

Interview with Dr Wilber Manyisa Ahebwa about the women's involvement in conservation

GVTC: Could you please introduce yourself to the GVTC readers and listeners?

WMA: I am called Dr Wilber Manyisa Ahebwa and I am the Team Leader of a group of consultants working for a GVTC regional research based on the integration of women in the development and management of natural resources. This contract was given to Eastern African Network for Association Tourism. It is a team of high specialized people, in the field of conservation, tourism and development.

GVTC: You are the Team Leader of a research group conducting a study commented by GVTC to know more about the participation of women in conservation and tourism. Can talk about this in more details?

WMA: The current study is conducted on the potential and existing conservation enterprises and we are looking whether women are particularly engaged. As particular terms of reference of this assignment we are basically looking at finding whether existing enterprises are and how they are taking advantage of tourism to link communities and conservation and looking whether we have and also looking at whether we have got a private community entrepreneurship in these cases, whether the private sectors are working with communities to develop particular enterprises helping them to benefit from tourism but also the existing natural resources and in that whether they influence them at tourism and conservation.

About the scope of our work, we are covering the PNVi Rwanda, (the National Virunga Park in Rwanda), PNVI DRC with extension to Tongo and then in Uganda we are looking at the Bwindi, Mgahinga, then the Queen Elisabeth and the Landscape, Rwenzori and Semuliki National Parks.

So far, we have identified a number of enterprises and we are interested how these enterprises have been run. So for the public private, I mean private community partnerships we look at actors engaged, the rules of the games and how they have been in change over time and how the actors are operating because sometimes the issues we learn from these existing PCPs (Private Community Partnerships) and whether there are possibilities to duplicate those experiences in the region. For the environmental service of enterprises we look at the potential markets segments, the competition in the region and what we learn from what is existing and then also we identify the potentials. In addition to all those, we are also mapping with techniques of GIS the area coverage, the number of beneficiaries, and even looking at the picture prospects of these enterprises. Finally we have to draw relations from all these. With specific focus I think the interest of GVTC is the role of women in the development and management of natural resources as well as conservation process; what can be done, what is currently being done, what are the challenges and what can be done to increase their participation in tourism and conservation enforcement.

GVTC: How many months will this research last to collect all the needed data and perform its results?

WMA :The agreement we signed was for three months and we are now finishing the field work in the three countries because we have teams who have been sent in the region, some in Rwanda, others in DRC and in Uganda. Now data are available and we are analyzing them. Around the second week of next October we shall have the final report submitted. We still have a month to get the work done. :

GVTC: What did you discover until now (so far?) in the three countries?

WMA: In the three countries, for DRC, it seems that most of those enterprises are still potential; the security issue is still being a problem, so there is not much activity taking place in Congo although the country has a lot of potential. Basically, what we are finding in Congo is potential. But the current level of tourism taking place is also minimum. We find that the engagement in business is also minimum. Actually, what we are able to find out if you go down in Goma where some activities are taking place, and you move up to Vitshumbi and in other areas even the accessibility is very difficult. We

could not access to Ishasha and other regions where we are told that it is very difficult to reach the region inside. So in DRC we tried to get what we could but most of it is still potential. But in Rwanda there are so many existing enterprises which are operational and they are many. People are doing the same things, women are engaged and some things/goods are imported from Kenya and are not locally made. We found some challenges and identified some gaps about what people are not actually doing yet it could provide a kind of interpoint for them to do business. Most of them are concentrated in one business and this prevents them from doing correctly business. So part of recommendations will be whether they can deliver social services. A number of enterprises has been identified in Uganda and Rwanda, with much potential. PCP have been also identified in the two countries; in DRC we did not identify any PCP. For PCP what we learnt the ranger/arrangement is fantastic because private persons bring in business and the communities are able to benefit from, the standards are high, clients like the services which are being offered in this arrangement, for instance they are running ecology in Uganda. But then what imaged is that the rules of the game in that case are not being followed. For example, regarding the Cloud Lodge, it is specified in the agreement that the communities are supposed to get 30 \$ US and at the time Cloud Lodge is supposed to charge 1.50 \$ per guest and per night. The agreement stated very well that in case the Uganda Safari Company is the private sector. In case it increases the prices, then the shares with the community will increase in the equal proportions. As I talk right now, the Lodge is charging 7 \$ US per guest and per night but the communities have not get the associated inclement according to the agreement. That is what we are learning from this research. The second thing is that the agreement is dealing with local resources which should be provided by private sector such as eggs, potatoes, vegetables, etc which communities are not able to supply. We tried to dig into and found that in some way they are not able; they are being taken by some other activities; others cannot sustain the supply and in that case the private sector/the person is forced to pass on to comparing to the supermarket or the nearest city to do shopping yet it would be offering market to these local communities to supply. And even when they are able to supply, they do not supply substantial things; they cannot buy from them.

