up and become friends with the non-Batwa. My advice to organisations wishing to work with the Batwa is that they should always try to understand who the Batwa are and why they behave the way they do. They should know that we are human beings and need to be treated so. Changing minds and ways of life requires patience. Organisations also have to be very honest and transparent in their work so as to impart faith and trust among us”. - Pafra Tamusore, Nyakabungo, Rubanda district.*

These initiatives have increased the interface between the Batwa and non-Batwa, leading to a greater acceptance for the former and inter-ethnic support for economic empowerment. This integrative approach helps to foster the participation of the Batwa in various community activities and social events. Ignorance of one another, stigma and discrimination across ethnic lines, at public functions such as funerals, vigils and community meetings, is no longer prevalent in the different villages where AICM has intervened.

Nonetheless, AICM notes that this approach meets challenges, especially when a vulnerable group such as the Batwa becomes assimilated to the ways of life of the better-off community, leading to a loss of cultural heritage. AICM has however, attempted to mitigate this loss of identity by having the Batwa settle close to each other in what is called the “Batwa communities”. This enables them to support one another and impart their culture to their children.

## Livelihood and agriculture

### **a. Livelihood for conservation, not the other way round**

Efforts to conserve Echuya forest long proved futile: after eviction, local residents (especially Batwa) would return to the forest in search of food, medicine, firewood and honey. Nature Uganda recognised the need to provide the Batwa with an alternative source of livelihood for their survival and for the forest's conservation. It encouraged group formation for peer support, provided the Batwa families with potato seeds, vegetable seedlings, fruit, and sheep. It conducted community sensitisation on agro-forestry, on the need to access medical care at health facilities and encouraged integration through community savings and loans associations.

#### **Investing our savings...**

*"We have been supported by Nature Uganda in various ways. We were given potato seeds which we planted as a group and earned good amounts. We obtained more seeds from our produce and re-planted them. After a while, we could afford to buy a motorcycle that has helped us transport the sick to the health centre. We use our profits from the savings group to fuel the motorcycle. Working as a group has helped us support each other". Nyirakaromba Pasikaziya, Biraara, Kisoro district.*

Nature Uganda also worked in collaboration with other civil society organisations to provide supplementary services to Batwa and non-Batwa communities around Echuya, for example the collaboration with the Kigezi Health Sector Foundation to provide free HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling, testing and medical care for the affected. This approach yielded positive outcomes, such as improved incomes, health, and social conditions. Nature Uganda also worked in partnership with the National Forestry Authority (NFA) and other stakeholders to allow the Batwa regulated access to the forest for traditional medicine and bamboo – a raw material of importance for cultural artefacts. This was

achieved under a Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) approach where CFM agreements and plans were signed in 2007 between four organised community groups and the NFA at Echuya, and have since been implemented and periodically reviewed.



*Promoting alternative livelihood options*

The acquisition of the motorcycle in Biraara village (see box) reflects Nature Uganda's increasing realisation that conservation cannot constitute a viable objective on its own and that adequate livelihoods by those who depended on the forest is a necessary pre-condition for its survival. Around Echuya, the organisation has therefore promoted economic opportunities and a saving culture among Batwa groups, with individuals encouraged to borrow from their groups and to be accountable to them.

Without continuing to provide alternative options for incomes, allowing regulated access to the forest might however become problematic as there have been instances of non-Batwa exploiting the opportunity to extract prohibited materials from the forest. Another limitation is the scarcity of land for the Batwa: without sufficient land for food and a surplus to sell for income, improving their livelihood remains challenging.

### **b. Sustainable soil conservation for Batwa communities**

Most of the land bought for the Batwa, given the hilly topography of Kigezi, has been affected by soil erosion. Food production proved difficult for the resettled Batwa at the outset, a situation worsened by their background as hunters and gatherers. BMCT has therefore not only promoted sustainable agriculture practices (especially to combat soil erosion and depletion) but also to address food security and household poverty.





