

Conservation news

Community-led sustainable finance mechanism for conservation in Uganda

Since 2013, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has been working with Bulyango, Kasenene and Kidoma-Bulimya Private Forest Owners Associations in the Northern Albertine Rift, Uganda. The focus is to empower local communities and strengthen community-based natural resource management through reforestation of two wildlife corridors for chimpanzees (Budongo–Mukihani and Bugoma–Wambabya forest linkages) and improved monitoring of chimpanzees and any threats to them.

Within the Private Forest Owners Associations, several Village Savings and Loan Associations have been established as an incentive for communities to engage in conservation activities, and to provide access to affordable microcredits that enable community members to invest in conservation-friendly enterprises. At the project outset, FFI provided capacity building for community members to enhance the governance and management of savings and loan groups. Groups that demonstrated sufficient capacity were provided with additional seed funds through the Private Forest Owners Association, to enable grants through a revolving fund mechanism.

Seed funding for the revolving fund mechanism was transferred to the bank accounts of the Private Forest Owners Associations so that they had ownership of this capital. Terms and conditions for the savings and loan groups to access the capital were mutually agreed through community-level discussion: (1) savings and loan group members can access the capital at a 20% annual interest rate, which is 4% lower than the market rate, with no collateral and minimal paperwork; (2) from the 20% interest, 12% will be for the operating costs of the saving and loan operations; and (3) the remaining 8% interest will provide a sustainable financing mechanism for chimpanzee and other wildlife conservation.

As of February 2022, 450 community members have accessed microcredits to pursue conservation-friendly agriculture and c. USD 1,900 were raised as sustainable financing for chimpanzee conservation, covering at least 40% of wildlife patrol costs. This has translated into more positive community attitudes towards conservation activities and provoked an influx of additional community members wanting to join the Private Forest Owners Associations, participate in conservation activities and benefit from opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Given these promising results, FFI aims to scale up the current savings and loan group model by increasing the geographical scope of the project, reducing the transaction costs associated with loan operations by adopting finance technology innovations, and exploring private sector finance

partnerships to reduce the dependency of seed funds on grant funding. By improving the capacity of Private Forest Owners Associations to function effectively as grassroots organizations and strengthening the sustainability of these initiatives, FFI continues to champion community-led conservation within the Northern Albertine Rift.

ROGERS NIWAMANYA and SILVER TUMWA *Fauna & Flora International, Kampala, Uganda*. CATH LAWSON and KIRAN MOHANAN (orcid.org/0000-0002-0366-3462, kiran.mohanan@fauna-flora.org) *Fauna & Flora International, Cambridge, UK*

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New database enhances the accessibility of global biodiversity information for conservation monitoring

To monitor the progress of conservation and sustainability projects, governments, civil society organizations, businesses and other stakeholders need data on the state of species and habitats, the pressures they face and responses to mitigate those pressures. Although project staff need to collect primary data, complementary data from global databases can help monitor key indicators (Stephenson et al., 2015, *Biodiversity*, 16, 68–85). There are several well-known global databases, such as the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species ([iucnredlist.org](https://www.iucnredlist.org)), the WWF/ZSL Living Planet Index ([livingplanetindex.org](https://www.livingplanetindex.org)) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([gbif.org](https://www.gbif.org)), but many managers do not know where to find other data.

In 2020, the IUCN Species Survival Commission Species Monitoring Specialist Group, in partnership with Re:wild, conducted the first global inventory of biodiversity data sources to identify those of potential use for conservation monitoring. Although there were challenges identifying the origins, usefulness and accessibility of the data, the study published a preliminary list and a review of factors affecting data availability and use (Stephenson & Stengel, 2020, *PLOS ONE*, 15, e0242923).

In January 2022, as part of a multi-stakeholder collaborative project led by the University of Lausanne and funded by the Swiss Network for International Studies, we updated the database to include data sources identified by specialist group members and a new literature review. Data sources were selected if they had potential relevance for monitoring at the global level, included at least some time-series data, and had data added in the previous 5 years.