LOCAL PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT WORKING TOGETHER TO MANAGE NATURAL RESOURCES:
Lessons from the Lake Victoria Basin

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Credits
cover photo: Local communities should be empowered to sustainably manage their natural resources as key stakeholders (© BirdLife).

Back cover photo: The Lake Victoria Basin is a hotspot for birds and other biodiversity (© BirdLife).

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Executive Summary

Seeking to conserve sites of biological and ecological importance outside the protected area network, conservation organizations are increasingly working with local communities, the original and ultimate stewards of the sites. In most cases, local people are aware of environmental problems; with training and capacity building they become enthusiastic protectors of critical natural sites. Donor-funded projects to support local community groups, however, last only a few years. It is therefore important to build the capacity of local conservation groups to stand on their own; and to engage with local, regional and national government to influence government policies and legislation.

This publication explores different ways in which local conservation groups, backed by national NGOs that are BirdLife Partners, have engaged with government at Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) near Lake Victoria. Their experiences are documented in five case studies:

- A mainly women’s group in Burundi, trying to regulate resource use on the slopes of a mountain chain, includes members elected to the municipal council, where they are able to include community and conservation priorities in government plans.
- Community members at Mabamba Bay in Uganda, with help from the national NGO, the wildlife authorities and the police, stop trafficking in the unique Shoebill Stork at their site.
- Not every story is a success story; at Lutembe Bay, also in Uganda, local and national conservation groups are unable to stop a flower farm from encroaching into the wetland, despite having good relations with the national environment authority.
- Members of local cooperatives learn how to make use of opportunities for conservation action in Rwanda’s detailed system of devolution.
- In Kenya, building the capacity of the local IBA Site Support Group was difficult at first, but their opinion is now sought by government officials.

Based on the findings from the five case studies, a number of recommendations are made (see pages 77 to 80). The recommendations include:

1. **To Government**: State institutions must be ready to listen to communities when approached, and consider their submissions and suggestions seriously – not dismissing them because of a lack of formal education or technical qualification, but recognising instead their expert local knowledge and understanding. Government policies and plans on the environment and natural resources will be more effective (and realistic) if they are based on local knowledge, include local community aspirations and priorities following proper consultation and building of ownership, and reflect local capacities.
2. **To NGOs:** At the start of any project, NGOs should be prepared to closely support and mentor communities and their organisations in the advocacy process. As the project develops, communities should be empowered to take action on their own, to increase project ownership and sustainability. Projects come and go – most have funding for between one and three years. NGOs should build capacity so that community organisations can work with government in the long-term.

3. **To communities:** CBO (community-based organisation) representatives need to be prepared with well-researched issues and recommendations when attending meetings where plans and policies are discussed. Their arguments should be well rehearsed.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABN</td>
<td>Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature</td>
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<td>ACNR</td>
<td>Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda</td>
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<td>AEABR</td>
<td>Association des Eglise Baptistes au Rwanda</td>
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<td>CBOs</td>
<td>Community Based Organisations</td>
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<td>CITES</td>
<td>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species</td>
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<td>COARIMU</td>
<td>Cooperative des Agriculteurs du Riz de Musenyi</td>
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<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
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<td>DDP</td>
<td>District Development Plan</td>
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<td>DEC</td>
<td>District Environmental Committee</td>
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<td>EDPRS</td>
<td>Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy</td>
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<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
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<td>GoR</td>
<td>Government of Rwanda</td>
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<td>IBA</td>
<td>Important Bird and Biodiversity Area</td>
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<td>JADF</td>
<td>Joint Action Development Forum</td>
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<td>KABAMU</td>
<td>Cooperative Abatiganda Musenyi</td>
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<td>KOSUMU</td>
<td>Cooperative Sugira Musenyi</td>
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<td>KWS</td>
<td>Kenya Wildlife Service</td>
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<td>LCG</td>
<td>Local Conservation Group</td>
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<td>LWUA</td>
<td>Lutembe Wetland Users Association</td>
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<td>MINALOC</td>
<td>Ministry of Local Governance</td>
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<td>MMC</td>
<td>Mpungwe Mountain Chain</td>
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<td>MWETA</td>
<td>Mabamba Wetland Eco-Tourism Association</td>
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<td>NBSAP</td>
<td>National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan</td>
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<td>NEMA</td>
<td>National Environmental Management Authority</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NK</td>
<td>Nature Kenya</td>
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<td>NU</td>
<td>Nature Uganda</td>
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<td>PCDC</td>
<td>Plans Communaux de Développement Communautaire</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
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<td>RCA</td>
<td>Rwanda Cooperative Agency</td>
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<td>REMA</td>
<td>Rwanda Environment Management Authority</td>
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<td>SSG</td>
<td>Site Support Group</td>
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<td>UWA</td>
<td>Uganda Wildlife Authority</td>
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<td>UWEC</td>
<td>Uganda Wildlife Education Center</td>
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<td>WMD</td>
<td>Wetland Management Department</td>
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<td>YAWEV</td>
<td>Yala Wetland Environmental Volunteers</td>
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2. Introduction

Natural resources provide the basis of human livelihoods worldwide, through the goods and ecosystem services that they provide. People everywhere depend on biodiversity for food, fuel, shelter, medicine, water supply and for the cultural and religious significance of species and places. Despite that dependence, in many places the goods and services provided by ecosystems are in decline; often due to activities by the same people who rely on those goods and services, a situation documented in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). At global level, this deterioration shows few signs of abating or being reversed (see WWF, 2014. Living Planet Report 2014: Summary).

The consequences of loss of biodiversity for local communities, particularly those living in poverty, are especially urgent and severe. They often have few alternatives when resources become degraded, and they are already vulnerable to periodic events like drought, floods, disease, price fluctuations and other ‘shocks’ to their livelihoods, many of which are expected to be exacerbated by climate change.

Many of the places on which rural people depend for livelihood and wellbeing are also valued for their biodiversity, and governments have policies for their protection and management designed to conserve the species and habitats they contain. These policies are frequently in response to commitments made under international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, where signatories have committed to protect 17% of terrestrial land and inland waters by 2020 (Aichi Target 11); and the Ramsar Convention, where contracting parties have a vision “to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services”. Outside the protection of particular places, laws frequently prohibit or regulate the harvesting of
wildlife and other natural resources in the wider landscape. Such policies, both if adequately implemented, or if, as too often, being largely ignored, have potentially very significant positive or negative implications for local people who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. It is that dependence on natural resources that can also make local people effective partners in conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. There is a key need, therefore, to identify ways in which local people and government can work together to manage ecosystems and sustain their productivity in the face of increasing pressure from development, population growth and climate change.

2.2 Working with local communities and organisations

Benefits to conservation of working with local communities and organisations

For government agencies and NGOs concerned with conservation, there are many good practical reasons to involve local organisations and communities in conservation and decision-making.

Local knowledge. Local people often have an intimate knowledge of the local environment that can be critical in developing strategies for conservation or sustainable use.

Motivation. Many local people are directly dependent on a site for resources, or the services it provides, including provisioning, recreational, and cultural benefits. They have the most to lose if biodiversity is lost or a site is degraded. They are often highly motivated to help ensure that the site continues to produce a sustainable supply of the benefits that they enjoy or depend on.

Sustainability. Conservation is a long-term endeavour. Supporting the work of local organisations enhances the prospects that conservation activities will be sustainable, delivered by locally motivated and capacitated individuals. This is especially important to avoid ‘stop - start’ actions driven by the time-frames of project funding.

Efficiency. Conservation involves complex relations between different stakeholders, resource users and decision-makers. Local individuals and institutions understand how to work within this complexity.

Legitimacy and avoiding conflict. When decisions and actions are led by organisations rooted in the community this helps give social legitimacy to an intervention and may help to avoid conflict.

Empowerment. Working with local organisations recognises and respects people’s rights (i.e. rights to resources, to participation, and to have a voice). Institutional development at the local level can also empower and increase benefits to vulnerable groups such as youth and women.

Cost Effectiveness: Working locally does not need huge sums of money to make a big difference. Local people have proved that low levels of resources can have far reaching positive impacts for both conservation and their own livelihoods.
2.3 Public Participation Principle

From an ethical, rights based perspective, participation has been described as the keystone of good governance. According to the United Nations, the characteristics of good governance include that it is “participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law” (What is Good Governance? United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

Public participation is now a requirement of many regional and international conservation and development conventions.

Examples of the principle of participation in international environment and development law.

Principle 10: Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

**Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)**
Article 8(j): Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices; Programme of Work on Protected Areas, Programme Element 2: Governance, Participation, Equity and Benefit Sharing. Goal 2.2: To enhance and secure involvement of indigenous and local communities and relevant stakeholders. Target: Full and effective participation by 2008, of indigenous and local communities.

Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights.

Article 1, setting out the objective of the Convention, requires Parties to guarantee rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

5. Ramsar Convention

The conference of the contracting parties calls upon Contracting Parties to make specific efforts to encourage active and informed participation of local and indigenous people, at Ramsar listed sites and other wetlands and their catchments, and their direct involvement, through appropriate mechanisms, in wetland management. (Ramsar 1996).

Despite such commitments to international agreements, many governments have not yet translated them into concrete, appropriate policies and plans – especially at the local level. In such situations civil society organisations can play a crucial role by holding governments to account to ensure that relevant policies exist, are implemented, and reviewed if required, that plans are fit for purpose, and budgets are spent wisely. Also, by giving feedback and evidence of what works on the ground, local organisations can bring the needs and voices of the vulnerable to the attention of decision-makers, holding their elected authorities to account. This will help reduce reliance on outside actors such as NGOs and so support greater long-term sustainability.
Much of the attention on participation and ‘working locally’ has focused on national (and international) NGOs that enable local organisations and communities as partners in the delivery of an agenda of conservation and sustainable use. Far less attention has been given to the experiences of local communities attempting to influence the policies and plans of local and national government. Communities might strive to embed their self-identified objectives: e.g., for sustainable management of natural resources, restoration of degraded land, protection of sites and species against ‘outsiders’, technical support for management, processing and marketing – within the agenda of government (and through that process, in the agendas of international NGOs and donors). Yet communities have good reasons for doing so (and NGOs have good reason for supporting them to achieve this). These include:

- **Sustainable, long-term support.**
The support that many NGOs can offer to communities is often limited to a project time-frame – at most 3 years, and very often only 1 or 2 years. For many natural resource management projects this is far too short to deliver the sustained input needed to deliver change. Government plans and budgets can offer a longer-term commitment.

- **Increased budget, resources and technical expertise.**
Much conservation funding is provided through small grants, and NGOs often lack the full range of expertise needed for integrated resource and landscape management and development. If government is persuaded of the value of an intervention, it often has far greater resources (human, financial, infrastructure) to provide sustained support.

- **Scaling up.**
Many projects implemented by NGOs work at the level of individual communities (or even selected households within communities). Working directly with government and integrating actions into government policy and plans provides opportunity for scaling up of successful interventions.

- **Coordination with other government initiatives.**
Integrating community priorities into government policies and plans enhances the possibility for cross-sectoral coordination and synergies with the work of other government departments (e.g. across environment, health, water and energy).

- **International development assistance.**
Many donors provide development assistance to government for priorities included within approved government plans. Including needs that communities have identified at that level increases the chances of them being funded.
Policies on decentralisation of decision-making exist in many countries to support this two-way relationship of rights and responsibilities. The example of Rwanda in this collection of case studies demonstrates communities’ role in planning, decision-making and collective action (Umuganda). However, the opportunities and processes through which communities can influence government plans and policies are not always clear cut; communities may also face closed doors and reluctance of government at all levels (local to national) to listen to the voice of local communities. Finding a suitable entry point for influence, and following through to a decision and action by government is not straightforward for communities. Communities may have limited understanding of their rights and the (prolonged) legislative, bureaucratic processes; lack of relevant contacts; low levels of literacy; and inadequate knowledge and skills of political engagement.

2.5 Lessons learned

The case studies in this publication describe experiences, and lessons learned, from five communities at priority sites for biodiversity conservation that have attempted, with support from national NGOs, to engage government in delivery of activities or outputs identified in their Community Action Plans. In any discussion of this kind there will be issues around the legitimacy of those making their case, lobbying government, and ‘representing the community’. Support to local NGOs has been criticised for undermining local democratic processes (Ribot 2006). In these case studies, national BirdLife Partners have supported a diverse range of community-based organisations representing a variety of resource-user groups. They include cooperatives representing rice growers, fishermen and basket makers (in Rwanda); organisations formed by eco-tourism guides and others dependent on local tourism (in Uganda and Kenya); and women’s groups concerned at the impact of hillside degradation and seasonal fires on the sustainability of supplies of fuelwood and water (in Burundi). In none of these cases can the organisations be said to represent the entire community – in that sense they are not democratic. However, all were pre-existing before the BirdLife Partner entered the scene. In discussions with government they have made clear which people and issues they are representing and have not posed as ‘community representative’ organisations unless their lobbying is based on a wider exercise of community consultation.
With a surface area of 68,800 square kilometres, Lake Victoria is Africa’s largest lake and the largest tropical lake in the world. The swamps, forests and islands in and around Lake Victoria are important for a diversity of wildlife. There are 17 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) directly connected to the lake system within bordering countries (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), and more in the wider Lake Victoria Basin (including in Rwanda and Burundi). Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas are places of international significance for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity (BirdLife International). They are identified according to a set of internationally agreed criteria.
Invasive water hyacinth is among the main threats to biodiversity and natural resources in the Lake Victoria Basin (© ACNR).

The IBAs around Lake Victoria provide habitat to bird species listed in the IUCN Red List for classifying species at high risk of global extinction (IUCN) such as Shoe-bill *Balaeniceps rex* (Vulnerable), Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris* (Vulnerable), Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* (Vulnerable), Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri* (Near Threatened), as well as important congregations of water birds (such as 5,500 breeding pairs of Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* at Lutoboka Point in Uganda).

The lake and its resources are economically very important to the countries that border it (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania). For example, Lake Victoria supports Africa’s largest and the world’s most productive inland fishery, and its natural resources and the ecosystem services it provides support the livelihoods of millions of people. However, the Lake Victoria Basin is one of the most densely populated rural areas in the world, and high levels of poverty are a major hindrance to sustainable biodiversity management.