*Nature Uganda also supports soil erosion control measures with Batwa communities*

With the support of Batwa leaders, BMTC identified and trained some Batwa to reach out to their colleagues and teach them terracing methods. This approach was meant to invest in the local human resources available, while reaching out to many. The Trust also provided seedlings and garden tools to the land owners to dig anti-erosion trenches, to use manure from their animals and to practice agro-forestry. BMCT encouraged and supported each household with 5 kgs of climbing beans and 25 kgs of Irish potato seeds. Each household was able to harvest an average of 30 kgs of beans and a sack of Irish potatoes.

Sustainable Land Management strategies have proved to be important because they have enabled Batwa farmers to adapt and become resilient to climate change by conserving soil and water, while increasing food production, hence increasing food security and restoring productive natural resources.

## Education and health

### **a. A holistic approach to education**

The Batwa Development Programme (BDP) started in 2008 and is one of the longest established initiative to

support the Batwa in the region. Interventions include health care (through the Bwindi Community Hospital), education and resettlement (land and housing) for Batwa communities in Kanungu district. For the BDP, education is seen as essential to provide a foundation for future improvements in welfare and economic self-sufficiency. With re-settlement, the Batwa were encouraged to take their children to school, but with mixed results, as the value of formal education was yet to be appreciated. Many of their children, both boys and girls, still drop out of school because of peer influence, discrimination by non-Batwa, lack of resources for school fees and scholastic materials, and distances of some schools (especially secondary schools).

### **Educational achievement**

*"I currently work with the BDP as Education Coordinator but I am also a beneficiary of the programme as I received a scholarship and went up to university. With my earnings, I have been able to construct a permanent house where I live with my parents. I have been exposed, thanks to travel in and out of Uganda. Above all, I have been able to open up a community-based organisation in my village that is supporting my relatives and fellow Batwa." - Sylvia Kokunda.*

The BDP therefore emphasises children attending schools close to their families to maintain close contact and encouragement from their parents, except for those enrolled in boarding schools. It has sought to attract the Batwa to school and to improve retention rates by constructing primary schools within their localities and by providing a wide range of services, including the payment of school fees, uniforms and shoes, scholastic materials, meals and health insurance, sanitary towels for adolescent girls and pocket money for students in boarding schools. *"We make sure that we provide children with what they cannot find at home to make them love school"*, says the BDP. In addition, priority to shelter for resettlement is given to families whose children are at school. The organisation also encourages parents to keep their children at school by sensitising them on the value of education, funding parental visits to schools, and by signing agreements with the BDP, such as when a child goes to an *"expensive"* secondary school. Parents are also themselves given access through self-formed groups to vocational training for income generation (tailoring,

carpentry and other building skills, wood carving etc.). Every child who performs well is enrolled into the best education institutions in the district to maximise the students' potential, while using them as role models to encourage others. Role modelling has indeed given impetus for children to stay at school: students are for instance given slots to speak at annual conferences and at camps organised for Batwa school children. Professionals are also invited to such events to provide career guidance. This approach to education, though relatively expensive in the long run, is considered amongst the most successful in the region.



*Batwa graduating from the Kanungu Mothers' Union Vocational Training Centre*

The United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) was founded to advance the collective voice of the Batwa in addressing their plight and finding sustainable livelihood solutions for them. UOBDU's approach to education is similar to BDP's. The holistic approach employed is intended to provide a conducive environment that can support a child go through school: UOBDU provides school fees as well as scholastic materials, sanitary ware for the girls and social support to parents to ensure that they get involved in their children's education. UOBDU helps parents to visit their children at school to maintain family ties and supports them with livelihood projects to encourage a savings culture. These savings are meant to eventually provide for children at higher institutions of learning. Concerted social support by parents, teachers and UOBDU ensures that children feel cared for. UOBDU engages teachers to monitor and promptly manage any risks that might affect the child's progress. The outcomes have been impressive, especially at primary school level. Counselling and career guidance have played a critical role in addressing the drop-out rate of Batwa children. As a means of motivating the Batwa children to learn, UOBDU also enrolls all the children receiving support in boarding schools.

