

WE WANT TO SEE A FLOURISHING BIODIVERSITY

The Uganda Biodiversity Trust Fund (UBF) is a private entity that works to finance biodiversity conservation in Uganda. As the world commemorates the International Biodiversity Day, **Joseph Bahingwire** asked the executive director, Apophia Atukunda, about the organisation and its activities.

Tell us about the Uganda Biodiversity Trust Fund.

We are a Conservation Trust Fund (CTF), commonly known as Uganda Biodiversity Fund (UBF). CTFs are usually private entities that are put together to finance the conservation of biological diversity by providing sustainable financing. We are governed by a board of trustees that has varied skills and has representation from national and international levels. Regarding our vision, as we look ahead, we want to see a sustainably financed flourishing biodiversity for the benefit of the people of Uganda. Our goal, which is tied to our mission, is that for the next five years, we aim to be a key player

in mobilising resources within the biodiversity conservation space.

Who are your partners in protecting biodiversity?

We have many woods in that fire, we work with different partners in the biodiversity conservation space. We work with government agencies that are mandated to conserve biodiversity for the people of Uganda; with the private sector, some of whom benefit directly from biodiversity as a resource for their businesses – we bring them on board to take responsibility and give back to the community. We also work with community-based organisations (CBOs) because these are on the ground, working closely with the people who live with



Apophia Atukunda

and interact with different aspects of biodiversity daily. We also work with NGOs, both at the national and international levels.

How relevant is this year's theme?

Building a shared future for all life is the theme for this year. You do realise that as human beings, we cannot live independent of the rest of the biological resources. We share a life. Biodiversity can survive without humans

but we cannot exist without it.

What should be done alongside biodiversity conservation?

Our development levels and our human population have not surpassed what this country can accommodate. When you move around the country, you realise that there is still a lot of unoccupied land. Our land resource is still enough but

we are selfish beings. We horde resources and destroy them in good measure. We constantly experience "the tragedy of the commons". In our development, we seem not to care about what is good for the nation and the future. We keep forgetting that it is a shared life and a shared future. If we are to have shared life, we cannot afford to degrade the wetlands or destroy forests.

How do your activities impact the future of tourism in Uganda?

Tourism contributes a big chunk to the national economy, a big portion of our forex earnings come out of the tourism industry, and yet the percentage of the national budget that goes to conservation is just about 1.2%. We are milking the cow, and yet we are not feeding it – won't the cow die? Look at the destruction going on and ask yourself if tourism will remain a big contributor to the economy? Uganda's tourism is heavily rooted in biodiversity, our tourists come to see the animals,

watch the birds and enjoy our beautiful scenery. Without these, we have no tourism to talk about.

What are some of those projects that you have undertaken to protect biodiversity?

As UBF, we grant funds to NGOs and CBOs for projects relating to biodiversity, climate change and livelihoods, including forest and wetland restoration, energy-saving technologies, sustainable land management, including climate-smart agriculture and agroforestry. We go for projects that earn money for communities, while protecting biodiversity and offer opportunities to the private sector to develop biodiversity-friendly value chains. We have so far supported 11 projects, worth about sh2b, and we have earmarked over sh1b for Karamoja region next year.

We shall work with the Karamoja Region Development Initiative to implement projects like "trees for carbon trading and for livelihoods".



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Uganda is a contracting Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and it actively participates in various Multilateral Environmental Agreements critical for biodiversity conservation and management. It is rich in biodiversity with over 380 species of mammals, over 1050 species of birds and over 600 fish species. Uganda's love for heritage is exhibited in its currency notes through the coat of arms with the Uganda Kob, Mountain gorilla, Crested crane and Weavers among the birds and animals used. Tourism is one of Uganda's leading foreign exchange earners and this mostly depends on biodiversity especially that of the outstanding animals such as the Lion. The United Nations has proclaimed May 22, the International Day for Biological Diversity to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. This year's theme is "Building a shared future for all life". The theme resonates well with understanding the future of the Lions especially in Queen Elizabeth where two recent incidents in Ishasha – Kanungu and Katunguru – Rubirizi claimed the lives of nine lions through poisoning and electrocution in a Park known to have one of the most rapidly declining populations of lions.