The lake, the lakeshore and the lake basin are regarded as engines of economic growth in countries where poverty alleviation and economic development are of the highest priority. As a result of these pressures the biodiversity and ecological integrity of IBAs around Lake Victoria are threatened by a number of factors, including:

1. **Pollution** – domestic waste and agricultural waste disposed directly into the lake, and catchment degradation affecting the water quality flowing through the IBAs into the lake.
2. **Invasive species** – especially the water hyacinth, which clogs water ways and obstructs lake and river banks.
3. **Habitat degradation** – especially through frequent burning, cutting down of riparian forests, and over-harvesting of Papyrus reeds.
4. **Exploitation** – especially through egg collection, disturbance of breeding colonies and hunting or poisoning for local consumption.
3.2 Addressing the challenges through IBA’s

The national BirdLife Partners in Kenya (NatureKenya), Uganda (NatureUganda), Rwanda (Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda, ACNR) and Burundi (Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature, ABN) are working to address these problems through active engagement at those Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) adjacent to the lake.

A key part of BirdLife’s strategy is to empower local organisations (Local Conservation Groups – LCGs) so that communities have the knowledge and information to: a) successfully integrate their development needs with sustainable environmental management; b) influence decision-makers at local, national, regional and international level; and c) have the technical support and investment to implement development initiatives which address pressing human needs whilst protecting the natural resources and biodiversity on which their livelihoods depend.

Funding from the Aage V. Jensen Foundation between 2013 and 2015 has helped to support and increase coordinated activities by BirdLife Partners around the shores of Lake Victoria. The project has involved the following components:

- **Participatory community development plans developed at six lake-shore IBAs.** These plans helped communities to understand patterns of resource use and environmental change, and to identify management and development priorities – those that they could implement themselves, and those where technical or financial support from local or national government, or development agencies (national or international NGOs) would be needed.

- **Capacity built within grassroots civil society organisations at each IBA,** strengthening community-based organisations’s ability to manage the resources on which their communities depend, and to advocate more effectively to decision-makers.

- **Local organisations networked nationally and regionally,** to help increase grassroots influence over policy makers whose decisions affect them and the resources on which they depend, and to facilitate effective transfer of experience and good practice from one community to another.

- **Regional and international forums informed of the importance of environmental services provided by IBAs in the Lake Victoria Basin** to the livelihoods and wellbeing of local people, and the threats they face. On behalf of local communities, BirdLife lobbied and built relationships with key decision-making forums, including the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) of the East African Community (EAC), the Ramsar Convention, the Nile Basin Initiative and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The project was aligned with the Vision and Strategy Framework for Management and Development of the Lake Victoria Basin (East African Community, 2004) and the Poverty Reduction Strategies of the five countries, which stress the importance of healthy ecosystems, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth.
BirdLife is a global network of national civil society organisations, present in 119 countries worldwide, that is working for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Through a participatory process led at national level, the BirdLife Partnership has identified over 12,000 sites of highest priority for bird and biodiversity conservation.

Working with local communities and other stakeholders, BirdLife is mobilising and empowering a global network of ‘Local Conservation Groups’, also commonly referred to as ‘Site Support Groups’ (SSGs) by Birdlife Partners in Africa. These are organisations and individuals that are rooted locally, working for the conservation and sustainable management of their local Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs).

The purpose of BirdLife’s approach

- Support local communities in the conservation and sustainable use of their biodiversity and natural resources, helping them to achieve their own objectives for environmental management;
- Empower and build capacity of local communities, so that they are able to manage sites and their resources more effectively, and influence decisions affecting their local environment;
- Build a global constituency of local stakeholders that is working for the conservation of globally important biodiversity;
- Network with local people, nationally, regionally and globally, for effective sharing of experience and lesson learning;
- Integrate conservation with wellbeing, poverty reduction and the livelihoods of local people.
The structures, governance, membership, and specific objectives and activities of Local Conservation Groups are diverse and vary depending on the local context. There are however a number of important characteristics of BirdLife's approach:

**Principles:** Through its work with local organisations, BirdLife aims to reflect the Partnership’s values and principles as a network of open, democratic, membership-based organisations.

**Long-term engagement:** Relationships are entered into with the intention of them being long-term associations, not something which is linked to a project time-frame. This reflects the long-term commitment of BirdLife Partners to the sites that the Partnership has identified as conservation priorities, and to the communities that use, depend on and appreciate them.

**Networks:** The experience of BirdLife shows the value of linking people and institutions across scales and geography, to share resources and experience, and bring local voices to the attention of national and international decision-makers. Local Conservation Groups form part of this networking approach, connecting local people nationally, as well as to institutions at national, regional and international level.
3.3 Project Focus

In its simplest form, this project had the following strategy:

1. **Strengthen capacity** and governance of community-based organisations (Local Conservation Groups)

2. **Participatory analysis** of environment and natural resource change, use, management and control

3. **Participatory planning** to identify needs and opportunities for sustainable development and increased community resilience based on management of natural resources

4. **Communications and advocacy to decision-makers** in local, national and regional government, to gain support and resources to implement community priorities

BirdLife Partners had been working with communities at the six sites included in this initiative for several years, and with support for a range of activities from different donors. However, the project described here permitted focused attention, over a three-year period (January 2013 to December 2015) on the strategy described in the above diagram. In December 2015 the Partners came together in Kigali, Rwanda, to review and share their experiences, focusing especially on the final stage—how local organisations and the communities in which they are based were able, with the support of the national BirdLife Partner, to influence local and national government.
Participants explored the appropriateness and effectiveness of decentralisation policies and other mechanisms providing an entry point for local communities; the extent to which government was receptive to the knowledge and experiences of local communities when making decisions; the relationships between local organisations and their wider community; and the role of local organisation membership of national and regional networks in achieving their objectives.

Participants addressed some of the questions which arise in the context of local civil society organisations as advocates of policy change, such as: What are the opportunities? What are some of the strategies that they can employ? What has been their role in natural resources policy? Are they active and effective only at the local level, or do they have a role in national policy making? And what are some of the constraints and limitations that they face?

This publication presents five case studies produced and presented at that workshop, and provides the lessons learned and recommendations that emerged from the discussion that followed.
3.4 Project partners

**Nature Kenya**

Nature Kenya (NK) is a membership-based Civil Society Organisation that was established in 1909 as the East Africa Natural History Society. Today its mission is connecting nature and people for a sustainable future. The organisation strives to advocate for protection of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), encourage community participation in conservation through promotion of sustainable benefits and incentives through nature-based enterprises such as beekeeping, butterfly farming, ecotourism, bird guiding, tree seedlings for business and forest restoration, and energy saving technologies such as solar cookers. Nature Kenya promotes the conservation of key species, sites, and habitats by empowering local conservation groups through the Site-Support Group approach that recognizes communities’ crucial role in conservation. Every year, Nature Kenya in partnership with the National Museums of Kenya, monitors and reports on the state, pressure and conservation response at IBAs, based on routine monitoring. The findings are published as Kenya’s Important Bird Areas, Status and Trends.

**Nature Uganda**

NatureUganda (NU) is part of the East Africa Natural History Society (EANHS), established as a membership-based Civil Society Organisation in 1909. Nature Uganda’s overall goal is contributing to biodiversity conservation, sustainable natural resource management and community wellbeing. NU’s mission is to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of nature, enhance knowledge of Uganda’s natural history, create a nature-friendly public, advocate for policies favorable to the environment and take action to conserve priority species, sites and habitats. The organisation’s work is centered on scientific research that benefits biodiversity and communities and empowerment of Local Conservation Groups, through training, awareness raising and engagement in conservation management at their respective sites.

**Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature (ABN)**

ABN was founded in 1999. The organisation’s main objective is to protect and conserve birds in Burundi, through creating awareness, encouraging research on and study of birds, and contributing to the rehabilitation and conservation of national bird reserves for the benefit of people and the natural environment. ABN’s main activities include support to ornithological research and monitoring, protecting threatened IBAs and bird species, public education and raising awareness on conservation issues.
Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR)

ACNR is a national non-governmental organisation, founded in 1992, that is dedicated to the promotion of biodiversity conservation through participatory and sustainable management of natural resources in Rwanda. Its interventions focus on developing and implementing programmes, strategies and projects to ensure that ecosystems, especially Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are conserved and protected, to integrate their health and integrity into local livelihood improvement efforts. The organisation undertakes research to improve scientific knowledge and understand biodiversity and ecosystems functioning, develops and implements an environmental education and public awareness program, and actively contributes to the enhancement of national policies and laws on environmental issues in Rwanda. Moreover, ACNR is at the forefront of efforts to identify and understand climate change impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation responses. It strengthens local communities’ capacity to cope with the effects of climate change on different economic sectors and human activities.
Summary

Mpungwe Mountains Chain (MMC) provides important ecosystem services to local communities and the nation, such as water catchment, soil protection; and goods such as firewood, honey, medicinal herbs and construction materials such as stones, pebbles, sand and wood. Currently, however, MMC is facing environmental problems due to bush fires and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. This affects the livelihood of the Ruyigi community. In 2014, with assistance from Association Burundaise pour la protection de la Nature (ABN), local communities living adjacent to Mpungwe Mountain decided to take part in reviewing a Ruyigi communal development plan so that they could raise the issue of considering Mpungwe Mountain Chain a protected area in Burundi. Their proposal was successful considered.

4.1.1. Introduction

Burundi is a landlocked country in central Africa bordered by Rwanda to the north, Tanzania to the east, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the West. It has a population of around 10 million. Being a small country (27,830 km²) this creates a high population density resulting in severe pressure on the environment, endangering biodiversity. There is therefore an urgent need to manage areas to protect biodiversity, whilst also meeting the livelihoods needs of local people – through the sustainable provision of ecosystem services.

The Mpungwe Mountains Chain (MMC) is located in eastern Burundi in the provinces of Ruyigi, Cankuzo and Rutana. Following pleas from local communities and other conservation stakeholders concerned at the area’s degradation, Mpungwe Mountains was added to the national list of protected areas. However, management of protected areas is often poor in Burundi and there is therefore a need and role for local communities to assist in the protection and preservation of the environment for the benefit of people and nature.
Context

MMC is located in eastern Burundi approximately 170 km from the capital. It is located in Ruyigi province (the communities of Nyabitsinda and Butaganzwa Gisuru) and extends into Rutana Province (the town of Musongati) and Cankuzo Province (Cendajuru community). MMC covers an area of 320 km² of which 80 km² falls within the jurisdiction of the town of Ruyigi.

The Mpungwe Mountains experience an average annual rainfall of 1,600 mm. The mountains are rocky in places and are covered by a shrub savanna inhabited by small mammals such as hares, and common birds such as the Speckled Mousebird (*Colius striatus*) and Handsome francolin (*Pternistis nobilis*), which are hunted by poor people in the surrounding population, who lack other protein sources.

MMC, however, connects with Ruvubu National Park, which is very rich in biodiversity and the most Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) of Burundi. MMC is surrounded by an agricultural population estimated to total approximately 150,000 people. The area is characterized by high levels of poverty and rapid population growth. The political crisis experienced in Burundi since 1993 has resulted in an economic crisis that has greatly affected the environment, since the population is highly dependent on the ecosystem services that the MMC provides. As a result of this crisis, the local people started to exploit the biodiversity of MMC in an uncontrolled way. MMC suffers from serious environmental problems, including deforestation, bush fires, erosion and effects of climate change.

The management responsibility for MMC falls under the Ministry of Water, Environment, Land Management and Urban Planning. Its preservation and sustainable management is among the priorities of Burundi as captured in the NAPA (National Plan of Action for Adaptation to Climate Change) and the NBSAP (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan).

The population of the Ruyigi community is represented by Serukubeze, meaning “The Ability To Do”. Serukubeze is a Site Support Group (SSG), established in 2010 with a mission to protect the environment and more specifically the biodiversity of MMC. The SSG realized that the degradation of MMC was threatening their livelihood and that the effects of this degradation were already being felt.

Serukubeze is a group of 29 members, of which 25 are women and 4 are men. The majority are aged in their thirties while only 3 (one man and two women) are in their twenties and have just completed high school. All members are very active and committed to protecting MMC, which explains the name they chose for their organisation.

As the SSG is still young, it has no financial resources of its own apart from its membership contributions. Thus, it is dependent on grant support from different organisations such as SOPRAD –the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ruyigi; GIZ (German Agency for International Development); and the Burundian Association for the Protection of Nature (ABN), especially for tree planting in the mountain chain. Through these organisations, the SSG not only benefits from financial support but also from participation in meetings, reviewing of local and national documents, and attending capacity building workshops. One such initiative is
the implementation of two projects led by BirdLife International: the “Ecosystem Based Adaptation to Climate Change in East Africa” project, funded by the UK Government’s Darwin Initiative; and the “Conservation of the birds and biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin through community-led action and sustainable development” project, funded by the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation from Denmark.

4.1.2. Participatory planning for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

With assistance from ABN (the BirdLife Partner in Burundi), the SSG developed its own action plan that would guide them towards conservation of Mpungwe Mountains. As a first step, a participatory vulnerability assessment was conducted, to analyze and exchange information on all the environmental problems which the community faces. The aim of the plan is to conserve and sustainably manage MMC, to improve the wellbeing of the local community through its natural resources and reduce their vulnerability to climate change.

“Serukubeze is a Site Support Group (SSG), established in 2010 with a mission to protect the environment and more specifically the biodiversity of MMC.”

Local community members and ABN staff conducting participatory planning and mapping of natural resources (© BirdLife).
The main threats identified during the planning process were frequent bush fires caused by agro-pastoralists, climate change, unsustainable and uncontrolled collection of natural resources such as building stones from the MMC and agricultural encroachment. The overall objective identified in the plan is protection of MMC in general while specific objectives include:

1. Eradication of bushfires on 80 Km² (in Ruyigi commune)
2. Regulation of the extraction of construction materials (sustainable exploitation)
3. Regulation of agro-pastoral activities in the mountain chain
4. Reforestation and protection of the mountain chain and its watersheds by the SSG on an area of 80 Km²
5. Diversification of local livelihoods.

When the project began MMC had no formal protection – it wasn’t listed among the protected areas of Burundi and use of the mountains and their resources was completely uncontrolled – resulting in the degradation (and impact on local livelihoods) described above. Therefore the SSG, with support from ABN, agreed to participate in decision making and planning sessions during the development of the Community Development Plans (Plans Communaux de Développement Communautaire (PCDC)) as a first step to achieve any conservation action.

4.1.3. Local communities influencing policy in the field of environmental protection
Influencing policy at the local level is a good strategy for communities to have their concerns and issues taken into consideration. Within the Ruyigi community, the SSG was able to influence decision-makers to take conservation into consideration, which is a great achievement on their part. Because communities are often not consulted before decisions are made, policy makers frequently make decisions which may not be in line with the will of the community.