While the strategies used by the two organisations have been met with success, the rate of attrition, especially in the early years at secondary school, remains high (contrary to primary schooling, with for instance 60% completion rates children supported by the BDP). Currently, under the BDP education programme, only 13 youth are in secondary education and 5 in post-secondary training. This is attributed to pregnancies and peer pressure, as opportunities provided by education are not always evident to the youth and, when going home, they are at times re-socialised in an environment where education is considered "unprofitable" by the adults. Some Batwa children have also abused the education support provided, without necessarily being at school. Limited funding, especially in the recent past, has also hampered the success rate of holistic education programmes for the Batwa, given the high costs of feeding, clothing, accommodation, and parental support.

#### **b. Health insurance**

The BDP, working through Bwindi Hospital, has introduced a health insurance scheme for local communities, with an annual premium of Ug. Shillings 20,000/= per person, adult or child. In the case of the Batwa, the BDP subsidises and the premium is 3,000/=. This approach to providing health care has proven successful with most of the Batwa in Kanungu responding and paying the premium (at times a considerable sum, when a large family has to be covered), although elderly people find the premium beyond their means, unless their families pay up.

The willingness to pay this premium demonstrates the appreciation of the value of health insurance (see box). The BDP however realises that the approach may not be sustainable if the Batwa do not have a source of steady income and it therefore introduced livelihood projects to support them to generate income that can be saved within their local saving and loans schemes. This is anticipated to create a stable and growing source of income that will in future (among others) sustain their contributions to the health scheme. Already, the health status of Batwa is said to have considerably improved and compensates for the lack of access to plant remedies previously collected from the forest. The conservation of Bwindi forest is in turn promoted.



### **Health insurance and group savings**

The “Bukuuto Batwa Tutunguuke” group members have permanent homes thanks to the BDP housing intervention which has also enabled them to engage in various economic and social activities that have helped them earn some money. They can afford the annual 3,000/= per person health insurance premium. Group members noted that paying the premium is much cheaper than paying for medical services throughout the year.

Emmanuel Simon says he has a family of 8 children and a spouse and he therefore has to raise 30,000/= yearly. He also has to save and pay for close relatives who (because of age, ill-health, or being orphans) cannot afford to raise the premium. Moses Bunan found that good health has enabled the group members to work every day and thus start a savings group, enabling them to borrow during hard times. Gladys Nyabitaka feels that health insurance is an important intervention because without health, nothing is possible. The group noted that, although the very poor might not be able to raise the premium, the intervention is beneficial and the Batwa therefore need to work harder to raise the required amount per person - Group discussion with community members of “Bukuuto Batwa Tutunguuke” village savings association, Bukuuto village.

### **Standing for elections**

“I am a 23-year old Mutwa. I completed Secondary 6 and have a certificate in Secretarial Studies and Information Management. I am currently serving on the LC 1 committee as the Secretary for Production and Environment. I am the first Mutwa to serve on the committee. I was voted in by both Batwa and non-Batwa. What inspired me to stand was the challenge I got from AICM during a community meeting on human rights. They asked us how many Batwa are on the LC 1 committee and whether we had no capacity to be leaders. I was touched by the talk. I learned about our rights to participate in our local governance. AICM encouraged us to mix with the Bakiga during church services, at funerals and other community functions. My interaction with the LC Chairman and other community members (through the AICM pairing approach) as well as taking part in the savings group has enabled me build my confidence and to make friends who later voted for me. I showed my capacity to lead through reporting cases of rights abuse on different occasions to the chairman. I would follow up cases and insist on having justice. I have been able to speak out for both Batwa and non-Batwa in meetings when something is not right”. - Fionah Baseme, Kinyarushengye, Rubanda District