Human – Wildlife conflict is the precursor of the rapid decline in lion population at both national and global levels. In Uganda, the major population of lions is now confined to three Parks, in Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls and Kidepo Valley National Parks with other Park such as Lake Mburo hosting tiny visiting populations. Queen Elizabeth therefore is an important stronghold for Uganda's remaining lions, providing home to probably an over estimated 144 of the 408 lions. However, these lions continue to be increasingly threatened by retaliatory killing by local pastoralists, poaching for meat and parts used in witch craft as well as snare accidents. The recent incident in 2021 in Ishasha - Kanungu directly point to witch craft where six lions were beheaded and their paws were missing. Lion fat is also extracted in such incidents as purported cure for ailments. Another incident of suspected electrocution of Jolly (adult female) and her two sub-adult cubs happened on 26th April 2022. With most candidates of these incidents being female, decimation of such a small population of lions may not be far from true. However, it is important to note that the decimation of such a population undermines national heritage and negatively impacts the economy through reduced revenue from tourism as the lion is most sought after species after the Mountain Gorilla.

The contribution of biological diversity to the national economy has always been under-estimated. Uganda largely depends on nature-based tourism through attractions including the Mountain Gorilla, Lions, Elephants, Leopards and Buffalo among others.



Other rapidly growing specialized attractions include birds and butterflies. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the total contribution of biodiversity dependent tourism to GDP was UGX 4,380.5 Bn accounting for 9.0% of Uganda's GDP in 2011. This was forecasted to rise by 4.2% in 2012, and to rise by 5.5% annually to UGX 7,797.8 Bn in 2022. The direct contribution of tourism to GDP was UGX 1,954.6 Bn accounting for 4.0% of total GDP in 2011, and was forecasted to rise by 3.7% in 2012, and to rise by 5.2% annually, from 2012 - 2022, to UGX 3,370.2 Bn in 2022. This calls for concerted effort by all stakeholders towards protection of species and the need to celebrate this day with action points towards conservation.

These efforts should be geared towards averting the major threats to biodiversity in Uganda that include; shrinking habitats due to continued encroachment, reduced forage due to domestic animal incursions, reduced prey due poaching, illegal trade in wildlife parts and unregulated competing investments in protected areas among others. All these originate from local communities in and around protected areas who are directly involved in illegal activities for personal benefit or sometimes as conduits for cartels in illegal trade of wildlife products. These should therefore be the focus through awareness campaigns on top of

benefits to change their attitudes towards protection of wildlife.

Across all the National Parks in Uganda, communities have positioned themselves to tap from tourism through employment, sale of crafts and other merchandise and entertainment among others. In accordance with Uganda Wildlife Act, the local communities living near protected areas also receive 20% of all gate entry revenue as royalties for people neighboring the wildlife protected areas. This is through the respective local governments and is distributed according to the geographical size of the Park boundary covered by the district. However, communities seem dissatisfied with the trickle-down effect and in most cases do not see themselves as beneficiaries from the Parks. This usually creates mixed reactions and poor attitude towards the Park. Coupled with cultural beliefs related to hunting and poverty, more still need to be done to harmonise community-park relations.