Some of the members of local decision making bodies (municipal councils) are selected by the local community through voting; these elected council members may also be members of the SSG. The councils take decisions on all areas of life of the community. When the municipal council meetings were attended by SSG members, the decisions that came out of the meeting took into consideration the opinions and proposals of the SSG and community. This provided an opportunity for civil society to influence decision-makers and to be a partner in consultations on development and environmental protection.

The Ruyigi local administration reviews and develops the Community Development Plan (PCDC) every 5 years, and this provides an entry point and access to decision-makers for the local community. The SSG, together with other conservation groups, takes part in this process and raises concerns regarding the ecosystem and their livelihoods.

The fact that some of the SSG members became part of the Ruyigi local council was an excellent opportunity for them, on behalf of their community, to influence the decisions of the municipal council, and define the vision of the PCDC. It was at the various local council meetings that they presented their message of including MMC as a protected site in Burundi.

“Because communities are often not consulted before decisions are made, policy makers frequently make decisions which may not be in line with the will of the community.
The process of influencing decision makers during PCDC development

“When we started the awareness programme, livestock herders and some farmers at Mpungwe Mountain Chain were opposed to the idea of conservation of the mountain chain. For them, the conservation of the hills means expropriation and denial of grazing area in Ruyigi Commune. During awareness sessions supported by the administration we explained to them that all of us including their families depend on the Mpungwe Mountains for ecosystem services such as domestic water, irrigation water, firewood. Despite the mountains being very rocky, cultivation has been going on which has resulted in accelerated erosion and flooding in our farms located in the swamps.

Currently, we find that they understand the importance of conserving MMC and some have abandoned their fields on the mountain, others no longer burn the fields for grazing. However, our success is limited as there are persons located in neighbouring municipalities such as Butaganzwa, Bweru, Kinyinya and Gisuru who have not been reached with the awareness programme and thus continue to threaten the mountain chain”.

Sibomana Consolate: Member of Serukubeze association.

4.1.4. Key lessons on local communities influencing decision makers

Success factors:

1. Empower women to participate. Serukubeze has a majority of women as its members, and women are usually the first victims of any environmental disaster. Thus they understand better than others the importance of conservation and they are powerful advocates for sustainable land management.

2. Engage individuals in positions of influence. Some members of the SSG are part of the municipal council who are involved in planning development activities; through their advocacy, the council supports actions aimed at protecting and safeguarding the environment. Also among the members of the SSG is a primary school teacher who plays an important role in environmental education of youth in schools. Such individuals can help the community gain access to the decision-making process.
Build management and advocacy capacity of local institutions. ABN has continued to support Serukubeze, especially in strengthening their capacity for management, conservation and environmental protection. ABN has organized training in fundraising and advocacy for members of the SSG. This capacity has been important in giving the SSG members the confidence to engage in the national planning process.

Ensure local involvement. The involvement of local people in decision making is important for the success of activities whether organized by local government, NGOs, CBOs or other partners. It helps to ensure ownership and understanding of the decisions made, which increases the probability that conservation and management measures will be supported by the community.

Integrate local knowledge. The local community has important local and traditional knowledge that when combined with scientific knowledge can help to find sustainable solutions to environmental problems.

Work as a team. Working as a team and collaborating with other stakeholders with complementary skills and networks was key to achieving conservation impacts.

Challenges:

Lack of support on the part of the local administration. It is this political factor that can cause locally-led actions to fail. Administrative institutions often don’t support initiatives that come from local groups because there may be influential political factors—when something is proposed that is not part of the policy or program of the ruling party, individuals may be unwilling to publicly back it. Where local government is concerned, ABN always takes this reticence into account when planning its activities, and aims to engage local authorities, and other stakeholders, early on in any initiative, for example through invitations to meetings and participation in exchange visits, to build awareness, ownership and support.
4.2 Local communities getting their agenda supported by the government: how the empowered community in Mabamba, Uganda, took action to protect their birds

By Dianah Nalwanga
Nature Uganda

Summary
Communities with good information on policies and legislation and with support from NGOs can use their local knowledge about threats to biodiversity to help government authorities fulfil their legal commitments concerning biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. To achieve this, communities need to understand the law very well and have the right connections to decision-makers and state agencies. Mabamba Bay is a Ramsar site and Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) rich in biodiversity, including globally threatened species. It has a range of natural resources on which the surrounding community depends for their livelihoods. But being outside the formal protected area network, this site has no legal protection from the Uganda Wildlife Authority, which protects wildlife in the country. The only protection it has is under the International Ramsar Convention. The natural resources of the site are thus to a large extent the hands of the surrounding community. The community obtains its mandate under the Ramsar Convention as being the stewards for the conservation of biodiversity at the site, as guided by the Wetland Management Policy of the Ministry of Water and the Environment in Uganda. The experience described in this case study shows that once the community is fully aware of the ecosystem values of their wetland they will be committed to put effort into supporting the enforcement of policies to protect these important resources.

In 2013 and 2014, the community was able to stop bird trafficking cases in Mabamba Bay. This was made possible because the community was aware of the policies governing the use of wetland resources. The two cases, described below, one on preventing bird trafficking and the other on supporting the Uganda police to arrest a person selling a Shoebill stork (*Balaeniceps rex*), were all handled by the community, with support from Nature Uganda (NU) and the relevant government bodies. These case studies demonstrate the power of unity and having well-established links with relevant authorities, as one way of empowering communities to achieve the enforcement of policies governing the conservation and sustainable use of their natural resources.

4.2.1. Introduction

Mabamba Bay Wetland System is an extensive marsh of over 17,000 ha situated west of Entebbe International Airport along the Lake Victoria shores in the south of central Uganda. It is located 36 km south west of Kampala at an altitude of 1,150 m above sea level. It stretches through a long narrow bay fringed with papyrus, opening into the northern side of the main body of Lake Victoria. It is situated in Wakiso District in the sub-counties of Kasanje, Kamengo and Mpigi. The landscape and catchment have remnants of forest and grassland,
and the Bay sometimes contains drifting papyrus islands. The wetland system is home to over 300 bird species, the endangered Sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekii*) (an antelope species) and supports a lucrative fisheries industry, thus providing a source of fish for home consumption and commercial use. It is also a source of raw material for local crafts, building materials, water for domestic and livestock use, as well as non-wood products such as medicinal plants, mushrooms etc. Its proximity to the business district of Kampala, the capital of Uganda, presents it with big opportunities and high potential for eco-tourism development. The number of tourists visiting the site seems to be increasing, but this requires proper records to assess the trends.

The community and its environment

The Mabamba community residing at the site spearheads the conservation of Mabamba Bay. They are organized into a Site Support Group (SSG), which aims to conserve and sustainably utilize the natural resources at the site. The SSG in Mabamba is called the Mabamba Wetland Eco-Tourism Association (MWETA). This is an umbrella group composed of three Community Based Organisations (CBOs) operating at Mabamba Bay. These are: the Mabamba Bird Guides and Conservation Association (MBGCA); Mabamba Wetland Crafts Association (MAWECA) and Zziba Wetland Management Association (ZIWEMA).

MWETA’s aim is to conserve the biodiversity of Mabamba Bay through enhanced sustainable income generation, raised community awareness and improved biodiversity monitoring. The group currently consists of 30 active members and is involved in a wide range of conservation activities including tourism, crafts, transport facilities, education and awareness plus habitat protection. These 30 members are the community members who went through the process of developing their Community Action Plan. The group is run by its members on a volunteer basis, and is registered with the District Local Government since 2008. The operations and daily running of the Association’s activities are governed by an elected executive committee, which is guided by MWETA’s constitution, and advised by a Joint Technical Advisory Committee (with External Advisers from Nature Uganda (NU), the District and Ministry of Water and Environment). Five sub-committees lead on activities relating to subsistence farming; water and sanitation; fishing; investment; and tourism, mining and crafts.

An organisational assessment conducted by NU three years ago showed that the
community group has all the required structures in place but requires training to boost their knowledge of some issues. Now, thanks to the project “Empowering local communities for the conservation and sustainable development of the birds and biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin, the Greatest of Africa’s ‘Great Lakes’”, which has improved the organisation and efficiency of the group, there are ample opportunities to achieve greater benefits for its members.

MWETA mobilizes and lobbies for resources and support from NGOs, donors, government or any other well-wishers. The local communities in the area through the SSG have taken great strides to promote income generation from tourism, soap making, production and selling of crafts, boat rides and associated activities.

Mabamba Bay faces many threats: the dry season incursion into the swamp by fishermen, some of whom build huts in the swamp and stay there, even keeping animals such as pigs in the interior of the swamp, needs to be addressed, as should the illegal hunting of the Sitatunga by local people. Another major conservation issue affecting the site is the proliferation of the Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crasipes*), an alien invasive species. Studies show that native water plants and invertebrates are adversely affected by this weed, which covers the water surface. This may in turn have an impact on birds and other biodiversity in the system. The proliferation of flower farms along the shores of Lake Victoria and the use of agrochemicals is likely to have an impact on the ecology of Mabamba Bay and its associated wetlands and waters.

The SSG has been working with a number of stakeholders in conducting conservation education and awareness activities around Mabamba Bay. One of the major wildlife education centres in Uganda, the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) in Entebbe, is within 20 kilometres of Mabamba and has been supporting MWETA. Nature Uganda, Environmental Alert, Nature Palace and other NGOs have put significant efforts into promoting awareness of conservation as well as promoting alternative income generating activities within the community. The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), mandated to protect the wildlife in the country, also supports the community on issues regarding the protection of threatened bird species and the Sitatunga, all protected under CITES.

### 4.2.2. Participatory planning for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources

A Community Action Plan is a statement of a community’s vision, values and intentions in relation to use and management of their natural capital. The planning exercise, which started in November 2013, involved natural resource assessments through the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools. Information collected ranged from seasonal climatic variability, resource access and control as well as the livelihood hazards exposure.
The PRA exercises, which culminated in a Community Action Plan for the site, will also be used to inform the review of a district wetland management plan under Uganda’s Ministry of Water and Environment. The exercise enabled the community to understand their status and current dependence on natural resources, and also encouraged and provided a framework for better use and management of natural resources.

**The Process**

To initiate the PRA process, a visit to the site was made followed by a meeting with community leaders. This meeting provided a basis for what to expect, a rough idea of livelihood activities at the site, and the governance status for the site. This laid a background for the site action planning workshops. As the next step, workshops were organized to conduct the action planning process for the site, which included the PRA exercises using tools and guidance provided by the BirdLife Africa Secretariat. This resulted in the formulation of the Community Action Plan.

**Methods**

Several community meetings were held to facilitate the development of the Community Action Plan. These meetings were coordinated under the umbrella body MWETA. Care was taken to ensure that all members of the group, including men and women, youths and old people all participated equally. This was achieved by using targeted grouping of these different categories of members so as to maximize the results from the group. The Wakiso district leaders and the Local Government representatives were also among the participants in these meetings, as they had to advise on the relevant wetland policies and governance and eligibility of the community decisions.

![Participatory Rural Appraisal is an effective tool in community natural resource planning (© NU).](image)
In addition to and around these meetings, the following PRA tools were used:

1. Resource mapping tool
2. Resource access and control analysis tool
3. Stakeholder mapping
4. Stakeholder analysis
5. Community assessment tool
6. Hazard mapping tool
7. Seasonal calendar tool
8. Livelihood vulnerability analysis

This exercise showed that the most vulnerable livelihood resources in the community are the birds, the Sitatunga, the swamp and the forest. Given this vulnerability (including the effects of climate change), adaptation measures should be sought for the management and conservation of these resources and the other ecosystem services provided by the wetland system. Generally the habitat in Mabamba Bay area remains in a fair state as assessed by the community members.

Opportunities
Due to its proximity to Kampala, Mabamba Bay is fairly accessible for regular monitoring by community members, conservation NGOs such as NU and government authorities. The good working relationship between NU, the community and the government created an opportunity for sharing information and experiences, and the immediate raising of issues and challenges faced by the community to the relevant policy makers. The site was flagged as one of the best birding destinations in the country in 2014.

This raised interest by the mandated Uganda Wildlife Authority in protecting Mabamba through working with local community partners at the site.

Threats
Being near the city centre, the site faces the threat of being readily accessible to people involved in wildlife trafficking—especially birds—and exploitation of fishery resources. Other threats to Mabamba Bay’s biodiversity includes dry season incursion by fishermen; illegal hunting of Sitatunga; invasive plants such as the Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), flower farms along the shores of Lake Victoria and their use of agrochemicals.
The objectives of MWETA are:
1. To create more awareness about conservation of the natural resources of Mabamba Bay
2. To promote more capacity building within the community
3. To promote sustainable utilization of wetland resources in improving community livelihoods
4. To promote MWETA as the leading community tourism group in Uganda

MWETA plays a very big role in influencing the management of natural resources in the wetland. The site has gained popularity for eco-tourism, especially due to a) the presence of the rare Shoebill in the area, as well as other interesting birds endemic to the papyrus swamp habitat, such as Papyrus Gonolek (Laniarius mufumbiri) and Papyrus Canary (Serinus koliensis), and b) the fact that it is just a few kilometres from the capital Kampala.

Mabamba’s declaration as one of the major tourist destinations in Uganda did not only lead to many tourists streaming to the site, but also wildlife traffickers coming to trap and export birds (to zoos or private collectors). In addition, many fishermen from other landing sites come to exploit the fisheries resources of Mabamba Bay. The community, realising the value of their resources, embarked on a mission to protect them.

With assistance from NU, they approached the district government to seek guidance on the guidelines for handling poachers and illegal fishermen. The district assigned some officers to monitor the wetland, especially the fisheries, but the issue of bird trafficking was not well addressed. The community thus contacted NU on the issue of bird trafficking and they were advised to contact UWA and UWEC who are mandated to protect wildlife in the country.

Even though Mabamba was recently declared one of the best birding tourism sites in the country, it is not a state protected area. However, the national wetland policy, which puts all wetlands under the government ownership, and the Ramsar site policy, which protects all wetland of international importance, both provide a degree of protection. With the limited presence of government wildlife officers, it is the role of the community to enforce these policies as the stewards for the conservation of such sites.
Stopping the bird traffickers

When a wildlife trafficker approached the heads of the Mabamba community, they asked him why he wanted birds from the site. He told them that he had a permit from UWA granting him permission to trap birds anywhere in Uganda. He produced his permit and it was valid. But it did not set clear boundaries or guidelines on where he was allowed to hunt and where not to hunt. The community members told the trafficker that he is not supposed to catch birds in Mabamba Bay because it is internationally protected as a Ramsar site. The community was able to take this action because it had been made aware of the activities legally permitted in a Ramsar site. They were motivated because they value their birds as a resource for tourism income.