“I am a 46-year old widow and I serve as the Chairperson for the Batwa community in Kinyarushengye. Before, I used to mobilise my fellow Batwa to learn from well-wishers such as AICM and other organisations that came to teach us. The most important thing AICM has done is to build our capacity to be self-confident, to participate in the governance of our community and to demand our rights. We were taught that women too - just like men - can take up leadership positions. Before, we did not speak in meetings because of discrimination by non-Batwa. Our views, if at all aired, used to go un-respected. As I was already appreciated among my fellow Batwa, I offered to lead my community. I was elected and I have also been able to mobilise my fellow Batwa to form groups for various development purposes. I support savings groups and educate - women especially - about the value of money and working in a group. I have mobilised and supported women to engage in kitchen gardening to improve our children's diet. I also help identify families in need of support and look for assistance. I have been able to report sexual violence cases against women and children and to protect the rights of my people. I have made friends with the non-Batwa community members and have received a lot of support from them. They have changed their attitude towards us through our engagement with their leaders”. - Mable Bakahebwa, Kinyarushengye

## **Rights and leadership development**

### **a. Rights and leadership**

Working in partnership with other development partners such as Minority Rights Group International (MRG) and the Independent Development Fund (IDF), AICM has maintained a human rights approach to empower the Batwa in demanding the enforcement of their rights. This is partly achieved through community sensitisation on rights, including the rights to participation in governance, rights to health, education and to a clean environment.



Once the Batwa expressed appreciation of their rights, especially to participate in governance, AICM embarked on capacity building through leadership training. A by-product of this initiative has been the emergence of a cadre of Batwa leaders at various levels such as Chairperson of various savings groups, or LC 1 and LC 2 representatives. Others have taken on key leadership positions in community savings groups that include other ethnic groups (see box). Empowerment of the Batwa by raising awareness about their rights and nurturing their self-confidence through constant interaction with the non-Batwa in community meetings and other activities has also contributed to laying of a strong foundation for leadership.

The Batwa who have obtained a level of formal education have also been employed as field staff in different organisations. This has built their self-confidence and propelled them to compete in elections. Interactions through other programmes (such as pairing), has displayed the Batwa's capacity to lead and changed the attitudes of non-Batwa. Self-confidence has also been built by asking the Batwa to lead their own advocacy agenda with minimum support; and exposing them to other IMGs, in Uganda and beyond.



*Fionah Baseme (in blue T-shirt) leads women in income generating activities – see box*

There are however some limitations that still impede the Batwa from fully exploiting their potential. Their educational attainment is rarely sufficient to qualify for higher offices and, although this may be less of an obstacle than in the past, numbers have also determined success for elective positions, a disadvantage for any minority group.

### **Speaking out for ourselves**

*“The most significant change in my life is the capacity to stand up and speak for myself and my fellow Batwa. UOBDU trained us on our rights and took us to different meetings where they encouraged us to speak out. As a result, non-Batwa are finally respecting us. Through constant engagement in community meetings we are now living together with each other in peace. We can now talk about our differences with respect and forgive each other without going to the community leadership or fighting. I am no longer afraid to talk to the police or local leaders and I can follow up any case if a Mutwa is arrested. I have also been exposed to other countries and have seen some of our demands implemented. It makes me feel valued as a human being. Now even the Bakiga have started fighting for our rights. They report any mistreatment of a Mutwa and will demand to know why the abuse happened. Empowering us to speak for ourselves is the most important approach because it is the foundation of all attributes”. - Eriyasi Habyarimana, Rutegyengyere, Rubanda district.*

*“The most important thing to me is the capacity-building from UOBDU. We were taught our rights and to always be confident. If you are not confident, then you are nowhere. You cannot demand anything. Without knowledge and self-esteem, you can never change the situation around you. If one gave you land without knowledge on how to utilise it and self-esteem to speak out and defend it, then you can fail to live on that land” - Musabye Allen, Nyakabande Kiburara, Kisoro district.*

### **b. Advocacy to build capacity and for self-empowerment**

UOBDU has emphasised advocacy as a strategy for capacity building and self-empowerment. The Batwa have been trained in advocacy skills and to represent themselves at different fora. UOBDU thus helped them to participate in a number of national and international conferences and provided support through physical presence in advocacy meetings. This has resulted in a better appreciation by the Batwa that other Ugandan indigenous people face similar challenges, and an

ability to work closely together to raise demands to government institutions responsible for service delivery.