To improve Community – Park relations, Ecological Trends Alliance through its community scouts, "Queens and Kings" aimed to stop lion killings in enclave communities inside Queen Elizabeth National Park. This was done through (1) Reducing number of livestock depredation by lions having built capacity of community wildlife scouts to monitor livestock, state of kraals and built community – protected area relationships and (2) Reducing number of lions persecuted in the four enclave villages through improved vigilance on lions' presence in the vicinity and instant reporting to Uganda Wildlife Authority. Through the two years of the project, there was no lion persecution in the four enclaves under the project's jurisdiction. The improved community – park relations and better response mechanisms to wildlife attacks as part of the mechanisms put in place by the project contributed to the positive change. Strengthened collaboration among the actors from the local communities, civil society and the Uganda Wildlife Authority seems to act as a silver bullet in management of human-wildlife conflicts.

Lessons from the four enclaves in Queen Elizabeth could be scaled to the other enclaves in Queen Elizabeth National Park and other Protected Areas with Lions and other wildlife conflict animals. In all this, Uganda Wildlife Authority remains central to coordination of the actors brought together either by geographical scope or target focus species. In this way, organizations will work to complement each other rather than compete. These actors therefore add value, expand scope and avoid duplication. In our opinion, improved vigilance and instant reporting of potential danger and incidences is key to the protection of lions from retaliatory killings.

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Biodiversity Conservation, a Basis for Tourism Investment

Biodiversity conservation. It does sound like the most impossible of scientific phenomena to tackle, but it is rather more of an intricate process that involves our day-to-day choices, socially, culturally, and economically. This, approached with the right nurturing and care, brings support to all life. The International Day for Biological Diversity (World Biodiversity Day) is a UN established day to increase understanding and awareness about biodiversity issues. This day is celebrated every year on 22 May with a global theme intended to emphasise pressing issues about biodiversity at the time. This year the theme is 'Building a shared future for all life'.

This theme highlights the interdependency of all living things and the diversity provided by our natural systems for human existence and a healthy planet. The onus is on us, humans, to protect and conserve our environment for the benefits of all living organisms. All life on Earth can only be sustained if we collectively contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) relating to sustainable economic growth, consumption and production, and use of water resources.

The very nature (pun intended) of biodiversity suggests that maintaining habitats can on its own form a basis for income generation through various investments, and top on this list is tourism. The activities that can be explored from a healthy biodiversity are innumerable and can therefore be a great source of revenue for the country. There must be a symbiotic relationship, where tourism operators make an active effort to protect and preserve what will continuously bring returns. Tourism can therefore contribute to awareness of biodiversity conservation requirements including habitat protection and restoration, community engagement and resource mobilisation.

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The pre-Covid-19 period saw the global tourism industry as one of the fastest growing and employment from travel and tourism predicted at a growth of 4.5% per annum over ten years (WTTC, 2018). Although there are arguments that local areas are adversely affected by tourism, it actually provides opportunities for reinvestment in biodiversity conservation using that revenue stream. In Uganda, in the past five years, tourism has contributed 7% of the country's GDP, creating opportunities to tackle youth unemployment and gender parity.

Some interventions that can be successfully employed include Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), where sustainable programs for the provision of environmental services that compensate service providers are created, and transfer of financial resources from beneficiaries of certain environmental services (tourism operators in this case) to those who provide these services (local communities). Another area is to incentivize and promote biodiversity conservation outside of protected areas, which boosts the national tourism appeal.

The World Tourism Organisation's core principles of sustainable tourism development are to improve the quality of life of the host community; to provide high quality experience for visitors; and to maintain the quality of the environment, on which both the host community and the visitors depend. A practical example is the community of Buhoma, neighbouring Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

The growth in Buhoma is largely due to Gorilla tourism. The community realises that it is the protection of the Mt. gorilla that brings the tourists, resulting in revenue and economic development. The community

thus willingly ensure and contributed to maintenance of a natural environment suited to the species.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has guidelines to enhance financing of protected area networks through capturing revenues from visitation (concessions and partnerships), to support the sustainable development of special places (tourism and conservation hotspots). These help communities who are stewards of natural areas, to complement their livelihoods through ecotourism and community-based tourism. This goes to show that tourism is a rewarding and sustainable venture with profit and purpose, if properly executed.