The community members subsequently informed NU of the incident, asking for advice, and were advised to stick to their right to protect their resources. They were also advised if this person resists, they should call UWA for guidance, because UWA recognises the community as the one that supports them in protecting this important site. The tricky part in this case was that the trafficker asked to be shown the boundary of the Ramsar site and the community members were not very sure about the exact boundary; however, they were clever enough to tell him that birds don’t have borders. The trader failed to convince the community members. Some days later, the same trader came back, but he met the same resistance; he left and has not returned.

In another example, community members helped rescue a Shoebill from wildlife traffickers. In March 2015, Mabamba community members, with the help of UWA and police, arrested a man for trading a Shoebill. Local communities can play a big role in combatting illegal wildlife trafficking of the Shoebill (© Frank Wouters).

The community member told the dealers that he had contacts of people who might buy a Shoebill, and would get in touch. He then discussed with other community members how to get the dealers arrested, because they knew that what the dealers were doing was not right. The community members, through MWETA, have been empowered to take the right action in such cases. They report to the responsible authorities, who help them in these cases. So they contacted Nature Uganda, and NU in turn alerted the UWA and the UWEC who are the legal bodies responsible for the protection of wildlife in the country. They came up with a plan to get the dealers to the rightful authority, the Kamengo police. The Executive Director of NU, posing as the buyer, called the dealers and agreed on the price, UGX 2 Million, about USD 597. They then agreed to meet in Kamengo to complete the deal. On the agreed day, MWETA members together...
with the UWA team from Kampala proceeded to the Kamengo police station where they got support from three police officers. The team went to meet the dealers, with one of the UWA staff masquerading as the buyer. The Shoebill had been tied to a banana plant with a banana fibre. As the ‘buyer’ (UWA officer) was counting out the agreed price, the police came in and arrested the dealer.

The community in Mabamba has been spreading awareness on the value of the Shoebill, and all birds and other biodiversity at their site, and most members are aware of this. The intruders were easily identified as intruders because they came looking for a buyer in this community where everyone was aware of the value of this Shoebill.

“The community members told the trafficker that he is not supposed to catch birds in Mabamba Bay because it is internationally protected as a Ramsar site. The community was able to take this action because it had been made aware of the activities legally permitted in a Ramsar site.”

4.2.4. Community conservation at Mabamba – factors for success or failure

**Strengths**

- Nature Uganda (NU) through BirdLife International’s Local Engagement and Empowerment Programme, works with MWETA, as SSG at Mabamba Bay landing site, to promote conservation through community involvement.
- The community group is legally registered and well known by the district and the wildlife management authorities.
- Conservation of bird species is not only critical for biodiversity but also for enhancing the livelihoods of local communities through eco-tourism.
- NU and the community have a good working relationship with the UWA and the UWEC.
- The community members are aware of their rights to protect their resources as the legal guardians for the site under the Ramsar guidelines.
- All member of this particular community are aware of the value of the Shoebill and other birds to their livelihoods and they advocate for their protection.
- The community members are knowledgeable about the Do’s and Don’ts (regulations) of the Ramsar site.
Weaknesses

- The awareness campaigns have focused on this one landing site and the other landing sites in the landscape are not yet informed of the value of biodiversity.
- The community members were not aware of the exact boundaries of this Ramsar site.
- The body that issues permits to trap birds did not stipulate that the permit is not valid for Ramsar sites.
- The Shoebill is not fully protected, since permits for trapping it may be issued.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- Empower the communities to take action independently or with little support required from NGOs and government agencies. As long as they know the guidelines and are respected as the custodians of the site, this will be possible.
- Ensure that the communities are recognized and well known by policy makers as the stewards for their sites. In that way, they will get the relevant support and enforcement when required.
- One in-situ community that is empowered is more effective than many ex-situ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or government bodies that are located far from the site.
- Always maintain a good working relationship between the community, the NGOs and the government. This way you build trust and issues are handled effectively.
- Encourage the government to facilitate local community involvement in policy discussions so that communities are aware of these policies and can influence them to become relevant and deliverable.
- Encourage communities and related supporters to spread awareness on environmental issues and other community issues to the whole affected landscape – working with individual communities may have limited impact in landscapes and at large sites.
- With the right level of support, connections and trust of regulatory authorities, communities can act as crime preventers at their site. Community organisations should not always rely on the support of law enforcement agencies, especially if the agencies’ own capacity and resources are limited.
- Conservation of bird species is not only critical for biodiversity but also for enhancing the livelihoods of local communities through eco-tourism.
4.3 Can a community stop encroachment on Lutembe Bay Ramsar site?

By Dianah Nalwanga
Nature Uganda

Summary
Lutembe Bay on the shore of Lake Victoria, is a Ramsar site and Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), with sensitive biodiversity and a range of natural resources on which the community depend for their livelihoods. As with Mabamba Bay (see previous case study), Lutembe Bay is not part of the State protected area network, and so its only protection is through its designation as a Ramsar Site. Protection of the site is thus in the hands of the community that live there. The community at Lutembe obtains its mandate to be the stewards for the conservation of biodiversity in this site under the Ramsar Convention. This is guided by Uganda’s National Wetland Management policy under the Ministry of Water and the Environment.

The community has its own vision and objectives for the management of this site, which may not be an explicit part of existing government policies. In such cases, the community has to influence the policies to fit their needs. In other cases, the policies are in line with the community needs, but the communities need support from the state agencies to implement and/or enforce these policies. This case study highlights some of the processes through which the community at Lutembe has been influencing the policies governing their site. It also shows how local communities can be involved in conservation of key sites and safeguarding of their natural resources. It brings examples of how political influence can interfere with the process of community engagement and empowerment and what lessons are learnt from such situations.

4.1.1. Introduction

Lutembe bay is 25 Km south of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. The bay, at the mouth of Lake Victoria’s Murchison Bay, is a secluded backwater between Kampala and Entebbe.

Lutembe bay and the surrounding highly populated areas have been strongly affected by commercial and industrial development, urban wastewater and conversion to agricultural land. The bay is the nearest site to Entebbe International Airport where one has a good chance of seeing congregations of migratory birds on their wintering grounds along the migratory pathways. It is recognized as one of the major tourist attractions in the country. Despite this recognition, the site has no formal protection and its management and protection is in the hands of local community members who are its custodians.
The Community

Lutembe community members are organized into the Lutembe Wetland Users Association (LWUA). The wetland adjacent community members who use the wetland and its surroundings for their livelihood came together to jointly undertake tourism and economic and social development activities. LWUA is a non-political, non-religious, non-partisan group, willing to cooperate with other development partners.

LWUA is an umbrella SSG comprised of two CBOs operating in the Lutembe area. These are “Black Heron Eco-Tourism Association” (BHETA), a tourism and conservation group with 21 members (13 men and 8 women); and “Microenterprise Development Agency Africa Cooperative” (MACO-OP), a sustainable financing support group with 195 members (112 men and 83 women).

LWUA is run by its members as volunteers, and has recently been registered with the District Local Government. The operations and daily running of the Association’s activities are governed by an elected executive committee, which is guided by the LWUA constitution. These are the community members who went through the process of developing their Community Action Plan.

The aim of the LWUA is to promote tourism, nature conservation and poverty reduction among the communities deriving livelihoods from Lutembe. The Association seeks to guard against illegal activities in Lutembe wetland such as wetland encroachment for settlements, businesses and agriculture, as well as over-harvesting of fish and other wetland resources. The Association mobilizes and lobbies for resources and support from NGOs, donors, government or any other interested parties. Its other sources of funding include the annual subscription fees from the members and income from activities such as sales of crafts and publications.

Since LWUA is a registered entity, it is allowed to conduct public awareness campaigns towards protection of Lutembe wetland. This SSG, however, needs empowerment so as to be equipped with the required skills to defend the wetland from destruction and degradation. The best empowerment that can be given is through training as identified during organisational capacity assessment conducted with the community.

“LWUA is a non-political, non-religious, non-partisan group, willing to cooperate with other development partners.
4.3.2. Participatory planning for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources

A number of NGOs have been conducting conservation awareness and education activities around Lutembe Bay. This includes CSOs like Nature Uganda (NU) as well as government departments such as the Uganda Wildlife Education Center (UWEC) and Wetland Management Department (WMD) who trained part of the community in tree planting and wetland edge gardening. The process of developing a Lutembe Wetland Management Plan for the site was spearheaded by the WMD with the full participation of the local community. The process, however, has not yet been completed. As a contribution to this management plan, a Community Action Plan for LWUA was developed by the Lutembe community, with the aim to incorporate it into the bigger Lutembe Wetland Management Plan. A Community Action Plan is a statement of the community’s vision, values and intentions in relation to use and management of their natural capital. The process, which started in November 2013, involved natural resource assessments through the use of PRA tools. Information collected ranged from seasonal climatic variability, resource access and control as well as the livelihood hazards exposure. To inform the development of the Community Action Plan, a resource planning activity was conducted by the community members, facilitated by NU.

The Process

The Community Action Plan was developed by a participatory process which helped the community to formulate their objectives and vision for the site. The Wakiso district leaders and the Local Government representatives were among the participants in these meetings, as they had to advise on the relevant wetland policies and the governance and eligibility of the community decisions. At the start of the process, it was only a few members, especially local political leaders, who were contributing to the discussion. After realizing this, subsequent workshops political leaders were not invited, so that other members of the community were given an opportunity to make their contributions to the plan. It was only during the stakeholders’
validation meeting, at which the plan was approved and adopted by the community, that the political leaders were again involved. Participants included 35 community members (ratio of men to women 2:1) including 8 Local Council (LC) Leaders, 4 representatives from the District and Ministry of Water and Environment and 5 other NGO and CSO partners including NU staff as the facilitators.

Opportunities
The site is an IBA and Ramsar site, thus internationally recognized. Its proximity to Kampala city and Entebbe airport make it accessible for visitors as well as supporting agencies (NGOs and government). The good working relationship with relevant government bodies like WMD and UWEC gives the community an entry point and opportunity to interact and raise their identified policy issues with policy makers.

Threats
The site is still in a relatively good condition though being encroached in several areas. The flower producing company Rosebud Flower Farm continues to expand into and drain the wetland. Lutembe Beach is being renovated as a tourist site and poses a great threat to the wetland as a result of the pollution and degradation that may arise from tourism activities, if not well managed. There is also a possible expansion of this beach by the developer, which may drain part of the wetland. The community assessment conducted in 2013 identified the need to empower the community with advocacy and awareness skills.
4.3.3. Conservation vs. Development

The Vision of LWUA is: “to maintain the benefits from wetland biodiversity as a source of livelihoods for future generations, with the aim of promoting tourism, nature conservation and poverty reduction among the communities deriving livelihoods from Lutembe Ramsar site”.

Their objectives include:
- Lutembe Wetland to be a model Ramsar site and Centre of attraction;
- To have a wealthy wetland for healthy people, through alternative income generating activities, enhanced skills, enforcement of laws, and by creating a sense of ownership;
- To mark boundaries by planting of trees along them and to carry out monitoring through nature walks with land marks, signage and information boards;
- To disseminate Information through capacity building, generation of information, partnerships, awareness materials and lobbying and advocacy.

Among the above objectives, the LWUA SSG decided to focus on planting of trees along the boundary and carrying out monitoring through nature walks to report any illegal activities inside the boundary.

This was done by the Ministry of Water and Environment under WMD in partnership with the community and the Wakiso district Local Government. The aim was to reduce the rate of encroachment on the wetland. The boundary was marked by planting trees in a few areas, but mostly by marking existing trees. The demarcation was finalized and anew map produced.

Since the Community Action Plan was developed in partnership with the government, represented by the district and WMD, Nature Uganda is in the process of ensuring that the policies in the plan are incorporated into the district management plans and the bigger Wetland Management Plan for the site. The government bodies and policy makers are ready to work together with the community and ensure that this plan is implemented.

The case of the flower farm

The National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) spearheads the development of environmental policies, laws, regulations, standards and guidelines, and guides government on sound environmental management in Uganda. In this case, they have the mandate to protect Lutembe wetland and to guide any activities to be done in this wetland as determined by the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted prior to any development. Nature Uganda and the communities, as stakeholders, are given a chance to participate in the consultations conducted during the EIA process. The current good working relationship between NEMA and NU creates a platform for one-to-one discussions on issues relating to this site – even if outcomes are not in favour of the environment.
Encroachment onto the Lutembe Wetland is mainly by the Rosebud Flower Farm, which continues to threaten the whole system through continued expansion into the wetland and water pollution. There have been many attempts to stop encroachment of Lutembe wetland by the flower farm, but without success.

The current good working relationship between NEMA and NU creates a platform for one-to-one discussions on issues relating to this site even if outcomes are not in favour of the environment.

Encroachment into Lutembe Bay for flower farming is a threat to its ecosystems (© BirdLife).

Early on, Nature Uganda and other CSOs working with the Lutembe community were invited by the management of Rosebud Flower Farm to the site to review the process of expansion and gauge if it passed through the right channels. On that day LWUA members and about 80 members from other CSOs, including the Nile Discourse Forum, Albertine Rift Conservation Society, NU and the Uganda Wildlife Society, among others, went to visit Rosebud in Lutembe. At the site the group were taken around to see the mature flowers, which were outside the wetland boundary at that time. This was followed by a meeting, and then lunch was served for another 3 hours. By the time this was completed it was very late and everyone was rushing home to escape the traffic on the Entebbe road. As a result, the objectives of the visit were not achieved – no one saw the boundaries they had all gone to see. The next time the CEO from NU went with political dignitaries to do the same they were denied access to the Rosebud site.
As the next step, the CSOs, led by the Nile Discourse Forum and NU, filed a case in the High Court, requesting the stopping of further encroachment of the flower farm into the wetland. However, when NU approached Rosebud officials, they insisted that their developments were all legal and that they held legally approved permits by the NEMA. Nature Uganda was given copies of the permits, and saw that although they had doubts about the legality of the expanded estate, the proof was there. Rosebud officials also highlighted their contribution to the country’s economy in terms of jobs created and revenue from the flower exports. Uganda’s flower industry makes millions of dollars in exports to Europe each year. This was a challenge to conservationists because they did not have a monetary equivalent for the wetland resources. As a result, the case against Rosebud and their encroachment into the wetland was halted. Some activists were surprised that Uganda’s environmental protection agency, which in the past has rejected or condemned wetland violations on this scale, allowed the flower farm to encroach on Lutembe wetland.