In particular, according to Peninah Zaninka, the UOBDU Coordinator, advocacy and capacity building has enabled the Batwa to build their self-esteem, articulate their issues in public and maintain a clear long term vision of what they want to achieve. She also noted that it is easier to believe a Mutwa sharing his or her plight than a Mukiga or Mufumbira speaking on his or her behalf.

Advocacy cannot lead to results as a stand-alone strategy and it has therefore been reinforced with other activities such as awareness creation on human rights and livelihood for economic empowerment. The organisation identifies 2 community leaders – one male and one female - to lead on advocacy initiatives for of his or her community. The outcome is a cadre of confident, knowledgeable and capable Batwa that keep driving their agenda at different levels (see box)



*Batwa, among leaders of indigenous minority groups, after a meeting to advocate for their collective rights in Kisoro, 2018*

## Collaborative work methods

### **a. Collaborative forest management**

Nature Uganda started work with Batwa communities evicted from the Echuya Forest Reserve in 2004. Its aim had initially been to protect the forest fauna, but it soon became evident that ensuring the livelihood

of surrounding communities and their participation in the management of the forest were key to its survival. Much of Nature Uganda's work around Echuya forest has thus focused on delivering Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) agreements between forest-adjacent communities, including the Batwa, and the National Forest Authority.

Acting as a mediator, it has ensured that agreements incorporate elements of affirmative action for the Batwa, and have the local governments witness these agreements. Thus the Batwa are allowed regulated daily access to the forest (rather than weekly, as for non-Batwa communities) to collect firewood, bamboos, and other resources. Their membership of CFM groups is free and they have reserved spaces on the CFM leadership. In community activities where payment is required, the fees for the Batwa are reduced. The CFMs are integrated into sub-county development plans and institutionalised into community governance structures and work plans for effectiveness and sustainability. This has given the Batwa opportunities for training and exposure; it has empowered them and has led to a greater sense of appreciation by other communities (see box).

With time, however, the NFA has expressed disquiet as unlimited access by the Batwa appears to have been used by non-Batwa as conduits to collect forest resources unsustainably and as a business. Affirmative action for the Batwa communities will therefore in all likelihood have to be restricted to non-timber products (such as medicinal plants). Nature Uganda is preparing to act as a mediator in managing the review of the relevant CFM agreements. Challenges faced under this arrangement also include the low capacity of the Batwa to negotiate good terms and conditions for the agreements, the non-compliance to CFM regulations by some CFM and non-CFM members and sometimes by NFA field based staff. Some forest resource users - including the Batwa – also at times have limited knowledge of the contents of CFM plans/agreements; while some members fail to pay their annual membership fees and therefore drop out.

### ***Saving our forest together***

*"I am the chairman of the Batwa community in Biraara village, Kisoro district. One of our achievements is our collaboration with the Batwa, Bakiga, Bafumbira, Nature Uganda and other stakeholders in the preservation of the forest reserve. We regard it as our home, we know the benefits of this forest and care more about its continued existence than any other group. With support from Nature Uganda, we created CFM Committees. These protect the forest against people who come and misuse it or start wild fires. Non-residents often cut down trees without replanting. Nature Uganda provided us with some training to build our capacity in forest management using the community approach. We also learned about our rights and how to approach forest encroachers. We have been able to chase out people who graze in the forest and those that cut down trees. We also ensure that wild fires do not break out. We report every month to Nature Uganda about occurrences in the forest. We are allowed minimal access to the forest for medicine, wood to construct our houses and sometimes firewood and other products. As a result of our working together as group, we started up a CFM savings group, which includes both Batwa and non-Batwa. The group acquired pigs from the Government's youth livelihood programme. The non-Batwa people have started changing their perception and attitude towards us the Batwa. Initially we could not eat from the same plate. If a Mutwa used a plate in the community, it would either be thrown away or it would be kept in a tree for later use. CFMs have portrayed us as human beings who have natural knowledge and skills about the forest and its protection. We can speak during meetings and our opinions are regarded as useful". - Sembagare Francis, Biraara CFM group*