The other area we are able to see is that in the agreement, these people are supposed to be employed. So when we consider PCP it is supposed to recruit locally and also train them over time. For Ugandan Lodge this has been done because most of the staff are locally recruited and this positive thing. They are sometime trained and shifted to another lodge and that is very positive. But the main problem is that substantial money is being channeled by communities associations. The community members form their association which teams double the private sector. In case of Uganda, for instance, in Cloud Logde, we have NCCDF. They are receiving money in a hundred of millions a year. But the major problem is that local communities or associations are misgoverned. They elect leaders who do things in the way that is not in the priority of the community members.

GVTC: Maybe those leaders are not motivated to do their work in the right way?

WMA: They are motivated because they have a lot of money but these guys do not have strategic plans. Actually, we look for strategies but they do not have any. They are doing actions which are not guided at all with the vision of the community. When we look at what they are doing with the money, it is not sufficient. For instance NCCD which is a very big structure and I think it will be a vocational institute to train the local communities in tourism and other things. Now, when you ask the communities what they would want, it is very far from what they are provided with. The leaders are investing in a bureauting while the communities would prefer something different. This kind of disharmony is discouraging because there is any strategic plan. So the leaders need to sit together through a brainstorm to agree on a strategic plan. The challenge remains the building of a structure and to know who will run it, who will train the team members, how the structure and its work will be recognized in the region, etc. They did not work to know that before setting up the structure. They only put a lot of money into the structure and at the end, it did not function. They did not think about the trainers neither the persons to be trained and on which courses they will focus the training; they simply put up the structure and spent a lot of millions while there are many areas which should be very profitable in the region. For instance, in Gisoro, they are constructing a factory to transform potatoes to produce potatoes juice. This provides

the market with Irish potatoes and when you try to understand what the communities may gain from such initiatives, you realize that there is a lack of Irish potatoes seeds. So the priority action is to provide women's associations with Irish potatoes seeds and these women will grow potatoes and supply the factory since this one sometimes runs out of supply.

The other issue we discovered is the dairy which produces yoghurt, cheese and other things. But people are still claiming for cows because from these they could supply the dairy. Actually, we changed strategies to appreciate conservation but leadership is still a problem and when we try to talk to people in those regions, we realize that people vote for their leaders but there is a big bribing by avoiding the process, leaders have access to a lot of money and once they take all of the office they become untouchable. So you have to wait for another voting period and when this period comes, there still bribe their community members to elect them so that they may be back into the structure.

GVTC: Do you think such leaders need more training on governance to become accountable?

WMA: I think they need a kind of training but in some areas some leaders have a master's degree even a PhD, for instance those who are in charge of Rwenzori Mountain Services and they really understand what they have to do. Even do, people are complaining because those leaders are busy at schools and universities, they do not have time to listen to anyone. I think the more important is an accountability system which is not completely set up and real. You know, in order governmental structures, you have the government overseeing what is being done. But in those associations, people are actually operating independently. Even the organizations like IGCP which helped to create them, after creating them, they cannot do/say anything. People we interviewed are complaining on what is going on. But without organization and constitution, they cannot do anything. The local government knows what is going wrong but it cannot do anything simply because the Constitution does not allow them to interfere and do something. So I think if there are new PCPs which are going to be created the issue of responsibility, accountability even provision of members resulting from managers should be looked into so that there some tight nuts for leaders coming in. I say that because voting will not be a success the bribers are voted and sometimes the good leaders are not voted.

GVTC: How do you think GVTC will make profit of your research and its results?

WMA: We hope that enterprises which are concerned by this research will make a profit of it. The enterprise idea, which is a new model just now, will increase in the local mentalities. Communities can have their private enterprises but they will need more environmental enterprises in terms of leadership. People should be able to link these enterprises to existing natural resources. They should be able to say we are having this business because of the national parks; should the national parks be there, then this business should not be there. And that is very clear and known by all the people: if visitors are not coming, there will be no incomes; there will be financial problems in the region. Where there are so many enterprises conservation is benefiting from them; the level of illegal activities against the parks is low. GVTC will benefit from this study because the lessons we are getting from this, our findings and sometimes the recommendations given by this research will be able to help GVTC plan and its partners to plan their interventions; plan what they can do with the organizations and communities groups in the three countries they are working with so that we can be able to have sustainable conservation of natural resources.

GVTC: Thank you very much Dr Wilber M. Ahebwa for those interesting details!

WMA: You are welcome!

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