Many other encroachers threaten this wetland, especially real estate developers. Cases of wetland reclamation have been reported at the site and the responsible bodies were called to intervene and successfully halted development in a few cases. But overall, development encroachment into the wetland is widespread and seems unstoppable.

4.3.4. Factors for Success or Failure

**Strengths**

The communities’ connections with Nature Uganda (NU) make it possible for their local observations on the site to quickly reach organisations and decision-makers at the national level. NU has good connections with the responsible policy makers (NEMA) and the government bodies responsible for the protection of this wetland (WMD). Personal contacts with the relevant district officers make it easy for local information, relayed by NU, to reach them when required. NU and the SSG have been working at this site for a long time and are well versed with the issues affecting the site, thus making it easy to know and understand its status and trends. There has been support from other CSOs, especially the Nile Discourse Forum, who were willing to join forces. NU’s membership was also useful in mobilizing the public, especially for the visits to Rosebud Flower Farm in Lutembe. Despite their differences, NU and the community have also managed to maintain a talking relationship with the Rosebud Flower Farm owner and management staff, to the point that NU were shown the permits and other documents concerning this farm.
弱点和挑战

Nature Uganda and the communities cannot enforce the implementation of laws and regulations governing the right use of wetlands. All they can do is obtain information and relay it to the rightful authorities; it is then up to those authorities to take action. The major authority in the use of environmental resources in Uganda, NEMA, gives the permits to use the land and is responsible for monitoring the way these permits are used. LWUA SSG and NU were reporting to NEMA about what they saw as illegal expansion into the wetland, yet the permits to expand were awarded by the same body. In that case, NU and LWUA met a wall.

The other challenge they faced was that some community members, especially women, derive their livelihoods from the flower farm, as they work in the greenhouses. The people employed by Rosebud are for obvious reasons reluctant or unwilling to participate in actions against their employer. Unitizing and mobilizing the whole community to take action becomes difficult when the community is divided.

教训

1. 重要的是在参与保护问题之前进行背景研究，特别是在涉及重大发展的地方。例如，了解玫瑰花田的法律地位在与公司接触之前将节省大量时间和金钱。
2. 政治支持对于解决大型土地使用问题至关重要，因为这些问题通常在高级官员中拥有政治盟友。
3. 社区需要更强大地参与当他们面临湿地侵占或退化时，这样他们可以采取行动并联系负责的机构，而不是由NU独立进行。
4. 在社区和其组织中，管理集团动态并欣赏一个社区中权力、个性、行为和文化之间的差异非常重要。促进社区团结的协调员或项目经理应该总是努力促进社区集团的团结，避免卷入社区冲突。始终保持中立立场。
5. 当社区理解自然资源的实际和潜在价值和利益时，他们将更有热情来保护它们。
4.4 Cooperatives and Umuganda in Rwanda: collective citizen action in support of sustainable development

By Prudence Ndabasanze
Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda

Summary
The Akanyaru wetlands in southern Rwanda are rich in natural resources used by local communities (water, fish, livestock grazing, agriculture) and provide important ecosystem services at national (water regulation) and international level (carbon sequestration). However, human population pressure, invasive species such as the water hyacinth and climate change such as frequent droughts are putting pressure on the wetlands, causing resource degradation, encroachment and loss of biodiversity. Through a participatory planning process, led by three local cooperatives, communities developed a plan focused on the role of the wetland in climate change adaptation. A number of habitat restoration and development measures were proposed. The key entry point for including these in national development policy is the District Development Plan (DDP). However, the cycle of current DDP development did not coincide with this project and so there was no opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of community priorities until the next cycle (2019 – 2024).
As an alternative, until the next 5-year DDPs are produced, the cooperatives are seeking to carry out some of the developments through Umuganda, as well as within on-going development programmes funded through international development assistance. Umuganda is Rwanda’s national framework for organized community service, held on the last Saturday each month, when citizens contribute collectively to national development through action at the local level. This case study describes and draws lessons from this process of planning, advocacy and local action.

4.4.1 Introduction
The community in Musenyi Sector, Bugesera District, relies on the goods and services of the Akanyaru wetlands to survive. However, the wetlands are a fragile and threatened ecosystem, and if their use is not well-managed this can undermine the basis of local livelihoods and lead to loss of internationally important biodiversity.
Local communities are dependent on and have knowledge of their local resources – and it is often their management decisions that most affect the sustainability of natural resources. Therefore, involving local communities in decision-making, building on their local knowledge, and engaging them as partners in development is critical to ensure sustainable management of natural resources.
Rwanda has an established, highly decentralized governance system, down to community level – Umudugudu – and a programme of monthly community service – Umuganda – to engage local communities in the implementation and
The Akanyaru wetlands cover an area of 30,000 ha (ACNR, 2004) and contribute to the wellbeing of over 82,000 people. The value of this ecosystem derives from the use of its goods (fresh water, building materials, fish and crops) and services (water retention and treatment, storage and recycling of nutrients and waste). Moreover, they provide habitats for biodiversity including for rare and threatened species.

The Akanyaru wetlands were identified as an important Bird and Biodiversity Area due to the presence of endangered bird species including Papyrus Gonolek, Laniarius mufumbiri (Near threatened), Papyrus Yellow Warbler, Chloropeta gracillostros (Vulnerable) and Madagascar Pond Heron, Ardeola idae (Endangered). The wetlands are also the home of Sitatunga, Tragelaphus spekii, an Endangered and CITES listed mammal. Blue Monkeys (Cercopithecus mitis dogetii) and snakes can be found in the papyrus swamps, while the waterways shelter Hippopotamus, Crocodiles and a variety of fish species.

Despite its status as an IBA, Akanyaru Wetlands have no formal protection. Biodiversity is threatened by agricultural expansion and intensification, illegal hunting, over exploration and persecution, energy production and mining (of peat), invasive species (water hyacinth) bush fires, unregulated grass cutting and grazing, and unseasonal flooding.

Just how effective is Rwanda’s governance framework (decentralization, cooperatives, Umuganda) at creating space for a local-level role in decision-making on management and use of natural resources? Does it provide a forum for local people to have a role in conservation of globally threatened species and sites located outside the formal protected area system? And is local knowledge sufficient and effective to influence decision makers?

This case study explores these issues at Akanyaru wetlands: one among seven IBAs in Rwanda.
Background

Akanyaru wetlands are located in the south of Rwanda on the international border with Burundi. Busesera region is a large plateau, bordered by the fluvial deposits of the River Nyabarongo. The landscape consists of a range of hills and valleys. The climate of the region is characterized by alternating rainy and dry seasons. The local community depends directly on the resources and natural services of the Akanyaru wetlands for their livelihood. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy in Musenyi sector and around 90% of the population rely on subsistence agriculture to survive. Such communities, reliant on subsistence agriculture, are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters such as drought. Therefore, agricultural development must be accompanied by environmental protection activities such as reforestation, water management and rational use of the Akanyaru wetlands.

The community is organized into cooperatives whose members work together in order to improve their livelihoods through sustainable use of natural resources from the Akanyaru wetlands, mainly from fishing, agriculture and handicrafts. The Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR) works with local community organisations called Site Support groups (SSGs) to address biodiversity threats at the Akanyaru wetlands. The community and various studies at the site have identified water hyacinth as among the main threats to both biodiversity and local livelihoods. This floating, invasive and non-native plant species that has colonized the wetlands is causing the extinction of indigenous species, hypoxia (oxygen deficiency) and reduction of aquatic biodiversity, reduction in productivity of the fishery, and obstruction of waterways.

The Coopérative Sugira de Musenyi (shortened to KOSUMU - sugira means prosperity) was created in 2012 with the aim of supporting young people who did not get an opportunity to pursue their studies; young girls who have become pregnant outside of marriage and have been rejected by their families; and unemployed youth. The main activity of this cooperative is to transform dried water hyacinth (and other plant fibers) into handicrafts to generate income. They produce bags, hats, furniture, baskets and boxes at affordable prices. This Site Support Group is currently composed of 15 women and nine men. Most of them are farmers and carry out small-scale trade. Membership of KOSUMU is no longer limited to the original target group, but has been extended to all those in the community who want to improve their livelihoods through handicrafts.

The Coopérative Abatiganda Musenyi (KABAMU) was established in 2012 to regulate fishery activities on the Akanyaru River around Musenyi. KABAMU is composed of around 220 fishers from Musenyi sector and has the aim of sustainable development and environmental conservation, including development of fish ponds.
The **Coopérative des Agriculteur du Riz de Musenyi (COARIMU)** was founded in 2011 and currently has 71 active members: 35 men and 36 women. The main activity is the cultivation of rice, but not limited to it. The main objective is to improve crop production and land consolidation in line with government policy. This SSG has had legal status since 2012. From the income generated from their activities they have built a cooperative warehouse and office.

**Révélien Nsanzabera** is a fisherman and cooperative representative, aged 38 years old. He is married with 3 children and has land, a house – his main asset – and owns a boat. As well as fishing activities, he is a farmer and possesses livestock. He left school at the age of 15 because his family did not have the means to pay his secondary school tuition fees. “Whatever I possess now was from the Akanyaru wetland; I built my house, bought a cow and goats, and bought land using revenue from Akanyaru Wetlands. I am a fisherman and sell fish. The wetland is really important for us and that is why we have to contribute to its conservation”.

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**Cooperatives at Akanyaru**

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise, according to internationally recognized co-operative values and principles.

The first attempt to institutionalize cooperatives in Rwanda began with the enactment of the Co-operative Ordinance 1949 that operated until the current law No. 31/1988 was enacted on 12th October 1988. The Government of Rwanda views cooperatives as a potential vehicle through which members can create employment and expand access to income-generating activities, develop their business potential, including entrepreneurial and managerial capacities through education and training; increase savings and investment, and improve social well-being with special emphasis on gender equality, housing, education, health care and community development. The Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) is a public institution in charge of the promotion, registration and regulation of cooperatives in the country. It has the mission to develop the cooperative sector so that it serves its members equitably, efficiently and empowers them economically.
Rosine Uwimana is a handicrafts maker, aged 34 years. She is married with 4 young girls and owns her own house. She left school at the age of 13 because of the 1994 Tutsi genocide. “Akanyaru is the source of life for me and my family – we fetch water in Akanyaru, get fodder for our livestock from there and it generates as well raw materials for handicrafts. Akanyaru wetlands play an invaluable role in our daily life especially during long drought periods”.

Stakeholders at Akanyaru

The Site Support Groups working at the Akanyaru wetlands have identified the main stakeholders relevant to their objectives. The table below lists the stakeholders identified by the local community as those with most significance.

| Stakeholder                                                                 | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                            | ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- |
| Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR)            | ACNR is a national Non-Governmental Organisation, dedicated to the promotion of biodiversity conservation through participatory and sustainable management of natural resources in Rwanda.                      |
| Local Authority                                                           | The Sector is the third level of administration, where people participate through their elected representatives. Technical and key political matters are handled and addressed at the Cell level. The Village is the smallest politico-administrative entity of the country and hence closest to the people. |
| Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA)                                           | Rwanda Cooperative Agency is a public institution in charge of promotion, registration and regulation of cooperatives in the country.                                                                           |
| Rwanda Environmental Management Authority (REMA)                          | Rwanda Environment Management Authority holds the legal mandate for national environmental protection, conservation, promotion and overall management, including advice to the government, on all matters pertinent to the environment and climate change. |
Savings and Credit Co-operative (SACCO Umurenge)

Savings and Credit Co-operative (SACCO) is a type of co-operative whose objective is to pool savings for the members and in turn provide them with credit facilities. Other objectives of SACCOs are to encourage thrift amongst the members and to encourage proper financial management investment practices. In rural areas, farmers have formed Rural SACCOs.

In addition to the stakeholders in the table there are other relevant actors working in Musenyi sector, including but not limited to, World Vision, Caritas Rwanda, Send a Cow and Christian Aid, all of whom work with local communities and have a potential impact on the environment and sustainable development.

**4.4.2 Participatory planning for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources**

ACNR has been contributing to capacity building of communities in Musenyi sector with a focus on biodiversity conservation and natural resource management, by building knowledge and skills that support strategies for integrated food, water and energy self-sufficiency. Members from the three cooperatives (SSGs) described above have been trained on government policies, project management, institutional management, fundraising and other relevant topics.

As part of this initiative, a Community Adaptation Plan for the Akanyaru wetlands was developed by people living on the banks of Akanyaru, using participatory rural appraisal methods and a climate change vulnerability assessment to capture the community’s values and vision.

The participatory rural appraisal methodology aimed to incorporate the knowledge and opinions of rural people in planning and management for sustainable development. The following tools and techniques were used: hazard analysis, livelihoods vulnerability mapping, stakeholder mapping, timelines, seasonal calendars and transect walks.

The participants were from the three Site Support Groups described above; gender balance and youth representation and participation were taken into consideration while selecting the participants. Although men were numerically dominant, women were present and expressed their ideas and opinions. Local authorities – district and cell representatives – were also present. The main opportunities identified in the plan by the local community were their social diversity, labour and the natural resources of Akanyaru wetland, as well as relations with key stakeholders (see stakeholder table on page 51) and local authorities.

The Community Adaptation Plan (2015-2020) developed by the local community has five strategic objectives: (i) to identify water sources and rehabilitate the Akanyaru ecosystem’s degraded areas; (ii) to increase the area and management of the
4.4.3 Local communities influencing decision-makers

Activities and expected outputs of Community Adaptation Plan

- The Akanyaru wetlands lakes and rivers rehabilitated and maintained through removal of water hyacinth and other invasive species, decomposition of water hyacinth for compost production and assessment of the impact of water hyacinth on biodiversity in invaded parts of the wetlands.
- Increased agricultural productivity and sustained natural resources management in and around Akanyaru wetlands through preparation of nursery beds for bamboo and other compatible fodder species, planting fodder species such as Pennisetum purpureum along the ditches of terraces, and agro forestry trees on farmers’ fields.
- Fishponds rehabilitated, constructed and coupled with well-managed eco-business activities in the Akanyaru wetlands through assessment of their current condition, and designing a rehabilitation plan that promotes ecotourism in the area.
- All degraded rivers and lake banks in the Akanyaru wetlands ecosystem rehabilitated through planting bamboo and other relevant plant species in river buffer zones.
- Climate smart agriculture mechanisms and off farm activities on Akanyaru wetlands developed and enhanced through training the local community on best agricultural practices.
Outcomes and Impacts

The first step and most critical stage in getting support from decision-makers was to bring all key actors onto a panel during the elaboration and validation of the Community Adaptation Plan. Local Authority Government stakeholders were then successfully brought to the table to discuss integration of the Community Adaptation Plan into the District Development Plan (DDP). In the long term this is an important step – the DDP is the basis on which local government budgets are set, and on which central government allocates funds. Although other sector/local plans exist they don’t have the same financing arrangements as the DDP. Unfortunately, the timing of development of the Community Adaptation Plan did not coincide with the DDP planning process, and the DDP won’t now be revised until 2018. In the interim, Government has committed verbally to support implementation of the Community Adaptation Plan wherever it can.