*"I am a Mufumbira and member of the CFM Committee. The aim is to safeguard the forest from intruders who cut down trees without minding the consequences. The Committee has helped to bring us together Batwa, Bakiga, Bafumbira, forest workers and all other people living within the surrounding communities. Before, the other tribes despised the Batwa. We looked at them as backward, dirty, useless*

*people. However, when we started working together in CFMs, we saw the good things that they know, especially about the forest. For example, the Batwa know how to chase away wild animals without harming them. We agreed that they take on some leadership positions on the committees and they have been able to serve better than we expected. After being organised under the CFMs, we were allowed by NFA and Nature Uganda to access the forest for limited resources such as herbal medicine, firewood and bamboos. However, some bad people started using members of the CFMs to access items not allowed, such as wood." -Yubu Rubibi, Kanaaba trading centre*



*Mutwa leader discussing forest management issues with CFM members*

### ***b. Working with Government for sustainable development***

Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), working with the Kisoro local district administration, have acknowledged the need to act with the Batwa to promote tourism and to safeguard their cultural heritage. The collaborative approach adopted reflected each stakeholder's competence: UOBDU had experience of working with the Batwa, UWA had experience in conservation while the local government partner was well grounded in promoting tourism. The two government bodies also recognised that the Batwa had co-existed with the forest without much destruction but, after eviction, they had dispersed into various communities and were being integrated and assimilated into other cultural communities. The "Batwa trail" initiative reflects these considerations.

The Batwa were also expected to earn some income from this tourism project, as Richard Muzenero, the



District Tourism Officer in Kisoro district, explains: *“The Batwa Trail project started in 2012 with three objectives: to incorporate the Batwa into the conservation efforts of the Mgahinga forest, to preserve their culture and to provide them with a source of income. The project was prompted by the need to tap into the knowledge and skills that the Batwa had in forest conservation”*. UWA staff also note that the Batwa were traditionally conservationists: some trees for instance cannot be cut and animals not be hunted because of their traditional myths and taboos. These can still be used to provide conservation messages and protect the forests.

The trail incorporates principles that have guided the successful implementation of the project: the activity focuses on including the Batwa as guides and entertainers, selected by the community; conditions were set to ensure the continued presence of the Batwa and quality service provision to the tourists (no alcohol, cleanliness, being well-trained). Training, provided by the project, takes place over 3 months. As an incentive to participate, the project pays each Mutwa who acts as a guide a daily fee of U.shs. 8,000/=-, while each entertainer is paid 6,000/=-. The remainder of the funds collected from the trail are shared equally between UWA and the Batwa (UWA however keeps the funds for the Batwa on a bank account for their future benefit). Batwa representatives participate in the monitoring and planning meetings, thus encouraging them to own the project. UWA has also allowed them to access traditional medicines and other cultural materials from the forest while on the trail. This too has helped to keep the Batwa volunteer to take tourists along the trail. UWA has purchased land for the Batwa, using proceeds from this project. Given its success, other Batwa trails have been replicated in Rubuguri, Buniga forest in Nkuringo, Bundibugyo and Buhoma.

Working with government is however not without challenges. One of the concerns are the limited funds available to the district to support development programmes, such as to improve the lives of the Batwa specifically. The funds given to the district are for all Kisoro residents, yet the Batwa have special needs. Affirmative action targeting the Batwa people is therefore required if they are to benefit from the contributions that UWA makes to the district out of earnings from tourism.

