

Interview with Mark David Mwine, Administrator of Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust.

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

Mark Mwine: I am Mark Mwine, the Trust Administrator of Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust. Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation is a Trust founded by the government of Uganda with the funding from The Global Environment Funds and the World Bank. It was set up to ensure that Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation area where there are gorillas and other endangered species and other biodiversity, is concept with the neighboring communities in partnership. We work with the protected area and in this case the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. So, we work in the park, we do research and support the communities neighboring the parks to appreciate conserving the biodiversity, conserving the landscape because of the value it adds at their livelihood.

GVTC: Can you please give us more details about the year the park was exactly founded?

MM: the protected areas were founded in the 1990s and after conservation it became conflict areas because this area was initially used by people. So, when the founded the park, conflicts arose and the protected areas were already in conflict with the local communities. After the park has been founded, we came in 1994 and worked with the park to ensure that the public out there appreciate the park as their own.

GVTC: What kind or did you discovered by working with the park and local communities?

MN:The members of local community are generally looking at the forest as their own resource. So to appreciate now the forest or the parks where the gorillas live, these areas should be conceived as something that is improving their livelihood. That is the reason why we are still supporting them start communities projects, income generating activities; they do so and we support them to start and continue sustainably with them. We have done sustainable infrastructures projects with them, strike the floskins, rain water harvesting; an AGC Stoves, to help them conceive even the rich forest they have outside of the forest and also to work with the park and help its authorities to appreciate that the communities need to see themselves benefiting the forest.so this is mainly done through tourism activities, in Buhoma they have community programs which we have supported, we helped them implement commette work and they benefit from it, we gave them water which comes from the park, especially from the Great Scape Kim comes from the park. So the people appreciate that park is adding value to their life by being next to it.

GVTC: What kind of visitors do you generally welcome in Uganda to visit national parks?

MM: Among foreigners we welcome Americans and Europeans are the biggest suppliers of tourism. But we started having people from Asian countries such as Japan, and even Africans themselves are beginning to appreciate tourism. To visit the park, a Ugandan citizen has to pay at least 6 for an overday. So it has become an incentive for them. And previous sector is becoming also to give them discount dreads at the pick when tourism is not at its pick. Such demands are at the low levels to promote local tourists to their area with discount

on accommodations and then they pay to have access to the Gorillas parents to go to the park.

GVTC: How is transboundary collaboration between Rwandan parks, Ugandan parks and Congolese ones?

MM: This is one of the things we would like to thank the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration for enhancing initially the International Gorilla Conservation had started it through regional meetings, through community projects it founded. For example, GVTC founded some projects in Uganda, in Rwanda and other in DRC and through these projects GVTC brought people together. Then, when you look at the protected areas authorities, because of their collaboration, the networks, the meetings they hold, this has allowed communication inter parks to be abound; they have caused meetings between parks, they have brought together wardens to meet and discuss conservation, And in process one cannot say that it is standardized across border but they are practicing what we would call “best practices”. And this is a courtesy of the network established by the Greater Virunga initiated by IGCP.

GVTC: DRC and Uganda are faced armed conflicts which may be observed as threats or dangers for their own national parks. What do you think about that?

MM: This is exogenous and outside of our control, but the best we have done is that, even within conflict; the national parks have remained intact and have been supported to control the protected areas. But in conflicts there is nothing we can do; because it is outside of our control and the best we can do is to support the infrastructures that are there, to maintain what is there and that has been done. Although we have tried to conserve, when conflict comes, it is difficult, you cannot conserve and protect in conflicts.

GVTC: Do you think community stakeholders should make the governments of the three countries more involved in conflicts resolution?

MM: That would be the best; if all the stakeholders can get together and talk with one voice, the protected areas would not be involved in conflict. Because these are world heritage sites like Bwindi is a world heritage site, the Virunga National Park in DRC is a world heritage site, so it would be inconsistent with the world not to advocate for peaceful resolution of conflicts. The challenge is that where guns are it is very difficult but we have tried and I think if the stakeholders can get together, if the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration can work with all the stakeholders, we would be able to achieve this.

GVTC: In the coming years Ugandan and even Congolese parks will be facing the oil exploitation which really constitutes a real danger for bio-diversity and conservation in national parks. How can you explain this to our readers?

MM: The extraction industry is industrial; what we need to do is to work with the extractors to make sure that they do not destroy what is there. Because the nations that are having oil and other minerals are poor nations and they look at these resources they can use. What we can do is to try to see whether it is wikelise in Bwindi and other forests where drilling would

make it very difficult and advocate for not drilling. And where it can be drilled like in a savanna , make sure that we mitigate the impact of drilling and this we can do with the coopera social responsibilities of the companies that are drilling. And with one voice we can negotiate with these companies to make sure they don't do dangerous things to the environment, that environment impacts assessment are foreword/affarawed and they do extraction with environment at heard. The other thing we need to do is to get together and talk with one voice. If we don't talk as one institution, if we don't talk as conservation together, our voice will not be heard. But, to be heard, we have to come together, talk and demand for the companies and governments to do responsible extraction.

GVTC: And your last word...

MM: the last word is to thank the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration for bringing us together; to thank the donors who made it possible, and say that, to conserve, we need to have a consent effort and if we conserve with the aim that the Greater Virunga stands for, we shall also develop. Thank you very much!

GVTC: You are welcome Mark!

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