Decision-makers and the planning process

In 2000, the Government of Rwanda decentralized responsibilities, authority, functions, as well as power and appropriate resources to district and sub-district levels. Vision 2020 Umurenge program –VUP –implemented through the Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC) applies the decentralization system and leverages technical and financial assistance to accelerate the rate of poverty reduction in Rwanda. Local people’s expectations of local government from this process have been high. By transferring power, authority and resources from central to local government, the programme has helped to reactivate local people’s participation in initiating and implementing plans that take into consideration local needs, priorities, capacities and resources.
Through DDPs, districts are given powers of autonomous management to address their own priorities expressed by local community members. Throughout this process, CBOs have the opportunity to express their needs and to be heard as they play a vital part in solving local environmental problems and other cross cutting issues. During the elaboration of District Development Plans, consultations take into consideration community knowledge in order to reflect on past achievements and future potential and so come up with the priorities that will drive the development of the district for the next five years.

The Government, through established institutions, supports community initiatives concerning conservation of biodiversity and sustainable environmental management. The Rwanda Environment Management Authority recruits and appoints Environmental Facilitators at district level whose role is to ensure that environmental sustainability principles are integral to all planning processes and are harmonized with and inform the EDPRS II formulation process. The Ministry of Agriculture appoints agronomy specialists at district level and the Rwanda Nature Resources Authority appoints a forest officer whose role is to ensure that issues relating to forest and nature conservation receive attention in all national development plans (Box4.4.4: Levels of Government in Rwanda).

Conservation of biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation are among the cross cutting issues that involve community, national, regional and global levels. Such issues need to be addressed starting from the lower levels, but it may be difficult for local communities to practically address such issues as their contribution to the deterioration of the environment is often low even though they may be facing the worst impacts due to their dependence on natural resources. A review of Rwanda’s decentralization policies shows that “The cell and Umudugudu structures are highly appreciated throughout the country for providing essential services closer to the population but they are still technically weak and inadequately facilitated to effectively fulfill their service delivery responsibilities. The Government appreciates that it would be unrealistic to leave lower level structures on their own and expect effective results, and therefore ought to support them in terms of human resources, logistics and other needs, especially those that demonstrate internal inability to meet their institutional capacity needs” (MINALOC, 2012).

NGOs, for example ACNR and World Vision, engage local communities in the implementation of biodiversity, environment and other related policies by carrying out various projects aiming to empower the community for sustainable livelihoods and development. They have resources such as expertise, staff and equipment but limited power to affect long-term policy change, and can only partly address any weaknesses in the decentralization of decision-making and development.
Levels of Government in Rwanda

The Republic of Rwanda is divided into Provinces, Districts, Sectors and Cells. The country is organized into four provinces in addition to Kigali city, 30 Districts, 416 Sectors, 2,148 Cells and 14,837 Villages. The District is the basic political-administrative unit of the country.

- **Province level:** The Province serves as a coordinating organ to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of Central Government planning, execution and supervision of decentralized services. It serves mainly as advisor to the decentralized entities and coordinates development activities. The administrative structure of the Province is as follows: The Governor of the Province, The Provincial Coordination Committee (PCC), The Provincial Permanent Secretary (PS) and The Province organisational structure.

- **Sector Level:** The Sector is the third level of administration where people participate through their elected representatives. The following is the administrative structure at the Sector level; The Sector Council (SC) and The Sector Executive Committee (SEC). The Sector Executive Committee works with the technical support of its two sub-committees: The Political and Administrative Committee (PAC) and The Community Development Committee (CDC).

- **Cell Level:** The Cell, which is managed by competent technicians, is another political team that serves as decision makers and advisors to those technicians. Technical and key political matters are handled and addressed at the Cell level. The key organisational bodies of the Cell are: The Cell Council (CC) and The Cell Executive Committee (CEC).

- **Village Level:** The Village is the smallest politico-administrative entity of the Country and hence closest to the people. Therefore, this is the entity through which the problems, priorities and needs of the people at a grassroots level will be identified and addressed. Leaders at the Village level are volunteers who are elected, to serve their country, by all the residents of the village aged above 18. They don’t handle any technical issues.

Bernard Nkezabera is an old man of the village, aged 61 years, and the coordinator of Cooperative des Agriculteur du riz de Musenyi (COARIMU). He is married with 4 children and 7 grandchildren. He left school at the age of 14 because his family did not have the means to continue to pay his tuition fees. "There are some issues which are beyond our control but we have the power as a community to contribute positively to the implementation of community adaptation for sustainable conservation of the Akanyaru wetland and sustainable development".
Influencing decisions, turning plans into action – Umuganda

Although timing of the development of the Community Adaptation Plan by the three cooperatives has prevented formal integration of its objectives into the DDP, there are other routes through which the community can turn their plans into action.

A mandatory community service day takes place in Rwanda, from 8:00am to 11:00am on the last Saturday of each month. Called umunsi w’umuganda (or simply umuganda), meaning “contribution made by the community” it is designed to be a day when citizens contribute their time, skills and labour to help build their country and their communities. By law all able-bodied persons above the age of 18 and below 65 are expected to participate in this community work. The start of this practice goes back to colonial times and is still practiced today. The community services include activities such as street cleaning, grass cutting, digging wells, building a community center, constructing houses for vulnerable people, and tree planting.

At the end of the community work, there is always a community meeting to discuss the current situation and establish priorities for the following month. This is the starting point for community members to be heard and to contribute to government plans. During the community meeting, each person has the right and freedom to speak; they point out their needs and are heard by the local authorities. Participation in Umuganda is usually supervised by a manager, or Umudugudu chairperson who oversees the effectiveness and efficiency of community participation. Everyone in the village has the right to speak, although village elders and those considered ‘wise’ generally take the lead. However, recent establishment of women and youth committees have created opportunities for their representatives to express and share their agendas with the wider community and to integrate their interests. Once everyone has had their say, local authorities make decisions on the implementation of policies, strategies and plans based on consensus or majority opinion.

The focus of Umuganda is on getting community involvement in implementation of the DDP. However, because many of the activities in the DDP overlap with the priorities of the Community Adaptation Plan prepared by the SSGs/Cooperatives, Umuganda also provides an opportunity to get community participation, and District Authority support, for the implementation of the Community Adaptation Plan.

Decisions on what activities will take place during Umuganda are made by the Executive Secretary of the Cell – based principally on the content of the DDP. He informs district authorities what is planned, and then informs local communities what they will do. Sometimes multiple activities are on offer and the community can choose which one they will do (splitting into small groups). How-

"A mandatory community service day takes place in Rwanda, from 8:00am to 11:00am on the last Saturday of each month. Called umunsi w’umuganda (or simply umuganda), meaning “contribution made by the community”

Local people and government working together to manage natural resources: Lessons from the Lake Victoria Basin
ever, the Executive Secretary can be (and frequently is) lobbied. This has been done successfully by the SSGs/Cooperatives, as they make a case to have their priority activities included in Umuganda.

In 2014, the main purpose of Umuganda organized in Musenyi sector was to build houses for Rwandans expelled from Tanzania in 2013. The SSGs and ACNR worked together with sector experts to build improved cooking stoves for displaced families – providing an environmentally friendly technology that reduced community dependence on the use of fuelwood for cooking. Other stakeholders were engaged in building, cleaning and tree planting activities – in line with the Community Adaptation Plan objectives.

In another example, ACNR and the SSGs have worked to prioritise activities addressing objectives in the Community Adaptation Plan concerning the damaging flooding of Nyabarongo and Akagera rivers and lakes. Long-term mitigation measures require development of alternative energy sources like the use of biogas, fuel-efficient stoves and other low energy systems, as well as rehabilitation of watersheds through tree planting. As part of the current tree planting season (2015/2016), Rwanda is aiming to plant over 30 million trees. With local authority support (provision of seedlings and materials) the Site Support Groups in Musenyi worked with ACNR and Association des Eglises Baptistes au Rwanda (AEBR) to plant over 15,000 trees during Umuganda held on 29th November 2015 at Kigusa primary School. This activity contributes to the second objective of the Community Adaptation Plan, which aims to increase the area of the riparian zone covered by trees, providing both ecological and economic benefit to the community.

In practice, integration of Community Adaptation Plan activities into Umuganda has been relatively straightforward. The social diversity among active members of the SSGs has been an asset during the decision making process; lobbying for poverty eradication and biodiversity conservation was easy for them as the topic is relevant to the whole community and fits well with government plans.

The objectives of the Community Adaptation Plan will also contribute significantly to the implementation of government’s Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies (EDPRS) II, Vision 2020 and Green Growth strategies (2050), which are the pillars of the Bugesera District Development Plan (as they are throughout Rwanda).

In 2000, a shift in the responsibilities of all levels of government as a result of the decentralization program required a new approach to monitoring and evaluation. Local levels of government are now responsible for implementing development programmes, which means that the central government and people of Rwanda need a way to ensure accountability. In 2006, Imihigo (known also as performance contracts) were introduced to address this need. The SSGs’ activities contribute to the outputs during the assessment of Imihigo and as a result have received encouragement and support from local authorities and relevant stakeholders.
4.4.4. Conclusions and lessons learned

1. **Legal instruments and supportive policies are critical for local involvement in planning.** Cooperatives in Rwanda are legitimated and governed by law No 50/2007 which provides for their establishment, organisation and functioning. The cooperatives Sugira Musenyi, Cooperative Abatiganda Musenyi and Coopérative des Agriculteur du Riz de Musenyi, like others working in the region, contribute to Rwanda’s economic and sustainable development. The government of Rwanda, in order to reach Vision 2020, has developed policies and strategies to support local communities to achieve their objectives. All three cooperatives have found their ideas strengthened and supported by the principal stakeholder, the Government of Rwanda, through policies including the EDPRS II, Environment and Biodiversity policies, National strategy for community development and local economic development, and other related policies.

2. **Government agencies, at all levels, need to support local participation in planning.** National and regional actors, such as local authorities, government institutions, NGOs and other networks conducting their activities in Musenyi Sector, have supported KOSUMU, KABAMU and COARIMU with the implementation of their projects.

3. **International agencies who work with local organisations can do a lot to empower communities and build lasting capacity at the local level.** International agencies have funded projects that have been implemented by national and local NGOs and CBOs. The members of SSGs described in this case study have benefited from this donor cooperation either directly or indirectly (Box 4.4.5: International Agencies working with cooperatives in the Environmental Sector in Rwanda).

4. **Local organisations that are recognized by government and have legal status become formal partners in development.** All three cooperatives are now recognized by local authorities, although two of them still have to regularize their status by registering with the Rwanda Cooperative Agency at National level. The third strategic objective of the Community Adaptation Plan is to improve livelihoods and sustainable development through enhanced knowledge and sustainable management, biodiversity conservation, land conservation and poverty reduction. Through their cooperatives, the community has been made aware of the importance of biodiversity and its conservation and they advocated for the provision of electricity in order to reduce dependence on wood as a source of energy. In October 2015, SSG representatives attended a planning meeting at district level. The outcome of the meeting was
the connection of the village to the national electricity network. Of course, connecting Musenyi Sector to the electricity network isn’t down solely to the efforts of the SSGs/cooperatives – it is included in the Bugesera District Development Plan and Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies (EDPRS) II. However, formal, legally registered organisations are more likely to be involved and consulted about the details. According to Sekamana, a representative of KOSUMU “when there is an issue which requires the presence of local representatives we are always invited to represent our group and community and to contribute to solve problems or provide relevant inputs to address the issue”.

5. Social and human capital are important elements for successfully influencing government policy and plans. Building social and human capital, through support to SSGs, their organisation and governance, is a necessary requirement for effectively influencing policy and plans. Umuganda is a clear form of social capital that has been critical to the achievements of the SSGs at Akanyaru – expressed in terms of sustained participation in mutually beneficial collective action, participation in by-law implementation, increased cooperation and compliance with by-laws, networking and linking with the local government structures and other rural service providers. Likewise, human capital, expressed as increased awareness, skills and knowledge, changes in behavior and attitudes, self-respect and self-worth, ability and confidence to speak in public, and to effectively participate in decision-making, women’s participation in community activities, and ability of local communities to manage conflicts, have contributed to the way in which cooperatives and their members have been able to engage with local authorities.

6. When influencing policy and plans, timing is critical. Rwanda has an impressive, comprehensive and effective set of legal and institutional arrangements to encourage and support community-led contributions to planning and development. This makes inclusion of genuine community priorities in government plans and policies relatively straightforward. However, priorities identified outside the formal planning cycle (in this case the District Development Plans) may lack an entry point for inclusion. Timing of community-led planning initiatives is therefore critical.

7. Communities themselves can do a lot when working collectively – but may still need access to expertise and funds. Communities can identify the problems, and may be willing to provide labour and other inputs to help solve them, but may lack the specific technical expertise to identify and implement solutions. Therefore, working together with government and their technicians remains critical, even for community-led actions. For example, in the
case of Akanyaru, communities rely on technical expertise from Government institutions to improve crop production for sustainable agriculture, contour terracing, agroforestry and marketing of handicrafts.