### **The Batwa trail**

*“This approach has proved successful and sustainable, because of collaboration with other stakeholders and respect towards each partner. The indigenous knowledge of the Batwa is now being utilised and protected through the trail. As a country we were on the verge of losing the true identity of the Batwa but I can now comfortably say that they shall live on as a people with their culture preserved. They have gained self-esteem and can ably speak and engage with other people. They participate in government conservation programmes which have seen them travel beyond their local communities. Government is also benefiting from their knowledge in forest conservation and has used the project to mobilise the Batwa for other programmes such as health and education. Likewise, Government and civil society such as UOBDU are learning from each other and institutional capacities are built. The government staff involved must be patient with the Batwa, ensure a good relationship with them and jointly work towards addressing those challenges”*. - Moses Turinawe, Tourism Warden, Mgahinga Gorilla National Park



*On the Batwa trail....*

### 3. Lessons learnt and guiding principles

**a. Empowerment: the host community is key and participation should take place at the outset**

Many respondents stressed the importance of a participative and inclusive approach that lays the ground for the gradual empowerment of the Batwa communities. While this may sound commonplace, in the context of Batwa-focused interventions, such an approach (in deed as well as in words) is not generally prevalent, as a caritative, “top-down” attitude towards a destitute people is still evident in many instances. Whether it informs organisational decision-making mechanisms (such as the BDP Executive Committee, consisting of Batwa representatives, regularly elected), or local-level practices (such as where the Batwa themselves decide who will benefit from land allocation), these constitute examples of best practice in the local context.

**b. Integrate within and outside Batwa communities, but safeguard cultural identity?**

Representatives of the organisations met stressed the importance of an integrative approach. Much emphasis was placed on the positive outcomes of working with groups, such as VSLAs, and communities, rather than assisting individuals. In addition, it was felt important to adopt an approach where Batwa are helped to be recognised as worthwhile members of the local communities by their non-Batwa neighbours. Despite the fact that the Batwa are living in small communities close to one another, integrative approaches enable them to spread outward and interface with the non-Batwa, thereby reducing instances of stigma and discrimination. The “pairing” mechanisms and the concept of “Batwa-resident areas” introduced by AICM provide good examples of such an approach. There was however little concern expressed about such an approach compromising the Batwa’s cultural identity.

**c. Build leadership skills**

Integration and an empowering approach are seen as good vehicles for the emergence of Batwa leadership, within groups, communities, and even of a cadre of

Batwa leaders with a political voice at local and national levels. This approach promotes a “do it yourself” attitude, builds ownership of processes and outcomes and reduces reliance on NGOs and Government for support. UOBDO has demonstrated this with a deliberate approach to create a cadre of Batwa community leaders to take on advocacy initiatives and serve their fellow Batwa. Once empowered and allowed to take on leadership tasks, the Batwa can drive their own agenda.

**d. The limits of affirmative action**

Affirmative action has been selected by several agencies as an appropriate approach, given the grave challenges met by the Batwa communities, compared to others. There are however limits to affirmative action as this may alienate the beneficiaries from other residents who do not benefit, and lead to the exploitation of a preferential system (as shown in the case of CFM agreements with communities around Echuya Forest and the BMCT livelihood support for management of soils erosion) and consequently to intra-community tensions. An all-inclusive approach to avoid the creation of special groups is needed.

**e. Project or programme? It all takes time...**

The long-term nature of change processes was stressed by all respondents, with a step-by-step progressive approach towards empowering the Batwa seen as the most effective. The most successful cases appear to be those where the interaction between the Batwa and external agencies has taken place over several years (and where this has allowed the development of a cadre of Batwa field agents, who best understand the local context). A long-term approach is needed to change the practices and lifestyles of a community, and to learn new life-long skills. This maybe explains the limited success by some organisations that have provided one-off resettlement interventions for the Batwa. The end result has been a lack of ownership of the interventions and the Batwa selling off the houses and lands given because they did not appreciate their value.

**f. *Networking and collaboration with all service providers***

Working in silos can lead to duplication and wastage of resources. Most of the respondents interviewed advocated for a collaborative approach between the various organisations providing services to the Batwa. It was emphasised that providing similar piecemeal interventions has resulted in the recipients (Batwa) feeling overwhelmed and selling off the items provided (especially where similar products are provided by various organisations to the same recipients). If consolidated, such efforts would have a greater impact. Organisations that have collaborated have registered success and their programmes are fast replicating, as the example of UWA's Batwa trail exemplifies, an experience currently being replicated in Rubugiri and Bundibugyo.

**g. *Working with the Government***

Civil society organisations (CSOs) often supplement the efforts of Government, thus bridging gaps in service delivery, but it remains the duty of the State to provide social amenities for its citizens. Government interventions have better prospects for sustainability, especially when they are no longer seen as “projects” with short-term horizons. CSO-Government collaboration can thus lead to better prospects for

sustainability (as for the Batwa trails), as well as helping to access technical expertise from the various partners involved.

**h. *Knowledge is key...***

According to most of the Batwa interviewees, access to knowledge and information has largely contributed to their empowerment. Knowledge has built self-esteem, confidence and the capacity of the majority to engage with the Government and fellow community members. Similarly, externally-inspired interventions can only achieve a modicum of success when anchored on good knowledge of the Batwa social and cultural identity.

**i. *Cultural rights and the Batwa identity***

The protection of cultural rights has not been an explicit objective for most of the organisations promoting and protecting the rights of the Batwa, as opposed to their economic, civil and social rights. The Batwa have been slowly assimilated by neighbouring communities, thus losing much of their culture. Although some organisations have gradually realised the need to safeguard the cultural identity of the Batwa and efforts are being made to work with them to promote their cultural rights, this is not done as a priority objective.



## 4. Conclusion

Contrary to the perception that Uganda's Batwa communities have seen their living conditions stagnate in the past decades, the examples and experiences described in these pages indicate that the interventions of several non-governmental organisations (and one government agency) have registered a considerable measure of success, with positive outcomes for the Batwa.

Such successes appear to have been built on several strategies adopted by these organisations:

- Placing the Batwa at the centre of their long-term interventions, avoiding the imposition of externally-driven agenda as much as possible, and ensuring that the Batwa are equipped with the necessary skills and are genuinely participating.
- Using an inclusive approach beyond the Batwa communities to involve non-Batwa neighbours, thus not only establishing peaceful co-existence, but also mutual esteem.
- Adopting a “holistic approach”, going beyond sector-based and practical interventions to a broader understanding of livelihood, as well as physical and non-physical needs, such as for esteem and recognition.

Shortcomings can however also be identified, such as:

- Inadequate inter-agency cooperation (at times exploited by the Batwa) and limited exchange of information on programming approaches.
- Limited action by Government institutions, where local authorities find it expedient to leave non-governmental organisations “deal with” Batwa communities.
- A limited engagement with cultural issues, at times the casualty of fostering inter-community dialogues and cooperation, at the expense of nurturing a sustained, evolving Batwa culture.

In spite of the progress made, it is also clear that the Batwa communities will continue to need support for the coming years. Further efforts will have to be made to enable all the Batwa communities come together and jointly advocate for their rights and their welfare, including the need for affirmative action (such as in the jobs market). More reflection is also needed to examine ways to ensure that the Batwa's cultural rights are respected, including their right to an identity (already so undermined by their forcible eviction from their ancestral homes) respected by all, so that they can contribute as equals in building the nation.



The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) was established with a mission to promote the recognition of culture as vital for human development that responds to our national identity and diversity. CCFU has worked to support different indigenous minority groups in Uganda, including the Batwa in Bundibugyo.

After their eviction from their forests for conservation purposes, the plight of the Batwa in South Western Uganda attracted attention and interventions, mostly by non-state actors, with varying degrees of success.

To encourage the exchange of information between the various Batwa groups and intervening agencies, CCFU conducted research to document the most successful experiences and interviewed Batwa representatives to solicit their reactions to such interventions. The documentation covered organisations operating in Kabale, Rubanda, Kisoro and Kanungu districts.

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