8. **Communities need support and entry points to build confidence to engage with decision-makers.** Local people’s knowledge is critical to decisions and policies for sustainable resource management and conservation – not only to ensure that plans are appropriate, but also to gain support and ownership from communities. However, communities often lack skills in advocacy (as well as confidence and opportunity) to enable them to influence decision-makers. Linkages to national NGOs, like ACNR, can help create opportunities for communities or cooperatives, through which they can be exposed to and gain experience of the decision-making process, and gain confidence to engage with government agencies. Government agencies need to do more to give opportunities for communities and their organisations to express themselves and to contribute to planning and decisions.
The “Supporting Ecosystem Rehabilitation and Protection for pro-poor Green Growth Program” (SERPG) and “Vulnerable Ecosystem Recovery Program towards climate change resilience” (VERP) were launched on 2nd October 2014 and will run till 2019. These programmes are implemented by REMA and co-funded by the Fund for Environment and Climate Change (FONERWA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

These programmes support innovative approaches to restore and conserve fragile island and wetland ecosystems, promote the sustainable management of natural resources, support livelihood diversification to enhance household income and reduce the number of people dependent on subsistence agriculture in Burera, Bugesera, Rusizi and Musanze Districts. Local communities and cooperatives have a role in implementation.

Through supporting ecosystem rehabilitation and protection for a pro-poor green growth program, the community around Lake Cyohoha in Bugesera District has received training on topics such as removal of water hyacinth and its transformation into compost. Cooperatives have seen their agricultural production and income increasing; rice production has increased from 40 tons to 120 tons over the last past two years.

“I am now able to feed my kids” says Marthe Nirere, an active member of Coopérative des Agriculteur du Riz de Musenyi during a field trip at Lake Cyohoha. She continued “Before I joined this cooperative, it was not easy for me and for my family to live. But now, after joining the cooperative and participating in different training, I learnt how to save and to plan for my family; I pay school fees for my kids and medical insurance on time. Moreover, I learnt the importance of Akanyaru wetlands and wish to contribute to the sustainable conservation of this ecosystem.”
Summary

Yala Swamp is a complex of wetlands in the delta of the Yala River, on the north-eastern shore of Lake Victoria in Kenya. It is rich in biodiversity, including globally threatened species. Examples include birds such as Papyrus Yellow Warbler (*Chloropeta gracilirostris*) (Vulnerable), mammals like the Sitatunga antelope (*Tragecephalus spekeii*), and fish such as the Critically Endangered Singidia Tilapia (*Oreochromis esculentus*).

Yala Wetland Environmental Volunteers (YAWEV) is a group of volunteers and nucleus of change among local communities who implement conservation action at this important wetland, including Important Bird Area (IBA) monitoring and acting as a link for local communities to engage the government regarding conservation issues. The group was established in 2009 with the objective of conserving Yala wetland through awareness creation, participating in site conservation activities, supporting site monitoring through data collection and enhancement of sustainable livelihoods through conservation enterprises including papyrus products development. YAWEV has since been the SSG that Nature Kenya has been engaging.

4.5.1. Introduction

Nature Kenya (NK) started working in Yala Swamp in 2009 to address issues of water birds being poisoned by local illegal poachers who were selling the birds’ meat as a source of cheap protein to the local community – this had become a common activity at the swamp. NK was also conducting regular biodiversity monitoring of the Yala IBA at this time. These activities were coordinated by an intern who engaged youth from the community; this provided the impetus for the creation of YAWEV.

The Yala Wetland Environmental Volunteers

As the group membership is voluntary-based, anyone is welcome to join as long as they participate in the activities of the group. To date the group has 20 members, consisting mostly of youth aged between 20-30 years old, who have a passion for conservation. The group has faced a number of challenges especially in having a consistent membership base, since a number of members moved out of Yala to pursue education or employment. Low literacy levels among the members limited their understanding of their rights and obligations as group members and therefore they relied on those who could read and write for basic communication and decisions. As a group consisting of youth, they faced a lot of resistance from other factions within the community, including politicians, who misconstrued their purpose as that of trying
Yala Swamp is a complex of wetlands in the delta of the Yala River, on the north-eastern shore of Lake Victoria in Kenya. The complex has three main components: the Yala Swamp, Lake Kanyaboli and Lake Sare. The total area of the swamp complex is 17,000 ha and it lies at an altitude between 1,130-1,160m above sea level. Most of the swamp is located within Siaya County but part of the swamp falls within Busia County. The swamp ecosystem plays an important role in biodiversity preservation and supports livelihoods dependent on its natural resources. The swamp complex is dominated by papyrus reed vegetation in the shallower areas and swamp grasses around the periphery. Yala swamp is rich in biodiversity ranging from birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and fish. Several species are listed as threatened in the IUCN Red List. Examples include the Papyrus Yellow Warbler (Chloroperagracilirostris) (Vulnerable), and Papyrus Gonolek (Laniarius mufumbiri) (Near-threatened), Sitatunga antelope (Tragecephalus spekeii), Vervet monkey (Cercopithecus aethiops), Nile crocodile (Crocodylus niloticus), Singidia Tilapia (Oreochromis esculentus) (Critically Endangered) and other Lake Victoria cichlid fish, many of which have been extirpated in the main lake by the introduction of Nile Perch.

The swamp acts as a natural filter for a variety of biocides and other agricultural pollutants from the surrounding catchment, and also effectively removes silt and excess nutrients before the water enters Lake Victoria, preventing soil erosion by retaining soils and sediments. It controls floods and acts as a carbon sink, it provides firewood, construction materials and raw materials for crafts, mainly the papyrus. It is a key tourist attraction for both local and international tourists and it is used for water sports, bird watching and cultural activities. It is an important farming and grazing site for local communities and has been referred to as the bread basket of Siaya County due its high farm productivity and presence of fertile soils in the flood plain. It is an important source of water for humans and livestock and provides water for farming and irrigation during the dry season. It also offers opportunities for education and research for students and professionals. However, the tourism potential of the site is largely untapped due to the lack of adequate marketing, tour guiding capacity and tourism infrastructure. In spite of these limitations, the site is visited by many students from primary schools, high schools, colleges and universities.

Site description, biodiversity and uses of Yala swamp

Yala Swamp is rich in biodiversity ranging from birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and fish. Several species are listed as threatened in the IUCN Red List.
Protection and Management Status of Yala Swamp

Yala Swamp is communal land that was held in trust by Siaya and Busia County Governments for many years. In 2003, the county council expropriated 11,000 ha of the swamp and leased it out to a private developer, Dominion Farms Limited, for commercial agricultural production and aquaculture. In 2006, local people were eager to find solutions to increased environmental degradation in the swamp and increased encroachment by farmers. The community agreed that a Community Conserved Area would be set aside for biodiversity conservation. The idea was adopted by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) who gazetted Lake Kanyaboli and its environs as a National Reserve through legal notice No 158 of 2010. The total area of the reserve is 41.42 Km² and it is currently under the management of Siaya County Government with technical and policy support from KWS.

Conservation and Development Challenges

Some of the major challenges faced by Yala swamp include drainage for agriculture, agricultural pollution, overharvesting of papyrus, increasing siltation due to poor agricultural practices upstream, encroachment and overutilization of wildlife especially fish and mammals notably the Sitatunga from KWS.

Fishing is an important livelihood activity in Yala Swamp but offtake levels are not sustainable (© NK).
Ineffective implementation of environmental laws and guidelines coupled with poor land management add to the Swamp’s problems. These trends are threatening the ecological and socioeconomic values and services derived from Yala Swamp. The underlying threat remains lack of recognition of the importance of Yala Swamp as a finite resource with roles in both the national economy and community livelihoods (Yala Swamp IBA – Conservation Management Plan 2009).

Historical events and development of Yala Swamp

Since the early 1950s there have been attempts by both private sector and the government to reclaim Yala Swamp for farming and development.

- In 1954 the Kenya Nile Water Resources Survey commissioned a survey to identify the development potential of the Lake Victoria Basin including Yala Swamp. In this report, Sir Alexander Gibbs identified the potential for the use of the Swamp for agriculture.
- In 1964-1970 The Kenyan Government received support to implement the recommendations of the Gibbs report. 2300 hectares of Yala swamp were reclaimed for agriculture development.
- In 1972, the government commissioned ILACO, a Dutch Consulting Firm, to investigate the possible development options on Yala Swamp. ILACO recommended the reclamation of a further 9,200 hectares for agricultural development and also recommended that an area of 6000 hectares to be left in its natural condition.
- The Lake Basin Development Authority, LBDA, was commissioned in 1979 to coordinate development and manage resources in the Lake Victoria region. They established a horticulture business in the reclaimed land.
- In 1985 LBDA started a rice farming business which collapsed in 1999.
- Local communities accessed Yala Swamp for grazing, fishing, water and other resources from the swamp without any problem in the past, but the situation changed after 2006 when the Dominion Farm, a private developer, was allocated the majority of the swamp land, which they effectively fenced and barred communities from using for grazing or other activities.
4.5.2 Participatory Planning for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

With technical support from Nature Kenya, YAWEV conducted a PRA exercise, engaging 10 villages through focus group discussions, and conducting household interviews of 100 households. The objective was to collect information that would lead to a better understanding of their natural resources, the changes occurring over time and the seasonality of production of different crops, the threats to natural resources and to livelihoods, and finally to develop a plan of action – the community plan – that would outline the priority issues and how they hope to address them. This process was ultimately important to help YAWEV as a group to identify conservation issues as prioritized by the community, and engage in trying to find solutions. In addition, the group was also able to identify the capacity gaps within their organisation and the resources they required to adequately address the environmental issues.

Community Action Plan activities include:

- Creating awareness on the ecosystem services provided by Yala Swamp.
- Development of a management plan for Yala wetland.
- Rehabilitation of the swamp.
- Setting aside community conserved areas to conserve biodiversity.
- Development of biodiversity baselines including GIS, biodiversity, hydrology and socio economiac data and initiating citizen science to monitor the IBA.
- Building capacity of local communities and stakeholder institutions in management, leadership and governance.
- Initiating and up-scaling sustainable livelihood and alternative activities that do not compromise the integrity of the swamp, such as fish farming, high value papyrus product craft development and sustainable agriculture.
- Building capacity of the SSG and local communities in advocacy to participate in policy and legislative frameworks and decision making processes.
- Mobilising resources by lobbying county governments to include Yala Swamp conservation priorities in resource allocation, and mobilising resources from the private sector and local and international sources.
- Sharing lessons and experiences at local and national levels.

YAWEV Empowerment and the Community Action Plan

Through the Community Action Plan, NK aimed to increase involvement of local communities in decision-making in county development, especially the environment sector. They targeted the county and sub county level government in Siaya. The development of the County Integrated Management Plan and preparation of annual budget estimates for the natural resources management sector of Siaya and Kisumu counties were expected to provide entry points for this advocacy.
The Community Action Plan has been useful as reference for local communities when engaging government during public consultations and developing plans on swamp management. Communities have contributed to the development of The Yala Integrated Management Plan and of a Tourism Strategy, among other government-led policy and planning processes based on information from the Community Action Plan. Due to the age and level of education of most of the YAWEV members, in many instances it was difficult for them to engage in technical discussions, especially those that require them to interact with ‘elite groups’ including in civic forums where issues of natural resource management in the county are discussed alongside related issues of development. Despite having a plan of action to reach out and influence policy-makers and the county government regarding the management and use of Yala swamp, YAWEV lacked the ability to effectively engage with these groups. Through a mentoring process, Nature Kenya nurtured individuals within the group to participate in forums starting with the District Environmental Committee (DEC). NK attends the DEC as an independent observer and as a stakeholder as a conservation NGO working in Yala. At the county level, the DEC holds regular monthly coordination meetings in order to get information regarding conservation within the area, to identify possible threats to the environment and to coordinate conservation action within the county. Most of the discussions during the meetings are limited to those in attendance, including CSOs and NGOs who then represent the community’s issues based on their experiences and work. Solutions that are formulated may not fit well to the needs of communities.
Community Participation in Sub County and County Development Forums:

At district and county level, there are several forums in which the communities can engage in including those discussing security issues, development issues and also natural resource management issues. The District Environmental Committee is one such forum that is chaired by the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), and attended by relevant government ministries including the Water Resource Management Authority (WRMA), Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and the County Water Department, and also other NGOs, CSOs, Community-Based Organisations and Private Sector Organisations are allowed to attend. The main role of the forum is the coordination of environmental matters within the county, as well as providing information on different developments and reporting on any issues of concern.

As much as these forums are open for communities to attend, they are not usually proactively engaged regarding the times of the meetings or even invited to attend. Furthermore, communities in most cases do not have the time and resources to attend these meetings as in many cases it requires transport and related expenses to get to the venue, and also someone to commit time to attend these forums, which they sometimes don’t see as useful. Moreover, these forums are sometimes pitched at a level that would deter the effective engagement of communities owing to their lack of technical capacity to articulate their issues. In some cases, adequate preparation is required prior to appearing at these meetings including good and reliable information that is not readily accessible to them.

Effective participation in such cases would require more than just education, training and planning, but walking side by side with communities, and introducing them to each step of engagement and what it requires.

4.5.3 Local communities influencing decision-makers

Nature Kenya initially introduced YAWEV officials to the DEC meeting by inviting them to attend and supporting their logistics. The first step was to introduce them to the different members of the DEC and help them understand the role of the forum. Over time NK was able to help them participate in the forums by preparing for the meetings and learning how to articulate and present their issues at the forum. Gradually, YAWEV’s capacity was strengthened through this mentoring process to independently participate by supporting them to develop messages and analyse issues. YAWEV was an active participant in the DEC until 2013 when the committee was dissolved.
after the establishment of county governments. The committee was replaced by Sub County Environmental Committees and County Environment Committees which to date have not been officially constituted. NEMA and county government departments now consult YAWEV, for example when developing the Siaya County Tourism Promotion Strategy.

**Earning the trust of the community**

When the community first heard of YAWEV and their objectives, they were immediately suspicious and believed that their land (Yala swamp) would be taken away from them again, as was done through the process of leasing land to Dominion Farms and through the gazettement of Lake Kanyaboli. Both processes restricted the community’s access to land, particularly for agriculture and grazing. There was therefore a lot of resistance to the group and attempts to create awareness were repelled by certain factions, including farmers within the community.

YAWEV collected information from research and several studies to develop key messages for creating awareness and educating the community. These messages included:

- Yala wetland is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), which should be conserved and promoted for ecotourism.
- Yala wetland has unique biodiversity, some of which has become extinct in the main Lake Victoria and should be conserved.
- Some sections of the wetland should be set aside for the conservation of the unique biodiversity of Yala wetland.
- There should be a balance between conservation and development.
- County government should coordinate development of a Land Use Plan to ensure that both development and conservation are secured for current and future generations.
- Yala wetland needs to be conserved because of the ecosystem services it provides.
- Climate change vulnerability is real and mitigation measures should be put in place from household to national level.

YAWEV organized an awareness meeting, inviting the local chiefs and local groups including the associations of farmers, fishermen and handicraft makers, who utilize the swamp. The objective of this meeting was to create awareness to the local community regarding the importance of the swamp and disseminate information collected during the development of the Community Action Plan that would eventually lead to development of conservation interventions. However, at the mention of conservation and protection of the swamp, the meeting degenerated as the local farmers association claimed that it was a scam by the group who were emissaries to convince the community to give up their land. Chaos broke out and a number of the group members sustained injuries during the incidence.
NEMA and county government departments now consult YAWEV, for example when developing the Siaya County Tourism Promotion Strategy.

YAWEV also faced resistance from politicians saying that if they fail to protect the livelihoods of their constituency they would lose votes. Constant invitations for meetings were sent to Members of County Assembly (MCAs). MCAs are elected members of the County Assembly who are responsible for formulating policies at the county government level. When they finally came for the meetings, they walked out during the discussions. YAWEV members wanted to discuss with politicians how to conserve Yala swamp, including setting aside sections of the swamp for rehabilitation and conservation. Farmers, however, were suspicious that YAWEV wanted to give away their cultivation rights within the swamp. Therefore the MCAs did not want to meet YAWEV members as they thought it would clash with their interests, which included promoting food security and fighting for the rights of farmers who form a majority of the Yala population. The main strategy used by YAWEV and NK has been creating awareness about the need to conserve the wetland. The awareness was targeted to key actors, including local communities and influential persons such as local county leaders, religious leaders, government officials and the private sector including the Dominion Farms.

Gaining Ground

In 2010, YAWEV and NK coordinated the development of the Yala Swamp Management Plan. They consulted other members of the DEC who gave inputs as there was a good working relationship between YAWEV and the DEC. This plan unfortunately was shelved because there were no funds to implement it. However two important results were achieved in the process: one was setting up a conservation area in Yala, which KWS took up and gazetted as Lake Kanyaboli National Reserve; and the other was compilation of information and requirements for designation of Yala Swamp as a Ramsar site. This process is still ongoing with KWS leadership. The institutional and management capacity of the group was built through trainings from NK, government agencies especially the ministry in charge of social services, gender and youth, and by other stakeholders. Due to the improved capacity of YAWEV one member was nominated to the county Wildlife Complaints and Compensation Committee and another one to the Uwezo Fund Committee, which is a government committee that vets and educates women and youths to apply for and get loans.

In 2014 NK started the process of developing a land use plan guided by a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Various sets of data were required to facilitate the process, including ecosystem service assessments, biodiversity baselines and socio-economic baselines. YAWEV’s role has been to mobilise local communities and create awareness about land use planning and collecting data, as well as acting as research assistants to technical officers from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) and Ministry of Water. In 2015, NK together with YAWEV made
A unanimous decision to expand the SSG from one community group to 30 community groups spread all over the Swamp. The aim of the SSG expansion is for ease of coordination of local communities, to enhance IBA and biodiversity monitoring and conservation actions within the swamp, and to have a bigger constituency that can have more influence with decision makers.

4.5.4 Challenges faced and Lessons learned

1. **Operating in an environment of mistrust created by many years of manipulation by elites and politicians** In every community there are people who are powerful and who like to be the ones being listened to all the time. These people like the status quo to remain. Advocacy about wetland conservation touched on a highly emotive issue – farmlands - which the local community did not want to discuss. Politicians and opinions leaders thought their position in the community was being challenged since many people were talking about the SSG. Politicians thought that the SSG was becoming too powerful and a threat at the next election.

2. **Competing interests between conservation, development and food security.** The people who are likely to benefit from conservation do not have enough food on the table and therefore cannot think of long-term benefits. Conservation does not come anywhere near priorities for households who are not able to sufficiently feed themselves. Farmers thought that due to conservation they would be denied land for farming and therefore their livelihood.

3. **Local community were too familiar with SSG members, knowing them too well to respect the messages they were passing.** SSG members are mostly young people and sometimes their words were not respected by elders. The people who make decisions or whose opinion is respected are mostly elders within the community. It was difficult for the SSG members to be heard and influence local communities’ decisions. The SSG members also found it difficult to access the opinion leaders in order to raise their awareness to a level that where they would be the ones lobbying communities to conserve the swamp.
Recommendations:

1. Strong and effective advocacy in conservation requires sound information about ecosystem functions and values and how they impact on people and biodiversity (social and economic aspects and their interactions).
2. The role of mentorship is key to move communities through the process of strengthening their capacity and their ability to conduct effective advocacy.
3. For communities to have a voice in decision-making, they need to analyse and understand the issues and be prepared to make useful contributions in the forums they attend.
4. Community-driven advocacy for sustainable natural resource management is more effective in achieving conservation goals and impact than externally driven initiatives.
5. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

These five case studies have described a variety of (non-mutually exclusive) roles and entry points for communities to influence government policy, planning and action. Together they demonstrate how local, natural resource-dependent communities have taken steps to plan, prioritise, and then influence government policy, plans and actions so that they better address the linked environment-development objectives they have identified in their community action plans.

5.1 Case summaries

1. Joint decision-making – community representation on decision-making councils

In Burundi we encounter how local communities can be engaged and participate to influence decisions in their region on matters that affect them. They only need to be well informed and be given the opportunity to participate in developing and reviewing some of the plans and legal documents that in one way or another will have an impact on their local environment. The representation of community-based organisations on decision-making committees provides an important entry point for lobbying and an effective track to influence.

2. Lobbying for more effective law enforcement

At Mabamba bay on the shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda, communities have become increasingly aware of the value of their natural resources – including birds which attract tourists. These same values have also come to the attention of individuals from outside the community who have sought to benefit from illegal trapping and trade in wildlife. The case study demonstrates how communities can work with government enforcement agencies (the police and the Uganda Wildlife Authority) to support community objectives for a rich, varied and biodiverse habitat. Critical factors in this case were communities equipped with information, local knowledge and an understanding of relevant laws and policies, as well as the value for community based organisations from being networked with national organisations (Nature Uganda and the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre) providing greater influence and access to government agencies.
3 The politics of money and jobs

Powerful economic interests can override due process and government policy – companies may appear immune to the laws by which others are judged and local communities trying to influence policies where big business is involved may face a long and uphill struggle. This is the case at Lutembe bay in Uganda. This case study shows that in some developing countries, with high levels of poverty, local communities must be prepared to confront arguments for destruction of natural habitat that are based on creating employment and incomes for poor people – and where environmental ‘externalities’ are largely ignored.

4 Embedding community priorities in government policy, programmes and plans

In Rwanda and Uganda we saw how local cooperatives and conservation groups, concerned at the state of the environment and its provision of natural resources on which they depend, have worked within existing mechanisms for prioritising and planning community work (and government support for it) to start to deliver some of their objectives. In Rwanda, timing meant that the preferred option (integrating community priorities into the District Development Plan - which would have maximised impact and ensured a budget allocation) was not immediately available, but it was still possible to get support from government institutions for work at local level. This demonstrates the importance of understanding the processes through which government plans are set and budgets and resources allocated (timetables and actors involved), in order to then identify how best to influence them. This is equally applicable in relation to local government as to national (or international) government. Government staff may well be sympathetic to community needs, but unless lobbying targets the right people, at the right time, it will have little direct influence.
The case study from Kenya focused on efforts by a community-based organisation to use local knowledge of the wetland resources and the community’s use of them to influence the development of plans such as the Integrated Management Plan for the site and the Siaya County Tourism Strategy. The experience at Yala demonstrates the importance of relationships at a number of levels. Within the community it was critical for the CBO and Nature Kenya to work on earning the trust of the community – this in a context where there is a history of disputes over land and resources, and where communities have seen their rights and access denied in the name of conservation. Winning the trust and confidence of politicians was equally important. Their concern was that conservation initiatives would negatively impact on the lives and livelihoods of their electorate, thus affecting their future election prospects. With both groups – the wider community and elected leaders – CBO members may have to overcome cultural barriers if they are to have their voices heard and be taken seriously. It is often the respected, more elderly individuals in a community that are the opinion leaders and decision-makers, and when CBOs are comprised mainly of younger people (as was the case at Yala) they may have to work hard to gain respect and confidence within their community.
5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations that follow emerged from the experiences of Nature Kenya, Nature Uganda, ABN and ACNR and the communities and local organisations involved in the case studies.

5.2.1 Recommendations for decision-makers

The governments of the countries where these case studies are located each have policies on decentralisation and local participation in decision-making. These case studies demonstrate ways in which government (national to local) can facilitate local input into plans, policies and projects that affect local people and their environmental resources.

- Dialogue and constructive collaboration is helped where there are good relations between government agencies and local communities. This may be down to the behaviour and attitudes of individual officers as much as to government policy, but processes that promote transparent and accountable governance at the local level are clearly important to maintaining relationships and building trust.

- Government also needs to create conditions, opportunities and non-threatening spaces which facilitate local community participation in policy discussions. Those not familiar with government processes or public meetings can easily be intimidated and not contribute or attend.

- State institutions must be ready to listen to communities when approached, and consider their submissions and suggestions seriously – not dismissing them because of a lack of formal education or technical qualification, but recognising instead their expert local knowledge and understanding. Government policies and plans on the environment and natural resources will be more effective (and realistic) if they are based on local knowledge, include local community aspirations and priorities following proper consultation and building of ownership, and reflect local capacities.

- Within formal planning processes, opportunities should be created (if they don’t already exist) for communities and their organisations to express themselves and to contribute to planning and decision-making. An allotted space for communities’ voice recognises local community rights, the value of their knowledge and opinion, and avoids their voices being suppressed by competing voices with more political influence.

- Communities often identify environmental problems, and are willing to lead actions to address them, but seek government technical (and financial) support to find and implement solutions. Government (and their technicians) should work together with communities to provide technical expertise where needed – not everything is possible with locally available skills and resources.
5.2.2. Recommendations for conservation NGOs

The organisations implementing the project featured in the case studies, and who participated in the workshop for exchange of experience and lesson learning, are all national NGOs working at local and national levels, who are committed to support and catalyse the role of community organisations in decision-making for sustainable management of natural resources. The following recommendations emerged from their experiences.

- At the start of any project, NGOs should be prepared to closely support and mentor communities and their organisations in the advocacy process. As the project develops, communities should be empowered to take action on their own, to increase project ownership and sustainability. Projects come and go – most have funding for between one and three years. NGOs should build capacity so that community organisations can work with government in the long-term.

- Community priorities identified outside government’s formal planning cycle may lack an entry point for action and budget allocation. The timing of support given to community-led planning initiatives may therefore be critical. Entry points should be identified early on, based on a thorough understanding of the policy-making and planning process.

- National NGOs should help create opportunities for community organisations, through which they can be exposed to and gain experience of the decision-making process, and gain confidence to engage with government agencies.

- Community recommendations on management and enforcement relating to the environment may need to apply at ecosystem level if they are to be effective. Ecosystem boundaries may be very different from administrative boundaries. NGOs have a role to play in helping to convene neighbouring communities with shared ecosystem-level interests.

- CBOs may have a small membership, even if the issues they address are of wider community relevance. Especially where ecosystem and landscape scale issues are concerned, NGOs may need to work with other local organisations to engage and raise awareness among the wider community – and even other communities within a landscape management unit.

- Exchange visits – to observe and learn from peers in similar circumstances – are an effective way to raise awareness of communities of the many and interesting opportunities to develop small-scale enterprises to improve livelihoods using local nature resources. Often it is not a specific technology or activity that is helpful, but the inspiration and confidence that people get from seeing people in a similar position who have succeeded with their enterprise and locally available resources.
• It is important to build capacity of community organisations in governance and leadership issues from the start. This helps to set out how things will be organised, the role and responsibility of leaders, etc., and helps to avoid internal conflict in the future.

• There is often a gap between officials and ordinary members of a community organisation in terms of education, social and economic status. NGOs need to take account of this and ensure that ordinary members are included in training, opportunities for exchange visits, etc.

• Community organisations can play an important role in advocacy – they have real-time information on their local environment and society, and often carry a mandate from their community. However, they may be suspicious of NGOs that seek to work with them, questioning their motivation. NGOs may need to work hard to earn their trust and respect – and take care to honour it.

• Face to face meetings with communities and other stakeholders are important and cannot be replaced by other means of communication and information sharing.

• Involving government representatives from the beginning and including lower levels of government in key meetings and as joint authors or facilitators of outputs helps to build trust, awareness and ownership, increasing the probability that priorities and recommendations will make their way into policy, budgets and plans.

• Levels of knowledge and understanding of policy and legislation may be quite low – not just among communities but also government staff. It may be necessary to produce guides for local communities – in local languages and with technical terms translated or explained.

• Communities need to be able to access timely information for effective action. NGOs should support local conservation groups to effectively connect with relevant networks that will allow them to access information necessary for the management of their site and to develop site actions. Opportunities to network with other local community groups are also an effective way of allowing them to access information, share experiences and learn.
5.2.3 Recommendations for local communities and their organisations

The local organisations in these case studies have worked with their communities to identify objectives for natural resource management, and then have worked to influence government policy and actions. The case studies analysed in this publication provide some valuable lessons for local, community-based organisations seeking to influence state institutions. NGOs can help them to meet some of these conditions. They include:

- For local community organisations that hope to influence government policy and plans, it is important, as far as is possible, to maintain a good working relationship with officers within relevant state institutions. However, this isn’t always easy, especially in situations where government doesn’t show respect for local institutions and knowledge, or where poverty and geography make meetings difficult.

- Local conservation groups may maximise their impact if they work with other locally based non-conservation organisations and neighbouring communities – both in terms of coordinated action for ecosystem management, but also in relation to ability to influence decision-makers.

- Where opportunities exist, it may be valuable and effective for communities and CBOs to have representatives on committees and consultative groups that contribute to local or regional government planning and policy, giving them a voice in decision-making forums and a position from where they can most effectively promote and advocate community objectives.

- Local organisations need to provide good information (for example, on ecosystem values and how they impact on people and biodiversity) if they are to carry out strong and effective advocacy. If necessary they should seek assistance from NGOs, universities and others to help them assemble credible evidence.

- In order to effectively manage and defend their sites, local communities need to step out and proactively enhance their capacity to engage with policy-makers and actively seek opportunities to engage in decision-making regarding their natural resources.

- CBO representatives need to be prepared with issues and recommendations when attending meetings where plans and policies are discussed. Their arguments should be well rehearsed.
References


